



**VAYETZE**

**JACOB'S MORAL DILEMMA**

*Don't Be Pious at Someone Else's Expense*

# PARSHAH OVERVIEW

## *Vayetze*

Jacob leaves his hometown of Be'er Sheba 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 Charan, Jacob stays with and works for his 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 handmaiden, Bilhah, as a wife to bear children in her stead, and two more sons, Dan and Naftali, are born. Leah does the same with her handmaiden, 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 will 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.

Is your spiritual growth more or less important than your neighbor's spiritual growth?



## RASHI'S RULES

1. If there is a difficulty in the text that would bother a five-year-old student, Rashi addresses it.
2. If Rashi does not address it, it can mean one of two things: either (a) it's not a question, or (b) the answer is obvious from Rashi's previous comments.

# TEXT 1A

*Genesis 29:16*

וּלְלָבָן שְׁתֵּי בָנוֹת, שֵׁם הַגְּדֹלָה לֵאָה  
וְשֵׁם הַקְּטָנָה רָחֵל.

And Laban had two daughters. The older one was Leah, and the younger one was Rachel.

## TEXT 1B

*Genesis 29:23*

וַיְהִי בְעֶרְבֹב, וַיִּקַּח אֶת לֵאָה בְּתוֹ וַיָּבֵא  
אֶתָּהּ אֵלָיו, וַיִּבֶא אֵלֶיהָ.

And it was in the evening, and he  
[Laban] took his daughter Leah and  
brought her to him. And he married her.

# TEXT 1C

*Genesis 29:30*

וַיִּבֹא גַם אֶל רָחֵל, וַיֶּאֱהָב גַּם אֶת רָחֵל  
מִלְאָה.

And he also married Rachel, and he  
loved Rachel more than Leah.



## QUESTION

How did Jacob marry two sisters if doing so is forbidden in the Torah?



## TEXT 2

*Leviticus 18:18*

וְאִשָּׁה אֶל אֶחָתָהּ לֹא תִקַּח, לְצָרָר  
לְגִלוֹת עֲרוֹתֶיהָ עָלֶיהָ בְּחַיֶּיהָ.

Do not take a woman [in marriage] with her sister as rivals, to uncover the nakedness of one upon the other in her lifetime.

## TEXT 3A

*Genesis 26:5*

אֲשֶׁר שָׁמַע אֲבִרְהָם בְּקוֹלִי וַיִּשְׁמֹר  
מִשְׁמֵרָתִי.

Abraham hearkened to My voice and  
kept My charge.

## TEXT 3B

*Rashi, ad loc.*

"וַיִּשְׁמַר מִשְׁמֵרֵי תִּי." גְּזֵרוֹת לְהִרְקָה עַל  
הָאֲזָרוֹת שְׁבִתוֹרָה, כְּגוֹן שְׁנִיּוֹת לְעַרְיּוֹת.

“He kept My charge.” [Referring to] decrees to distance oneself from actions that the Torah warns against. For example, prohibitions to prevent illicit relationships.

Rashi's silence suggests he expects students to find the answer on their own, implying it's so simple even a five-year-old can grasp it. The answer must be implied in his earlier comments or previous biblical passages.



## BINDING LAWS



Legally Enforceable

## SOCIAL NORMS



Optional

# TEXT 4

*Maimonides, Mishneh  
Torah, Laws of Kings  
and War 9:1*

עַל שְׁשֵׁה דְבָרִים נִצְטָנָה אָדָם  
הָרֵאשׁוֹן: עַל עֲבוֹדַת זָרָה, וְעַל  
בְּרֵכַת הַשֵּׁם, וְעַל שְׂפִיכוֹת  
דָּמִים, וְעַל גְּלוּי עֲרִיּוֹת, וְעַל  
הַגָּזֵל, וְעַל הַדִּינָיִם.

אֲף עַל פִּי שְׂכֵלָן הוּא קִבְּלָהּ  
בְּיַדֵּינוּ מִמֹּשֶׁה רַבְּנוּ, וְהִדְעַת  
נוֹטָה לָהֶן, מְכַלֵּל דְבָרֵי תוֹרָה  
יִרְאֶה שְׁעַל אֱלֹהֵי נִצְטָנָה.

