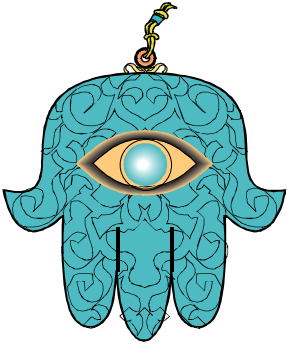
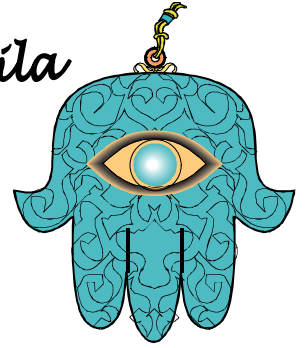


Spiritual Thought for the Week

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Praying in the Dark ***(Parashat Vayetze – Genesis 28:10-32:3)***

You are walking all alone, unaware of the passage of time. As you look up in the heavens, you realize that the sun is setting, and darkness is setting in. As you look around, you also realize that you have walked very far, and you are now a great distance from your home. You have no cell phone, and there is no immediate transportation available. Darkness sets in, and you become frightened. **“Jacob left Beer-Sheba, and set out for Haran. He came upon a certain place and stopped there for the night, for the sun had set”** (Genesis 28:10-11). On his journey towards Haran, Jacob encounters darkness, in a place that the Torah simply calls “a certain place.” What was this “certain place”?

According to some commentators, that “certain place” was Mount Moriah, the future site of the Beit Ha-Mikdash (The Holy Temple in Jerusalem). The place had personal meaning to Jacob, as it was the site where his father Isaac was bound on an altar, almost offered up as a sacrifice. If indeed this was the “certain place” where Jacob had arrived, the combination of physical darkness, along with the emotional and psychological terror of standing in this very spot, must have been a frightening experience for Jacob.

There are others who read the Hebrew word for “a certain place” – **“Makom”** – as a metaphor for God, especially in light of **“Ha-Makom”** being one of the titles given to God in the Talmud. Read this way, the Hebrew **“Va-Yifga Ba-Makom”** would be translated **“He encountered God.”** This was Jacob’s very first encounter with God, and it happened in the dark, “for the sun had set.”

Whether his encounter was with a frightening place, or with God, the rabbis tell us that Jacob’s reaction to being in the dark, all alone, was to pray: **“Jacob initiated Tefillat Arvit (the Evening Prayer)...at evening a person should say, May it be Your will, O Lord my God, that you bring me out of darkness into light”** (Midrash Bereshit Rabbah 68:11).

Like Jacob, that long walk you took all alone, now in the dark, can either become a lonely encounter with an emotional issue from your own past, or it can become an encounter with God. Whichever it is, our reaction – when all alone in the dark – is to pray, as Jacob did, that God shall **“Bring us out of darkness into light.”**