Parashat Vayetze: Israel's Assurance

Rabbi Joshua Rabin, Astoria Center of Israel, Astoria, New York[1]

Bereishit 28:12	
וַיַּחֲלֹם וְהִנֵּה סֻלָּם מֻצָּב אַרְצָה וְרֹאשׁוֹ מַגִּיעַ הַשָּׁמָיְמָה וְהִנֵּה מַלְאֲכֵי אֱלֹהִים עֹלִים וְיֹרְדִים בּוֹ׃	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.

Yair Zakovitch, *Jacob: Unexpected Patriarch*, 46
People can flee their pursuers while never breaking free of their conscience and past. Jacob escaped his brother's wrath but he left behind an elderly, blind father and a loving and worried mother without knowing whether he would see them ever again…The uncertainty…must have weighed heavily on him.

1. **Jacob's Assurance**

Rashi on Bereishit 28:12	
עולים וירדים. עוֹלִים תְּחִלָּה וְאַחַר כָּךְ יוֹרְדִים? מַלְאָכִים שֶׁלּוּוּהוּ בָּאָרֶץ אֵין יוֹצְאִים חוּצָה לָאָרֶץ, וְעָלוּ לָרָקִיעַ וְיָרְדוּ מַלְאֲכֵי חוּצָה לָאָרֶץ לְלַוּוֹתוֹ׃	עלים וירדים— It states first ascending and afterwards descending! Those angels who accompanied him in the land of Israel were not permitted to leave the Land: they ascended to Heaven and angels which were to minister outside the Land descended to accompany him.

Hizkuni on Bereishit 28:12	
עלים וירדים בו, עלים...בתרגום ירושלמי מפרש, המלאכים שהיו ממונים ללוותו היו עולים למעלה לבשר לשאר המלאכים בואו למטה וראו את יעקב הנחמד למראה שדמותו חקוק בכסא הכבוד והיו המלאכים עולים ויורדים ומסתכלים בו.	עולים ויורדים בו...The Jerusalem Targum understands the function of these angels as having been to accompany Yaakov from here on in wherever he went. The reason that they ascended was to relay their messages to other angels in the celestial spheres that they had been assigned to descend to earth. They were to show them that there was a human being of the stature of Yaakov on earth. They would recognize him at once as a likeness of his features had long been engraved at the base of G-d's throne.

Yair Zakovitch, *Jacob: Unexpected Patriarch*, 49
Whereas a moment previously Jacob's world had suddenly been compressed by an all-encompassing darkness closing around his weary body, a vast world has now opened before him. Three axes become apparent: the vertical connection between earth and heaven; the horizontal dissemination of Jacob's descendents in all four directions; and a temporal line embracing both past and future, reaching from Abraham and Isaac to Jacob and the generations that will issue from him.

[1] All translations are from Sefaria, unless otherwise noted.

2. **Israel's Assurance**

Seforno on Bereishit 28:12	
והנה מלאכי אלהים עלים וירדים והנה יהוה נצב עליו. כי אמנם כן יהיה לבסוף ששרי האומות אחר עליתם ירדו, והאל יתברך ה"נצב" לעד לא יטש את עמו, כאמרו "כי אעשה כלה בכל הגוים, ואתך לא אעשה כלה" (ירמיהו מ"ו:כ"ח).	והנה מלאכי אלוהים עולים ויורדים..והנה יהוה נצב עליו, this foreshadowed the future when the "angels of God" the superpowers who had become very powerful in our world would begin their decline and end up at the bottom of the rungs of the ladder. The Lord God, Who stood above the ladder is the symbol of the promise that God will never abandon the Jewish people, as we know from Jeremiah 46:28 כי אעשה כלה בכל הגויים ואותך לא אעשה כלה, "even when I utterly destroy all the gentile nations, I will not destroy you."

Maimonides, Hilkhot Yesodei HaTorah 7:3	
הַדְּבָרִים שֶׁמּוֹדִיעִים לַנָּבִיא בְּמַרְאֵה הַנְּבוּאָה דֶּרֶךְ מָשָׁל מוֹדִיעִין לוֹ וּמְיָד יֵחָקֵק בְּלִבּוֹ פִּתְרוֹן הַמָּשָׁל בְּמַרְאֵה הַנְּבוּאָה וְיֵדַע מָה הוּא. כְּמוֹ הַסֻּלָּם שֶׁרָאָה יַעֲקֹב אָבִינוּ וּמַלְאָכִים עוֹלִים וְיוֹרְדִים בּוֹ וְהוּא הָיָה מָשָׁל לְמַלְכֻיּוֹת וְשִׁעְבּוּדָן.	When a prophet is informed of a message in a vision, it is granted to him in metaphoric imagery. Immediately, the interpretation of the imagery is imprinted upon his heart, and he knows its meaning. For example, the ladder with the angels ascending and descending envisioned by the patriarch, Jacob, was an allegory for the empires and their subjugation [of his descendants].

Yair Zakovitch, *Jacob: Unexpected Patriarch*, 50
Even though Jacob walks in the opposite direction, from the Promised Land back to the land of his grandfather's birth, it is precisely at this point, as he leaves...that he needs a blessing that will promise his return.

3. **A Promise of Return**

Rashi on Shir Ha-Shirim 1:1	
ואומר אני, שראה שלמה ברוח הקודש שעתידין ישראל לגלות גולה אחר גולה, חורבן אחר חורבן, ולהתאונן בגלות זה על כבודם הראשון, ולזכור חיבה ראשונה אשר היו סגולה לו מכל העמים לאמר (הושע ב ז) אלכה ואשובה אל אישי הראשון כי טוב לי אז מעתה, ויזכרו את חסדיו ואת מעלם אשר מעלו, ואת הטובות אשר אמר לתת להם באחרית הימים. ויסד הספר הזה ברוח הקודש, בלשון אשה צרורה אלמנות חיות, משתוקקת על בעלה, מתרפקת על דודה, מזכרת אהבת נעוריה אליו, ומודה על פשעה. אף דודה, צר לו בצרתה, ומזכיר חסדי נעוריה ונוי יופיה וכשרון פעליה, בהם נקשר עימה באהבה עזה, להודיעה כי לא מלבו ענה, ולא שילוחיה שילוחין, כי עוד היא אשתו והוא אישה, והוא עתיד לשוב אליה.	"I say that King Shlomo saw prophetically that in the future, Israel will undergo exile after exile, destruction after destruction, and they will mourn in exile for their original glory, remembering the original love by which they was separated from all other peoples, and they will say, 'I will go and return to my first husband, for then I fared better than now', and they will remember His kindnesses and their value, and the goodly things promised to them in the eschaton. And Shlomo wrote this sefer prophetically, in the language of a widowed woman who longs for her husband, 'who clings to her beloved', remembering how she loved him in her youth, and [she] admits her failings. And even her Beloved is pained by her pain and remembers the kindness of her youth, the comeliness of her beauty, and the quality of her deeds, in which he was bound up with her in intense love, and He tells her that He does not willfully bring her grief, and nor has she been sent away permanently, for she is still His wife, and He her husband, and he will return to her in the future."