הוֹסִיף לְנֹחַ אֶבֶר מִן הַחַי,  
שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "אֲךָ בְּשָׂר בְּנִפְשׁוֹ דָּמוֹ  
לֹא תֹאכְלוּ" (בְּרֵאשִׁית ט, ד).

נִמְצְאוּ שִׁבְעַ מִצְוֹת.

Adam was given six commandments: The prohibitions against idol worship, blasphemy, murder, incest and adultery, and theft, as well as the commandment to establish courts of justice.

Though we received these commandments [separately] from Moses and [we would have embraced them regardless because] they are logical, it still appears from the Torah that G-d instructed Adam concerning them.

G-d added the prohibition against eating flesh from a living animal and gave it to Noah. As it is written, "You may not eat flesh with its life, which is its blood" (Genesis 9:4).

Thus, there are seven commandments.

# TEXT 5

*Rashi, Genesis 11:32*

כְּשִׁיזָא אַבְרָם מִחָרָן עָדִין נִשְׁאַרוּ מִשְׁנוֹתָיו הַרְבֵּה, וְלָמָּה  
הַקָּדִים הִכְתּוּב מִיתָתוֹ שֶׁל תֶּרַח לִיְצִיאָתוֹ שֶׁל אַבְרָם?  
שֶׁלֹּא יִהְיֶה הַדָּבָר מְפֹרָס לְכֹל, וַיֹּאמְרוּ: לֹא קִיַּם אַבְרָם  
אֶת כְּבוֹד אָבִיו.

Terah lived for many years after Abraham left Charan, so why did the Torah relate Terah's death before Abraham's departure?

So that the matter would not become public knowledge and people would not gossip that Abraham failed to fulfill the requirement to honor one's father.

## TEXT 6

*Rashi, Genesis 34:7*

לְעֵנֹת אֶת הַבְּתוּלוֹת, שֶׁהָאֲמוֹת גָּדְרוּ  
עֲצָמָן מִן הָעַרְיֹת עַל יְדֵי הַמַּבּוּל.

Rape was proscribed when the nations adopted laws against all illicit relationships as a result of the flood.



## BINDING LAWS

*Adopted by all nations*

- The Noahide Code
- Prohibition against Illicit Relations
- Honoring Parents



The Patriarchs voluntarily adopted all the laws of the Torah as their norm, though they were not legally obligated to do so.

## TEXT 7

*Rabbi Yakov Heizler,  
Rav Rabanan Al Maran  
Baal Shevet Halevi, p.  
401*

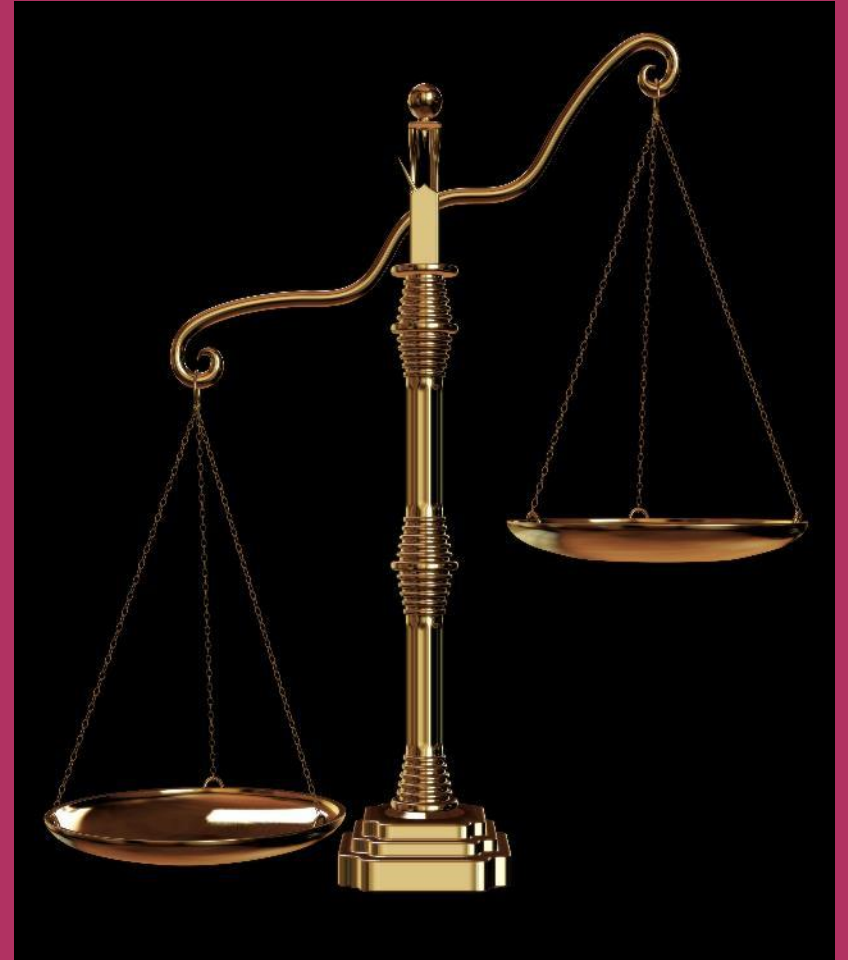
כמה פעמים שינן לפני המשמשים בהוראה, שבעל  
הוראה, אף על פי שדעתו נוטה בדרך כלל לחומרה,  
מכל מקום, צריך לדעת מהי שורת הדין ומה חומרא,  
כדי שבבא שאלה לפניו ידע להקל במקום הצורך.

