KING DAVID KABBALAH
SICHOS SHABBOS

FROM THE KABBALISTIC TEACHINGS OF RABBI SHEPHERD SHLIT''A



1 MEAL

Remez: A Symbolic Interpretation of Yakov's Journey

This commentary by the Or HaChaim offers a profound allegorical interpretation of Bereshit (Genesis 28:10–13), connecting Yakov's journey to the spiritual journey of the soul in this world. Drawing on insights from the Zohar and Talmud, the Or HaChaim explains how the details of Yakov's departure and dream reflect the challenges, responsibilities, and ultimate purpose of the human soul.

Translation and Commentary:
Verse:

"וַיֵּצֵא יַעֲקֹב מִבְּאֵר שָׁבַע וַיֵּלֶךְ חָרָנָה."

"And Yakov left Be'er Sheva and went to Haran."

Yakov's Departure Symbolizes the Soul's Descent into This World

The Zohar (I:147) interprets "ויצא יעקב" as referring to the soul's departure from the heavenly realms. The soul, referred to as "Yakov," is so named because it enters the physical world, where the yetzer hara (evil inclination) lies in wait, metaphorically "at its heel" (עקב).

- "Be'er Sheva" (the Well of Seven): This refers to the divine source from which all souls emerge, symbolized as a "well of living waters." The number seven alludes to the oath (shevuah) the soul takes before descending, as described in the Talmud (Niddah 30b): the soul swears to uphold the Torah and its commandments.
- "Haran": This represents the challenges and struggles the soul faces in the physical world, as it is written, "Sin crouches at the door" (Bereshit 4:7). The soul enters a world where the yetzer hara becomes active immediately after birth (Sanhedrin 91b).

Verse:

"וַיִּפְגַּע בַּמָּקוֹם..."

"And he encountered the place..."

The Soul's Need for Prayer and Divine Assistance

The word *"ויפגע"* (encountered) hints at prayer, as explained in rabbinic teachings. The soul must turn to God, "the place of the world," for help in overcoming the *yetzer hara*. The struggle against the evil inclination is lifelong, requiring constant prayer and vigilance.

- **"וילן שם כי בא השמש" (He rested there because the sun had set):** This alludes to the soul's journey from birth to death. Just as the soul must remain vigilant throughout life, a person should not place full trust in their righteousness until their life "sets," as taught in *Pirkei Avot* (2:5): *"Do not trust yourself until the day of your death."*

Verse:

"וַיִּקַּח מֵאַבְנֵי הַמָּקוֹם..."

"And he took from the stones of the place..."

Torah as the Tool to Subdue the Yetzer Hara

The "stones" represent the Torah, which is the foundation of the world. The Talmud (Berakhot 5a) teaches that one must "rage against the yetzer hara" by studying Torah, and if this does not suffice, recite the Shema and meditate on the day of death.

- "אבני המקום" (the stones of the place): The Torah is likened to stones because it is the tool used to "stone" and overcome the yetzer hara. The Talmud (Sotah 21a) adds that the Torah protects a person both during study and afterward.
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- "וַיָּשֶׂם מְרַאֲשֹׁתָיו" (he placed them under his head): This refers to reciting the Shema before sleep, as advised by Rav Shimon ben Lakish. The "placing" of stones symbolizes the mental preparation required to battle spiritual challenges.

Verse:

"...וְהִנֵּה סֻלָּם מֻצָּב אַרְצָה"

"And he dreamed, and behold, a ladder was set on the ground..."

The Ladder as a Symbol of the Soul

The ladder in Yakov's dream represents the human soul, which connects the physical and spiritual realms:

- "מֻצָּב אַרְצָה" (set on the ground): A part of the soul remains grounded in the body, even during sleep. This is why, when a person is startled awake, the soul can respond, as it is still connected to the body.

- "וְרֹאשׁוֹ מַגִּיעַ הַשָּׁמָיְמָה" (its top reached the heavens): The soul's higher essence is constantly linked to the spiritual realms. If the yetzer hara does not dominate, the soul can ascend unhindered to heaven.

"מַלְאֲכֵי אֱלֹהִים עלים וְיֹרְדִים בּוֹ" (angels of God ascending and descending on it): This refers to the spiritual "angels" created by good deeds. As the Talmud teaches (Pirkei Avot 4:11), each mitzvah creates an advocate for the soul, which ascends and brings divine blessings in return. These blessings "descend" to the individual as spiritual and physical benefits.

Verse:

"...וְהִנֵּה ה' נִצָּב עָלָיו"

"And behold, Hashem stood over him..."

