

Introduction to Parsha #7: Vayetze¹

READINGS:	<i>Torah Vayetze:</i>	Genesis 28:10 – 32:3
	<i>Haftarah:</i>	Hosea 12:13 – 14:10
	<i>B'rit Chadasha:</i>	John 1:35-51



And the angels of the Holy One arose and descended . . .
[Genesis 28:15]

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition # 4, *Ga'al* [the Petition for Redemption].

Breaking news! A man matching the description of wily young fugitive Ya'akov ben Yitzchak, recently of the Negev, has been spotted roaming the hills overlooking the ancient settlement of Luz. Since fleeing Be'er-sheva in haste this morning on foot this man has been moving on a very deliberate Northeasterly bearing. It is believed that he may be headed for his uncle's place in Mesopotamia. The uncle, it is said, may be even more dangerous than the fugitive.

You are advised to exercise *extreme caution* if you encounter this man. He is reported to be alone, weary, and frightened. He does not, some say, have much if anything to lose. His brother insists he needs to be killed. The latest eyewitness report indicate that this fugitive appears to be talking to himself, and that he cannot stop babbling about seeing angels and being visited by his father Yitzchak's God. Stay tuned for more details.

The Third-Generation Odyssey of Covenant Life Is Underway!

Welcome to the study of the seventh of Torah's 54 parshot. The name of this

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parsha is *Vayetze*. This Hebrew phrase is roughly translated “*and [he] departed*”². *Ya’akov ben Yitzchak* the fugitive, that is.

There are indeed so many *partings* and *leave-takings* contained within the four chapters we study this week that I have come to call the week we study this parsha the ‘*Week of Radical Departures*’.

As it happened to the patriarchs *so it is ordained to happen in the lives of their descendants*. Be prepared for some major *leave-taking issues* to arise in **your** lives this week as well! Rehearse your *good-byes*, *fare-thee-wells* and *until-we-meet-again*s. Prepare to have routines and relationships unexpectedly interrupted. Oh and it might not hurt for you to *pack yourself a travel bag* and *get your passport papers in order* while you are at it.

A New Main Character Takes Center Stage

Much was made in these studies last week of the fact that in parsha *Toldot* the focus of Torah’s attention was changing from *Avraham* to his son *Yitzchak*. By the end of last week’s parsha however even our new hero *Yitzchak* had grown old and gone blind. This week therefore the focus of Torah’s attention is going to change again – from *Yitzchak* to his youngest son *Ya’akov*³.

We were, of course, introduced to *Ya’akov* last week. Initially he was introduced to us as *one of two feisty fetuses at war within Rivkah’s womb*. We saw him grasping the heel of his twin brother *Esav* as both were born. We watched as *Ya’akov’s* heel-grasping birth position became a *prophetic description of his early life*. He was constantly under *Esav’s* heel. Towards the end of last week’s studies however a *dramatic shift* occurred. Through a series of events *Ya’akov* actually wound up with the upper hand in his struggle with *Esav*. By the end of parsha *Toldot* *Ya’akov* found himself blessed by his father with not only the promise that he would *inherit the firstborn’s share of material goods*, but also that he would *be his father’s choice as heir to the spiritual inheritance that the Holy One had promised to Avraham and his descendants* –

1. the *land of Israel*,
2. *descendants as numerous as the grains of sand* on the seashore, and
3. the *leading, guiding, protection, provision and Presence of the Holy One*

² The verb root of the Hebrew phrase *Vayetze* is *yatza*, *yod*, *tzade*, *alef*, Strong’s Hebrew word #3318, pronounced *yaw-tzaw*. Strong’s says this verb means to *go or come out or forth*, or to *depart*. The first Biblical usage of this verb root is in Genesis 1:12, where Torah tells us that on the third day, after the Creator spoke forth plant life from the dry ground, and from the earth was caused to go or issue forth [*yatza*] grass and herbs bearing seed, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed.

³ *Ya’akov’s* name is written in Hebrew as: **יַעֲקֹב** [*i.e. yod, ayin, kuf, veit*].

Himself, with all the blessing that entails.

Partially because Esav vowed to kill Ya'akov, but primarily because Ya'akov was nowhere near ready to receive the enjoyment and responsibility associated with these blessings, parsha ***Toldot*** concluded with a plan being developed for Ya'akov to leave home, travel 500 miles or so back to the village from which Avraham and Rivkah had come, seek refuge with Rivkah's brother Lavan, and find a suitable bride.

