

Torah Thoughts Vayeitzei

5779:

Our ancestor Jacob had two visions of the divine: one, when he was leaving his parents' home in flight and seeking a wife, and another upon returning home after raising the family he had been seeking. These two encounters bookend Jacob's years of maturation, marking the beginning of his adulthood at one end and the onset of middle age at the other.

Many people go through a similar pattern: leaving home for school, work or family and then years later returning to aging parents. The years in between are filled with their own kinds of adventures, but it is in moments of transition that our awareness of our choices is most acute. Choosing what college to attend or where to get that first job away from home, whom to marry, and when, all shape the trajectory of our adult lives significantly. Then, when our own children are grown and our careers are closer to their end than their beginning, family obligations and thoughts of our own mortality shape our approach the final third of our lives. These two points in life are when we are most able to see how far we have to go, or how far we have come.

Jacob's encounters – between childhood and adulthood and then between adulthood and middle age – are with God and angels. They are points of significant transition for Jacob and for the history of the nation that will descend from him, and he understands that as they are happening. Do we too have the same hyper-awareness of those transitions? Too often we miss the significance of these shifts in the busy details of paperwork, moving furniture and finding the supermarket. When we find ourselves at the beginning of such a chapter in life, we should pause and look down the road upon which we are about to travel. Stopping just long enough to understand how it will change us, we too may be inspired to see God's hand shaping our lives, as Jacob does this week at the beginning of such a journey, saying 'God was in this place, and I did not know it.'