Points to Ponder

Vayetze 5783

**עֹלִ֥ים וְיֹֽרְדִ֖ים בּֽוֹ: There were Malachim going up and down on it (28:12) – Rav Schachter** noted that the angels also refers to the angels of each nation of the world. That they moved up and down the ladder hints to the rise and fall of every nation and country. When Hashem showed Yaakov the ladder and wanted him to ascend it, Ya’akov didn’t want to experience the descent afterward. Hashem in essence told him not to worry. The Jewish people still continue to exist unlike every other nation. The existence of the Jewish people is lema’alah min hateva – supernatural. In that regard we are compared to the moon -- we get bigger and smaller, but we never disappear totally. The **Midrash** says there were 15 generations between Avraham and Shlomo, just like the waxing of the moon until the 15th day. After Shlomo passed away, everything went downhill for 15 generations, until Tzidkiyahu (who was blinded) like the waning of the moon. Then, the moon appeared invisible for 18 hours. That’s the current tekufah. But we are not out for the count – we have not disappeared.

**וַיִּירָא֙ He was fearful  (28:17) -** Why was Yaakov fearful and apologetic for the fact that he fell asleep? The **Netziv** suggests that if he had such a profound experience while he was sleeping, the experience would have been that much greater, had he been awake. He was apologetic that he squandered the opportunity. We can get some inspiration while we are “sleeping” and passively going through the motions. However, if we want real inspiration, we have to seek it out.  When Yaakov was inspired, his reaction was to look at the place as a place of awe. We sometimes look for heimishkeit in our shul, seeking a warm place that is socially comfortable, but to really gain from the experience, we need to have a sense of awe.

**אַחַ֖י My brothers (29:4)** - When Yaakov encounters the shepherds at the well, he immediately criticizes them for gathering water at that time of day. Yet their reaction was to explain why they were out at that time. Why we were they so receptive to Yaakov’s criticism? **Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky** explains that the key word in this conversation is “achai.” Yaakov called them his brothers, and they were able to see his sincerity. If you want to give mussar to someone, the message will be best received it comes from a place of concern for the wellbeing of the recipient of the mussar.

**כְּיָמִ֣ים אֲחָדִ֔ים And it was like a few days (29:20)**- Why does it say כימים אחדים? When you are waiting anxiously for something, it usually feels like it takes longer! The **Sefas Emes** says that כימים אחדים doesn’t mean that the days went by quickly but rather that they were united in purpose: to get back to Eretz Yisrael. We often lose sight of our broader mission in life. Ya’akov never lost focus despite the many years he spent in Lavan’s house.

**הַפַּ֨עַם֙ אוֹדֶ֣ה This time I will offer thanksgiving to Hashem (29:35) - The Ben Ish Chai** notes that Hashem sends his help and assistance to the Jewish people through two primary means: He conducts miracles overtly and covertly. When miracles occur overtly, it is easy for one to see Hashem’s hand in daily events and the need to thank Him. However, when we recognize the hand of Hashem even when he acts covertly, in those moments he feels an even more overwhelming desire to continue to protect us and help ease our continued success. The Ben Ish Chai adds that this may help us understand why we state in the Hallel that “This event is from Hashem, it is wonderous in our eyes” and immediately add “This is the day created by Hashem and we will rejoice and be thankful for it (Tehillim 118:23-24).” When we recognize the hand that Hashem plays in daily events we merit to experience more of Hashem’s hand. Hence we immediately continue “Ana Hashem Hoshiya Na.”

**כִּ֚י שָׂכֹ֣ר שְׂכַרְתִּ֔יךָ I rented you (30:16)** - Is  This a proper way for Avos and Imahos to discuss marriage? A rental agreement? Really? **Sforno** explains that the essence of their connection was like Adam and Chava before the Eitz HaDaas – to connect together in order to populate the nation. But this seems out of place and almost nasty – is the ideal marriage one where the couple does not connect – merely “rents” a partner in order to procreate? **Rav Wolbe** adds that we often assume that the “Me” and the “we” in relationships are the opposite of Yiras Hashem. That is, there is love and the opposite is Yiras Hashem. But in truth the opposite is true – when a couple connects on a spiritual level – when they set goals in their lives that are above just their needs and wants but strive for a more globally focus and purposeful union beyond themselves, (like Yiras Shomayim) then the love grows because not only is the couple connecting physically, their souls are working together toward something more permanent and more valuable.  They are able to nurture one another and something they continue to build together.

**וְיַֽעֲקֹ֖ב הָלַ֣ךְ לְדַרְכּ֑וֹ And Yaakov went on his way and he met with the angels of Hashem (32:2)** - That Yaakov was able to see Malachim after 14 years in Yeshiva is understandable but after being in Lavan’s house? How? **Rav Aharon Lichtenstein** explained that a person in yeshiva must maximize his time and work on his relationship with God so that this relationship is strong enough to outlast his career in yeshiva. If we work on ourselves and our connection to God during our formative years in yeshiva, we shall merit seeing angels in yeshiva, and will continue to see angels even after we leave yeshiva.”

**Haftarah:**

**שׁוּבָה יִשְׂרָאֵ֔ל Shuva Yisrael (Hoshea 14:2)** – The midrash comments that Reuven was the first to open with Teshuva and thus his descendant Hoshea would also be the first – instructing Bnei Yisrael to return to Hashem. The only thing is both Reuven and Hoshea were not the first to engage in their jobs. Why are they so credited? The **Meshech Chochma** explains that Reuven was the first to realize that embedded in his need to ask for Teshuva from his father is the need to ask from Hashem whose relationship with you is clearly strained as indicated by the ability to sin. Reuven saw this and worked on his Teshuva. Hosea highlighted the message within Te0shuva – they were the first to make these links clear.