

ויצא

TORAH IM DERECH ERETZ

Yaakov experienced three prophecies that are recounted in *Parshas Vayeitzei*. The first prophecy occurred after Yaakov spent fourteen years learning Torah in the *yeshivah* of Sheim and Eiver. For those fourteen years Yaakov studied so diligently that he did not allow himself a single night's sleep in bed (Rashi, *Bereishis* 28:11). Yaakov reached the greatest heights of Torah scholarship; for that he was rewarded with a prophecy, a dream during the night:

ויחלם והנה סלם

He dreamed there was a ladder (*Bereishis* 28:12).

Fourteen years later, after devoted service to his uncle *Lavan Ha'arami* — Lavan the Aramean — Yaakov was privileged to experience a second prophecy:

ויאמר ה' אל יעקב שוב אל ארץ אבותיך ולמולדתך ואהיה עמך

And Hashem said to Yaakov, “Return to the land of your fathers, to your birthplace, and I will be with you” (*Bereishis* 31:3).

This came in the form of a vision while he was awake, one that was not merely a dream. Finally, after another six years of intensely loyal and honest labor for Lavan, Yaakov experienced his third prophecy. This time it was not a dream, nor even a vision; it was an actual physical involvement with prophecy:

ויפגעו מלאכי אלקים

And he encountered Angels of Elokim (*Bereishis* 32:2).

Yaakov was now of such great stature, that he was almost an equal of the Angels.

The ultimate goal of mankind is service to Hashem. Yaakov began his journey to prominence by studying Torah, for without Torah no greatness is possible. Once he had achieved Torah eminence, he concentrated on service to the Almighty. He had learned Torah from his father Yitzchak, his grandfather Avraham, and his great-grandfathers, Sheim and Eiver.

Who taught Yaakov service and devotion to the Almighty? Paradoxically, it was Lavan. Proper training in the worship of Hashem involved learning how to behave relative to a human master. Yaakov devoted every fiber of his being to honest, ethical and devoted service to Lavan:

טרפה לא הבאתי אליך...ביום אכלני חרב וקרה בלילה ותדר שנתי מעיני

That which was torn of beasts I did not bring to you... In the day the heat consumed me, and the frost by night, and my sleep fled from my eyes (*Bereishis* 31:39, 40).

Yaakov then applied this lesson of total immersion in human service to the worship of Hashem (*Midrash Tanchuma, Vayeitzei* 13). It was only after he had acquired and applied this knowledge that Yaakov was privileged to receive the highest form of prophecy. We can relate the progression of Yaakov's three prophecies to the history of *Klal Yisrael*. The first prophecy involved our preparation for greatness. The *galus* (exile) of *Mitzraim* — Egypt — was not a punishment; it was a purification for *Klal Yisrael*. The Torah refers to *Mitzraim* as the "*Kur Habarzel*" — "Iron Furnace" (*Devarim* 4:20). Rashi explains that an iron furnace (as opposed to a clay furnace) involves tremendous heat, and it is used to purify gold. *Klal Yisrael* was purified by Hashem in *Mitzraim*. During this process Hashem cast aside the non-worthy members of *Klal Yisrael* as "dross." Only one out of five Jews was found worthy of being redeemed from *Mitzraim* (*Zohar, Shemos* 13:18), and continuing on to *Kabbolas Hatorah*, the receiving of the Torah. Then came forty years of intensive Torah-study in the desert — devoid of any distractions. Eventually this Torah learning was coupled with the ultimate holiness of *Eretz Yisrael* — Land of Israel — and of the *Beis Hamikdash*. But then, Hashem perceived that His children were still not good enough, for they had not yet learned how to avoid sin. The *Beis Hamikdash* was then destroyed and *Klal Yisrael* was sent into the Babylonian exile, to learn from new teachers — Achashveirosh and Haman *Harasha*. *Klal Yisrael* had to spend more time learning how to serve human masters:

קיימו מה שקבלו כבר

They upheld what they had accepted earlier (*Shevuos* 39•).

The new *Kabbalas Hatorah* was infinitely greater than the first *Kabbalas Hatorah*. The first *Kabbalas Hatorah* involved some coercion by Hashem, in the form of a "*har chegigis*" — a mountain held high over *Klal Yisrael's* heads (*Shabbos* 88•). The second *Kabbalas Hatorah*, however, was totally voluntary on the part of *Klal Yisrael*. At this point Hashem permitted His people to return to *Eretz Yisrael* and to build a second *Beis Hamikdash*. This was parallel to Yaakov's second prophecy — the vision. The *Gemara* (*Berachos* 33•, quoted below) associates the concepts of *dei'ah* — knowledge — and of *Mikdash*. The most profound level of knowledge one is capable of obtaining is prophecy; the attempt to acquire some level of Divine knowledge is the responsibility of each individual. Clarity of thought would obviously be much easier to achieve within the *Mikdash*. In the Torah the word "*dei'ah*" — "knowledge" is surrounded by two of the Divine names:

כי קל דעות ה'

For a G-d of Knowledge is Hashem.

The word "*Mikdash*" is also surrounded by two Divine names:

פעלת ה' מקדש ה'

That you wrought Hashem, the sanctuary (of) Hashem....

It is evident that knowledge, understanding, and the Sanctuary are inextricably interwoven. The possession of one enhances the other. As long as *Klal Yisrael* is worthy, these qualities work together to provide the greatest perfection. If, however, *Klal Yisrael* is deemed unworthy due to the taint of sin, then they lose prophecy, knowledge, understanding, and most tragically of all — the *Beis Hamikdash*.

Four hundred and twenty years after the building of the Second Temple, Hashem determined that once again, because of their sinful nature, *Klal Yisrael* needed to learn how to serve human masters. Thus the Second Temple was taken from us. We who still exist in a state of *galus* — exile have much to learn from our present predicament. If we do learn our lessons properly, then we can once again achieve the highest levels of *kedushah* — sanctity. It is necessary for us to analyze our newly gained insights in the light of the great teachings of past generations — the *mesorah* — and to work for the ultimate glory — the coming of *Mashiach*. This is the parallel to Yaakov's third prophecy — actual participation with the Angels of Hashem.

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