In parsha ***Vayetze*** the plan is going to come to fruition. Let's take a quick peek ahead at the Third Generation Odyssey of Covenant Life.

A Parsha Vayetze Travelogue

At the end of parsha ***Toldot*** things appeared to really be in a mess for the covenant family. *Yitzchak* (Isaac) had grown old and blind. *Rivkah* (Rebecca), already sick to death of Esav's two Kena'ani wives, now had to deal with yet another destabilizing influence in the camp. Esav had just brought *Machalat*, granddaughter of Ishmael, into the patriarchal camp as his third wife, to help him plot Ya'akov's murder. And *Ya'akov* was preparing to leave his home and his family's encampment near Be'ersheva and head off into the Wonderland world of Lavan the Aramean – a place not unlike Robert Louis Stevenson's immortal dimension where nothing is ever quite as it appears to be. Alas the covenant family's 'mess' is going to get worse before it gets better.

1. Ya'akov Embarks on His Great Covenant Life Adventure

Every journey in life begins with a critical departure⁴. Ya'akov's journey begins with such a departure *from Be'er-sheva*. As the parsha opens the Covenant-Partner-in-Training is *on the run*. His father's dwelling in the Negev is disappearing in his rear view mirror. He has all he can handle dodging highway robbers and wild beasts as he winds his way through the mountains of Central Kena'an. He has yet to pass through the Galil. Also awaiting him are the dense forests of the Levanon. And even beyond the great land of spreading cedars he will have a gauntlet of physical and spiritual obstacles to overcome before he reaches – ***if*** he reaches - Upper Mesopotamia. His destination - the village of Charan in the region of Paddan-Aram - is still many days of treacherous travel away.

Charan is of course the very same village from which both his grandfather

⁴ The author defines a 'critical departure' as *leaving of that which is familiar and comfortable and stepping out into a place where the ordinary schedules and routines of life have to be abandoned in order to deal with a new set of physical, emotional, and spiritual challenges*. A critical departure involves significant risk and requires *major adjustments to the way one looks at, thinks about, and engages with the world*.

Avraham and his mother Rivkah had begun their journeys to a new life in the land of Kena'an. They took two steps forward; he starts his season as the main player on Torah's stage with one step back.

Rivkah's brother Lavan and his family, descendants of Avraham's brother Nachor, still live in Charan, and it is with the remnants of that family Ya'akov hopes to sojourn until things blew over with Esav.

Anything could happen along such a journey. Will Ya'akov make it – or won't he?

2. Ya'akov's First God-Encounter

The trail from *Be'er-sheva* to *Charan* had been blazed long before Ya'akov struck out on this odyssey. But Ya'akov had a whole lot more to think about on this trip than rough terrain, forks in the road, a dearth of watering holes, and highway robbers. SomeOne much more fearsome than a highway robber was silently shadowing his every footfall. And the moment of confrontation was now at hand.

As night approached on the first day of the journey Ya'akov reached what looked like an ordinary high place. It looked like a good place to spend the night. He was physically and emotionally exhausted, so he stopped and set up camp. He had no tent to pitch, and no pillow or bedroll to lay out. He just plopped down on the ground, caught his breath for a few moments, and laid his head on a stone. That is when his approach to life changed forever. As Ya'akov's weary head rested on that immortal Rock he found himself caught up in a strange and wonderful vision.

A paved pathway [Hebrew *sullam*] appeared before him. It led from earth into the Heavens. As he gazed in wonder at this pathway he saw hosts of angels moving along it. Some were ascending from earth into the Heavenly Realms beyond. Others were descending out of the Heavenly Realms toward earth. And then Ya'akov saw the Architect of it All. He saw the SomeOne Who had been shadowing him the whole journey – that Glorious, Awe-inspiring, breathtakingly wonderful but knee-buckling SomeOne that his father and grandfather had told him about so many times. And He was standing high above it all. There HE was – a thousand times bigger than life. He was much, much more fearsome than Esav. He was *exalted above all Creation*. He was *radiant in Countenance*. He was *clothed in resplendent Light*. He was *stunning in His Glory* – yet both *exuding and inspiring joy, mercy, and shalom*.

