

TWIN PEAKS

by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann

Yaakov awoke from his sleep, and he said, "Indeed, Hashem's presence is in this place, and I did not know." (28:16)

Yaakov's apparent chagrin at having slept in a place whose holiness remained hidden from him at first glance seems at odds with a well known passage in masechet Chulin (91b):

When Yaakov arrived at [his final destination of] Charan, he said [to himself], "Is it possible I passed by the place at which my forefathers prayed, and did not pray there?" He decided to return, and began travelling back, at which point the earth 'jumped' for him [i.e. the Temple Mount, the place at which Avraham and Yitchak prayed, came to meet him].

Yaakov was conscious enough of the significance of the place that, realizing he had passed it by, he felt compelled to return. How can this be resolved with his evident surprise that, "Indeed Hashem is found here"?

The Midrash in this week's parsha, referring to the central theme of the mountain, cites the first verse of Tehillim (Psalms), Chapter 121: *"I pick up my eyes to the mountains [from where will my salvation come?]"*. The Midrash comments, "I pick up my eyes to my teachers and those who made me serve..."

Sefer Zera Berach notes that the verse refers to mountains, yet there is only one mountain found in our parsha? Also: Who or what are the teachers and those who made me serve?

As discussed above, the mountain in question is identified by our Sages as Har Ha-Moriah, the Temple Mount. The Midrash (Yalkut Reuveni, parshas Yisro) says that Har Ha-Moriah was also the mountain upon which the Torah was given. "When Hashem came to give the Torah [on Har Sinai], the Temple Mount uprooted itself and came to the Sinai desert, so that the Torah would be given upon holy ground."

Apparently, the mountain upon which Yaakov slept was not only the place upon which one day the Holy Temple would be built (and upon which the Western Wall stands to this day), it was also Har Sinai, upon which Hashem would descend and lovingly give His Torah to His chosen nation.

With the above, Zera Berach explains, we suddenly understand a cryptic passage in parshas Shemos. Moshe asks Hashem for a sign that his mission of redemption will succeed, to which Hashem responds (Shemos/Exodus 3), *"Here's your sign: When you remove this nation [from Egypt], you will serve G-d upon this mountain."* Moshe's vision was at Har Sinai, upon which Hashem would

soon give the Torah. If so, it would seem more logical for Hashem to say, "*... you will receive the Torah upon this mountain.*" Why "*... you will serve G-d?*"

'Serving G-d,' while likely encompassing every facet of our lives as Bnei Torah, is commonly understood to be related to prayer and animal sacrifice, which was performed in the Holy Temple. Moshe stood then before Hashem at Har Sinai, which was also Har Ha-Moriah. Hashem therefore refers to the place upon which Jews will one day serve Hashem, through prayer and sacrifice.

This also illuminates a difficult verse in parshas Ki Savo. The person who brings his basket of first-grown fruits (bikkurim) to the Beis Ha-Mikdash recites a brief passage of thanksgiving, in which he says (Devarim/Deuteronomy 26), "*... And You brought us to this Place and You gave us this Land.*" Rashi explains that this Place refers to the Holy Temple, while this Land means the Land of Israel. If so, doesn't this Land logically belong before this Place - the order in which we encountered them?

According to the Midrash, however, the Temple Mount left Israel and came to the Sinai Desert at the Torah's giving. Thus, it is indeed true that You brought us to this Place - Har Ha-Moriah, first, and then, You gave us this Land.

This is why, he explains, the dualistic mountain upon which Yaakov prayed and slept, is set against the mountains (pl.) at which King David gazed. It also clarifies why the Midrash refers to, "my teachers... those who made me serve." Teachers refers to those who teach Torah; a reference to its future giving upon this mountain. Those who make me serve refers to avodah, serving Hashem, a reference to the prayer and sacrifice that would one day be performed upon the place at which Yaakov stood.

The previous Bobover Rebbe zt"l (Kerem Shlomo) says that we now understand Yaakov's cryptic despair when he said, "Indeed, Hashem is at this place, yet I [Anochi] did not know."

He asks: Why does Yaakov use the unusual term Anochi - I, instead of the more common Ani or even just lo yadati - I didn't know? Anochi, he explains, is commonly identified with the Aseres Ha-Dibros, the Ten Commandments, which start with the words, "*Anochi Hashem Elokecha - I am Hashem, your G-d.*"

Brilliantly, he explains that Yaakov surely knew the place was very holy - otherwise why did he bother to return there? He likely knew, in fact, that it was on this very spot that the Jews would one day construct the Temple, and His nation would come from near and far to serve Him, pray in His Temple, and experience His presence. What he didn't know, and what was revealed to him in his vision, was that this was also the place upon which the Torah would be given. Ve-Anochi lo yadati - that this is the very place upon which Hashem will reveal Himself to an entire nation and declare, "*Anochi Hashem Elokecha,*" this I did not know.

One nagging question: Yaakov implies that had he known that Hashem is found in this place he would not have slept there (indeed this is Rashi's understanding). If we approach the verse according

to its most simple meaning (which, as above, has its own problems), that Yaakov had no idea where he was, we can grasp how he can say, would I have known, I wouldn't have gone to sleep. But according to our present approach, that he knew he stood upon the place where the Temple would one day be built, Yaakov appears to be saying the following: "I thought this was only (?) the place where the Beis Ha-Mikdash will be built; had I known it is also the mountain upon which the Torah will be given, then I would surely not have slept here"?!

Perhaps Yaakov's regret for going to sleep stems not from the holiness of the site (surely the Temple Mount is holy enough on its own), but rather from some other factor. Consider this: According to our Sages, before setting out to Charan, Yaakov 'hid himself' for fourteen years in the Yeshiva of Shem (son of Noach) and Ever, during which he studied Torah constantly. So great, say Chazal, was his sacrifice for Torah study that not once during the fourteen years did he sleep through the night, preferring instead to use the quiet serenity of darkness to explore the Torah's mysteries undisturbed. This is why, they teach, when Yaakov slept this night, it says (verse 11), "*And he slept at that place.*" That night he slept, something he hadn't done for fourteen years.

"Although it is a mitzvah to study Torah both at day and at night," Rambam (Hilchos Talmud Torah 3:13) writes, "one acquires the bulk of his wisdom at night times. Therefore, one who desires to acquire the Crown of Torah knowledge must be exceedingly careful with his evenings, not to waste even one of them with sleep, food, drink, chatter etc. The song of Torah is only at nighttime... One who studies Torah at night, a thread of kindness is cast upon him the following day."

Yaakov's incredible stamina was not a byproduct of his desire to inflict himself. Rather, it stemmed from a recognition that true Torah wisdom comes only to those who "place their nights as days." Perhaps, then, his chagrin at having slept upon "this place" was not because it was so holy, but because it was the very place upon which Hashem would one day descend in an act of exceptional love and place His Torah in His children's hands.

If in the Yeshiva, in which Torah was taught and studied, Yaakov refused to waste even one night in fourteen years on sleep, how much more so had he realized this was the very place from where Torah would one day go forth for all eternity. Ki mi-tzion tetze Torah u'dvar Hashem mi-Yerushalayim; for from Zion Torah will go forth, and the word of Hashem from Jerusalem. Have a good Shabbos. Text Copyright © 2007 by [Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann](#) and **[Torah.org](#)**