

## A Closer Look- Vayetzei

### The Text:

Jacob left Beersheba and traveled toward Charan. He came upon a certain place and spent the night there, for the sun had gone down...He had a dream: there was a ladder standing on the ground, with its head reaching Heaven; angels of the Lord were going up and down it.

And behold - God was standing over him; He said, "I am God, Lord of your father Abraham, and Lord of Isaac. The land upon which you lie I shall give to you and to your descendants. Your descendants shall be as many as the dust of the earth ....I shall be with you; I shall guard you wherever you go, and return you to this land. I shall not abandon you until I have fulfilled what I have said..."

Jacob awoke from his slumber, and said, "Indeed! God is in this place - and I did not know..."[Genesis 28: 10-16]

"And I did not know' –i.e. had I known, I would not have slept in such a holy place." [Rashi, commenting on above.]

### The Puzzle:

Jacob realizes that he has unwittingly violated the holiness of this special place by sleeping there. Knowing what he now knows, he exclaims, he would never have done so.

Jacob just experienced an amazing prophecy, with a personal promise of God's protection and blessing, his destiny as the father of a great nation, and the inheritance of the Holy Land. If Jacob hadn't gone to sleep, he would have missed it all! And doesn't having this prophecy prove that God *wanted* him to sleep here?

### The Answer:

It doesn't matter what the benefits were - if sleeping here is disrespectful, it can't be done. What would happen to the prophecy if Jacob wouldn't sleep? God will figure that out. Jacob's job is to do the right thing under all circumstances.

### The Message:

The end doesn't justify the means. We usually apply this principle to black-and- white *rules* – you can't steal, even if you want to give the money to charity. But in matters of etiquette – being a mensch – we're a bit more flexible: "I hate to be rude, but I had to make a point!" To Jacob, such intangibles were just as important as any other laws. It's worth giving up a once-in-a-lifetime prophetic experience, if the alternative is overstepping the bounds of propriety.