Jacob Arrives in Paddan Aram

I found the following on the “Farnam Street Learning Community” blog site about amateurs and professionals you may find interesting.

* Amateurs stop when they achieve something. Professionals understand that the [initial achievement is just the beginning](https://fs.blog/2017/07/critical-mass/).
* Amateurs have a goal. [Professionals have a process](https://fs.blog/2017/06/habits-vs-goals/).
* Amateurs think they are good at everything. Professionals understand their [circles of competence](https://fs.blog/2013/12/circle-of-competence/).
* Amateurs see feedback and coaching as someone criticizing them as a person. Professionals know they have weak spots and seek out thoughtful criticism.
* Amateurs value isolated performance. Think about the receiver who catches the ball once on a difficult throw. Professionals value consistency. Can I catch the ball in the same situation 9 times out of 10?
* Amateurs give up at the first sign of trouble and assume they’re failures. Professionals see failure as part of the [path to growth and mastery](https://fs.blog/2015/03/carol-dweck-mindset/).
* Amateurs don’t have any idea what improves the odds of achieving good outcomes. Professionals do.
* Amateurs show up to practice to have fun. Professionals realize that what happens in practice happens in games.
* Amateurs focus on identifying their weaknesses and improving them. Professionals focus on their strengths and on finding people who are strong where they are weak.
* Amateurs think knowledge is power. Professionals pass on wisdom and advice.
* Amateurs focus on being right. Professionals focus on [getting the best outcome](https://twitter.com/farnamstreet/status/882997006620389376).
* Amateurs focus on first-level thinking. Professionals focus on [second-order thinking](https://fs.blog/2016/04/second-order-thinking/).
* Amateurs think good outcomes are the result of their brilliance. Professionals understand when good outcomes are the result of luck.
* Amateurs focus on the short term. Professionals focus on the long term.
* Amateurs focus on tearing other people down. Professionals focus on making everyone better.
* Amateurs make decisions in committees so there is no one person responsible if things go wrong. Professionals make decisions as individuals and accept responsibility.
* Amateurs blame others. Professionals accept responsibility.
* Amateurs show up inconsistently. Professionals show up every day.
* Amateurs go faster. Professionals go further.
* Amateurs go with the first idea that comes into their head. Professionals realize the first idea is rarely the best idea.
* Amateurs think in ways that can’t be invalidated. Professionals don’t.
* Amateurs think in absolutes. Professionals think in probabilities.
* Amateurs think the probability of them having the best idea is high. Professionals know the probability of that is low.
* Amateurs think reality is what they want to see. Professionals know [reality is what’s true](https://fs.blog/2016/02/joseph-tussman/).
* Amateurs think disagreements are threats. Professionals see them as an opportunity to learn.

I became interested in this because of the alternate title I have for Genesis chapter 29: “The Amateur Meets the Professional”. Jacob was an opportunistic trickster who cheated his brother out of his birthright and blessing, indeed his name means “supplanter”. While he seemed adept in developing schemes, I think he was out of his depth when he met Laban. While Laban’s skills were used for deceitful purposes, the above characteristics of professionals can be used for constructive purposes and you may find them useful to apply to your personal and professional lives.

The chapter begins as Jacob continued his trip finally arriving in Haran where he met shepherds preparing to water their sheep. He met Rachel who would become his wife at the well just as Abraham’s servant had met Rebekah at a well. Water was and is a scarce commodity in the Middle East due to the arid climate. Wells played a vital role in providing drinking water for humans and animals. They were a focal point for communities as people gathered near them to water livestock and collect water to take back to their homes so it was natural for Jacob to seek out the locals by going to a well. The exchange between Jacob and the shepherds is somewhat curious. There were 3 flocks of sheep at the well and their shepherds were apparently sitting around waiting for more flocks to come before they rolled the stone away from the well to water the sheep. This seemed inefficient to Jacob and he also may have thought getting the sheep watered and on their way would give him an opportunity to be alone with Rachel so he rolled the stone away by himself. “Torah Studies” suggests that the difficulty in rolling the heavy stone away was symbolic of the difficulty Jacob would encounter in marrying Rachel.

After meeting him at the well, Rachel took Jacob back to her home to meet her father Laban who gave him a warm welcome. After Jacob had stayed with Laban and his family for a month, Laban proposes that he pay Jacob for his work and asks what wages he would want. Jacob offers his services for 7 years in exchange for Rachel’s hand in marriage, an extraordinary commitment which indicated how devoted he was to Rachel. It also showed how much Jacob’s actions were controlled by his emotions while Laban viewed it as a transaction. After their wedding, Laban substitutes his older daughter Leah for Rachel on the night the marriage is consummated. It is ironic that Jacob was unable to see that it was Leah instead Rachel in the bed. Laban had tricked him using darkness just as Jacob had tricked his father using his poor eyesight. When Jacob confronted Laban the next morning, Laban claimed that it was customary for the oldest daughter to be married first and that if he wanted Rachel he would have to work another 7 years. The expression “what goes around comes around” seems to apply here as well as numerous Biblical verses about reaping what you sow (Prov. 1:31, 22:8, Gal. 6:7).

While it may seem that Jacob was getting well deserved punishment for how he had treated his brother, God was also preparing Jacob to be the father of the 12 tribes of Israel. The Jews wandered in desert for 40 years before they were ready to enter Canaan and Jacob would have to toil for 20 years before he would return to claim his inheritance in Canaan (see Rom. 5:3).