

Vayetzei: Insights of The Rav

- Analysis of Jacob's doubts, and the answer Hashem gave him at Bethel. Jerusalem supplanting Beer Sheva. Starting with family rather than thousands. Joseph repeating the galut experience. Why this was necessary.

VAYETZE: INSIGHTS OF THE RAV

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(I regret to say that I have no information as to who transcribed this shiur. I have tried to stick as closely as possible to the text as it appears in my notes. Perhaps it is Josh Rapps? [Ed.]

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Sedra Vayaytze.

This evening we shall explain a few aspects of the word, Vayaytze. Rashi's interpretation is that the word "Vayaytze" denotes that the departure of a "zadik". A righteous person leaves a profound impression. When he is in a town, he is its glory, its grandeur, its beauty. "Vayaytze yaakov mibayr shova vayaylech chorona".

Where does Rashi derive this conclusion about the departure? Where is his source for this statement? It was no longer the B'er Sheva which it previously was. He felt that semantically Vayaytze tells a story. It contains a message. B'er Sheva became a desolate place which had previously been a beautiful city.

In Hebrew the word Vayaytze appears, according to its context, with different connotations, as demonstrated in various places in the Torah. In chapter 11, sentence 8 of Sedra Bo in Chumash Shmosh we find: Vayaytze mayim Paroh b'chori af. We find it combined with the word ays when Pharaoh asked Moshe to pray for him and he answered that he could not pray here. "I will go out and spread out my hands to G-d!" There are three possibilities here. It is combined with the words "ays", "m'ays" and "min", all meaning "going out from". It means a physical departure, not a spiritual one. For instance, we find in Sedra Vayakal (section 35, sentence 20): when Moshe sent the people to obtain the ingredients necessary for the Ohel Moed, "Vayaytze kol adas bnai Yisrael milifnai Moshe". They went out to attend to important business, to return shortly with the offering for the Mishkan. This is a departure, not forever, but for a short time. They went just to get what they needed. It is a physical departure for a short time but not permanent. The same applies to what Moshe said to Pharaoh, "I'll walk out to the city gate to pray." Again, it is physical, "B'tzesi ays", not "min". "Ays" is departure from a person: Moshe's leaving Pharaoh. These are the semantics of the word.

When it is combined with the word "min" (or a contraction of "min") it means something different; it means "permanent, forgotten."

Thus "Vayaytze Yaakov mi'ber" means "I had to move away from something dear, something I loved". A "force" has displaced me. This is what Rashi means in his explanation of Mi Be'r Sheva. He didn't want to go but was uprooted. Moreover, Vayaytze min refers to something

tragic, something sad which is reminiscent of a catastrophe - his moving from B'er Sheva. How do we know he felt like that? B'er Sheva felt it and Jacob felt it. It is hard to imagine a B'er Sheva without the personage of Jacob. They were one entity; he belonged to the city. His destination was strange and foreign to him and he felt that he could never learn to live there. His tragedy was the necessity to live minus his father's home. Why did he experience this in such tragic terms? Of course, it is understood that no one wants to leave his father and mother and the home he loves. But this was not Jacob's main reason, for he was not a child. The Torah would not talk merely about sentimental terms. The Patriarchs were not in the habit of turning natural events into tragedies.

There is a posuk in Tehilim which reads, "I lift up mine eyes to the mountain; from whence shall mine help come!" This posuk of Tehilim refers to Jacob when he left Be'r Sheva to go to Choron. It was a spiritual moment of tragedy for him. Interestingly, however, after he spent the night "B'mokom", in Bethel, he became light-hearted, happy, because he had experienced an encounter with G-d and was given the assurance of Divine help. But it was not due merely to an encounter with G-d and not only the promise of protection and assurance. What did G-d tell him?

Abraham introduced the Covenantal Community. It was signed and sealed by G-d and it imposed an obligation not only on man but also on G-d. It involved each side of the covenant. Was it unconditional or did Abraham have to meet certain conditions and obligations? Certain definite conditions were introduced as we find in Chapter 18, line 19 of Sedra "Vayera".

"For I know that he will instruct his sons and his community after him to observe the ways of G-d to do charity and righteousness in order that G-d will bring to Abraham that which He has promised concerning him."

He must transmit all his teaching to future generations. If Abraham leaves no "will", there is no obligation by G-d. It is said that every member of the Covenant must write two wills. There is the normal will that disposes of his personal wealth and belongings. But there is another will, the one of observing Derech Hashem. "He (Abraham) will entrust the spiritual treasure to his children."

According to Rambam, a "mitzvah" is not merely a commandment but "mittzva she'bal peh' " an utterance or a will. The word "mitzvah" is synonymous with the word Tzavaah (will). If it were not carved out, the covenant would have terminated.

According to the Rambam, Abraham was the first teacher – not to a few – but to tens of thousands. The Community consisted of Talmidim. The main thing was the "Teacher-father", not merely based on the biological factor but on the teaching aspect. Rambam calls it, "The nation which is in love with G-d." This is how he termed the Covenantal Community. We often find in Tehilim the phrase, Shigoyun L'Dovid as it introduces a psalm. The word Shigoyun means the "Madness of David." He was madly in love with G-d. Abraham's responsibility was to see that there is someone to pass it on to. This was the type of community which Abraham passed on to Isaac and which Isaac then passed on to Jacob. It was "love of G-d" and it was consummated at Sinai.

