

Coming and Going

Vayeitzei – Rav Benjy Myers

In this week's parasha, we continue with the life story of Yaakov. Following the threat to his life, Yaakov is sent away by his parents to his uncle's home in Haran. While in Lavan's home, he marries and becomes the respected and wealthy head of a big clan.

The Parasha begins by setting the scene: "And Yaakov left Beer Sheva and went to Haran" (Bereishit 28:10). Rashi questions the apparent superfluity of this opening statement: "And Jacob left: Scripture had only to write: 'And Jacob went to Haran.' Why did it mention his departure?"

The Torah does not use words unnecessarily. And we already know that Yitzchak and his family settled in Beer Sheva (see Bereishit 26:23). Therefore, faced with such a situation one needs to ask: what is the reason for these additional words?

Rashi himself answers: "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. And likewise (Ruth 1:7): 'And she went forth from the place,' stated in reference to Naomi and Ruth."

Rashi's answer is surprising not so much in its content, but rather in his additional proof.

It seems obvious how Yaakov could be considered a righteous man. He is given the blessing by Yitzchak which is not retracted even after Yitzchak discovers the subterfuge used to receive it. Before setting out for Haran Yaakov is given an additional blessing by Yitzchak. This blessing is the ultimate in blessings, the one given by God to Avraham, in which he is promised that the land will be his and his descendents. At the start of his journey, Yaakov dreams of the ladder



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and angels going up and down, prays to God to help him on the way, and promises to tithe his future assets in return for His assistance.

On the other hand, Rashi brings support for his argument from the beginning of the Book of Ruth. At this stage, all we know is that Naomi left the land of Israel due to famine, her husband died in exile, her sons married Moabite women and then died themselves, and now she is setting out to return to her home in Beit Lechem, having heard that the famine has ended.

How could Naomi and Ruth be considered righteous at this stage? How could Rashi have used them as the proof for his statement?

I believe that the righteousness in these two stories entails more than just correct behavior toward man and God. It is also a question of leadership.

When Moshe asks God to appoint the next leader, he asks specifically that it should be someone who "who will go out before them [the people] and come in before them, who will take them out and bring them in, and who will go out before them" (Bemidbar 27:17).

The leader, the righteous leader, in the very act of coming and going should have a profound effect on his or her surroundings. During their departure, Ruth uttered the immortal words linking her to the Jewish people and their destiny. This is her righteousness. Her desire to serve the Almighty even though her upbringing was far from ideal, Jewishly. Through her words and actions Ruth showed those around her how one should interact with other people and with God, and merited being the antecedent of King David.

Yaakov was fleeing his brother's wrath, and yet still he had the wherewithal to pray to God, to dedicate his future to Him. We are told that even in the difficult circumstances in which Yaakov lived while with Lavan, he nonetheless adhered to the word of God.



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Some make an impact on their surroundings only when they are there in person. The righteous leader, through word and deed, make an impact that reaches beyond them, and has an effect even when they are not there.

May we succeed in following in the footsteps of these righteous leaders, and may our comings and goings only be for the good



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