

THE KEDUSHA OF GALUS - THINKING IN PARALLEL

by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann

Parshas Vayeitze begins with Yaakov leaving home, on his way to Charan to seek a suitable mate, at the behest of his parents. On his way, he encounters a place, and lays down to sleep.

And he dreamt, and behold, a ladder was standing on the ground, and its top reached heaven - angels of G-d were going up and down on it. (28:12)

During his dream, Hashem appears to Yaakov in a vision. Although Yaakov is presently fleeing his brother, Eisav, and things seem bleak, Hashem promises him that great things are to come:

The ground upon which you lie, I will give it to you and your descendants. Your offspring shall be [plentiful] as the dust of the earth. You will spread out powerfully... All the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you and your offspring... (28:13-14)

Upon awakening from his vision, Yaakov's reaction is noteworthy:

Yaakov awoke from his sleep. He said, "Indeed, Hashem is in this place, yet I did not know!" He was frightened, and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the dwelling place of G-d - it is the gate to heaven!" (28:16-17)

On Yaakov's remark, "Indeed, Hashem is in this place, yet I didn't know," Rashi comments:

If I had known, I would not have layed down to rest in such a holy place!

How different, says the Shai La-Torah, is the reaction of a tzaddik than our reaction might have been! Imagine you're learning late one night in beis ha-midrash. You're the only one left, and you're really tired and feel like going home, but your love and dedication for the Torah pushes you to stay on for another half hour. Alas, in the middle of learning, you are overcome by fatigue; you lose your struggle to keep your eyes open, and your head slowly comes to rest atop your open Gemara. In your slumber, Hashem appears to you in a vision. "Because you have shown such tremendous dedication to and love for My Torah," He says, "you are destined to become a great and revered scholar. From all over the world, people will seek your advice and take advantage of your almost endless knowledge. Your children will become great scholars and rabbanim in their communities..."

Suddenly you awaken. It is clear to you that this lucid vision was no simple dream. When you arrive home, your wife asks you how your learning went. You feel humbly obligated to tell her of your vision. She is elated - her joy at being the subject of such meaningful blessings knows no end. What person would not pray all their lives for such a promise!

"You know," you tell her, "I feel really bad about falling asleep on top of a Gemara - especially in the middle of the holy beis ha-midrash! I never do that. If I would have realized I couldn't have stayed awake, I would have come home a half hour earlier!"

Absurd? To us it certainly seems so. Wasn't it bashert (destined)? Doesn't the value of such a dream and its promises outweigh the "minor" impropriety of having fallen asleep? From Yaakov we see that a truly G-d-fearing person is more concerned with his own actions than he is about lofty assurances and promises of grandeur - even such noble ones as Yaakov received. "Indeed, Hashem is in this place, yet I did not know!" - for had I known, I would not have layed down to rest, even if it meant forfeiting everything I've just been told.

On Yaakov's remark, "This is the gate to heaven," Rashi notes that from here we see that the Beis Ha-mikdash shel ma'alah (Holy Temple on High) is parallel to the Beis Ha-mikdash shel matah (earthly Temple). Our Sages teach that there exists in heaven a spiritual Temple. When we serve Hashem in our Temple, corresponding services are performed in the Heavenly Temple. Thus, in some sense, the two Temples are physically "parallel" to each other.

Rashi makes an almost identical comment on the words (found in the Song of the Red Sea):

You will bring them, and plant them on the mount of Your heritage; the place You dwell in, You have made it, Hashem. (Shemos/Exodus 15:17)

Rashi writes: The place You dwell in - refers to the earthly Beis Ha-mikdash. You have made it, Hashem - refers to the Beis Ha-mikdash shel ma'alah. This teaches us, he says, that the earthly Beis Ha-mikdash is parallel to the Heavenly Beis Ha-mikdash. Almost identical. Except that in our parsha, Rashi writes that the Heavenly one corresponds to the physical one, while in the Song Rashi writes that the earthly one corresponds to the spiritual one!

Chazal say, says the Belzer Rebbe zt"l, that when we are in exile, Hashem too (to the extent we can express it) goes into exile with us (Ta'anis 16a). Yaakov is on his way out of Israel. He is going to spend the next 20 years of his life separated from his family, and from his Land, in the surroundings of Lavan. Hashem uproots the Beis Ha-mikdash shel ma'alah and brings it to where Yaakov sleeps. He is giving Yaakov a message: Wherever you go - I will follow. In the Song, Hashem speaks of bringing His nation into the Land, and building a Beis Ha-mikdash in its proper place. There, when

things are where they should be, Rashi writes that the Beis Ha-mikdash shel matah will be built on the place which corresponds to the proper location of the Beis Ha-mikdash above.

While we may never merit the dreams of Yaakov Avinu, when a Jew reminds himself that Hashem accompanies him throughout all his exiles, both physical and emotional, he may find himself humbled by the thought, and become more acutely aware of the magnitude of his responsibilities, and the impact of his actions. Having the Almighty "follow us around," after all, is both an honour, and a tremendous responsibility.

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