Jacob’s Ladder

We are blinded to a lot of reality, are we not? Sometimes we are blinded to nationwide events, and sometimes our blindness is exposed to the world.

In our Torah portion, *Vayetze*, when Jacob left Beersheba to go to his Uncle Laban's house, he stopped at a place that he later realized was Bethel, the house of God.

Lest we think this story is just about a patriarch and not applicable to us, let us spend this week taking a different and deeper look at this story. It would be pure blindness for us to miss out on this spiritual reality through our oversights of His presence.

There is a Hebraic phrase that tells us there is a connection between heaven and earth: "as above, so below," or "on earth, as it is in heaven." But how is this possible? How is it possible that infinite light can connect to finite matter? There must be a bridge, a ladder, a conduit through which all prayers ascend. There must be a conduit by which all angels—which are ministering spirits—minister to those who are about to inherit salvation (Heb. 1:14). Yeshua informs Nathaniel that He is that ladder (John 1:51).

During the time of Moses, on Mount Sinai, the connection was made. At that moment, the two realms of heaven and earth were connected. For Jacob it was a dream. For Israel, our covenant family, his descendants, the ladder was Mount Sinai.

Many of you are familiar with the Hebrew language and the number system associated with each letter, known as *gematria*. It is ironic that Mount Sinai's numeric value and that of a ladder (*sulam*) are identical (130). We see this in story form in Exodus 19:17, where the people stand at the base of the mount and the top of it reaches to heaven. Of that mountain, we are told that it burned with fire unto the heart of heaven (Deut. 4:11). Where we see the angels ascending and descending in Jacob's dream, we see Moses going up into the presence of God and coming down into the presence of the people to minister to them.

We see a similar picture with the altar that Yahweh had built in Exodus 20:24, where sacrifices were offered, and priests would ascend and descend on behalf of the people, and the odors of that which was offered ascending to heaven where we find Yahweh standing (Amos 9:1).

We can draw some wonderful, practical connections for our lives today. With Yeshua being identified as the Ladder that connects heaven to earth (1 Tim. 2:5; John 1:51), and Himself being like unto Moses (Deut. 18:15–18), who not only delivers the instructions of God (the Torah), but is the Lawgiver who can save and judge (James 4:12). He is the Living Torah made flesh who came to dwell among us (John 1:14). He is our High Priest, and He lives to present our offerings before the Father (Heb. 4:14–16; 7:25).

Jacob's ladder is more than a one-time dream. It is a Person. It is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. It is the only way to the Father! It is the Torah made flesh. He is the conduit of ministry and blessing. And He lives to be the Ladder for us to the Father.

Have you recognized how close Bethel, the house of God, is to you? In your life, in the flight and pursuit of being His bride, the Ladder could be closer than you might expect.

Scripture is like finding a gold vein in the mountains—discovering gold on the surface makes you want to dig deeper and deeper to mine all the wealth possible. This week's Torah portion, *Vayetzei*, is a classic example of a gold mine. The deeper you dig, the greater the spiritual wealth. But with every attempt to go deeper, there are more and more details to consider.

In the story of Jacob's ladder (Gen. 28:10–22), we have some gold-mining questions we could ask ourselves: What is the ladder? Why is God standing at the top? What are the angels doing ascending and descending on the ladder, when they should descend from heaven first in order to ascend? How do all the stones Jacob gathers become one stone? Why does the text tell us that he had more than one head (*m'raasot*)? What are the connections between these stones and the breastplate of Aaron the High Priest? How is the single stone (*even*) connected to Israel, Yeshua, and the Father? Why are stones everywhere in this story? What is the stone anointed? How does the stone become the house of God? And these are just a few questions we can ask. :-)

The deeper we mine for gold, the more intricate the questions become, but those questions lead to the purest gold and move us past quaint Sunday School stories.

Everything in Jacob's story is about two opposing nations and two different peoples (Gen. 25:23). His dream captures his destiny and the future of God's people. Every detail in his dream is significant. Hebrews 1:14 describes the angels as ministering spirits sent forth to those who are about to inherit salvation. These angels are not just ascending and descending on the ladder; they are traveling in/on the ladder. We know Yeshua identified Himself as the ladder to Nathaniel (John 1:50–51), and at the end of this week's Torah portion, Jacob is revealed as the ladder to model a heavenly mindset while on the earth (Gen. 32:1–3).

