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Holy Sleep

When I was a teenager I overslept a lot. It wasn't that I had a hard time waking up, my problem was that I always went back to sleep.

Yaakov Avinu unknowingly slept in the place of the future Beit Hamikdash. He had a prophetic dream, seeing angels and hearing from God. Suddenly, he woke up exclaiming his cluelessness that God was in this place! He became full of fear, sleeping in the house of God, at the gates to heaven.

The very next verse says he woke up in the morning. Does this imply that he went back to sleep? How could he sleep in such a holy place?

Perhaps there is something deeper going on here. Rav Hirsch comments that Yaakov

didn't just realize that he was in a holy place, he realized that a place down here on earth has the capacity to be holy. God isn't just in the heavens, we can serve him in this physical world. In Yaakov's dream God promises that he will be with him in *everything* he does. Yaakov internalizes this with his prayer the next morning, recognizing that the bread he eats and clothing he wears is directly from God.

It is no coincidence that the reward for *oneg shabbat*, eating and sleeping on our holiest day, is to receive the reward promised to Yaakov in this very dream. This episode introduced the idea that eating, and dare I suggest sleeping, have tremendous potential religious value. May our sleep be filled with gratitude for the wonderful gift that it is, and infused with purpose, gathering strength to continue serving God in all of our ways.



Mordechai Grossman
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Finding light in the dark

"וישק יעקב לרחל וישא את קולו ויברך"

Rashi explains that Yaakov cried because he was going to Rachel empty handed after all of his possessions were stolen by his nephew Eliphaz. At the same time,

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Eliphaz who was on a mission to kill Yaakov at the request of his father, Esav. However, because Eliphaz was a student of Yitzchak, he wasn't able to go through with the murder. When Eliphaz reached Yaakov, he said to him "what should I do about my father's command?" Yaakov replied "take my possessions, because a poor person is considered like a dead person". As a result, Eliphaz was able to keep his father's command by "killing" Yaakov.

Using this extreme example, Rav Chaim Shmulevitz expressed the great contrast of good and evil that is found within every person, adding that even Torah learning cannot necessarily save someone unless his intentions are pure. As it says in Hoshea, "for the ways of HaShem are straight, and the righteous will walk in them and the rebellious will stumble in them". Another example of this is brought in the Gemara which compares Torah to a powerful drug - if it is used properly it will bring life, if not, it will be like a deathly poison.

Similarly, the Vilna Gaon writes that Torah represents water and causes anything that it comes across to grow - whether for good or bad. He explains that both plants used for medicine and those which are poisonous all grow when watered. So too, Torah causes whatever is in the heart to grow, whether for good or bad. Shabbat Shalom! ■

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