

Yaakov flees Esav's wrath (even though it was found out that he would not try to kill Yaakov until Yitzchok passes) and flees to his uncle's house in Aramea.

וַיִּקְוֶה יַעֲקֹב מִשְׁנֵיתוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר אֲכֵן יֵשׁ ה' בְּמָקוֹם הַזֶּה וְאֲנֹכִי לֹא יָדַעְתִּי:

“And Yaakov got up from his sleep and he said, *It is true, there is HaShem in this place, and I did not know it.*” (Genesis 28:16).

This place has the tradition of being Jerusalem, and more specifically, the Temple Mount, the location of the two Batei Hamikdash. However, this verse means more. It also could have been allegorically connected to the Temple Mount, or Mount Moriah, even if it was factually not on that exact location.

The main source that this was the actual Temple Mount is the Midrash. *R. Eleazar said in the name of Reb Yose the son of Zimra, “This ladder stood in Beersheva and the middle of its slope reached opposite the Beis HaMikdash.”* (Genesis Rabbah 69:7). Certainly, the middle was not opposite the actual Beis Hamikdash if it was not built yet. It was opposite the place where the Beis Hamikdash would be built.

Rashi adds to this interpretation as he says “Yaakov says to himself, if I knew this was the House of the Lord I would not have slept here.” There must be only one House of the Lord and that, we know, is located on the Temple Mount.

The Gemara never identifies this place as the actual location of the Temple Mount. The Gemara does say in Pesachim 88a that *Rather, the verse specifically mentions Yaakov to allude to the fact that the Beis Hamikdash will ultimately be described in the same way that Yaakov referred to it. It will not be referred to as it was referred to by Abraham. It is written of him that when he prayed at the location of the Temple Mount, he called it mount, as it is stated: “As it is said on this day: On the mount where the Lord is seen”* (Genesis 22:14). *And it will not be referred to as it was referred to by Yitzchok. It is written of him that he called the location of the Temple field when he prayed there, as it is stated: “And Yitzchok went out to meditate in the field”* (Genesis 24:63). *Rather, it will be described as it was referred to by Yaakov, who called it*

house, as it is stated: “And he called the name of that place Beis-El” (Genesis 28:19), which means house of the Lord.

The Gemara is saying he called the place where he slept Beis-El. Just as he referred to a place where there is the “house of the Lord, gate of heaven” (Genesis 28:17) so, too, we refer to the Temple as Holy House. Certainly, this Gemara is allegorical because a huge building cannot be called a mountain or field. And it is called the Temple Mount (as referred to by Avraham) and the Holy House (as Yaakov called it). Yaakov had the merit of naming that the place to go to pray to HaShem would be a house / building / temple.

In fact, the Midrash Bereishis Rabbah reads on and says *For Beersheva is situated in the South of Judah, Yerushalayim in the North of it on the boundary between Yehuda and Benyamin and Beis-El in the North of Benyamin’s territory, on the border between the land of Benyamin and that of the children of Yoseph (Ephraim). It follows, therefore, that a ladder whose foot is in Beersheva and whose top is in Beis El has the middle of its slope reaching opposite Yerushalayim.*

Clearly the Midrash means that Yaakov was actually not in Yerushalayim. Yerushalayim is on the border of Binyamin and Yehuda and the place called Beis El, which was Luz (as it is called in Genesis 28:19) is in the northern border of Binyamin on the border of Yoseph’s territory. Yaakov may have referred to Yerushalayim as *House of HaShem* and *gateway to heaven* which he saw in the dream.

Further, the distance between Beersheva and the Temple Mount is approximately 54 miles, which would take a normal walker (3 miles per hour) 18 hours to walk. Yaakov left at least after midday, as he had to first prepare a meal and get the blessings. Even if he left the next day in the morning, he would not have crossed the hilly terrain in one day. The verse says he had to stop because “the sun had set.” (Genesis 28:11). The Gemara Chullin 91a says the sun set early so he would stop. Certainly, Yaakov could not cover the distance and also have the sun set early. (If you will argue that he walked fast, the verse only says “Yaakov raised his legs” to indicate he started walking with speed in verse ibid 29:1.

We also do not know when the 14 years of learning in Yeshivas Ever took place (according to the view of Rashi and adopted nearly universally in the Orthodox commentaries since). It likely took place before he arrived at Beis-El. We can only speculate he was on his

way, and some time on the way he arrived near Luz and the sun set and he had to stop for the night because he was losing daylight.

If this was the Temple Mount and the Binding of Yitzchok happened here (the view adopted by Rashi and many meforshim) then Yaakov should have known that it was a special place. Yet he says, “I did not know....” Clearly it was Luz not Yerushalayim.

