

CHEVRAH TORAH 5778...Seeking ✨ Spirituality

Shabbat VAYETZEI

Genesis 28:10-17

KEY KOSHI:

WHAT DOES JACOB'S LADDER-DREAM RESPONSE TEACH US ABOUT OUR SPIRITUAL SEARCH/STRUGGLE?
HOW CAN JACOB ENABLE OUR SPIRITUAL LIFE-RESPONSE?

P'SHAT—AWARENESS... The beginning of knowing about God is simply paying attention, being fully present where you are

10] Jacob left Beer-sheba, and set out for Haran.
11] He came upon a certain place and stopped there for the night, for the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of that place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. 12] He had a dream; a stairway was set on the ground and its top reached to the sky, and angels of God were going up and down on it. 13] And the Lord was standing beside him and He said, "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac: the ground on which you are lying I will assign to you and to your offspring. 14] Your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you and your descendants. 15] Remember, I am with you: I will protect you wherever you go and will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."
16] Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is present in this place, and I did not know it!" 17] Shaken, he said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the abode of God, and that is the gateway to heaven."

10 ויצא יעקב מבאר שבע וילך חרנה :
11 ויפגע במקום וילן שם כי בא השמש
ויקח מאבני המקום וישם מראשיתו
וישכב במקום ההוא : 12 ויחלם והנה
סלם מצב ארצה וראשו מגיע השמימה
והנה מלאכי אלהים עלים וירדים בו :
13 והנה יהוה נצב עליו ויאמר אני יהוה
אלהי אברהם אביך ואלהי יצחק הארץ
אשר אתה שכב עליה לך אתננה
ולזרעך : 14 והיה זרעך כעפר הארץ
ויפצת ימה וקדמה וצפנה ונגבה ונברכו
בך כל משפחות האדמה ובזרעך : 15 והנה
אנכי עמך ושמרתך בכל אשר תלך
והשבתך אלהאדמה הזאת כי לא
אעזבך עד אשר אם עשיתי את אשר
דברתי לך : 16 וייקץ יעקב משנתו ויאמר
אכן יש יהוה במקום הזה ואנכי לא
ידעתי : 17 ויירא ויאמר מה נורא
המקום הזה אין זה כי אסבית אלהים
וזה שער השמים :

REMEZ—UN-SELF-AWARENESS... God showed Moses a Torah of black fire written on white fire.

The negative ground on and by which all things can be read is itself a message.

V.16 *Jacob awoke from his sleep and said: "Surely God was in this place and I, i did not know!"*

RASHI... "*Mishnato—*from his sleep." For had I known [that God would be in] this place, I would never have gone to sleep.

Ba'AL HaTURIM... R' Yochanan explains the word *MiSh'nato—*from his sleep, as *Mi-MiSh'nato—*from his Mishnah, or, from his study. When Jacob awoke he was already engaged in the study of his dream, for since he studied the Mishnah day and night, he kept right on searching it for what his dream might actually mean.

The ALTER of GER... R' Yochanan taught: Not *his sleep*, but *his study*. And the passage continues, "*YHVH is in this place and I did not know.*" As RASHI says, 'For if I knew, I would not have slept.' If this is so, in keeping with R' Yochanan, we must also say, 'If I had known [God would be here] I would not have kept on studying!' From this awakening we understand that at certain times and certain places—when we know—being there takes precedence even over our learning.

HaKTAV V'HaKABALAH... The letter alef has been appended here to indicate he is speaking on his own behalf. The principal word is Ken. The addition of alef then means "I have assured myself...Indeed!"

RASHBAM... "*Achen*" is two words, ACH—But, and KEN—it is so. Idiomatically, the connotation is a converse one: *Ach*—it is not as I thought previously, BUT *Ken*—it is rather so...It connotes a new perception of reality.

MALBIM... Jacob perceived that the spirit descended upon him solely because of the nature of "*this place*," even though he had not made the necessary preparations to receive it.

HIRSCH... Jacob modestly assumes that "*this place*" is responsible for God's proximity, but then he realizes, God is seeking human beings... They must be bearers of His Presence.