[Rabbi Shmuel Wosner] often reminded rabbis who serve as Halachic decisors to know which stringencies are Halachically binding and which are motivated by one's personal scruples. This way, even rabbis who are inclined to be stringent will know when it is necessary to rule leniently.

**BINDING LAWS**



**OPTIONAL COMMITMENTS**



# TEXT 8

*Genesis 29:25*

וַיְהִי בַבֶּקֶר, וַהֲנִהּ הִיא לְאֵה. וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל לָבָן:  
"מַה זֹּאת עָשִׂיתָ לִּי! הֲלֹא בְרַחֵל עָבַדְתִּי עֲמֹךְ,  
וְלָמָּה רָמִיתָנִי?"

And it was in the morning and behold it was Leah. And he said to Laban, "What is this that you did to me?! Behold I worked for you for the right to marry Rachel. And why did you deceive me?"

## BINDING LAWS

*Adopted by all nations*

- The Noahide Code
- Prohibition against Illicit Relations
- Honoring Parents
- Honesty

## TEXT 9A

*The Rebbe, Rabbi  
Menachem Mendel  
Schneerson, Likutei  
Sichot 5, p. 147*

פון די זהירות'ן וואס זיינען  
דעמאלט געווען אנגענומען ביי  
די אומות, איז געווען - צו  
אפהיטן זיך פון אפנארן איינער  
דעם אנדערן.

וכדמוכה פון דעם וואס יעקב  
האט גע'טענה'ט צו לבן'ען "ולמה  
רמיתני" (בראשית כט, כה), ביז  
אפילו לבן (הרמאי) האט געמוזט  
פארענטפערן זיך מיט דער  
בארעכטיקונג, אז "לא יעשה כן  
במקומינו גו'" (שם, כו).

One of the norms adopted at that time by the nations was to refrain from deception.

This may be inferred from Jacob's demand of Laban, "Why did you deceive me?" (Genesis 29:25). [This norm was accepted] to the extent that even Laban the swindler was compelled to defend himself with the argument that [marrying the younger sister ahead of the older sister] "is not done in our place" (Genesis 29:26).

## TEXT 9B

*The Rebbe, Rabbi  
Menachem Mendel  
Schneerson, Ibid., pp.  
147-148*

ווייל יעקב האט פריער צוגעזאגט  
חתונה צו האבן מיט רחל'ען . . .  
איז אויב ער וואלט איר ניט  
דערפילט דעם צוזאג, וואלט ער  
דאך דערמיט באגאנגען רמייה.

במילא איז מובן, אז די חומרא פון  
אפהיטן דעם לאו "ואשה אל  
אחותה לא תקח" (ויקרא יח, יח),  
אויף וועלכען ס'איז דאן ניט געווען  
קיין ציווי, האט ניט געקענט דוחה  
זיין דעם איסור פון רמייה.

Considering that Jacob  
had previously promised  
Rachel that he would  
marry her, . . . not  
keeping his pledge would  
have been deceptive.