Luz is identified in Yoseph’s territory (Ephraim) in later Tanakh as it says, “And the house of Yosef sent to spy out Beis-El. Now the name of the city before was Luz.” (Judges 1:23). Therefore, Yaakov did not stop on the Temple Mount.

If so, why does he call the place he was at the gateway of heaven and the House of the Lord?

Ibin Ezra gives us a clue when he writes “The meaning of Yaakov’s statement is that there are places where miracles are seen. The point is that there are some places where HaShem’s presence is more manifest than in others. I cannot explain why this is so because it is a deep mystery.” What is the mystery? Why HaShem’s presence is more manifest in some places or about the great miracles that occurred in this place where Yaakov slept?

Sforno comments that, *there can be no question that this is a location from where the gift of prophetic insights is dispensed, seeing that I have been granted such an insight without even having expected it or prepared myself for it spiritually. It is a fact that the characteristics of a person undergo changes in the land of Israel—just as the climate and very air in this country are different—contribute to one’s mental and spiritual progress. Our sages have phrased this (Baba Basra 158) as “the very air of the Land of Israel makes one wiser.”* Sforno is not saying that prophesy stems from the Temple Mount. He says that the entire Land has such connection to HaShem to give the sight.

Ohr Chaim says, *What did Yaakov mean by the word וַיִּשְׁתָּחֲוֶה in this verse? It appears to mean that something concealed had been revealed to him. Why would he then express surprise at having been unaware of such knowledge, i.e. וַיִּשְׁתָּחֲוֶה לֹא יָדַעְתִּי? Did he have to be aware of everything that is hidden? Perhaps we may explain this by referring to Gemara Chulin 91 where the words “for the sun had set” are interpreted to mean that Yaakov personally experienced an unusually early sunset on that day. This was designed to force him to spend the night at that site. What Jacob meant then was that at the time when the early sunset occurred he had not understood its meaning. He did so now only with the help of the dream he had dreamt. When*

*Jacob said: יש השם במקום הזה, that HaShem is in this place, he meant that HaShem is present at this site all the time, in contrast to other sites. This is why HaShem wanted him to spend the night there in order to communicate with him there. Yaakov apologized for not having prepared himself for a divine revelation; had he been aware of the significance of that site he would surely have done so. Prophecy requires the recipient to first prepare himself mentally. Perhaps if Yaakov had prepared himself to become the recipient of a message from HaShem he might have prophesied while awake instead of while dreaming. This may have been what he bemoaned in this verse. Rashi explains simply that Yaakov meant that if he had known the holy nature of that site he would not have allowed himself to go to sleep there. If that were the only meaning of Yaakov's words we could say to him (Rashi) that Yaakov then would not have experienced all the promises HaShem made to him during his dream. We therefore need to include what I have just written in order to explain the verse satisfactorily.*

It does not settle well how the Ohr Chaim says how Yaakov should have prepared himself for prophesy. We see no indication that Avraham or Yitzchok received prophesy while awake or that they prepared themselves for it. Yaakov learned for fourteen years in Yeshiva, spent sixty years of his life learning the ways of his father, it does not seem to fit that his surprise was that on the road he should have prepared himself for prophesy. The surprise must have been something else.

Radak says *Yaakov concluded that this site was a site chosen for revelations, seeing that he had become the recipient of such great and wonderful visions in his dream with the ladder. "That I did not know" means if I had known that this was a holy site I would not have chosen this site to sleep on. It is possible that this dream represented the beginning of Yaakov's prophetic visions. This is why he had not been aware of the sanctity of the site until after his dream, seeing that this was the first time HaShem had revealed Himself to him in any manner.*

Rashbam says, *Yaakov says to himself, contrary to what I thought when I lay down here that this is a totally secular place, devoid of sanctity. Every time the expression אכן occurs in Scripture it means that the person exclaiming it had to revise an opinion previously held. A well-known example is Exodus 2:14 אכן נודע הדבר, when Moses made the devastating discovery that his having slain the Egyptian had not remained a secret.*

What was Yaakov's surprise? What did he not know? Before we can answer that we have one more important question. How can it be, as Ohr Chaim, Rashi, Radak, and others say, that if

Yaakov had known he was going to get a prophesy or know that the place was Holy he would not have slept there? If he did not sleep there he would never get the prophesy because he would not get it while awake. How can he know a place is Holy unless he is told? Furthermore, how can Yaakov only just come to a place where prophesy is readily available when he had been living in the Land and near the Temple Mount (and Luz) his whole life? What was special about a prophetic dream now?

Finally, the Birchas Asher ask, “how is it that Yaakov knew this was a prophesy and not a mere dream?” Yaakov seemed to have a special epiphany here.

