

Parsha Ponders

Vayeitzei | December 02, 2022 | 8 Kislev 5783

*Why did Yaakov go to sleep?*¹

ויצא יעקב מבאר שבע וילך חרנה: ויפגע במקום וילך שם כי-בא השמש וגו' וישכב במקום ההוא: וייקץ יעקב משנתו ויאמר אכן יש יקוק במקום הזה ואנכי לא ידעתי

Yaakov left from Be'er Sheva and journeyed to Charan. He encountered The Place, and he lodged there, for the sun had set...and he slept in that place. [Then] Yaakov awoke from his sleep, and said: "Behold, there Hashem in this place, and I didn't realize"²

Yaakov's journey to his uncle Lavan to seek a wife wasn't a simple one. It actually involved a fourteen-year detour in the academy of Shem and Ever³. After that, we are told that he encountered *The Place*. Unbeknownst to him, this was the site of the future Temple in Jerusalem⁴. The Torah then tells us that since the sun set, he slept in that place. Why does the Torah stress *in that place*? This teaches us⁵ that for the fourteen years that he was studying in the academy, he didn't sleep, as he learned day and night. This was the first time he had slept in all these years. While this sounds like a supernatural feat, let's take it at face value. If this is what the Torah is teaching us, why indeed did Yaakov choose to sleep that night? What was different about that night than all the nights prior? Why didn't he learn Torah⁶?

We immediately notice a surprising contrast between the *shidduch* of Yitzchak to Rivka and Yaakov to Rachel. Yitzchak's emissary, Eliezer, came to Rivka to convince her to marry his master. Eliezer came laden with camels carrying the family's entire fortune, including precious gems and jewels. While these monetary possessions didn't matter to Rivka, it certainly made convincing her family much easier⁷. What do we see with Yaakov? It appears that he went penniless to Rachel's family. He prayed to Hashem for a morsel of bread, and clothing to wear⁸. He had no gifts to offer Rachel upon engagement. He had to agree to work for Lavan to "pay his dues". What happened? Why didn't Yitzchak send off Yaakov with the family fortune⁹?

Rashi answers¹⁰ these questions by bringing a *Midrash*. Yaakov indeed left his family with a fortune. Eisav, furious that Yaakov received the blessings, sent his son Eliphaz to kill Yaakov. When Eliphaz caught up to Yaakov, the former admitted his reluctance at fulfilling his father's wishes. He didn't want to kill Yaakov, but couldn't go home without a successful mission. Yaakov suggested Eliphaz take all of his possessions, as a poor man is akin to someone dead¹¹. Yaakov was now completely poor, without any possessions. Well, except for one. Yaakov declared that he crossed the river with his walking staff¹². We

¹ Based on a shiur by Rav Daniel Glatstein, found online at <https://www.torahanytime.com/#/lectures?v=167677>

² Genesis 28:10,11,16

³ Rashi to v. 9, from Megillah 17a

⁴ Rashi to v. 11

⁵ Rashi ad. loc., quoting Bereishis Rabbah 68:11

⁶ Chasam Sofer Al HaTorah to v. 16 s.v. לא ידעתי וזהו המקום הזה ואנכי לא ידעתי

⁷ Parshas Chayei Sarah

⁸ V. 20

⁹ See Ibn Ezra to Genesis 25:34, who proves from these questions that Yitzchak must have become poor in his old age, and Yaakov and Eisav must have grown up in poverty. Ramban ad. loc. strongly disagrees

¹⁰ Rashi to Genesis 29:11, quoting Bereishis Rabbah 70:12

¹¹ Nedarim 64b

¹² Genesis 32:11

see then that he still maintained a walking staff, but had nothing else with which to impress his potential *shidduch*.

Is there anything significant about this walking staff? The commentaries are bothered that after Yaakov's rest at the Temple area, he poured oil on a stone monument which he had built¹³. Where did he get oil from¹⁴? Remember, he was penniless. Some say¹⁵ that his walking staff was hollow. He kept oil inside of it at all times, so that he could light a candle at night to learn from. He donated some of this oil as an offering upon the monument. We learn from here that Yaakov learned at night by candlelight.

The Torah uses an interesting term to describe Yaakov's visit to the Temple area. It says ויפגע, that he *encountered* the place. Our Sages see¹⁶ from this word an allusion to prayer. They learn from here that Yaakov enacted the evening prayers. However, this is highly problematic. The rest of this verse states that he slept there because the sun had set. Read fully, the verse is telling us that Yaakov prayed, the sun set, and then he went to sleep. That means he prayed the evening prayers, while it was still daytime¹⁷? Some say¹⁸ this is actually proof for the opinion that one can pray the evening prayers before dark. The problem is we don't generally rule this way. How can we then resolve the verse with our Sages' understanding?

One approach is that that night was Shabbos¹⁹. Even though there's a dispute if one can pray the evening prayers before dark or not, everyone agrees that on Friday, since there's a *mitzvah* to accept Shabbos early, one can pray the evening prayers before dark²⁰. This is actually alluded to in the Hebrew word for oil, שמן, and monument, מצבה. Spelled fully, שמן reads שי"ן מ"ם נו"ן, which has the same numerical value as the word שומר, to guard. The word מצבה spelled fully reads מ"ם צד"ק ב"ת ה"א, which has the same numerical value as the word שבת. These two words allude to Yaakov being שומר שבת, observing the Shabbos day, that evening.

Now, if it was Shabbos night, this clears things up wonderfully. There's a Rabbinic prohibition against reading from candlelight on Shabbos, out of concern that one will tilt the candle to make it brighter. This would transgress the prohibition of igniting or kindling a fire²¹. As we said before, Yaakov learned Torah every night by candlelight. For the past fourteen years, Shabbos wasn't a problem, as an exception to this prohibition is in front of one's teacher²². Their presence is a constant reminder not to tilt the candle. However, this was Yaakov's first Shabbos by himself. He had no one to stand guard over him, and it would have been prohibited to learn by candlelight. As such, he had nothing to do that night but go to sleep.

¹³ [Genesis 28:18](#)

¹⁴ [Bereishis Rabbah 69:8](#) says it was oil that came from the heavens

¹⁵ [Paneach Raza ad. loc.](#)

¹⁶ [Berachos 26b](#)

¹⁷ [Da'as Zekeinim ad. loc.](#)

¹⁸ [Tosafos ad. loc. s.v. ויעקב תקן](#)

¹⁹ [Chasam Sofer's Toras Moshe I ad. loc.](#)

²⁰ [Magen Avraham to Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 267:1](#). See there for his more elaborate reasoning

²¹ [Shabbos 1:3](#); [Shabbos 12b](#); [Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim § 275](#)

²² [Shabbos 1:3](#); [Shulchan Aruch loc. cit. § 6](#)

The last problem to resolve is Yaakov's statement upon awakening. He experienced prophecy, and realized he was in a holy place. Rashi tells us²³ that Yaakov regretted sleeping there. Why should he regret sleeping there? As demonstrated, there was nothing else for him to do! The reason is because he realized he was at the Temple Mount. We have a rule²⁴ that Rabbinic enactments don't apply at the Temple Mount. Yaakov expressed dismay once he realized that this night, too, he could have learned by candlelight, even though it was Shabbos.

Good Shabbos

²³ [Rashi to Genesis 28:16](#)

²⁴ [Pesachim 65a](#); [Beitzah 11b](#)