And then Ya'akov heard for the first time the Most Beautiful Voice a man can ever hear. The Holy One - the God He had heard so much about from his grandfather Avraham and his father Yitzchak – was not only looking at him, but was

SPEAKING TO HIM.

What is man that You are mindful of him - and the son of man that You visit him?
Psalm 8:4.

The Glorious Voice that spoke to Ya'akov from the top of the great paved pathway of ascent and descent had quite a message for him. The Creator of the Universe shared with his awestruck captive His Plan to make the place where he has laid his head not only his but his descendants' inheritance forever. The same Voice then declared to Ya'akov that he himself, though presently 40 years old and unmarried, would have 'seed' that would spread out 'as the dust of the earth'.

There was more. Three more stunning promises were announced. He promised that He would *be 'with' Ya'akov everywhere he went on this journey*. He declared that He personally would *provide for all Ya'akov's needs*. And He committed all the vast resources of Heaven to *bring Ya'akov back safely to the land of his birth*.

3. Ya'akov Responds to the Holy One's Revelations and Promises

Upon awakening from this Divinely induced dream-state Ya'akov laid out a 'fleece' of sorts for the Holy One. If the Holy One would both *feed and clothe* him throughout his exile, would *guard and protect* him at all times, and would *bring him safely back to his native land*, Ya'akov posited, then he would acknowledge the Holy One as God, would build a 'house' to honor Him on the site of the dream, and would give the Holy One a tenth of all he obtains on his journeys.

4. Ya'akov Arrives in Charan

Ya'akov then continued on his journey and came to a well at the outskirts of Charan. By this well Ya'akov met the young woman destined to be the love of his life - Lavan's youngest daughter, *Rachel* [pronounced Raw-*khel*'].

5. Ya'akov Meets and Goes to Work for Lavan

Lavan heard of Ya'akov's arrival and rushed out to invite him into his home. After a 30-day period of 'labor for food' Ya'akov agreed to work for Lavan for 7 more years labor in exchange for the hand of Rachel in marriage. After the seven years of labor however, Lavan secretly substituted Leah, his oldest daughter, for Rachel in the darkened bedchamber. The next morning Ya'akov found himself united with someone other than the bride he had bargained for.

Lavan had his reasons for playing this dirty little trick on Ya'akov, of course. Rachel had an older sister, and in that culture it was a cultural taboo for a younger sister to be given in marriage before an older one. Knowing Ya'akov's love for

Rachel, Lavan took advantage of his naiveté. When his ruse was discovered he told Ya'akov that he would be happy to let him marry Rachel also - if Ya'akov was willing to give him an additional seven years of labor for her bride price. Ya'akov had been outwitted. He had no choice. And so quickly he found himself loved – and fought over – by two sisters who turned out to be a whole lot more like their father Lavan than anyone had realized.

6. Ya'akov Fathers 12 Children [11 sons] By Four Women

Leah was very fertile, Rachel was not. Leah bore Ya'akov a total of seven children – six sons and a daughter. Rachel, like her kinswoman Sarai had done before her, decided to try to fix the problem of her barrenness by giving her maidservant to Ya'akov to serve as a surrogate mother. It worked. Leah then followed Rachel's example, giving Ya'akov her maidservant for the same purpose. Ya'akov thereby fathered 4 more children – two by each of his wives' maidservant.

Later in life Rachel was finally enabled by the Holy One to have a son of her own. She named this son *Yosef* (Joseph). By the end of the parsha therefore Ya'akov had accumulated four wives, 11 sons, and a daughter. Meanwhile the Holy One greatly blessed the house of Lavan by reason of Ya'akov's presence there.

7. Lavan's Wealth Is Transferred to Ya'akov

Seeing how richly he had been blessed with material wealth by reason of Ya'akov's presence Lavan had no intention of letting Ya'akov leave even after the 14-year period of service he had imposed on Ya'akov for his daughters was over. Lavan used his powers of persuasion to negotiate a deal with Ya'akov that resulted in Ya'akov working for him 6 more years [bringing the total number of years Ya'akov had worked in Lavan's household to 20]. Under this 'deal', with a lot of help from the Holy One, Ya'akov wound up being the one who was wealthy, and Lavan's holdings returned pretty much to the state they were in back when Ya'akov arrived.

