

Vayetzei Study Sheet

The Moment of Awakening in a Holy Place

Source Sheet by Judith Spicehandler

Genesis 28:10-19

(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."

בראשית כ"ח:י"א-י"ט

(י) וַיֵּצֵא יַעֲקֹב מִבְּעַר שְׁבַע וַיֵּלֶךְ חֲרָנָה:
 (יא) וַיִּפְגַּע בְּמָקוֹם וַיִּלֵּן שָׁם כִּי־בָא הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ
 וַיִּקַּח מֵאֲבָנֵי הַמָּקוֹם וַיִּשֶׂם מִרְאֲשֹׁתָיו
 וַיִּשְׁכַּב בַּמָּקוֹם הַהוּא: (יב) וַיַּחְלֵם וְהִנֵּה
 סֹלֶם מַצֵּב אֶרֶץ וְרֹאשׁוֹ מֵגִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיְמָה
 וְהִנֵּה מַלְאָכָי אֱלֹהִים עֹלִים וְיֹרְדִים בּוֹ: (יג)
 וְהִנֵּה ה' נֹצֵב עָלָיו וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ
 אַבְרָהָם אָבִיךָ וְאֱלֹהֶיךָ יִצְחָק הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר
 אַתָּה שֹׁכֵב עָלֶיהָ לְךָ אֶתְנֶנָּה וְלִזְרַעְךָ: (יד)
 וְהָיָה זֶרְעֶךָ כַּעֲפַר הָאָרֶץ וּפְרָצְתָּ יָמָה
 וְקִדְמָה וּצְפֹנָה וְנִגְבָּה וְנִבְרָכְוּ בְּךָ
 כָּל־מִשְׁפַּחַת הָאָדָמָה וּבְזֶרְעֶךָ: (טו) וְהִנֵּה
 אֲנֹכִי עֹמֵד וְשֹׁמְרֵתִיךָ בְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר־תֵּלֵךְ
 וְהִשְׁבַּתִּיךָ אֶל־הָאָדָמָה הַזֹּאת כִּי לֹא
 אֶעֱזָבְךָ עַד אֲשֶׁר אִם־עָשִׂיתִי אֵת
 אֲשֶׁר־דִּבַּרְתִּי לְךָ: (טז) וַיִּקֶּץ יַעֲקֹב מִשְׁנָתוֹ
 וַיֹּאמֶר אָכֵן יֵשׁ ה' בְּמָקוֹם הַזֶּה וְאֲנֹכִי לֹא
 יָדַעְתִּי: (יז) וַיִּירָא וַיֹּאמֶר מַה־נּוֹרָא הַמָּקוֹם
 הַזֶּה אֲיֵן זֶה כִּי אִם־בַּיִת אֱלֹהִים וְזֶה שֶׁעַר
 הַשָּׁמַיִם: (יח) וַיִּשְׁכֹּם יַעֲקֹב בַּבֹּקֶר וַיִּקַּח
 אֶת־הָאֲבָן אֲשֶׁר־שָׁם מִרְאֲשֹׁתָיו וַיִּשֶׂם אֹתָהּ
 מַצֵּבָה וַיִּצַק שֶׁמֶן עַל־רֹאשָׁהּ: (יט) וַיִּקְרָא
 אֶת־שֵׁם־הַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא בַּיִת־אֵל וְאוּלָם לְזֵן
 שֵׁם־הָעִיר לְרֹאשְׁנָה:

(18) Early in the morning, Jacob took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. (19) He named that site Bethel; but previously the name of the city had been Luz.

Rashi on Genesis 28:11:1

(1) **ויפגע במקום** AND HE LIGHTED UPON THE PLACE — Scripture does not mention which place, but by writing **במקום** the place it refers to the place mentioned already in another passage, viz., Mount Moriah of which it is stated (Genesis 22:4) “And he saw the place (**המקום**) afar off”.

Genesis 22:4

(4) On the third day Abraham looked up and saw **the place** from afar.

Bereishit Rabbah 68:9

And he came upon (vayifga') the place (Genesis 28:11) - Rav Huna says, in the name of Rabbi Ami: **why do we substitute the name of the Holy Blessed One and use Place?** Because God is the Place of the world, and the world is not the place of God. From what is written "Here there is a place with Me" (Exodus 33:21) the Holy Blessed One is the place of the world and the world is not the place of the Holy Blessed One.

Genesis 28:16

(16) And Jacob woke from his sleep, and he said: ‘Surely! the Eternal is in this place; and I did not know it.’

Rashi on Genesis 28:16:1

רש"י על בראשית כ"ח:א:א'
 (א) **ויפגע במקום**. לא הזכיר הכתוב באיזה מקום אלא במקום – הנזכר במקום אחר, הוא הר המזריה, שנאמר בו וירא את המקום מרחק:

בראשית כ"ב:ד'
 (ד) **ביום השלישי וישא אברהם את עיניו וירא את המקום מרחק:**

בראשית רבה ס"ח:ט'
 ויפגע במקום (בראשית כח, יא), רב הונא בשם רבי אמי אמר מפני מה מכנין שמו של הקדוש ברוך הוא וקוראין אותו מקום, שהוא מקומו של עולם ואין עולמו מקומו, מן מה דכתיב (שמות לג, כא): הנה מקום אתי, הוי הקדוש ברוך הוא מקומו של עולם ואין עולמו מקומו.

בראשית כ"ח:ט"ז
 (טז) ויפקן יעקב משנתו ויאמר: אכן יש ה' במקום הזה ואנכי לא ידעתי:

רש"י על בראשית כ"ח:ט"ז:א'

(1) **And I did not know.** For if I had known, I would not have slept in such a holy place as this.

