

# The Path To Follow

Vayeitzei

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Rabbi David Pinto Shlita

## The Temple: Source of Israel's Prosperity

**I**t is written, "He came upon the place and spent the night there.... He dreamed, and behold: A ladder set up on the earth, and its top reached the heavens. And behold, angels of G-d ascending and descending on it. ... Jacob awoke from his sleep... and he was frightened and said: 'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of G-d, and this is the gate of Heaven' " (*Bereshith* 28:11-17).

When Jacob reached this sanctified place, the Temple Mount (*Chullin* 91b), he rested and slept. In his dream, he saw a ladder whose feet were set up on earth and whose top reached the heavens, with angels ascending and descending upon it. In his dream, G-d promised him: "Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth" (*Bereshith* 28:14). Yet it was only when Jacob awoke that he understood the sanctity of this place, for he said: "This is none other than the house of G-d."

This incident is difficult to understand, and it leaves us puzzled.

Why did Divine Providence lead Jacob to sleep at the very place where the Temple would be built, rather than elsewhere? Furthermore, why did G-d reveal Himself to Jacob precisely there, since He could have also revealed Himself to Jacob and blessed him elsewhere?

We also need to understand and explain the connection that exists between the ladder which the angels were ascending and descending, and G-d's promise to Jacob that "the land upon which you are lying, to you will I give it and to your descendants" (*Bereshith* 28:13). What did G-d mean by this?

G-d's will was for Jacob, "the chosen one among the Patriarchs" (*Bereshith Rabba* 76:1), to rest in this very place – where the Temple would be built – in order to teach us what enables Jews to enter the Temple, to approach the Holy of Holies, and to cleave to G-d; it is to make us understand that prosperity, blessings, and success come from this place. In fact on that very night, Jacob enjoyed a lofty physical and spiritual level by sleeping in that place after having spent 14 years without sleep, as the Sages have said: "Here he lay down to sleep, but he did not sleep during the 14 years of his seclusion in the land when he studied under Eber" (*Bereshith Rabba* 68:11).

In fact after having sensed the holiness of this place, Jacob was seized with fright and exclaimed: "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of G-d." In other

words, such great holiness and purity could only be found in the Temple, and he therefore understood that from this place – from the area destined for the Temple – the source of all holiness springs forth. Those who visit it will bathe in the sanctity of "the house of G-d" – the Sanctuary – and the hearts of Jews will remain drawn and attached to G-d (the word *Mishkan* [Sanctuary] and the word *moshech* [to draw in] come from the same root), and they will sanctify themselves. "The gate of Heaven" means that the Temple (and the merit that it confers upon us) elevates, sanctifies, and makes us cleave to the Torah, which is acquired through 48 attributes (*Pirkei Avoth* 6:6; *Kallah* 8). When a person cleaves to his Creator, he enjoys supreme elation and resembles "a ladder set up on the earth...its top reach[ing] the heavens" (*Bereshith* 28:12), elevating himself higher and higher.

Nevertheless, the Jewish people are liable to "ascend and descend" in their spiritual lives, sometimes defeating the evil inclination and sometimes being defeated by it. As the Sages have said, "He who places himself in the arena stands either to fail or win" (*Shemot Rabba* 27:9).

This teaches us a valuable lesson that applies throughout our lives. Today, when we are in exile – when the Temple has been destroyed because of our sins, and when our glory, our protection, and our sanctification has left us – we only have the Torah that remains, which alone can save us from the influence of this bitter exile (*Zohar* I:152b; III:176a). All that remains to sanctify us are our houses of study and houses of prayer, each of which constitute a "miniature Temple" (*Megillah* 29a). We must therefore frequent them in order to escape harmful influences. The Sages have said, "Since the day that the Temple was destroyed, the Holy One, blessed be He, has nothing in His world but four cubits of Halachah" (*Berachot* 8a; *Zohar* III:202a), meaning four cubits of Torah and prayer. It is also said, "Hashem loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob" (*Tehillim* 87:2). "The gates of Zion" – these represent the gates of Heaven that Jacob saw in his vision; "the dwellings of Jacob" – these represent the houses of study and houses of prayer that we have in place of the Sanctuary and Temple. It is only when we frequent them that we are saved from falling, as the Sages have said: "The Torah protects and saves" (*Sotah* 21a).

