

HAAMEK DAVAR

- Dr Jacob Solomon

Vayeitzei

Within his dream about the angels going up and down the ladder:

G-d said [to Yaakov]: "I am G-d, the G-d of Avraham your father, and the G-d of Yitzchak. The ground on which you are lying I will give to you and your descendants..." (28:13).

Wasn't Avraham Yaakov's grandfather, not his father?

The Meshech Chochma's explanation puts the entire emphasis on the words before: Ani HaShem, I am G-d. For G-d used the words Ani Hashem to Avraham only, and that was just once, early on. It was with Ani HaShem that He declared to him "Ani HaShem, who brought you out of Ur Casdim to give you to this land to inherit." To which Avraham queried: "By what means shall I know that I will inherit it?" (15:6-7). The Gemara (Nedarim 32a) explains that it was for this querying of G-d (who appeared to him as Ani Hashem) that his descendants would suffer 210 years of exile before coming into their inheritance.

From then on, G-d would appear to the Avot in the frame of Keil Shaddai, G-d who is sufficient, G-d who

supplies what is needed at the time (17:1, 35:11). Not with the same degree of fullness as Ani HaShem. He had appeared as Ani Hashem to Avraham Avinu only, as He reminded Yaakov now: Ani Hashem to G-d of Avraham your father, and by that close ancestral connection (thus 'father'), indirectly to you in that way. But that would not happen again until Moshe Rabbeinu: "G-d spoke to Moshe and said to him Ani HaShem", reminding him pointedly that He appeared to his ancestors as Keil Shaddai only (Sh'mot 6:2,3).

And indeed, Yaakov kept his prayer to G-d in the frame of Keil Shaddai only. Even though he woke up overawed, he asked only for what he needed for survival, what would be sufficient for him: "If G-d will be with me, will guard me on this way that I am going; will give me bread to eat and clothes to wear; and I return in peace to my father's house and G-d [Hashem] will be a G-d [Elokim] to me. Just bread to eat, clothes, to wear and a safe passage with His guidance. As the Radak explains, the righteous ask only for what they need, and no more. That much and no more. Keil Shaddai.

And G-d did answer him with Keil Shaddai. He managed to earn a living with a safe passage, though, as the

Haamek Davar observes, not in the way that he had expected. He didn't merely earn his living as a shepherd. On the contrary, he had to bargain, struggle, and watch his back in the slippery business environment of Lavan his father-in-law: one wrong move spelling destitution or worse. He couldn't just take leave and go home: he had to keep his newly-formed family escape plans to himself for a propitious moment, and even then Lavan caught up with him, charging him with the theft of his household gods. The Haamek Davar emphasizes that G-d looked after him in a way that indeed showed that He was Keil Shaddai. For by taking care of his needs in such a way that at every step he knew that it was not merely the normal course of events, but G-d's special demonstration of putting him into almost impossible situations and then giving him the means to extricate himself from those situations, every time with honor. With Lavan, with Eisav. And even with the people of Shechem, on whom had fallen the fear of G-d (35:4).

Perhaps this gives us an indication of the way G-d relates to individuals that put their trust in Him. He helps them, but not in the way that they expected. Instead of a mere safe passage through life, He puts them

into situations often way beyond their control and then subtly orchestrates events that not only lead to a safe emergence, but a whisper in the person's ear: I am G-d, Keil Shaddai, who provides your needs in such a way that you never forget where they come from. Your personal revelation... I am with you. ✕