

Parashat Vayatzte, 5772, 2011:

Waking Up to New Realities

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Dedicated to the sacred memories of my sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra, my sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, and Shifra bat Chaim Alter, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Yosef Shmuel ben Miriam.

There are four instances of the term “*vayikatz*”, or its variant, “*vayiketz*” (“and he awoke”) that appear in the Hebrew canon of Biblical literature known as *Tanach*. We find the term used in regards to Noach, Yaakov, Pharaoh (two times), and Shimshon. In each instance, it foreshadows a fundamental change in the person’s life. Let us examine the word’s usage in the context of these history-shaping individuals.

What do we know about Noach? The Torah teaches us that he was: “a righteous man - he was perfect in his generations; Noah walked with G-d.” In addition, upon leaving the Ark, he became “... a master of the soil, ... [who] planted a vineyard.” Tragically, however, “... he drank of the wine and became drunk, and he uncovered himself within his tent.” (*Sefer Bereishit* 6:9 and 9:20-21, this and all Bible translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*). The result of his intoxication is well known: “And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father’s nakedness, and he told his two brothers outside.” (*Ibid.*, 9:22) Though there are numerous interpretations of these verses, the end result is clear: “**And Noah awoke [*vayiketz*] from his wine, and he knew what his small son had done to him. And he said, ‘Cursed be Canaan; he shall be a slave among slaves to his brethren.’” (*Ibid.*, 9:24-25) Noach awakened from his inebriation to find himself personally humiliated and no longer “... perfect in his generations” or able to walk with G-d. His**

wine-induced stupor and uncontrolled son caused a nearly irreconcilable alienation from G-d, and thereby changed his life for evermore.

Pharaoh had two interconnected dreams in Parashat Miketz. The first dealt symbolically with healthy and lean cows, while the second utilized the metaphor of good and bad ears of grain. After the first dream, the Torah tells us: “And the cows of ugly appearance and lean of flesh devoured the seven cows that were of handsome appearance and healthy; **then Pharaoh awoke [vayikatz].**” So, too, in dream number two: “And the thin ears of grain swallowed up the seven healthy and full ears of grain; **then Pharaoh awoke, [vayikatz]**” and behold, a dream.” (*Sefer Bereishit* 41:4 and 7) Pharaoh soon called Yosef to the rescue, who proceeded to save Egypt and the entire known civilized world from death and destruction – inclusive of his father Yaakov and his siblings. This all transpired after “vayikatz.”

Shimshon hagibor's (the great and mighty Samson) life also changed irrevocably as a result of having woken from his slumber:

And Delilah said to Samson, “Until now you have mocked me, and told me lies, tell me with what you may be tied up.” And he said to her, “If you weave the seven locks of my head to the roller.” And she fastened (it) with the peg, and said to him, “The Philistines (have come) upon you Samson.” **And he awoke from his sleep [vayikatz]**, and plucked away the peg of the web and the roller. And she said to him, “How can you say ‘I love you,’ while your heart is not with me? These three times you have mocked me, and you have not told me wherein is your strength so great.” (*Sefer Shoftim* 16:14)

Significantly, after this incident, Delilah successfully manipulated Shimshon into revealing the true source of his strength and, as a result, he was captured and tortured by his Philistine enemies. Here, too, the word that set the stage for the change in Shimshon’s fortune was none other than “vayikatz.”

The last example of “*vayikatz*” is found in this week's *parasha* in reference to *Yaakov Avinu* (our Patriarch Yaakov). His awakening differs in kind and degree from those of all the others, since it portended a positive and spiritual change:

And Jacob awakened [*vayikatz*] from his sleep , and he said, “Indeed, the L-rd is in this place, and I did not know [it].” And he was frightened, and he said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of G-d, and this is the gate of heaven.” (*Sefer Bereishit* 28:16-17)

Yaakov's hallmark was *emet* (truth). As such, he was not afraid to admit to himself that “... the L-rd is in this place, and I did not know [it].” A lesser man might very well have rationalized the vision that was vouchsafed to him as a mere act of nighttime fantasy and imagination. Yaakov, however, faced the truth; G-d in all His glory had spoken to him in a dream, in a vision of the night, in a place that he had not even suspected as being filled with His ineffable presence. Once he was able to realize the gravity and singular significance of his encounter with G-d, and once he had truly wakened from his spiritual slumber, Yaakov was ready and able to recognize the uniqueness of the place where he had slept. Yaakov, in a word, underwent a spiritual transformation; a religious awakening that set the stage for his, and our, unparalleled relationship with Hashem.

We are not *Yaakov Avinu*, and we do not merit direct nighttime visions from Hashem. Given that this is the case, how can we, too, awaken from our spiritual slumber and achieve new relationship heights with our Creator? I believe the answer, at least in part, is to be found in the famous *mishnah* in *Pirkei Avot*: “Rabbi Eliezer would say: ... Repent [do *teshuvah*] one day before your death.” (2:11) This concept is further elaborated upon in *Talmud Bavli, Shabbat* 153a:

Rabbi Eliezer would say: Repent one day before your death. His students asked him:

“Does a man know the day he will die?” He responded: “Since this is the case [i.e. a person does not know when they will die], he should repent today, for perhaps tomorrow he will die; therefore, all his days will be in a state of repentance. So, too, did King Solomon in his great wisdom say: “At all times, your clothes should be white, and oil should not lack from your head.”” (*Sefer Kohelet* 9:8)

With Hashem’s help, may we be *zocheh* (merit) to recognize and maximize the spiritual potential inherent in our lives. Moreover, may we be like *Yaakov Avinu*, so that we, too, will be able to wake up to the new realities inherent in each day. *V’chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

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