

Parashat VaYetse

- When we think of a *shaliakh*, that is, an apostle or emissary, we imagine a man in his thirties or older, someone with experience in shepherding congregations and discipling others. We picture a spiritually mature man who is sent out by a G-d-fearing community – typically Christian or Jewish – to extend the influence of a movement to a part of the world that has had little contact with the vision promoted by the sending community. In several of his letters recorded in the B’rit Chadashah, Paul, Sha’ul, describes his Messianic apostolic authority as originating in the will of G-d and not men, and to the believers in Corinth, Sha’ul wrote that “Truly the signs of an apostle were worked among you in all patience, in signs and wonders and mighty works.”
- But now suppose there is a young man in the community who is raised by G-dly parents, who is taught the traditions of faith and family, and who is sent out by the community to find a wife, raise children, and perpetuate the vision of covenant relationships begun years earlier by ancestors who behaved righteously in response to discerning the voice of HaShem. In other words, suppose we consider a young man such as Jacob, the central figure in this week’s parashah, VaYetse.
- *VaYetse Ya’akov*, “and Jacob went out” is how the portion begins as we proceed through the story of Jacob’s spiritual journey after a troubled youth marked by rivalry with his brother Esau for spiritual heritage and competition for their parent’s affection. Jacob the supplanter, the trickster who has learned guile through his mother, Rebecca, now finds a worthy adversary in Uncle Laban, under whom Jacob must toil for fourteen years to acquire his beloved bride Rachel.
- If Ya’akov is indeed a type of apostle, bringing the good news, the *besorah*, that the G-d of Abraham and Isaac will bring forth a future seed who will bless not only Jacob’s offspring but all nations, then what are the signs of Jacob’s apostolic authority? Our answer can be found in Ya’akov’s own testimony to his brother Esau found in next week’s parashah.
- In addition to the wives and children acquired in Charan, Ya’akov reports “I have lived as a foreigner with Lavan, and stayed until now. I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, men-servants, and maid-servants. I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find favor in your sight.” The fruit of Ya’akov’s apostleship consists of the greater witness afforded by an expanded household. Through the twelve sons of Jacob, Beit Yisrael, the House of Israel can bless the Promised Land and can extend blessing to all nations.
- If any of us find that we, like Jacob, are sent out in service to HaShem, may we find the faith to believe that like the author of the book of Hebrews, we are “partakers of a heavenly calling, among those who consider the Apostle and Koheyn Gadol of our confession, Yeshua the Messiah.”