### Complete Honesty and Integrity

The greatest among our people, our father Jacob, the father of the twelve tribes, found himself confronted by a deceitful “employer” who acted with creative deceptiveness, of which he was the master. It is not without reason that he deserved the dubious title of “Lavan the Aramean,” which also means: The deceitful one.

Yet our father Jacob, who merited the crown of pure truth – as the verse says, “Grant truth to Jacob” (Micah 7:20) – taught us a lesson in how we must conduct ourselves. He taught us to walk in paths of honesty, integrity, and righteousness, without worrying about the character of our employer or the merchant we are dealing with.

Regarding the verse in this week’s *parsha*, “Jacob sent and summoned Rachel and Leah to the field” (*Bereshith* 31:4), the Sages say that Jacob’s intentions were sincere: He did not want to stop working, which was to watch over the herd, as he was speaking with his wives. He therefore called them into the field so he could speak with them there, and not stop watching over the herd for even an instant.

In his book *Tuvcha Yabiu*, the *gaon* Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein *Shlita* writes the following:

“Today, one of the ways in which we can sanctify G-d’s Name is through complete honesty. A Jew who works for a living, regardless of the field, can sanctify G-d’s Name by demonstrating to everyone that he is completely committed to not stealing even a penny from his employer, by never neglecting his duties, and by never using his employer’s office or factory materials for his own use.”

### Witnesses in the Celestial Court

In the book *Kav HaYashar*, Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch Kaidanover *Zatzal* states: “I knew a Jew who worked as a tailor. Before his death, he instructed the members of the *Chevra Kadisha* to make his coffin from the bench upon which he worked, and to place in his hand the ruler with which he measured fabric.

“When they expressed their surprise at this strange request, the tailor explained that his workbench and ruler would serve as his defenders, testifying on his behalf before the Celestial Court that he never took the least amount of fabric from what his clients brought him to make their garments, and that he practiced his profession with complete honesty.”

### The Concept of Theft

It is said that the *gaon* Rabbi Israel Salanter *Zatzal*, the founder of the Mussar Movement, once gave a lesson in mussar to a local cobbler. He asked the cobbler to make certain, whenever he hammered nails into a sole, to take his time and work carefully. “Why?” asked the cobbler. Rabbi Israel gently replied, “If you make a mistake about the position of the nails, they will enter the sole at the wrong place, and over time the shoe will be damaged. It will no longer be wearable at that point, and you will be guilty of theft.”

What follows is another account drawn from the notes taken by one of Rabbi Israel Salanter’s students:

When Rabbi Israel lived in Memel, a new *Chazan* was appointed in synagogue. Naturally, he asked Rabbi Israel for his advice on what he should focus on during prayer.

“First of all,” replied Rabbi Israel, “You should clearly rehearse all the prayer melodies in order to faithfully carry out your duties. Otherwise it will constitute theft, for you have been paid to pray.”

### He Disregarded All Personal Considerations

Rabbi Eliyahu Dov Leizerovitch *Zatzal*, among the greatest disciples of the Alter of Kelm (Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv *Zatzal*), was the spiritual leader of the Ohr HaChaim yeshiva in Slabodka. Incredible accounts are told about the devotion and loyalty he demonstrated for his work at the yeshiva, and the way in which he completely dedicated himself to whatever task was entrusted to him.

Rabbi Eliyahu Dov remained within the walls of the yeshiva for the entire day. He was the first to arrive in the morning and the last to leave at night, and he never turned his attention away from his students at any time of the day.

The yeshiva was located in Slabodka, a suburb of Kovno, while his home was located far away in Kovno. To reach the yeshiva, Rabbi Eliyahu Dov had to cross the Vilia River, and yet he would always get up very early each day to arrive for the *Shacharit* service. He would then remain at the yeshiva late into the night, after all the *sedarim* were completed, in order to supervise the students at all hours of the day. During the day, his food consisted of some cake and a bottle of milk, which he brought from home. It was only when he returned home at night that he ate his main meal.

