



Parshas Vayeitze

For the week ending 9 Kislev 5759
27 - 28 November 1998

Overview

Fleeing from Esav, Yaakov leaves Be'er Sheva and sets out towards Charan, the home of his mother's family. After a fourteen year stopover in the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever, he resumes his journey and comes to Mount Moriah, the place where his father Yitzchak was brought as an offering, and the future site of the *Beis Hamikdash*. He lays down to sleep and has a prophetic dream of angels ascending and descending a ladder between heaven and earth. Hashem promises him the Land of Israel, that he will found a great nation and that he will be guarded by Divine protection everywhere. Yaakov awakes and vows to build an altar there and tithe all that he will receive. Then he travels to Charan and meets his cousin Rachel at the well. He arranges with her father, Lavan, to work seven years for her hand in marriage, but Lavan deceives Yaakov and substitutes Rachel's elder sister, Leah. Yaakov commits himself to work another seven years in order to also marry Rachel. Leah bears him four sons — Reuven, Shimon, Levi and Yehuda — the first Tribes of Israel. Rachel is jealous that she cannot conceive, and gives her handmaiden Bilhah to Yaakov. Bilhah bears Dan and Naftali. Leah also gives Yaakov her handmaiden Zilpah, who bears Gad and Asher. Leah now gives birth to Yissachar, Zevulun, and a daughter, Dina. Hashem finally blesses Rachel with a son, Yosef. Yaakov decides to leave Lavan, but Lavan, aware of the wealth Yaakov has made for him, is reluctant to let him go, and concludes a contract of employment with him. Lavan tries again to swindle Yaakov but is unsuccessful, and Yaakov becomes extremely wealthy. Six years later, Yaakov, aware that Lavan has become resentful of his wealth, takes advantage of his father-in-law's temporary absence and flees with his family. Lavan pursues them but is warned by Hashem not to harm them. Yaakov and Lavan agree to a covenant and Lavan returns home. Yaakov continues on his way to face his brother Esav.

Insights

DO ANGELS FEAR TO TREAD?

“...And behold, a ladder was set earthward and its top reached heavenward; and behold! angels of G-d were ascending and descending on it.” (28:12)

Mention the word *angel* and the picture of an improbably non-aerodynamic, overly-plump baby with wings flying around doing target practice with a bow and arrow will probably float into your subconscious.

The word *malach* in Hebrew is very poorly translated as angel. Really, there is no English word for *malach*.

A *malach* is an incorporeal spiritual messenger. If this is so, why do angels need a ladder? Presumably they can reach their destination without recourse to such worldly apparatus.

Yaakov is the third of the Patriarchs. Avraham, the first, represents *chessed*, kindness, going out to people, expansiveness, the emotional way. His son, Yitzchak, represents *din*, self-control, intellectual analysis, judgment. Yaakov is the ladder between the two. Yaakov is the synthesis.

Yaakov shows that there need be no contradiction between the head and the heart. Yaakov is the ladder set earthward, with its top reaching to the heavens. On that ladder, that perfect connection between the head and the heart, angels can travel to their appointed destination.

Prepared by Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem, Israel

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TOP CAT

“And Yaakov departed from Be’er Sheva...” (28:10)

It must be great to be a cat. There’s so much food around. Every dumpster and garbage can must seem like the Ritz. There’s no difference between that smell and the smell of a freshly fried steak. The fact that your meal has just left someone else’s plate doesn’t bother you at all. Of course, the disadvantage is — you have to be a cat.

Personally, even though my gastronomic opportunities are more limited, I’d rather be a human being.

When we develop a closer relationship with G-d, we develop a sensitivity to the world around us. Song lyrics on the radio which we used to hum, suddenly seem coarse and offensive. Billboards which we never even noticed, now seem incredibly indecent. Our eyes and ears have been opened. Now we smell the difference between garbage and steak.

Rashi tells us that the Torah chose the word “depart” rather than just “go” to tell us that the departure of a righteous person makes an impression. When a righteous person is in town, he illuminates it with his presence. When he leaves, his lack is felt.

The question arises, why didn’t the Torah also use the verb “depart” when Avraham left his birthplace? Surely, when Avraham left Charan, there was the same lack as when Yaakov left Be’er Sheva?

When Avraham left Charan, all he left was a city of idol worshippers, people whose spiritual sensitivity was about the level of a cat. They never perceived Avraham’s spiritual stature when he dwelled amongst them, and thus his departure went unnoticed. When Yaakov left Be’ersheva, however, he left behind his parents, Yitzchak and Rivka. It was upon these spiritual giants that his departure made an impression. Yitzchak and Rivka were sensitive to the barometric difference that Yaakov’s departure caused. The people of Charan, however, couldn’t tell the difference between garbage and steak.

LAUNCH PAD TO THE STARS

“...And behold, a ladder was set earthward and its top reached heavenward; and behold! angels of G-d were ascending and descending on it. And behold! Hashem was standing over him...” (28:12)

The *gematria* (numerical equivalent) of the word *sulam* (ladder) is the same as (Mount) *Sinai* — 130. This is so because Mount Sinai is the ladder that connects the physical and the spiritual. G-d “stood” at the top of the ladder that Yaakov saw in his dream, just as G-d “stood” at the top of the mountain when the Torah was given. The angels going up and down parallel Moshe and Aharon who brought the Torah down to this world.

