

Politics & Mysticism in the Weekly Torah Portion *Parshat (Portion) Vayetzei*

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This week...

- * *Watcher Angels manipulating human events*
- * *The invisible world around us visible in dreams*
- * *Deceiving the deceiver with the ole' "switcheroo"*
- * *Good and evil both serve Heaven*
- * *Psychological integration of opposites leads to dominion over angels.*

Shalom & welcome all.

This week's Torah portion is called Vayetzei (Genesis 28:10-32:3).

In this week's Torah portion we read about the building of the family of Jacob. Because of the recent episode where Jacob tricked his brother Esau out of his patriarchal blessing, Jacob is forced to leave his family and to seek a wife from his wife's brother Laban.

In travel, Jacob settles down for the night and has a fantastic dream. He not only sees God, who makes promises to Jacob, he also sees angels ascending and descending on what Jacob describes as a ladder going up to Heaven. Although dream language is archetypal in nature and is thus never literal, nevertheless Jacob saw a spiritual reality which is most revelatory. While many thinkers wish to interpret angels as being only symbolic representations, Jacob's dream reveals that indeed, these are actual entities, and apparently they have regular purpose for being here on Earth.

It has been a long established principle in Torah circles that our world, and all that we see in it, is surrounded by yet a greater reality of an even greater world, that is invisible to our physical senses. This greater reality interacts with our world, and guides events herein, very much like a puppet on a string. We find scriptural evidence for this in the Book of Daniel 4:14, which states that "Watchers," defined by the commentators as angels, make decrees and then execute them upon mortal men. While we human beings do have input into this system, it still seems that these Watchers have the upper hand. The Biblical message is that the power that influences the Watchers towards us with benevolence is righteous behavior and moral action, defined of course, by Biblical precedent.

The Biblical account of Jacob's ladder shows us that these angelic entities enter and exit our world. In other words, they are not indigenous to here. They come and go. Now, just where they come from, and to where they go is not recorded. Jacob sees the bottom of the ladder, the top he sees going up into the skies, called in Hebrew, Shamayim, translated as Heaven, but this is not a reference to a specific place, but is more a reference to a direction. We should understand that what Jacob visualized was some sort of transportation device.

Watchers come and go. They come with a purpose and leave when their job is done, and their allotted time is up. We humans, for the most part, are totally oblivious to their comings

and goings. For the most part, most of us even deny the actual existence of such a reality. Therefore, we remain blissfully ignorant and woefully blind, never realizing what it is that actually works to shape our lives, and world, from behind the unseen scenes.

Jacob was given a glimpse of the unseen. Yet, even this glimpse had to wait for him to sleep. His conscious mind could not receive and integrate such an experience. He, like most of us, could only receive such a revelation in the dream state of subconsciousness, where the intellect and rationale of the waking consciousness is not dismissing and denying any reality that it finds objectionable.

Upon awakening, Jacob, back in consciousness recognizes that a dream is a dream. Yet, this dream was so jarring that he knew that there was something more to it than just sleep-time entertainment. Therefore, Jacob made his vow to God. Jacob proclaimed that if indeed what he saw in his dream was real, and that indeed God will be with him as the dream said, then, and only then, would Jacob do what he is pledging to do. Essentially, Jacob made his vow conditional upon his dream coming true. The conditional nature of this vow clearly indicates that Jacob, like his son-to-come Joseph, had deep intimate knowledge of dreams and their ways.

Jacob travels on to the house of his uncle, Laban. Here he is welcomed and treated like family, be this for better or worse. After some time, Laban approaches Jacob and they work out a deal where Jacob is to work seven years for Laban, and receive as his wages the hand of Laban's daughter Rachel in marriage.

We all know the story of the “switcheroo” that Laban, Leah and Rachel pulled on poor, dear, innocent Jacob. Laban must have conceived of the idea. Leah was clearly on-board. If Leah did not consent, she could have, at any moment, told Jacob who she was. But Leah allowed the marriage to be consummated and was silent all during the time of intimacy with Jacob. She knew what she was doing, and was clearly part of the plan. Now, where was Rachel all this time? Did Laban tie her up or lock her away somewhere? Did she not realize that something was amiss of what was supposed to be her wedding day? Rachel was no dummy. She must have been aware of what was going on. Indeed, the Biblical commentaries suggest that Rachel knew very well what was going on and colluded with her sister Leah to help her succeed in the deception of Jacob.

