

# IN THE DARKNESS OF THE NIGHT

by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

*G-d spoke to Yisroel in visions of the night, and said, "Yaakov, Yaakov."*

Meshech Chochmah: Neither of the *avos* who preceded Yaakov was a recipient of a nocturnal vision. This is peculiar to Yaakov – and it occurs more than once. Many years earlier, as Yaakov fled from Esav's wrath and readied himself to face the uncertainties of living with Lavan, he experienced the prophetic dream of the angels ascending and descending the ladder that connected Heaven and earth. There as well the vision occurred at night.

These two episodes share a common element, which we can assume is the reason for this unusual way of communicating information to Yaakov. In both cases, Yaakov was on the cusp of leaving the land of Israel, and exposing himself to the vicissitudes of *galus*. In both cases, Hashem wished to reassure Yaakov that He would be with him even in the dark night of exile. Chazal<sup>[2]</sup> state the upshot of this reassurance plainly and openly: "When the Jews were exiled to Bavel, the *Shechinah* went with them.

This motif in Yaakov's life explains his particular contribution to our fixed prayer. Avrohom established *shacharis*; Yitzchok *minchah*.<sup>[3]</sup> Yaakov – who gave his name to his people – ironically created the model for a davening that is halachically voluntary! Should not the name Yisrael be linked to a daily fixed prayer? Our people's self-understanding is bound up with constant conversation with G-d!

Perhaps. But a more vital understanding for that people is that Hashem will never abandon them. This is the unique contribution of Yaakov.

This contribution follows the pattern of the offering of the heavy limbs of animals slaughtered earlier in a given day. While generally the *avodah* of the *beis hamikdash* grinds to a halt during the evening, the offering of the residual limbs is an exception. If the process of offering began by day with the animal's slaughter and application of its blood on the *mizbeach*, the burning of the limbs (if not completed by day) may take place at night.<sup>[4]</sup>

These halachos create an image, whose message is clear: when something is associated with Hashem during the daytime, i.e. connected to Him during times in which He illuminates our lives freely and easily, it remains attached to Him even when His countenance seems to turn away. When a curtain of darkness falls on an animal whose elevation towards Hashem began by day, the *avodah*

of that animal may continue even at night.

Prophecy is subject to the same rule. A *navi* who once experienced *nevuah* while in the land of Israel (like Yechezkel) can continue to receive prophecy when he leaves the land.<sup>[5]</sup>

These ideas yield a crucial bit of instruction to us. When a Jew holds firm to the *mesorah* – when he follows the ways and lessons of his forefathers who lived at a time of the open connection between Hashem and His people that existed when the *beis hamikdosh* stood in its place – then he can be treated as a continuation of an ancient and venerable people. The *Shechinah* continues to dwell among such people. If, however, he forgets the covenant of his ancestors and does not follow in their ways, but lives as if part of a separate people, then the *Shechinah* is not with him in *galus*! He is treated with scorn and derision, no longer as part of a proud, ancient group that once saw the glory of Hashem when it was open and manifest.

Yosef's Blindfold<sup>[6]</sup>

*I will descend with you to Egypt, and I will bring you up, and Yosef will place his hand on your eyes.*

Meshech Chochmah: What magic is Yosef's hand working? Whatever it is doing, should it not be mentioned in its proper chronological place – sometime after Yaakov's descent to Egypt, and before his eventual rising up out of the land?

Yosef's hand is meant to avert Yaakov's intellectual gaze upon the enigmatic course of his life. Why would Hashem lead him to Egypt, only to declare from the beginning that His intention was to lead him out of it? Avrohom was instructed to turn his life around, and follow G-d's instruction to move to the land of Canaan. Once there, however, he was to remain there. Why would Hashem tell Yaakov to emigrate to Egypt, for the apparent purpose of making an eventual u-turn? If his descent to Egypt was for some good purpose, why rise up and leave later?

Hashem tells Yaakov not to peer too intently into the ways of Divine providence. Yosef's odyssey should cover Yaakov's eyes to prevent him from looking so hard, because it points to the inscrutable and elevated ways of His thought. Who would ever have thought that Yosef's travail would lead to such great good? Who could have predicted that by living in Egypt, he would become its ruler? It is Yosef's example that would help Yaakov understand the apparent paradox of being told in the same breath to go to Egypt, and to leave it as well.

In fact, the benefit of Yosef's position was not limited to providing for his family – something he perhaps could have done from a distance. Yosef's prominence and role worked in tandem with the eventual presence of Yaakov to create awareness of fundamental truths about G-d and Man. Thus, the long, hard stay in Egypt would eventually prove to be a necessary experience on the way to the elevation of the Jewish people with the Exodus. But it would also bring great promise to others. It would benefit some Egyptians in the short run – and all of humanity in its greater role. Klal Yisrael's limited stay in Egypt would eventually make sense, just as Yosef's life did.

[1] Based on Meshech Chochmah, Bereishis 46:2

[2] Megilah 29A

[3] Berachos 26B

[4] Berachos 2A

[5] Moed Katan 25A

[6] Based on Meshech Chochmah, Bereishis 46:4

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