

Parashat Vayashav 5778, 2017:

*To Live to Serve Hashem*

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzhak, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Avraham Yechezkel ben Yaakov Halevy, Shayna Yehudit bat Avraham Manes and Rivka, the *refuah shlaimah* of Devorah bat Chana, Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka, Shoshana Elka bat Etel Dina and Chaya Mindel bat Leah Basha, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Our *parasha* begins with the *pasuk* (verse): “Jacob dwelt in the land of his father's sojourning, in the land of Canaan.” (*Sefer Bereishit* 37:1, this and all Bible and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*) At first glance, it appears to be redundant, since two chapters earlier, the Torah presented a number of *pasukim* that clearly indicate that Jacob was, indeed, “in the land of his father's sojourning, in the land of Canaan.” For example:

And Jacob came to Luz, which is in the land of Canaan that is Beth E-1, he and all the people who were with him. (35:6)

And it came to pass when Israel dwelt in that land... (35:22)

And Jacob came to his father Isaac, to Mamre, Kiriath Arba, which is Hebron, where Abraham and Isaac dwelt. (35:27)

One of the meta-principles of classic Torah exegesis is the singular import of every letter, word and *pasuk*. Therefore, each verse is deemed vitally necessary – even when its significance initially eludes us. As such, it is incumbent upon us to ask, “Why does the Torah tell us once again: ‘Jacob dwelt in the land of his father's sojourning, in the land of Canaan?’”

As in many matters of this nature, Rashi (1040-1105) offers us deep insights into “the story behind the story.” In one of his Midrashically-based comments on the second verse of our *parasha*, Rashi refers to the word “dwelt” from our verse, and helps us understand its inclusion in the Torah:

It is further expounded upon [as follows]: “Dwelt” When Jacob sought to dwell in tranquility, the troubles of Joseph sprang upon him. The righteous seek to dwell in tranquility. Said the Holy One, blessed be He, “What is prepared for the righteous in the world to come [i.e. great reward] is not sufficient for them! They seek [as well] to dwell in tranquility in this world!” (Brackets my own)

Rabbi Eliyahu Mizrachi (1450-1526), known as “the Mizrachi,” reminds us in his explication of Rashi’s gloss that there were a number of other desperate scenarios that Jacob faced prior to Joseph’s tragic sale by his brothers: his wrenching time with Laban, the trials and tribulations of his physical journey from Haran, his visceral fear of Laban and Esau, his abject consternation for Dinah following Schechem’s outrageous act, and his depth-level trepidation that the nations surrounding the town of Shechem would launch an attack against his family in retribution for Simeon and Levi’s sacking of the town and the murder of its male inhabitants. Beyond a doubt, rather than finding the tranquility he sought, Jacob encountered trial after trial.

Rabbi Moses Sofer (1762-1839), known as “the Chatam Sofer,” asks a very straightforward question regarding Rashi’s comment:

Is it not the case that the Holy One is good and seeks to bring about good (*tov u’mativ*) [to His creations?] If so, why would He be so strongly opposed (literally, “hate”) to righteous individuals benefitting from both worlds [i.e. this world *and* the world to come]? (*Torat Moshe*, Parashat Vayashav, translation and brackets my own)

While the Chatam Sofer offers a variety of responses to his question, I believe his son, Rabbi Abraham Samuel Benjamin Sofer (1815-1871), known as “the Katav Sofer,” provides one of the best approaches to answering his father’s question. He begins by noting that Rashi changed the text of *Midrash Rabbah, Bereshit* 64:1. Therein, it was Satan (i.e. the evil inclination), and not Hashem as in Rashi’s text, who declares: “What is prepared for the righteous in the world to come [i.e. great reward] is not sufficient for them! They seek [as well] to dwell in tranquility in this world!” In addition, the Katav Sofer emphasizes that the Midrash, unlike Rashi’s version, includes

two references to dwelling in tranquility: “When the righteous dwell in tranquility (*sh’yoshevim b’shalvah*), and seek to continue to dwell in serenity (*u’mevakshim leishav b’shalvah*) in this world (*b’olam hazeh*) ...”

The Katav Sofer now asks two questions regarding the original text of the Midrash: “What is the difference between the terms ‘*sh’yoshevim b’shalvah*’ and ‘*u’mevakshim leishav b’shalvah*,’ and why is the obvious phrase, ‘*b’olam hazeh*,’ used. After all, where else could it be?” (All translations my own) He suggests that the reason why *tzadikim* desire to live in peace and harmony is to avoid the misery associated with poverty. Additionally:

This is in order [to give them the freedom to live life in a normal fashion] so that they will not be prevented from preparing themselves for life in the World to Come. As our Sages stated in *Pirkei Avot*: “If there is no flour [sufficient food,] there can be no Torah.” (3:17) This concept is found, as well, in the words of King David, peace be upon him, who said: “May only goodness and kindness pursue me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the L-rd forever more.” (*Sefer Tehillim* 23:6)

Seeking this level of *parnasah* is totally acceptable and exemplifies the idea of “dwelling in tranquility.” According to the Katav Sofer, however, if *tzadikim* have achieved this status and then *u’mevakshim leishav b’shalvah*, i.e. seek even greater pleasures in this world, there is a serious problem, for the pursuit of mere self-gratification leads one “to legitimately fear that as a result of the bounty that a *tzadik* has received he will, G-d forbid, [ultimately] reject Hashem.” As the Torah testifies: “And Jeshurun (i.e. the Jewish people) became fat (rich) and rebelled; you grew fat, thick and rotund; [Israel] forsook the G-d Who made them, and spurned the [Mighty] Rock of their salvation.” (*Sefer Devarim* 32:15)

At this juncture, the Katav Sofer recapitulates his thoughts and, in so doing, explicates the inherent meaning of the original Midrashic text:

In sum: “When the righteous dwell in tranquility and seek to continue to dwell in serenity in this world (*b’olam hazeh*) ...,” for the purpose of this world (*olam hazeh*), rather than to perfect their souls in the World to Come, then the Satan will, indeed, come and criticize them by proclaiming: “What is prepared for the righteous in the world to come is not sufficient for them! Therefore, they desire to dwell in tranquility in this world for the wrong reasons! Instead of preparing themselves for the World to Come, they pursue hedonistic pleasures in this world – solely for the sake of this world!”

In sum, if *tzadikim* pursue hedonistic goals in this world, they will be unable to sufficiently focus their energies on perfecting their spiritual being.

The Katav Sofer’s words are clearly focused upon the *tzadikim* of the world. I believe, however, that they are deeply relevant for us all. Long ago King Solomon declared: “Whoever loves silver will not be sated with silver...” (*Sefer Kohelet* 5:9) Our Sages followed his lead and proclaimed:

Who is rich? One who is satisfied with his lot. As is stated: “If you eat of the toil of your hands, fortunate are you, and good is it to you;” “fortunate are you” in this world, “and good is it to you” in the World to Come.” (*Pirkei Avot* 4:1, translation, Rabbi Yosef Marcus)

With Hashem’s great kindness, may we be *zocheh* (merit) to live lives that reflect the wisdom of King Solomon and the powerful insight of our Sages, so that we, too, may live in tranquility in this world as dedicated servants of the Almighty. *V’chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org>

They may also be found on <http://www.yutorah.org/> using the search criteria of Etengoff and the parasha’s name.

The email list, *b’chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

\*\*\* My audio *shiurim* for Women on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at:  
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\*\*\* I have posted 164 of [Rabbi Soloveitchik's](#) English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.