The Ultimate Goal: Prophetic Connection

The ladder also symbolizes the path to prophecy. Yakov's dream foreshadows the potential of every Israelite to achieve divine connection. The Rambam (*Hilchot Teshuvah 5:5*) states that all Israelites are inherently capable of prophecy.

The progression in the dream reflects spiritual growth:

1. The soul refines itself through prayer, Torah, and good deeds.
2. The soul's connection to the heavens strengthens.
3. Eventually, the individual may merit direct revelation of the Divine Presence.

Moral and Spiritual Lesson:

Yakov's journey symbolizes the soul's mission in this world:

1. Spiritual Struggle: Life is a battle against the yetzer hara. Through Torah, prayer, and self-awareness, one can prevail.
2. Connection to the Divine: Every mitzvah strengthens the soul's link to the spiritual realm, creating "angels" that ascend to advocate for us and bring blessings.
3. Lifelong Growth: The ultimate goal is not only to overcome challenges but to ascend spiritually, reaching closer to God and fulfilling the soul's divine purpose.

Yakov's dream teaches us that no matter how "earthbound" we feel, our soul is a ladder connecting heaven and earth, capable of achieving profound spiritual heights.

2 MEAL

Background and Context:

In Bereshit (Genesis 31:12), Jacob recounts the divine vision he received regarding the spotted, speckled, and streaked animals among Lavan's flocks. The Or HaChaim delves into the significance of the "ברודים" (translated as "dappled" or "spotted"), the necessity of their appearance in Jacob's dream, and their spiritual and practical implications in Jacob's relationship with the deceitful Lavan.

Translation and Commentary:

Verse:

"...הָעַתּוּדִים הָעלִים עַל הַצֹּאן עֲקֻדִּים נְקֻדִּים וּבְרֻדִּים"

"The male goats ascending upon the flocks were streaked, speckled, and spotted..."

What Are "ברודים"?

The term "ברודים" is less familiar than the terms "עקודים" (streaked) and "נקודים" (speckled). R' Avraham ibn Ezra suggests that "ברודים" refers to animals with patches of different colors (dappled). However, the Or HaChaim questions this interpretation, as the agreement between Jacob and Lavan did not include "ברודים." Why, then, would this type appear in Jacob's dream if it was not part of his portion?

The Role of Divine Intervention in Jacob's Flocks:

The Or HaChaim explains that Lavan's dishonesty required God's intervention. Lavan not only sought to manipulate Jacob through verbal agreements but also employed divination through "teraphim" (idols) to predict and control the outcomes of Jacob's efforts. The teraphim, imbued with mystical knowledge, could discern details about the offspring of the flock.

To counteract this deceit, God devised a miraculous solution that would outmaneuver Lavan's schemes without disrupting the natural order. Instead of altering the genetic traits of the animals post-conception—an act that would disrupt nature—God embedded three patterns (עקודים, נקודים, ברודים) simultaneously within the genetic makeup of the offspring. This innovation rendered Lavan's teraphim powerless, as the divine plan concealed which specific pattern would manifest in each birth.

Why Include "ברודים"?

The inclusion of the "ברודים" was a safeguard. If Lavan were to shift his agreement and claim that "ברודים" should now belong to him, this type would already exist in the flocks as part of the established divine intervention. Thus, God ensured that Jacob's share would remain intact regardless of Lavan's manipulations.

Miraculous but Natural:

The Or HaChaim emphasizes that the miracle avoided disrupting nature. Instead, the miraculous outcome was embedded in the natural processes of breeding and birth. Similar to how some birds change their coloration naturally, God instilled this flexibility into the flocks to ensure that Jacob's rightful share emerged despite Lavan's interference.

- "ברודים" as Dappled:

Supporting ibn Ezra's interpretation, the Or HaChaim suggests that "ברודים" are indeed a form of mottled or dappled pattern. The term may derive from their snowy-white appearance, resembling "ברד" (hail). This interpretation ensures that the divine intervention was purposeful and precise, thwarting Lavan's plans without creating unnecessary or excessive miracles.

Verse:

"כִּי רָאִיתִי אֵת כָּל אֲשֶׁר לָבָן עֹשֶׂה לָךְ."

"For I have seen all that Lavan is doing to you."

Why Did God Intervene?

The angel reveals that God's miraculous intervention was a response to Lavan's continued deceit. Lavan's reliance on teraphim and relentless scheming made it impossible for Jacob to succeed through natural means alone. The divine plan ensured justice by enabling Jacob to overcome Lavan's manipulations.

Available Dedications

- **Divine Justice in the Redistribution of Wealth:**

The vision also reassures Jacob that taking possession of the flocks was not theft. God, as the ultimate judge, saw Lavan's dishonesty and determined that Jacob deserved compensation for years of exploitation. The miraculous breeding ensured a fair outcome, transferring wealth to Jacob in a manner aligned with divine justice.