His personal choice to  
observe the nonbinding  
stringency "Do not take a  
woman and her sister"  
(Leviticus 18:18) could not  
overrule the prohibition  
against deception.



## ANSWER

Jacob married two sisters because, at the time, the prohibition against marrying sisters was a voluntary family practice, not yet a binding law. However, the law against deception was binding, and since he had promised to marry Rachel, he was obligated to fulfill that promise, even if it meant marrying two sisters.



Spiritual Charity:  
someone else's basic  
spiritual needs take  
priority over your  
spiritual luxuries.

# TEXT 10

*The Rebbe, Rabbi  
Menachem Mendel  
Schneerson, Ibid., p. 148*

בשעת ס'איז דא א איד וואס ווייס ניט  
פון אידישקייט, און מען דארף אים  
געבן צדקה ברוחניות, דערציילן אים  
און ווייזן אים די וועג פון אידישקייט  
וכו', האט א צוויטער איד . . . קיין  
רעכט ניט צי טענה'ן אז ער וועט בעסער  
אט די צייט פארנוצן פאר זיך אויף צו  
שטייגן אליין אין תורה ועבודה.

נאר ער דארף זיך אליין משפט'ן: מיט  
וואס איז ער דאס וויכטיקער און  
שענער פון יענעם, אז ער דארף האבן  
כל מיני הידורים ברוחניות, אויפן  
חשבון פון דעם וואס ער וועט  
פארמיידן פון א צווייטן אידן די ענינים  
הכי מוכרחים?

Some Jews know nothing of Judaism and require spiritual charity—someone to teach and show them the basics. In such circumstances, no one has the right to claim they can't because their time would be better utilized studying Torah and praying.

Rather we must judge ourselves: What makes our spiritual devotions more important or better than those of our fellow? Is it right for us to worship G-d at the highest level, at the price of refusing other Jews their basic spiritual needs?

# TEXT 11

*Jewish Educational  
Media, Mr. Shimshon  
Stock, "In-Reach," Living  
Torah, 72:286,  
[www.chabad.org](http://www.chabad.org)*

I was a crazy kid. I was wild. At one point, my friend was serving the Previous Rebbe, and I was sitting upstairs and rushing him to serve [the Rebbe] faster. I said, "Hurry up, we have to go."

So, the Rebbe asked, "What is your rush? Where are you going?"

I said, "You don't want to know."

He said, "Tell me. I won't tell anyone."

I said, "You don't want to know."

I had just turned fifteen. After he asked several times, I told him. I did not have the nerve to tell him right away that I wanted to go to the movies. But since he said, "Tell me. I won't feel bad; I won't tell anyone," I told him.

The Rebbe asked, "Maybe, instead of rushing [to go to the movies], I will learn Torah with you for half an hour, from 8:00 to 8:30?"



# TEXT 11

*Jewish Educational  
Media, Mr. Shimshon  
Stock, "In-Reach," Living  
Torah, 72:286,  
[www.chabad.org](http://www.chabad.org)*

We went to learn with him every Thursday night for about six weeks. . . . I was not studious; I was not interested in it. So, we sat and discussed, and he would encourage me to be more observant. He would not rebuke me. Rather, he helped me understand that it would be better for me to be more observant.

We studied the abridged Code of Jewish Law, that much I recall. But we did not delve into it deeply. We learned certain laws, but we did not discuss them much; he focused more on my character traits. He did not lower my self-esteem; he did not push me down. He never pushed people down. Especially me; I don't know why, but that was the Rebbe. He never pushed people down.

Deep down, we always know what the right thing to do is. Often, the best person to consult for guidance is yourself.



# TEXT 12

*Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh  
Weinreb, “A Jew from  
Maryland,” jedia.org,  
June 8, 2013*

And then I heard the Rebbe say in the background, in Yiddish: “Tell him that there is a Jew who lives in Maryland that he can speak to. Der Yid hayst Veinreb—his name is Weinreb.”

The secretary asked me, “Did you hear what the Rebbe said?”

