## [Planting Seed – NETZAKH and Parshat Vayeitzei](https://www.torahofawakening.com/torah-of-awakening-teachings-408656/planting-seed-netzakh-and-parshat-vayeitzei)

A disciple once asked the Baal Shem Tov, “Why is it that one who is rooted in the Divine sometimes experiences a sense of separation and remoteness?” The Baal Shem answered, “It is like a mother who supports the hands of her toddler learning to walk. The toddler toddles toward the mother, but then the mother steps back and loosens the child’s hands a bit, making walking a bit harder. In this way, the child learns to walk on their own.”

Spiritual practice is not unlike other practices such as physical exercise or playing music; while it is true that every moment we spend exercising or practicing an instrument allows us to improve, it is also true that only through *regularly engaging* with the exercise or instrument can we continue to develop and not regress. In this way, both the experience of improvement *and* the possibility of regression can be motivating forces, urging us on to continue developing on our path.

Spirituality is just like that.

When our practice bears the fruit of ecstasy, peace and spaciousness, should motivate us to continue and develop our practice even more. Don’t think that the journey is over, just because you had a special experience – *practice more!*

Because at some point, the wonderful experience we thought we had achieved simply vanishes; like all experiences, it comes and eventually goes. This too should motivate, rather than disappoint us. In this way, whether we experience closeness or remoteness, the answer is the same: *don’t give up!*

This is the imperative of the seventh *sefirah*of *Netzakh,*which means “eternity” or “victory.” The idea is that we need to be “eternally” persistent in our spiritual path, and that this commitment *itself* is the “victory,” rather than the achievement of some particular experience. Experiences come and go, but our persistence can endure, if we are committed. This is *Netzakh.*

רַבִּי חֲנִינָא בֶן חֲכִינַאי אוֹמֵר, הַנֵּעוֹר בַּלַּיְלָה וְהַמְהַלֵּךְ בַּדֶּרֶךְ יְחִידִי וְהַמְפַנֶּה לִבּוֹ לְבַטָּלָה, הֲרֵי זֶה מִתְחַיֵּב בְּנַפְשׁוֹ

*Rabbi Hananiah ben Hakhinai said, “One who stays awake at night and walks on the road alone and turns their heart to emptiness, behold, bears guilt in one’s soul.”*

-Pirkei Avot 3:4

This particularly stern *mishna*warns us not to waste a moment of our precious and short time we have on this earth. Every moment can be a form of practice – of learning, of service, or even of simply being present to the Ever-Present. This kind of teaching can be a powerful reminder of our task and potential.

But also, we should hear it in the context of *Tiferet,*of striking a balance in life; it is not meant to make us neurotic, tight, or too serious. And, it is important to know, the way to balance is different for everyone; the main thing is to ask oneself the question, to be aware of and take responsibility for the choices we are making, to consciously craft the structures of our lives, so that we can grow in fulfillment of our potential for the peace and spaciousness that is our deepest nature. There is a hint in the *parshah:*

וַיַּ֞רְא וְהִנֵּ֧ה בְאֵ֣ר בַּשָּׂדֶ֗ה וְהִנֵּה־שָׁ֞ם שְׁלֹשָׁ֤ה עֶדְרֵי־צֹאן֙ רֹבְצִ֣ים עָלֶ֔יהָ כִּ֚י מִן־הַבְּאֵ֣ר הַהִ֔וא יַשְׁק֖וּ הָעֲדָרִ֑ים וְהָאֶ֥בֶן גְּדֹלָ֖ה עַל־פִּ֥י הַבְּאֵֽר׃

*He looked, and behold – a well in the field, and behold – three flocks of sheep lying beside it, for from that well the flocks drank, and the stone was great on the mouth of the well.*

-Genesis 29:2

This passage describes the moments before Jacob meets and falls in love with Rachel; like the earlier story, when Eliezer is seeking a bride for Isaac, it begins at a “well” in a “field.” Both the “well” (בְּאֵ֣ר *b’er)* and the field (שָּׂדֶ֗ה *sadeh*) are different aspects of *Hokhmah,*or consciousness.

The “field” is the quality of spaciousness ­– consciousness as the open field within which all experience comes and goes. This field is always present as the background of our experience.

The “well” is power of consciousness to impart a sense of connection, an experience of Oneness or Wholeness. In this sense, *Hokhmah* is like water, quenching our thirst for returning to our Divine essence. This is the experiential dimension of consciousness which becomes available through meditation. Unlike the “field,” which is always there, we need to “roll the rock” off the “well” again and again through regular practice, so that the “three flocks” may drink.

