

TORAH STUDY - - DOING IT OUR WAY

by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann

And Yaakov left Be'er Sheva, and he went to Charan. [28:10]

Ma'aseh Avos siman le-banim: The actions of the forefathers foretell what will happen to the children. Yaakov's departure from Eretz Yisrael—his actions, prayers, and preparations—are seen by commentators as preparing his progeny for our nation's many centuries of exile.

He took from the stones of the place, and placed [them] at his head. [v. 11]

He did so out of fear of wild animals [Rashi]. If we are talking about everyday wild animals, such as wolves and bears, it seems strange to make- do with shielding only one's head. Could they not sidestep the shield and attack his body?

In his dream, he sees a ladder grounded on earth, whose top reaches Heaven. Hashem appears to him. I [Ani] am Hashem, G-d of your father Avraham, and G-d of Yitzchak...Behold, I [Anochi] will be with you; I will guard you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this Land. [28:12- 15]

In the first sentence Hashem refers to Himself as Ani, while in the second sentence He says Anochi. Both words mean "I," but the discrepancy can not be without significance.

And Yaakov awoke from his sleep—Don't read 'from his sleep' [mi-sh'naso] but rather 'from his learning' [mi-mishnasol]. [Midrash] Why do the Sages remove the verse from its more literal meaning?

It was a day for a royal celebration: The king's only daughter was to be wed. Finding a suitable groom for the fine princess had been no easy task; after all, it's not every day that the king gives away his only child, and with her, the future of his dynasty.

Many wondered what the king would do once she was married. Of course his majesty spent much of his day taking care of national issues, such as wars and taxes. But for the past twenty-or-so years, his 'leisure time' had been completely occupied by his beloved daughter. When she was young, he had played with her. As she grew, they spent their time together playing intellectual games and discussing important matters such as philosophy and politics. Now she would be moving into her own home. Many speculated the king would quickly grow old and feeble from loneliness.

Before leading her to the wedding ceremony, the king took an envelope from his robe and pressed it into his daughter's hand. "Open this envelope only after the wedding, together with your husband." She briefly wondered what its contents could be. But she was soon swept away with the day's

festivities.

Late that night, as she sat with her groom in the royal bridal suite especially constructed for the occasion, she remembered the envelope. With her husband, the prince, looking over her shoulder, she opened it, and read aloud. "My dear daughter and son-in-law: Congratulations on this most joyous day of your lives! My dear son-in-law: As you know, my daughter, my only child, is very dear to me. Not a day has gone by since she was born that I didn't spend time with her. Her departure from my palace opens a gaping hole in my life—a void I could never fill. I therefore have from you but one request: I can not bear to part. Please, make me a small room in your new home so I can be with you; I will not intrude in your lives, but I will cherish being with you and seeing you grow."

Chazal (our Sages) quote this story as an allegory to the Tabernacle. After Hashem gave the Torah—His most treasured possession—to us, He couldn't bear, so to speak, the separation. He asks us to construct a Tabernacle, a 'small room,' so He can dwell among us always.

How is giving the Torah similar to the king giving the hand of his daughter in marriage. Can't Hashem still 'enjoy the Torah,' so to speak, even after giving it to us?

In giving us the Torah, Hashem does not simply allow us to use it and enjoy it too. Like a husband who, once he has betrothed his wife, prohibits her to all other men, by giving us the Torah Hashem relinquished His own relationship with it. After the Torah was given, it became the exclusive domain of the Sages of Israel to interpret, rule, and decide the meaning and laws of the Torah (within the parameters taught to Moshe at Sinai). Even if a Heavenly voice proclaims they are wrong, they are forbidden to retract their decision! (See Bava Metzia 59b) It is for this unique relationship with the Torah that we thank Hashem every day when we recite the blessing "Giver of the Torah." When Hashem gave us the Torah, so to speak, He gave Himself along with it!

This idea finds expression in the very first word of the Ten Commandments, "I (Anochi) am Hashem, your G-d." The word Anochi, when its letters are separated, spells A-Ana/I, N-Nafshi/My soul, C-c'avis/I have written, Y-y'havis/I have given it [My soul] over. (Shabbos 105a) In giving us the Torah, to the extent we can express it, Hashem relinquishes His control over the universe and gives it to us.

Praying that Hashem answer us "in the merit of our forefathers" is the very basis of many of our prayers. What we may not have considered is that when we mention Avraham and Yitzchak, it has the unfortunate potential to bring merit upon the heads of our enemies too, as they are likewise the children of Avraham and Yitzchak!

Yaakov realized this, and wanted things to start with him. He placed the stones around his head...The stones are the letters of the Torah (Zohar). He placed them around his head, as if to say, let me be the head, the beginning—let it not be necessary to arouse the merits of my fathers Avraham and Yitzchak, so as not to bring merit to our enemies.

Avraham is the pillar of kindness. Yitzchak is the pillar of strength. Yaakov is the pillar of the

Torah—"Yaakov was a simple man who sat in the tents of Torah" (25:27). Hashem reveals to Yaakov that his merit, the merit of the Torah, is very great. Ani—I am the G-d of Avraham and Yitzchak: I did not reveal to them the power of Anochi. But now: Behold Anochi—I am with you: Now that the pillar of Torah has been revealed to the world through you, you're running the show. As long as you remain faithful to the Torah and it's study, you and your progeny will have nothing to fear.

And Yaakov awoke from his sleep—don't read 'sleep,' but rather 'study.' It was now clear to him, more than ever before, how great Torah study was, and its ability to change the course of history!

And he said, 'Indeed Hashem is in this place,'—this much I knew already. Ve'anochi lo ya-da'ati—but I did not know the secret of Anochi—that with the Torah, Hashem has given us the 'keys to the universe.' [Techeles Mordechai]

The Torah, says the Gemara (Kiddushin 66a), sits alone in the corner— waiting for someone to take her; whoever wants can come and take her!

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