



PARSHAT VAYEITZEI

CONNECTING HEAVEN AND EARTH

At the onset of our *parashah* we are told that Jacob left Be'er Sheva, the settlement founded by Abraham after his oath of peace given to Avimelech. The name Be'er Sheva literally means “the well of seven,” or the “well of the oath” because the words for “seven” (שֶׁבַע) and “oath” (שְׁבוּעָה) in Hebrew are related. Because Jacob’s leaving Be'er Sheva was already related in last week’s *parashah* (*Toldot*), the *midrash* explains that the repetition stresses another point:

“From Be'er Sheva...” – from the well of the oath, meaning to say that Jacob said to himself, if I remain here, Avimelech will force me to make an oath as he did my grandfather. It is better for me to leave and not tarry the good fortune of my descendant by another 7 generations.

The *midrash* is telling us that Jacob was sensitive enough to recognize that it was the vow made between Abraham and Avimelech that postponed the Jewish people’s entering and conquering the Land of Israel by 7 generations (the oath’s duration). He felt that in the interest of not creating another unnecessary delay, it was better for him to leave the Land of Israel. The most important thing was not to sign another “peace treaty” that would prevent his offspring from inheriting the land.

Be'er Sheva also means “well of the birthright” and the “well of blessings,” referring to the birthright Jacob had bought from Esau and the blessings he had (instead of his brother Esau) received from Isaac. Just as Jacob did not want to fall into an unnecessary agreement with Avimelech, he also did not want to lose his birthright and blessing, which Esau disputed. For this reason too, Jacob preferred to disappear for a time.

Of course, we should not conclude that Jacob’s departure from the Land of Israel meant that he was not interested in it anymore. On the contrary, his departure was meant to ensure his title to it. But, instead of staying and focusing on the external and legal aspects of his title and right to the land (as his father’s legally firstborn son), he preferred to ignore the external debate (for now) and focus in his exile

on his inner, essential connection to the Land of Israel. All this, until he would garner the strength and resources to reclaim his rightful inheritance. For, the ability to physically conquer the Land of Israel depends on our mastery and knowledge of the deepest dimensions of the Torah—Kabbalah. It is exactly because Kabbalah is so non-practical and beyond physical reality (compared to the revealed dimension of the Torah, its laws, etc.) that it is able to influence those parts of reality that the Torah’s revealed dimensions cannot normalize and rectify. In this manner, when Jacob would have returned, it would have been clear that the entire purpose of his descent (departing the Land of Israel) was to ascend to the Land of Israel and conquer it.

Another way of making this point is that a Jew that lives outside the Land of Israel is not aware of the ongoing “practical” and real-politik considerations of those Jews that dwell in the land and have been (falsely) convinced that to continue to live there they need to compromise and concede to the other inhabitants of the land. Therefore, unlike his brothers in the land, this Jew is not open to realistic compromise, peace treaties, etc. regarding our right to the Land of Israel. His lack of practicality (as politicians and other mavens would put it) coupled with his understanding that the land is an ideal, single, unified entity that cannot be broken up into parcels of negotiable real-estate, leads him to accept nothing but the simple reality of inheriting and settling the entire land.



We can now better comprehend the hidden message of Jacob’s dream of the ladder with angels ascending and descending. The most prominent image in this dream is the ladder. As an object, the ladder serves to connect between two levels of reality. Indeed, in Hebrew, the word for “ladder” (סֹלֵם) and the word for “symbol” (סִמּוּל) are permutations of one another, making the ladder an archetype for all symbols whose purpose is to help us connect two realities (the spiritual—the reality being symbolized—with the mundane—the reality offering us the symbol). As an archetype, the ladder

in Jacob's dream, symbolizes the ability to connect heaven and earth, these two general planes of reality; as the Torah describes what Jacob saw, "A ladder standing firm on the earth and its top reaching heaven."

Extending the symbol a bit further, we see that it does indeed allude to Jacob's departure from the Land of Israel, forcing him to focus on the heavenly aspects of the land. But, even when he has ascended to a spiritual outlook, he faces downwards, ready to use his bird's eye, ideal, view of his connection with the land as a starting point for bringing down and applying all his spiritual insight in the mundane realm. Though conditions have made it impossible for him to inherit the land right now, his spiritual understanding only strengthens his commitment and yearning to making his vision a reality, here below.



Jacob's ladder carries another straightforward symbolism; it represents a challenge to ascend and attain a lofty goal that seems very distant.

The sages explain this symbolism,

The Almighty showed Jacob the supernal minister of the Babylonian empire ascending and descending; the supernal minister of the Medean Empire ascending and descending; the supernal minister of the Greek Empire ascending and descending; and the supernal minister of the Roman Empire ascending and descending.

The Almighty challenged Jacob, "Jacob, why do you not ascend?" Jacob became afraid...

The Almighty said to him, "Know, that if you ascend, you will not descend." But, Jacob did not have faith and did not ascend. Said the Almighty to Jacob, "Were you to have ascended, you would not have experienced descent. But, because you had no faith, you and your offspring will serve these empires."

This teaching from the sages relates that Jacob's feeling that he should focus on spirituality (until the proper time for inheriting the mundane) affected not only his relationship with the Land of Israel but the Jewish people's entire outlook on

physical nature. Jews sense that their proper role is to focus on the spiritual, to enlighten those who are not with the light of Torah, to educate, etc.

But, the ladder presents a challenge, to join the supernal ministers of the greatest empires in history in the heavens. Though the supernal ministers of the empires are in the heavens, they are not necessarily spiritual. Instead, like all angels of God (*Elokim*, God's Name that represents nature), these angels represent dominion over nature, over the natural, physical world. The ladder Jacob sees in his dream is thus a challenge to ascend together with the supernal ministers of these famous empires and take dominion over the natural world.

But, fearing the difficulties inherent in rectifying the physical realm, Jacob prefers that "God stand over him," watching him and protecting him while he focuses on loftier, more essential matters. But, the sages tell us, that had Jacob (had the Jewish people, as a nation) not feared taking the reigns of mundane reality, had he not preferred to shine light from above only, we would not have experienced exile. Holding onto both ends of the ladder, Jacob would have been able to bring about the redemption (the manifestation of Godliness throughout physical reality) in a single stroke, for he would have been the master of both the spiritual and the physical.

God showed Jacob, the *yeshivah* student (he had been studying in *yeshivah* for 14 years prior to the dream), the ladder in order to impress upon him that he has the power to influence the world not only spiritually, but physically as well. Rectifying the Land of Canaan (and turning it into the Land of Israel) and its inhabitants depends on Jacob taking dominion not only over the spiritual, but over the physical as well. Only then can the nations understand Jacob's stature, open themselves to being rectified by him, and be able to receive his guidance.

(Based upon Ma'ayan Ganim for Parashat Vayeitzei)

THE REDEMPTION GROWS NEARER...

In order to sanctify the new moon, the clouds, symbolizing that which conceals the Mashiach—"David the King of Israel who continues to live and exist," must first part. [As known from many stories,] it is the *tzadikim* who have the ability to part the clouds—all those things that conceal and hide the Mashiach, until it will be seen that indeed, "David the King of Israel continues to live and exist."

(from a gathering for children, 8 Nisan, 5767)