

Between Two Dreams

"JACOB LEFT BEERSHEBA, and set out for Haran. He came upon a certain place and stopped there for the night, for the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of that place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. He had a dream, a ladder was set on the ground and its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it" (*Genesis 28:10-12*).

Jacob did not leave his home and his country to go to Haran on a pleasure trip or to seek adventure. He was a fugitive, running for his life after being threatened by his brother Esau "who had a hatred of Jacob on account of the blessing his father had given him" (*ibid.*, 27:41). Young Jacob must have been very upset, being forced to leave his idyllic life of study and personal growth in the "tents of Shem and Eber."

His mother, who warned him that Esau was scheming to murder him and advised him to flee, was now far away. He missed home and wondered what would happen now with his studies. And what about his uncle Laban, to whom he is running now, and whose reputation as a shrewd operator was not unknown even in the land of Canaan? How would he receive him? And yet, Jacob has

this marvelous dream in which heaven and earth are joined together; he sees angels going up and down. He receives a message of Godliness, a promise of a great future. Upon awakening he proclaims: "This is an abode of God, a gateway to heaven!"

Notwithstanding the gloomy circumstances in which he finds himself at that hour, Jacob is sure that God is with him and that he will be returning home. He is a man with a dream. A heavenly, angelic dream.

This, however, is not the only dream Jacob dreamt. There is yet to come another dream, one quite different in nature.

Twenty-one years elapse between the two dreams. When the second dream comes, Jacob is settled down and prosperous, he has two wives, children and property. He has, in Haran, been exposed to Laban's materialistic society and values, in fact he became part of it, as he engaged in an economic struggle with his shrewd uncle and father-in-law to secure a livelihood for his growing family.

Jacob had just concluded a series of hard negotiations with his senior partner, and had arrived at a seemingly satisfactory arrangement, and, suddenly, a dream. He tells it to his wives at a clandestine meeting in the fields: "Once at the mating time of the flocks, I had a dream in which I looked up and saw that the he-goats mating with the flocks were streaked, speckled or spotted. The angel of God said to me in the dream, 'Jacob.' I answered, 'Here I am.' And he said, look up and see all the he-goats mating with the flock are streaked, speckled or spotted, for I have seen all that Laban has been doing to you. I am the God of Bethel. . . Now leave this land at once and go back to your native land."

The dream as told by Jacob to his wives does not seem to make sense in warranting the conclusions arrived at by

the angel of God. Now that Jacob is "making it" and even biology works for him, thanks to the ingenious invention he devised, and all the sheep "go his way," is now of all times, the time to "leave this land at once"? Why?

A closer reading will reveal to us that this last dream of Jacob did not come as suddenly as it may seem at first glance and that it is connected with Jacob's earlier dream at Bethel. There are two factors that make Jacob realize that it is high time for him to leave this land at once and return home. One is in the bad "vibes" which reach him from the sons of Laban complaining that he got rich on their back: he feels unwanted, a victim of economic envy. This Jacob should have perhaps fought and survived, but there was another factor, a more serious one, which convinced Jacob that he did not belong there, in the land of Laban and his sons.

In the language of Scripture (31:2): "And Jacob noticed that Laban's face did not appear to him as it did before" (this translation is truer to the Hebrew original than the current English translations). What was that "new face" of Laban that so startled Jacob? We know from the story told so far, that Laban's attitude toward Jacob was not particularly friendly from the beginning; what then had changed now?

May we suggest that what had startled Jacob in the "reading" of Laban's face was not that it changed from a friendly countenance to an unfriendly one, but that, on the contrary, the face of Laban appeared now to Jacob as being proper and "normal." Until now, whenever Jacob looked at Laban, and his total enslavement to materialism, he felt uneasy and it appalled him: What a strange "face!" He was constantly aware of the gap between his own values and those of Laban. Now, as he himself became immersed in the materialistic world of Laban, he suddenly

realized that the face of Laban "does not appear to him [as strangely!] as it did before." Moreover, his dream has changed too. It is filled with streaked, speckled and spotted flocks instead of ascending and descending angels. "I have seen all that Laban has been doing to you," says the angel of God. The worse had happened. Laban succeeded in destroying your original dream and made you dream his material dreams. "I am the God of Bethel"—Do you still remember, Jacob, the dream you dreamt there? . . .

All that follows is a direct result of this moment of truth. At this point Jacob hears the Lord saying to him (*Genesis 31:13*): "Go back to the land of your fathers where you were born and I will be with you." From that moment on, he knows that he does not belong here anymore. When he summons his wives to the meeting in the field, he tells them about his upcoming plans by way of the dream he had.

Jacob finds himself again when he realizes what happened to his dream, how it changed from a dream of a ladder stretching from earth to heaven, with angels going up and down on it, to a dream of cattle, all kinds of cattle, streaked, speckled and spotted. He catches himself in time to realize that dreams filled with sheep which were, as we know, the hard currency of those days, cannot take the place of the dreams of his youthful idealism where man communicates with God. It is then, when the materialistic dreams are about to take him over, that Jacob realizes what Laban and Labanism had done to him, and that he must act now or he will not have another chance. It is then that he decides to go home, back to the land of the fathers and mothers, where he may yet recapture the old dream. Where Jacob may yet become Israel.