Since the Jacob narrative is prophetic for God's people and the nations, I would suggest that we are to be the ladder that connects earth to heaven, even as Yeshua taught us to pray (Matt. 6:10). The ladder gives us two perspectives: one from below and one from above, with God overseeing both. The ministering spirits are examining the life of Jacob from two perspectives—one, how he looks from above, and when they descend, how he looks from below. Two images of one man or one nation.

Each one of us has two images! One from above and one from below. One is how God views us, and the other is how we view and live out life ourselves. We each have two faces, two personalities, and two identities—one heavenly and the other earthly. There is the person you are and the person you were potentially designed and meant to be by God's design.

His design is what we are capable of accomplishing. The challenge for all of us is experiencing in our own mind the reality of what God envisioned for our lives. When God created you, He had a vision of who you are and what He expects you to become. This ultimate purpose and mission for our daily existence is how you experience yourself in your

own vision and how God experienced you in His mind (Isa. 45:21; 46:10; Rom. 4:17; 8:28–29).

It is when we begin to get a glimpse of what He called us to that we begin to see our face below match with His face above. It is when the drive for our full potential kicks in—the ultimate you. But for now, most of us are content with the schizophrenic who displayed incredible *chutzpah* to his psychiatrist when he wanted a group discount!

How does God picture you? How do you picture yourself in your most elevated moment? How about at your lowest point? How often do they match up in your life? Unfortunately, our schizophrenic training has made us a pale copy of what we should be.

Part of our relational issues stem from viewing people from below instead of above. We should look at people for who they are going to be, not the "in progress model" that they are at the moment.

Jacob actualized himself completely. He brought his potential to fullness. The fear of Esau and the guilt of the past did not stop him. The angels ministering in him recognized the greatness that he would achieve, and this man of truth did achieve what he was called to do.

It is this self-actualization—matching the image in our own mind and action with God's mindset and provision—that gives us the ability to overcome temptation consistently. If we keep in mind God's view of us, whenever temptation calls us to act in the lower, beastly nature, we will not succumb to the natural impulses that hinder us from reaching our potential.

The sages believe that this is why Joseph was able to overcome the daily temptation from Potiphar's wife: he kept in his mind his father's ladder vision in his own life. His earthly visage fully reflected the heavenly counterpart. He recognized that his life was a candle for God in this world to connect the earthly realm to the heavenly. He did not want to disappoint his father's dream of the ladder nor his Heavenly Father's purpose for his life. He was capable of seeing himself beyond the image below—the beastly passions that Mrs. Potiphar wanted of him. Yes, he saw himself in a deeper way: what he was truly meant to be! And that is what empowered him to run away from the seductress (Gen. 39:1–12).

If we only give an image from below to those around us, we deprive them of understanding who they are and what they can achieve. A proper focus will give us victory over and deprive us of costly addictions, unproductive and amoral lives. It vaults us high above low self-esteem and allows us to reach the heights that God designated for us. We are much more than descendants of bacteria and the animal kingdom.

We need to ask questions of ourselves like the baby camel asked his mother:

"Mom, why are our feet and three toes so flat?" The mother replied, "Because, honey, God designed us to walk long distances through the Haran's (dry places) of this world." "Mom, why do we have these long eyelashes?" "Because, sweetheart, when we are traversing across the vast deserts, the long eyelashes protect our eyes from getting damaged." "Mom, why do we have this big hump on our back, and some of our uncles have two?" "Well, love,

those humps are filled with water and keep us hydrated as we journey through the barren wastelands of this world." "Mom, if this is the case—that we have flat feet, long eyelashes, and these large humps—why are we in a cage in this zoo?"

We must ask this question of ourselves. The question burns: Why am I locked up in this cage of captivity when I can traverse the hot barren places of this world? Why do I feel undeserving and unable? Why can't I be closer to the image above? Why do I live below my dignity? Below my calling? Where is my self-respect? These are gut-wrenching questions that need to be answered so we do not deprive ourselves of what we have been called to become.

We do not belong in a cage!

Our culture and our training have empowered the evil inclination inside each one of us, causing the image above to be estranged from the image below. Most carry so much baggage, have so many dilemmas, and have negative self-talk that has been beaten into us through society and family that it creates the great divide between the two images. Consequently, we live lives of quiet desperation, and we do not share with anyone our deepest desires, and our image below gets isolated from the image above.

Fortunately, God is right there to help us. Put your mind to the divine will and the light above. Allow your higher self to be reflected in the image below. Every time your negative inclination fires up for sin, God is there to cool the fire and conquer the inclination—so be committed to master it. God the Father knows how to fight fire with fire, and He knows how to cool you off when you get too hot.

