

## Parshat Vayetze: Feeling his presence during the way

November 24, 2012

Last week we learnt about the complex dynamics within Isaac's family: Two parents who each one loved one son more than the other, a couple where the wife (Rebecca) deceive her husband asking her son Jacob to dress up like Esau to receiving the first-born blessing. We spoke last week about what happens in a family when the parents don't have their eyes wide open to see what is happening, and especially we reflected about how the family have to pay the consequences of those absences.

In our Parsha, the first one who starts paying the price of his own mistakes was Jacob. After deceiving his father with Rebecca's complicity he needed to escape from the fury of Esau who wanted to kill him. Jacob run for his life starting a dangerous journey from Beer Sheva to Haran, birth town of his mother, with the intention of meeting his uncle Laban and finding a wife.

But the journey is not easy at all: He left Beer Sheva with nothing more than himself, not enough food and even without enough cloth. You can imagine how desperate the young Jacob should have been escaping in the middle of the dessert, departing from his mother, probably with remorse and guilt, without food nor clothing, not knowing what the future will bring and not knowing if he would see his parents again.

And in the middle of this despair, the night arrives and he has a dream: *“He saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. There above it stood the Lord, and he said: “I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac....I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go.”*

Jacob discovers God’s presence in the middle of his anguish and realizes that the God of his father and his grandfather is also with him. We could say that Jacob represent the typical case of the one who looks for God in bad situations (“There are no atheists in foxholes”) and probably that is related to his immaturity and his complex past. But I think the story here highlights a very deep and meaningful message:

Jacob was escaping from his own misbehaviour and the fact that he is alone in the night, in the middle of the dessert, without food or clothes, is just the beginning of several consequences he would need to assume because of his past deeds (come to the synagogue on Saturday to see how the story continues...) Jacob started to pay a high price for something that was his own responsibility and he must address that only by himself. And in the middle of this situation, alone and without almost anything, he discovers God who says to him: “I am the Lord of your father and grandfather. Don’t worry Jacob! You won’t be alone, I will be with you!”

And that is a beautiful message:

As Jacob, when we make big mistakes in life, especially related to our families and loved ones, we will have to assume important consequences and face the challenge of starting again, paying the price of what we did. But even though it could be the most difficult test in our life, even if we are completely alone and lacking the most basic things, God always will be with us and will never abandon us.

We don't disappoint God with our mistakes because He doesn't want us to be perfect. He also won't come to solve our problems and to fix our life: That is something we have to do by ourselves (exactly as Jacob did when he reconciled Esau after learning the lesson in Laban's house). But while we try harder to be better human beings, assuming consequences and fixing mistakes, God says to us: "I know it is difficult... I know you are feeling guilty, sad and alone, but I am here with you, and I will be with you during all the way".

Shabbat Shalom!

Rabbi Claudio