

Parasha Meditation Vayetze

Bereishit 28:10-32:3

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum

Stepping Inwards on the Ladder of Ascent

Introduction:

וַיִּחְלֶם וַיְהִי וְהִנֵּה סֻלָּם מְצָב אֶרֶצָה וְרֵאשׁוֹ מִגִּיעַ הַשָּׁמַיְמָה וְהִנֵּה מַלְאָכֵי אֱלֹהִים עֹלִים וְיֹרְדִים בּוֹ: (בראשית פרק כח, פסוק יב)
 “He dreamed, and behold a ladder is standing on the earth, but its head reaches heaven...”¹
 The metaphor of Ya’acov’s ladder lends itself to profound meditation. The ladder symbolizes the connection that links earth to heaven, matter below to spirit Above, and us to G*d.

Keeping our Head in Heaven with our Feet on the Ground

Netivat Shalom explains that this world is like a ladder standing on the earth, while its head reaches heaven. Through being involved with earthly matters, we can reach the very highest level, until our “head reaches heaven.” We have the opportunity to elevate ourselves and cleave to Hashem, specifically by elevating the earthly lowly matters towards heavenly levels. The Torah verse also teaches us, that even when we are involved in matters of this world, we mustn’t forget to keep our head in heaven. When we really desire to elevate the physical and bring heaven down to earth, then Hashem will watch over us and help us. We learn this from the following verse “וְהִנֵּה הַשֵּׁם נֹצֵב עָלָיו” – “Behold, Hashem was standing over him,”² – to guard him.³ When we desire to sanctify ourselves, Hashem will guard us with a protection beyond nature.⁴

The Ladder Within

Ya’acov’s ladder teaches us about how our relationship with Hashem in truth is a relationship with our own inner core. Hashem is the underlying structure of all of existence, including our own existence. Alienation from G*d, means alienation from the depths of the self. A relationship with Hashem means a relationship with our own inner core, with the reality of our reality.

רבי חייא ורבי ינאי חד אמר עולים ויורדין בסולם וחד אמר עולים ויורדים ביעקב...
 (מדרש רבה בראשית פרשה סח פסקה יב)

Rabbi Chia said they ascend and descend on the ladder, Rabbi Yanhai said that they ascend and descend in Ya’acov.⁵ During his dream of the ladder, Ya’acov was looking into himself. We learn this from the word “*bo*” “...Behold, angels of G*d are ascending and descending ‘*bo*.” The preposition ‘*bo*’ can mean either ‘on it,’ ‘in it’ or ‘in him.’

¹ Bereishit 28:12.

² Bereishit 28:13.

³ Rashi Bereishit 28:13.

⁴ *Netivat Shalom, Parashat Vayetze* pp. 183-184.

⁵ *Bereishit Rabah, Parasha 68, Piska 12.*



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כי באמת האדם עצמו הוא הסולם ויש בו פנימיות הנשמה חלק אלוה ממעל רמז לבהי' וה' נצב עליו כנ"ל
(שפת אמת ספר בראשית - פרשת ויצא - שנת [תרמ"ז])

In truth, the person himself is the ladder, and within him is the inner Neshama a part of G*d from Above, this hints to the aspect "G*d was standing upon him."⁶

The Ladder of Ascent

Various levels of consciousness exist between us and our Divine self. Each rung represents a gradual ascent whereby we can earn wisdom and perfection one step at a time. As the ladder has no moving parts, it symbolizes ascent by way of our own personal effort. The Ladder reminds us that reaching the highest realms of consciousness is not a short, swift journey. However, we must also keep in mind that no journey is without its rests and pauses. Therefore, whenever we require a respite during our spiritual ascent, the rungs of the ladder provide us with the support and strength we need until we are ready to take our next step upward.

Meditation:

Sit comfortably in your chair, close your eyes. Take several deep breaths, and let go of anything you are may be holding on to.

