

On Being the Other (Zohar 1:148)

R. Yitzchak was walking alone at night. He came upon a father and his two sons speaking about the sun. Uninvited, he followed behind them listening from a distance. They spoke about gods invitation towards man and mans invitation towards god. They spoke about the holy madness of King David, the reversal of laughter and grace, and the ways in which god must behave while in the house of his faithful. R. Yitzchak revealed himself to them, kissed them, and exclaimed, “had I only embarked upon this path to hear this, it would have, could have been enough.” A fleeting sense of fulfillment, a sense of totality lost as quickly as it was grasped.

The mans son opens and speaks, interpreting Jacob’s descent from Beer-Sheva into Haran. Previously interpreted as the descent from faith into doubt, day into night, serenity into rage; the son reads Jacobs descent as the quest towards relation, towards the other.

The son continues: what does it mean that Jacob stumbled upon the place? He opens with an analogy, a story within a story, a meandering tale amongst those that wander on the way...

When the king descends to the dwelling of his queen, a dwelling removed in time and space from the trappings of royalty, removed from the beds of gold and the images of open spaces . A distant place, devoid of externality. A space that is sparse and impoverished, a bed of stone and a blanket of wheat. He must cast off the burdens of his certainty, the edifices of the known, he must descend into the unknown invitation. He must leave what was once his, he must let himself be invited, he must descend into the pit with flames of desire. For even the stones of her floor are enrapturing.

Jacob was surprised. Caught off guard. Invited by the beckoning call of that place. In the depths of night, Jacob descended into the dreamscape of the host.

Wandering on the way (אורחא), stumbling upon strangers, R. Yitzchak becomes the guest (אורח), humbling himself in the face of the other, being welcomed. Giving space.

R. Yitzchak heard the words of the mans son, and R. Yitzchak cried.