SUMMARY OF PARASHAT VAYETSE

Jacob leaves Beer-Sheba and heads to Haran, Syria. He is fleeing from his brother Esau, who sets out to kill him. He also goes to Haran with the intention of finding a wife in his mother's hometown. Shortly after starting his long journey, Jacob had a beautiful dream when he arrived at Bethel: angels ascending and descending on a ladder. God promises Jacob His blessing and protection and guarantees that he and his descendants will inherit the land of Israel.

After several days, Jacob arrives in Haran and heads to the well of water. There, he meets a young woman who turns out to be his cousin, Rachel, and he falls in love with her. Rachel takes him to her home. Jacob is welcomed by his uncle Laban. They quickly reach an agreement: Jacob will work for Laban for seven years, and in return, Laban will allow him to marry his daughter. But when the wedding day arrives, Laban gives Jacob his daughter Leah instead of Rachel, something that Jacob only discovers the next day. How is it possible that Jacob did not recognize Leah? There are several explanations, but the simplest is that 1. Rachel and Leah were sisters, and they must have been very similar physically and in their voices. 2. Women in ancient times wore a very thick veil, like the burqa worn by women in Afghanistan. 3. Everything happened in the shadow of night. 4. Jacob did not expect it. Many commentators explain that Jacob was now a victim of a case of "identity theft" similar to what he had caused when he disguised himself as his brother Esau to receive his father Isaac's blessing, who was blind. The similarities between these two episodes cannot be a mere coincidence.

Jacob had to work for another long period of time to marry Rachel. Before the giving of the Torah, there was no prohibition against marrying two sisters. Leah, Bilhah, and Zilpah give birth to several sons for Jacob. Rachel was barren, but ultimately, she gave birth to a son named Joseph.

Jacob now has eleven sons, Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Joseph, and a daughter, Dinah. The birth of his twelfth son, Benjamin, will be mentioned only in next week's Parasha. Each of his sons will establish one of the tribes of Israel. There is a very important difference between Ishmael's sons and Jacob's sons: we read a little earlier that Ishmael also had twelve sons, and each of those sons created a separate nation (shneim asar nesi'im le'umotam). Jacob, however, managed to have all his sons form 12 tribes of one people.

After working for Laban for many years, Jacob expresses his desire to return to the land of his fathers, Eretz Israel. But Laban convinces him to stay longer and offers to pay him with a portion of the flock so that Jacob can have his own inheritance. After a few years, Jacob's flock miraculously increases, and our patriarch returns to his homeland without seeking Laban's consent. He gathers his family and tells them that God revealed Himself to him in a dream, announcing that it was time to leave.

Jacob and his family practically flee without Laban's knowledge. And when Laban finds out, he goes after Jacob with ill intentions. God reveals Himself to Laban and warns him not to harm Jacob. Laban reproaches Jacob for taking his daughters and grandchildren away. Jacob and Laban finally reconciled and made a peace treaty in Gal-ed. Jacob continues his journey, destined for the land of Canaan, and arrives in the city of Mahanaim. Jacob's next challenge will be to confront his brother Esau, who had decided to kill him 20 years earlier.