So here we have Jacob the deceiver of his father, Isaac, being deceived by his father-in-law Laban. Jacob tricked Isaac into giving him his patriarchal blessing, and Laban tricked Jacob into marrying a woman through whom that patriarchal blessing would be achieved. Remember, it is Leah's sons, Judah and Levi, who inherit both the Throne and Priesthood of the nation of Israel.

While I do not think Laban knew in advance that his deception would lead to such tremendous consequences, I am sure that Heaven knew this all along. And even though the text does not say this outright, I believe that we can conclude, in light of Jacob's dream ladder, that maybe one of those angels who came down that ladder that night has been following Jacob all this time. Maybe it was this angel who put the thought into Laban's mind to concoct this scheme in the first place. Maybe it was the angel who also convinced both Leah and Rachel, through their dreams, to go along with Laban's plan. It seems that everyone was in on this “switcheroo,” Heaven, Laban, Leah and Rachel, with the only one

being left out of this deception, was the deceiver himself, Jacob. What does this tell us about the ways of Heaven? This is a classic example of the old saying, “what goes around, comes around.” This truly is the way of Heaven.

The name Jacob means something negative. It was this negative aspect of Jacob's personality that God had to work on, to transform Jacob into Israel. Israel means one who fights with Heaven and conquers. Only one who has got the guts would ever even think of taking on Heaven, all the more so, to be determined to beat Heaven at its own game. Yet, when Jacob is confronted by the Watcher angel, (discussed in the following weekly portion), the two wrestle together all night long, until Jacob acquires ascendancy and demands a price, before he allows the angel to leave, and to apparently ascend the ladder, for then was its allotted time.

Jacob's time with his father-in-law is a period in sharp contrast with the period he was with his own father. At home, with Mom and Dad, Jacob was the subordinate one. Here in the home of his father-in-law, Jacob had to put every trick he had ever learned into play in order to survive. In Dad's house Jacob was the deceiver, in Laban's house Jacob was the deceived. And through all these struggles and hard times, Jacob was honed and fine-tuned into a strong, responsible and powerful man.

Indeed, God does work in mysterious ways. Jacob felt the sting of deception and learned to become sensitive and aware of its presence. Jacob learned to sense the deception in Laban at every turn. By seeing this in Laban, it also helped Jacob to recognize these things within himself. So by Laban out-Jacobing Jacob, Jacob was enabled to be transformed into Israel. This was the Watcher angel's mission all along.

This process of personality refinement continues to this day. The ladder is not just a psychological metaphor or symbolic representation of anything. The ladder is real! It is some type of transportation device between one dimension and another. The ladder is the bridge that connects our seen world with the unseen world that surrounds us.

Jacob's example serves us as an archetype and role model for today. Just as the Watchers were involved with him then, so too are other Watchers involved and present with us, now! Yes! If you are reading these words, you can rest assured that there is an invisible presence, just behind you, over your shoulder, watching you and whispering into your unconscious what to think and how to feel. You, in turn, think these thoughts and feel these feelings without ever entertaining the awareness that these may very well be coming into you from an outside source.

Like Jacob, our lives are guided, for better or for worse, all depending on our choices, our actions, and our moral character. We are not only being watched, we are being led. Sometimes we are being led down a path not of our own choosing, and sometimes, down a path that we firmly resist and resent. Yet, like Jacob being deceived into marrying Leah, Heaven has its ways, and its plans, and Heaven seldom asks our opinions about what we think or feel about the matter.

In the end, Jacob was transformed into Israel. This is a psychological and spiritual process where one is transformed from being unenlightened, into being enlightened. Jacob is no more the deceiver, nor is he to be deceived. In the struggle for power and dominance,

Jacob proved the better, and bested his father in-law at his own game. Laban paid the price for how he treated Jacob with the loss to Jacob of a substantial part of his wealth.

Jacob was now powerful, and all who would seek his harm would, like Laban, pay the price. Jacob, now Israel, instead of deceiving to get what he wants, takes what is rightfully his. And anyone taking from Israel that which does not belong to him will face the wrath of the defeater of angels. But this is another story.

And this conclude my weekly Torah portion lesson in politics and mysticism.

Any comments? Please send them to me at kosher Torah1@yahoo.com

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