Moral and Spiritual Lesson:

1. God Protects the Righteous from Deceit:
2. Jacob's story illustrates how God intervenes when dishonesty and injustice seem insurmountable. Even when Lavan used mystical tools to manipulate outcomes, God's wisdom ensured Jacob's success without violating natural law.
3.
4. Divine Justice Balances the Scales:
5. The redistribution of Lavan's wealth to Jacob reflects a broader principle of divine justice. When human systems fail to uphold fairness, God intervenes in subtle but effective ways to ensure that righteousness prevails.
6.
7. Trust in God's Plan:
8. Jacob's vision teaches us to trust that God sees all injustices and responds at the appropriate time. Even when circumstances appear overwhelming, divine providence works behind the scenes to protect and uplift those who are wronged.
9.

Harmony Between Nature and Miracles:

The method God used to help Jacob highlights the balance between miracles and natural processes. This approach teaches that divine intervention often works through the natural order, subtly guiding outcomes while maintaining the world's integrity.

3 MEAL

Background and Context:

In Bereshit (Genesis 32:2–3), Jacob encounters a group of angels as he prepares to meet his brother Eshav . The Torah describes this meeting briefly, leaving much to interpretation. The Or HaChaim explores the significance of the angels' appearance, Jacob's reaction, and the meaning of the term "מחנים" (Mahanaim, meaning "two camps").

Translation and Commentary:

Verse:

"וַיִּפְגְּעוּ בּוֹ מַלְאֲכֵי אֱלֹהִים".

"And angels of God encountered him."

Why "ויפגעו בו" (They encountered him)?

The Or HaChaim highlights the unusual phrasing. Instead of describing the angels approaching gradually, as humans might, the Torah says they "encountered him," implying an immediate and sudden appearance. This suddenness made it clear to Jacob that these were not ordinary men but divine messengers. The term "ויפגעו בו" reflects this supernatural element—an instant, almost startling encounter that revealed their otherworldly nature.

Verse:

"וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב כַּאֲשֶׁר רָאָם, מַחֲנֵה אֱלֹהִים זֶה; וַיִּקְרָא שֵׁם הַמָּקוֹם מַחֲנָיִם".

"And Jacob said when he saw them, 'This is God's camp,' and he named the place Mahanaim."

What Did Jacob Recognize?

The Or HaChaim explains that Jacob immediately understood these were angels because of the miraculous nature of their arrival. Unlike humans, who approach visibly from a distance, these angels appeared suddenly, confirming their divine origin. Jacob declared, "מַחֲנֵה אֱלֹהִים זֶה" ("This is God's camp"), recognizing that this was no ordinary group of men but a heavenly host sent to assist him.

Why Name the Place "Mahanaim" (Two Camps)?

Jacob's naming of the site reflects the coexistence of two distinct "camps" or forces at play:

1. The Human Camp: Jacob and his household, physically prepared for a confrontation with Eshav .
2. The Divine Camp: The angels, appearing in human form, were sent by God to provide spiritual and physical assistance.

The dual nature of the camps symbolized the harmony between human effort and divine intervention. Jacob's statement acknowledges the partnership between his own preparations and God's support.

Key Insights and Lessons:

- **Divine Support is Immediate and Miraculous:**

The sudden appearance of the angels ("ויפגעו בו") reminds us that divine assistance often arrives unexpectedly, especially when one is in need. Jacob's recognition of this reinforces the importance of staying spiritually attuned to perceive such interventions.

- **Acknowledging the Dual Effort in Challenges:**

By naming the place Mahanaim, Jacob emphasizes the partnership between human effort and divine help. Even as he prepared strategically for his meeting with Eshav , he understood that success ultimately depended on God's support. This balance teaches us to combine practical effort with faith and reliance on divine assistance.

- **Confidence Through Divine Assurance:**

Jacob's encounter with the angels gave him reassurance before his confrontation with Eshav . The presence of both "camps" symbolizes that one is never alone when undertaking difficult tasks—divine forces accompany and strengthen those who act with righteousness.

- **The Role of Faith in Perception:**

Jacob's immediate recognition of the angels reflects his spiritual sensitivity. This reminds us that perceiving divine help often requires a mindset open to faith, as God's presence is not always apparent without reflection or awareness.

Practical Takeaway:

When faced with challenges, we must prepare diligently, like Jacob did, while simultaneously trusting in God's unseen support. Recognizing the "two camps" in our lives—our own efforts and God's assistance—enables us to approach difficulties with confidence, knowing we are never truly alone.