

A LESSON FROM THE PARASHA

Don't Be Afraid Of The Dark



RABBI
 EPHRAIM
 SKOLNIK

This week's *parasha* begins with Yaakov *Avinu* leaving his parents' house in order to get away from his brother Eisav. He goes to his uncle, Lavan, in the city of Charan. On the way to Charan, he stops off at Luz and there he falls asleep. During his sleep, he has the vision of the ladder placed firmly on the ground with its top leading into heaven. On the ladder there are angels coming up and going down. Clearly, there is great symbolism in this, as well as a message for all generations.

My *rebbe*, Reb Yosef Elefant, shares the following on this chapter. Yaakov was on a journey unlike any of the other forefathers. He was sent on a lonesome journey to his uncle, who was a known swindler and con man. He was being sent away from his holy father and mother without any spiritual support. The situation looked bleak and hopeless. It is interesting that specifically in this time of darkness for Yaakov, G-d comes to him in a dream. In Yaakov's dream the angels were ascending the ladder. The *Midrash* explains that this is symbolizing all the future exiles which would befall the Jewish people. Why specifically now was he shown this? Did he not have enough troubles already without being told about the future exiles?

Reb Yosef Elefant explains in the following manner. It is specifically in the dark times that you have the

potential to connect to G-d in a deeper way than before. It specifically during exile that you can gain access to a certain clarity. Going into exile, "the night," for the Jew is not a time of distance from G-d, but, rather, a time of closeness. The "ladder" in Yaakov *Avinu's* dream symbolizes the potential for one to reach all the way to heaven. How do we access this great potential? We see the answer in this *parasha* as well.

Yaakov, on his way to Charan, stopped off to learn in the *yeshiva* of Shem and Eiver. He simply sat and learned for 14 years. Yaakov had the opportunity for spiritual growth in life when it was still "daytime." He put himself completely to it and learnt for 14 years without interruption. Only after this time of growth did he have his vision in the night. We all have times of "darkness" and lack of clarity when we feel distant from spirituality. This *parasha* with Yaakov teaches us the way to connect to spiritual light in a time of deep darkness. The key is, we must prepare ourselves by grabbing the sparks of clarity and light when they do come. We must utilize the "daytime" light to bring ourselves closer to G-d. In this way, when darkness does come, G-d will present us with the "ladder" we need to have an even deeper and more meaningful spiritual connection than before. 🙏



THE RABBI WAS ASKED ON THE PARASHA

THIS WEEK WITH
RABBI MEIR MINSTER

Q) What did Rachel hope to accomplish by stealing her father's idols? Wouldn't he just get new ones?

A) Rachel stole the *terafim* of her father. *Terafim* are not idols; they are a mysterious implement of *kishuf* (black magic) that Lavan had accepted as his deity.

Rav Moshe Shapiro, *zt"l*, gave the following depiction of these *terafim* based on the *Zohar* and the *Ramba"n*. First, they can only be created at specific times by a skilled expert. Second, their production requires alternating applications of force and release, timed perfectly. Through these *terafim* one is able to predict future events. Rav Shapiro explains that this is not in any way like prophecy, which comes from Hashem Who is the master of time, the future, and everything, and is really a retroactive expression of the true future outcome, something that we can't fathom. The *terafim* work in the other direction completely. They create an incredibly deep and insightful understanding of the present, which foretells what should follow, what the future should be. The *Ramba"n* is clear that these predictions are not fool-proof; sometimes things happen in the future that should not have occurred, that don't logically follow from the present. In regards to the Jewish people, this is almost a given. Our destiny is controlled by Hashem and always seems to go in new and unanticipated directions.

(To me, this process seems very much like our modern-day reliance on mathematical models and algorithms to predict the future, whether it is the technical analysis of the stock market, indicators for economic growth, weather and climate models, or virus transmission and mortality projections. We use mathematics and computers, while

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THE RABBI WAS ASKED ON THE PARASHA

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the *terafim* are based on the dark arts. Either way, one would be wise to heed the *Ramba'n's* cautionary warning to factor in Hashem's plans, remembering the adage "past/(present) performance is not indicative of future results.")

Lavan worshipped the *terafim*. The thought of living without knowing the future shook him to his core, so he treated them like an idol. Lavan had already admitted to Yaakov that he used this kind of divination to understand and predict his successes. Rachel was clearly trying to free her father from this *Avodah Zarah*, this need to be certain of the future. Interestingly, according to the *Midrash*, the brothers suspected that Binyomin, her son, was in fact guilty of stealing Yosef's golden goblet, because Yosef had appeared to use it as one would use *terafim*. Binyomin, like his mother, cannot stand by idly in the face of this type of work-around of G-d's control of the world. In another example, Mordechai, a descendant of Binyomin, stands up to Haman, who uses lotteries in the same way.