(א) **ואנכי לא ידעתי. שאלו ידעתי לא ישנתי במקום קדוש כזה:**

Sforno on Genesis 28:16

Surely the Eternal is in this place, There is no doubt that this place is established for prophecy, after having seen a vision such as this without *intending* to prophecy, for indeed the prophet must prepare their intellectual faculties, according to the variations of place and atmosphere, as they say: "The atmosphere in the land of Israel brings wisdom."

But I did not know, For had I known, I would have prepared myself for prophecy, but I did not.

Knowing that we must relinquish preconceptions

Nehama Leibowitz on Vayetze

Sometimes, the very willingness to subordinate one's mind makes that mind receptive to matters undreamed of. Jacob is an example of such an attitude. After his dream, he was able to exclaim, "Indeed the Lord is in this place, although such a thought had been furthest from my mind" (Genesis 28,16 approx). This newfound insight had been contradicted by Jacob's thought processes on several accounts. A) The assumption that G-d is subject to physical dimensions as we humans use the term had been quite alien to Jacob. He was amazed to learn that G-d has a permanent residence on earth. B) The idea that G-d moves from place to place accompanying people, would never have occurred to him, had this fact not been revealed to him. C) The thought that G-d's movements, as it were, could be brought about by outside influences, i.e. were not completely self-induced, had likewise been beyond Jacob's wildest imagination. In theology, the points just mentioned were thought completely impossible; Jacob would not have dared think of the Creator in those terms. G-d did not mean to demolish the theories Jacob had believed in; He wanted merely to broaden Jacob's spiritual horizons.

Knowing to be awake to the present moment, the now.

Torah Journeys: Vayetze by Rabbi Shefa Gold

Jacob's journey is blessed at its outset with a dream and with a moment of awakening. In the dream God shows Jacob the stairway that connects the realms of Heaven and Earth and then gives him a promise. Through this blessing, **we ourselves become that stairway**, that connection, with our feet planted in the foundation of Earth and our

crowns open to the expanse of Heaven. Through us the Divine flow pours down into the earthly realms. Through us the pleasure and miseries of earthly experience are offered up to The Divine Expanse.

When I become available to this flow, I am awakened to the most awesome and transformative truth. God was here all along and I didn't know it. THIS is none other than the House of God. THIS is the Gate of Heaven. This very moment and this place here where I stand is at once God's home and the doorway to all realms.

Our journey brings us the blessing of *zeh* - "This." In becoming fully present to this moment - Here and Now - the Presence of God is revealed.

- What are the barriers to our enjoying the blessing of *zeh* - Here and Now?

Knowing that the darkness contains new possibility

The Murmuring Deep by Aviva Zornberg

The night at Bethel is the heart of his journey, the dream interim between Be'er Sheva and Haran. There, he dreams and wakens with the words, "Surely, God is in this place. And I did not know." He wakens, that is, with the deep conviction that he *did not know*. He has brushed against a knowledge that could only arise from the way of ignorance. In such profound shifts of experience, the revelation is the not-knowing; the sense of previous darkness itself intimates a dawning light. In a startled moment, Jacob recognizes the shape of his own ignorance: "Surely, God is in this place." Why is it so unexpected that God should be *in this place*? What strange beauty has just touched him?...

Mount Moriah becomes...a place in Jacob's mind, uncannily overwhelming him, just as the sudden sunset becomes his personal syncope, a kind of blackout, which moves him to a new genre of prayer - *arvit* [*the evening prayer*] - the prayer in darkness. This is the place he unwittingly bypassed on his journey: "How could I have forgotten to pray?" ...

I suggest that, for Jacob, the *Akedah* is the unreachable place. His prayers cannot find inspiration in the thought of that terror. But, having unwittingly traveled past Mount Moriah, guilt assails him: "How could I have passed by the place where my fathers prayed, without praying there?" He sets himself to return, and finds himself abrasively hurtling against that place, that darkness. **A new prayer is born: *arvit*, which represents an unimaginable possibility - that divine light can be revealed in the dark.** The world of darkness, of sleep and dream, of loss of consciousness, vulnerability,

passivity - all this is associated with the *Akedah* and his father's helplessness from which he has long recoiled.

Knowing that we need to be aware of the role our egos play

God Was In This Place & I, i Did Not Know by Rabbi Lawrence Kushner

The verse literally reads, "Surely God was in this place and I, i did not know." The sense is "...and me, I didn't know." But the "I" (in Hebrew, *Anochi*, אנוכי) seems to be redundant. Unless, of course, you assume, as Jews have done for millennia, that God does not waste words.

The simple "extra I" (which the school of Kotzk identifies as ego or conceit) leads Pinchas Horowitz...to an important insight. "It is only possible for a person to attain that high rung of being able to say, 'Surely God is in this place,' when he or she has utterly eradicated all trace of ego from his or her personality, from his or her sense of self, and from his or her being. The phrase, 'I, i did not know,' must mean, 'my I - i did not know.'"

The beginning of true piety is not so easy," whispered the Kotzker. "You must subdue your ego and call yourself a liar. It could make you lonely and a little crazy. A crazy man about God. You understand me?"

"Yes, I think so. God was here all along, and the reason I didn't know it is because I was too busy paying attention to myself."

Religious life demands constant vigilance against the schemes of our egos (the little *is*) to supplant the Divine.

Knowing the limits of knowing

Ibn Ezra on Genesis 28:16

(1) SURELY THE LORD IS IN THIS PLACE. The meaning of Jacob's statement is that there are places where miracles are seen. I cannot explain why this is so because it is a deep mystery.

אבן עזרא על בראשית כ"ח:ט"ז
 (א) אכן יש ה'. הטעם בעבור שימצאו
 מקומות יראו שם נסים. ולא אוכל לפרש
 למה זה כי סוד מופלא הוא:



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