What are these three flocks? These are the three dimensions of our experience, present right now:

Sensory awareness – physical body
Feeling-tone, mood, attitude – emotional body
Thought structures, points of view, narrative – mental body

Ordinarily, we tend to be focused on some object within these realms – we might be involved with some thoughts, or we might be dealing with physical objects, or whatever. But when we wish to “roll away the rock” from the “well” and drink from the “waters” of consciousness, we must “gather” the “three flocks” together:

וְנֶאֶסְפוּ־שָׁ֣מָּה כָל־הָעֲדָרִ֗ים וְגָלֲל֤וּ אֶת־הָאֶ֙בֶן֙ מֵעַל֙ פִּ֣י הַבְּאֵ֔ר וְהִשְׁק֖וּ אֶת־הַצֹּ֑אן וְהֵשִׁ֧יבוּ אֶת־הָאֶ֛בֶן עַל־פִּ֥י הַבְּאֵ֖ר לִמְקֹמָֽהּ׃

*When all the flocks were gathered there, the stone would be rolled*(galalu) *from upon the mouth of the well and the sheep drank; then the stone would be returned upon the the mouth of the well, to its place.*

-Genesis 29:3

“Gathering the flocks” means becoming aware of the presence of all three dimensions of experience at once; it means *being*the awareness of all three dimensions. This is Presence, which is the essence of meditation and all spiritual practices. But in order to be effective over time, spiritual practice must be engaged regularly, again and again:

וְגָלֲל֤וּ אֶת־הָאֶ֙בֶן֙ – *and the stone was rolled…*

The word for “rolled” is *galalu,*from the two-letter Hebrew root, גל. “Rolling” implies something that is done over and over again, like the turning of a wheel, as in the word *gilgul,*which is reincarnation.

גל is also the root of the words:

גָלוּת  *galut* – “exile”
גְאוּלָה  *ga’ula* – “redemption”
גַליָא*galuya* or גִלוּי *galu’i*– “revelation.”

These three words, which describe the stages of the Israelites’ going out to freedom from slavery in Egypt, also describe the process of spiritual unfolding: first there is the experience of separateness or suffering that leads one to the path (*galut*). At some point, there is the experience of release from this narrow state, a taste of inner freedom that contrasts with and gives meaning to the state of constriction (*ga’ula*). Finally, there is the unfolding of knowledge and increased perception which allows one to live from the state of freedom (*galu’i*).

The two-letter root itself also expresses this process:

*Gimel*ג represents the Fullness, Completeness, or Wholeness of *Hokhmah,*represented by the “waters” of the “well*.*”

*Lamed*ל represents transformation – the gradual learning over time how to bring forth the “waters” and express them in our lives over time.

Bringing together all these levels of meaning, we can understand גָלֲל֤וּ *galalu*, the “rolling” of the “stone,” to mean:

***Persistent practice****toward the****redemption****of the experience of****separateness****into the****revelation****of the Wholeness of consciousness…*

Persistent practice is often likened to the tending of a garden; just we would tend the plants with water and good soil and make sure it gets enough sunlight, so too our regular practice nurtures transformation over time. And, like the garden, we must be patient, and we must trust the process. Accordingly, the “Saying of Creation” associated with *Netzakh*is the bringing forth of seeds and plants:

וַיֹּ֣אמֶר אֱלֹהִ֗ים תַּֽדְשֵׁ֤א הָאָ֙רֶץ֙ דֶּ֔שֶׁא עֵ֚שֶׂב מַזְרִ֣יעַ זֶ֔רַע עֵ֣ץ פְּרִ֞י עֹ֤שֶׂה פְּרִי֙ לְמִינ֔וֹ אֲשֶׁ֥ר זַרְעוֹ־ב֖וֹ עַל־הָאָ֑רֶץ וַֽיְהִי־כֵֽן׃

*And*Elohim*said, “Let the earth sprout vegetation: seed-bearing plants, fruit trees bearing fruit after their kind with their seeds in them upon the earth, and it was so.*

-Genesis 1:11

Similarly, the *mitzvah* of the *Aseret Hadibrot* (Ten Commandments) associated with *Netzakh*is the only one having to do with the regular cycles of spiritual practice:

זָכ֛וֹר֩ אֶת־י֥֨וֹם הַשַּׁבָּ֖֜ת לְקַדְּשֽׁ֗וֹ

*Remember the day of Shabbat to sanctify it.*

שֵׁ֤֣שֶׁת יָמִ֣ים֙ תַּֽעֲבֹ֔ד֮ וְעָשִׂ֖֣יתָ כָּל־מְלַאכְתֶּֽךָ֒

*Six days you shall labor and do all your work.*

וְי֙וֹם֙ הַשְּׁבִיעִ֔֜י שַׁבָּ֖֣ת לַיהוָ֣ה אֱלֹהֶ֑֗יךָ לֹֽ֣א־תַעֲשֶׂ֣֨ה כָל־מְלָאכָ֡֜ה אַתָּ֣ה וּבִנְךָֽ֣־וּ֠בִתֶּ֗ךָ עַבְדְּךָ֤֨ וַאֲמָֽתְךָ֜֙ וּבְהֶמְתֶּ֔֗ךָ וְגֵרְךָ֖֙ אֲשֶׁ֥֣ר בִּשְׁעָרֶֽ֔יךָ

*And the seventh day is a Shabbat to the Divine, your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or daughter, your male or female servants, or your cattle, or the stranger who is within your gates.*