On Fridays, Rabbi Eliyahu Dov arrived early to welcome Shabbat at the yeshiva, where he remained late into the night. It was only during the *sedarim* on the night of Shabbat that he felt he could return home to recite *Kiddush* and eat the Shabbat meal.

Rabbi Eliyahu Dov disregarded all personal considerations for the sake of his only objective and occupation: The good of the yeshiva students.

### Troublesome

It is written, “He came upon [*vayifga*] the place and spent the night there” (*Bereshith* 28:11).

The term *vayifga* designates prayer. Why does the verse use this term rather than to simply say, “He prayed there”?

Rabbi David of Lvov *Zatzal* answers this by stating that the Torah wants to teach us that when a person is about to pray and ask G-d for all his needs, he should act like a son towards his father. In fact when a person asks his father for something, the more he desires it, the more he will ask for it, over and over again, until it actually becomes troublesome (*paga*) to his father. The father will eventually grant him what he wants, if he sees just to what extent his son is pleading with him for it.

This is how we must pray to Hashem, with tremendous persistence, until we bother Him, so to speak. Our Father is compassionate, which is why the Torah placed all this in the term *vayifga*, in the sense of troublesome.

### A Certain Splendor

It is written, “Jacob departed from Beersheba” (*Bereshith* 28:10).

Rashi states, “This teaches that the departure of a *tzaddik* from a place makes an impression, for while the *tzaddik* is in the city, he is its glory, he is its splendor, he is its majesty. When he departs from there, its glory has departed, its splendor has departed, its majesty has departed.”

The commentators ask why the Torah feels the need to mention the effects of a *tzaddik's* departure in regards to Jacob, rather than in regards to Abraham or Isaac.

The *gaon* Rabbi Shmuel Rosovsky explains that here the Torah wants to teach us that although Isaac and Rebecca remained in the city, Jacob's departure was still noticed. It is not because there are no *tzaddikim* left in a city that the effect is even greater, but because of the fact that each *tzaddik* has a particular splendor and glory. When a *tzaddik* leaves a place while other *tzaddikim* remain, his departure is still noticed because a certain splendor is missing, the specific glory of that *tzaddik*. We learn this from Jacob, who despite leaving his parents Isaac and Rebecca in the city, still created a void of his particular splendor.

### Ascending and Descending

It is written, "Behold, angels of G-d ascending and descending" (*Bereshith* 28:12).

Since angels dwell in the upper worlds, they should have first descended and only then ascended. Why does the text say, "ascending and descending"?

Rashi explains that the angels of Eretz Israel who had accompanied Jacob until then were now ascending to Heaven, and angels for outside Eretz Israel were descending. Rabbi Chaim Berlin, however, believes that even if the verse is speaking about the same angels, it can easily be explained. To what can it be compared? It is like the eastern side of a synagogue: It is considered an elevated place because that is where the ark is located, and therefore if a person heads in that direction, he is said to be ascending. However if the ark were to be placed at the western side of a synagogue, that side would become elevated in importance, and people there would be described as being "above."

Because the passage states, "Behold, Hashem was standing over him" (*Bereshith* 28:13), at that point the earth grew in importance and was considered an elevated place. Therefore the angels coming to earth from Heaven would be regarded as "ascending," and those going to Heaven would be regarded as "descending."

### A Completely Different Subject

It is written, "He came upon the place and spent the night there" (*Bereshith* 28:11).

Rashi states that during the 14 years that Jacob lived with Eber, he did not sleep at night, for he was learning Torah.

Rabbi Meir Yechiel of Ostrova asks how these 14 years were special, since Jacob learned in the yeshiva of Shem and Eber even beforehand, as Rashi explains in *Parsha Toldot*: "Jacob was a wholesome man, abiding in tents" (*Bereshith* 25:27) – the tent of Shem and the tent of Eber.

Rabbi Meir Yechiel replies that Jacob initially studied with them how to serve Hashem among Jews, for at the time he was living among *tzaddikim* such as his parents and teachers. Afterwards, Jacob went to learn how to live as a Jew among non-Jews and evildoers such as Lavan, which is a different subject.

### The Ma'aser of Wisdom

It is written, "Of all that You give me, I will surely give You a tenth" (*Bereshith* 28:22).