Back to our question. We might reasonably conclude that finding another set of *terafim* might not have been as easy as just going down to the nearest *Avodah Zarah* convenience store. Since they are difficult to produce, they may have been very rare, and this would explain Lavan's great efforts in trying to retrieve them. Additionally, Lavan was addicted to the knowledge of the future and the comfort that it brought him. Like all addictions, sometimes going cold-turkey can be a shock that brings the addict back to reality and allow him to live a normal life. Perhaps, Rachel had hoped

A SHINING EXAMPLE

The doctors' plot 1953. Stalin's diabolical, genocidal plan to destroy the Russian Jewish population. It began with arresting all Jewish doctors and forcing them to confess that they were planning a coup by plotting to poison Soviet leadership. One of the Jewish doctors taken away unexpectedly was Dr. Sergei Andropov, being forcibly taken from his home without so much as a goodbye to his wife and young son Ilya. All of a sudden, even having food to eat became a struggle beyond the grief of losing their father and husband and the uncertainty of what had become of him. All those who had been friends with the Andropovs cut off all association with them. It was very dangerous in Soviet Russia to befriend even the family of an enemy of the state.

Dr. Andropov had been gone for a year and half when, one day, shortly before Purim, five-year-old Ilya asked his mother if this year they would be giving *mishloach manos*. "Sure, if you'd like," said his mother.

that spending some time without the *terafim* would allow Lavan to see Hashem's control of the world. Sincere or not, this is in fact Lavan's words to Yaakov right before he accuses him of stealing the *terafim*, "... But the G-d of your father addressed me last night, saying, 'beware of speaking with Yaakov either good or bad.'" 🤖

Something always bugged you about the upcoming parasha (or last week's)? Ask! If you would like to submit a question on the parasha, please email it to parasha@cincykollel.org. Questions will be selected to address at the discretion of the Rabbi who is answering that week. Questions may be edited for brevity/clarity.

A BA'AL HATURIM FOR YOU

On the words of the *passuk* in 29:2, "And He looked and there was a well in the field," Ba'al HaTurim explains why Yaakov was looking for a well. Yaakov's mother Rivka had given him instructions on how to find his wife. "If you meet a girl at the well who is from my brother's family that resembles me," said Rivka, "that is the girl who is for you to marry." 🤖

Yaakov ben Asher, known as the *Ba'al Haturim*, was a scholar and biblical commentator who lived most of his life in Spain from approximately 1275 to approximately 1340. His classic commentary is printed in many editions of the *Chumash*.

"But to who?" Ilya said, "We don't have any friends to give it to." "Ilya, no matter what happens, we still have a friend in heaven. Let's give *mishloach manos* to Hashem." Ilya was enthusiastic about the idea, but all they found to give was an old cookie. "I think we used to give two things Ilya. Let's fill a cup with the tears we will gather from thinking about your father and that cup of tears will be the second thing for Hashem's *mishloach manos*." Quite soon, they had a cup of tears ready to give together with the cookie. As Mrs. Andropov began wrapping up their unique *mishloach manos* there was a loud knocking at the door. She froze. Loud unexpected knocks on the door usually meant trouble. Gathering her courage, she went to answer the door and when she did, she gave a shriek of delight. Dr. Andropov was standing in the doorway! As Ilya came running, he called out, "Look Ma! Hashem sent us back *mishloach manos* too!" 🤖

THE FALSE MESSIAHS OF JEWISH HISTORY

RABBI NOSSON WIGGINS

DAVID AL-DOJI (PART I)

In the 1140s, Rabbi Binyamin of Tudela (a city in the northern province of Spain called Navarre) embarked on a great voyage to Asia to visit the far-flung Jewish communities of the East. As documented in his personal diary, Rabbi Binyamin passed through Bagdad, Iraq, where he found a flourishing Jewish community with thousands of families. Ten outstanding Talmudic academies functioned in Bagdad, with some of their leaders tracing their ancestry back to Dovid *Hamelech*. One of the rising stars of the Bagdad *yeshiva* system was a young man named Menachem ben Shlomo Al-doji. Possessed with a brilliant mind, Al-doji quickly became recognized as a remarkable scholar and *halachic* authority. However, Al-doji had an unusual obsession with Arabic culture which eventually led him into the treacherous study of magic and witchcraft. Al-doji became quite inflated by his vast accumulation of Torah wisdom, sciences, and magic, and in the 1160s, while in the northern region of Caucasia, he proclaimed himself the Messiah. Menachem changed his name to David, and his father, Shlomo, announced that he was none other than Eliyahu the prophet. David began publicly performing spectacular miracles which gained him a sizable following to whom he gently and confidently assured that the time for redemption was imminent. David and his father sent letters to communities across Asia announcing the immediate arrival of the Messiah. Those who were opposed to David attributed his wonders to his mastery of wizardry, while his admirers swore that he had been granted Divine power. Eventually, with the passage of time, the excitement turned to despair and sorrow and the residents of Caucasia shamefully returned to their regular lives. 🤖