

We read in this week's *Parashah* about the 14 years that Yaakov worked as a shepherd as "payment" for Lavan's daughters, Rachel and Leah. After those years, Lavan asked Yaakov not to leave his household, which had been blessed on Yaakov's account. He said (30:28), "Specify your wage to me and I will give it." In effect, Lavan told Yaakov: Name your price! And what did Yaakov choose? To receive as yet unborn speckled, spotted, and brown sheep as payment. Yaakov said, "Do not give me anything [else]; if you will do this thing for me, I will resume pasturing and guarding your flocks."

R' Avraham *ben Ha'Rambam* z"l (son of Maimonides; Egypt; 1186-1237) asks: Shepherding is painful work, as Yaakov himself said (31:40), "By day scorching heat consumed me, and frost by night; my sleep drifted from my eyes." Why, then, did he choose to remain a shepherd for Lavan instead of naming some other price?

R' Avraham answers: Being a shepherd enabled Yaakov to engage in *Hitbodedut* / solitary meditation on spiritual matters, while any other occupation would have distracted him from that pursuit. This is why Moshe Rabbeinu, too, chose to be a shepherd and why he drove the sheep deep into the wilderness. Surely there were suitable grazing places closer to Midian, but Moshe Rabbeinu did not want to be in a place where his *Hitbodedut* would be disturbed.

R' Avraham adds: The other Patriarchs also engaged in *Hitbodedut*. Regarding Yitzchak we read (24:63), "Yitzchak went out to supplicate in the field." Regarding Avraham we read (22:5), "Avraham said to his young men, 'Stay here by yourselves with the donkey, while I and the lad go yonder; we will worship and we will return to you.'" From the fact that this statement did not arouse the curiosity of Avraham's "young men" (Yishmael and Eliezer), we can infer that Avraham regularly engaged in *Hitbodedut*, R' Avraham writes. (*Ha'maspik L'ovdei Hashem*" Perek Al Ha'hitbodedut)

Shabbat

R' Yitzchak ben R' Elyakim (Poznan, Poland; early 17th century) writes: Our Sages say (*Berachot* 57b) that *Shabbat* is a microcosm of *Olam Ha'ba* / the World-to-Come. Our world was created to endure for six millennia, and the seventh millennium will be a "*Shabbat*." All Jews who observed *Shabbat* properly in this world will merit to observe that *Shabbat*. They will not work; they will only learn Torah and pray. [Ed. note: From the fact that there will be prayer in the World-to-Come, where we will have no needs or worries, we can learn that prayer is not merely asking for our needs; rather, it is an expression of our relationship with *Hashem*.]

R' Yitzchak continues: Just as in *Olam Ha'ba* there will be no pain or worry, just pleasure and tranquility--*Tzaddikim* will sit there with crowns on their heads and bask in the light of the *Shechinah*; also, there will be no haughtiness, wasted words or *Lashon Ha'ra*--so it should be on *Shabbat*, even more than on a weekday.

Just as in *Olam Ha'ba* *Tzaddikim* will occupy themselves with nothing but spiritual matters and there will be no *Yetzer Ha'ra*, so it should be on *Shabbat*. All eating and drinking on *Shabbat* should be for the sake of Heaven and not for one's own pleasure; only because that is what G-d commanded in order to preserve the soul within the body.

Just as in *Olam Ha'ba* there will be no jealousy or hatred, and everyone will be happy with his portion even if it is smaller than someone else's portion, so a person should rejoice on *Shabbat* with whatever *Hashem* gave him and not wish for more than that. Fortunate and praiseworthy is a person who behaves this way! R' Yitzchak exclaims.

R' Yitzchak concludes: This world is comparable to *Erev Shabbat* / the eve of the Sabbath. Just as one who toils and cooks many dishes on *Erev Shabbat* will have many things to eat on *Shabbat*--and the opposite is true if one does not prepare before *Shabbat*, for it is too late to prepare once *Shabbat* begins--so, too, one who toils and performs many *Mitzvot*, good deeds, and acts of charity in this world will merit *Olam Ha'ba*.

R' Yitzchak adds: These are only some of the similarities between *Shabbat* and *Olam Ha'ba*, but there are a thousand times more!

(*Lev Tov* ch.6)

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“And he dreamt, and behold! A ladder was set earthward and its top reached heavenward; and behold! angels of *Elokim* were ascending and descending on it.” (28:12)

R’ Moshe ben Maimon *z”l* (*Rambam*; 1135-1204; Spain and Egypt) writes: When a prophet sees a vision, it may take one of two forms. Sometimes, every single detail in the vision contributes to the prophecy’s message. In other cases, the vision may include extraneous details, which serve as literary flourishes or which are meant to conceal the parable’s true message.

