

## **Vayeitze D'var Torah**

**By Ruth Nemzoff, author of *Don't Bite Your Tongue: How to Foster Rewarding Relationships with Your Adult Children***

**You will recall that Rebecca sends her son, Jacob away to find a wife. She does not like the Hittite women who live near-by. And, she also wants to get him away from the wrath of his brother, Esau, from whom, with her assistance, Jacob had stolen the birth right. Like so many of us when we send our kids off to college, or graduate school or for the summer. We have many agendas. We want our children to get an education, or have a good experience or get out of a bad situation and we want them to find a nice spouse. And like Rebecca we discover that often our children do not return. And we are bereft that they choose to remain where we ourselves have sent them for opportunity.**

**In today's pasha ,Veyeitze, Jacob does indeed find a wife in this new land, a lovely girl, she doesn't worship the same good, but is lovely, none-**

the less. But, oy, the father in-law. Laban. It turns out he is a trickster , a deceiver and not a particularly generous guy. After an initial show of hospitality, Laban makes it clear that Jacob cannot be a freeloader, but must work for him. Jacob asks to marry Rachel and agrees to work for seven years to have this privilege. But on the wedding night, Laban , substitutes his older and less pretty daughter , Leah, for younger daughter, Rachel . Now had Rebecca had the advantage to modern conveniences like the donkey express or the internet, she would have heard this news and been irate. She might have concluded that her son was cheated and his father in –law, her brother, was clearly a no-good nick. If, however, she reflected on her own behavior she might have noticed that her brother had done exactly what she had done. She had deceived her husband so that he gave his inheritance to the younger son, not the older one for whom it was intended. She did this for what she perceived as a greater good. She might have seen some of her own imperfections in her in-law and she might have realized that she she too was not perfect, This of course, would have been a painful realization, so It might have felt better to complain about her son’s father-in-law.

Had she reflected further, she might have realized that like so many of our *machatunin*, Laban, was not all bad. Yes, he did cheat Jacob, but he

had also protected his daughter. He knew that if he married off the younger before the older, the elder's life would be at a standstill. She would be doomed to a barren, unmarried future. So Laban, the terrible father-in-law, was perhaps a very good father. Like Rebecca he cheated for what he saw as a greater good. Had Rebecca been able to see this, she would have realized her in-law was a mixed bag, much like she was. Someone who would do whatever it took to succeed, but also someone who cares about the family.

Laban might have rationalized that he was not merely cheating Jacob, but was compromising to help his daughter. He agreed that if Jacob stayed and continued to work for another seven years, he could have Rachel , too. What could be better? He would give Jacob his two daughters. However, from Rebecca's point of view. Laban was a cheat. Again, had Rebecca had access to modern communication systems, she might have advised and cautioned her son. She might have said, "Don't trust this guy ,your father-in-law ? He cheated you once already. What guarantees do you have that he won't cheat you again?" She might have said, "You are a fool to stay and work for him. " But Jacob had made his choices and both she and he had to live with them. Like so many of us, Rebecca might have wanted to save her child from making another mistake, but was impotent to do so.

**However, as the years passed, things turned out not as disastrous as Rebecca would have feared. Leah bore him many sons, and gave him her servant to bear him some more sons, and Rachel did the same and finally even Rachel had a son. Jacob worked hard, sure, but he was able to have a family, and had he only married Rachel, maybe he wouldn't have had this joy. Like so many of the decisions our children make, they may work out in a way different from what we expected.**

**And, finally Jacob does stand up to his father -in -law. He outwits him by using great animal husbandry techniques and he negotiates a good deal. He manages to get his father-in-law to allow him to take all the speckled goats and all the dark sheep. His brothers -in-law are not happy. But, Jacob speaks up and he says, "Your father has cheated me. He has changed my wages time and time again. "The girls, Rachel and Leah, now side with Jacob. They think they deserve some of their fathers' wealth also. We like Labon risk creating lifetime of animosity amongst our children unless we treat all our children fairly and discuss with them why and how we plan to divide our estates.**

**As Jacob was leaving Laban's land, Rachel steals her father's gods and hides them so he cannot pray to them and overtake Jacob. She, who did not worship his G-D, helps assure that her husband's God does not have to compete with her father's. Like so many of our non-Jewish in-law children, Rachel preserves her spouse's faith.**

**This is a tale of many perspectives as all family stories are. One might interpret this story to show that what goes around must come around, Jacob himself had deceived his father. And now his father-in-law deceives him.**

**We can see Laban as both a terrible immoral man or as a good father, protecting his oldest child from certain despair. We can also say Laban was terrible and inhospitable to require Jacob to work for him. After all, he was a visitor and his nephew. On the other hand, we can say that Laban, rather than enabling Jacob to remain an irresponsible youth, encouraged him to take on adult responsibility. We can relate today to the dilemma of questioning when are we enabling our children to remain irresponsible and when are we facilitating their growth. The ancient version of : Do we allow our children to follow their dream of becoming the next great rock star, or the author of the great American novel, or do we require them to support themselves?**

**We could also take the message that our actions when raising our children can later affect who our children become. Rebecca and Laban were siblings. Both deceived people who they were supposedly quite close with. Was this deception learned at the knees of their parents? Is this parasha a warning us that unless we are generous and empathetic to our children, they will not be empathetic to us.**

**There is so much we can learn from this story; about being honest with our own motives for the decisions we make for our children; about accepting the flaws of our new family members; about not worrying that every decision our children make will lead to disaster. We can learn that with loving kindness we can bring our families together far better than judgment and rejection. We can learn that if we welcome the spouses from whatever background, they might, just might, end up being the defenders of our faith. We can learn that our children may make good out of seemingly bad situations and mostly we can learn that we must forgive both ourselves and others for our flaws. We are all, imperfect humans just like Rebecca and Laban.**

**At the conclusion of this pasha, Jacob and Laban have a heated argument. Eventually they sign a treaty promising to remain peaceful and they part ways. In many families, the only truce is parting ways. Families may do this physically, or by biting their tongues and never working out their problems . If having a cold peace and no connection is NOT your goal, you might want to think about the many perspectives in your family, and how you might share those perspectives. You might want to think about what being fair to all your children and what they fairness means to you and to them. Does it mean dividing things Even steven or giving each according to his or her needs. , and you might want to look at all family members through realistic, but slightly rose colored glasses. Like Rebecca and Laban. We are all a mixture of good and bad.**