



## **Parshat Vayitzei**

Ya'akov, pursued by Eisav and on his way to Charan, stops to sleep and has a prophetic dream. God tells him that He will watch over him and give the land upon which he is lying to him and to his descendants. Moreover, God tells him that his offspring shall be as he 'dust of the earth.' (Bereisheit, 28: 14. Much has been said, in midrashic literature and the classical commentators, about the imagery dust used here, in contrast to the images of the stars in the heavens or the sands of the sea, which God used when speaking to Avraham and Yitzchak. Maimonides, in his Igeret Teiman, or Epistle to Yemen, offers his own approach, in keeping with the theme of that letter, which he wrote to offer encouragement to the Jews of that beleaguered community, which was persecuted and faced with the challenge of forced conversion to Islam.

Maimonides formally addressed his letter to a certain scholar named Ya'akov ben Natanel Fayummi, but asked that it be distributed to all the Jews of Yemen. In it, he assured the Jewish community that the events occurring were already foretold in the Bible, and that the Jewish people were assured by God that they would endure and ultimately experience redemption. As one of the sources for the nation's promised survival, he mentions God's blessing to the fleeing Ya'akov, during the prophetic vision he experienced on his way to Charan.

In his letter Maimonides writes that God promised Ya'akov that even though the other nations of the world would humble and defeat his descendants, his people would ultimately outlast them. This is the meaning, writes Maimonides, of the divine promise to Ya'akov that his descendants would be as the dust of the earth. Although they would be trampled on like the dust, similar to a treading ground, in the end they would overcome and be victorious. In addition, he writes, just as dust eventually settles on the person who treads on it, and outlasts him, so, too, will the Jewish nation outlast its oppressors. The Jewish people has witnessed, throughout history, the fulfillment of this divine promise, as interpreted by Maimonides, as ancient nations who persecuted us have disappeared from the historical scene, and we have continued to exist. In our own day, we have seen the collapse of the Soviet Union alongside the continued growth of the Jewish population of the State of Israel. May we live to see the fulfillment of the other divine promise that Maimonides explicated in his Epistle to Yemen- the advent of the messianic era- as well.