



VAYESHEV

KEEP CLIMBING

Trajectory Is All That Matters

PARSHAH OVERVIEW

Vayeshev

Jacob settles in Hebron with his twelve sons. His favorite is seventeen-year-old Joseph, whose brothers are jealous of the preferential treatment he receives from his father, such as a precious many-colored coat that Jacob makes for Joseph. Joseph relates to his brothers two of his dreams, which foretell that he is destined to rule over them, increasing their envy and hatred toward him.

Simeon and Levi plot to kill him, but Reuben suggests that they throw him into a pit instead, intending to come back later and save him. While Joseph is in the pit, Judah has him sold to a band of passing Ishmaelites. The brothers dip Joseph's special coat in the blood of a goat and show it to their father, leading him to

believe that his most beloved son has been devoured by a wild beast.

Judah marries and has three children. The eldest, Er, dies young and childless, and his wife, Tamar, is given in levirate marriage to the second son, Onan. Onan sins by spilling his seed, and he too meets an early death. Judah is reluctant to have his third son marry her. Determined to have a child from Judah's family, Tamar disguises herself as a prostitute and seduces Judah himself. Judah hears that his daughter-in-law has become pregnant and orders her executed for harlotry, but when Tamar produces some personal effects he left with her as a pledge for payment, he publicly admits that he is the father. Tamar gives birth

to twin sons, Perez (an ancestor of King David) and Zerah.

Joseph is taken to Egypt and sold to Potiphar, the minister in charge of Pharaoh's slaughterhouses. G-d blesses everything he does, and soon he is made overseer of all his master's property. Potiphar's wife desires the handsome and charismatic lad; when Joseph rejects her advances, she tells her husband that the Hebrew slave tried to force himself on her and has him thrown into prison. Joseph gains the trust and admiration of his jailers, who appoint him to a position of authority in the prison administration.

What does being a good Jew mean to you? Can a Jew who disregards some or all the Jewish traditions be considered a good Jew?



RASHI'S RULES

1. Rashi only answers questions when they arise. He does not preview questions that will arise at a later point.
2. Rashi answers questions the first time they arise. He does not delay answering them until they arise a second time.
3. Rashi does not use extra words. If any words in his commentary appear to be extra, we misunderstood them.

TEXT 1A

Genesis 38:12–13

יב. וַיִּרְבוּ הַיָּמִים וַתָּמָת בַּת שׁוּעַ אִשְׁתׁ יְהוּדָה. וַיִּנָּחֶם יְהוּדָה
וַיַּעַל עַל גִּזְזֵי צֹאנוֹ, הוּא וְחִירָה רְעֵהוּ הָעֶדְלָמִי תִמְנָה.
יג. וַיֵּגַד לְתָמָר לֵאמֹר, "הִנֵּה חָמִיד עֹלָה תִמְנָה לְגֹז צֹאנוֹ".

12. And days passed and Judah's wife, the daughter of Shua, passed away. Judah was consoled and ascended with his friend, Chirah the Adullamite, to Timnah to [oversee] his sheep shearers.

13. Tamar was informed, "Behold, your father-in-law has ascended to Timnah to shear his sheep."

TEXT 1B

Rashi, Genesis 38:13

"עָלָה תִּמְנָתָה": וּבְשִׁמְשׁוֹן הוּא אוֹמֵר, "וַיֵּרֶד שִׁמְשׁוֹן
תִּמְנָתָה" (שׁוֹפְטִים יד, א). בְּשִׁפּוּעַ הָהָר הָיְתָה יוֹשְׁבֶת, עוֹלִין
לָהּ מִכָּאן וַיּוֹרְדִין לָהּ מִכָּאן.

“Ascended to Timnah”: But of Samson, it is written,
“And Samson descended to Timnah” (Judges 14:1).
The city was located on a mountain slope. One
could ascend to it from the bottom and descend to
it from the top.

RASHI'S QUESTION

If Judah climbed up to Timnah and Samson climbed down, was it at the top or bottom of the mountain?

RASHI'S ANSWER

Timnah was in the middle of the mountain, so one would climb up from the bottom or down from the top.

QUESTIONS

1. Why does Rashi address the ascent in Genesis before the descent in Judges is encountered?
2. If Rashi had a good reason to bring it up at this point, why didn't he raise the question in verse twelve, where the ascent was first mentioned?
3. Why did Rashi specify that the passage in Judges was written about Samson, when the passage he quotes says just that?



The Rebbe explains
that the question being
asked by Rashi is: why
mention the elevation
to Timnah at all?

