



Carnegie Shul Chatter

November 10, 2021



Vayetze in a Nutshell

Genesis 28:10–32:3

Jacob leaves his hometown of Beersheba and journeys to Charan. On the way, he encounters “the place” and sleeps there, dreaming of a ladder connecting heaven and earth, with angels climbing and descending on it; G-d appears and promises that the land upon which he lies will be given to his descendants. In the morning, Jacob raises the stone on which he laid his head as an altar and monument, pledging that it will be made the house of G-d.

In Haran, Jacob stays with and works for his

What Do You Mean?

“In the Torah, and in our lives as well, the choice of words is critical,” says Rabbi Jordan Parr in this week’s main article, and how right he is.

How often do we struggle to find just the right word? What is the subtle nuance that we are trying to convey? And how do we try to convey it?

One of the things that bothers me about all the communication people so often do by email or texting these days is that they are looking to say something as quickly as possible and they choose the first word that pops into their minds rather than taking the time to pick the most appropriate word. Sometimes, as a result, what they intend to say and what the reader comprehends are not at all the same thing, and the miscommunication can be disastrous.

Worse yet, when communicating via tweet or e-message, the recipient of the message cannot see the sender’s facial expression or hear the nuance in their tone of voice. And that can also lead to big misunderstandings.

I remember when people discussed important things face-to-face. That is rarely the case anymore. We are just too busy to sit down and have a real conversation with someone else. And that is a shame.

My mom used to always tell me, “Don’t get yourself in trouble. Think before you speak. And listen before you reply.” What sage advice.

uncle Laban, tending Laban's sheep. Laban agrees to give him his younger daughter, Rachel—whom Jacob loves—in marriage, in return for seven years' labor. But on the wedding night, Laban gives him his elder daughter, Leah, instead—a deception Jacob discovers only in the morning. Jacob marries Rachel, too, a week later, after agreeing to work another seven years for Laban.



Leah gives birth to six sons—Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun—and a daughter, Dinah, while Rachel remains barren. Rachel gives Jacob her handmaid, Bilhah, as a wife to bear children in her stead, and two more sons, Dan and Naphtali, are born. Leah does the same with her handmaid, Zilpah, who gives birth to Gad and Asher. Finally, Rachel's prayers are answered and she gives birth to Joseph.

Jacob has now been in Charan for fourteen years, and wishes to return home. But Laban persuades him to remain, now offering him sheep in return for his labor. Jacob prospers, despite Laban's repeated attempts to swindle him. After six years, Jacob leaves Charan in stealth, fearing that Laban would prevent him from leaving with the family and property for which he labored. Laban pursues Jacob, but is warned by G-d in a dream not to harm him. Laban and Jacob make a pact on Mount Gal-Ed, attested to by a pile of stones, and Jacob proceeds to the Holy Land, where he is met by angels.

I am sure you have heard the expression, "Between a rock and a hard place." But what about, between a rock and a holy place?" Is this where Jacob was stuck in this week's parashah, Vayetze? Here are Rabbi Jordan Parr's thoughts on the subject from wupj.org:

Between a Rock and a Holy Place

Parashat Vayetze

By Rabbi Jordan Parr

I have a special affinity for this Parasha, especially since it was my Bar Mitzvah portion, lo those many years ago. And as my Hebrew name is Ya'akov, I have tried to envision myself walking in Jacob's sandals, especially at this time when he is alone, a fugitive, sleeping fitfully with his head on a rock, terrified of his brother Esau – whose birthright he stole.

But sometimes, we find redemption when we are at our depths. I can't imagine a more dire situation than sleeping in a field with a rock as my pillow. The very word Vayetze, the first word of our Parasha, means to leave. But Rashi



notices that the Torah does not use the word *Vayelech*, a word with a similar meaning, which it used to describe Abraham's journey. As Rashi notes, *Vayelech* means to leave with one's possessions and with great honor; *Vayetze* means to flee, taking nothing with you. Jacob fled for his life.

But I want to focus on another curious word. While sleeping on the ground, Jacob had his famous dream of the ladder rising to heaven. But after describing the ladder, with angels ascending and descending on it, Torah writes that God "*Nitzav alav*," God stood over it.

Again, our eyes widen, and we wonder what is going on here. Torah has again triggered our brains. Usually, we use the word "*Omed*," to stand. But the Torah uses the verb *Nitzav*, a word that at first glance means the same thing. Yet if we assume that every word of the Torah is there for a reason, we must ask: Why does the Torah use *Nitzav* and not *Omed*?

If *Nitzav* sounds familiar, it's because it's the name of one of the final Parshiyot in Deuteronomy, *Nitzavim* (the plural of *Nitzav*). For many of us, we read this passage on Yom Kippur Morning as well as during the High Holiday season in our regular Torah reading cycle.

Commenting upon the word *Nitzavim*, the Ramban, Rabbi Moses ben Nahman, writes that the Torah uses *Nitzav* when discussing the Brit, the Divine Covenant. In Parashat *Nitzavim*, Israel stands at the cusp of entering Eretz Yisrael. Parashat *Nitzavim* describes the renewal of the Divine Covenant, the Brit that God made with Israel at Sinai.

Using the classic Rabbinic technique of inserting a known meaning of a word in one place into a different place where that same word appears in an ambiguous way, we can learn why the Torah uses the verb *Nitzav* instead of *Omed*. God stands over the ladder (*Nitzav alav*) to bestow the Brit, the Covenant, onto Jacob. God gives Jacob the dual blessings of land and people; God chooses Jacob to fulfill the Brit that God had earlier given to Isaac and Abraham. Jacob realized this gift upon arising, built an altar, and continued his journey as a changed man.

In the Torah, and in our lives as well, the choice of words is critical. Had the Torah simply said that God stood (*Omed*) over the ladder, we would have thought nothing of it. But since the Torah uses the verb *Nitzav*, our eyes widen, and we wonder why. The answer is that God gave Jacob the blessings of the Brit in his dream. This special term conveys a special gift: the gift of God's Brit to the Jewish people. May we choose our words so that we merit the Brit and that God brings blessings upon us and upon the entire world. Shabbat Shalom



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