Now, I couldn’t believe my ears. I knew for sure I had not given the secretary my name, but the Rebbe had just said my name. I was taken aback, and I wanted to hear it again. So, when the secretary asked whether I heard, I said no. The secretary repeated the Rebbe’s words to me: “S’iz doh a Yid in Maryland mit vemen er zol reddn. Zayn numen iz Veinreb.” “There’s a Jew in Maryland with whom he should speak. His name is Weinreb.”

So, I replied, “But my name is Weinreb!”

And then I heard the Rebbe say, “Oib azoi, zol er visen zayn az amol darf men reden tzu zich—if that’s the case, then he should know that, sometimes, one needs to speak to himself.”

The secretary also seemed stunned by what was taking place. He just stopped, and I could hear his breathing. And then he said to me, “The Rebbe said that sometimes it’s best to talk to yourself. Isn’t your name Weinreb?”



# TEXT 12

*Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh  
Weinreb, “A Jew from  
Maryland,” jemedial.org,  
June 8, 2013*

“Yes, my name is Weinreb, but maybe the Rebbe means a different Weinreb?”

“No, the Rebbe’s saying, ‘Talk to Weinreb,’ and he explained that you must talk to yourself.”

I thanked him very much, and the call ended with that.

. . . Since 1971, there have been times when I faced difficult questions in life and, before I sought advice from anyone else, I would listen to my inner voice. I would set aside time to first study some of the Rebbe’s teachings—like Likutei Sichot—in order to connect again, and then I’d follow the advice he gave me: to talk to myself. And I’ve encouraged other people to do the same.

Before you go asking this and that of another person, first talk to yourself and listen to what you have to say about it—sometimes your own advice is the best advice.



# TEXT 13

*The Rebbe, Rabbi  
Menachem Mendel  
Schneerson, Sichot  
Kodesh 5730:1, p. 361*

דער חשבון דארף זיין א חשבון צדק.

ווי עס איז דא דער ווארט פון רב'ן מהר"ש, אז  
"דער אויבערשטער נארט מען דאך זיכער ניט  
אפ חס ושלום, און די וועלט נארט מען אויך ניט  
אפ, נאר ער נארט זיך אליין אפ, איז דען א קונץ  
אז א נאר זאל אפנארן א נאר?" וואס וויבאלד אז  
מ'האט דאס אונז דערציילט, איז א סימן אז דאס  
איז אויך א נתינת כח אז דאס קען אזוי זיין.

"ולא בשמים היא . . . ולא מעבר לים היא"  
(דברים ל, יב-יג). און ווי רש"י טייטשט,  
"שאלו הייתה בשמים, היית צריך לעלות  
אחריה וללמדה". און אויב דאס וואלט געווען  
"מעבר לים", וואלט מען געדארפט איבערפארן  
דעם ים. נאר בחסדי ה' איז דאס לא בשמים היא  
. . . ולא מעבר לים היא, נאר "כי קרוב אליך  
הדבר מאד בפיך ובלבבך", והמעשה הוא העיקר,  
"לעשותו" (דברים ל, יד).

We must assess ourselves honestly.

There is a saying from the fourth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Shmuel Schneerson, "You certainly can't mislead G-d, G-d forbid. You also can't mislead the entire world. You can only mislead yourself. So, is it an achievement to mislead a fool?" The fact that this saying was brought to our attention means that we can live up to it.

The Torah states, "It is not in the Heavens . . . or across the ocean" (Deuteronomy 30:12–13). Rashi explains, "If it were in the Heavens, you would need to climb after it to study it." If it were across an ocean, you would need to cross the ocean. By G-d's grace, [the key to honest self-assessment] is not in the Heavens . . . or across the ocean. Rather, "It is very close to you—it is in your mouth and heart, so that you fulfill it" (Ibid., 30:14)—for action is key.



If a fellow Jew needs our help with their basic Judaism, we must dedicate the necessary time, even if we intended to use it for our own spiritual development.

## KEY POINTS

1. It is good to adopt personal stringencies and commitments for our spiritual advancement, but never at the expense of our standing obligations.
2. It is good to push ourselves to be as pious, righteous, and scholarly as possible, but not at the expense of others.
3. If another needs us to teach them basic Judaism, we must accept even if we had hoped to use that time for personal spiritual advancement.
4. Sometimes we lack clarity on the right choice to make. However, in our heart of hearts, we always know the truth.
5. To find that truth, we must consult our inner voice and assess our motives honestly.

