

Sparks

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Your Place or Mine? Living in the Arms of Love

Jacob runs for his life to Charan because his brother Esau was out to kill him. The Bible records that on his way “he reached the place and spent the night there ... and lay down to sleep.” (Genesis 28:11)

The Midrash –the Jewish Oral Tradition-- interprets “the place” to mean “G-d.” G-d is “*The Place*” because according to the Kabbalah He made space within Himself for creation and always holds us all within His loving embrace. Therefore, His loving presence is our ground, context and place. Thus, it states:

Why do we refer G-d as “The Place?” Because He is the Place of the world (i.e. we exist within G-d) ... G- d is the dwelling place of the world...

Jacob lived this truth. He always defined himself and his actions within the context of G-d. Therefore, even though Jacob lay down in a physical place, He experienced himself exiting within the arms G-d’s loving embrace.

To Live the Impossible Dream

The Torah describes Jacob’s dream as follows: “He had a vision in a dream, a ladder was standing on the ground and its top reached up towards the heaven. Angels of G-d were (first) going up and (then) down on *him*. And behold the Lord was standing over him.” The Midrash interprets Jacob’s dream in a fascinating way:

They were ascending and descending upon Jacob (i.e. the verse is understood to mean that Jacob had a dream and “Behold he was a ladder standing on the ground and his head reached heaven. And behold upon him angels of G-d were ascending and descending”)...this must mean that some were exalting him and others degrading him (so to speak, coming down on him), dancing, jumping and maligning him. Thus, it says in Isaiah 49:3, “Israel through you, I (G-d) will be glorified.” The angels who ascended and saw Jacob’s features engraved on high exalted him and those who descended below and found him sleeping degraded him. It may be compared to a king who sat and judged in a judgment chamber; people ascend to there and find him judging, they go out to the yard and find him sleeping.

In other words, Jacob is an absolute mystery for the angels. From the perspective of heaven, he was totally one with G-d and interfaced with Divinity -- such was the intensity of his loving bond with G-d. His features were engraved, so to speak, within the oneness of G-d. He radiated godliness. The angels, therefore, exalted him because his Divine status was greater than theirs. However, from the perspective of the lower and physical world, Jacob was totally human, a mere physical creature bound to the body. So, when the angels found him sleeping, physically vulnerable and very un-godlike, they degraded him and jumped with joy that he was lower than them.

G-d, however, praised him, “Israel (referring to Jacob), through you I will be glorified.” Jacob revealed the mysterious and miraculous power of G-d’s love. He experienced himself at one with G-d and yet still knew that he was not one and the same as G-d. He was able to be both human and divine—one with G-d and yet other. He was able to be a ladder connecting heaven (spiritual) and earth (physical). He could keep his feet on the ground while having his head in heaven.

When Jacob awoke from his dream he declared, “G-d is in this place, but I did not know.” Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki (Rashi), the 11th century Torah commentator, takes this to mean that if Jacob had initially realized the holiness of the physical spot, he would have not gone to sleep there. In other words, Jacob would have felt uncomfortable to partake in such a purely human and physical act as sleep in such a holy place. But he now realized the full embrace of G-d’s loving presence including even his humanness and therefore he went back to sleep after the dream. (see verse 28:18)

G-d’s Promise

In the dream G-d came to him and promised, “I am the Lord, the G-d of Abraham your father, and the G-d of Isaac. I will give to you and your descendants the land upon which you are lying.” The Midrash explains that Jacob experienced G-d fold up all of the Land of Israel and place it under his head. Next G-d said, “Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth.” In other words, just as the dust of the earth is found in every corner of the world, so shall your children spread from one end of the earth to the other. And finally, G-d promised Jacob, “You will spread out to the west, to the east, to the north, and to the south.” According to the Midrash this means that Jacob and his descendants would transcend the limitations of space and encompass the world.

This is because Jacob mirrored G-d’s love and he too made a space and place in his life for G-d. He too held G-d in his loving embrace. Jacob was a living sanctuary for G-d. Therefore, the Zohar – the Kabbalistic classic – also calls Jacob “the place.” In other words, he made of himself a place for G-d and became a living sanctuary for the presence of G-d on earth.

Jacob’s intense love will be the inheritance of his descendants, the whole Jewish nation, when they build the third Temple, as it is written in Exodus 25:8, “They shall make Me a sanctuary, and I will dwell in them.” Then finally the whole world will become the living sanctuary for G-d on earth. As expressed by the prophet Isaiah 2:2-4: “Come let us go up to the mount of the Lord, to the House of the G-d of Jacob...”

At that time we will all know that there is not such thing as your place or mine. There is just One Place. G-d is “The Place” for humanity and humanity is the place for G-d. G-d lovingly accommodates and embraces us and we lovingly accommodate and embrace G-d. We will joyously experience all in One and the One in all.

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