*Vayetze*

Rabbi Shefa Gold

Remember : The Torah is not about someone else or about some other time and place. It is fruitful and beneficial to read our sacred text as a map of the inner landscape, shining a light into this here, this now of my life.

Jacob represents the quintessential Human with all of our foibles, all of our potentials, all of our weaknesses and nobilities. The parsha begins with Jacob running away. Or you might understand his situation as being sent away. After deceiving his brother who would then become a mortal threat, Jacob has to leave. He is also sent to find family, find a wife from within the tribe. Jacob leaves and is on a mythic journey, running for his life and running to his destiny.

Torah is about the journey. I leave the place I know or I am sent. I am running for my life or I am drawn forward by possibilities. I may think I know where I’m going (from Be’er Sheva to Haran) but truly, it’s what happens along the way that matters.

I leave Egypt (the place of constriction, conditioned reactivity, slavery) and I journey to the Promised Land (the place of awakened consciousness where the flow of milk and honey sustains me). Torah is about what happens along the way.

As Jacob I am running away from the mess I have made. And I am running towards the possibilities of love, connection, family, security, abundance. Of course the mess I have made will follow me wherever I go and I will eventually be forced to face my worst and most destructive habits of mind and heart.

This is our journey. All of us must leave the familiar and step out into the unknown in order to fulfil our potential, and in order to get some perspective on who we are becoming and what we must do to heal. Like Abraham we hear the call to leave everything that we know- our home, family and illusions of certainty. That leaving may be painful. It might feel like we are being forced out of our comfort zone into a land we do not know. And yet, in the deepest corner of our hearts we also hear the invitation. The invitation to become a blessing.

Rumi describes it like this: Come, come whoever you are! Wanderer, worshiper, lover of leaving, come.

As Jacob I am a wanderer who is becoming a wonderer. I step into the awesome unknown of the journey. I become a worshiper, opening to God from a profound sense of vulnerability. I become a lover of leaving when I sense the invitation to awaken.

And that is what this journey we’re on is. It is a journey of awakening.

*Vayetze* gives us a seed moment for that awakening.

When I am truly awake, I see the miracle that was always before me. When I am awake, I am touched by the beauty and poignancy of this very step, aware that it is a part of an amazing journey. When I am awake, I experience life, and death, as a great adventure, and I am filled with enthusiasm and humor. When I am awake, I am filled with compassion for my own predicament and that compassion overflows towards all beings.

My spiritual practice is meant to turn me in the direction of that kind of awakeness. So, Jacob’s moment of awakeness is a gift for all of us as we plant the seed moment and then make a commitment to tend it with our awareness, celebration and practice. We all have moments of fleeting clarity, when suddenly we know ourselves as integral to the cosmos, and the way forward opens up. But then the moment is gone and we are lost again, stumbling through life, trying to make the right deal.

But what if that moment of clarity could be planted in us as a seed of the possible? What if we could live in the light of that lucid magical moment?

Jacob’s journey pivots on an ordinary word that just happens to be a secret name for God…. HAMAKOM, which means “the place.“ This Divine name points to the omnipresence of God. It is a word that awakens us to the truth that God is with us, everywhere.

Jacob comes to a place on his journey. The sun has set, so he takes a stone from that place as his pillow. The Stone might represent the hard place we have come to in our life. It is dark, so the only thing we can do is rest …. and dream.

The dream shows Jacob a ladder that stretches between earth and heaven, between the finite and the infinite, between our limited perspective and the Divine expanse. Angels are going up and down this ladder, showing us the way to bridge this divide. And then God gives Jacob a glimpse of the wide perspective, connecting him to his ancestors and descendants. God shows Jacob the path he must traverse and assures him that he will return. Through all of it, the important thing to remember, God reminds us is …”I am with you” (*Anochi Imach)*

When Jacob wakes up, he has that seed moment of remembrance, which is our seed to plant. With Jacob we remember that God is in this place. How awesome! We remember that this present moment is the house of God, and it is the gate of Heaven.

As Jacob continues on his journey, he misunderstands the Divine promise, and tries to frame it as a deal- if you give me the right food, and the right clothes for this journey, then you will be my God and I’ll give you a tenth of my riches in return. So often our relationship with God is like that. We want things to go our way, with God’s blessing. In my clearer moments, this is the promise I hear.

THE PROMISE: I will give you HAMAKOM, “the place,” the land of your life – to possess, to know, to inhabit, cultivate, refine. The awesome place that I give you is none other than the House of God – I live there at the heart of every molecule and I will shine out through the windows of your own eyes when they are open to this truth. And this awesome place is the Gate of Heaven – connecting all realms and dimensions, Heavens and Hells – connecting you with your wildest dreams.

I will give you descendants. You will be a delicate flower held up to the wind. You will be blown open, that your seeds may scatter and take root, blossoming in places you could not imagine. The winds of history and circumstance and coincidence will spread your essence, your song, your sigh, mixed with the pollens of desire, to the far corners of the world. Your fragrance will waft through the farthest garden.

Through you and your descendants, all the families of the earth will be blessed.

I am with you. I do not promise that it will be comfortable or that you will not suffer. I do not promise that you’ll never be hungry or feel despair. I do not promise that your heart will never be broken. My promise is simply that I am with you – in your suffering, your hunger, your despair, through your wandering, your stumbling, your confusion — (I am with you), “*Anokhi Imach*” (Genesis 28:15) — even when you feel abandoned.

When I hear this promise, I return to my spiritual practice inspired to embrace this moment as it is, to receive it as Grace. I tend the seed of awakening by honoring moments of clarity. I honor those peak moments through expressions of awe and wonder, through creative pursuits, and by asking whoever I’m with, “Hey, did you see that; did you feel that; can we share this moment of miracle?”