

SIDRA OF THE WEEK : וַיְצַד

1. Yaakov, obeying his parents' orders, leaves home. Seeing him leave, Aysov sends his son Elifaz to overtake Yaakov and kill him, but Elifaz — who was brought up on the knee of his grandfather Yitzchok — knows this to be wrong and only takes everything that Yaakov has with him, sparing his life. Elifaz returns with these things to Aysov and intimates that Yaakov is no more, and Aysov's anger is subdued.
2. Yaakov goes to the Yeshiva of Shem and Ayver and is hidden there for fourteen years, after which time, obeying the wishes of his parents, he makes his way to Chorrion and the house of Lovvon, his mother's brother.
3. He is almost at Chorrion when he realizes that he has passed the holy site of Mount Moriah without offering up any Tefilloh, and he resolves to return there. He gets to Luz (not far from Mount Moriah) when the sun sets suddenly and he is forced to sleep there in an open field. During the night he has the dream of the Heavenly Ladder, in which he is shown various angels ascending and descending — a prophecy of the different empires that will emerge and their spheres of influence upon the future Jewish People. He is promised by HaShem that He will care for him wherever he goes and for his descendants always.
4. When Yaakov awakes from his sleep, he is fearful of the holiness of the place and names it "Beis-El," meaning "House of G-d." (It is the site of the Beis HaMikdash in Yerushola'im.) He proclaims the stone upon which he had rested his head as a monument to the glory of HaShem, symbolizing the foundation stone of the future House of Israel, and he vows to dedicate to HaShem a tenth ("Maaser" "מַעֲשֵׂר") of all that He will give him (as indeed the Jewish People do to this day).
5. Yaakov once again sets out in the direction of the Land of the Two Rivers and arrives at Chorrion. When he sees a group of shepherds with their flocks of sheep gathered round a well of water, he asks them if they know Lovvon. "Yes," they answer. "And are things well with him?" "Yes, everything is well with him" — as could be seen from the fact that his daughter Rochel is just then coming into sight, bringing her father's sheep. Yaakov then asks the shepherds why they are gathering up the sheep so early. "Why don't you draw water and give the sheep to drink and let them graze!" They explain that they would like to do just that but they cannot roll the great big stone off the top of the well without Rochel adding her strength to theirs and thus get to the water. From their matter-of-fact reply, Yaakov is put on his guard about the dishonest nature of this people of Chorrion. It seems they cannot trust even their own people but must ensure in this way (in what is arguably the world's first recorded example of a combination lock!) that no-one takes the water from the well without the others being present. Thus, when Rochel arrives at the scene shortly after that (but not before) Yaakov steps forward and singlehandedly rolls the heavy stone off the well. (After all, he feels obliged

SIDRA OF THE WEEK : נצ"ו

to do the shepherds a favour for having wrongly accused them of cheating on their employers by gathering in the sheep too early.) At the same time, Yaakov thus shows that he has been blessed with great physical strength and that he is willing to work for his keep while he is Chorrion with his uncle.

6. His uncle Lovvon quickly recognizes what a great asset Yaakov will be to his fortunes and he is keen that Yaakov should work for him for as long as possible. To this end he promises Yaakov that he may marry Rochel if he works for him for seven years. But at the end of that time he deceives Yaakov by making him marry Rochel's sister, Leah, first. Only in return for a further seven years' work can he marry Rochel. Yaakov also marries two other daughters of Lovvon, Bilhoh and Zilpoh, and there are born eleven sons and one daughter.
7. Once Yosef is born, Yaakov asks for Lovvon's permission to leave. Lovvon, knowing full well that his new prosperity has transpired only with Yaakov's coming, coaxes him to stay on for a while longer, this time for payment, namely, any marked sheep, or spotted sheep, or mottled sheep, or coloured sheep (he repeatedly changed the conditions each season!) that are born into Lovvon's flocks shall belong to Yaakov. So Yaakov stays on for six more years.
8. HaShem blesses Yaakov's endeavours and he prospers exceedingly till Lovvon — despite his own great wealth — is jealous of him. At this, Yaakov is determined to return home to the Land of Kenaan and his father's house, and he departs — this time without informing Lovvon, who is far away supervising the sheep-shearing.
9. Unknown to Yaakov, however, Rochel has taken her father's household gods (a last-minute attempt to stop his idol-worshipping). Lovvon is informed of Yaakov's leaving and gives chase. That night, Lovvon is warned by an angel of HaShem not to harm Yaakov. When he reaches him, Lovvon rebukes Yaakov for stealing away — and for stealing his idols. He unsuccessfully searches through Yaakov's belongings and Yaakov is angered by Lovvon's behaviour towards him.
10. Lovvon tries to pacify Yaakov's feelings and makes a "Treaty of Friendship" with him at Gal'ayd. Yaakov prepares a farewell banquet for Lovvon and his men and he parts from Lovvon in all good faith.
11. As soon as Yaakov is out of sight, however, Lovvon sends a message to Aysov informing him of Yaakov's imminent return home.
12. Yaakov, oblivious of any danger, proceeds on his journey home with his family and his flocks. But when he comes to the borders of the Holy Land he sees camps of angels ready to accompany him along his way. He feels uneasy about the future: after the years of trouble with his devious father-in-law, he is anxious: what lies ahead if he is in need of such protection from HaShem?

For the explanation of the Haftorah of Sidra נצ"ו please go to HAFTORAHS.