

Dear Chavraya,

Every journey in the realm of space has a corresponding inner journey. The landscape of our experience in the world is mirrored in the landscape of our souls. So it was for our ancestor Jacob when he set out from B'er Sheva to go to the land of Charan, the place of his mother's birth. At the outset of this week's Torah portion, *parashat Vayetze*, the sun is setting on Jacob's first day on the road and he seeks a resting place upon the hard ground, drawing together stones to make a pillow for his head.

Alone in the desert darkness, away from home for the first time, fleeing the turmoil of a family divided, we can imagine the swirling of emotions within Jacob. The inner journey wends its way through Jacob's soul, territory as uncharted and challenging as the desert of his physical journey. On the spatial plane, Jacob is seeking the way to Charan. In the realm of soul and psyche, Jacob's inner journey is to find wholeness, *sh'laymut*.

When Jacob comes to the place where he will spend the night, the Torah says, *vayifga bamakom, he encountered the place*. The word *makom*, a word of layered meaning, appears in some form eleven times in the *parasha*. *Makom* means *place* and it is also one of God's names, reflecting omnipresence, the Place of the world. Jacob encounters a place of struggle, along the road and within himself. This is to be the nature of Jacob's life, our ancestor, and so for ourselves.

In his book, *Bais Aharon*, Rebbe Aharon of Karlin offers from the mid-nineteenth century a strikingly modern psychological insight. In addition to meaning *encounter*, the word *vayifga* also means *injury, wound, damage*. The Karliner teaches that we should read the word *vayifga* literally, as *wound*. The inner wound needs to be healed. Shifting from Jacob, the Karliner speaks to each one of us, *shelo yihiyeh libcha chaluk al hamakom/so that your heart will not be divided against the place*. When in the quietude of night we encounter that place of our own inner wounds, then healing and wholeness will come on the wings of dawn. *Hamakom/the Place* - - it is God, it is the innermost place of our souls, it is the physical place of our journey. Encountering the place, we find wholeness.

As we come to encounter the place that is Shabbos, may we find wholeness within ourselves, with each other, and with God, Who is Hamakom.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor