

## This Week In Torah *Vayetsei*

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How is your Thanksgiving week going? Sure, this pandemic has altered plans and compelled many to suspend time-honored family traditions. But remember—a socially distant Thanksgiving is one way to ensure that you don't have an ICU Hanukkah! Also, remember those memories of what was should not inflict pangs of loss; it can be a catalyst to recommit to do what is necessary to help ensure that what-was-once can be once-again.

Take Jacob for example. In this week's *parasha*, Jacob has a theophany—an encounter with God. In a dream of a ladder that extends to heaven, Jacob hears God speak to him reminding him of the *brit* that was established between Abraham and Isaac.

Uncomfortable with his head on a rock, Jacob awakes to proclaim, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the abode of God, and that is the gateway to heaven." Then Jacob responds to this encounter with a conditional response, " If God remains with me, if He protects me on this journey that I am making, and gives me bread to eat and clothing to wear, and if I return safe to my father's house—the LORD shall be my God." Let me suggest that Jacob's response is not transactional in nature but transformative; Jacob is not setting conditions but he is willing to frame life with Divine presence. Whatever happens, he understands God is there but if he fails to admit this then he is shutting God out as if God doesn't exist.

How we frame spiritual encounters is less about to ratiocinate through cause and effect, but more a willingness to define us as part of the Divine realm. Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik wrote that logic does not always sustain faith; sometimes trust beyond what can be defined will suffice.

The same is true as we try to balance the need for social distancing with our Thanksgiving meal in the wake of this pandemic. Sure, we can rationally explain the science of this, but it still hurts. That is why memories come into play—

Genesis 28:13—“And the LORD was standing beside him and He said, “I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac: the ground on which you are lying I will assign to you and to your offspring.”

*The Daily* is a *New York Times* podcast. A few weeks ago, it featured a young reporter recording a Zoom conversation between herself and her grandmother about matzah ball soup. The reporter was searching for the secret since she could not replicate it—she tried using a fowl to make broth, various brands of matzah meal as well as recipes to make the matzah balls. The grandmother shared the secret recipe—open four cans of College Inn chicken stock, add vegetables, use the Manischewitz matzah ball mix. “That’s it? No secret recipe? Cans and a mix.” the reporter said with surprise. “O, darling. I am not a chef. I assemble, not cook. The reason why it tasted so good was where and when I served it.”

---Location, location, location.

---The memory of another generation doing the preparing makes it so much sweeter.

---Trying to replicate it won’t work. But it will when one plays it forward and prepares it with love for another.

That is what Jacob gleaned in his theophany at Beth El. The simplicity of an encounter is more complicated than it seems. Rational logic needs to yield radial logic; memories are mixed in with Jacob’s vulnerability and his narcissism. Fear of the unknown is balanced with a sense of divine prophecy. History of what happened can be repeated with a new twist in another generation; where past virtues strengthen another’s resolve.

Grandma’s soup may be efficiently made but it is still delicious. The memories add to it. “Behold God was in this place and I did not know it.”