8. As Resentment Over Ya'akov's Prosperity Grows, the Holy One Releases Ya'akov to Go Back Home

After Lavan and his sons recognized that Ya'akov was getting wealthier and they were getting poorer they became jealous and angry. Ya'akov then received word from the Holy One that it was time to return to Kena'an. Rather than face Lavan, Ya'akov decided just to take his growing family and belongings and run away under cover of darkness. Unbeknownst to Ya'akov Rachel decided to take her father's household idols with her. The hurried departure from Charan with wives, children, and false gods in tow became Ya'akov's second departure of the parsha.

9. Lavan Pursues Ya'akov and Catches Up With Him at Gilad

Surprised to find Ya'akov's camp abandoned and Ya'akov, Rachel, Leah, their servants and all their children gone – along with the vast flocks and herds that had once belonged to them and his household idols to boot - Lavan and his sons took off in pursuit of the fugitives with mayhem on their minds. It took Lavan's war party 7 days to catch up to Ya'akov and his entourage.

10. Lavan Confronts Ya'akov

A very emotional and uncomfortable confrontation ensued in the hill country East of the Jordan River that became known as Gilead. Lavan accused Ya'akov of various improprieties not the least of which was the theft of his household idols. After a search of the camp for these idols proved unfruitful [due to some deception by Rachel] however the tables turned, and Ya'akov released a torrent of angry charges against Lavan.

11. Ya'akov and Lavan Make a Mutual Non-Aggression Pact

There were tense moments. But rather than engage in a bloody war, Lavan proposed a mutual non-aggression covenant, and Ya'akov accepted. They then partook of a covenant meal and went their separate ways. The departure of Ya'akov from Gilead marked his third critical departure of the parsha.

12. Ya'akov Sees Angels for the Second Time in the Parsha

Then as Ya'akov prepares his final approach to Eretz Kena'an, just as we thought the curtain on the parsha was closing, Torah tells us Ya'akov saw a delegation of angels encamping squarely in his path. Ya'akov was thus reminded of the promises the Holy One had made to him - and the vow he made to the Holy One - 20 years previously.

Introducing Life in the Crucible of Exile

As stated above, in this seventh parsha of Torah Ya'akov departs the Holy Land and enters into a prototypical 'exile'. Separated from his family he takes up residence in a place far away from anyone who knows the God of Yitzchak and Avraham or who lives the *sh'ma* lifestyle. He then spends 20 years or so in a *crucible* – the crucible of exile - where the Holy One tries him as silver and refines him as gold. As we read and study this parsha keep in mind Proverbs 17:3, the proverb which says:

The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold,

*but the Holy One tests the hearts.*⁵

This week the Holy One will process Ya'akov through a series of very difficult life experiences specially designed to remove his many impurities and prepare him to be the carrier of the glory he was created to be. Keep in mind however that the crucible that Ya'akov will experience in parsha Vayetze is not his crucible alone. The crucible of exile will be an experience *many, many of us his descendants will share.*

The Torah includes the narrative of Ya'akov's exile in detail not merely in order that we will understand our family history but in order that we will learn from Ya'akov's struggles – and particularly from his exile to the house of Lavan - how to not only survive but actually *prosper* and fulfill our Divine purpose in the midst of crucibles which He has ordained for each of us.

Read the narratives of Ya'akov's exile and maturation very, very carefully, therefore – because *your survival – and the degree to which you fulfill the Divine Destiny the Holy One has designed for you and your household - may just depend upon how well you learn and put into practice the lessons that Ya'akov's struggles are designed by the Author of Torah to teach about Covenant life.*

Some Thoughts on the Subject of 'Departing'

This week's parsha begins with Ya'akov making a dramatic *departure* from his father, his mother, his brother, his home, and from everything else he knows of life. Torah describes it as follows:

Vayetze Ya'akov mi-Be'er Shava

Ya'akov departed Beer-sheva

vayelech Charanah

and headed toward Charan.

[Genesis 28:10]

Departing is something with which we all must come to grips, Beloved. It means leaving something behind – at least temporarily – to go where destiny calls us. If you have not had to do that yet, I assure you – you *will!*

⁵ See also Malachi 3:3. There we are told that Messiah will “*sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to the Holy One an offering in righteousness.*”

*Life is a Journey . . . across a Very Narrow Bridge*⁶

Strategic departing is you see a good part of what life on earth for a child of the Most High God is about. Avraham learned that lesson beginning in Genesis 12. Yitzchak learned the *same lesson* beginning in Genesis 26. In parsha *Vayetze* it is finally Ya'akov's turn. Chapter 28 of Genesis⁷ is for Ya'akov a *bon voyage* with which begins an odyssey of life-changing import.