What we see in our children, our loved ones, our spouses, and in ourselves is what we make of ourselves. If all we see is the image below—imperfections, flaws, blemishes, past mistakes projected into the future—then that will be the self-image we embrace (Rom. 2:1–4). But if I muster up the courage to see their image as soulful diamonds, ambassadors of God, rays of heavenly light, filled with goodness and potential, then I will give them the tools to have the earthly and heavenly images become one.

We live in a world governed by crooked politicians, social media, high tech, and Hollywood, which promotes a two-faced society. It is a world where the left acts as though they are right, and they are persistent in pressing their agenda until the resistance becomes exhausted and throws in the towel or raises the white flag.

However, there is a group of people rising up, spiritually and physically, who want to take the two-faced reality of all our lives and make it unified as one face—one that is the same inside as it is outside.

In a world where people are desperately looking for answers, we do not have to look any further than the foundational truths from the patriarchs, our forefathers who went before us. Through Abraham, we learn mercy and hospitality. Through Isaac, we learn strength, judgment, and the fear of the Lord. In Jacob, we learn the balance (*tiferet*) between the two and the merit of truth (Micah 7:20).

These men are like the chariots of God in this present world. They maximized their human potential. They carried God's presence and purpose into this world. No, they did not transcend beyond their human existence, but they reached their potential in spite of their setbacks and early life choices. They teach us valuable lessons on how to become the best we can be and how to overcome the two-faced society that saturates us daily.

There is more written of Jacob in the book of Genesis than of any other character. Out of the "big three," we can identify with him the most. His adventures, expressions of emotion, setbacks, and ability to model a complete person—literally, he became the legacy of Adam and what it means to be human.

As we start our studies on Jacob, once again I find myself enamored with Jacob. Why, you ask? He learned how to confront his life issues face to face—something that is not easy for me.

Though he is famously known for his deception of his father Isaac, Scripture testifies that he truly is a man of truth (Micah 7:20). He made a questionable decision toward Esau and his father, but from that point forward, each decision he made rectified that bad choice. No, it does not undo the choice, but he worked diligently for twenty-two years to resolve that decision, knowing all the time that the brother he offended was out to kill him—not an easy task!

After Joseph's birth, Jacob was emboldened to face Esau (Gen. 30:25). Prophetically, he was empowered with the physical presence of an individual in his life, which strengthened him to face his largest nightmare (Obad. 1:18). He did not rush in where "angels" fear to tread, but he acted on the wisdom he learned from his father and grandfather on how to confront the situation with Esau.

Soon, we will see faces (*panim*) appearing all over the place. Jacob will send three flocks of gifts to appease the face (*pani*) of Esau (Gen. 32:21), and afterward, Jacob was able to face (*pani*) him and be forgiven for his previous deception.

Once Jacob set this rectification of the past in motion, he had to wrestle with issues within himself (Gen. 32:22ff), where his name was changed from Jacob (*Ya'akov*, the crooked one) to Israel, the one who walks upright and overcomes with God. It was here that he saw God face to face (*Peniel*), and his walk would never be the same (Gen. 32:31).

His encounter with the divine presence altered the way he viewed his arch-enemy, Esau. When Esau arrived with four hundred men, instead of violent war, they embraced, kissed, wept, and Jacob spoke to Esau as one who had the face (*pani*) of an angel (Gen. 33:10).

The relationship was rectified, the past was forgiven, and both went their separate ways. When Jacob arrived in Shechem, the site of a future bloodbath, he encamped in the face (*pani*) of the city, where he would have to face more challenges.

Jacob's story of truth starts with his encounter at the house of God (*Bethel*) with the ladder in Genesis 28. The ladder starts at the earth and reaches to heaven, where the angels are going up and down the ladder. What does this mean? What is the significance of this angelic ministry within Jacob's life (Heb. 1:14)?

There are two views within this story: as we saw yesterday in part 2, we saw how Jacob's face is viewed from above and how his face is viewed from below. The ladder is really about our ability to connect the earth with heaven and bring heaven down to earth, which is revealed in our faces (*panim*) and in our behavior (Matt. 6:10).

Each of us has two faces. There is one on the inside and one that we portray on the outside. One is spiritual and the other physical. The purpose of the angels ministering in us is that the two faces of our lives would become one.

Ultimately, the outward expression of our behavior would match the inner man. Our goal in being men of truth is to unveil the inner face in all external circumstances. This is the secret of the faces (*panim*). It is this reality that reveals the secrets of the world.

