

Parsha Ponders

Vayeitzei | November 26, 2020 | 10 Kislev 5781

*Productive sleep*¹

ויפגע במקום וילן שם וגו' ויחלם והנה סלם מצב ארצה וראשו מגיע השמימה והנה מלאכי אלקים עלים וירדים בו: וייקץ יעקב משנתו וגו'

[Yaakov] arrived at that place and slept there...He dreamt and behold! A ladder stood in the ground whose top reached the Heavens, and behold Angels of G-d were going up and down on it...Then Yaakov woke from his sleep...²

On Yaakov's journey towards his uncle Lavan, as a safe haven from the wicked Eisav, he took a stop at Mount Moriah. There, he napped, and dreamed the famous prophetic dream about Angels going up and down a ladder. The Torah tells us that he woke up from his sleep, and he continued on his journey. Our Sages however³ read the verse homiletically. Instead of reading the word as *משנתו*, from his sleep, we can read it as *ממשנתו*, from his learning. Meaning, Yaakov woke up from his learning. Besides being a cute play on words, what does this even mean? What are we to learn from this alternate reading of the verse⁴?

Our Sages exhort us⁵ that all of our actions should be for the sake of Heaven. What this means⁶ is that when a person goes about their day-to-day activities, eating, drinking, conducting business, and even sleeping, it should all be for one purpose: to give us the strength and ability to serve Hashem and learn His Torah. If someone does this, even while they are doing seemingly mundane tasks, they are fulfilling countless *mitzvos*. Someone who is sleeping isn't always regarded as ignoring their studies. On the contrary, if their intent is to allow them to study further, the sleeping is regarded as actually learning!

This was Yaakov's intent with his break on his journey. He had been learning Torah the entire way⁷, and took a break to get some rest. His intent was to build his strength so he could continue learning and reach his destination. He had no interest in the personal pleasure that sleep provides. Since he slept for the sake of Heaven, he merited to his prophetic dream. The verse then isn't merely telling us that Yaakov woke up from his sleep. That would imply it was the regular sleep of most people, for their own personal pleasure. Rather, it was sleep for the sake of learning and connecting to Hashem. Something all of us can strive for as well⁸.

Good Shabbos

¹ Based on Kesav Sofer to Genesis 28:16

² Genesis 28:11,12,16

³ Bereishis Rabbah 69:7, brought in Yalkut Shimoni Vayeitzei § 120

⁴ Besides the Kesav Sofer's interpretation, which follows, other suggestions include the Ba'al HaTurim to v. 16, who says that Yaakov would learn Torah in his dreams, Mattanas Kehunah ad. loc., who says that Yaakov's prophetic dream counted as learning, and Radal ad. loc., who says it means that Yaakov fell asleep in the middle of learning. Meaning, he didn't go to bed; he learned as long as he could until sleep overtook him. Torah Sheleimah ad. loc. § 117 also cites Sefer Chassidim HeChadash § 15, 285, which says that the Avos were beloved by Hashem because they never stopped for one moment from contemplating Torah day and night, and he cites this *Midrash*

⁵ Avos 2:12

⁶ Rambam's Shemonah Perakim Chapter 5

⁷ V. 18 says that Yaakov poured oil on the altar he had constructed. Where did he get this oil? *Chazal* tell us that Eliphaz, Eisav's son, stole everything from Yaakov after he left his home (Rashi to *ibid* 29:11, quoting Bereishis Rabbasi p. 117. See also Sefer HaYashar Toldos § 10)! All Yaakov had was his walking staff. Paneach Raza to *ibid* 28:18 suggests that the staff was hollow, and Yaakov kept oil inside. He stored it so he could use it for fuel to learn Torah by light in the nighttime

⁸ The Kesav Sofer uses this to explain the surprising *gemarra* Chullin 91b. See there