



Finding Faith: Yaakov & the Ladder

Yaakov's famous dream was of a ladder linking earth and heaven. The angels of the Lord went up and down, connecting the earthly and the heavenly realms.

How could Yaakov be afraid, knowing that the Divine messengers were with him and God was aware of his situation? Yaakov's faith said, **HASHEM LI V'LO IRA** - "The Lord is with me: I shall not fear."

The same faith sustained the patriarch's descendants throughout the centuries. "The Lord is with me: I shall not fear" was a Yaakov's ladder for millions of Jews through millennia of time.

That is, according to some critics, until our present age, when some have said that the Jew has become "Yaakov without the ladder".

This seems to suggest a person who has come adrift from God. Possibly it is God who has cast man adrift and left him to suffer alone. Possibly it is man who has cast God adrift and decided he can manage by himself.

After 11 September, one well-known

American religious leader used this terminology in relation to the twin towers disaster.

She asked why any modern person could imagine that the tragedy showed that God did not care, when for so long man had proclaimed his self-sufficiency and told God to keep out of human affairs.

Jews have a different problem. Until the Holocaust, the vast majority of Jews were believers, certain there was a God and that God would protect His people. There was no thought that God had no place in history, no thought of Yaakov abandoning his ladder.

Then came the catastrophe. Many who had been religious now lost patience with God. What kind of God was He, they said, when He let His people down at precisely the moment when He was needed?

It was once the nations that said, "Where is your God?" (T'hilim 19:10). Now the Jews themselves said, "God, where are You?"

Decades of Holocaust theology have tried to find an answer. Some blame the Jews themselves for supposed sins that range from assimilation to anti-Zionism. Some say that God cannot grant free will without running the risk that evil nations and

ideologies will misuse it. Some say it is God testing our faith as He tested our ancestor Avraham.

The theories are innumerable and none seems to bring much comfort. More than seventy years after the event there are still Jews who cannot say "The Lord is with me", who cannot believe in Yaakov's ladder.

Some call this a holy loss of faith. Jews argue with God, but somehow they keep talking to Him.

It's tempting to brush aside Yaakov's ladder but they are trying not to. They know that their ancestors were able to say with Iyov, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him" (13:15).

As Rashi puts it, "Even though He slay me, I will not be separated from Him but will constantly hope in Him. There is no running away or rebellion in my words." **OZ**

Editor's note: Rabbi Apple's thought-provoking piece this week, brought to my mind the following passage in the Monday & Thursday addition to Tachanun:

HABEIT MISHAMAYIM UR-EL... Look from heaven and see how we have become a scorn and a derision among the nations; we are accounted as sheep brought to the slaughter, to be slain and destroyed, or to be smitten and reproached.

UVCHOL ZOT... Yet, despite all this, we have not forgotten Your Name: we beseech You, forget us not.