

Menachem Persoff

With Faith and Fortitude

In Parshat Vayeitzei, Yaakov embarks on a life-changing odyssey, leaving Eretz Yisrael for Charan. However, his journey was not just a matter of changing geographical locations: Yaakov was leaving his spiritual comfort zone for unknown pastures replete with challenges to his worldview.

The question is oft asked: Why did Hashem create a world where instead of dwelling in tranquility while observing His mitzvot, we face many vicissitudes, including dealing with the internal and external influences that threaten our well-being and challenge our faith?

Let us visit Yaakov and observe his take on that question. How did he prepare for the upcoming trials related to living in a spiritual wilderness?

First, suggests the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Yaakov recognized that he was put into this world to be part of it, to interface with reality with all its incumbent difficulties, and not to be a recluse whose only focus was Torah study. More so, Yaakov understood (as perhaps we should) that we must embrace the material world in order

to raise it to a higher spiritual level of Kedusha.

Yaakov would not seek trouble, but he knew to be prepared for eventualities and confrontation with the "other side". Indeed, if NISYONOT - spiritual challenges or tests - came his way, he would accept, even welcome them. Rather than despairing, he internalized that overcoming these kinds of adversities was his purpose in life.

When Yaakov laid down to rest, he placed stones around his head, ostensibly (following Rashi) to protect himself from wild animals. But why, asks the Rebbe, did he place stones only around his head? - Because, for the Rebbe, the head needed to be protected from the spiritual wild beasts about to impinge on Yaakov's cognition, moral fiber, and ethical sensitivities.

Yaakov needed to remain cool-headed and determined in his new environment. Yes, he would take care of his material concerns and provide for his (future) family. But he would not sacrifice the standards of right and wrong inherited from his holy fathers for an easier godless existence.

In that context, the Rebbe reminds us of David Hamelech's assertion

(T'hilim 128):

"When you eat the labor of your hands

Happy you shall be, and it shall be well with you."

May we be blessed with finding that balance between Kodesh and Chol with the same faith and fortitude as our forefather, Yaakov. [MP](#)