

And behold! Angels of G-d were ascending and descending on it. (28:12)

The realm in which the Heavenly Angels make their “home” is Heaven. Thus, the Torah should have written that Angels were first descending and then ascending back to their spiritual habitat. *Rashi* clearly says that *olim techilah, v’achar kach yordim*, they first went up to *Shomayim* and then returned down to land. *Horav Chaim Berlin, zl*, explains this with a practical analogy. The eastern wall of a *shul* is called the “front,” and walking up to the lectern or *Aron Kodesh* is called “walking up.” The reason for this is that the *Aron Kodesh*, Ark, is situated on the eastern wall. Thus, the concepts of “up” and “down” are determined by the location of the *Aron*. If, for example, the *shul* decided to place the *Aron Kodesh* on the western wall, that wall and surrounding area would now have a new stature. It is not the place that lends significance, but what is on/at the place.

The Torah writes, *V’hinei Hashem nitzav alav*, “Behold! Hashem was standing over him.” Heaven’s distinction is that it is where the *Shechinah* reposes. (Actually, Hashem is *Mekomo shel olam* and is, thus, everywhere. *Shomayim* is the sphere where His Heavenly Throne is situated.) Since Hashem was resting above Yaakov, the *Shechinah*’s location was no longer in Heaven, but on earth. Therefore, when the angels were going down to earth, they were actually going up to Hashem, Who had now elevated the earth’s status. Indeed, we must think twice when we think we are ascending, to consider whether, in fact, we are not descending and vice-versa.

Our perception of majestic and impressive is often colored by physical and material parameters. To the human eye, what can be more elevated than entering a majestic palace with its glitter and fancy trappings, on our way to greet the king? Such an experience feels lofty and over the top, since it is human/material centered vision. The Torah has a different take on elevation and majesty. It is not measured by gold, marble and glitter, but by the presence of holiness. A person may descend into a lowly, barren field, a poverty-stricken alley, a filthy, pest-infested ghetto and encounter a great *tzadik* there. That is elevation, that is true illumination – that is majesty. The seemingly simplistic projects are the greatest majesty.

I remember the first time I met *Horav Aharon Leib Shteinman, zl*. I was with my son and grandson, and we were allowed the rare opportunity to daven with his minyan. But, first, we caught a glimpse of his “bedroom/study/nerve center.” He had just woken up and, as he sat up on his bed in the corner of his room, the *gabbai* brought him water for *netillas yadayim*. He then sat on his white resin lawn chair at his card table stacked with *sefarim* to recite *brachos*. At that moment, I felt I was in the palace of a king! His card table became an ornate desk; his resin chair made of the finest leather. I was in the throne room with the king! Some people see a tiny, dingy apartment; others see a palace in which the *gadol ha’dor* lives.