

And he dreamt, and behold! A ladder was set earthward and its top reached heavenward. (28:12)

Yaakov saw a ladder in his well-known dream. According to *Chazal*, the ladder was standing on a slant, the bottom resting in Be'er Sheva with the top parallel to Beis El. The middle of the ladder coincided with the site of the *Bais Hamikdash*. The **Maharal** wonders why the ladder stood slanted. The message of the angels ascending and descending would have been equally effective if the ladder had stood straight. While various reasons are suggested for the ladder's specific position, the *Maharal* makes a compelling observation which presents a profound lesson. We view each subsequent rung on the ladder as a higher level in *Torah* erudition and spiritual development. When the rungs are straight, each one directly above its predecessor, it reflects a higher level, not a distinct one. Since they are all in the same line, on the same plane, they are not different from one another--only higher, loftier.

When a ladder is on a slant, each rung is in its own plane. Each is distinct from the preceding rung, not only in height, but also in position. It is as if each rung has its own unique position/character. Likewise, as one grows in *Torah*/spirituality, he becomes a totally new individual. He is not the same person as he was previously. He distinguishes himself from others who are not on his level. He cannot be compared to any individual who is not on his level of *Torah* and *mitzvos*.

Chazal tell us that if the previous generation can be likened to angels, then we are like humans. If we view them as humans, then we are no more than donkeys. As one grows spiritually, he becomes a new being. As one grows above his peers, he becomes a new personality, one totally distinct from his previous self. With this idea in mind, **Horav Eliyakim Schlesinger, Shlita**, explains why someone who is not yet privileged to be a *ben Torah* cannot fathom the qualities that distinguish a *Torah* scholar from everybody else. They might think that it is simply a matter of quantity--the *talmid chacham* just happens to know more, he has a greater and more profound knowledge of *Torah*. *Chazal* maintain that it is much more than that. The scholar is on a totally different plane than his counterpart, a position that the common man does not comprehend.

Furthermore, when a ladder is standing straight, each rung "sees" the rung above it. It will therefore, perceive a distinction between the two--one is on a higher level than the other. When a ladder is on a slant, however, the lower rung cannot see anything above it. Consequently, it does not recognize that anything is higher than it. Similarly, the common Jew who has not yet had the opportunity to study and appreciate the beauty and profundity of *Torah*, does not ascribe any distinction to those who have mastered and excelled in *Torah*. As one ascends the ladder of *Torah* and *mitzvos*, he undergoes a transformation with each step.