

Torah Talk—מאמרי תורה



The Parasha Letter of The Jewish Primary Day School of the Nation's Capital

Parashat Vayigash
December 19, 2015

פרשת ויגש
ז' בטבת תשע"ו

Torah Reading: *Bereshit* (Genesis) 44:18-47:27

In this *parasha*, Yosef reveals his identity to his brothers, prompting the entire family to move to Egypt, where Yosef reunites with his father, Yaakov.

Yaakov's story comes full circle in chapter 46, verses 2-4. Five weeks ago, we read about Yaakov starting out on the journey of his life. At that point, he has just left Beer Sheva and has laid down to go to sleep. The text says (28: 12-15):

יב ויחלם, והנה סולם מוצב ארצה, וראשו, מגיע השמימה; והנה מלאכי אלהים, עלים וירדים בו. יג והנה ה' נצב עליו, ויאמר, אני ה' אלהי אברהם אבידך, וא-להי יצחק; הארץ, אשר אתה שכב עליה--לך אתננה, ולזרעך. יד והנה זרעך כעפר הארץ, ופרצת ימה וקדמה וצפנה ונגבה; ונברכו בך כל-משפחת האדמה, ובזרעך. טו והנה אנכי עמד, ושמתידך בכל אשר-תלך, והשבתידך, אל-האדמה הזאת: כי, לא אעזבך, עד אשר אם-עשיתי, את אשר-דברתי לך.

12 And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. **13** And, behold, Hashem stood beside him, and said: 'I am Hashem, the God of Abraham your father, and the God of Isaac. The land whereon you lie, to you will I give it, and to your seed. **14** And your seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south. And in you and in your seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. **15** And, behold, I am with you, and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back

into this land; for I will not leave you, until I have done that which I have spoken to you of.'

In our current story, Yaakov has just reached Beer Sheva. God appears to him again in a dream:

ב וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים לְיִשְׂרָאֵל בְּמַרְאֵת הַלַּיְלָה, וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב יַעֲקֹב; וַיֹּאמֶר, הִנְנִי. ג וַיֹּאמֶר, אֲנֹכִי הָאֵל-אֱלֹהֵי אֲבִיךָ; אֶל-תִּירָא מִרָדָה מִצְרַיִמָּה, כִּי-לִגְוִי גְדוֹל אֲשִׁימָךְ שָׁם. ד אֲנֹכִי, אֵרֵד עִמָּךְ מִצְרַיִמָּה, וְאֲנֹכִי, אַעֲלֶךְ גַּם-עֹלָה; וְיוֹסֵף, יִשִּׁית יָדוֹ עַל-עֵינֶיךָ.

2 And God spoke to Yisrael in the visions of the night, and said: 'Yaakov, Yaakov.' And he said: 'Here I am.' 3 And He said: 'I am God, the God of your father; do not fear to go down into Egypt; for there I will make of you a great nation. 4 I will go down with you into Egypt; and I will also surely bring you up again; and Yosef shall put his hand upon your eyes.'

The parallels in the two excerpts are intriguing. Both involve dreams that Yaakov has at night. Both occur in proximity to Beer Sheva. In both, we have images of going up and coming down (the angels and God.) In both, God promises Yaakov that his children will become a great nation and that Hashem will never abandon him.

In literary analysis of the Torah text, the phenomenon of parallel events occurring at the beginning and end of a story is referred to as “bookending” or “bracketing.” It lets us know that Yaakov’s days as the main protagonist in our story are over. Furthermore, Hashem remains steadfast in the Divine promise of protecting Yaakov. Yaakov’s life has been filled with many traumas, such as the loss of his son, Yosef, the loss of his beloved wife, Rachel, the incident with Deena, the fight with the angel in which he was injured, and more. The one stable factor in Yaakov’s life has been God. God assured Yaakov at the beginning of his life odyssey, and here once again assures him towards the end.

We, too, can go forward in life with the assurance that we will be accompanied by God along the way, especially as we near the end of the particularly tumultuous year of 2015 and prepare to enter a hopefully more peaceful year in 2016.

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- Think back on all of the adventures that Yaakov had in his life. What are the first three words that come to your mind to describe Yaakov's life?
- Why did Hashem need to assure Yaakov at the beginning of his journey? Why does Hashem need to reassure Yaakov again now?
- If you were Yaakov, about to be reunited with the beloved son that you haven't seen in 22 years, how would you feel? What is the first thing you would say to that son?