

Parashat Vayatzte 5782, 2021:

*And Behold I am with You*

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, Chana bat Shmuel, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Peretz ben Chaim, Chaya Sarah bat Reb Yechezkel Shraga, Shmuel Yosef ben Reuven, Shayndel bat Mordechai Yehudah, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof, Pittsburgh, and Jersey City, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, Moshe ben Itta Golda, Yocheved Dafneh bat Dinah Zehavah, Reuven Shmuel ben Leah, Chana bat Sarah, and the health and safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Our *parasha* begins with the well-known words: “And Ya’akov left Be’er Sheva, and he went to Haran.” (28:10) In his *Commentary on the Torah*, Rashi (1040-1105) explains this *pasuk* with a midrashically-suffused gloss:

**And Jacob left:** Scripture had only to write: “And Ya’akov went to Haran.” Why did it mention his departure? But this tells [us] that the departure of a righteous man from a place makes an impression, for while the righteous man is in the city, he is its beauty, he is its splendor, he is its majesty. When he departs from there, its beauty has departed, its splendor has departed, its majesty has departed. (These and all Tanach and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

Rashi’s celebrated interpretation tells us a good deal about how Be’er Sheva was affected by Ya’akov’s exit. He had been its “beauty, splendor and majesty,” and his leave-taking signaled an abrupt end to all three. What we do not know, however, is how Ya’akov was impacted by his exodus from Be’er Sheva. To fully appreciate the depth of the spiritual and psychological changes Ya’akov was forced to undergo, we must understand the nature of Be’er Sheva at that time.

My rebbe and mentor, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik *zatzal* (1903-1993), known as “the Rav” by his students and followers, describes Be’er Sheva in this manner:

Beer Sheba... was the first home of the covenantal community, the center of spiritual life for the adherents of Abraham's teaching. Beer Sheba was rooted in a wellspring of *kedushah* [holiness]. It was a fulcrum for offerings to G-d and a conduit for the Divine Presence... Later on in Jewish history, that *kedushah* found its home in the place that Jacob encountered on his journey from Beer Sheba: the holy city of Jerusalem. (This, and the following quotations of the Rav, *Darosh Darash Yosef: Discourses of Rav Yosef Dov Halevi Soloveitchik on the Weekly Parashah*, Rabbi Avishai C. David, editor, pages 74-76.)

According to the Rav, Be'er Sheva was, in essence, the *Beit HaMikdash* of the *Avot* and *Emahot* in that it was the "center of spiritual life for the adherents of Abraham's teaching... a fulcrum for offerings to G-d and a conduit for the Divine Presence." This depiction of Be'er Sheva's singular import places us in a much better position to understand Ya'akov's experience when, as the Rav suggests, "he was uprooted by forces beyond his control, [and] compelled to leave a place he loved... to which he had become bonded." Beyond a doubt, Ya'akov must have felt existentially adrift upon leaving this this holy place, and entering *galut*.

The Rav posits that Ya'akov may also have feared "... that if he left the home of his father and grandfather and the center of their teaching, he would lose his role as leader and the teacher of the covenantal community," because his "departure from the city of Beer Sheba temporarily detached him from the spiritual destiny of the Jewish people." In my estimation, this may have been the impetus for Ya'akov's prophetic vision upon leaving Be'er Sheva:

And he dreamed and behold! a ladder set up on the ground and its top reached to heaven; and behold, angels of G-d were ascending and descending upon it. And behold, the L-rd was standing over him, and He said, "I am the L-rd, the G-d of Avraham your father, and the G-d of Yitzchak; the land upon which you are lying to you I will give it and to your seed. And your seed shall be as the dust of the earth... And behold, I am with you, and I will guard you wherever you go, and I will restore you to this land, for I will not forsake you until I have done what I have spoken concerning you." (28:12-15)

In his dream, *Ya'akov Avinu* was reassured by *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* that although his connection to *Eretz Yisrael*, and by extension Be'er Sheva, had been temporarily rent asunder, it would be reestablished. Hashem promised *Ya'akov*, "I will restore you to this land," and assured him that both he and his children would inherit it. Then, too, perhaps Hashem's pledge to *Ya'akov*, "And behold, I am with you ... I will not forsake you until I have done what I have spoken concerning you," can be seen as a guarantee that "his role as leader and the teacher of the covenantal community," would once again be established.

May the time come, soon and in our days, when we will witness the fulfillment of Michah's oft-quoted phrase, "You [Hashem] shall give the truth of *Ya'akov* (*emet l'Ya'akov*)" (7:20), when *Ya'akov Avinu* will take his place as the rightful leader and teacher of the entire Jewish people once again. *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

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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 [rdbe718@gmail.com](mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com).

\*\*\* My audio *shiurim* on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpvd>

\*\*\* 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: [The Rav zatzal](#)