Yaakov’s vision of the ladder falls into the first category, *Rambam* writes. (*Moreh Nevochim*, Introduction)

R’ Yosef Gikatilla *z”l* (1248-1310; Spain; author of *Sha’arei Orah*) explains: Yaakov, and likewise other prophets, did not prophesy until they understood the structure of the world, from bottom to top. Only then could they meditate on abstract matters and connect themselves to the Upper World, separating themselves completely from the distractions of their physical senses. This is what Yaakov’s dream is teaching us--the step-by-step process, reminiscent of a ladder that is the only way to attain prophecy.

“I will explain a little,” R’ Gikatilla continues. “And he dreamt”--This introductory phrase tells us that what follows is a prophetic dream that Yaakov experienced because he came to a holy place, as the previous verse says, “He encountered the place.”

“And behold! A ladder”--Yaakov saw the entire world as a ladder, *i.e.*, he understood the connection between the lowliest creations and *Hashem*. Yaakov understood that *Hashem* created everything and its existence flows from Him through a series of steps, like rungs of a ladder.

“Was set earthward”--One who wants to attain prophecy must first understand the secrets and the structure of the natural world.

“And its top reached heavenward”--Once he understands the lower world, he can proceed to the higher worlds, first perceiving how the heavenly bodies move by the command of *Hashem*, and gradually proceeding to the world of the angels.

“And behold! angels of *Elokim* were ascending”--Next he must recognize that angels are not physical beings, only abstract “intellects.” Having done that, he can seek to “ascend” with them and discover what needs to be discovered, be it a secret of the spiritual worlds or something that is needed to address a problem in the physical world.

“And descending”--Finally, he can take what he learned back to the physical world. (*Kitvei Rabbeinu Yosef Gikatilla: Likkutim* p.27)

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

R’ Mordechai ben Hillel *z”l Hy”d* (rabbi of Nurnberg, Germany; murdered in the Rindfleisch Massacres in 1298) writes: There are those who have a custom to sleep with a stone under their heads on *Tisha B’Av* night. Our verse can serve as an allusion to such a practice, for Yaakov saw the *Bet Hamikdash* and its destruction. (*Mordechai: Mo’ed Katan* 934)

R’ Shlomo Zalman Ehrenreich *shlita* (Brooklyn, N.Y.) writes: The words of R’ Mordechai imply that Yaakov already knew when he took a stone for a pillow that he was at the place of the *Bet Hamikdash* and that the *Bet Hamikdash* would be destroyed. This does not seem to be consistent with the Torah’s narrative, which says that Yaakov awakened from his vision and exclaimed (verse 16), “Surely *Hashem* is present in this place and I did not know!” Before that, he apparently did not appreciate where he was and certainly did not know about the future destruction of the site.

R’ Ehrenreich answers: The *Gemara* (*Pesachim* 88a) notes that Avraham Avinu referred to the place of the Temple as a “*Har*” / “mountain” (*Bereishit* 22:4), Yitzchak Avinu referred to it as a “*Sadeh*” / “field” (24:63), and Yaakov Avinu referred to it, in our *Parashah*, as a “*Bayit*” / “house.” [Until here from the *Gemara*.] What do these different names or references signify?

R’ Chaim Yosef David Azulai *z”l* (*Chida*; 1724-1806; Chevron, *Eretz Yisrael* and Livorno, Italy) explains that all of the Patriarchs saw prophetically that the *Bet Hamikdash* would be built and destroyed. Avraham and Yitzchak assumed that the site of the Temple has no holiness when the Temple is not standing. Thus, they viewed the place only as a lonely mountain (*Har*) or field (*Sadeh*), respectively. Yaakov, however, viewed the site’s holiness as eternal. Therefore, he called it a house (*Bayit*). [Until here from *Chida*]

Based on this, R’ Ehrenreich writes, we can say that Yaakov did know when he came to the place that it was the future site of the *Bet Hamikdash*, and he also knew that the Temple was destined to be destroyed. The reason why he nevertheless allowed himself to sleep there was that he thought, at that point, as his father and grandfather had thought: that the place has no sanctity when the *Bet Hamikdash* is not standing. Only after Yaakov dreamt of the ladder and of the angels going up and down did he conclude, “Surely *Hashem* is present in this place.” Yaakov did know where he was, he just did not know that *Hashem* was present in that place at that moment. After that realization, he named the place “*Bayit*.”

(*Avnei Ha’makom: Sha’ar Ha’avanim* p.7)