TEXT 2

Genesis 22:3, 9

וַיָּקָם וַיֵּלֶךְ אֶל הַמָּקוֹם . . . וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל
הַמָּקוֹם.

And he arose and went to the place. .
. . And they came to the place.

ANSWER 2A

Rashi did not question the Torah's mention of climbing in verse twelve because he understood that first mention as an allegorical ascent rather than a practical climb.

TEXT 3A

Genesis 38:1

וַיְהִי בְּעֵת הַהִיא וַיֵּרֶד יְהוֹדָה
מֵאֶת אֶחָיו.

And it was at that time, and
Judah stepped down from among
his brothers.

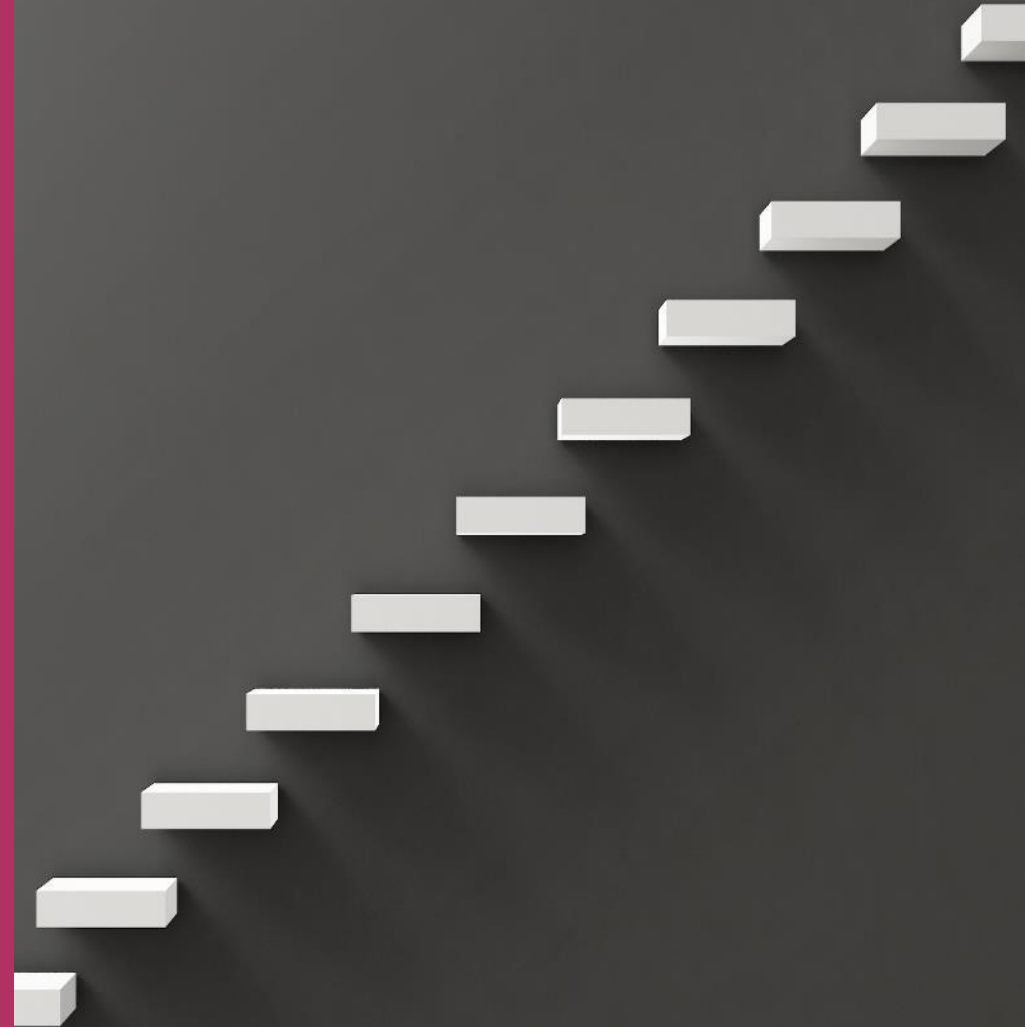
TEXT 3B

Rashi, ad loc.

וְשֶׁהוֹרִידוּהוּ אֶחָיו מִגָּדְלָתוֹ כְּשָׂרְאוֹ בְּצָרַת אֲבִיהֶם.
אָמְרוּ: אַתָּה אָמַרְתָּ לְמָכְרוֹ, אֵלּוּ אָמַרְתָּ לְהַשִּׁיבוֹ
הָיִינוּ שׁוֹמְעִים לָךְ.

Judah's brothers demoted him from his high position when they saw their father's distress. They said, "You advised us to sell him. Had you advised us to return him, we would have obeyed you."