As we have discussed in previous studies, Yeshua is the ladder (John 1:50–51). Jacob is the ladder. We are the ladder. Is it possible for us to express the inner (*paniut*) man to the world around us? Is it possible for us to reveal the divine spark in each of us (John 1:9)? Will we let our light shine during these winter months when invisible roots are growing deep and visible leaves are absent?

The destiny of all mankind is to reveal the hidden things of this world, to help people look past the facade of the superficial. We are responsible for making this planet a better place to live—*tikkun olam*. We are to take responsibility for the betterment of the world, and it begins with us.

And one day, because of the truth lived out in our lives, we will go to the temple of the God of Jacob, where the truth of the Torah will flow to all the nations (Isa. 2:1–4). This will be the reality for those who have clean hands and a pure heart and seek the face of the God of Jacob (Ps. 24:1–6).

The Aaronic blessing, which is prayed at the end of many services, is a constant reminder that God wants His face to shine upon you! He does not hang His head in shame of us; He lifts His face upon us to give us peace, and He places His name upon Israel so we will live the two-faced lifestyle as one (Num. 6:23–27).

This is the answer for overcoming the world. Focus on getting your two faces as one, and then let your light shine so that they may see your good works and glorify our Father in heaven (Matt. 5:13–16). May the ladders of our lives connect heaven and earth for those around us to see.

Before we jump into any other topics in our Torah portion, *Vayetze*, it is really important to take a few steps back and remind ourselves that everything in these narratives is about two nations and two peoples (Gen. 25:23), which prophetically include each one of us. Therefore, I want to encourage each of you to put yourself into the narrative that lies before us and the stories to come.

In our Jacob's ladder studies, we see that Jacob has fled from his home in search of a bride (Gen. 28–29). Along the journey, the sun mysteriously drops over the horizon, and Jacob has to bed down for the night (Gen. 28:11). This was an unintended stop for Jacob, but it was a

necessary stop from God's perspective... Have you ever had an unexpected stop in life? Had an unexpected encounter with something or someone?

Jacob is on the run. His exile is in full swing. He is alone and wondering what the future holds. It is here, in this moment of "the place," that he gathers together stones for his head to lay on (Gen. 28:11)... yes, I said heads (*mera'ashot*)... very strange indeed.

Here he dreams of a ladder that reaches from earth to heaven. The angels are ascending and descending on the ladder, which is located at the entrance to the house of God (Gen. 28:16–17). When he wakes up from his sleep, he takes the stones that his head was lying on and makes a single pillar to mark this momentous revelation in his life (Gen. 28:18).

The many stones became one stone. For some, your mind may go back to the first time we see stones in Scripture. Actually, the first time stones are mentioned, they are being replaced by bricks—items which are man-made, not God-made (Gen. 11:3). Bricks are all the same. Stones are as individual as humans are to one another. Maybe that is why Scripture relates to the twelve tribes as "stones" in the breastplate of the High Priest (Ex. 28:29) and also the foundations of the New Jerusalem that will one day come down out of heaven (Rev. 3:12; 21:1–4). Maybe that is why we are referenced in Scripture as living stones (1 Pet. 2:5). Maybe there is a connection between all of the stones coming together to form One Stone, known as the chief cornerstone (Ps. 118:22; Isa. 28:16; Matt. 21:42; Acts 4:11; 1 Pet. 2:6–7), Yeshua Himself—the stone (*even*, a combination of *abba* and *ben*, father and son) that the builders rejected. These stones that become one are a picture of the body of the Messiah, where there are many members, yet only one body (Rom. 12:4–5; 1 Cor. 12:12–20).

This stone that the builders rejected is alluded to by the stone that was covering the well where Jacob met Rachel (Gen. 29:3), and the flocks were watered. One man, Jacob—who would later be known as the stone of Israel (Gen. 49:24)—has the spiritual and physical strength to remove the stone so the flocks could be watered (Gen. 29:3).

Scripture is referred to as water (Isa. 49:10; 55:1, 10–11), God's presence (Ps. 63:1; Jer. 2:13). It is living water (John 4:11–12; 7:38). It is the only substance that can ultimately quench our thirst (Isa. 12:3; Rev. 22:17), cleanse our bodies (Ezek. 36:25; Eph. 5:26), refresh us (Hos. 6:3; Isa. 44:3), and much, much more!

Jacob's journey is similar to the journey of our soul: an amazing adventure, honest accounting, more adventure, opportunities for righteousness or the chance to return to our default settings, uncertain challenges, and more opportunities to see God move in our lives.

