

# *A Blessing to Wake Up To*

PARSHA INSIGHTS - VAYAITZAI (5759)

## **DID YOU SAY “MODEH ANI” TODAY?**

“Yaacov awoke out of his sleep, and he said, ‘Surely Hashem is in this place, and I did not know it!’ And he was afraid, and said, ‘How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of G-d, and this is the gate of Heaven.’” (28:16-17) The Torah is recording Yaacov’s reaction to his dream about angels going up and down a ladder leading to the heavenly realm. This occurred on his way from *Eretz Yisroel* [the Land of Israel] to Aram to find a wife and start the nation of *Klal Yisroel* [the Jewish people]. After awakening from his otherworldly vision, he grasped the sanctity of the place, the future site of the *Bais Hamikdosh* [Temple] (see 28:17 with *Rashi*).

Rav Zalman Sorotzkin reminds us that besides the simple meaning of the text, the actions of the forefathers and mothers are examples from which we are supposed to learn. The word “Yaacov”, used so many times to refer to that lofty individual, can also be a term for his progeny, the Jewish people as a whole. We are actually nicknamed “Yaacov”, since it is another term for “Yisroel” (as he was renamed in *Parshas Vayishlach*). Consequently, we need to study Yaacov’s behavior as he arose from sleep, and this will guide us in our own conduct.

**“Yaacov awoke... and he said, ‘Surely Hashem is in this place...’”** This is a sign that when a Jew wakes up in the morning, he must immediately understand that “Hashem is in this place.” He needs to acknowledge this by reciting the prayer known as “*Modeh Ani*”. We will discuss this *tefila* [prayer] in more detail shortly.

**“...And I did not know it...”** I have not yet studied and comprehended Torah today. I do not know it as of yet! Thus, a Jew is expected to recite *Birchas Hatorah* [the blessings preceding Torah study] in the morning. He must then strengthen himself like a lion to delve into Torah, the Divine Intellect, in its written and oral forms. *Chumash* and *Mishnayos*, *Gemara* and *Halacha*, ancient and recent commentaries - he needs to learn and KNOW Torah.

**“And he was afraid, and said, ‘How awesome is this place!’”** A person must become full of reverence for Hashem. He must picture how he would act if he were standing before a human king, as stated by the *Rama in Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 1:1. With this attitude, he will successfully get up to serve Hashem with devotion, as stated afterward concerning Yaacov: **“And Yaacov arose early in the morning.”**

Here are the words of the *Mishna Brura* in *Orach Chaim* 1:8, regarding the “*Modeh Ani*” prayer. Immediately upon getting up, it is proper for a person to say “*Modeh Ani*”. The recitation means as follows:

*“I thank You, living and eternal King,  
For You have returned my soul within me compassionately;  
Great is Your faithfulness.”*

This is based on a verse in *Megillas Aicha* [the Book of Lamentations] 3:23: “They are new every morning - great is Your faithfulness.” The concept is that we are assured each morning that Hashem will restore the souls entrusted to Him while people are sleeping. The *Mishna Brura* points out that this prayer of thanks may be said even before one washes his hands, even if they are certainly soiled. The reason? It contains no actual name of Hashem in any form. (He adds, though, that Torah study is prohibited until one washes. Plus, the person has not said the *brachos* [blessings] before learning Torah - *Birchas Hatorah*, so it is certainly forbidden to learn at this point.)

We see that a Jew must dedicate himself to Hashem from the very first moment of each day. Yaacov’s awakening is a hint to this. Please remember to say *Modeh Ani*!

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