

*Parashat Vayeitzei* (Genesis 28:10-32:3)

*Parashat Vayeitzei* describes Jacob's flight from Canaan to Haran to escape his brother Esau's anger. Along the way, he dreams his famous dream of angels going up and down a ladder (Gen. 28:12). When he wakes, he declares, "... How awesome is this place! This is none other than *beit elohim*, the house of God, and that is the gateway to heaven" (Gen. 28:17).

Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk (1717-1787; a founding rebbe of Chassidism) reads this story symbolically. He notes the letters in *lechem*, the Hebrew word for bread and a symbol of the physical world, also spell *chalom*, the Hebrew word for dream. Jacob's vision now provides a road map for how to rise above the mundane preoccupations of this world (feeding your belly with bread) and enter God's sacred realm (feeding your soul with dreams of *k'dusha*, sanctity).

Rebbe Elimelech continues: the way to rise up spiritually is through worship; the angels ascending the ladder are prayers. And because prayers that come from the heart enter the heart (based on his reading of Babylonian Talmud B'rachot 6b), those same prayers return and descend to "pierce the heart," magnifying the transcendence of the moment. Jacob recognizes he has experienced a different dimension of *k'dusha* when he wakes.

Rabbinic commentary often uses Biblical figures as stand-ins for the Jewish people; this is particularly apt with Jacob, who next week is renamed Israel. Now the dream story isn't about something that happened to a Biblical patriarch long ago; it's a challenge to each of us today.

Gut Shabbos/Shabbat Shalom