

Vayeitzei / וַיֵּצֵא

Climbing the Ladder

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Toras Avigdor Junior

Adapted from the teachings
of Rav Avigdor Miller z"l

Sunday morning Totty, Avraham, and Tzvi arrived in shul and began saying brachos and pesukei d'zimra. It seemed like it was going to be a regular shacharis until suddenly the door to the shul banged open with a loud **CRASH**, followed by a terrible screeching sound, like something heavy being dragged across the floor. Everyone in the shul looked up from their siddurim to see none other than Tzadok "Hatzadik" dragging a huge ancient-looking ladder across the shul.

Oblivious to everyone staring at him, Tzadok stood the rickety ladder up against the wall and, with a siddur in his hand, quickly climbed to the top. Once there, he started davening Shacharis from the top of the ladder as if this was a perfectly normal thing to do.

After davening was over, Rabbi Leiter, the Rov of the shul walked over to the ladder and looked up at Tzadok.

"Good morning, Tzadok," the Rov began cautiously. "How are you today?"

"Oh, Rabbi Leiter, I'm doing wonderful!" Tzadok replied joyfully from the top of the ladder. "In fact, I get a big mazel tov! Today I became a Tzadik Gamur!"

"Wow!" the Rov responded. "A Tzadik Gamur?! Who could have guessed. And I'm guessing this has something to do with this big ladder you brought to



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shul? The one that's making a big scratch on the wall we just painted?"

"Oh my! I'm so sorry!" said Tzadok, "You can borrow my ladder later to repaint the wall."

Rav Leiter closed his eyes for a second and shook his head. After regaining his composure, the Rov said "Tzadok, would you mind coming down from your ladder for a minute so that you can explain to me what's going on? It's hard for me to keep my neck craned upwards for so long."

Tzadok carefully made his way down the ladder and stood next to Rav Leiter, all ready to explain himself. After all, it was important that the Rav should know the secret to being a tzadik.

Tzadok stroked his beard and looked at the Rov. "Ah, Rabbi," he began. "Let me tell you what's going on. When the judge found me not guilty after I was arrested for selling fake segulot, I made a promise to become a real Tzadik. And the Rov of the prison taught me about how the ladder in Yaakov's dream teaches that we need to climb up the ladder of Yirat Shamayim to become a tzadik.

Well, here it is! The biggest ladder I could find – I don't look for shortcuts to becoming a tzadik. I found this big old ladder and I climbed it too! And now I'm a tzadik gamur!"

Just then, Avraham and Tzvi, who had been listening to the conversation with the rest of the shul, brought the Rov a cup of coffee from the shul's coffee station. "Thank you boys!" the Rov said with a smile, before making a shehakol. After taking a long sip, the Rov took a deep breath and turned back to Tzadok.

"Tzadok," he said. "First of all, it's never a good idea to bring a big ladder into shul during davening. A tzadik would never want to interrupt people's davening. And secondly, climbing a ladder will not make you into a tzadik. Becoming a tzadik means working on yourself, improving your midos, doing mitzvos, and serving Hashem."

"But Rabbi!" said Tzadok. "What about that ladder in Yaakov's dream? Rabbi Volender told me that climbing a ladder is the secret to being a tzadik!"

"Excellent question, Tzadok," said Rav Leiter. "Do you want to know what that ladder in Yaakov's dream is teaching you? Look at your ladder here. You see that it's made of many rungs. You know why they made it that way? Because you can't just jump to the top of a ladder. You need to go up one step at a time.

"It's the same thing with serving Hashem. Nobody can just snap his fingers and – POOF! – become a tzadik. It takes slow and consistent work, both with your actions and your mind. And through constant achievements, one step at a time, you can eventually reach the level of a tzadik."

"Look at Avraham and Tzvi over here. They never brought a ladder into shul; but they're climbing the real ladder of Yaakov Avinu. Last year Avraham decided he wanted to be a tzadik in davening. And he began slowly climbing the ladder. He started with one bracha in shemona esrei. For one week he said that one bracha slowly and with kavanah. And then the next week he added on a second bracha with extra kavanah. And the third week, he added a third. And now look at him daven! He's a tzadik in davening!"

And Tzvi? He became a tzadik in chesed by climbing the ladder one step at a time! He started by making sure to do an extra chesed one time every week. And when he got used to that, he started doing an extra chesed twice a week. And then he climbed the next rung, and then the next rung. Today everybody in the shul knows that Tzvi is the chesed tzadik!"

Rav Leiter looked at Tzadok with a big smile. "You won't need this rickety old ladder anymore, Tzadok. The ladder you're going to have to climb to become a tzadik is right in front of you wherever you are. All you have to do is decide that you're going to start climbing towards Hashem one rung at a time.

Have A Wonderful Shabbos!



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