

He dreamt, and behold! A ladder set up toward earth, and the top of it reached to Heaven, and behold! Angels of G-d ascending and descending against it. And behold! G-d stood beside him. (28:12,13)

Yaakov *Avinu* set the tone and established the standards for our nation. The principles by which we live as a people were set forth by the Patriarch as he journeyed from Beer-Sheva to Charan. Yaakov gives us our name and destiny, as we are called *Bnei Yisrael*. Avraham *Avinu* was instructed to “go for yourself,” *lech lecha*, uproot yourself and your family, and leave for a destination unknown. He did so as a successful *baal ha'bayis*, householder, with a wife and retinue of servants and wealth. Yaakov did not leave because he was so commanded by Hashem; rather, the Almighty “arranged” for his quick departure, as he was forced to run away from Eisav without much of his own to take with him.

Avraham had a home; Yaakov was about to start a home with nothing more than himself, the qualities inherent in his personality. **Horav S. R. Hirsch, zl**, very aptly explains our Patriarch's approach towards establishing the foundation of the Jewish home and, by extension, the Jewish culture and way of life. This is his primary concern, and so it should be ours. The home unit is the focus of Jewish life. Everything else emanates from the stability of the Jewish home. Yaakov was the first to declare that Hashem must be sought, above all, within the home. He was the first to articulate the concept of *Bais Hashem*, House of G-d, which Rav Hirsch explains as the place within which the soul of man grows and flourishes and to which, in turn, he brings all that he has achieved, transforming it into life-building activity. This is the greatest and nearest place which Hashem may be found – the home.

In his vision, Yaakov saw three sets of ideas. He saw the Heavenly Ladder that was set up by a Higher Power, with its “power base” in Heaven and steps running down to earth. This taught him that a communication link existed between earth and Heaven. This was the first lesson. The destiny of all life on earth is not to be sought below, but Above. In other words, if Yaakov was compelled to travel from Beer-Sheva to Charan, it was designed by Heaven for a noble purpose. He should look toward Heaven to help him to understand this purpose.

Yaakov saw Angels of G-d ascending the ladder. *V'hinei*, “And behold! Angels of G-d were ascending and descending against him.” The Torah introduces the second set of ideas. The messengers of G-d ascend the ladder to Heaven to obtain an image of what, ideally, man should look like. They then return to earth and set the ideal image to contrast the man as he is in reality, so that they can “stand over against him,” either as friend or foe, depending on how his actual character compares to the Divinely-set ideal.

V'hinei, Hashem nitzav alav, “And behold! Hashem stood beside him.” Herein is introduced the

third set of ideas. Yaakov is not alone. Hashem stands before him. True, the character of earthly man does not, at first, conform to his Divinely mandated image. Hashem knows this, and, therefore, stands beside man to demonstrate His love. This love is revealed primarily through the skills for betterment derived in the education of man. This love is unique in the sense that it does not look only at the past and present, but delves deeply into the future, into man's enormous potential. It sees each man in terms of what he will be in the future, and, if it observes within him a spark of purity, it will seek to preserve and develop it.

Yaakov *Avinu* learned an important lesson that day: one need not go to Heaven in search of G-d. Hashem is everywhere! The Glory of G-d seeks its dwelling place among mortal men. He taught the world this lesson by building a home/family based upon the principle of, *Hashem nitzav alav*, "G-d stood beside him." We live as a family and as a nation, upheld solely by the grace of G-d and in accordance with His will. If only the world would listen to the lesson and accept its blueprint for life, the promise of *V'nivrechu becha kol mishpechos ha'adamah u'bezaracha*, "And through you will all the families on earth be blessed, and through your seed."