

IF YOU VALIDATE IT, IT IS NO DREAM

by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

Yaakov awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely Hashem is present in this place, and I did not know!"

"Surely" seems like the wrong word. Yaakov wakes up after a phenomenal prophetic dream, and expresses his wonder about this special, holy place. What he should have said is "Wow!" In biblical Hebrew, we can get pretty close to that. The word "behold!" conveys the same sense of surprise mixed with awe. (This word is no stranger to our parshah. In the verses that precede ours, the word *hinei* is used multiple times.)

Surely/ *achein* means something very different. It implies that several alternatives can be considered, with the speaker concluding that one of them alone can be shown - indeed, surely - to be the correct choice. But why would Yaakov use "surely" instead of "behold" in our pasuk?

Yaakov may have been less of a dreamer than we suppose. He realized that not all dreams are cut from the same cloth. Some are nothing more than ordinary brain maintenance. As the gemara tells us, people think about certain things by day, and then dream about them at night. Only some dreams communicate messages from the upper worlds. Even those often contain "static"-extraneous elements that have no real meaning, or even false meaning.²

Yaakov very much wanted to believe in the dream he remembered so vividly, and in the implications of all of its details. How was he going to assure himself that the dream in its entirety conveyed accurate impressions from beyond? The upshot of his nocturnal vision was that "Hashem was standing over him."³ How could he be sure?

Yaakov arose from his dream and felt the kedushah of the place. He was gripped with awe and reverence, and realized that it was nothing less than Hashem's presence there that was working on his neshamah. Hashem was indeed standing over him; Yaakov had walked into His close proximity! He had been the source of the dream, nothing less.

Furthermore, Yaakov reasoned, his perception of the place's kedushah was abundantly clear at that moment. Why had he sensed none of it when he arrived, the afternoon before? He had davened that evening, using his trademark tefilah of *maariv*. How had he managed to spend time in focused prayer to Hashem, and not felt what he now sensed in the morning? Yaakov understood that Hashem had purposely withheld his comprehension of the kedushah of the place, just so he would be able to have that dream. Had he realized the kedushah of the place, it would have kept him up all

night. Certainly he would not have treated the place cavalierly, and bedded down for the evening. Yaakov realized that he had been, as it were, set up to remain unaware of the kedushah, and therefore able to lay himself down to sleep.

In that sleep, he had his dream. In the morning, seized by the kedushah of the place, Yaakov was able thereby to demonstrate to himself that his dream was a genuine prophetic one. Surely, said Yaakov, surely the Shechinah is in this place, and it was the source of my dream.

Tough Charity

*Whatever You shall give me, I will certainly tithe it to You.*⁴

Emphasis belongs on the word "me." Yaakov proclaims that he is prepared to give up a tenth even of what was unmistakably given "me," meaning for his individual needs. He would not restrict his giving to what others call "discretionary cash," funds that remain after basic needs are filled. Yaakov pledges that he will subject to his program of charitable giving even what seems necessary for basic subsistence. In effect, he says, "I will tighten my own belt. I will take, if need be, from what would be going into my own mouth, and give it to Your poor."

Perhaps this is what Yeshaya meant when he wrote,⁵ "Surely you should break your bread for the hungry." Even what is clearly your bread - what you have designated for your own meals - you should share. Furthermore, you should do so even if it is for the hungry, i.e. by breaking bread and offering some to the poor, it will result in your remaining hungry! By this you will accomplish tzedakah in the fullest sense - giving to others when you have not filled your own needs.

Chazal tell us⁶ that Hashem has particular regard for the minchah offering of a poor person, who sacrifices more than others in bringing his humble offering. Although not as expensive or elegant as the offerings of others, G-d cherishes it as if the person offered his own self for HKBH, since he must part with funds that are important to him in his struggle to make ends meet. Surely the same applies to any person who makes do with less in order to help feed the poor.

Sources:

1. Based on Be'er Mayim Chaim, Bereishis 28:16
2. See Ramchal, Derech Hashem, 3:1:6 (end)
3. Bereishis 28:13
4. Based on Be'er Mayim Chaim, Bereishis 28:22
5. Yeshaya 58:7
6. Menachos 104B