1. Breathe in Hashem's life-giving energy, breathe out tensions, negativity and worry. Breathe deeply and feel completely relaxed in all of the limbs of your body. Relax, get yourself in a meditative mode, and imagine that you are Yaakov, "*asleep, but your heart is awake.*"⁷
2. Imagine a ladder in your mind's eye. Try to visualize its shape and color. Is it a small indoor ladder, or a larger gardening ladder? Is it made from wood, metal or another material? What is its color? Perhaps it has more than one color? How many rungs does it have?
3. Now imagine yourself standing at the bottom of this ladder. Which difficulties and fears make it hard for you to take the first step to ascend the ladder? Perhaps it is negative habits, addictions, *lashon hara*, mitzvot that are difficult for you. Try to identify these blocks and then try to connect with the light of Hashem which always comes down from Above.
4. Visualize Hashem's light entering all of your negative actions and gradually melting them away. Then take the first step to the bottom of the ladder. This is the level of ארץ - Earth/*Malchut*. You will be ascending the ladder from below on earth towards heaven above. Imagine saying the word "Amen" twice in your mind's eye as you leave each rung to climb the next rung of the ladder.
5. As you now stand on the bottom of the ladder, feel yourself standing firmly; get in touch with the thing on earth which supports you, your daily routines, the people who are close to you, your support system. Get in touch with Hashem's light that flows through all the channels of your

⁶ Sefat Emet, Bereishit, Vayetze 5647.

⁷ Based on Shir HaShirim 5:2.

support system into yourself. Now look up at the first rung. What blocks you from taking your first step? Which negative emotions are you struggling with, anger, worry, fears and doubts?

6. Visualize Hashem's light entering into all your negative emotions and gradually melting them away. See if you feel like taking another step onto the first rung of the ladder, as you say "Amen" in your mind's eye. You are now reaching the first rung.

7. The First Rung וילון-*Vilon/Veil/Yesod*

Imagine that you are now entering the veil of the Heavens, where the Divine light is indwelling in all physical and psychological substance. Remain on the first rung as you imagine Hashem's light within you. Get in touch with the dream of your life, the things you always wanted to accomplish, but so far didn't reach. Visualize fulfilling your dream. When you are ready, recite the word "Amen" twice in your mind's eye, and take some deep relaxing breaths as you ascend the second rung of the ladder.

8. The Second Rung רקיע-*Rakia/Expanse/Hod*

Imagine the bright light of the sun warming you. Our body is continually filled with Hashem's light and love. Even when we don't see it or feel it, we know that we are filled with Hashem's light. From your place on the ladder, send Hashem's light and love to someone you love very much, or someone you know really needs it. Now imagine the soft light of the moon, stars and constellations on a dark blue sky. Enjoy basking in the soft glow with the knowledge that Hashem guides all your ways through His faithful servants. Now visualize the letters of the word "Amen" *Alef, Mem* and *Nun* and repeat the word while you breathe calmly and step up to the third rung.

9. The Third Rung שחקים - *Shachakim/Clouds/Netzach*

You are walking in a thick white mist. Your feet tread lightly upon the flimsy ground, lifted, by the wonder and awe in your heart. You are chasing something, some mysterious beauty, which hides behind the endless appearances of its perfection. There is no separation between one moment and the next, one victory and the next that you fathom in your mind's eye. Each success you have accomplished blends into a greater success, as you imagine all the obstacles in your life that you succeeded to overcome. They are all so different, yet they are one and the same. Visualize the manna flowing down to you and taste its heavenly taste. Now imagine saying "Amen" twice, and take some deep breaths preparing yourself to ascent to the fourth rung.

