

Vayetzei Drosh by James Burns – December 3rd, 2022

We have just read Vayetzei, where we learnt about Yaakov's dream and his subsequent marriages to Rachel and Leah. Reading it through, the part I kept coming back to was the second verse in which we learn that Yaakov arrives in the place, and he spends the night there, using a **stone (or perhaps stones)** for a pillow before falling into a deep sleep.

וַיִּפְגַּע בַּמָּקוֹם וַיֵּלֶן שָׁם כִּי־בָא הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וַיִּקַּח מֵאֲבָנֵי הַמָּקוֹם וַיִּשָּׂם
מֵרָאשִׁיתוֹ וַיִּשְׁכַּב בַּמָּקוֹם הַהוּא:

There's a lot to unpick here. Firstly, why was a stone used as a pillow, who **here** would make that choice? It could be purely practical – it is the custom in some places never to sleep directly on the ground, always elevating your head to guard against insects and small animals creeping into the various orifices of your face. Or perhaps it could have been to do with the particular type of stone; those who believe in the power of crystals will often sleep with a specific stone under their pillow, to help with their dreams – more on that later.

A stone must make for a very uncomfortable pillow, and yet this may have been the first time in more than a decade that Yaakov slept through the night, as according to the Talmud, he did not flee directly to Haran (as would seem from the text), but rather studied for 14 years at the study house of Shem and Eber, never lying down to sleep, only drowsing for a while before continuing his studies. If that's the case, perhaps his slumber was just a very deep sleep, and the dream was just a dream.

I want to go back and look at the pillow and how it was created. There seems to be a discrepancy in how many stones were used to create the pillow. Different translations say he took ***of the stones of the place OR some of the stones OR one of the stones***. After Yaakov's dream, it is written, and the translations seem to agree, *that he rose up early and took the **stone** he placed under his head*. Here we have a singular stone, whereas in the previous verse there may have been more than one.

Midrashim offer different opinions on this verse (obviously!): Rashi says that Yaakov made the headrest "and, afterward, they became one stone via a miracle that night", which suggests the transformation happened after Yaakov had gone to bed, so he choose multiple stones for his pillow. Others suggest that Yaakov rested his head on a merged stone, so either he put the stones down and they merged in front of him, or the stones were already merged before he chose them.

What is so special about a stone (or stones) that Yaakov was able to use one as a conduit to the almighty? This is where I want to bring things back to the idea of gemstones. Yaakov was the father of the tribes of Israel, and Aaron's breastplate was adorned with twelve stones, one for each of the tribes. Exactly which stones adorned the breastplate, as well as which gem was linked to which tribe, is a matter of dispute, and there are more than 30 opinions on this.

In the study of crystals, three of the possible stones on the breastplate are thought to influence dreams.

The first of these is the amethyst, found in the third row of the breastplate. The Hebrew word for **amethyst**, *ahlamah* -- אֶחְלָמָה, literally means “dream stone,” and it was thought that it induced pleasant dreams. It is used by those with racing thoughts, who need something to calm their minds before bed or who wish to access other realms and improve their psychic abilities.

Lapis Lazuli is a semiprecious stone that has been used for centuries to induce lucid dreaming and it is a possibility either for Sapir on the second row of stones (according to the description by Greek philosopher Theophrastus, who described it as "dark" and having the "colour of verdigris", as well as being "speckled as of with gold"), or Tarsis on the fourth row, which was supposedly the colour of the sea, but is also described as having gold flecks. The stone is said to have a strong connection to the subconscious mind, and is thought to help unlock the secrets of the subconscious.

It is also said to help improve communication between the conscious and subconscious minds, making it easier for people to become aware of their dreams and achieve lucidity. In addition, Lapis Lazuli is believed to help connect people with their **spiritual guides and angels**, making it easier for them to access guidance and support during their journey through lucid dreaming.

Finally, we have **Jasper**, the last of the twelve stones found on the 4th row of the breast plate. Yasefeh – יָסֵפֶה, in Hebrew means precious stone. Red jasper is said to be a powerful stone for those who wish to explore the world of lucid dreaming. It is said to help one become aware of the dream state and to control the dream environment. It's a stone of creativity and can help you make decisions of how you'd like your lucid dreams to progress forward.

Perhaps the stone/stones that Yaakov choose were infused with one of more of these three stones? They would certainly account for Yaakov's dream, (although it could still be the 14 years without a good night's sleep that was the cause).

So, what happened to Yaakov's pillow? According to folklore, it was brought to Scotland by way of Egypt, Spain and Ireland by the prophet Jeremiah, and named the Stone of Scone, where it became an ancient symbol of Scottish sovereignty.

Also known as the Stone of Destiny, it was used for centuries in the coronation ceremonies of Scottish monarchs.

Following his victory at the Battle of Dunbar in 1296, England's King Edward I seized the stone from Scotland's Scone Abbey and had it fitted into the base of a specially crafted wooden Coronation Chair on which English—and later British—monarchs have been crowned inside London's Westminster Abbey ever since. The stone was secretly buried underneath the historic abbey for safekeeping during World War II. Seven hundred years after King Edward I removed the Stone of Scone from Scottish soil, British Prime Minister John Major unexpectedly announced its return, which occurred on November 15, 1996. It now resides in Edinburgh Castle but will be made available for future coronation ceremonies at Westminster Abbey including that of Charles III next May.

Is it the real stone though? Rumours persist in Scotland, that the rock taken by King Edward I was a replica and that the monks at Scone Abbey hid the actual stone in a river or buried it for safekeeping. We may never know the truth about the stone, or is it stones, or what led to Yaakov's dream.