

"And he dreamed and behold (there was) a ladder set up on the earth and its top reached up to Heaven, and behold the angels of Hashem (were) ascending and descending on it." (28:12)

Yaakov Avinu's dream contains profound implications which express the Torah's perspective on life. The ladder serves an important purpose. The angels either ascend to Heaven or descend to the earth. Horav Mordechai Ilan z.l., suggests that this is the nature of Am Yisrael. The Talmud in Megillah 16a states, "This nation (Am Yisrael) is compared to dust and also to stars. When they descend (spiritually) they descend to the dust, and when they ascend, they can reach the stars." Moreover, the Midrash states concerning this ladder, "Hashem showed Yaakov the meaning of "a ladder set up on the earth" as referring to Korach who was swallowed up by the earth, while "its top reached up to Heaven" refers to Moshe who ascended to Hashem to receive the Torah." Hashem showed Yaakov two extremes, the apex of spiritual distinction and the nadir of depravity. There is no "standing still" on the ladder of spirituality. One either goes up, or he goes down. Furthermore, one who stands still is viewed as slipping. Our purpose in life is to grow spiritually from day to day, reaching heights not attained the previous day. Yaakov's dream carries with it a timeless message. Even one who has sunk to the "earth" should not yield to depression. He should not think, "I can never make it." Rather, he should look up to the top of the ladder, for it is attainable, but only if he works at it. Likewise, one who is at the top should not feel he has "made it" and relax complacently in his spiritual well-being. He should look down and reflect that man can always fall, if he does not continually work to maintain his spiritual achievement.