כִּ֣י שֵֽׁשֶׁת־יָמִים֩ עָשָׂ֨ה יְהוָ֜ה אֶת־הַשָּׁמַ֣יִם וְאֶת־הָאָ֗רֶץ אֶת־הַיָּם֙ וְאֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־בָּ֔ם וַיָּ֖נַח בַּיּ֣וֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִ֑י עַל־כֵּ֗ן בֵּרַ֧ךְ יְהוָ֛ה אֶת־י֥וֹם הַשַּׁבָּ֖ת וַֽיְקַדְּשֵֽׁהוּ׃

*For in six days the Divine made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore, the Divine blessed the day of Shabbat and sanctified it.*

-Exodus 20: 9-11

This fourth “commandment” is actually two *mitzvot* which form the foundational positive and negative structures of *Shabbat:*

*Zakhor et Yom HaShabbat l’kadsho…*

זָכ֛וֹר֩ אֶת־י֥֨וֹם הַשַּׁבָּ֖֜ת לְקַדְּשֽׁ֗וֹ
*Remember the day of Shabbat to sanctify it…*

This means all the many practices which frame Shabbat as a sacred time – lighting candles Friday night, chanting the *kiddush*prayers on Friday night and Saturday, enjoying festive meals, learning Torah, chanting the special prayers and songs for Shabbat, and so on.

*Lo ta’asei khol melakhah…*

לֹֽ֣א־תַעֲשֶׂ֣֨ה כָל־מְלָאכָ֡֜ה
*You shall not do any work…*

The meaning of מְלָאכָה *melakhah,* “work,” is somewhat complex, but the essence is not doing things aimed at achieving material goals in time – this means not only refraining from livelihood work, but also not talking or even thinking about plans for the future at all – as well as no errands, no travel, no cooking, no purchasing, and so on. The essence is that *Shabbat*is a retreat from the world of time and doing, a twenty-five-hour immersion into the blessedness of simply Being.

This weekly practice of *Shabbat,*together with the micro-practices of daily *avodah*and *Torah* (meditation, prayer and learning), along with the micro-micro-practices of returning to Presence hundreds of times per day through the practice of *brakhot* (chanting blessings), are the rhythms of the spiritual life. They are the expressions of *Netzakh*as the structures which support the spiritual life, the גָלֲלוּ אֶת־הָאֶבֶן מֵעַל פִּי הַבְּאֵר *gal’lu et ha’even me’al pi hab’eir–*the “rolling of the stone from the mouth of the well” – the regular practices which establish our realization of our essence within the highs and lows of the turning wheels of time, transforming the world one step at a time…

***More on Vayeitzei...***

[**Lamp in the Dark Wood – Parshat Vayeitzei**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/torah-of-awakening-teachings-408656/lamp-in-the-dark-wood-parshat-vayetzei)12/2/2019 [0 Comments](https://www.torahofawakening.com/torah-of-awakening-teachings-408656/lamp-in-the-dark-wood-parshat-vayetzei#comments)

There’s a funny thing with the newer cars nowadays. Since I travel a lot, I’ve had the experience of renting fairly new cars, and they all seem to have the strange and irritating characteristic of the radio coming on automatically as soon as you turn the car on. It seems to matter not whether the radio was on or off when the car was turned off; when you turn the car on, the radio comes on blasting. Why would a car be designed that way? Are people that uncomfortable with silence that the default should be noisiness?

Recently I was in such a car with my son. We laughed and yelled at the car every time it happened. But after a while, my son became adept at slapping the button to turn it off instantaneously, as soon as the very first sound wave emitted from the speakers. And thus, the irritating car radio design became the impetus for developing a new level of awareness…

The mind is not so different.

As soon as we wake up in the morning, the “radio” of the mind starts playing things at us. Do we simply get drawn into whatever the mind gives us? Or do we develop the attentiveness to slap the button and turn it off? Or at least change the “station” to the one we choose? Although, with the mind, it’s not like we have buttons we can push. How can we silence the mind or tune in to the station we want?

A disciple came to Rabbi Yisrael of Rizhyn and said, “Whenever I listen to you teach, a state of deveikus (oneness with the Divine) comes over me. A warm light permeates my whole being and I feel connected to the Divine Presence in all things. But when I go back to ordinary activities, all kinds of thoughts come into my mind and I feel disconnected once again. How can I clear my mind and tune in to the light?”

The Rabbi of Rizhyn answered: “This is like a person who stumbles through the forest in the darkness. Then someone comes along with a lamp, and as they walk together, they are able to see the path. But, when the one with the lamp leaves, again the person is plunged into darkness and can’t tell which way to go. The trick is, you must carry your own lamp!”

The lamp, of course, is a metaphor for awareness. If we want to turn off our thoughts, we can’t simply push a button; we have to be purposefully aware of our thoughts, which means, paradoxically, allowing the thoughts to be there.

Imagine you turn on your car and the radio starts blaring at you, but instead of hitting the button to turn it off, you listen intently to every little sound you’re hearing. And as you listen, the radio becomes softer and softer… until all that’s left is the listening, and the sound of the radio disappears completely.