As it was for the patriarchs, so it is for us today. Rabbi Nachman of Breslov likened life in this world to a series of dangerous crossings. Perhaps the rabbi's most famous declaration along this line was:

“Kol ha-olam kulo, gesher tzaar me'od
All of life is a journey, across a very narrow bridge.

v'haikar lo lifached
And the most important thing is to not be afraid.

Imagine therefore that a suspension bridge swings between *where you are now* and *where the Holy One would have you to be*. The prospect of departing across that bridge creates emotions ranging from *apprehension* to *terror* – but *we must cross over in spite of our fear*. For if we settle for *where we are* when the Holy One would have us go *somewhere else* we deprive our lives of purpose and destiny.

Life is, you see, by and large *a series of departures* in search of our destiny. Over the course of a lifetime - if we are paying attention - we learn *why* to depart, *from what* and *from whom* to depart, *when* to depart, *how* to depart, *how to survive* on the journey, and *how to know when we have reached our next destination*.

Ya'akov's Secrets for Surviving an Exile

Over the course of this week we will see two main dimensions to Ya'akov's 20-year exile in Charan:

1) He will develop and maintain personal virtue and intimate communion with the Holy One in the midst of a hostile foreign culture where neither are valued; and

2) He will marry, will father children, will work hard to eke out a living, and

⁶ Rabbi Nachman of Breslov likened this world to a "very narrow bridge", meaning that life is a series of dangerous crossings. Perhaps his most famous declaration is: "*The whole world is a very narrow bridge. And the most important thing is to not be afraid.*" Imagine therefore that a suspension bridge swings between where you are now and where the Holy One would have you to be. The prospect of departing across that bridge creates emotions ranging from apprehension to terror – but we must cross over in spite of our fear. For if we settle for where we are when the Holy One would have us go somewhere else, we deprive our lives of meaning.

⁷ Moshe will learn this lesson beginning in Exodus 1; Israel will learn it beginning in Exodus 14.

will - despite all the negative influences that prevailed in the community in which he is forced to live - struggle to infuse his family with the spiritual heritage received from Abraham: "***to keep the way of God and to do righteousness and judgment***".

In the course of the events, God-encounters, and life experiences Torah lays out for us to study this week we will see the Holy One do an amazing thing – He will through these events transform a very ordinary man’s life into a ‘*stairway to Heaven*’ like unto the ladder Ya’akov sees in the dream sequence with which the parsha begins.

Ya’akov will set a pattern to be followed and relived over and over again by all Avraham’s true descendants. Each of us, you see, like Ya’akov has been sent [scattered like seed] throughout the world on a mission – a mission to uncover and draw out the spiritual potential the Holy One has invested in all men and all nations, tribes, and tongues, and to declare in every location and in every life circumstance as do the *serafim* that encircle the Holy One’s throne “***Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts; the whole earth is full of His Glory!***”

Your Mission, Dear Reader, Should You Choose to Accept It

Following the pattern set by our Patriarch Ya’akov the *spirit* [Hebrew, *neshamah* – *i.e.* that which has been breathed into man by the Creator] of every person - must confront the challenge of physical existence. Departure by departure, as each person matures, establishes and follows a vocation, as he takes a spouse, as he builds a home, and as he raises a family, is faced with the seemingly impossible challenge of creating and maintaining an environment where the *neshamah* is nurtured, where Godly values are expressed, and where Godly principles of government [*i.e.* the *mitzvot* of Torah] are given *meaning, effect, and real-life application*.

Through a myriad of contacts with the world around him each person must face – as did Ya’akov - the challenge of discovering, refining and making manifest to the world around him the glory of the Holy One. until ‘***all the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of The Holy One just like the waters cover the sea***’.

This pattern is reflected in the national history of Ya’akov’s physical descendants, the Hebrew people. Forced to depart Eretz Yisrael in 586 BCE in connection with the Babylonian captivity and to go into *galut* [exile] among the nations, then forced to go from nation to nation by pogrom, persecution, ghetto-ization and expulsion decree, the Jewish people have been far less than perfect over the past two and two thirds millennia.

