

From the Rabbi's Desk
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Stories with a Twist

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And He Didn't Believe Him and Didn't Go Up

Insights into Midrash Tanchuma Veyetze-b



Background to Our Story

Jacob



<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacob>

Jacob (later given the name [Israel](#)) is regarded as a [Patriarch](#) of the [Israelites](#). According to the [Book of Genesis](#), Jacob was the third Hebrew progenitor with whom God made a [covenant](#). He is the son of [Isaac](#) and [Rebecca](#), the grandson of [Abraham](#), [Sarah](#) and of [Bethuel](#), and the younger twin brother of [Esau](#). Jacob had twelve sons and at least one daughter, by his two wives, [Leah](#) and [Rachel](#), and by their [handmaidens](#) [Bilhah](#) and [Zilpah](#).

Jacob's twelve sons, named in Genesis, were [Reuben](#), [Simeon](#), [Levi](#), [Judah](#), [Dan](#), [Naphtali](#), [Gad](#), [Asher](#), [Issachar](#), [Zebulun](#), [Joseph](#), and [Benjamin](#). His only daughter mentioned in Genesis is [Dinah](#). The twelve sons became the progenitors of the "[Tribes of Israel](#)".

As a result of a severe drought in [Canaan](#), Jacob and his sons moved to [Egypt](#) at the time when his son Joseph was viceroy. After 17 years in Egypt, Jacob died and Joseph carried Jacob's remains to the land of Canaan, and gave him a stately burial in the same [Cave of Machpelah](#) as were buried Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebecca, and Jacob's first wife, Leah.

Genesis 28:10 - 22

¹⁰ Jacob left Beer-sheba, and set out for Haran. ¹¹ He came upon a certain place and stopped there for the night, for the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of that place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. ¹² He had a dream; a stairway was set on the ground and its top reached to the sky, and angels of God were going up and down on it. ¹³ And the Lord was standing beside him and He said, "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac: the ground on which you are lying I will assign to you

and to your offspring. ¹⁴ Your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you and your descendants. ¹⁵ Remember, I am with you: I will protect you wherever you go and will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." ¹⁶ Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is present in this place, and I did not know it!" ¹⁷ Fearful, he said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the abode of God, and that is the gateway to heaven." ¹⁸ Early in the morning, Jacob took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. ¹⁹ He named that site Bethel; but previously the name of the city had been Luz.

²⁰ Jacob then made a vow, saying, "If God remains with me, if He protects me on this journey that I am making, and gives me bread to eat and clothing to wear, ²¹ and if I return safe to my father's house — the Lord shall be my God. ²² And this stone, which I have set up as a pillar, shall be God's abode; and of all that You give me, I will set aside a tithe for You."

Edom, Rome and Christianity

After the destruction of the Second Temple, Edom became a soubriquet for Rome. Thus the new villain has taken on the name and fate of the old villain. Leading to this, it seems, is the prophetic image of Edom as the great destroyer, guilty of the ruin of Israel...Once the Roman empire became the Christian empire and Christianity took the place of idolatry as the religion of Rome, the name of Edom was transferred to the Christians. ("Between Jews and Christians," Open University unit, pages 11-121).

The Text: Midrash Tanchuma Veyetze-b

(ב) וירחלום והנה סולם מוצב ארצה וראשו מגיע השמימה והנה מלאכי אלהים עולים ויורדים בו. א"ר שמואל בר נחמן אלו שרי אומות העולם דא"ר שמואל בר נחמן מלמד שהראה לו הקב"ה לאבינו יעקב שרה של בכל עולה שבעין עוקים ויורד. ושל מדי חמשים ושנים. ושל יין מאה ויורד. ושל אדום עלה ולא ידע כמה. באותה שעה נתירא יעקב אבינו ואמר שמא לזה אין לו ירידה. א"ל הקב"ה (ינני לך) ואתה אל תירא עברי יעקב ואל תהת ישראל כביכול אפילו אתה הוואה עולה אצלי משם אני מורידו שנאמר (עונדים ל') אם תנביה כנשר ואם בין כוכבים שים קנך משם אוריך נאם ה'. א"ר ברכיה בשם רבי הלבו ור"ש בן יוסינה מלמד שהראהו הקב"ה ליעקב אבינו שרה של בכל עולה ויורד. ושל מדי עולה ויורד. ושל יין עולה ויורד. ושל אדום עולה ויורד. א"ל הקדוש ברוך הוא ליעקב יעקב למה אין אתה עולה. באותה שעה נתירא אבינו יעקב ואמר כשם שיש לאלו ירידה. כך אני יש לי ירידה. א"ל הקב"ה אם אתה עולה אין לך ירידה. ולא האמין ולא עלה. ר"ש בן יוסינה היה דורש. (תסלים ע"ס) בכל זאת חטאו עיר ולא

"He [Jacob] had a dream; a stairway was set on the ground and its top reached to the sky, and angels of God were going up and down on it" (Genesis 28:12).

First Interpretation of Jacob's Dream

Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachman said: these (going up and down) were the leaders of the nations of the world, as Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachman said: this

teaches us that the Holy One, blessed be He, showed to our forefather Jacob the leader of Babylonia going up 70 rungs and then going down; and the leader of Media going up 52 rungs and then going down, and the leader of Greece going up 100 rungs and then going down, and the leader of Edom (Rome) going up and he [Jacob] didn't know (wasn't able to see) how high he went up.

At that moment, fear seized our forefather Jacob and he said: maybe this one (the leader of Edom) will never go down?

The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him [to Jacob]: "*So do not be afraid, Jacob my servant; do not be dismayed, Israel*" (Jeremiah 30:10). Even if you see him going up to Me, from there I will bring him down, as it is written: "*Though you soar like the eagle and make your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down, declares the Lord*" (Obadiah 1:4).

Second Interpretation of Jacob's Dream

Rabbi Berachia in the name of Rabbi Chelbo and Rabbi Shimon ben Yosina said: this teaches us that the Holy One, blessed be He, showed to our forefather Jacob the leader of Babylonia going up and down, and the leader of Media going up and down, and the leader of Greece going up and down, and the leader of Edom (Rome) going up and down.

The Holy One, blessed be He, then said to Jacob: Jacob, why don't you go up?

At that moment fear seized our forefather Jacob and he said: the same way these go down, so too I will go down.

The Holy One, blessed be He, said [to Jacob]: if you go up you won't go down.

And he [Jacob] didn't believe Him and he [Jacob] didn't go up.



Explaining the Structure of the Story (What is the sequence of events in the story?)

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

First Interpretation

? What is Jacob afraid of in the first interpretation of the dream?

? How does the Holy One, blessed be He, assuage Jacob's fears?

? Was the Holy One, blessed be He, successful in assuaging Jacob's fears? Yes/No? If yes, why do you think so?

Second Interpretation

? What is Jacob afraid of in the second interpretation?

? How does the Holy One, blessed be He, try to assuage Jacob's fears?

Bonus ? The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Jacob: "*if you go up you won't go down.*" Is it possible to always go up and never go down? If not, why did the Holy One, blessed be He, say this to Jacob?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

Answer 4 _____

Bonus ? The Holy One, blessed be He, encouraged Jacob to go up the ladder and He even tried to assuage his fears. Now, from the end of the story, we know that the Holy One, blessed be He, wasn't successful in assuaging Jacob's fears. Why do you think this was the case?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 (Base this answer on the first interpretation) _____

Answer 3 _____

Answer 4 _____

"The Twist" – Or the Lessons We Can Learn from the Text

! Nobody stays up there forever (including your own challenges)!

! Even if you will eventually go down, it is worth going up!