

# RABBI JACK'S MESSAGE IN A MINUTE



One of the most moving stories in the Book of Genesis is found in this week's reading of *parashat Vayetze*. Jacob in his meanderings, pauses to rest and begins to sleep. He experiences a vision, a ladder that is grounded on Earth, but rises upward to Heaven. Jacob sees angels of the Lord, both ascending and descending upon it's rungs. In that moment God "spoke" to Jacob, and reaffirmed the covenant he made with the prior matriarchs and patriarchs. Namely, that Jacob's people will be given a homeland, that his children and their descendants will be numerous, and they will be forever in a relationship with *Adonai* through the wisdom contained in the Torah.

Feeling the presence of the Almighty, Jacob emotionally declares that he was not aware that this place was a portal to the Divine, and so as a reminder, he named the location Beth-El, the House of God. There is something unusual, and perhaps instructive, in the actual language Jacob used to express his sense of awe and communion with the Creator. He said, "*Anochi, lo yadati*" "I didn't know"...this was a holy space. (Gen. 28:16) Actually, if we are going to translate the biblical Hebrew accurately it would be, "*Anochi*" means "I", "*lo yadati*" means "I don't know". Therefore, the verse literally says, "I, I don't know". What to make of this strange phrase, with the unnecessary "I"?

There is a beautiful *drash*, explanation, that offers to make sense of the odd verbiage while at the same time imparting a worthwhile spiritual message. You see the verse can also be read as "I did not know I"--which Jacob exclaimed the moment he realized he had a direct encounter with God. That is to say, according to the kabbalistic commentators, only when you are able to shed the awareness of yourself, to not "know" your "I" are you able to tap into the mystical realm of a heavenly connection.

This sudden utterance of Jacob reveals that to reach a godly plane we must not think of ourselves, not be self centered, selfish or in any way be concerned about what might be in it for us. Rather, knowing holiness is losing yourself for the sake of others. No wonder Jacob was renamed Israel, the namesake that symbolizes the possibility of a world in which the focus is on the other--the widow, the orphan, the stranger, the immigrant and the poor. Only then can we be open to the possibility of being in perfect harmony with a power greater than our own.

L'shalom,  
Rabbi Jack