

If G-d came to us in a dream, chances are we would have a reaction. Whether positive or negative, excited or frightened, we probably would not pretend like it never happened. Yet Lavan did just that. Or so it seems.

As Lavan searches for a fleeing Yaakov, Hashem appears to him in a dream. Already the story is unusual, as Lavan was clearly not worthy of such an honor. Yet the more surprising aspect of this dream is Lavan's response, or his lack of one. Hashem tells Lavan that he is forbidden from speaking with Yaakov "from good to bad" things (31, 24). But that does not phase Lavan. He continues on to rebuke Yaakov for leaving.

Further, later on in the story when Lavan asks Yaakov to make a peace deal, he ambiguously says, "He shall be a witness between us" (31,44). Rashi tells us that Hashem is the witness that Lavan is referring to. Why is that Lavan goes from ignoring G-d when He comes to him in a dream, to respecting Him and wanting Him to be a "witness" between him and Yaakov only pessukim later?

We only know that Lavan remembers the dream when he tells Yaakov that he has the ability to hurt him, but since Hashem warned him not to say anything to him "from good to bad," he will not cause him harm (31,29). To me that sounds like someone declaring himself to have begun fasting before sitting down for a large meal. Lavan finally recognizes that he had the dream, but is Lavan not directly disobeying G-d's order as he relays the order to Yaakov? Not only is Lavan speaking to Yaakov, but also he seems to be violating particularly the "bad" aspect of the manner in which G-d did not want him to address Yaakov with.

The Netziv points out in “Haemek Davar” that really Lavan was not commanded to not speak at all with Yaakov. Hashem commanded him to watch the way he spoke. If Hashem had not wanted Lavan to speak with Yaakov at all, He would have used language that certainly would have scared Lavan into not talking to Yaakov. With this specification, we understand that Lavan was not completely disobeying G-d when he spoke to Yaakov.

Quoting the Abarbanel, Malbim helps us understand the rest. Hashem specified to Lavan not to speak with Yaakov first with good, and then with bad. Instead Lavan is only allowed to start with bad, and end on good terms, which indeed he does. Lavan is upset with Yaakov because he left without letting him kiss his kids goodbye. But in the end, he leaves after making a peace covenant, with a positive outcome. With this approach we can understand that Lavan did in fact listen to Hashem, and did not need to respond because he understood that he could not go against G-d. Proof is that he tells Yaakov that he is able cause harm to him, yet because of the dream he does not (31, 29).

I would like to suggest that now it makes sense that Lavan made Hashem a witness in the covenant. After all was said and done, however scornful Lavan acted, he ended on good terms. To celebrate his geniality, Lavan tried to communicate to Hashem that he listened to Him. But do not be fooled by Lavan’s attempted righteousness. The passuk tells us that after the covenant, “Lavan returned to his place” (32,1). More than literally, I think we can understand that Lavan’s brief instance of obeying Hashem, which itself was

scattered with hateful statements directed towards Yaakov, did not leave a lasting impression. Lavan returned home, returning to his evil ways as well.

Good Shabbos from the Kotel.

David Mandelbaum