Twenty-two years after leaving his mother and father, Jacob—whose name will be changed to Israel (Gen. 32:28)—will have another encounter with a stone. Jacob will be asked by his father-in-law Laban to make a covenant with him, ultimately to make a separation between Laban's worldly mindset and Israel's spiritual mindset. Today, we would call it the separation between church and state. It is here that Jacob takes the stone, and his children each place a stone as an altar, a covenant marker between two different mindsets. And it is here that each member of the family brings a stone to make the one covenant altar of stone.

Within this story we find references to all three of our patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Each of them, in their individual ways, reveals to us a special facet of God's Kingdom—the Stone made without human hands that will destroy the system of this world (Dan. 2:35, 44–45). Abraham revealed to us that this Kingdom was like a mountain: magnificent, but distant (Gen. 22:14). Isaac taught us that the Kingdom was like a field: accessible, sustainable, and essential for life (Gen. 24:63). Jacob reveals that this Kingdom is personal, like a house that becomes a home (Gen. 28:19).

It is this revelation that the rest of Genesis, and the entire Bible for that matter, leads us to experience. It is the revelation that will be revealed in greater detail in the centuries to come. Jacob succeeded in revealing the *Shechinah* glory in every area of life, even in an "inanimate stone."

Isaiah 2:3 prophesies a future day when the house of the God of Jacob—the foundation of all Israel, made of stone—will be the source from which all the instructions of God will pour out to the nations. It is here that all the nations will be invited: whoever is thirsty, come. Whoever is hungry, come. It will not cost you any money, but you have to buy it?? Huh?

The cost will satisfy your soul. It will be refreshing like the rain. It will never return to God void. It will accomplish exactly what it was meant to do, so come! Come buy that which is free, with your time, your life, your heart, and your soul (Matt. 16:24–27). Seek Him while He may be found. Turn from your ways if they are not pleasing to God. Keep inviting people to drink if your ways are rock solid (Isa. 55:1–11; Rev. 21:6; 22:1, 17).

We are just a week from the Thanksgiving holiday; it is truly the season of Thanksgiving! Thankful that God calls us living stones—individuals, not uniformed, man-made bricks. We are the place of altars, where worship and covenant take place. We are a witness to the world of the One True God, and the truth that was revealed through Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, and Jacob and Leah, Zilpah, Rachel, and Bilhah. And for those who remain faithful, they will be called God's house (Heb. 3:6), where the Torah—God's instructions—will restore this chaotic world into harmony and *shalom*.

In the story of Jacob's ladder, Jacob falls asleep and dreams of a ladder reaching to heaven, with angels ascending and descending upon it. The LORD is standing at the top of the ladder and says:

*"I am the Lord God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. Also your descendants shall be as the dust (*afar*) of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you."* (Genesis 28:13–15)

Here we see Jacob receiving the same blessing that Abraham and Isaac received regarding their descendants... but with one small change...

Jacob's descendants will be so numerous that their numbers are compared to the "dust of the earth." The Bible uses other similes to describe the descendants of the patriarchs:

"Blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore..." (Genesis 22:17)

Now let us be honest. Would you prefer your descendants to be compared to the twinkling "stars of the heaven," the beautiful white "sand which is on the seashore," OR the "dust of the earth"? I should probably mention that the word used in Genesis 28:14 for "dust" (*afar*) also translates as "ashes," "dirt," or "rubbish."

Although I am sure Jacob appreciated the prophecy that his descendants would be a multitude of people, do you think he may have winced just a bit to hear them described as the "dirt of the earth"? That same material that the Lord God used to form man and the RDA of the serpent (Gen. 2:7; 3:14).

The phrase "dust of the earth" can illustrate more than just numbers. It can also refer to an attribute of the Israelites... huh?

People tend to trample over the "dust of the earth," but in the end the "dust" always remains on top! In fact, that same "dust" ultimately covers those who trample it!

Jacob is told that his descendants will be crushed by the world, but God's promise is that they will rise to the top like "dust"! And, like the "dust of the earth," the descendants of Jacob can never be destroyed.

What a fun and constant reminder "dust" can be for us. We find "dust" everywhere! Now we can look at it in a whole new light and praise the Father for this awesome reminder of His chosen people, while always being cognizant that He is mindful that we are nothing but dust (Ps. 103:14).

Shalom,

Alan Lee

www.LightinTorah.org

Watch video https://youtu.be/nzMh2ZovsT0