

Yaakov's Dreams - Angels or Sheep (Vayishlach)

- Nisson Shulman.

Yaakov convinces his wives to leave their father's house when he describes his latest dream of sheep ascending, descending, instead of angels on a ladder to heaven. In this parsha we see the gradual ascent of Yaakov, till he attains his former spiritual state.

Vayishlach, Yaakov's Dreams - Angels or Sheep?

How does Yaakov convince his wives to leave their father's house and return with him? He tells them of a new dream, not angels ascending and descending a ladder from earth to heaven, but a new dream. The Angel of Hashem called out to him, Yaakov, and he answer Hineni. Really? Is that you Yaakov? The dreamer of dreams of heaven and angels? Lift up your eyes and what do you see now! And all I could see, says Yaakov, were sheep ascending and descending, speckled, streaked, spotted, no angels, just sheep! Whereupon the angel commands, "All you can see is sheep and their procreation? For I see what living with Lavan has done to you." "Anochi hakel, Bes El, asher machachta sham matzeva, asher nadarti li sham neder, ATA kom tze min haaretz hazot veshuv el Eretz moladetecha." So his wives are convinced, that for Yaakov to really regain his spiritual personality where he can see angels linking heaven and earth, he must leave, and they consent to go with him.

And so the first sign of Yaakov's return to spiritual greatness is his meeting a camp of angels in the last Sidra, in the last sentence, and he calls the place Mahanayim.

And now, ready to meet Esav, he sends Malachim, and Rashi emphasizes that they are malachim mamash. Obviously, Rashi is referring to his dreams. Ramban points out he must still traverse Edom, but nevertheless, we see Yaakov already on the way to becoming conversant with Malachim.

He is beginning to rise, simply because he sloughed off Lavan's tuma. Even so, it is a gradual rise. These are malachim mamash, but not malachei Eretz Yisrael. Only after his meeting with Esav, his crossing the border, Nahal Yabok, his experience with the angel, finally, he is required (Ch. 35) to return to Beth El, veshev sham, vase sham mizbeach lkel hanirah elecha bebarchacha mipney esav achicha. (It requires ascent, and removal of all idolatry from his household, purification, mikveh, in fact a conversion...)

This also explains the repetition, when he called the name of the place kel bet kel. Kel as He appeared to me at that time and there, and promised protection which he has fulfilled.

And that is why there is an emphasis in 35:5, Vayera Elokim el Yaakov od beboo miPadan Aram vayevech oto. His name is changed, he is given the promise of the land of Israel (The promise of children was already fulfilled, so he is promised the land to future generations...)

And thus, though it seems that 35:14-15 is a repetition of what happened very early in his story when he fled Esav and therefore should not have been repeated, that is actually not so. It is a new revelation, confirming that he has re-attained his prior height of spirit, and the promises them are still his, and the matzeva and oil anointing are new, done again. A second time upon his attaining the original state. And that is the essence of Teshuva – climbing back again...