IBN EZRA... How is it that "*God is in this place*" and yet "*the whole earth is full of His Glory*" [Isa 6:3] The mystery remains...

N.SARNA... "*in this place*" This reaction of amazement is unprecedented in the patriarchal stories. Neither Abraham nor Isaac exhibits any surprise at their experience of God's sudden revelation. Jacob's emotional response lies, at least partially, in his realization of the baseness of his behavior... He must have been beset with feelings of complete abandonment by God. Having fallen prey to guilt and despair, he is surprised that God is still concerned for him. At the same time, the place he's stumbled upon possesses no intrinsic value for Jacob. It is merely a convenient spot to lodge for the night.

S'FORNO... Had I known where I was, I would have prepared myself to reach a greater degree of prophecy... The power of this place where Jacob lay down—the same place where Isaac was brought as a sacrifice and where the Holy Temple was to be built, was already established... But Jacob was unaware...

ZOHAR... "*Anochi lo yadati*" As if to teach—God was in this place, yet I did not know God as ANOCHI.

For the first time Jacob has a revelation, just as his father Isaac "*Anochi Elohei Avraham*" [Gen 26:24] and Abraham "*Al Tirah Avram, Anochi magen lach*" [Gen 15:1] that Adonai is in fact, ANOCHI.

PANIM YAFOT... When does man ultimately experience God's nearness? Only when he is suffused by "*lo yadati—I do not know.*" That is, when he himself knows that—for all he knows—he does not know, and no longer pretends to possess wisdom and insight.

TIFERET SH'LOMO... If the Presence of the Holy One indeed dwells here, if I have invoked the holiness of this place, it can only be because "*my I—I did not know.*" I obliterated everything that was my ego, my sense of "*Anochi-ut*," any trace of self-intention. Everything was now only for the sake of the Holy One of Being, for the sake of bringing together the Divine Presence within all and every being.

V.17 *Shaken, he said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the House of God, and that is the Gateway to Heaven*

R' N.GILLMAN... What about Bet-El? Drawing on the symbolism of the ladder, the midrash explains the foot of the ladder stood in Be'ersheva, its head in the northernmost part of Israel, and its center in Jerusalem... To this day, long after the destruction of the temple, whenever Jews stand to worship, we face Jerusalem. But things have changed significantly... We build synagogues wherever we wish... and when ten Jews enter and worship God, that spot becomes the center of that community's religious world... For us today, no single spot is inherently sacred. In fact, space is no longer sanctified by God. We sanctify a space by deciding to worship there... Wherever it is that we turn to God on earth, that spot becomes our Bet El.

D'RASH—READING BETWEEN THE WORDS...

R' Larry KUSHNER...KOTZK... *Va-Anochi Lo Yadati...* 'God was here because I was able to subdue my ego.'

Some meeting this is: Menachem Mendel of Kotzk and Jacob; a fanatic for attaining truth through negating the ego meets the Hebrew Bible's paradigmatic egotist... By the time Menachem Mendel came down the ladder, Jacob was deep into one of those mental self-examinations where what you need, in order to go on living, is to believe that you are a good person destined for greatness. Although what you actually need to become a good person and be destined for greatness is to confess to yourself that you are neither destined, necessarily, nor generally a very good person... How do you reconcile the mutually exclusive claims of your ego and God's... Idolatry believes there is a divine Ego that is accessible to human manipulation. Idolaters infiltrate heaven and remake God in their own image... Jews tried it once at the very foot of Sinai... Yet the first idol, the one that makes us all idolaters, is not a statue, but the ego. I am not referring to that imaginary dimension of the psyche postulated by Freud... Ego is not thinking you are a talented or good person. That is only self-confidence... Ego is arrogance. It is making yourself big at the expense of someone else. The entire Hebrew Bible can be understood as a chronicle of humanity's incessantly foiled attempts... to displace God... "I'm God; you're not." That is all you need to know... The Holy One of Being has an intention beyond your ken... God's ego is not yours. In the words of the prophet Isaiah, "My plans are not your plans." Not because you don't want to do what God wants, but because you can only comprehend a tiny part of God's plan. "I'm God; you're not." This is the beginning of the reconciliation between God's ego and your own. This is also what Menachem Mendel of Kotzk may have taught Jacob: God can only be God when you are not. [[God Was in This Place...](#), pgs 38-48]