What Jews *have* been successful in doing however is maintaining against all odds, by the ‘keeping’ power of the Holy One, a very strong tradition of God-focused and family-centered life, built squarely [if imperfectly] upon the twin foundation stones of the *mitzvot* of Torah and prayer. Jews have thereby, like Ya’akov, though very much imperfect like him, been used mightily by the Holy One to introduce such things as monotheism, sanctification of the Holy One’s Name, and eternal standards of righteousness and justice, to every corner of the world to which they have been scattered.

Israel’s Exile – Like Ya’akov’s – is Only Temporary

The Holy One did not leave Ya’akov *to his own devices* as he made his our departures in this world. Hence on his way out of Israel on the way to exile in Charan Ya’akov will experience a dramatic vision of, and receive directions from, the Eternal One. In connection with this vision, about which we will read in detail in *Shiur L’Yom Sheni* [Monday’s Study], Ya’akov will hear the Eternal One promise him unqualifiedly before he ever left the Land of milk and honey: "***I will return you to this soil.***"

Ya’akov needed very much to hear that. He needed to be strengthened by the knowledge that though his departure was necessary for the present, the Holy One did not intend for him to stay in Charan forever. He needed to know that because his destiny and eternal dwelling place were in Eretz Yisrael, his exile would one day – in the Holy One’s time and by the Holy One’s doing - come to an end. He needed to know that it was only a journey across a very narrow bridge.

We very much need those revelations as well, Dear Reader. For, you see, Israel’s sons, scattered through the world, have now begun the final act of *departing* – the departure from our various lands of exile back to the land of our fathers, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya’akov. It is important in the midst of daily stories of terrorist attacks and ‘land for peace’ proposals not to lose sight of this miracle that is happening around us in our lifetimes.

Look beyond today’s headlines, Dear Reader. As terrifying or as frustrating as the headlines may be the truth that really matters is this: ***We as a people – and all the people of the nations, tribes and tongues of the world who wish to participate with us - stand on the threshold of the Redemption promised to Ya’akov.*** Indeed, many – natural born Jew and covenant engrafted Gentile - have already crossed that threshold. Many more are approaching it every day.

May Maschiach soon lead our people, every individual Jew who will come, and all

gentiles who wish to come with them, out of exile and back to the place prepared for them - first in the Holy One's *Holy Land*, and secondly in *the World to Come*.

A Brief Introduction to Haftarah Vayetze

Hosea 12:13 – 14:10

The haftarah readings selected by the sages for this week come from the book of the prophet known to most people today as '**Hosea**'. The prophet accuses his contemporaries of forgetting the Holy One. The direct connection between parsha **Vayetze** and this passage in Hosea is made clear by the first verse, wherein the prophet reminds us:

*Ya'akov fled to the land of Aram,
and [there] Israel served for a wife, and for a wife he herded sheep.*
[Hoshea 12:13]

That reference to Ya'akov's time of exile in Charan proves to be a launching pad from which the prophet first indicts Israel for sins of *forgetting and forsaking the Holy One* and for *turning its back on His great deliverance*, then *passionately calls her to make t'shuvah* [return]. The prophet will say to her:

Shuvah Yisra'el ad Adonai Elohecha

Return, Israel, to the Holy One your Lord;

ki chashalta b'avonecha

you have stumbled because of your sins.

K'chu imachem devarim

Take with you words,

v'shuvu el-Adonai

and return to the Holy One.

imeru elav kol-tisa Avon v'kach-tov

Say to Him, 'Forgive all iniquity, and grant us favor;

uneshalmah farim s'fateinu

so we will offer the words of our lips instead of calves.'

[Hoshea 14:4-5]

The prophetic call this week for all of us is to pause and consider in what ways and in what areas of our lives we too have for all practical purposes forgotten the Holy One. Here are some questions to ponder:

Have you forgotten what His Presence feels like, and how once it overwhelmed your senses and transcended 'reason'? Have you forgotten what His Voice sounds like, and how once the sound of it made you tremble deep inside? Have you forgotten how the Fragrance of His Breath once awakened passion within you, and

caused your heart to leap within your chest? Have you forgotten what the light of His countenance looks and feels like, and how once that Light both transformed your visage and exponentially enhanced your vision?

