

# REACHING UPWARD

*by Rabbi Yaakov Menken*

*"And [Yaakov] dreamed, and behold there was a ladder, secured to the ground, with its head reaching to Heaven, and behold, the angels of the L-rd ascending and descending upon it." [28:12]*

There are any number of beautiful explanations of this verse found in the Medrash and later writings. One such perush asks that we look at the ladder as a parable, applicable to a human being. Though we are "rooted to the ground," going about our daily lives and dealing with the physical world, each of us is nonetheless given the opportunity to have a "head reaching to Heaven."

What does it mean to have a "head reaching to Heaven?" This refers to a person who goes through life doing his or her actions for the sake of Heaven. If we analyze our behavior, and work every moment to increase our spirituality, learning, and good deeds -- as well as those of others -- then this is a "Heavenly" life. Every minute of the day offers us this opportunity to be "rooted to the ground" with "a head reaching to Heaven."

Not only do we affect ourselves, but "the angels of the L-rd ascend and descend upon it" -- the whole world, physical and even spiritual, depends on the actions of human beings. The Kabbalists say that each time a person does a Mitzvah, s/he creates a "good angel" -- and, Heaven forbid, the opposite is also true. If we live spiritual lives, then we bring light to the entire world, and even the angels are uplifted.

We see a demonstration of this later, when Moshe ascends Mt. Sinai to receive the Torah. When the nation of Israel turns away from their leader, and appoints a Golden Calf to replace Moshe -- with some even worshipping it as an idol -- "G-d said to Moshe, 'Go, descend, for your nation has defiled itself, that which you brought up from the land of Egypt.'" [Shemos 32:7] When Israel defiles itself, it -- and the world -- no longer can sustain a leader who is up in Heaven, speaking directly with G-d.

The Torah tells us again and again: each of us has the opportunity to affect ourselves for the better, and simultaneously to have an impact on others as well. It begins with us, as individuals. "Tikkun Olam," perfection of the world, can only come about by beginning with "Tikkun Atzmo," perfection of one's self. Every generation hopes that it will be the one to finally perfect the world; the Torah tells us where to start.

Good Shabbos,

Rabbi Yaakov Menken

*This week's class is dedicated to the speedy healing of Azriel Yitzchak ben Chaya Gitel.*

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