That’s what it’s like with silencing our mind, because our thoughts and our awareness are coming from the same mind. Put your energy into being present rather than thinking, and the thoughts disappear on their own. It’s like turning over an hourglass – the sand is in one side, and when you turn it over, it simply flows to the other side. Similarly, when our consciousness is taking the form of thinking, if you simply be aware  of your thoughts then your consciousness will begin flowing from the “thought side” to the “Presence side.”

A teacher can help you do this. When good teachings come to us externally, it’s not difficult to “tune in” to the “station” that the teacher is “broadcasting.” This is like the person who walks with another who carries a lamp.

Receiving this way from a teacher is a good and helpful thing, but it should ultimately lead to an awareness of one’s own inner light rather than make one dependent upon the light of the teacher. Only our own light isn’t something external to us, like carrying a lamp. In fact, it isn’t even something we “have” at all; it is what we already are.

And yet, it’s easy to be so seduced by our experiences on the levels of thought, feeling, and sensory perception that we can forget the luminescent field of consciousness within which all experience is arising. Our lamp is already shining, but it’s as if it is covered by a dark cloth that conceals its light. We need to take off the covering and reveal the light, so that it can illuminate whatever experience we’re having, and shine even into the darkest moments. This begins to happen as soon as we become conscious of whatever is present in this moment, accepting this moment as it appears, and knowing that we are the consciousness of this moment. Just that little shift – awareness becoming aware of awareness and being simply present – allows that luminescence to be revealed. And that luminescence is not something separate from the Divine; it is the consciousness of Existence Itself, becoming aware through you, right now. This is the deepest dimension of who we are, beyond the personal, beyond our personhood.

This is not to denigrate the personal dimension; our personhood is precious, fragile, flawed, growing, learning, transforming. But all of our personal qualities are possible only because of the impersonal field within which the personal dimension arises; they are inseparable.

In our sacred stories and in our tefilah (prayer), we often imagine the Divine as personal; we give Existence a personality, so that we can relate to It in a personal way. This is the great feat of devotional path: it allows us to personally approach the absolutely most impersonal thing imaginable ­– Existence Itself. As long as we engage in the personalization of the Completely Impersonal in order to open our hearts in gratitude, awe and surrender to the Mystery (rather than engage in blame, victimhood, entitlement and arrogance toward the “God” that didn’t give us what we want), the devotional path is uniquely precious: it elevates the personal to its highest potential and allows us to see Being Itself as our Father, our Mother, our Lover, our Friend, our Master. This paradox of a personal relationship with the Impersonal is expressed in the haftora:

כִּ֣י אֵ֤ל אָֽנֹכִי֙ וְלֹא־אִ֔ישׁ בְּקִרְבְּךָ֣ קָד֔וֹשׁ
For I am the Divine, not a “person” – I am the Holiness within you!
(Hosea 11:9)

It is ironic – God is talking like a person, telling us that He is not a person! But “He” can do this because “He” is really b’kirb’kha kadosh – the Holiness within you. Meaning, God is the consciousness beneath our personhood, our deepest self. This is hinted in the first part of the phrase: El Anokhi – I am the Divine. Meaning, the “I” – the awareness beneath the person – is the Divine.

And yet, this Divine “I” at the root of our being is not somehow trapped inside our bodies; it is not “within” as opposed to “without.” It is neither external not internal, because everything we perceive on all levels is perceived within Its light. That’s why the “lamp” is an apt metaphor; the lamp shines its light outward into the forest, just as the light of consciousness shines through all experience, revealing all things to be different forms of the One Thing. This is hinted in Jacob’s dream of the ladder between heaven and earth, when the Divine speaks to him:

וְהִנֵּ֨ה יְהוָ֜ה נִצָּ֣ב עָלָיו֮ וַיֹּאמַר֒ אֲנִ֣י יְהוָ֗ה אֱלֹהֵי֙ אַבְרָהָ֣ם אָבִ֔יךָ וֵאלֹהֵ֖י יִצְחָ֑ק הָאָ֗רֶץ אֲשֶׁ֤ר אַתָּה֙ שֹׁכֵ֣ב עָלֶ֔יהָ לְךָ֥ אֶתְּנֶ֖נָּה וּלְזַרְעֶֽךָ׃
And behold, the Divine stood over him and said, “I am All-Existence, God of Abraham your father and God of Isaac, the land upon which you are lying; to you I will give it and to your descendants…”
(Genesis 28:13)

This is usually translated to mean:

I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac, and I will give the land to your descendants…

But here I am translating it:

I am the God of Abraham, and I am the God of Isaac, and **I am the land upon which you are lying**; to you I will give it…

Seen in this way, God is standing over Isaac, showing him that the Divine is above him. But God is telling Isaac that the Divine is the earth below him! In other words, the totality of experience: above, below, and b’kirb’kha kadosh – the Holiness within you.