It seems the interpretation of these verses is that Yaakov lied down to sleep. He even used stones. Some say to protect himself, but that is an almost feeble attempt at protection. The verse says, “he took from the stones of that place, put it under or by his head, and lay down in that place.” (ibid 28:11). The verse does not say why he put stones there, but it was important that he lied down and took a stone. It does not reveal the name of the place as Luz until after he arises. He then uses the stone from under his head to make a monument. Clearly, to make a monument the stones must have been significant. However, a stone, or even several stones will not do much in terms of protection because solitary stones are no deterrent to venomous insects and wild animals. What was the purpose of the stone?

Now, for the first time, Yaakov experiences a prophesy. There is a ladder with angels going up and coming down and HaShem promises to be with Yaakov in all his travels. He does not just wake “vayakom” or “vayashkem.” He “vayeekeitz” become active or arises. Not from slumber of sleep, but from being asleep for more than sixty years. He arises from his sleep, a life without foresight, and says “it is true. There is Hashem.” He realizes, now on a personal level—not from just being taught—that HaShem exists. This was his first prophesy, first connection to HaShem. He sat in tents of Shem and Ever and his father, Yitzchok, and he learned the traditions. He heard the mesorah. He now, for the first time, feels it in his bones, he knows it. He can say with certainty Hashem exists. Not only that, HaShem exists in *this place*, in the Land.

“But I did not know that.” What did Yaakov not know? Didn’t Yaakov know that HaShem exists and is in the Land from all he was taught? Yaakov is now realizing and learning, “HaShem exists in this Land, and I did not know He can protect me wherever I go.”

Yaakov is about to leave the Land and go to Aramea to a place of idol worship and far from his father, mother, and teacher (Ever). He feels all alone on this journey. He is wandering out of the tents, out of his comfort zone, with no money, and going into the unknown.

Now is the time for him to become the Ish Tam, the man of perfect faith. The Torah describes that Yaakov becomes a man of perfect faith. This is the moment. We know of Yaakov's struggles with faith. When he complains to Pharaoh (Genesis 47:9) and when he worries over his son Yoseph and cannot be consoled (Genesis 37:35). However, he shows times of perfect faith. He has now reached his pinnacle. *Now I know that HaShem surely exists, in this place, and I did not know that He will follow me and protect me even out of this Land. Now I know that He will.*

Thus, the exact place Yaakov sleeps is not the Temple Mount and it need not be. The entire Land has such powers, is a gateway to Heaven. Yaakov is saying, "If I knew the entire Land was a gateway to Heaven and a place to pray and call up to HaShem, I would not have slept. I would not have been asleep my entire life trying to make myself the elder, gain the birthright, and the Blessings. I would have put my faith in HaShem and let HaShem take care of it. Now I know, so now I know HaShem is with me, and I go to Lavan unafraid, and I am certain of my success."

Now, Yaakov takes something as simple as a stone from under his head, and makes it a monument to the finding of such faith. A random stone that is from the Land it holy and it serves the purpose of commemorating the power of the Land and its connection to the heavens and HaShem. He took a stone for no other purpose then to lay his head, but that stone now serves the purpose of showing how great and holy and connected the Land is.

## BONUS SHTIKEL

Yaakov flees from his brother, leaves his home, and heads toward Padam Aram. He is heading to a new life, to gain a wife and start a family. On the way he lies down in Luz. He does not know that it is a special and holy place. That night he has a dream prophesy and is told that this place is special and holy. It is the gateway to heaven. (Genesis 28:10-17). He calls the place “Beis-El” the House of the Lord because he prophesizes that HaShem has an abode on Earth in this place. Now, the House of the Lord is the Beis HaMikdash. That is located in Yerushalayim some 900 years later. The gateway of heaven, the place to come to talk and pray to HaShem is the Temple Mount. How is Luz that place, too?

The Temple Mount was not always the “gateway to heaven” and the House of the Lord. That place was where the Holy Presence / Shechina resided. The Shechina rested on the Mishkan. For more than four centuries it resided in the Sinai desert, Shilo, Nov, Givon, and just outside Yerushalayim. Then it rested in the Beis HaMikdash in Yerushalayim. Clearly, the Temple Mount was not the only place that is special and that has a connection or link to HaShem.

Luz was such a place. It seems that it was designated as the sight of the Mishkan or the Beis HaMikdash. It is located on the border between Binyamin and Yoseph’s (Ephraim) territory. It makes sense for that to be the location of the Beis HaMikdash because they were the sons of Rochel, Yaakov’s favorite and chosen wife. Yoseph should have been the oldest, if not for Lavan. Something changed between Yaakov’s stay in Luz and the building of the Beis HaMikdash on the border between Yehuda’s and Binyamin’s territory. The sight was still in Binyamin’s territory but no longer in Yoseph’s. That reason is for a different vort. Yaakov stayed at a holy place that was designated as the gateway and connection to HaShem.