



Text:

Jacob left Beersheba and traveled toward Charan. He came upon a certain place and spent the night there, for the sun had gone down...He had a dream: there was a ladder standing on the ground, with its head reaching Heaven; angels of the L-rd were going up and down it.

And behold – G-d was standing over him; He said, “I am G-d, L-rd of your father Abraham, and L-rd of Isaac. The land upon which you lie I shall give to you and to your descendants. Your descendants shall be as many as the dust of the earthI shall be with you; I shall guard you wherever you go, and return you to this land. I shall not abandon you until I have fulfilled what I have said...”

Jacob awoke from his slumber, and said, “Indeed! G-d is in this place - and I did not know...”

[Genesis 28: 10–16]

“And I did not know’ –i.e. had I known, I would not have slept in such a holy place.”

[Rashi, commenting on above.]

Question:

Jacob realizes that he was unwittingly violating the holiness of this special place by sleeping there. Knowing what he now knows, he exclaims, he would never have done so.

Jacob just experienced an amazing prophecy, with a personal promise of G-d’s protection and blessing, his destiny as the father of a great nation, and the inheritance of the Holy Land. If Jacob hadn’t gone to sleep, he would have missed it all! And doesn’t having this prophecy prove that G-d *wanted* him to sleep here?

Answer:

It doesn’t matter what the benefits were - if sleeping here is disrespectful, it can’t be done. What would happen to the prophecy if Jacob wouldn’t sleep? G-d will figure that out. Jacob’s job is to do the right thing under all circumstances.

Message:

The end doesn’t justify the means. We usually apply this principle to black-and- white *rules* – you can’t steal, even if you want to give the money to charity. But in matters of etiquette – being a mensch – we’re a bit more flexible: “I hate to be rude, but I had to make a point!” To Jacob, such intangibles were just as important as any other laws. It’s worth giving up a once-in-a-lifetime prophetic experience, if the alternative is overstepping the bounds of propriety.

Please see other side...



Fleeing the land of Canaan, Jacob spends the night on a lonely hilltop, identified by the Midrash as Mount Moriah - future site of the Temple in Jerusalem. Jacob dreams of a ladder to Heaven, with angels climbing up and down; G-d Himself speaks to Jacob, promising Divine blessing, protection, and a future as the father of a great nation who will inherit the Holy Land. Buoyed by this uplifting vision, Jacob continued his journey to in Charan, home of his maternal uncle Laban.

On the outskirts of Charan, Jacob meets Rachel, Laban's daughter. Inspired by the family connection they share, Jacob performs a superhuman feat: he rolls a large boulder from the mouth of the well – ordinarily the work of several shepherds – and waters his uncle's sheep.

Convinced that Rachel is his predestined bride, Jacob offers Laban seven years' labor as a shepherd in exchange for Rachel's hand in marriage. Laban agrees, but tricks Jacob on his wedding night by presenting Leah, his other daughter, instead. Jacob has no choice but to agree to another seven years' labor in exchange for being allowed to marry Rachel too.¹

Leah begins to bear children immediately, but Rachel remains barren. She finally has a son, whom she names Joseph, signifying her hope for another child. Jacob extends his stay in Charan to work for Laban for a profit. Aided by Divine assistance, Jacob prospers despite the tireless efforts of Laban, the arch-swindler, to cheat him at every opportunity.

Eventually, G-d commands Jacob to leave Charan. While Laban is away on business, the family flees westward to Canaan. Laban pursues Jacob, but G-d commands him in a dream to leave Jacob alone. Laban contents himself by indignantly accusing Jacob of mistreating *him*; Jacob, in turn, rebukes Laban, pointing out his unflinching adherence, at great personal sacrifice, to the highest standards of honesty, despite Laban's incessant attempts to rob him blind. In the end, the two seal a pact of peace. Laban returns home, and Jacob and his family continue their journey to Canaan.

[1] The classical Biblical commentators explain why this arrangement was acceptable under the circumstances, although it would be forbidden today.

Please see other side...