הוּא הָאֱלהִים בַּשָּׁמַיִם מִמַּעַל וְעַל הָאָרֶץ מִתָּחַת אֵין עוד
It is the Divine in the heavens above and upon the earth below, there is nothing else…
(Deuteronomy 4:39)

Uncover the lamp within – know the light of consciousness that you are. And in that light, see the Divine shining from all things and all beings, especially the person who is before you. And know that when you offer kindness and Presence to that person standing before you, you make an offering to the Divine, and you help reveal the Divine light in that person as well…

[**The Way Up is The Way Down – Parshat Vayeitzei**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/the-way-up-is-the-way-down-parshat-vayeitzei)
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Imagine you lived in a place where the sky was constantly overcast, so that the sun was hardly ever visible. From your point of view, it would look like the dim light of the overcast sky was coming from the clouds themselves. If you were a small child and had never heard of the sun, that’s what you would probably assume.

Now, imagine you are that child – you have no knowledge of the sun, and your parents take you for a trip on an airplane. As the plane gets higher and higher, you look out the window, and you see nothing but cloud all around. Soon after, the plane bursts through the cloud cover and you see the blazing sun and the blue sky for the first time. Imagine what a revelation that would be!

That’s what spiritual awakening is like.

For most of us, the sky has been covered with clouds our whole lives. Meaning, our minds are constantly moving with the “clouds” of thoughts and feelings. Without ever questioning, we assume that our consciousness and our thoughts and feelings are identical. Because of this, we also don’t tend to distinguish between the thoughts and feelings we have about reality, and actual Reality. All we know are the clouds; we experience the present moment through the lens of our stories, through our sense of past and future.

How to awaken from the seductive dream of our minds and hearts and come to the truth of this moment?

וַיִּפְגַּ֨ע בַּמָּקֹ֜ום וַיָּ֤לֶן שָׁם֙ כִּי־בָ֣א הַשֶּׁ֔מֶשׁ
He encountered The Place and spent the night there, for the sun had set…

In this week’s reading, Jacob is running from his murderous brother. The sun had set – meaning, he was in a state of inner darkness. He was running and running, until he “encounters The Place” – he sets stones for his head and lays down on the earth. In other words, he connects with the physicality of his present experience.

Then, after a dream in which the Divine appears to him and he sees a ladder reaching from the earth to heaven with angels going up and down, it says:

וַיִּיקַ֣ץ יַעֲקֹב֮ מִשְּׁנָתֹו֒ וַיֹּ֕אמֶר אָכֵן֙ יֵ֣שׁ יְהוָ֔ה בַּמָּקֹ֖ום הַזֶּ֑ה וְאָנֹכִ֖י לֹ֥א יָדָֽעְתִּי
Jacob awakened from his sleep and said, “Surely the Divine is in this Place and I didn’t even know it!”

The Divine is not something separate from the truth of this moment – it is the radiant sun of consciousness, ever-present as the perceiving Presence that you are.

But, there are clouds!

The way to “rise of above the clouds,” so to speak, is paradoxically to connect with the earth. That’s because when we become conscious of our physical sensations, the “clouds” of thoughts and feelings can clear up naturally, revealing the radiant awareness beneath them. This is expressed in the next verse:

וַיִּירָא֙ וַיֹּאמַ֔ר מַה־נֹּורָ֖א הַמָּקֹ֣ום הַזֶּ֑ה אֵ֣ין זֶ֗ה כִּ֚י אִם־בֵּ֣ית אֱלֹהִ֔ים וְזֶ֖ה שַׁ֥עַר הַשָּׁמָֽיִם
He was afraid and said, “How awesome is this Place – it is none but the House of the Divine, and this is the gate of heaven!”

In fact, the word for “The Place” is HaMakom, which is Itself a Divine Name.

So, if you want to rise above the dark clouds of this world, the way up is actually the way down. Come down from your mind, into your body and into connection with the earth, to HaMakom, because This, Here-Now, is the gateway of heaven… ​

[***Be Still- Parshat Vayeitzei***](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/be-still-parshat-vayeitzei)
11/24/2017  [2 Comments](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/be-still-parshat-vayeitzei#comments)

This week’s reading, Parshat Vayeitzei, begins with Jacob running away from his brother Esau, who wants to murder him. It says,

“Vayeitzei Ya’akov mibe’er shava vayelekh kharana, vayifga baMakom-
“Jacob went out from Be’er Sheva and walked toward Haran, and he encountered The Place…”

It’s a strange phrase- “He encountered The Place…”

But the word for The Place- HaMakom- is actually one of the Hebrew names for God. By calling God HaMakom, The Place, the text is giving us a hint about where the Divine can be found. For Jacob, “The Place” was between the home he had left behind and the new home he was going to. In other words, between the past and the future. So, where is this special Place between your past and your future in which we can encounter the Divine? That Place, of course, is always where we already are!

And yet, the mind tends to see this Place as insignificant compared to our imagined past and future. After all, our past is our story, our identity, and our future is our desire, our goal. So, past and future are important, but when they become more important than the present, meaning- when imagination becomes more important than Reality, this creates a feeling of being disconnected from Reality, of being disconnected from this Place, from this moment. And when that feeling of being disconnected dominates your life, and the alienation becomes more and more painful, you can reach a point where something has to shift. That’s what happened to Jacob. His origin and his goal became so heavy, that for an instant he was able to pop out of the story and see the moment.

