



**Finding God in the Unexpected:  
Torah Reflections on *Parashat Vayetze*  
Genesis 28:10 – 32:3**

**6 Kislev, 5771      November 13, 2010**

Last night, I sat with a group of participants in our volunteer training program and asked them to recall a moment of holiness, of encounter with God. This group of ordinary people quickly filled the room with extraordinary stories.

One woman described the first time she saw the Pacific Ocean and the breathtaking beauty of the coastline. Another woman recalled when her appendix ruptured as a teenager and the sense of faith she found in the midst of her terror and pain. One man spoke of the wonder of holding his daughter in his arms for the first time as the umbilical cord was cut. Another recounted watching the sunset and feeling connected to the trees, the sky, and everything around him.

In this week's *parashah*, as Jacob leaves his birthplace and begins the journey to his mother's homeland, he receives a powerful dream. He sees a ladder stretched between the earth and heaven with angels going up and down it. God stands upon the ladder and promises protection on his journey and tells him of the wondrous future that lies ahead. When Jacob awakens from his dream he exclaimed, "Surely God is in this place and I did not know it."

How often does this happen to each of us? We are going about our lives, busy with life's many details, and all of sudden something happens. Something stops us and we realize the sanctity of the moment. Perhaps we are brought to this awareness by an onset of illness, or crisis. Anniversaries, lifecycle events and other moments of joy can also remind us of the preciousness of life.

Jacob's revelation is momentous, filled with angels, heavenly gateways, and visions of God. Yet this same awareness can come in more subtle forms: the first bite into a crisp apple; a tree burning itself up in brilliant oranges and reds; the sound of a baby's laugh; the voice of a friend from far away; the scent of the lilies filling an entire room; or an unexpected kindness from a stranger.

The daily liturgy contains a prayer for these ordinary miracles: "We give thanks... for the miracles that are with us every day...every hour,

morning, noon, and night.” Here our tradition reminds us to notice the miracles that are with us at every moment. Not the miracles of the Exodus and Sinai, but the ones that fill our days and sustain us, from one breath to the next.

May we be blessed to find God’s presence in our daily routine, as well as life’s milestones; when we are amid the beauty of nature and among our community; as we celebrate life’s joys and when we find ourselves filled with sorrow. May we be blessed, like our ancestor Jacob, to awaken to God’s presence in unexpected places.

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