

TorahFax: Vayeitzei
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Tuesday, Kislev 8, 5784 / November 21, 2023

One of the highlights of this week's Parsha, Vayeitzei, is the story of Esau wanting to kill his brother, Yaakov, because he got their father's blessings instead of him. Yaakov had to flee Be'er Sheva, where his parents lived, and go to Charan, to his uncle, Lavan.

On the way he had his famous dream, in which he saw a ladder standing on the ground and its head reaching into heaven, upon which G-d's angels were ascending and descending.

This took place at Mount Moriah, where G-d tested Abraham by having his son, Yitzchak (Yaakov's father), bound on the altar. This was the very same place where many years later, the Holy Temple would be built. Yaakov, who knew that his uncle Lavan was a swindler, feared the unknown he would have to face from his uncle. He stopped at Mount Moriah to pray and rest for the night.

Yaakov had a dream in which he saw a ladder standing firmly on the ground and its top reached to the heaven. Yaakov saw G-dly angels going up and down the ladder. In his dream, he saw G-d standing beside him and G-d said, "I am the G-d of Abraham and the G-d of Yitzchak. The land on which you are lying, to you I will give it and to your descendants. And your seed shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west, to the east, to the north and to the south. And in you and your children shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

When Yaakov awoke, he exclaimed, "How full of awe is this place. This is none other than the House of G-d and this is the gate of heaven." Yaakov felt assured that G-d was watching over him and would bring him back safely to his parents. Yaakov made a vow, "Of all that You will give to me, a tenth I will give back unto You!"

The Talmud tells that once during a famine year, King Munbaz distributed his own treasures and all the treasures accumulated by his forefathers to feed the poor. His family and friends complained, "Your forefathers have stored these valuables for many generations, how can you give them away?"

"I am not giving them away! I too, am storing these valuables," replied King Munbaz. "But while my forefathers stored their treasures in this world, I am storing them in the World-to-Come. My ancestors stored their treasures in a place where hands can steal them, I am storing the treasures where no hand can take them away. My parents stored valuables which didn't produce fruit, I am storing them in a way that they will produce fruits [saving people's lives]. My parents saved money and I'm saving souls. My parents stored for others while they had no benefit from the valuables they saved, but I, by distributing them to the poor, am saving them for myself by fulfilling a mitzvah."

What we give to Tzedakah-charity is really the only thing we truly save for ourselves. No one can take that from us. While every other material possession can be ours today and be taken from us tomorrow. The Tzedakah we give is everlasting.

Wednesday, Kislev 9, 5784 / November 22, 2023

"It was only a dream," is a common expression which indicates that something is not very significant. However, in the Torah we do find that dreams played an important role and foretold important events.

The first mention of a dream in the Torah is in this week's Parsha, Vayeitzei, when Yaakov was on his way to his uncle's home. The Torah tells us that on the way, he came upon Mount Moriah and the sun set. He slept there for the night and he had a dream.

In his dream he saw, "A ladder which was set on the ground and the top of it reached into heaven and the angels of G-d were ascending and descending on it. He saw G-d standing over him and G-d tells him, 'I am the L-rd, the G-d of Abraham and Yitzchak, the land upon which you are lying upon it, to you I will give it and to your children. And your children will be as the dust of the earth and you shall spread to the west, to the east, to the north and to the south. I will be with you and I will watch over you wherever you go and I will bring you back to this land.'"

At the end of the Parsha, which took place twenty years later, Yaakov has another dream in which an angel tells him that the time has come for him and his family to return home.

Other famous dreams in the book of Genesis (Breishis) are Joseph's dreams and Pharaoh's dreams. All of the above dreams came true and they shaped the history of our people.

There are various opinions about the significance of dreams in the Talmud. On one hand, it states that dreams are one-sixtieth of prophecy, but at the same time the Talmud also writes that no dreams are without nonsense. Rabbi Simon ben Yochai says, "Just as there is no grain without chaff, so there is no dream without vain things in it." Thus, dreams are a mixed bag of truth and nonsense.

The Talmudic sage Rabbi Bana'ah says, "There were twenty-four interpreters of dreams residing in Jerusalem. Once I dreamt a dream and I went to each of them to ask for its interpretation. Each one gave me a different interpretation. I received twenty-four interpretations for the same dream. Yet, all of these interpretations came true for me."

The Talmud also says that dreams are the result of what we think during the day, as the following story in the Talmud illustrates: A Roman emperor asked Rabbi Yehoshua what he (the Emperor) was going to dream that night. Rabbi Yehoshua replied: "You will dream that the Persians will conquer you and ill-treat you." Reflecting on this the entire day, the emperor dreamed exactly that.

There is a special prayer we recite on holidays when the Kohanim bless the congregation, in which we ask G-d to reverse our negative dreams into positive ones.