So, before Jacob encounters the Present, he’s just running. But now that Jacob is beginning to despair, he is letting go of his story in time; he is giving up hope. And in this “giving up,” he begins to notice the place he is in. He brings his mind all the way down to the stones, and becomes still.

So on this Shabbat Vayeitzei, the Sabbath of Going Out, may we go out from our automatic and unconscious responses to things, may we become still and connect with the Presence of this moment, so that we may say, “Akhein yesh Hashem bamakom hazeh, v’anokhi lo yadati-
Surely God is present in this place and I didn’t even know it!” Good Shabbos!

[**Go Out! Parshat Vayeitzei**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/go-out-parshat-vayeitzei)
12/8/2016 [1 Comment](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/go-out-parshat-vayeitzei#comments)

 "Vayeitzei Ya'akov- And Ya'akov went out from Be'er Sheva..."

Our reading begins with Jacob fleeing for his life from his brother’s rage.

"Vayifga bamakom- He encountered the Place..."

This word for "The Place"- HaMakom- is unusual because it’s also one of the Names of God.

So why is God called The Place?

Jacob falls asleep and dreams of a ladder set toward the earth, with its top reaching toward the heavens. There are angels going up and down the ladder. Suddenly he has a vision of the Divine and receives a special message of hope and protection.

When he wakes up, he says,

“Akhein, yesh Hashem bamakom hazeh, v’anokhi lo yadati-"Surely the Divine is in this Place, and I didn’t even know it!"

The word for knowing- Da’at or Da’as- isn’t the same as the English word for knowing, which implies an intellectual understanding. The Hebrew word is the same word used in the Garden of Eden story-

“V’ha’adam ***yadata*** et Khava- and Adam knew Eve...”

This the knowing of intimacy and connection, not the mind and thinking.

So the hint here is that if you want to really "see" the Divine in this Place- the Makom that you’re in right now- then you have to really connect with it fully and consciously. Know- Da- that there is only one experience happening right now, that everything within your experience in this moment is arising within the open space that is your awareness.

If let your awareness open and connect deeply with the fullness of what’s happening, then you’ll know for yourself-

“Akhein- Yesh Hashem bamakom hazeh!"

The Divine is not just in this space, the Divine is this space. And all aspects of your experience- your thoughts, feelings, sensations, and perceptions- are all one with the space that you are:

The open space of awareness within which this moment arises.

But to know that, to be intimate with the space of this moment, you have to go out- Vayeitzei- from those limited forms of consciousness- the thoughts and feelings we often think of as “me”- and into the vast open space of Presence.

So my friends, on this Shabbat Vayeitzei, the Sabbath of Going Out, may we all remember to “go out” from ego to meet the Timeless that glows softly within all things. And, let’s go out to greet the Timeless One as the Shabbos Kallah, the indwelling Presence of Shabbat.

Good Shabbos good Shabbos!!!
love,
brian yosef

[***The Flight- Parshat Vayeitzei***](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/the-flight-parshat-vayeitzei)
11/19/2015  [11 Comments](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/the-flight-parshat-vayeitzei#comments)

This past Monday I boarded the plane for Costa Rica to join my wife and children on our six-month excursion to Central America.

The trouble started the moment I tried to check in.

Due to a new baggage restriction that went into effect that very day, the woman at the ticket counter told me I was only allowed to check two bags. I had three.

After a scramble to repack everything right then and there, another woman came over and started whispering something to the first woman. The new woman nervously informed me that I also wasn’t allowed my two carry-on bags. I could only have one carry-on, plus a small item such as a purse or tiny backpack.

Repack again. Text my friend who dropped me off, run out to curb with a bunch of stuff I expelled from my suitcases, dump it in the trunk. Finish checking bags, get to gate just in time to board. Not in a good mood.

Sitting between two people. One continuously rubs his arm against mine for hours as he types at his tablet device. A thought occurs to me- what if they lose my luggage? Airlines have misplaced my suitcases on multiple occasions, and once, a suitcase of mine was even lost for good. And I don't even like hot humid weather!

Suddenly, as these thoughts are occurring to me, the plane starts lurching violently. The captain asks the flight attendants to have a seat. It feels like the plane keeps hitting huge potholes in the sky. The guy next to me gasps as his tablet device literally flies up into the air. I feel myself thrown upward as well, but I’m held in place by the seatbelt.

After a few minutes of this, another thought occurs to me- I didn’t have time to finish davening that morning! Without hesitation I reach for my siddur and start the morning prayers:

Barukh she’amar v’ahyah ha’olam-
Blessed is the One who speaks the universe into being…

Now I tell you the truth- the turbulence stopped immediately within seconds after I started davening. Did the davening cause the turbulence to stop? Was this testimony to the power of prayer?

The mind loves this kind of question.

Some minds will jump in- “See, the power of prayer at work!” Others will be skeptical- “The turbulence would have stopped anyway, but because you started praying at that time, your mind makes a correlation where there was none…”

That’s the dualistic mind- it’s one or the other.