Rabbi Larry HOFFMAN... Maimonides died in 1204, the beginning of a century that would culminate in the Zohar, the kabbalistic masterpiece that popularized a new name for this origin of all existence—*Ein Sof*, "Endless." Art Green, an interpreter of Kabbalah, calls it "the hidden reaches of infinity." Like Maimonides' divine First Cause, *Ein Sof* is the ever-present bedrock beginning of everything—very much, says Green, like the Talmud's name for God, *Hamakom*, "The Place," not this place rather than that one, but the infinite reach that puts God simultaneously in everyplace, always... Not for nothing, then, does our sedra begin, *Vayifga bamakom vayalen sham*, which our standard Jewish Bible translates, "*He [Jacob] came upon a certain place and stopped there for the night...*" *Makom* is widely interpreted as *Hamakom*, the spatial name for the endlessness of God... We see Jacob's story beginning, "He stumbled upon God's endless and eternal presence [*Hamakom*], intent on "dwelling there" as long as he could, before renewing his journey back home."

But if God as *Hamakom* is everywhere, always (like Maimonides' indestructible First Cause and the Zohar's boundless *Ein Sof*), we should wonder how Jacob could have "stumbled" upon it—he must already have been there! What Jacob stumbled upon, then, was not new geography but new insight: that his finite *makom* ("place") was part of the infinite *Hamakom* ("The Place"). It dawned on him that wherever he might stop off in the journey of his life, God would be precisely there. As the Karliner Chasidim put it, Jacob stumbled upon the understanding that whatever *makom* he inhabited must be "the right place at the right time."

...Apparently, when we inhabit no *makom* in which to find God as *Hamakom*, God finds us... The mystery of God is the infinitude of *Hamakom*, God's limitless capacity to be available to us whenever we happen to be anywhere, but also when we fear we are nowhere at all.

SOD—The SELF of the UNIVERSE... God's "I am" has the psycho-theological force not of dissolving individual selves but of reminding us that we were never individual selves in the first place...Our selfhood endures by virtue of its participation in some greater Self,

Rabbi DAVID SEGAL...

Get comfortable, if you aren't already...I invite you to close your eyes...

Picture yourself in an ordinary place. Somewhere nondescript, normal, routine. Maybe it's your office, your kitchen, a restaurant; your car, your yard, a section of sidewalk. It's a place you don't notice much. Not good or bad, but overlooked. Imagine yourself there, doing whatever boring routine things you normally do there...Now there's a flash of light — you look up — and a doorway opens in the ceiling, or the sky, depending on where you are...A ladder drops down from the doorway. Beings start climbing down. I hesitate to say "angels" because then you'll picture goofy folks with halos in white robes playing miniature harps. I invite you to picture these beings, these angels or messengers, any way you want except for white-robed harpists.

They climb down, then back up, a steady flow... You wonder why, what are they up to, then you look closely. You see that the ones climbing down carry light in their hands. You're not sure how, but they're holding pure, glowing light, without any container. When they get to the bottom of the ladder, they take their handful of light and hide it in something ordinary. A rock, a picture frame, a notebook, a set of keys. Whatever objects there are in the place you chose. One by one, the angels approach each object around you with their hands full of light, they lay their hands on it, and the light moves from their hands into the thing. It glows for a brief, brilliant moment. And then it fades.

You wonder what it would be like to see this light all the time, to notice this light that hides in the ordinary. It fades so quickly. You want it to stay...The steady flow of angels — however you picture them — stops. The last one reaches the bottom of the ladder. This one looks around the place, as if completing a mental checklist, and then looks at you. With glowing eyes, this one approaches you and lifts two hands full of light toward you. You lift your hands as if to receive a gift, palms up. The light moves into your hands, makes them shine. The light spreads up your arms, into your chest, your heart, up your neck into your face; then down through your legs into your feet. You are glowing, radiant. The light envelopes you, becomes you. You are a being of light...Then you open your eyes.

"And Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely ADONAI is present in this place, and I did not know it!"