Judah was demoted by his brothers after causing his father distress. The process of his reinstatement began with his journey to Timnah after his wife's passing. This is why the Torah described Judah's journey to Timnah as an ascent.



TEXT 4

*Rabbi David Pardo,
Maskil LeDavid,
Genesis 38:13*

דבשלמא, "ויעל" דלעיל, שפיר יש לומר דהתורה העידה "ויעל" לפי שנתעלה בה.

אבל כאן דהכתוב מספר שהוגד לתמר "הנה חמיך עולה תמנתה", ליכא למימר שהמגידים לה אמרו "עולה" לפי שנתעלה בהן.

The phrase “and [he] ascended” [from verse twelve] can be interpreted as the Torah testifying that he ascended because he was elevated by his journey.

But this passage [verse thirteen], where the Torah recounts that Tamar was told, “Behold, your father-in-law has ascended to Timnah,” [is different]. It cannot be said that the ordinary folk who informed her of Judah’s journey used the term “ascending” because Judah would [eventually] be elevated by this journey.



In verse thirteen, it was Tamar's friends who told her that Judah was ascending. This must mean that he was physically ascending to Timnah.

ANSWER 1

Rashi introduced a passage the student had not yet read, not to raise a question about it, but to answer a question about this passage. He used it to prove that Timnah was on a slope, which is why Tamar's friends mentioned Judah was climbing—so she would know his location.

ANSWER 2B

Rashi waited until verse thirteen to address the question because in verse twelve, it was G-d who was speaking, whereas in verse thirteen, it was Tamar's friends—ordinary people. Rashi was focused on addressing the physical ascent mentioned by Tamar's friends.

TEXT 5A

*“Factors to Consider
When Building a
Mountain Home,”
www.zameen.org*

Enjoy stunning views of the green meadows, rugged cone-shaped mountains, woody forests, wildflowers, and clear blue skies from your living room. Living close to nature has a soothing and calming effect on your mind and soul. . . .

[Being] situated on the hillside maximizes views and natural sunlight—a prized feature that has multiple health benefits such as higher productivity, better sleep, and good mood. . . .

Tall trees, chirping birds, and fluttering butterflies are some of nature’s gifts that you can enjoy at your leisure.

A mountain home is less crowded. Unlike a house in an urban setting, where you will find buzzing marketplaces and houses up close, there is peace and tranquility [when] living in a mountain home. . . .

A less crowded home means more privacy. . . . Building a house on a [mountaintop] allows you to select a location off the beaten path.

TEXT 5B

Ibid.

However, bringing that picture to life is quite difficult. There are quite a few pre-construction tasks you must carry out before laying the first brick. . . .

The most challenging . . . is its foundation. Most of your budget will be spent on laying down complex foundation systems. . . . The cost of establishing the foundation layer of a mountain home is more than an entire house constructed on a flat surface.

If you have seen mudslides, you will know how important it is to have a proper solution for drainage of surface and sub-surface water when building on a mountain slope. Rainwater needs to be directed away from your home's foundation. Retaining walls must be waterproofed and drained well. There should be no water pooling near the retaining wall.

Access to the construction site is an important consideration for homeowners, contractors, and laborers. Remember to calculate the cost of transporting construction materials up the hill. The truck driver and the laborers will charge an extra amount for this.

There are pros and cons to building on top of a mountain. But why build on a slope?



TEXT 6

*Rabbi Shmuel Eidels,
Talmud, Sotah 10a*

דאיכא למימר דחדא כפשטיה . . . שבהר
היה. ויעל כפשטיה, וירד לדרשת הגנאי.

We might suggest that there was one Timnah . . .
[situated] at the top of the mountain. [Judah]
ascended to it literally and [Samson] descended to
it virtually.