But there is a third way-

And that’s to see that all events are part of a single Reality, and that This One Reality is what we call God. God is the turbulence, God is the prayer, and God is the ending of the turbulence. It’s not three things- it’s not me stopping the turbulence with prayers; there’s only one continuous event, one Reality- God’s unfolding in time.

Seen that way, the prayers could even be taken right out of the equation. There was turbulence. It stopped. Is that not miracle enough?

I was thrown out of my seat. That reminded me to pray. Is that not miracle enough?

I’ll tell you this:

In the moment that the turbulence subsided as I chanted the prayers, that moment was all there was. The luggage tzures no longer mattered. What had happened at the ticket counter was in the past, and whatever was going to happen later at the San Jose airport was in the future. Only that moment was real.

In this week’s reading, Jacob has a similar experience:

“Vayeitzei Ya’akov mibe’er shava vayelekh kharana, vayifga baMakom-
“Jacob went out from Be’er Sheva and walked toward Haran. He encountered The Place…”

It’s a strange sentence- “He encountered The Place…”

But the word for The Place- HaMakom- is actually one of the Hebrew names for God. By calling God The Place, the text is giving us a hint about where God can be found. For Jacob, “The Place” was between the home he had left behind and the new home he was going to. Between the past and the future, he encountered God.

Where is this special Place between your past and your future that you encounter God?

That Place, of course, is always where you already are!

And yet, the mind tends to see this Place as insignificant compared to our imagined past and future. After all, our past is our story, our identity, and our future is our desire, our goal. Past and future are important.

But when past and future become more important than the present, meaning- when imagination becomes more important than Reality, this creates a feeling of being disconnected from Reality, of being disconnected from this Place, from this moment.

When disconnectedness dominates one’s life (God forbid), and the alienation becomes more and more painful, you can reach a point where something has to shift. That’s what happened to Jacob. He was running from his brother Esau whom he had tricked and cheated, and now Esau was trying to kill him. Jacob is in a dark place:

“Vayalen sham ki va hashemesh-
And he spent the night there because the sun had set”.

The setting of the sun is a symbol of his inner darkness- Jacob is in despair over his situation.

So what does he do?

“He took from the stones of The Place and put them for his head…”

What are the qualities of stones? They are dense. They are heavy. They don’t blow around, but are still.

A person’s head, on the other hand, is the place where thought happens. Thought is perhaps the least physical thing in our experience. Rather than being still, it constantly bubbles this way and that.

So bringing “stones” to his “head” hints at a radical shift in consciousness. He is bringing his mind all the way down to the stones and becoming still.

And then something startling happens:

“And he dreamt- and behold! A ladder was set toward the Earth, its top toward Heaven, and behold! Angels of God ascended and descended upon it.”

What's the meaning of this vision?

There's a tradition that everything has an angel, or spiritual force, causing it. According to this idea, everything we experience is determined in the “spiritual” realm, and we really have nothing to do with it.

The Talmud says, “Everything is in the hands of heaven except the awe of heaven” (Berakhot 33b). In other words, everything that happens is predetermined, except our relationship to it. Other than that, we have no real power. Seen from this point of view, the angels descending the ladder would be the determining forces for what goes on in our world.

However, there’s another opposing idea that every deed a person does actually creates an angel. Do good, create good angels. Do bad, create bad angels. These created angels then go around producing good or bad effects in the world.

So in this view, what happens is not determined by the angels, but by the human beings creating the angels. In other words, everything is in our hands. This view is represented by the angles ascendingthe ladder.

But in Jacob’s vision, there are angels going up the ladder and down the ladder; he sees the paradox of both realities at once. Everything is determined by forces which are created by our actions, yet our actions are themselves determined by forces, which are themselves created by our actions, and so on ad infinitum.

So what's the meaning here?

The answer is in HaMakom- this place we have now come to.

Because in order to access the Divinity of this moment, you have to surrender your preoccupation with the way things “come out”- you have to give up control.

This is the meaning of the angels coming down- everything is in the “hands of heaven”.

At the same time, this supreme surrender actually frees you from your automatic responses to things. You are no longer a victim of your own preferences; you have choice. So next time you get annoyed with a loved one and you feel yourself going into your same old response, stop. Surrender. Access the power of transformation- the power that allows you to choose how to be.

This is the meaning of the angels going up- your choice to be in "awe of heaven"!

Then you will realize like Jacob did:

“Akhein yesh Hashem bamakom hazeh, v’anokhi lo yadati-
Surely God is present in this place and I didn’t even know it!”

There is a mishna that sums it up well:

“Everything is foreseen, yet freedom is given.” (Pirkei Avot 3:19)

“Everything is foreseen”- you have no choice, so surrender your attempt to control anything.

But, in that surrender, you connect with the only true freedom there is- your freedom to choose how to respond in this moment.

Jacob’s newfound freedom is expressed a few verses later:

“Jacob lifted his feet and went…”

It is as if he is now flying, his feet in the air...

