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## NEWS & VIEWS

November 14, 2018 | 6 Kislev 5779

Blog Edition

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### Vertical Ladders of Sky, Horizontal Ladders of Earth

Parashat Va-Yetze (*Genesis 28:10-32:3*)

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I've been thinking about John Keats lately. About how he died at the age of 25. About how so much of his life up to that point was spent contemplating a way out of this world. Beauty, imagination, sleep - these were his exits and escapes. These were the paths he used to transcend reality, to free himself from the cruelty, the violence, the brokenness of this world. He writes in his "Ode to Sleep":

*O soft embalmer of the still midnight  
 Shutting with careful fingers and benign  
 Our willing eyes...  
 O soothest Sleep!...  
 Save me from curious conscience...  
 Seal the hushed casket of my soul.*

Keats is praying to sleep here. He is beseeching and commanding sleep to "shut" closed his eyes, to "save" him from consciousness, to "seal" his soul off from the darkness of the world. And Keats issues these prayers because, as he describes elsewhere, to fall asleep is to lift the soul up into "the light of heaven." To fall asleep is to drift into an embrace of pure beauty. While to wake up - to wake up for Keats means plunging from a "vastness of sky" into the "muddy stream of real things."

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