

Parshat Vayetzei - Torah From The Holy Land

Torah and Tefillah: Revealing the Hidden

The last few weeks have been tough for Israel, as it has literally been going up in flames. Some of the fires that have been consuming the north may have been the work of terrorist activity, exacerbated by the dry weather and strong winds blowing around the country. Instead of creating a further wedge between Jewish Israelis, Arab Israelis, and Palestinians, the Arab populations of Israel have gone out of their way in support of the victims of the fire, and contributed firefighters to help put them out. Through the fire, the minority populations in Israel have revealed a face not often seen by Israelis. Israel has come out of it stronger and more unified, with a little more love to go around.

In this week's parasha, Jacob begins his journey to Haran to find a wife. On the first night, Jacob lays down to rest, and has his famous dream with the angels ascending and descending on a ladder. Jacob wakes up and proclaims "*Mah nora haMakom hazeh! YHVH bamakom hazeh v'anochi lo yadati.* How awesome is this Place! YHVH is in this place and I didn't even know it." Tradition teaches us that haMakom is actually a name of the Divine, one of the many. What is the aspect of the Divine that is revealed through this name?

A few weeks ago, I heard a *d'var Torah* at the Moreshet Yisrael synagogue in Jerusalem. The speaker, Rabbi Joshua, talked about the phrase that one is supposed to say right before they leave a mourner when sitting *shiva*, the seven days after the burial of a loved one. The phrase, *haMakom y'nachem etchem b'toch sha'ar avelei Zion v'Irushalim*, May the Place comfort you among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem, is a curious one for its use of haMakom as the name of the Divine. "Why", he asked, "is haMakom used? It's the place itself that does the comforting," he said quoting his wife. "The community comes around you to keep you company and take care of you." While I'm not sure it was intended to be a theological statement, it contains an important one nonetheless. It's through the power of community coming together that we reveal the comforting power of the Divine. When, out of Divine commitment and values, we reach out and join our lives to the lives of others, we come together in Holy unity. This is a nice drash, explanation, but I think it's even deep than this.

The name of the Divine in our parasha, *haMakom*, is brought to symbolize a hidden God that in fact was there all along. It's only when we wake up that we can realize it. Ya'akov avinu was in his own world, worried about what his brother might do him and whether he might be able to find a wife. He was living a dream life, his head in the clouds, not aware of the moment. But he was startled out of his sleep by a visit from the Divine. Finally, he realized what his father and grandfather had known all along: the Divine is in every place, we need only to open our eyes.

This is the essence of the Divine in our parasha. In the moments where it seems like we're the furthest from the Divine, when our world is literally and metaphorically on fire, we can call on *haMakom*. And through the fire we realize that even here the Divine is present all along. May the Holy Blessing One bless us in the coming week with a renewed sense of the Divine Spirit, that we may reveal more love, awe, and justice in the world.

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