

# ALSHICH

## INSIGHTS FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE

ספר בראשית

פרשת ויצא

SERIES 1: ISSUE 7

## THE WHOLE WORLD EXISTS FOR THE SAKE OF YAAKOV

### Chapter 28

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

(י) וַיֵּצֵא יַעֲקֹב מִבְּעַר שֶׁבַע וַיֵּלֶךְ חָרָנָה.

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.

(יא) וַיִּפְגַּע בַּמָּקוֹם וַיֵּלֶן שָׁם כִּי בָא הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וַיִּקַּח מֵאֲבָנֵי הַמָּקוֹם וַיִּשֶׂם מִרְאֲשׁוֹתָיו וַיִּשְׁכַּב בַּמָּקוֹם הַהוּא.

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.

(יב) וַיַּחְלֵם וְהִנֵּה סֹלֶם מַצֵּב אֶרְצָה וְרֹאשׁוֹ מַגִּיעַ הַשָּׁמַיְמָה וְהִנֵּה מַלְאֲכֵי אֱלֹהִים עֹלִים וְיֹרְדִים בּוֹ.

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."

(יג) וְהִנֵּה ה' נֹצֵב עָלָיו וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹתֶיךָ וְאֵלֹהֵי יִצְחָק הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה שֹׁכֵב עָלֶיהָ לְךָ אֶתְנַנְנָה וְלִזְרַעֲךָ.

### Consider the following questions:

1. 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 *the place*. Why did He use such an extreme measure to accomplish this goal?
2. Why does the Torah need to tell us so many details in verse 11 – He chanced upon the place; he spent the night; the sun set; he took from the stones and placed them around his head; he lay down to sleep?
3. What is the meaning of angels ascending and descending in Yaakov's dream?
4. What is the deeper meaning of Yaakov's dream about the ladder?

A short introduction is necessary to understand our passage: Our Sages (*Chullin* 91b) say that Yaakov reached Charan but went back because he felt bad that he hadn't prayed first at *Har HaMoriah* to beg for Hashem's protection even after he would leave the Land of Israel. Yet the Torah shortly says (verse 19) that the place where Yaakov slept was formerly called Luz and Yaakov renamed it Beit El (House of God) after he woke up from his dream. In addressing this difficulty, Rashi writes that *Har HaMoriah* was uprooted from its place and transported miraculously to Luz.

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. This explains the Torah's unusual use in verse 11 of the phrase *וַיִּפְגַּע בַּמָּקוֹם*, that he "**chanced upon the place**," referring to the future site of the Beis HaMikdash. This also helps us understand the various details given in the rest of the verse. 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*. [\[This answers Question 2.\]](#)

In response to Yaakov's plea for protection, God showed him that even though he was unimportant in his own eyes, in truth the entire universe was created in his merit (as noted in *Vayikra Rabba* 36:4) and therefore it was morally obligated, as it were, to be subservient to him, so he had nothing to fear.

To show Yaakov that the **physical world** was subservient to him, Hashem (as stated above) uprooted the holiest place in the physical world, *Har HaMoriah* – the gateway to heaven, the site of the future *Beis HaMikdash* – and brought it to him, in Luz. 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. [\[This answers Question 1.\]](#) Then, in order to show Yaakov that even the **spiritual realm**, inhabited by 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.

*Bereishis Rabbah* 68:12 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 mission because they had arrogantly stated (*Bereishis* 19:13), "**We** are destroying Sedom," 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 him. According to both explanations, the angels in the dream were demonstrating that the angelic realm was subservient to him. [\[This answers Question 3 and begins to answer Question 4.\]](#)

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*. [\[This completes the answer to Question 4.\]](#)

### THE ALSHICH AND HIS COMMENTARY

The Alshich (1508–1600), was one of only five famous rabbis in Jewish history universally known by the title "HaKadosh" (the holy one). He served on the same Beis Din as Rabbi Yosef Caro, author of the *Shulchan Aruch*. The Alshich is most noted for his monumental Tanach commentary.

The Alshich uses his creative insight and encyclopaedic knowledge of Tanach, Talmud, and Midrash to weave together his profound interpretations. He simultaneously focuses on the text as well as the context of a series of verses by listing a range of questions and then answering them all with one or two concepts.

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