



## Torah Reflections on *Parashat Va-yaytzay*

Genesis 28:10 - 32:3

11 Kislev 5767

December 2, 2006

Recently, I met with a woman whose elderly father had passed away. As the last surviving member of her family, she felt alone and abandoned. She encountered a “dark night of the soul” in which she questioned God’s presence in her life. She yearned for a sign from God that she was not alone. I asked her to recall the last time she sensed God’s presence in her life. We spent time in silent meditation. She slowly began to recall a time long ago in which she sensed God’s “hand” touching her shoulder. She wished to experience that feeling of closeness once again. I suggested that she place a pad of paper by her bed and record her dreams every night. Before she went to sleep, she expressed her intention and hope that God would visit her in her dreams that night. The next time we met, she shared with me a picture she drew following a dream she had in which she felt embraced by God. Her dream of God’s loving arms embracing her felt as comforting as a warm blanket on a cold night.

How many of us yearn for God’s felt presence in our lives? We hope that God will offer us comfort and protection when we feel scared and alone. That desire may be particularly strong following a troubling diagnosis, the loss of a beloved family member or friend, or the termination of a relationship or marriage. At these pivotal moments in our lives, we feel broken-hearted, wondering whether we will ever feel whole again.

Sometimes, our dreams can be prophetic. In fact, the Talmud states that a dream is one-sixtieth of prophecy (Berachot 57b). Our rabbis saw dreams as a gift and also as a source of healing. The Talmud quotes Isaiah 38:16, “You caused me to dream and made me live.” Our dreams can awaken within us the desire to explore our spiritual paths, or shed light on helpful directions for our exploration.

In this week’s *parashah*, Jacob leaves home for the first time and begins a heroic journey searching for his place in the world. He encounters God in the dark of night. According to the biblical scholar, Avivah Zornberg, Jewish tradition sees Jacob as the first human being to pray in the dark. He falls asleep and dreams about the angels of God going up and down a magical ladder. In his dream, Jacob is not alone; he senses God standing beside him, reassuring him that his descendants will populate the earth. When Jacob awakes from his dream, he says, “Surely God is present in this place, and I did not know it.”

Maybe we can learn from our ancestor Jacob that there always is the possibility for healing and a renewed connection with God. Following his dream, Jacob makes a vow with God saying that if God remains with him and protects him on

his journey, then he will be able to return home in peace. The medieval commentator Rashi reads “in peace (*be-shalom*)” as meaning “whole.”

May we be blessed, like Jacob, to experience God’s loving presence when we feel vulnerable and alone. We pray that a sense of wholeness may be restored to our broken hearts. During our nightly journey in the world of dreams, may the angels accompany us and offer us deeper insights into the meaning of our lives.

© Bay Area Jewish Healing Center, Rabbi Aliza Berk



*This Torah Reflection was written by Rabbi Aliza Berk, MFT, of the Bay Area Jewish Healing Center. It is brought to you by the Bay Area Jewish Healing Center (a beneficiary of the Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin and Sonoma Counties), an affiliate of the Institute on Aging.*

\*\*\*\*\*

The Bay Area Jewish Healing Center provides Jewish spiritual care for people coping with illness, loss and dying, regardless of affiliation or ability to pay.

Our services include:

- Rabbinic care, chaplaincy, counseling and spiritual direction—at home or in hospitals, hospices, nursing homes or other care facilities
- Spiritual support groups for patients, caregivers, and the bereaved
- Healing and memorial services, and specialized rituals

Whether through prayer, study materials, or simply a listening presence, the Bay Area Jewish Healing Center is here to support you during difficult times.

\*\*\*\*\*