

Shabbat Shalom with a Side of Torah - Vayaetzea

Journey's are amazing opportunities for growth. Sometimes they are intentional and sometimes accidental, and sometimes, we don't even know that we are traveling. Even more true, whether the journey is intentional or accidental, we can almost never predict where we are going to finish or what lessons we are going to learn along the way. Jacob fled his home, having been threatened by his brother. Along the way, he found not only sanctuary from Esau, two wives, a new family and job, but most of all, he found faith. It took a midnight epiphany, but even after spending years referring to God as his father's God, Jacob found God for himself.

Epiphany - "A sudden, intuitive perception of or insight into the reality or essential meaning of something, usually initiated by some simple, homely, or commonplace occurrence or experience." Jacob left home and fled to his mother's homeland. Night came, and he took a nap. We all sleep at night, but on this night, he had an epiphany. Jacob dreamt of a stairway that reached from the ground on Earth to the farthest heavens. Atop that ladder, God stood, calling to Jacob, telling him to have faith on this journey. This conversation is important because up to this point, Jacob had never acknowledged God. The text does not leave it with this conversation, it goes on to tell us about the angels going up and coming down the staircase. This mention of angels is almost an afterthought in the course of the text. Perhaps the authors/editors left out much description of the angels intentionally. The less information we get, the more we have to add to the conversation.

I believe in angels, and I think that it is important that the angels are described first as going up and only then, as descending. In my head, the text makes it clear that while Jacob only first knows of God's angels at this moment, the work angels do long precedes his epiphany. Now, I don't necessarily believe angels are winged beings who actually ascend and descend. I think we are angels, showing up for each other, helping us see more clearly, feel more deeply, and appreciate life more keenly, and I believe that this is how God works on Earth. I think it is through these engagements that we have our epiphanic moments, wherein we interact with divinity. For many years, I have believed this to be true, but over the last year and a half, the evidence is overwhelming. My healing has only come because of the people who have, knowingly or not, brought the most timely needed love, support, and kick in the pants. In learning from them, I have gained the insight to enter other people's lives to help them, as well. In these moments when lives touch, somehow the world seems to make more sense.

It takes a lot of faith to accept this engagement. Faith is the ability to hear with our hearts. There are some things we cannot know. We cannot, at least at this point in time, know for certain what happens when we die, how intuition works, or even how it is that we end up in each other's lives at precisely the moment when we can do the most good. We dream many dreams. The future is created by dreamers who pay attention to their dreams and who work to make them come true. We hear many voices that distract us from our daily program. How real; how positive or negative these dreams can be depends on our frames of reference and our willingness to listen. The distractions can be positive or negative and it is faith that helps us sort them out. The very same stuff that helps decide what is good and what is not helps us to figure out how to listen and discern that which should be heard and that which should be ignored. When we find ourselves able to hear the voices of those looking to help us; when we find the

voice that others can accept, we experience the triumph of faith. Jacob awoke and acknowledged God's presence in his life.

How often do we acknowledge angels ... or epiphanies? How many opportunities present themselves that we just let pass by? We deny ourselves the blessings of growth, and deny others of the blessings we have to share, simply because we find ourselves unable to listen with our hearts. Too many of us lack enough faith to pay attention. Where we will find ourselves more open to hearing, more open to paying attention to our dreams, we would find ourselves living in a world that made more sense for more people. May this upcoming holiday season see our hearts open to new journeys and new understandings, as we welcome people into our lives and look to have our love and strength welcomed into the lives of those in need around us. Shabbat Shalom.