ANSWER 3

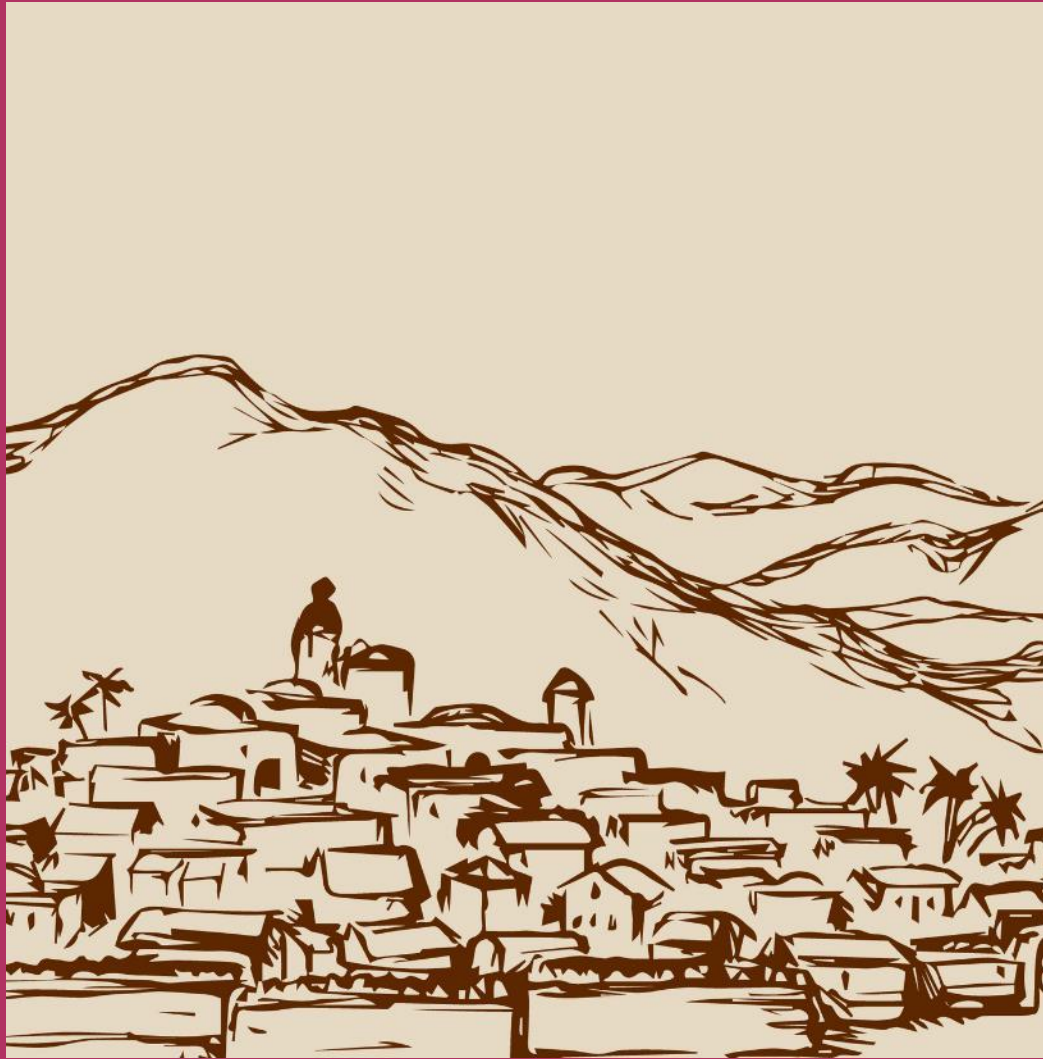
Rashi's point was not that the passage was written about Samson, as that is clear from the text. Rashi's point was that the repeated mentions of Samson's descent to Timnah show it was a literal descent, proving Timnah was on a slope.

TEXT 7A

*Jerusalem Talmud,
Sotah 1:8*

אמר רבי אייבו בר נגרי: כגון הדא בית מעין,
שיורדין בה מפלטתה ועוליין בה מטבריה.

Rabbi Ayvu son of Nagri said, “This is like Hada, the city on the spring. We descend to it from Paltata and ascend to it from Tiberias.”



Timnah may have been built on a slope to serve as a trading post.

TEXT 7B

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, Likutei
Sichot 10, p. 127*

הדוגמא מסבירה למה יצאה
מהרגיל ונבנתה בשיפוע הר.

כי הייתה בין שתי ערים
ומובן שכל שעסקו עם
שתיהן וכן בכל העסקים
שבין אחת מהן עם חברתה
(שצריך להיות טרדת
ד"יורדין ועולין"), נוח
להפגש באמצע.

ואם העסקים בקביעות,
בונים שם מקום קבוע (עיר).

The example explains why this city was
a deviation from the norm and was
built on the slope of the mountain.

Because it was between two cities, it
made sense that anyone who worked
with both, as well as all the business
dealings between one and the other
(which would require the hassle of
going up and down), would
conveniently meet in the middle.

If the business dealings were common,
a permanent place (city) would have to
be built.

TEXT 8A

Psalms 24:3

מִי יַעֲלֶה בְּהַר ה' וּמִי יִקְוֶם
בְּמִקְוֶם קֹדֶשׁוֹ.

Who will climb G-d's mountain and
who will arise to His holy place?

