

# Taking a Long and Deep Breath

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As many of us know, the chapters of the Torah are not of Jewish origin. The division of the Torah into groups of verses that are part of our tradition is indicated by the "Ptuchot" and "Stumot", indicated in the Torah by the letters "פ" and "ס", that divide the Torah into paragraphs.

The first 6 parshiyot of the Torah, from Breishit through Toldot, are all divided up into paragraphs. Here are the numbers:

Breishit-23

Noach-13

Lech Lecha- 7

Vayera-6

Chaye Sara-4

Toldot-4

Parshat Vayetse is the first Parsha, and one of only 2, that is not divided up at all into paragraphs. Vayetse is a single block of 147 verses.

While there is no question that results from this point, it is something that should be realized and considered.

The story of Vayetse is a story of Jacob leaving his home to find a wife. It is reasonable to assume he would find her, marry her, and take her home to meet his parents and live with him happily ever after in the land of Canaan. Abraham's servant found a wife for Isaac in a day. He slept over, and returned the next day. The sum total of his trip was the travel back and forth plus 2 days of finding the girl and negotiating the marriage.

Jacob's extended stay may be attributed to his mother promising him she would call for him when Esau calmed down from losing the blessings to Jacob. She never does call for him. For as long as she lived, Esau never calmed down. The Midrashim argue whether he was still angry upon seeing Jacob when he finally does return, or whether the return triggered brotherly love. But Rebecca's seems to pass away before having the opportunity to unite her twins.

The twenty years Jacob spends with Laban could be divided into at least 8 neat portions;

The trip

The arrival

The first 7 years of labor

The marriages to Leah and Rachel

The second 7 years of labor and the birth of the children

The negotiations beyond the marriage obligation

The last 6 years and Jacob's tactics to increase his share

The escape from Laban

The Torah's refusal to divide Vayetse into paragraphs is indicative of a perspective on the totality of Jacob's experience in Haran.

The 8 portions of the episode were not experienced by him as separate "pieces" of life. Despite the powerful and disparate episodes of those 20 years, there was something binding them into an indivisible unit. Jacob left Canaan to get married, build a family, and get established. He did what he had to do to accomplish that. It took as long as it took; 20 years.

With his mission accomplished, he returned. True, he received 2 pushes to come back. One was his realization that his success was not appreciated by Laban's children. The

second was Hashem appearing to him in a dream and telling him to return. Be that as it may, Jacob's trip to Haran was a necessary interruption of his life in Canaan, Eretz Yisrael. The totality of his stay there, despite the 8 things that happened, were all part of that necessary interruption.

It were as if Jacob had taken a metaphorical deep breath for his stay in Haran, to be exhaled only upon his return to Eretz Yisrael. Despite 2 marriages, 12 children, and a great deal of property developed, the whole Diaspora episode of Jacob was one. Thank God, he made it back to Eretz Yisrael.

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