The Talmud states, "Dreams are influenced by their interpretation. A dream can have either a good or a bad interpretation. Positive thoughts and positive interpretations bring positive results.

Thursday, Kislev 10, 5784 / November 23, 2023

This week's Parsha Vayeitzei tells the story of Yaakov leaving his parents' home, because his brother, Esau, wanted to kill him. He went to his uncle, Lavan, who lived in Charan. On the way he had a dream in which he saw a ladder extending from earth all the way to heaven and angels were going up and down the ladder. G-d promises him that He will watch over him, bless him and return him in safety.

When he came to Charan he met his cousin Rachel at a well, where she came with her father's sheep. He showed great strength by removing the rock from the mouth of the well and gave her sheep to drink. Yaakov wants to marry Rachel and offers his uncle, Lavan, to work for him for seven years for Rachel. Lavan agrees but on the wedding night he gave him his older daughter, Leah, instead of Rachel. When Yaakov complained, his uncle responds that it is not proper to give the younger daughter before the older one. Yaakov offers to work another seven years for Rachel. Lavan accepts and Yaakov also marries Rachel. In addition to Leah and Rachel, Yaakov marries two more daughters of Lavan, Bilha and Zilpa. From these four wives Yaakov had twelve sons, from which the Ten Tribes were descendant. He also has one daughter, Dina.

Although Yaakov came to Lavan a poor man, when he left Lavan, he had great wealth, due to G-d's blessings. At the end of the Parsha we read how Yaakov, knowing the character of his father-in-law, was afraid that he will not let him leave with his wives and children, decides to leave while Lavan was away. Lavan chased after them, but Lavan was warned in a dream not to harm Yaakov. Thus, this Parsha begins with Yaakov's dream and ends with Lavan's dream.

Q. How old was Yaakov when he left his parents and how old when he came to Lavan?

A. Yaakov was 63 when he left his parents. On the way to Lavan he stopped at the yeshiva of Ever, where he studied for 14 years. Thus, when Yaakov came to Lavan he was 77.

Q. How old was Yaakov when he married Leah? How old was he when he married Rachel?

A. As mentioned, he worked seven years before he married Leah. Yaakov waited seven days then married Rachel. He was 84 when he married Leah and Rachel.

Q. How many years did Yaakov stay with Lavan?

A. Twenty years. Fourteen years he worked so he can marry Leah and Rachel. He worked another six years for Lavan and was blessed by G-d with great wealth.

Q. Who else, in the Torah, had to flee from someone who wanted to kill him and met his future wife, who was leading her father's sheep at the well?

A. Moshe. The Torah tells us (Exodus 2:16) that when Moshe fled Pharaoh, who wanted to kill him, he met his future wife, Tziporah, at a well. The other shepherds would chase them away, but Moshe helped them and gave their flock to drink.

Friday, Kislev 11, 5784 / November 24, 2023

In the beginning of this week's Parsha, Vayeitzei, the Torah tells about Yaakov's famous dream. In his dream he saw, "a ladder stood upon the earth and the top of the ladder reached into heaven and G-d's angels ascended and descended upon it. G-d was standing over him and said, 'I am G-d, the G-d of Abraham your father, and the G-d of Yitzchak. I will give to you and to your descendants the land on which you are lying.'"

According to our sages, the ladder which Yaakov saw in his dream, represents our prayers. Through the ladder of prayer we connect to G-d.

Prayer is a very important part of Judaism and our connection to G-d. We pray three times daily; Shacharit (Morning Prayer), Mincha (Afternoon Prayer) and Maariv (Evening Prayer).

The prayers have their roots with our patriarchs, Abraham, Yitzchak (Isaac) and Yaakov (Jacob).

The Morning Prayer is associated with Abraham; the afternoon prayer with Yitzchak and the evening prayer is mentioned in this Parsha in connection with Yaakov, who prayed in the evening, before going to sleep.

Although the structure of the prayers, as we know them today, have been compiled many years later by Ezra the scribe and the Rabbis of the Great Assembly, the concept of the prayers and their origin are related to the patriarchs.

Q. In Hebrew prayer is called "Tefilah." Why?

A. One reason is that "Tefilah" comes from the word connect. Through prayer we connect to G-d.

Q. In Yiddish prayer is called, "Daven." Why?

A. The Yiddish word for prayer "Daven" comes from the word "D'Avuhon" which means "from our fathers." As the three prayers are associated to our forefathers: Abraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov.

Q. Why do many Jews sway back and forth while praying?

A. In Psalms (35:10) King David refers to prayer as, "All my limbs say G-d, Who is like you." Through the movements of our body, our entire body ("all my limbs") is involved in the prayers.

Also, our soul is likened to a candle (Proverbs 20:27). Just as a flame of the candle continuously moves and flickers, rising upwards, so too, when we pray, our soul ("candle of G-d") constantly moves in its desire to connect to its source - to G-d.