

by Rabbi Dr Raymond Apple z"l

VAYEITZEI

Looking for Angels

Yaakov has won a hollow victory.

He has the birthright. He has the blessing. But the price is that he has to leave home.

A refugee from all that he loves, he has no pillow but a stone, no bed but the ground, no tent but the heavens.

Lonely, penniless, depressed and afraid, he wonders what the future will bring, or even whether he will survive.

Yet somehow he succeeds in sleeping, and that is when he dreams his famous dream: "Behold a ladder set up on earth, its top reaching to heaven, and behold angels of God ascending and descending upon it" (B'reishit 28:12).

The imagery of the ladder has taken hold of the imagination of every commentator.

Some say the ladder is symbolic of prayer, others that it links earth and heaven and denotes that the soul is from above and the body from beneath.

All very interesting, but the angels and the ladder have to be seen in context.

Surely the message is that no-one is ever completely alone, no-one is utterly friendless, no cloud lacks its thin silver lining. There is a protecting Presence whose agents are the angels.

But not only this. No matter how lowly one feels, one can still look up and find angels, symbols of the inspiration to continue and to determine to rise above the moment.

In English history that's "Turn again, Whittington, Lord Mayor of London!"

In Jewish tradition it is, "There's hope for your latter end" (Yirmiyahu 31:16).

Above & Within

One view of Yaakov's ladder is that it represents Divine polarity.

There are two aspects of the Almighty: "I dwell above in holiness, but also with the contrite and lowly in spirit, reviving the spirits of the lowly, reviving the hearts of the contrite" (Yishayahu 57:18).

Rabbi Yochanan said, "Wherever in Scripture you find God's loftiness, there you also find His lowliness" (Megila 31a).

God is great, mighty and awesome,

but He also concerns Himself with the orphan, widow and stranger (D'varim 10:17-18).

God is at the summit of the ladder, majestic and sublime, and also at the foot of the ladder, comforting those who suffer.

He is transcendent - above and beyond - and immanent, nearby and within.

He is AVINU MALKEINU, Father and King. If He were only MALKEINU, His creatures would be afraid to approach Him; if He were only AVINU, they might exploit His love and say with Voltaire, "Of course God will forgive; that's His job!" -OZ

Y'HI ZICHRO BARUCH