

Good Shabbos... In a previous dvar, I once mentioned that I believe there is a very deep, special, and ongoing connection between Jewish history and American history. This week's parasha, Vayeitzei, located barely halfway into Sefer Beresheet, already lays the groundwork for this possible connection. This week's parasha suggests some intriguing similarities between the Jewish people's experience over 4000 years and the American people's experience over barely 400 years. In this week's parasha, Yaakov flees his uncle Lavan's tyrannical house. Yaakov seeks to escape Lavan's economic exploitation of him in winning Rachel as his bride. It can also be inferred that Yaakov may be trying to escape Lavan's religious hostility. This could be suggested by Lavan's overbearing devotion to his "teraphim" idols. After escaping, Yaakov proceeds to travel to a strange land to find freedom from Lavan's economic and religious grip. Yet, Yaakov still keeps his ties to ancestral home and beliefs. Yaakov is the essential wanderer. The story of America's founding and growth can be viewed as quite similar to this story of Yaakov. America's story, too, is the story of essential wanderers who flee to a strange land to escape economic and religious oppression. And like Yaakov, the American immigrant also often keeps strong ties to ancestral home and beliefs. But the most important connection between the story of Yaakov and that of the American immigrant is in their allegiance to a common dream. In this regard, Yaakov is like the prototypical American frontiersman or pioneer. Yaakov at Bait-El may be forced to sleep on a hard stone for a pillow. But that doesn't prevent him from dreaming of angels streaming up and down in front of him. Yaakov's dream of angels streaming up and down before him allows him to keep God's promise before him. Yaakov dreams of an active covenant with God and of a better life for his family. Similarly, the American immigrant may be temporarily forced to live in a hard, unforgiving sod hut on the Great Plains or in a New York City tenement. But like Yaakov at Bait-El, the American immigrant also dreams the relentless dream of angels before him guiding him to the promised land. As with Yaakov's various wanderings, the promised land for the American immigrant was an elusive place, which at various times could be found to exist almost anywhere – though especially to the West. The American immigrant's hopeful dream might be defined merely in terms of land or wealth. Or it might also be defined, as it was for Yaakov, as something much more. Either way, the power of the dream, the power of the promise, was as transformative in its own way for the American stranger in a strange land as it had been for Yaakov. Indeed, what could better define the American idea of Manifest Destiny than God's promise to Yaakov right at the beginning of the parasha, "You shall spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south."? And for those so inclined to extend the parallel, what could better define the

idea of American exceptionalism than God's second promise to Yaakov which immediately follows:  
the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you and your descendants."?... Good Shabbos.

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