Where in Torah do we find that "Yitzchak" took over the lead? In Chapter 26, line 25 of Toldos it declares, Vayiven shom mizbayach. Once he built the altar, he was now the teacher. Now he became the successor.

We also find that Abimelech, the King of G'ror, recognized this greatness, as did the previous Abimelech of Abraham. Here, immediately after being told that Yitzchak built the Mizbayach, Abimelech came to sign a treaty. "Now I see that G-d is with you. Let there be a treaty between you and me". A king does not sign a pact with an ordinary person but with a person of equal importance. In Chapter 22 of Sedra Vayera, Abimelech made a treaty with Abraham and recognized him as a king. Also, he wouldn't have done this with an ordinary man. Thus, with both Abraham and Isaac we find them recognized as kings. Therefore, lineage succession is clear.

Now as for Jacob, where do we find the leadership turned over to him?

We find it in the second Brochos or blessings bestowed upon him by his father Isaac before Jacob left his home. Chapter 27, line 4: "And may He bestow upon you the blessings of Abraham." Isaac never intended these blessings for Esau. He intended for Esau only "M'tal Hashamayim" the dew of heaven, the physical riches. The second ones, Birchas Avrohom were for Jacob. "Travel and spread the words of G-d. Tell the people who G-d is!" That is the trusteeship of the Covenantal Community: "love of G-d". Interestingly, here we find the name of G-d written as Kail Shakai. In the first blessing it is written E-ohim. Shakai means "limitation", not too big, not too much, limited. Jacob's role would now involve a limited group of people.

Jacob understood all this but there was something he didn't understand. If he is the leader of the community, he thought it only could be carried out in Eretz Yisroel. He knew that his father Yitzhak wanted to leave the land but G-d stopped him. "You are the leader of the Community: You and the community are one entity and you cannot leave."

Here suddenly Jacob's father tells him to leave the land with the "Birkos Avraham," (Abraham's blessings). This is what he couldn't understand. We are told by Rambam that B'er Sheva was the "Ir M'Kudeshes", the city that was as holy during the Patriarchs' time as Jerusalem was destined to become. It was the center of Abraham's activities. From time to time we are told that Abraham left B'er Sheva to expand his activities but invariably he returned to the city. Thus, if the city had such stature, Jacob couldn't visualize leaving B'er Sheva. In fact, he was uprooted and taken by force from B'er Sheva. "It is not your place." These were his fears, for he thought that his role would be taken away from him. It was hard for him to realize that he could be a leader C a teacher in a place of Pagans. B'er Sheva indeed lost a great man! The holiness is not B'er Sheva per se. It is not holy any more after his departure and is similar to Mt. Sinai. Now it means nothing per se. "The moment the shofar 'Tkiah G'Dolah' was sounded at Sinai and the 'Shechina' departed, there was no longer holiness." Similar is B'er Sheva. Jacob was frightened! Perhaps, not only was Kedusha (holiness) taken from B'er Sheva but maybe from him too. Maybe there is another man. This was his great fear. This is why he declares almost hysterically, "Where shall I turn my eyes, etc." "Can I build a community in Choron? It is an impossibility." Why did G-d send him to Choron? Why start from scratch? Why lose the tens of thousands who Abraham trained, who Yitzhak trained? Apparently, the community was destroyed. However, it

was G-d's inscrutable will. In Choron he did start the community with a handful of children, with twelve people. Only this did G-d want! He left thousands and came back to an old blind father with a handful. Why?

I believe that G-d tried to teach Jacob this Yesod haYahadus, faith is recognizable and understandable even on the moon. If he didn't leave, the community would have been limited only to Eretz. Yahadus wanted Jacob to realize this and to start from scratch. It also shows us that we can start from scratch.

There was Churban rishon, and a Churban sheni, destruction after destruction, and yet we picked up the threads and started from scratch. Yitzhak told him, "Lech Padena Arom". And Jacob had to experience this, not only Jacob, but later, Joseph. G-d wanted Jacob to experience Golus, to be a stranger, to be rejected, not in a known land, to be exposed and persecuted. But why twice? First, it was father and then the son. Joseph resembled Jacob physically and also resembled Jacob's awesome experiences. Jacob had to experience it in poverty and hard work. Joseph had to experience it both ways, in poverty and as a successful man with material wealth. It was to teach us, the later generations, that we can be part of the Covenantal Community under all conditions in all places.

This is what G-d wanted for Jacob. "Go, forget all your friends and your people: go to Choron. Try to convert the young girls - your wives - your children." And from the twelve cornerstones comes the nation. There will be a "Mokom Kodesh", a holy place, but not B'er Sheva. There he became happy with B'Mokom, the mountain where he slept that night. AI realize I don't have to worry. B'er Sheva is not the place of destiny. It will be in time to come in another place."

Submitted by Nisson Shulman