

Hashem shall place you as a head and not as a tail; you shall be only above, and you shall not be below. (28:13)

The *Ramban* explains that the two terms are not repetitious. It is possible to be a leader to some and a follower of others. Hashem promises that if *Klal Yisrael* is worthy, they will follow no one. They will be highly respected – by everyone. *Horav Ezriel Hildeshaimer, zl*, explains that a person who grows up amid luxury, who is used to and comforted by the finer things in life, will invariably not be impressed when he is “bumped up,” elevated to another class of living. He has had so much exposure to a grandiose lifestyle, that a little more will not dazzle him. For him to be stirred, he would require something extraordinary, something that he never dreamed of, something unrealistic. One who has really not imbibed from the fountain of wealth, however, who has lived a simple, austere lifestyle – and enjoyed it – will be impressed with almost anything that allows him to forget his humble beginnings. Any change to his present austerity will evoke within him a feeling of praise and adulation.

V'hayissa rak l'maalah; “You shall be only above” is interpreted as an elevation in status on par with one who is used to luxury. For him, a bump up does not exude wild accolades, because it is merely a step-up in status. The blessing is that our ascent should be gradational – not overwhelming; incremental – not abrupt. Thus, we observe a hidden blessing that in order to achieve a gradational elevation, one must previously have been in a somewhat above standard position.

Alternatively, by nature, when something falls downward, it descends quickly due to the earth's gravitational pull. On the other hand, when we fling the same object upward, it rises slowly. The opposite is true with regard to fire, which rises quickly. When it burns down, however, it does so very slowly. By nature, a stone moves quickly down to its source, while by nature, fire climbs upward. The rule is: Everything moves quickly toward its source; the stones move downward, while fire, which is energy, moves upward. When they move away from their source, they travel slowly in the opposite direction.

A Jew's *neshamah*, soul, is a *chelek Elokai miMaal*, miniscule component derived from Hashem in Heaven Above. This means that everyone has a part of Hashem within him. It is his power source. Thus, the *neshamah* aspires and strives to reach upward. This is true as long as spiritual contamination has not soiled it. If it has become dirtied or flawed, its focus becomes altered and it looks downward, which is in direct contradistinction to its natural proclivity for upward striving.

Thus, the *pasuk* speaks to us in practical terms, “You shall be only above.” Your *sheifah*, striving, yearning and ascendancy shall be quickly focused upward, toward your source; your ascendance shall be quick, because, after all, you are going home. You should not descend slowly toward the ground, neglecting a flawed soul that is slowly sinking to the ground.

From a practical position, we see this often. The student who is *shteiging*, growing in Torah and *yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven, has an aura of effusiveness about him. He is excited about his spiritual growth. He is all “pumped up.” He is learning up a storm and *davening* with great and meaningful *kavanah*, devotion and intention. If *chas v’shalom*, Heaven forbid, he loses his desire, such that his *geshmak*, joy in learning, has dissipated, his fear of G-d has waned, and his *davening* attendance has slacked off, it all moves slowly, because it is not natural. His *neshamah* is coming along “kicking and screaming,” because it is going in its unnatural direction. May we be worthy of Hashem’s blessing.