

(10) Yaakov left Be'er Sheva and went to Charan.

(11) He chanced upon “the place” and spent the night there because the sun had set. He took from the stones of the place and he placed them around his head and lay down [to sleep] in that place.

(12) He had a dream. There was a ladder positioned [with its base] towards the ground and its top reaching up to the heavens. The angels of God were ascending and descending upon it.

(13) And God was positioned upon him, and said, “I am the Lord God of Avraham your father, and the God of Yitzchak: the land on which you lie, to you will I give it and to your seed.”

THE WHOLE WORLD EXISTS FOR THE SAKE OF YAAKOV

Consider the following questions:

1. Having stated in verse 10 that Yaakov went to Charan, how can the next verse say that he chanced upon “the place” — which refers to *Har HaMoriah*, the site of *Akeidas Yitzchak* and the future Temple Mount in Yerushalayim?¹ After all, he had already reached his destination outside the Land of Israel.²
2. In telling us that Yaakov came to *Har HaMoriah* the *pasuk* says: וַיִּפְגַּע בַּבְּמָקוֹם, he chanced upon “the place” (verse 11). Why does the Torah use the unusual expression of “chanced upon”?
3. The Torah (verse 28:19) tells that that the place where Yaakov slept was formerly called Luz, and Yaakov named it Beis-El (the House of God).³ The obvious difficulty is

1. See Rashi to verses 11 and 17.

2. Charan was a city located in present-day Turkey.

3. Luz (Beis-El) is located in Eretz Yisrael, about ten miles north of Jerusalem.

(י) וַיֵּצֵא יַעֲקֹב מִבְּאֵר שֶׁבַע וַיֵּלֶךְ חֲרָנָה.
 (יא) וַיִּפְגַּע בַּמָּקוֹם וַיֵּלֶן שָׁם כִּי־בָא הַשָּׁמֶשׁ וַיִּקַּח מֵאֲבְנֵי הַמָּקוֹם
 וַיִּשֶׂם מִרְאֲשֵׁיתוֹ וַיִּשְׁכַּב בַּמָּקוֹם הַהוּא.
 (יב) וַיַּחֲלֹם וְהִנֵּה סֹלֶם מְצֹב אֶרְצָה וְרֹאשׁוֹ מִגִּיעַ הַשָּׁמַיְמָה וְהִנֵּה
 מַלְאָכֵי אֱלֹהִים עֹלִים וְיֹרְדִים בּוֹ.
 (יג) וְהִנֵּה ה' נֹצֵב עָלָיו וַיֹּאמֶר אָנֹכִי ה' אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹרָהֶם אָבִיךָ וְאֱלֹהֵי
 צִיְחָק הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה שֹׁכֵב עָלֶיהָ לָךְ אֲתַנְנָה וּלְזַרְעֶךָ:

that, as stated in Question 1, “the place” where Yaakov slept was actually Yerushalayim. In addressing this difficulty, Rashi writes that *Har HaMoriah* was uprooted from its place and transported miraculously to Luz.⁴ But we may ask: wouldn’t it have been more appropriate for Luz (which was a relatively less important place) to be uprooted and transported to the Temple Mount?

4. Our Sages (*Chullin* 91b) tell us that Hashem made the sun set before its time in order to force Yaakov to spend the night in that place. Why did He use such an extreme measure to accomplish this goal?
5. Why does the Torah need to tell us so many details in verse 11 — He chanced upon the place; he spent the night there; the sun set; he took from the stones and placed them around his head; he lay down to sleep in that place?
6. What is the meaning of angels ascending and descending in Yaakov’s dream?
7. What is the deeper meaning of Yaakov’s dream about the ladder?

4. Rashi, verse 28:17. This is how Rashi explains the קפיצת הדרך (“contraction of the way”) mentioned in *Chullin* 91b; see further. Hashem performed the miracle of קפיצת הדרך in order to help Yaakov and hasten his return trip.

In answer to the first question, our Sages⁵ explain that after Yaakov got to Charan, he felt bad that he had passed by the place of the future Beis HaMikdash — where Avraham and Yitzchak had poured out their hearts to God — and he had not prayed there. He therefore decided to retrace his steps in order to pray there himself. In other words, Yaakov indeed *went to Charan* first and only afterward came to “*the place*,” i.e., the Temple Mount.

To explain this more deeply: When Yaakov was approaching Lavan’s home in Charan, he became concerned about how he would survive Lavan’s schemes against him. He was particularly worried since he had left the sanctity of Eretz Yisrael and the protective embrace of the Divine Presence in order to live in an impure land. He therefore decided to turn back and visit the holiest place on earth — the future Temple Mount, *Har HaMoriah*. There he would beg for Hashem’s protection even after he would leave the Land of Israel. [This answers Question 1.]

Answer to
Question 1

Responding to Yaakov’s prayer, God appeared to him on *Har HaMoriah* and showed him that even though he was unimportant in his own eyes, in truth the entire world was created in his merit,⁶ and therefore he had nothing to fear. How did God do this? By showing him that the entire world was subservient to him.⁷

The universe can be divided into three levels: (1) the lower part of the physical world — i.e., the earth and everything in it; (2) the higher part of the physical world — i.e., the heavens and the stars; and (3) the spiritual realm, which is inhabited by *malachim* (angels).

- (1) In order to show Yaakov that the physical world was subservient to him, God uprooted the holiest place in the

5. *Chullin* 91b.

