

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter VII: Vayetzei (Gen. 28:10-32:3)

Essay 4. Jacob's dream confirmed that he held the birthright

מדרש על פסוק "ויחלם והנה סלם מצב ארצה", והנה "סלם" זה הכפוש. "מצב ארצה" זה המזבח, הדא הוא דכתיב "מזבח אדמה תעשה-לי", "וראשו מגיע השמימה" אלו הקרבנות וכו', "והנה מלאכי אלהים" וכו' אלו הפקדים וכו'. רבנן פתרון ליה בסיני, והנה "סלם" זה סיני. "מצב ארצה" "ויחלמו בפתחתיה החר". "וראשו מגיע השמימה" "והנה בער באש עד-לב השמים" וכו' עכ"ל. קשה מה ענין אלו דברים להראותם למעקב במקום הנה ובזמן הנה?

There is a **midrash on the verse, "He dreamt: a ladder was set on the ground and its top reached to the sky, and messengers of G-d were going up and down on it."**¹

Bar Kappara taught [that the verse related to the Temple]: **Here we understand the word "a ladder": this is the ramp. "Set on the ground": this is the altar, as it is written, "Make for Me an altar of earth."**² **"And its top reached to the sky": these are the sacrifices whose fragrance rise to Heaven. "And messengers of G-d" etc.: these are the high priests.**

The rabbis taught [otherwise, that] this [verse] as [referring to] **Sinai: Here "a ladder": this is Sinai. "Set on the ground": [Refers to] "and they took their places at the foot of the mountain."**³ **"And its top reached to the sky": [Refers to] "The mountain was ablaze with flames to the heart of Heaven, dark with densest clouds."**⁴

- Gen. Rabbah 68:12

A question is why were these things shown to Jacob at this place and at this time?

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¹ Gen. 28:12.

² Ex. 20:21.

³ Ex. 19:17.

⁴ Deut. 4:11.

וניש לומר דאימא במדרש רבה על פסוק "ויקרא יצחק אל-יעקב ויברך אתו", שברכו ברפת הגלות, וקשה וכי הגלות ברכה היא? אבל איתא במדרש שבמראה בין הבתרים הראה לו הקב"ה לאברהם גיהנם ושעבוד מלכות ומתן תורה וקרבנות, ואמר לו כל זמן שבניך יהיו עסוקים בשמים יהיו ניצולין משמים, ואחר כך ישאל לו במה אתה רוצה שיירדו בניך, בגיהנם או במלכות, ובירר לו המלכות.

It can be said that it's brought in Midrash Gen. Rabbah 75:8 on the verse as Jacob was about to flee to Haran to avoid the wrath of Esau, "So Isaac sent for Jacob and blessed him; he instructed him, saying, 'You shall not take a wife from among the Canaanite women.'"⁵ The Midrash says **that he blessed him with the blessing of Exile, and this is difficult, for is Exile a blessing?**

But it's brought in the Midrash Gen. Rabbah 44:21 that in the vision "between the pieces,"⁶ the Holy One, Blessed be He, showed to Abraham both Gehenna and the subjugation to the kingdoms, and also the giving of the Torah and the sacrifices.⁷ [G-d] said to [Abraham], "As long as your children occupy themselves with [the latter] two, they will be saved from [the former] two." Afterward, He asked him: "Where do you prefer your children to descend? To Gehenna, or to the kingdoms?" [G-d] chose for him the kingdoms.

ומשום הכי יצדק שפיר לומר ברפת גלות, כדי שלא ירדו בניו לגיהנם, ובנדאי שיעקב בכל הדבר הזה מהרהר לבו על ברכה זו שברכו אביו והיה מצטער על הדבר הזה. לכן בשרו הקב"ה והראהו בחלום שתי דברים אשר אם יעסקו בהם יהיו ניצולין מן הגלות, על דבר שאין מראין לו לאדם אלא מהרהורי לבו.

Because of this, [Isaac] was certainly correct to recite a blessing of Exile, in order that his children not descend to Gehenna, and it is certain that Jacob would have pondered in his heart the entire trip about this blessing that his father had blessed him with, and he would have agonized over this matter. Therefore, the Holy One, Blessed be He, gladdened him with good tidings and showed him in the dream two things, that if [his descendants] would engage in [the Torah and sacrifices], they would be saved from the Exile. This is in the way that "a person is shown [in his dream] only the thoughts of his heart [when he was awake],"⁸ i.e., if a person is pondering a matter when awake, he often has dreams about the matter.

