

## *Walk through the Parsha*

with **Rabbi David Walk**



## **There's No Place Like Home**

### **Vayeitzei**

Our Torah reading this week begins with a bit of a mystery. We begin: Ya'akov departed (VAYEITZEI, went out) from Be'er Sheva and went toward Charan (B'reishit 28:10). Oh really! But didn't he already leave in last week's parsha? It said, 'Yitzchak sent Ya'akov off, and he went to Padan Aram (verse 5). In case you thought he hadn't really left Be'er Sheva yet, we have an eyewitness to his departure: When Eisav saw that Yitzchak had blessed Ya'akov and sent him off to Padan Aram (verse 6). So, why does our word frugal Torah repeat the departure scene?

The famous comment by Rashi, that we are recording the loss to Be'er Sheva of its glory, splendor and beauty, does help a bit. We repeat the scene, because the inhabitants of Be'er Sheva felt the loss so profoundly. The first rendition was for Ya'akov, the family and us; the second was for the poor, bereft citizens of Be'er Sheva.

We also surprisingly have two names for his destination, Charan and Padan Aram. Apparently, Charan is the city in which Rivka's family dwelt. Padan Aram is the area around Charan. To flee for his personal safety (the first leaving) it was sufficient to trek towards Padan Aram. However, his other purpose was to find the proper wife for the head of the Avraham clan. This required finding Charan, the family's home.

The great Chassidic commentary, the S'fat Emet, has a different take. He explains, 'the text doubles the leaving. The first was, indeed, flight for his life. The second was for the 'real' Ya'akov to emerge and mature. It was very hard for Ya'akov to depart from Eretz Yisrael, and because of this great yearning for the Land, God revealed to him the reality of the Temple (in the dream) as part of his growth process.

Ya'akov must flee Be'er Sheva for his physical safety, but he also had to emerge from Be'er Sheva to take the next step in his own life's journey. He only grows into the person fit to be the third of our Patriarchs on this voyage of personal discovery. The Ya'akov who lived in Be'er Sheva could never have rolled the boulder from the well opening (29:10). Now we have a heroic figure ready to

compete with Lavan and later challenge Eisav and his angel.

Perhaps, the long description of Ya'akov's travels signals another message. The incidents in the lives of our Patriarchs often foreshadow later historical developments in the long drama of the Jewish People (MA'ASEI AVOT SIMAN L'BANIM). The repetitive nature of the narrative signals the many exiles of Ya'akov's descendants. We've been wandering so long that many of our brethren view the Diaspora as the default status of the Jewish people.

This last critical detail explains the scene as Ya'akov sleeps at the foot of the Ladder. From the apex of the Ladder, God assures Ya'akov. 'Now, I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back again into this Land. Indeed, I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised to you' (28:15).

With that statement, we can finally understand the central idea in this verbose description of Ya'akov's departure. Ya'akov knew that his father had never left the Holy Land, and he wanted, needed, yearned to emulate his saintly father. So, the repetitive verses about his leaving reflect his hesitancy to go into exile. He was the 'tent dweller' for that purpose: Stay close to Home, just like father.

We're not supposed to leave Eretz Yisrael. The Rambam paraphrases the Talmudic statement from the end of Tractate Ketubot: It is forbidden to leave Eretz Yisrael L'OLAM (at any time, permanently), except to study Torah, take a wife, ... or if there is a famine (Hilchot Melachim 5:9).

Prof Yonatan Grossman is fascinated by this descriptive departure. He claims that the text is setting up a comparison between Ya'akov and Avraham, and forces Ya'akov to follow in the footsteps of his grandfather, not his father.

The Professor sees in Ya'akov's return to Eretz Yisrael from the same area from which Avraham made the journey, an uncanny similarity to Avraham's progress through the Land: We then discover that these journeys are almost identical. The Torah records three stages in Avraham's entry.

1. Arrival in Shechem, where he constructs an altar.
2. He then embarks again, this time reaching Beit-El, where he once again builds an altar.
3. Finally, he heads southward towards Chevron, where the third and final altar is erected.

Remarkably, Yaakov's return to

Canaan corresponds to the entry of his grandfather.

1. He first purchases a plot of land near Shechem and builds an altar.
2. He then proceeds to Beit-El where he constructs a second altar.
3. From there he continues to Chevron.

Ya'akov isn't just leaving Be'er Sheva and Eretz Yisrael. He is departing from his father's path to follow his grandfather's. Ya'akov is a new beginning of the Covenant. Unlike Yitzchak, he is an initiator not a preserver. Ya'akov is a 'reset' of the deal with God.

At this point, we can resolve another thorny issue: Why did Ya'akov's getaway from Be'er Sheva leave the town bereft of its glory (HOD), splendor (ZIV), and beauty (HADAR)? Wasn't Yitzchak still there? Not to mention Rivka, the TZADEKET. Prof. Grossman concludes: Once Yaakov packs his bags and heads towards Charan, thus embarking on a new beginning of God's covenant, the Torah "leaves" Yitzchak and brings us along with Yaakov throughout his journey.

All the glory, splendor and beauty left along with Ya'akov, the new star in the Hebrew firmament. The Shechina

accompanies Ya'akov and abandons Yitzchak, who is never a protagonist again in the text!

The Torah makes a big deal of Ya'akov's departure from Be'er Sheva, Eretz Yisrael and Yitzchak, because he is embarking on the grand path which we, his children, must trod. BARUCH HASHEM he found his way home, may all his descendants do the same, soon. 🙏