6. See *Vayikra Rabbah* 36:4, cited by the Alshich.

7. As the Alshich writes, if the entire world existed only in Yaakov’s merit, it was morally obligated, as it were, to be subservient to him. (Cf. Ramban, *Bereishis* 1:29.)

physical world, *Har HaMoriah* — the gateway to heaven, the place from which He took the earth to form Adam, and the site of the future Beis HaMikdash — and brought it to Yaakov, in Luz. This point would not have been made if God had instead brought Luz to *Har HaMoriah*. [This answers Question 3.]

Answer to
Question 3

- (2) In order to show Yaakov that the heavens and stars were subservient to him, Hashem altered the very operation of the heavenly bodies and caused the sun to set early, thus forcing Yaakov to spend the night where he was. Delaying Yaakov in a more mundane way would not have accomplished this purpose. [This answers Question 4.]
- (3) In order to show Yaakov that the angels were subservient to him, Hashem showed him the vision of a ladder reaching up to the heavens, with angels ascending and descending upon it. The Midrash⁸ gives two explanations of this phenomenon. (a) The angels who had been accompanying and protecting Yaakov in Eretz Yisrael were returning to heaven, while at the same time a new group of angels was descending to accompany and protect Yaakov outside Eretz Yisrael. (b) The angels who were ascending were those who had been sent to destroy Sedom. These angels had not been allowed to return to heaven after accomplishing their mission⁹ because they had arrogantly stated, “**We** are destroying Sedom,”¹⁰ when they should have said, “God is destroying Sedom.” When Yaakov came to *Har HaMoriah*, God gave them permission to return to heaven in Yaakov’s merit. They then descended in his honor, coming this time to serve him and accompany

Answer to
Question 4

8. *Bereishis Rabbah* 68:12.

9. The Midrash states that this had occurred 138 years earlier.

10. *Bereishis* 19:13.

Chapter 28

(20) Ya'akov made a vow, saying, "If God (Elohim) will be with me and protect me on this journey that I am making, if He gives me food to eat and clothes to wear,

(21) "And if I return intact (בְּשָׁלוֹם) to my father's house, Hashem will be my God."

Answer to
Question 6 and
Beginning of
Question 7

him.¹¹ According to both explanations, the angels in the dream were demonstrating that the angelic realm was subservient to him. [This answers Question 6 and begins the answer to Question 7.]

Completion
of Answer to
Question 7

The Torah also tells us (verse 13) that *God was positioned upon him* (Yaakov). This part of the vision symbolizes that only God was above Yaakov (for everything except God was subordinate to him). It further symbolizes that God chose Yaakov (and no one else in his generation) to serve as His Chariot, i.e., as the vehicle through which the Divine Presence would be present in the world, resting *upon him*.¹² [This completes the answer to Question 7.]

Based on what we have learned, we can also understand the use of the unusual word (וַיִּפְגַּע) in verse 11. We have explained that Yaakov, after arriving in Charan, headed back to Eretz Yisrael to pray at *Har HaMoriah*; and that when he arrived in Beis-El, Hashem brought *Har HaMoriah* to him. In light of this, it is not at all hard to fathom that Yaakov had no idea that the mountain he had now come across was actually the destination he was seeking. That is why the Torah describes Yaakov's arrival at the future Temple Mount with the phrase, וַיִּפְגַּע בַּמָּקוֹם — *he chanced upon "the place."* It was a sudden, unexpected encounter. [This answers Question 2.]

Answer to
Question 2

11. One difference between the two explanations is that according to the first one, the angels ascending the ladder were a different group than the ones who were descending it, with both happening at the same time; according to the second explanation, the angels ascending the ladder were the same group who had descended it many years earlier.

12. For a fuller explanation of this concept, see Alshich above, *Parashas Vayeira*, text at footnote 15.

(כ) וַיִּזְדַּר יַעֲקֹב נֹדֵד לֵאמֹר אִם־יְהִיָּה אֱלֹהִים עִמָּדִי וְשָׁמַרְנִי בַדֶּרֶךְ
הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי הוֹלֵךְ וְנִתְּנָלִי לֶחֶם לֶאֱכֹל וּבְגָד לְלַבֵּשׁ.
(כא) וְשָׁבְתִי בְשָׁלוֹם אֶל־בֵּית אָבִי וְהָיָה ה' לִי לֵאלֹהִים.

The Torah's use of the word וַיִּפְגַּע also helps us understand the various details given in the rest of the verse (see Question 5). It was because Yaakov *chanced upon* “the place” without realizing that it was the sacred ground of *Har HaMoriah* that he dared to spend the night there. And if you wonder why Yaakov *spent the night there* instead of continuing on to Yerushalayim (considering that he did not realize that Yerushalayim had come to him), the answer is that it was because the *sun had set*. And because he was still unaware that he was on sacred ground, *he took from the stones of the place* and made personal use of them, placing them *around his head ... and lay down [to sleep]*.¹³ [This answers Question 5.]

Answer to
Question 5

In sum, it was through Yaakov's dream and all that accompanied it that Hashem showed Yaakov that the entire world was subservient to him, and that he therefore had no reason to fear leaving Eretz Yisrael and going to Lavan's house.

YAAKOV MAKES A VOW TO GOD

Consider the following questions:

1. Why does verse 20 state that Yaakov made a vow, **saying** (“לאמר”)? This word always connotes “to say to

13. As the Alshich notes, when Yaakov woke up from his sleep he proclaimed (verse 16), אֲכֹן יֵשׁ ה' בְּמִקוֹם הַזֶּה וְאֲנֹכִי לֹא יָדַעְתִּי, *Surely, Hashem is in this place, and I did not know!* Upon which Rashi comments: Yaakov was saying, “Had I known, I would not have slept here.”

14. Translation of this *pasuk* and the next follows the simple meaning of the text. We shall see that the Alshich explains these *pesukim* differently.