⁵ Gen. 28:1.

⁶ Gen. 15:9–21.

⁷ Gen. Rabbah 44:21: "Simeon b. Abba said in R. Yochanan's name: [G-d] showed him four things: Gehenna, the [foreign] kingdoms, Revelation, and the Temple, with the promise: 'As long as your children occupy themselves with the latter two, they will be saved from the former two. If they neglect the latter two, they will be punished by the former two. Would you rather that your children descend into Gehenna or into the power of the [foreign] kingdoms?' He asked him. R. Chanina b. Papa said: Abraham himself chose [subjection to foreign] powers. R. Yudan, R. Idei, and R. Chama b. R. Chanina said: Abraham chose Gehenna, but the Holy One, Blessed be He, chose [subjection to foreign] powers for him."

⁸ Berachot 55b.

ועוד איתא במדרש שם רבי יהושע בן לוי פתר קריא בגלות, שחלום הזה רומז על חלומי של נבוכדנצר הרשע, לומר שאחר הגלות הוא יגאלם וישיבם על אדמתם. והראיה לו גלות של כבדל כדאמרין בגמרא למה הגלן לכבדל? מפני שעמוקה כשאול, לרמז לו שהגלות הוא במקום שהינם. ועוד איתא במדרש על פסוק "והנה מלאכי אלהים" וכו', ר' ברכיה אומר עולם ושליש עולם הראה לו, עולים אין פחות משנים וכו'. וקשה מאי נפקא מינה במה שהראה לו עולם ושליש עולם.

It is also brought in the Midrash there (68:13) that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi explained the verse about the exile, that this dream hints at the dream of the wicked Nebuchadnezzar,⁹ to say that after the Exile, [G-d] will redeem them and settle them on their Land. [G-d] showed [Jacob] the Babylonian Exile, as it says in the Gemara: "Why did he exile them to Babylon? Because it is [a land] as deep as the netherworld,"¹⁰ i.e., it is a land of plains and valleys, to hint to [Jacob] that the Exile is in place of Gehenna.

It's also brought in the Midrash (68:12) on the verse, "and messengers of G-d were going up and down on it," that "Rabbi Berechya said 'a world and a third of a world He showed to him [meaning four angels], no less than two were ascending, and two descending [for the verbs ascending and descending are in the plural form], for each angel is a third of the world [in size].' . . . Those angels who escort a man in the Land of Israel do not escort him outside the Land. Thus, 'ascending' refers to those who had escorted him in the Land [who are now returning to Heaven], while 'descending' refers to those who were to escort him outside the Land."

It is difficult to understand what practical difference there is why He showed him a world and a third of a world, i.e., four angels.

ולפי עניינו אתי שפיר, שיעקב היה מהרהר בלבו נמי על הבכורה שלקח מעשו אם מתקיים בידו אם לאו, ואין מראין לו לאדם כנ"ל. והעולמות הם שנים וכל אחד הם ג' שלישים, נמצא שהם בין הכל שישה שלישים. והבכור נוטל פי שנים, אם כן עולם ושליש עולם הראה לו לרמז שמתקיים בידו הבכורה.

Regarding our topic it is fine, that Jacob would have pondered in his heart about the birthright that he took from Esau, whether it would persist in his possession or not, and "a person is shown [in his dream] only the thoughts of his heart [when he was awake]," as discussed above. For Jacob and Esau, there are two worlds [bulk of angels], and each of [the worlds] is three thirds, so that it's found that altogether there are six thirds, i.e., six angels. The firstborn takes a double portion; if so, a world and a third world that was shown to [Jacob] hints that the birthright will persist in his possession. I.e., Esau merits one angel accompanying him in the Land of Israel, and a different angel accompanying him outside the Land. Jacob, who possesses the birthright, has a double portion: two angels accompanying him in the Land of Israel, and two different angels accompanying him outside the Land. Thus, the dream of four angels showed Jacob that he still had the birthright.

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⁹ Daniel, chapter 2.

¹⁰ Pesachim 87b.