In his book *Ta'am VaDa'at*, Rabbi Moshe Sternbuch *Shlita* notes that the duty to give a *ma'aser* applies not only to money, but

to everything that Hashem grants man. One must even give a *ma'aser* of the wisdom that He grants man, for one receives blessings and success as a result.

One of the disciples of Rabbi Shimon Shkop *Zatzal* cites him as saying, "Just as we give a *ma'aser* of our money as a way to become wealthier, likewise we become much wealthier in terms of spirituality when we give a *ma'aser* of our understanding." We are obligated to give others a portion of our wisdom, and we never lose out by giving.

It is said that several yeshiva students were not making progress in learning Torah, despite praying for it. They only saw a blessing in their learning when they devoted some of their time each day to helping weaker students, for they were aided by the merit of this "*tzeddakah*."

### This Heap and this Pillar

It is written, "This heap be witness, and this pillar be witness" (*Bereshith* 31:52).

In *Responsa Rambam* (No. 14), we find the following question: "What is the meaning of 'this heap' and 'this pillar'? It does not mean that the earth or the heap of stones or the pillar shall witness, but that they will be signs to remind people why they are there, becoming like witnesses."

## In the Light of the Parsha

### What Gives Angels the Strength to Recite the Shira?

It is written, "The voice is the voice of Jacob" (*Bereshith* 27:22).

We may explain this double expression allegorically, according to the book *Mishpat Tzedek*, based on a statement found in the Zohar: "If Israel only knew why G-d visits their sins upon them more than those of other nations, they would perceive that He does not collect from them a hundredth part of His due" (Zohar III:66a).

We know what the *sefarim* say (see *Be'er Mayim Chaim*, *Parsha Bereshith*, explanation of verse *Bereshith*, No. 6), namely that all the upper and lower worlds are under man's control. If a person studies Torah and serves Hashem, he receives divine emanations and transmits Hashem's influence to the worlds that depend on him. He therefore gives strength to the angels so they can recite the *shira*. However if the Children of Israel neglect the study of Torah and the service of Hashem, the angels cannot recite the *shira*, and none of the worlds will receive the emanations they require. If the Children of Israel sin, they create deficiencies in all the worlds, which is why their sins are so grave.

From here we learn that when Jacob's voice is heard, it also awakens the voice of the angels so they can recite the *shira*. According to this explanation, we may say that the double expression "the voice is the voice of Jacob" designates Jacob's voice in Torah learning in this world and Jacob's voice above. This is because Jacob's voice gives angels the strength to recite the *shira*.

## A Life of Torah

When the *gaon* Rabbi Moshe Sofer *Zatzal* (better known as the Chatam Sofer) was asked for the secret of his great success in learning Torah, he replied: "I became a *talmid chacham* in five minutes."

His students were stunned by this response. In five minutes? How can a person grow and elevate himself in Torah in so short a time? "In five minutes," replied the *gaon*, "the five minutes that one is constantly losing while waiting in line, either at the grocery store, at the train station, or while waiting for a bus. I never wasted these five minutes, for I used them to the utmost. By the power of those minutes, I grew and elevated myself in Torah!"

### What About My Time?

For more than 40 years, the Rosh Yeshiva of Kol Yaakov, Rav Yehudah Ades *Shlita*, lived near Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach *Zatzal*, the Rosh Yeshiva of Kol Torah. He learned from his Torah and saw how he conducted himself, being privy to his thoughts. In his eulogy for Rabbi Shlomo Zalman, Rav Yehudah Ades described just how much importance he attributed to time. In this context, he recounted two stories that he heard from him:

A Jew from Tel Aviv had arranged a meeting with Rabbi Shlomo Zalman for 4:00 pm in Jerusalem. Rabbi Shlomo arrived at the correct time, but the Jew in question was late. The Rav therefore got up and left. At 4:15 pm, the Jew from Tel Aviv arrived and waited for a long time, until he finally returned home.

A few hours later, he telephoned Rabbi Shlomo and asked why he had not waited for him. "We agreed to meet at 4:00 pm, but you weren't there!" replied the *gaon*. The man apologized, saying that it was difficult to arrive at the exact time when traveling from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, meaning that it was impossible to keep to a fixed schedule.