There is only one ladder out of this world. Only one way to reach the stars. The launch pad is called Sinai. The spaceship is called the Torah.

TALKING STONES

“And he took from the stones of the place, and he placed them around his head, and he lay down in that place.” (28:11)

The Midrash tells us that the twelve stones all wanted the merit of being the stone on which the great *tzaddik*, Yaakov, would lay his head.

A few verses later (verse 18), the Torah talks of one stone, implying that the stones had subsequently all become one. What is the significance of the stones being transformed into one?

The twelve stones represent the twelve tribes of Israel. The argument between the stones was about which tribe was the essence of the Jewish People.

Was it Levi and the priesthood that were to serve in the Holy Temple? Or was it Yissachar who would study Torah? Or was it Zevulun who through his business acumen would support Yissachar so that he could study the Torah?

Each of the stones claimed that *it* was the essence of the Jewish People, until Hashem took them all and made them into one. For no one part of the Jewish People is its essence. Rather the essence of Israel is unity, for only in unity can we fulfill our purpose: To reflect the Oneness of the Creator who unites everything into One.

ULTIMATE NAME-DROPPING

“It is in my power to do you all harm; but the G-d of your father addressed me last night, saying, ‘Beware of speaking with Yaakov either good or bad.’ ” (31:29)

If Lavan was trying to frighten Yaakov by telling him “*It is in my power to do you all harm...*” why does he then destroy his credibility by admitting that Hashem Himself told him to “*beware of speaking with Yaakov either good or bad?*”

Such is the way of those who lust for status. They are quite prepared to trip themselves up just to “drop” an important name. And Lavan could not resist the ultimate name-dropping — telling Yaakov that Hashem had spoken to him — even though it would completely enfeeble his threats.

Sources:

Do Angels Fear To Tread? - Rabbi Reuven Lauffer, Rabbi Menachem Nissel

Top Cat - Chasam Sofer

Launch Pad To The Stars - Midrash

Talking Stones - heard from Rabbi Calev Gestenter

Ultimate Name-Dropping - heard from Rabbi Mordechai Perlman

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Haftorah: Hoshea 11:7-14:10

A FRIEND IN HIGH PLACES

“You corrupted yourself, Israel, for your help is only through Me.”(13:9)

A great king once asked one of the Sages of Israel why it was that at the time of the destruction of the *Beis Hamikdash* so many thousand of Jews were slain.

The Sage replied that the Jewish People had always put their trust in Hashem saving them, and He had always had protected them. They had never concerned themselves with the strategies of war, rather they had always poured out their hearts in prayer and offerings.

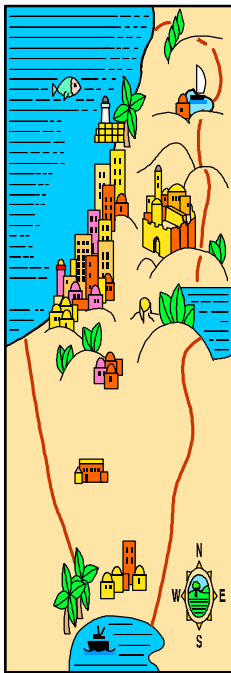
Therefore, when the Jewish People sinned, and consequently lost Hashem's protection, they were left bereft of any defense at all. They fell before their enemies like the standing crop before the scythe, like lambs abandoned by their shepherd, torn by the teeth of wolves.

The Jewish People are the lamb amongst the 70 wolves. The lamb is not protected by F-16s or the military might of any world-power, however broad its shoulders may be. The Jewish People have only one Friend. But He is the only Friend we need.

Based on Ahavas Yehonason in Mayana shel Torah

LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael



BEIT EL

“He called that place Beit El, but its original name was Luz.” (Bereishis 28:19)

Beit El — Luz, where Yaakov had his prophetic dream of a ladder reaching to Heaven, reappears in the Biblical account (Shoftim 1:23) of the tribe of Yosef conquering the city. The entrance to this city was perfectly concealed. A giant luz tree stood in front of a cave which served as the entrance, and only the city's inhabitants were aware that the tree was hollow and could be walked through. The Hebrew scouts waited until someone exited, and induced him to reveal the entrance by promising him protection from the war they were about to wage against his town.

They thus succeeded in invading and conquering the city, and allowed their guide and his family to safely leave. He went to the Hittite area of the land and established a city which he named Luz. The new Luz was where the techeiles dye for tzitzis was pressed, and its secret location made it invulnerable to the invasions of foreign kings who exiled the inhabitants of all the other cities. The kindness the guide had shown the Hebrews by just pointing his finger towards the entrance received its ultimate reward in the city's invulnerability to death itself. When its aged inhabitants grew weary of life, they went outside the walls of the city to die.

The modern Jewish settlement of Beit El, established after the Six-Day War on the approximate site of the ancient city, is fifteen minutes north of Jerusalem and near the Arab city of Ramallah.

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