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 RESEARCH UNIT

שבת..... *for Friday nights*קדש

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 Sedra Vayetzei

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THE SLEEP OF JACOB

SLEEP IS A RATHER MYSTERIOUS ELEMENT IN OUR HISTORY. JEWISH PEOPLE are generally thought of as restlessly active, forceful go-getters, high energy people... Large numbers of us go to bed late, get up early, or both: there are things to be done! The Sedra¹ provides an insight into the ‘sleep’ dimension of the Jewish people: both as regards our lack of sleep and also what we can achieve when we do sleep.

We start, of course, with our great ancestor Jacob. He is on a journey, and he comes to a place where he sleeps: “...and he lay down in that place”. The Torah is so emphatic about him sleeping that the Sages add an intriguing extra snippet of information.

We often find that parts of the narrative are skipped over in the text of the Written Torah, but are filled in by the Oral Torah, transmitted by the Sages. They tell us that after Jacob left home he spent fourteen years in the company of his illustrious ancestor Eber, a great-great grandson of Noah, studying the pathways of G-dliness. These early teachings about the Divine were so compelling that during



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117 GEORGE STREET, LONDON W1H 7HF
www.chabadresearch.net - cru@lubavitchuk.com

this entire time Jacob did not actually lie down to sleep properly. He would only drowse for a while, and then continue studying². Hence the Torah says: “and he lay down in that place”. Now, for the first time in years, Jacob really had a comfortable good night’s sleep!

While Jacob slept he had a beautiful dream of a ladder, on which angels were going up and down. One explanation of this is that the angels signify Divine protection for him, wherever he went. In the dream G-d said to him: “The land on which you are lying down, I will give to you and to your descendants”.

The Sages comment: this means that G-d “folded up the whole of the Land of Israel and placed it under Jacob, in order that it should be easy for his descendants to conquer”³.

The lives of the Patriarchs actually set the stage for the future.⁴ By the fact that Jacob slept on the spiritually compacted entire Land of Israel, neatly folded by G-d, he was preparing something important for his descendants the Jewish people. Of course, as we know, they would have to enter the Land of Israel and settle in it.

However, this entry was planned to be completely peaceful. The Sages tell us that if the Jews had not erred with the Spies, they would not have had to fight for the Land at all, the nations would willingly have given it to them⁵.

In order to create this future for his descendants, Jacob did not have to do anything at all, except to lie down and go to sleep. The essential mystical action of ‘folding up the whole land of Israel’ so that it would be so easy to conquer was performed by G-d.

What does this mean for us today? That in a profound, spiritual way, the Land of Israel belongs to the Jewish people, Jacob’s descendants. The ultimate promise of Judaism is that without having to battle for it, the nations of the world will recognise that this is our right. Does this sound a Messianic dream? Of course. Yet like many Jewish dreams, including that of Jacob in the Sedra, if you take them seriously they have a habit of coming true...⁶

1. Genesis 28:10-32:3. 2. See Rashi to 28:11. 3. Rashi to 28:13. 4. See Ramban to Gen.12:6. 5. See Rashi to Deut.1:8. 6. See the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s *Likkutei Sichot* vol.20, pp.130-135.

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SEDRA VAYETZEI

DETERMINATION

Yoni was getting very upset. His teacher had told the class earlier that day that they would be having a competition. Each pupil in the class would write a story. The best story would win a prize.

Everybody had been excited about it. Yoni had been very excited too, but now that he was trying to write the story at home, it seemed to be much harder than he had thought it would be. He couldn't even write the first sentence!

'Why is this so hard?' he asked, complaining to no one in particular. 'What's the problem Yoni?' his grandfather's deep voice boomed out from the doorway.

Yoni's grandfather lived nearby, so he came to visit very often. He could see that his grandson was genuinely miserable. 'What is the problem?' he asked again, gently. 'Well', said Yoni. 'I'm trying so hard to write this story and I just can't seem to do it. I cannot even begin!'

'OK... Yoni. don't worry. I'll help you out!' his grandfather comforted him cheerfully. Yoni looked up at his grandfather's smiling face. Yoni couldn't help but smile back, his grandfather always managed to have that effect on him.

'All right,' Yoni said. 'But it has to be my own story, you cannot write it for me'. 'I'm not going to write it,' said his grandfather. 'What I'm going to do is tell you a story - and then we'll see!'

Yoni laughed. He loved hearing stories from his grandfather. And who knows, perhaps that would help him write his own story...

'Well...' began his grandfather, 'this is a story about our great forefather Jacob'. Yoni nodded. He remembered the Sedra that week was about Jacob.

'Jacob had left home and has gone to live with his uncle Laban. He wanted to marry Rachel, Laban's daughter. So, Laban said to him, "work seven years and then you can marry her!"

'Jacob didn't mind doing that. He got to work and shepherded Laban's sheep for seven years. After seven years, the time came for him to marry Rachel. But what happened?'

'Laban tricked him,' said Yoni.

'That's right. The bride at a wedding is covered by a veil and you cannot quite see who it is. Instead of giving Rachel as the bride to Jacob, Laban gave her older sister Leah! Jacob was very upset, but he didn't give up. Laban said that he could marry Rachel as well, on condition that he would work another seven years. Jacob was determined to marry Rachel, so he agreed.'

Yoni was listening; but he was also wondering what this had to do with him and his story. 'Now, you see, we can learn from here a few things,' continued his grandfather. 'But one thing is for sure, that we *should never give up*, even if we get tricked like Jacob. He was determined to marry Rachel - and he did, even though it meant working an extra seven years!'

'Does that mean I may have to work seven years on my story?' asked Yoni. 'Hey - I've just had an idea! I'll write about someone who didn't know what to write - but was very determined! Thanks, Grandpa...'

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