

Torah Tidbits from Rabbi Larry Moldo

Dreams and visions

This week we begin Jacob's solo adventure. The story picks up just after he and his mother have tricked Isaac into giving Jacob Esav's blessing. Esav, naturally, is a bit agitated and really wants to get back at Jacob in some permanent way. For Jacob's protection (and to keep Esav from becoming yet another fratricidal success) his parents send him out to the Old Country. They promise to send word to him when the coast is clear.

He starts his journey, so worried about God and protection that he has a very nice dream of angels, ladders, and a God who is present in places where Jacob didn't think God was.

Things happen as they often do - Jacob falls in love, gets married twice, and works for a scheming father-in-law as the good, impoverished servant/slave he is. He never does receive any word from his parents that it is safe to come home - whether it is because Esav never forgot or Laban never let the message be delivered is unclear, because the text says nothing about it. After about 20 years, Jacob has another dream sequence. In this one, he uncovers the best way to increase "his" flock, as Laban seems a bit averse to giving him anything on a permanent basis.

At this point he realizes that between the fact that his successes are being used against him to enrich every other member of Laban's family and the content of the dream, that it is time to go back. Even if the coast is not clear, and even if Esav has gotten better at being violent.

It is time to go home.

Home, to Jacob, is where God can be found in the strangest of places, and where hopeful visions have at least a small chance of coming true. In this space called "making a living" there is no room for hope. All there is time for is hard work, and even more hard work, knowing that there is no future in it. Laban will always be there to change the rules and take away almost everything you have.

By the way, Laban is not legally wrong, even according to Torah law. When a slave starts a position as a single person, he leaves the position as a single person - and if he is given a wife by his master, then the wife and any children belong to the master and he still leaves as a single person. It is still not a nice thing to treat your nephew as if he is a stranger.

What do we hope for? What dreams do we have? Can we bring the sense of home with us, so that even when we are focused on "making a living" we still have hopeful dreams involving God? When violent people in the world strive to remake the world in their image, can we find the strength to face our own shortcomings and enable the innocent to survive? Let us at least strive to keep all the innocent who are suffering in mind as we muddle through with our lives, and resolve to be even more kind, caring and compassionate as we work to avoid future massacres.