

PARSHAT VAYESHEV
GENESIS 37:1-40:23
21 KISLEV 5783/15 DECEMBER 2022



Figure at the Window
Oil on papier-mâché by Salvador Dalí (1925)

THE USES OF A CLOAK

1. Now Israel loved Joseph best of all his sons, for he was the child of his old age. He made him a striped cloak. (Genesis 37:3)

She took off her widow garment, covered her face with a veil and, wrapping herself up, sat down at the entrance to Enaim... (Genesis 38:14)

“...he left his garment with me and fled outside.” (Genesis 39:18)

2. “And Jacob settled (*vayeshev*).” Jacob sought to dwell in tranquility. But then the disturbance regarding Joseph sprung upon him. The righteous seek to dwell on tranquility. But the Holy Blessed One said, “The righteous do not consider that which is prepared for them in the world to come to be enough for them; they seek to dwell in tranquility in this world as well!” (Rashi at 37:2)

3. “Jacob settled in the land of Canaan, in the land of his father’s sojournings [*megurei aviv*].” (37:1) He settled in the land of his father’s fear [*megurei aviv*] and in the land of Canaan, of humility [*kana*] - and he sought to dwell in peace. This peace obtains when a person behaves in such a way as to keep far from all doubt, and guards himself from any evil act. That is the modality of peace. But in response to Jacob’s desire for such peace, God told him that as long as a human being lives in a bodily experience, it is impossible to behave with extreme wariness and fear and humility. For God wants human acts, and in this world human beings must act in love, in ways that are not completely clarified. (Ishbitzer, Mei HaShiloach)

גור - to sojourn; גַּר - sojourner

גור - to stir up strife; מְגוּר - fear, terror

4. [Freud] sees every life as an attempt to clothe itself in its own metaphors. (Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*)

[Freud] let us see that any supposed limit on the range of human possibilities, any religious or philosophical context within which we might hope to put the entire range of human lives, any all-encompassing goal for human beings as such, will always be a projection of some particular choice among those possibilities, a working out of one particular fantasy, a picture of human existence drawn from one particular perspective....*The horizon will move on whenever we do, there will be a context beyond every context.*

Language is to be used as an adaptive tool to cope with the natural and social environments to achieve a desired, pragmatic end.

It is better to focus on whether one has been imaginative enough to develop interesting alternatives to one’s present beliefs....In a foundationless world creative humanism replaces the quest for an external authority to provide hope for a better future, a future free from dogmatically authoritarian assertions about truth and goodness.