

# HAAMEK DAVAR

- Dr Jacob Solomon

## Vayeitzei

*He dreamed... a ladder was set on the ground and its top reached Heaven... angels of G-d were going up it and down it... (28:12).*

Rashi explains that Ya'akov had reached the border of Chutz La'aretz. The angels ascending were those who went with him to the border, and the angels descending were a different set that were to be with him throughout his travels in Chutz La'aretz. It was the "changing of the guards"; something that was to happen again 20 years later when "Ya'akov went on his way and the angels of G-d met him" (32:2). Rashi explains that at that point the angels operating in Eretz Yisrael joined him as he re-entered the territory on his way home. Those two meetings with the angels at the start and end of the parasha beautifully frame the story of Ya'akov's life in Chutz LaAretz.

The Midrash (Vayikra Rabba 29:2) interprets the ladder in the vision of Ya'akov Avinu in a wider context. "Do not fear, My servant Ya'akov... for I am with you" (Yirmiyahu 46:18). This Midrash views the ladder with the angels going up and down with not just Ya'akov's situation, but as a

window to the future of Israel. There would be legions that would oppress Israel including Bavel, Yavan, and Edom. With Edom, identified as Rome and its disciples through succeeding ages, that ladder would go up so far as to be out of sight and out of vision. The descendants of Ya'akov, Am Yisrael, would be going through hard and challenging times. Yet the angels would still be ascending and descending... they would be supporting those who are striving to get up that never-ending ladder which, in view of the challenges faced in the Golah, would be getting narrower and narrower, harder and harder to climb with each rung upwards.

"Do not fear, My servant Ya'akov... for I am with you." Remember that Yirmiyahu received and communicated this prophecy when he himself had just been forced into exile, dragged by his friends into the foreign environment of Egypt barely in advance of the Babylonian exile. "Ya'akov", it may be explained, refers to both the Jewish people, his descendants and to Ya'akov himself. And to G-d's appearing to Ya'akov with the vision of the ladder and the angels: "Do not fear", as a message to him and to his descendants.

This is the challenge facing Klal Yisrael, both as individuals and as

communities. The higher one climbs in life, in both mitzvot bein adam la-makom and bein adam l'chaveiro, the harder and more challenging the next rungs upwards appear. There is the temptation to compromise with a "that's good enough for me" and "that's good enough for us."

Ya'akov Avinu had to climb his ladder when things looked bleak. With Lavan. With Eisav. With Shechem. And if that was not enough, with Yosef, eventually leaving his beloved homeland for Egypt. But it was all for the good. With each step he became greater and greater. And with his heart in place and with maximum efforts to always do the right thing, the relays of angels helped him upwards and when in apprehension in fear, descended to prevent him falling.

And we, every one of us, have our own ladders to climb. On Rosh HaShana we are judged: on balanced, are we on the same place on the ladder this year as we were this time last year? If we are higher up, we are judged for good. If we fell down chas v'shalom, it's the other way. And if we on balance are in the same place as last year, we have the Aseret Yemei Teshuva to do something about moving up - urgently! And in our daunting fears of doing the right

thing, it is on us to have the faith that if we put in the effort, G-d will help us. The angels going up will help us on our upward climb. And in facing setbacks, the angels coming down will give us the strength to recover and get back onward and upwards on the ladder. 📖