

EVERY NANA SECOND

by Rabbi Label Lam

And he met "the place" and he slept there because the sun (suddenly) set, and he took from the stones of "the place" and he arranged them around his head, and he lay down to sleep in that place. (Breishis 28:11)

He arranged them around his head: In a circular shape because he was afraid of wild animals... (Rashi)

And he said to them, "The day is yet great, it's not time to gather in the flock, give them water to drink and go shepherd." (Breishis 29:7)

It would sure be amazing to meet someone like Yaakov Avinu! That would undoubtedly be the experience of a lifetime. What could be more exhilarating?! That's not a rhetorical question! He we have in Chumash chosen snippets, windows- into the actions and words that define the essence of Yaakov and the other Patriarchs as well. These words, these selective accounts are authored by none other than The Almighty. What an opportunity we have to gain a crystal clear composite picture of the greatest people that have ever walked on the planet.

Here we have just two incidents of many. One describes simply how Yaakov went to sleep for the first time in many-many years. The other narrates a confrontational episode with the citizens of the place that would become his new home. Both accounts are inviting us to take a closer look.

As incredible as it may sound, our sages tell us that Yaakov did not sleep for the fourteen years while he was busy studying Torah at the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever. After that time he left to follow through on the instructions of his parents to continue to Charan, and find a wife.

Not having slept for so many years can make a man pretty tired. Yaakov's head should have hit the proverbial pillow like a led balloon but we are treated to a few details that indicate that he had a competing concern. He first arranged a protective circle of stones to guard his head first. (Don't ask me how this works) If he was merely fearful of wild beasts, then why did he set them up around only around his head?

I believe the answer is that Yaakov's effort was to guard his mind and even while he slept. King Solomon had told us similarly, "From all the things you watch, protect your mind, because from it

founts life". How much more so should someone guard his intellect, his thoughts with ultra-caution especially when awake!

Then we find Yaakov engaging the shepherds, he presumes, are taking a siesta at midday. He feels compelled to rebuke and remind them that the day is yet long and there is plenty of work to be done. The Mishne in Pirke Avos however states, "The day is short and the work is much..." How can Yaakov portray, "the day is yet great"?

I once heard the following brief explanation on that Mishne, "When is the day short? When the work is much!" When, then, is the day long, boring, and painfully protracted? When do we tend to push the clock in our minds? When one perceives that the work is little or already done. Alternately, given his work ethic, Yaakov may be speaking of the actual weightiness of the day. "The day is yet great!" In any case, he must have been pained by what he saw on display, to approach total strangers and tell them off in such a bold manner.

Yaakov Avinu couldn't stand to see time being wasted. Imagine people shoveling perfectly good food or hundred dollar bills into a furnace. It would be hard for us to witness this and sit still. The famous poem of the Ibn Ezra reads nicer in Hebrew rhyme but still makes perfect sense in translation: A man worries about the loss of his money (momav) but he doesn't worry about waste of his days (yomav). His money ultimately doesn't help (ozrim) and his days are not returning (chozrim)!"

It's hard to make a whole garment out of these few threads of info about Yaakov our Father but we see an important pattern emerging. If he were alive today and visiting our lives, would he feel entirely comfortable with the time we spend on our computers or would he be repulsed by the enormous waste of time and alarmed about the profound moral dangers that are lurking there **every nana second!?** DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and Torah.org.