Rabbi Shlomo Zalman's reply was simple and yet true: "If you had left a half-hour earlier, you would have arrived in Jerusalem at 3:45 pm, and you have waited for 15 minutes. But that's not what you did, because you didn't want to waste your time. Yet why did you think that you could waste my time?"

### A Matter of Life and Death

Here is the second teaching from the Beit HaMidrash of Rav Yehudah Ades *Shlita*:

One day a Jew accompanied Rabbi Shlomo Zalman to his home along Ussishkin Road. This Jew was walking slowly, and Rabbi Shlomo asked if he could pick up the pace. The Jew refused, saying that he could not walk any faster. Rabbi Shlomo then said to him, "But I can't walk slowly, and so I'm going to proceed to the house, where I will wait for you."

When Rav Ades recounted this, he exclaimed: "This story teaches us a great lesson. Rabbi Shlomo Zalman was very careful never to hurt a Jew. That said, how could he leave the person accompanying him alone? The answer is that for Rabbi Shlomo Zalman, time was a matter of life and death. He therefore could not walk slowly, for time was too precious for him!"

### A Thousand Time More Effective!

A former student of the Porat Yosef yeshiva recounted the following story:

"On Sunday, we arrived at the yeshiva early in the morning. Rabbi Ezra Attiya *Zatzal*, the Rosh Yeshiva, saw us and asked the entire group: 'How many hours did you study on Shabbat?'"

"One of us said, 'One hour,' another responded, 'Two hours,' while a third person said, 'Three hours.' However Rabbi Ezra was not happy with these answers, and he said to us: 'I want you to sit down and study Torah for seven hours straight!' We were stunned when we heard this. Learning for seven hours on Shabbat? We couldn't even conceive of such a demand! However Rabbi Ezra Attiya did not let us off the hook: 'If you tell me that you studied for seven uninterrupted hours, I'll know that you are faithful students who learn for the sake of Heaven.'

"On the following Shabbat, several advanced students gathered in the Be'er Sheva synagogue in the Beit Israel district, where they studied Torah for seven hours straight, from morning till night, eating and drinking almost nothing. They lived only Torah.

"On Sunday morning, they told Rabbi Ezra that they had studied for seven hours on Shabbat. Clearly satisfied, he said to them: 'Good! But I didn't mean just one Shabbat. I meant every Shabbat!' Since that time, this group had gathered every Shabbat in the Be'er Sheva synagogue to learn, and for many of them it has become second nature."

The Sages say, "Shabbat was given to Israel only to study Torah" (*Yerushalmi, Shabbat* 15:3). This is why kabbalists have written that learning Torah on Shabbat is a thousand times more effective than during the week.

### He Never Stopped Learning Torah

Rabbi Chaim Yitzchak Hiekin *Zatzal*, the Rosh Yeshiva of Aix-les-Bains, describes the tremendous diligence of his teacher the *gaon* Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman *Zatzal*:

"For him the expression, 'His lips never ceased learning' was not just a figure of speech or an exaggeration. During the three and a half years that I studied at the Baranovitch yeshiva, I never heard a word other than Torah escape his lips!

"Even when Rabbi Elchanan returned home after an absence of many weeks, he exchanged only a few words with his wife: 'How are you? What are the children writing?' He would then immediately go and learn Torah.

"Even when his young son, Rabbi Naftali Beinisch, returned from the Mir yeshiva, and they met after a long time apart, even then Rabbi Elchanan did not change his ways. He extended his hand to him and said, '*Shalom Aleichem*' and quickly asked: 'How are you?' In the same breath he added: '*Nu*, we must study!'"

## Guard Your Tongue!

### How to Rectify Transgressions

If a person has transgressed by believing *Lashon Harah*, to rectify it he must remove the matter from his heart by not believing it. Even if he finds it difficult to imagine that the person who told him about it was inventing stories, he should tell himself that perhaps he added something or omitted some detail from the account, or he left out a statement that was said by others. As such, what he was told has been changed from good to bad. A person must also take it upon himself to no longer believe *Lashon Harah* or *Rechilus* that was spoken by a Jew, and he must confess to what he has already believed in the past. In this way, his past transgressions will be forgiven if he has not recounted anything to others.