

# STAGNATION IS DESCENT

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

*These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 123 -- Tefillah B'Tzibur: Is It Mandatory? Good Shabbos!*

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## A Ladder Is a Perfect Representation of the Jewish People

The pasuk [verse] says, "And Yaakov left Beer Sheva and he went to Charan..." Yaakov had a dream about a ladder whose feet were on the earth and which stretched all the way up to the heaven.

The Medrash says that when the verse refers to the ladder "emplanted on the earth" it refers to the fact that Yaakov was (prophetically) shown Korach about whom it is written, "and the earth opened its mouth (to swallow Korach)". The Medrash goes on to say that when the pasuk says that the head of the ladder reached the heaven, it refers to the fact that Yaakov was (prophetically) shown Moshe about whom it is written "Come up to HaShem [G-d] (in Heaven)."

What does this Medrash mean? Rav Mordechai Ilan comments that what G-d showed Yaakov was the essence of the nation who would descend from him. Klal Yisrael is like a ladder.

The Talmud in Megilah says, "This nation is compared to the dust and compared to the stars -- when they go down they descend to the dust; but when they go up they ascend all the way to Heaven." A ladder is the perfect representation of the Jewish people. No one ever remains standing on a ladder. It is either used to go up or to go down. People sit on chairs, on sofas, or beds. Those are pieces of furniture used for stationary positioning. No body ever uses a ladder for simply standing.

That is what the Jewish People are all about. We are a nation that cannot remain stagnant. Either we will ascend and achieve wondrous heights or we will go in the opposite direction -- to the dust!

This is what the Medrash means by saying that G-d showed Korach and Moshe to Yaakov. They were the two ends of the spectrum. On the one hand there was a person who was consumed with jealousy and what was his end? "The earth opened its mouth..." Because he was not ascending, he descended to the greatest depths possible. On the other hand, there was a Moshe Rabbeinu [our teacher], who demonstrated the far outer limits of what a human being is capable of achieving.

There is no standing in the middle. Stagnation itself is descent. Klal Yisroel (and indeed life in general) is a ladder with feet on the ground and the top reaching toward the heavens. It is up to the individual to decide which direction he will be heading -- up toward Heaven or down to the greatest depths. This was the dream that G-d showed Yaakov about his future nation.

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### **The Honesty of Our Father Must Foreshadow Our Own Honesty**

At the end of the parsha we find a seemingly insignificant event. A bunch of stones were piled up as a marker. Lavan called the pile of stones by an Aramaic name (Yegar Sahadusa) and Yaakov called it by a Hebrew name (Gal-ed).

Sforno says that this pasuk teaches us that Yaakov never changed his language. This has tremendous significance. One of the main themes that occur throughout the book of Bereishis is that all the events of the Patriarchs foreshadow the events of their descendants (ma'aseh avos siman l'banim). All the actions of the Patriarchs laid the groundwork for the history of Klal Yisroel throughout the Diaspora and throughout its existence.

When Avraham Avinu went down to Egypt and was able to survive, this burned the trail so that future generations would also be able to go down to Egypt and survive. Chazal tell us that one of the things that safeguarded the integrity of the Jewish people so that they did not assimilate and disappear during their many years in Egypt was the fact that they did not change their language, their names, or their style of dress. From where did they get this fortitude to keep talking in their own language -- Hebrew, the 'Holy Tongue'? Says the Sforno, it happened right over here in this seemingly insignificant act.

The act of Yaakov - insisting to refer to the pile of stones by a Hebrew name, despite the fact that Lavan called it by an Aramaic name - was the act that gave the Jewish people in future years the strength to keep their own language in Egypt.

If this is true, about a seemingly small act, let us for just a few minutes look at the totality of what happened in Parshas Vayeitzei and let us try to see the implication in terms of Ma'aseh Avos Siman LaBanim.

Parshas Vayeitzei is the prototype of Yaakov Avinu going into Exile (Galus) and Parshas VaYishlach contains the prototype of his returning to Eretz Yisrael. The fact that in this parsha, Yaakov was able to go into Galus and come back is what enabled his children to repeat this unlikely phenomenon, generations later.

It is instructive to look at this parsha and the dialogue at the end of the parsha between Yaakov and Lavan. After 20 years in Galus, what is the discussion that Yaakov has with his father-in-law? It all hinges on the issues of truth and integrity.

Lavan does not accuse Yaakov of not being religious or meticulous in observance. He accuses him of not being honest, of cheating (Why did you steal from me? [Bereishis 31:30]).

What is Yaakov's response?

"...What is my transgression? What is my sin that you have hotly pursued me? When you rummaged through all my things, what did you find of all your household objects? Set it here before my kinsmen and your kinsmen, and let them decide between the two of us. These twenty years I have been with you, your ewes and she-goats never miscarried, nor did I eat rams of your flock. That which was mangled I never brought you -- I myself would bear the loss, from me you would exact it, whether it was stolen by day or stolen by night. This is how I was: By day scorching heat consumed me, and frost by night; my sleep drifted from my eyes..." [Bereishis 31:36-42]

I never stole a thing from you. I gave you an honest days work for an honest days pay! I was with you for 20 years and I can say that I was honest! I did not cheat you. I did not rob you. I did not take anything behind your back. I was 100% trustworthy.

That is the "ma'aseh avos siman l'banim" of Parshas Vayeitzei. What will the Jewish People have to say to G-d in the future, after a 2,000 year Exile? What this parsha tells us is that we will have to be able to say "We were honest (ehrllich)!"

We did not cheat in business. We did not rob Goyim [the gentile citizens of our host countries]. We were not shysters. We were not all the things that sometimes, unfortunately, people accuse Jews of being.

It is when Klal Yisrael will be able to say "We were ehrlich" that Klal Yisrael will finally be able to come back from Galus.

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### Personalities & Sources:

**Sforno** -- Rav Ovadiah Sforno (1470-1550); Bible Commentary. Rome and Bologna, Italy.

**Rav Mordechai Ilan** -- author of the Mikdash Mordechai

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