10. The Fourth Rung זבול-*Zevul/ Habitation/ Tiferet*

Imagine a beautiful garden, and in its center the outline of the house you can call "home." Imagine your true home. This home has always been the home of your wandering soul. Feel assured that you are not lost. Even as the vision fades from your mind's eye, and the dark clouds of your ordinary consciousness obscure its beautiful garden, you are ascertained that there is a place where you belong, a place in complete harmony with the essence of who you are, and with your name. Your home is connected to the heavenly Jerusalem (*Yerushalayim shel Ma'ala*). Visualize the Temple, and its altar upon which Michael the arch-angel and great prince stands and offers his offering. Take another few deep breaths. Recite "amen" twice in your mind, as you prepare yourself to ascent to the fifth rung.



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11. The Fifth Rung **מעון – Maon/ Dwelling place/ Gevurah**

In this realm you need to deal with your shadow side, the part of yourself repressed to the rear by un-rectified knots. It could be knots of deep seated jealousy, hatred, and desire to injure others and yourself in order to survive. It could be your darkest fear, or your deepest self-hatred. Imagine your *Gevurah*, cracking each of these un-rectified nuts. See them melt away while you bring Hashem's light into each of them. Imagine the pitch dark night, and hearing the ministering angels singing songs of praises to Hashem. You can now rest at peace in *Ma'on*, in your personal refuge in the midst of spiritual warfare. No matter what kinds of adversities you may be facing, you have found a place of peace in a land at war. Find this Heaven in your heart. This secret place in your heart is beyond suffering. You may judge all things according to their nature and actions, and annihilate all things by means of love for their opposite, yet the emptiness of this sanctuary of peace is exempt. "Amen, Amen" you recite, as you take some deep breaths and visualize entering the sixth rung.

12. The Sixth Rung **מכון – Machon/ Established Place/ Chesed**

Go through the doors of fire and the chambers of vapor, storm, whirlwind and hail until you reach absolute *Chesed*. "For I have said, the world is built by *Chesed* – love, you establish your faithfulness in the very heavens."⁸ "כִּי אָמַרְתִּי עוֹלָם הָסֵד יִבְנֶה שָׁמַיִם תִּכְוֶן אֲמוּנָתְךָ בְּקֶהֱם:"⁸ Get in touch with your absolute *Chesed*, which is changeless and constant in its perfection. It is the most fundamental of all, a template and foundation for all which follows; the first certainty of G*d's creation. Feel your love emanating from the spring of His eternal love and allow it to fill your heart, and from there your entire being as you keep breathing slow loving breaths. Feel how much you love yourself and everyone else in your world. "Amen, Amen," continue your loving breaths, as you imagine entering the seventh and final rung.

13. The Seventh Rung **ערבות – Aravot/ Desert/ Empty Expanse/ Keter/ Chachmah/ Binah**

You are now floating into the holy heaven of *Aravot*, filled with the treasures of life, the treasures of peace, and the treasures of blessing. You meet there the souls of the righteous, and the spirits and souls which are about to be created. Imagine the glittering dew in the sun with which the Holy One, blessed be He, is about to review the dead. There also are celestials, seraphs, and holy beings and ministering angels and the throne of glory, and the King, the Living G*d, high and uplifted, sitting over them among the clouds, and darkness and cloud and thick darkness surround Him. There is again a firmament above the heads of the living creatures "shining like the glitter of the purest crystal."⁹ Now allow your mind to empty as you get in touch with that emptiness which is, paradoxically, most full. It is the emptiness of particular forms, in which all forms find their source. Nothing and all things are contained herein.

14. "שִׁירוּ לַאלֹהִים זְמִירוֹ שְׁמוֹ סֵלוֹ לְרִכְבֵּי בְּעֶרְבוֹת בְּיָהּ שָׁמוֹ וְעֲלֹזוֹ לְפָנָיו:" – "Sing to G*d, sing praises to His name, extol Him who rides upon the *aravot* – highest heaven – in Y-a His name, and rejoice before

⁸ Tehillim 89:3.

⁹ Babylonian Talmud, Chagiga 12b, Yechezkiel 1:22.