At the end of my flight, I had ample opportunity to practice surrender once again, when my two suitcases never arrived at baggage claim.

It took the airline three more days to locate them in Mexico, send them to Costa Rica and deliver them to The Place we’re now staying. And while this particular practice of surrender was powerful for me and apparently necessary, I am happy to be reunited with my sandals and my coffee paraphernalia (along with my beautiful wife and children). Barukh Hashem!

On this Shabbat Vayeitzei, the Sabbath of Going Out, may we all remember to “go out” from our stories in time to meet the Timeless that glows softly within all things. Let’s greet the Timeless One- the Shabbos Kallah, the indwelling Hei Ha'olamim- Life of the Worlds, uniting Her with Her Source through our own inner return to the Ayin- the Nothing from which everything springs- on this Holy Shabbos Kodesh.

Good Shabbos, Good Shabbos,
b yosef

[**"Touch the Earth"- ﻿Parshat Vayeitzei**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/touch-the-earth-parshat-vayeitzei)
11/25/2014  [6 Comments](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/touch-the-earth-parshat-vayeitzei#comments)

Right now, as you read these words, how are you relating to this moment? Do you feel it to be a passage in time, a means to travel from your past toward your future? Do you feel that this moment is merely a stepping-stone from one moment to the next?

Or, instead, do you encounter this moment in and of itself? In other words- are you present, or are you hurrying through the present?

This parshah begins with Jacob fleeing from his brother Esau and heading to Haran where he will get married and begin a family. The drama of the story portrays this scene purely as a transitional moment. And yet, at this time of hurrying from one place to another, from one stage of life to another, something remarkable happens: “Vayifga BaMakom- He encountered the place” (Gen. 28:11).

What does that mean?

The word for “encounter” (peh-gimel-ayin) means to “meet” or to “happen upon”, but it can also mean to “hit”, as in “hitting the bulls eye”. In other words, this seemingly insignificant moment becomes the “target”. Jacob has an encounter.

What does he encounter? He encounters the “place”. Not a particular thing or being, but the space in which things and beings appear. The word for “the place”- HaMakom- is also a Divine Name. So, when Jacob shifts his attention toward the space within which this moment unfolds, he encounters the Divine. Meaning, he encounters the Reality of the Space Itself, rather than his mental idea of the space as merely a temporal hallway between memory and anticipation.

How does he do it? He places stones around his head and lies down in the “place”. He brings that which is most ethereal and formless- mind and thought- to the most concrete and solid- stones of the earth. This practice of focusing on something physical brings the mind out of its constant stream of thinking, out of its ideas about what is going on, and into connection with what is really going on, right now. Awareness becomes presence by touching forms that are actually present.

Jacob then dreams of a ladder set on the earth, reaching toward the heavens, with angels ascending and descending upon it- “Jacob’s Ladder”. Hassidic master Rabbi Aharon of Karlin taught on this verse that the ladder itself is an instruction in presence. It teaches that when one’s feet are firmly rooted in the earth, one’s head can reach the heavens. Being “rooted in the earth” means that awareness is connected with the physical world, as it is. The “head reaching the heavens” means that, paradoxically, when awareness is totally connected to the physical, you can become aware of that which is aware; awareness becomes aware of awareness. As long as awareness is wrapped up in thinking, it dreams that it is the thinking. It dreams up the “me” that is defined by thinking. But when thinking subsides, there can be this realization: I am not this thought-based self. I am just this boundless, free, radiant awareness. The head has reached the heavens!

Jacob then awakens and exclaims: “Yesh Hashem bamakom hazeh- The Divine is in this place- v’anokhi lo yadati- and I didn’t even know it!”

Here, the Torah gives us an excellent description of what “awakening” is all about- it gives us a "Torah of Awakening". In the dream state, the mind-generated self imagines the Divine to be elsewhere. It is something to be reached, achieved, hoped for, given up on, disillusioned about. But even within the dream there are clues. Just as Jacob understood the message of the ladder, so it is with everything in our lives: If we look carefully, it is possible to see: That which we seek is That which is Present. But to see this requires becoming present. The present is whole, complete, Divine. To be present is to not be separate from that wholeness.

Then, as you journey in the world of time, you can stay connected to that wholeness. You can draw from the wellspring of renewal, even as you do your work in the world, as it says a few verses later- “vayar v’hinei v’er basadeh- he looked, and behold- a well in the field!”

To be sure, as Jacob’s ensuing twenty years of servitude to his uncle Lavan shows, life can still be replete with challenges. But when you are rooted in the earth and your head reaches the heavens, the challenges are different. There is a lightness- as it says when Jacob leaves the “place” after his vision-“Vayisa Yaakov raglav vayelekh- Jacob lifted his feet and went”- it is as if he is flying. Actually, the things and events in time are flying- endlessly coming and going, while the Place remains endlessly the same. What is that Place? It is always where you are and it is also ultimately what you are: Divine Presence, living as this one, ever-changing moment.

Take a moment to connect with the Place through connecting with the Earth- take off your shoes, touch the Earth, bow your head to the ground... enjoy!