Have you forgotten how *Wonderful He is*? Have you forgotten how *Holy and Awesome He is*? Have you forgotten *the humility that comes with the knowledge of his glory*? Ah, Dear Reader, it happens to the best of us. Sometimes in the busyness of life, in the ‘mundane, mundane waiting’, and as we face deadlines and interpersonal conflicts, we all forget. We don’t forget that He exists. We just forget that *He is Above All Else, and is Everything to us*.

Meditate also on the extent to which you have in the course of forgetting Him also forsaken His great deliverance in deference to either the cold orthodoxy of religion on the one hand or the misshapen values of secular society on the other hand. Hear the passion of the Holy One’s heart in the prophet’s message. This is the prophet through whom the Holy One will declare Himself to be our husband instead of our Master. Hear the Holy One crying out to you like a husband cries out to a cold-hearted spouse. Hear Him calling you back to the place of intimacy and communion with Him. And heed the call to *t’shuvah*, then stand and watch in awe as Maschiach restores to you and your loved ones to the destiny and blessedness for which you were all created and which is your eternal inheritance in Him.

Mi chacham v’yaven eleh navon

Whoever is wise, let him understand these things;

v’yeda'em ki-yesharim

whoever is discerning, let him know them.

Dar'chei Adonai v'tzadikim yelchu vam

For the ways of the Holy One are right, and the righteous walk in them;

ufosh'im yikashlu vam

but transgressors stumble in them.

[Hoshea 14:10]

The Apostles of Y'shua of Natzret Speak

John 1:35-51

The truly great and eternal truths of Scripture run like a thread throughout all the Holy Writings. All revelation that is pure, holy, and eternal therefore must begin in the Creation story, must resurface in the accounts of the patriarchs, must come into better focus in the Sinaitic revelations, must find voice and expression in the Psalms and Wisdom writings, must be reiterated by the Prophets, and must be brought forward into the Intense Supernal Light of Messiah by one or more of the apostolic writers.

Each Revelatory Truth of the Holy One – each eternal and unchanging principle of relationship with Him – you see, is a river that runs throughout the Bible. *Our perspective of it* changes with the circumstances, but it itself does not. Our ability to grasp it and apply it to our lives increases with each resurfacing and clarification – but it remains eternally the same, *just as its Source remains the same.*

To complement and place in Messianic context the readings of parsha *Vayetze* and its haftarah I commend to you this year the final 16 verses of the first chapter of Yochanan's [John's] account of Y'shua's life on earth. In these passages Yochanan, who was *kohen gadol* [high priest] by birthright⁸, but who turned itinerant preacher of righteousness and Immerser by reason of the pollution of the priesthood he was born to head up, will declare to those who seek to follow him that Y'shua of Natzret is 'the Lamb of God' and will thereby follow Ya'akov in the *ministry of decreasing*.

We will follow the talmidim of Yochanan – men named Andrew and Sh'mon Kefa [Simon Peter] as they come to a point of departure like unto Ya'akov's – in that they first meet the Messiah, then leave everything and everyone they know to learn and begin to walk in Messiah's way of walking out the Torah lifestyle. We will see these two introduce Messiah to a man named *Pilipos* [Phillip], and we will see *Pilipos* in turn introduce Messiah to an acquaintance named *Natan'el* [Nathaniel]. To this man Y'shua will make the famous declaration:

***"Most assuredly, I tell you, hereafter you will see heaven opened,
and the angels of the Holy One ascending and descending on the Son of Man."***

[John 1:51]

Hence our week will begin and end with a vision of an open heaven, with a stairway upon which angels ascend and descend.

*May you, like Ya'akov and Natan'el,
be granted to see the Holy One's gateway to Heaven.
May you and your loved ones dwell in its shadow,
and live in the very presence of the angels of God.*

The Rabbi's son

⁸ See Luke 1:5-17.

Amidah Prayer Focus for the Week
The Fourth Petition: Ga'al [Kinsman Redemption]

Re'eh v'onyeinu, v'rivah riveinu
Behold our troubles, and carry away our sorrows

u'goleinu m'hera l'ma'an Shemecha
and redeem us quickly, for the sake of Your Name

ki go'el chazak atah
for You are a fierce Redeemer

Baruch Atah Adonai Go'el Yisrael
Blessed are You, O Holy One, Israel's Kinsman-Redeemer