

## Human Rights Shabbat, Parashat Vayetze - Rabbi Debra Rappaport

[Open with invitation to guided meditation; base on the following from Sheila Peltz Weinberg via Rachel Goldenberg]:

Find a relaxed, stable, alert position for the body. Close the eyes or soften the gaze. Take three deep breaths in and out. Feel contact between the feet and the floor, between your body and the seat or floor. Release the shoulders and any other places that feel tension - the face, the jaw, hips. Allow the breath to come and go naturally.

Now, take a few moments to bring to mind a moment when you felt held - a moment when you felt seen. Use your imagination to remember the place, the time, the person or people who were with you, could be a pet, who surrounded you with love and safety, who saw and accepted you in that moment without judgment. You didn't have to do anything to receive or deserve their kindness beyond just being you.

When you've identified this moment, allow the body to feel the sensations you felt in that moment. Receive the feeling of being held, of being seen. Allow the heart to open to how it feels to be known and cared for. When the thoughts wander, bring the awareness back to that felt sense of being held and seen.

From this week's *parsha*, *vayetze*:

Jacob left Beer-sheva, and set out for Haran. He came upon **a certain place** and stopped there for the night, for the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of **that place**, he put it under his head and lay down in **that place**. He had a dream; a stairway was set on the ground and its top reached to the sky, and angels of God were going up and down on it. And YHVH was standing beside him and He said, "I am YHVH, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac: the ground on which you are lying I will assign to you and to your offspring. Your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you and your descendants. Remember, I am with you: I will protect you wherever you go and will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely YHVH is present in **this place**, and I did not know it!" Shaken, he said, "How awesome is **this place**! This is none other than the abode of God, and that is the gateway to heaven." Gen. 28:10-17

In these opening verses of our parasha, the word, "makom," or "place" appears five times. You may know that *ha-Makom*, the place, is one of the Hebrew names for God. In this story, *ha-Makom*, that place of comfort, could be any place, and even, as our colleague Rabbi Rachel Goldenberg suggests, *ha-Makom* is actually a moment - a moment for Jacob of feeling deeply cared for, connected, and seen. In our own moments of feeling held and seen, we get a taste, perhaps of what Jacob experiences in this dream. Perhaps like a parent tucking us in, or a dream of loved ones from which we wake up with an unexplainable sense of well-being.

You may be wondering why I'm evoking such love and comfort when it's Human Rights Shabbat, and so many human rights are being violated at this moment in so many places. Actually, that is precisely why I've brought this teaching. Around the world, our brothers and sisters are without Place for a ridiculous number of reasons including but not limited to incarceration, religious persecution, ethnic cleansing, human trafficking, environmental disasters, mental health challenges, poverty. The human need for *Makom* is real and significant. It is a basic human right to have a safe place to lay our heads for the night so that we can dream and imagine like Jacob did. [If you aren't familiar with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, I encourage you to find and read it.

This moment of grace came upon Jacob when he least expected it. Feeling connected with our own sense of *Makom* can help each of us be that angel bearing acts of loving kindness that might surprise another when they most need it. May we have strength and courage to take action to support human rights from a place of love, of *ha-Makom*. Shabbat Shalom.