TEXT 8B

*Rabbi Menachem
Recanati, Exodus 24:12*

לפי דברי רבותינו זכרונם
לברכה (סוכה ה, א) נראה שלא
היתה כוונתם בזאת העלייה אל
ההר. שאומר שם, רבי יוסי
אומר: מעולם לא ירדה שכינה
למטה ולא עלה משה לרקיע . . .

נראה כי כוונתם בעליית משה
אל ההר, וכן עלה אל ה', אין
הכוונה אל ההר, אלא ענין
העלייה היא נטילת רשות לעלות
ממדריגה למעלה ממדריגה.

From the teachings of our sages,
it would appear that Moses never
climbed a physical mountain.
Rabbi Yossi says, “The Divine
Presence never descended below,
nor did Moses ascend to the
Heavens” (Talmud, Sukkah 5a). . . .

I suggest that when the Torah
says Moses climbed the mountain
or ascended to G-d, it does not
refer to an actual climb. The
intention is that Moses received
Divine permission to ascend to
ever-higher spiritual levels.

Our service to G-d is
likened to climbing a
mountain.



TEXT 9

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, Likutei
Sichot 10, p. 127*

וידוע דכאשר האדם מטפס ועולה ההרה,
אי אפשר לו להפסיק באמצע עלייתו
ולעמוד זמן מה במקום שיפועו של ההר,
כי כמעט מן הנמנע שלא יתמוטט ויפול
למטה. אלא עליו להמשיך עלייתו בלא
הפסק.

וכן הענין בעליה "בהר ה'", שהתמדת
העליה מוכרחת . . . בכדי להבטיח
שלילת הירידה.

והיינו, שאין לו להסתפק במעלתו שהגיע
אליה עד כה, כי הסתפקות זו במעלתו
ואי עלייתו מדרגא לדרגא במעלות
הקודש, סופה שתביא לידי ירידה.

It is known that when climbing and ascending a mountain, we can't stop midway and stand for a time on the slope. If we do, it is almost inevitable that we will stumble and fall downward. Rather, we must continue our climb without pause.

Climbing G-d's mountain is similar in the sense that one must always be climbing to ensure they don't fall.

We must never be content with the spiritual level we have reached thus far. Contentment with our current level and failure to ascend from one sacred level to the next inevitably leads to descent.



Once we start climbing,
we must keep climbing
and never stop. If we stop,
we might stumble and fall.

TEXT 10

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, Ibid., p. 128*

ומרומז ענין זה בדברי רש"י,
שמה שנאמר לשון עליה
וירידה בתמנה הוא לפי
ש"בשיפוע ההר היתה
יושבת".

בי בשיפוע ההר (שהוא ענין
העבודה להתעלות ברוחניות)
נמנעת העמידה, וגם ההילוך
הוא לא באופן רגיל, כי אם
או עליה או ירידה.

This is implied by Rashi's words.
He wrote that the reason the
phrases "ascent" and "descent"
apply to Timnah is because it sat
"on the slope of the mountain."

The slope of the mountain,
which connotes spiritual
improvement, prevents one
from standing still. Moreover,
even ordinary walking is not
possible. One can only climb,
either up or down.

The quality of a Jew isn't determined by their current position on the ladder of mitzvot, but by the direction they're moving—whether they're continuously climbing or not.



TEXT 11

*Rashi, Bereshit
Rabah 85:14*

"מה פרצת עליך פרץ?"

זה רבה על הפריצים. ממך יעמוד משיח, שנאמר בו:
"עלה הפורץ לפניהם" (מיכה ב, יג).

“Why did you breach the breach?”

This child would be the greatest of all breachers. He would be the progenitor of the Mashiach, of whom it is written, “The breacher arose before them” (Micah 2:13).



Judaism is a constant ascent, and redemption awaits those who keep climbing.

KEY POINTS

1. There are many reasons to live at the top of the mountain. Chief among them is security. There are also many difficulties in building at the mountaintop. These include grading the slope, drainage, and the cost of transporting materials and tools to the top.
2. Living at the bottom of the mountain offers other benefits: ease of building, social interaction, and cultural activities.
3. The hardest place to build is on the slope in the middle of the mountain. It has all the difficulties of building on a mountain, no benefits of living at the bottom, and no security that comes from living at the top.
4. One reason to build on the slope is to create a trading station for cities at the top and cities at the bottom.

KEY POINTS

5. Living on the slope is a metaphor for Judaism. Jewish practice is like climbing G-d's mountain. Once we embark on the climb, we must keep climbing until we reach the top. Stopping mid-climb can result in a fall. We must always see ourselves as if we are on the slope, in the middle of our climb.