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him.”¹⁰ The word “*Aravot*” which is often translated as “highest heaven” also means mixture, since this heaven is a mixture of fire and water. In this realm feel your deepest gratitude for all the goodness in your life, which arouses your deepest desire to praise Hashem in the very highest way. Know in your heart of hearts that Hashem stands beside you. Hear in your inner ear Him say to you: “וְהִנֵּה אֲנִי עִמָּךְ וְשָׁמְרְתִּיךָ בְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר תֵּלֵךְ וְהִשְׁבַּתִּיךָ אֶל הָאֲדָמָה הַזֹּאת כִּי לֹא אֶעְזָבְךָ:”
 “I am with you, and will keep you wherever you go. I will return you to this earth. For I will not leave you...”¹¹ “Amen Amen!”

15. Slowly begin to go down each of the rungs of the ladder from the highest heaven downwards. From the seventh and highest heaven *Aravot*, to the sixth realm of *Machon*, descending into the fifth level of *Ma'on*, until you come to the fourth rung of *Zevul*. Plunging down to the third realm of *Shachakim*, descending down to the second level of *Rakia*, followed by the first rung of *Vilon*, until you finally return from your heavenly journey and reach the Earth. You are back on the ground, take some soft steps with your feet on the floor, and tap your hands on the table before you release your arms and legs, then open your eyes.

Notes:

The Symbolism and Imagery of Ladders

Going up the ladder is the spiritual stairway through which we can approach our Divine self, and reach higher realms of consciousness in our quest for spiritual perfection.

The two vertical uprights of the ladder symbolize that our upward ascent, from the bottom-most rung to the upper-most rung, is a journey through the realm of duality. Before we can step up to the next higher rung on the ladder we must first experience and master the lessons of duality which exist at our current level of elevation. As we steadfastly ascend the rungs of the ladder we slowly elevate ourselves, higher and higher, above the lower plane of the superficial and mundane. Upon reaching the higher rungs of the ladder, we begin to breathe in the rarefied air of Higher Consciousness. It is at these higher levels of consciousness that the mysteries of Eternity slowly begin to unveil their secrets to us.

The Divine unified realm is beyond all frustrations, confusions and restraints of the material world. Only *tzadikim* reach the top-most rung of the ladder – the realm of highest consciousness. Reaching this level through personal desire and effort enables the *tzadik* to transcend duality and achieve entrance into the Infinite domain of Enlightenment and Unity. May we learn to access the light of our Neshama as we gradually climb Ya’acov’s ladder one rung at a time! May the inner light of each of us shine forth and uplift our personal surroundings this month, from the inside out!

¹⁰ Ibid. 68:5.

¹¹ *Bereishit* 12:15.



About Us



Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum

Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum, a native of Denmark, is Founder and Director of Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin. She holds a Bachelor of Education in Bible and Jewish Philosophy from Michlala Jerusalem College for Women, and a Masters of Art in Jewish History from Touro College. Chana Bracha also began her practice as a spiritual healer through Emuna, tefila and energy work. For more than two decades Chana Bracha has taught Bible studies with special emphasis on women's issues in Israel and the United States. She creates curricula emphasizing women's spiritual

empowerment through traditional Torah values. Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin located in the Judean Hills of Israel offers a unique program to women of all ages and backgrounds to learn in a holistic Torah study environment that nurtures the mind, body and soul. Intensive textual study of Tanach, Halacha and Chassidut are woven together with creative spiritual expression, and connection with the land of Israel through organic gardening, herbology, Jewish sources of healing and sustainable living. Classes in Jewish mysticism, Chassidism and Jewish meditation are directed at the spiritual thirst so prominent in our times.

*In 2010 Rebbetzin Chana Bracha published her first book, *Women at the Crossroads: A Woman's Perspective on the Weekly Torah Portion*.*

Chana Bracha has a married son and several granddaughters. She lives with her husband and younger son on the land of the Judean hills, Israel.

If you are interested in:

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or visit her blog: <http://rebbetzinchanabracha.blogspot.com/2010/11/emunah-healing-for-women.html>

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