

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION
ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

PARASHAT HASHAVUA

This shiur is available in the archives at:
<http://vbm-torah.org/archive/parsha75/07-75vayetze.htm>

PARASHAT VAYETZEI

**“And This is the Gateway of Heaven”
Rav Shimon Klein**

“Surely the Lord is in this place”

In our *parasha*, Yaakov flees from Esav and makes his way from Beer Sheva to Charan. On the way, he encounters a place, sleeps there, dreams, and experiences a Divine revelation. God promises the land to him and to his descendants; He also promises him progeny and promises to watch over him and bring him back to the land (*Bereishit* 28:13-15).

Following this, we read:

And Yaakov awoke from his sleep and he said, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it.” And he was afraid, and said, “How dreadful is this place; this is none other than the House of God, and this is the gateway of heaven.” And Yaakov rose up early in the morning and took the stone that he had put under his head, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil on the top of it. And he called the name of that place Beit El, but the name of that city was originally called Luz. (28:16-19)

“Surely the Lord is in this place” – he marvels, and continues, “How dreadful is this place,” arriving at the conclusion, “This is none other than the House of God, and this is the gateway of heaven.” Why does Yaakov focus specifically on the place? We might have expected him to marvel at the dream and to ponder God’s words to him. Instead, he is filled with wonder at the site itself. He discerns that this is the House of God or the gateway to heaven, and he gives the place a name: “He called the name of that place Beit El (House of God).”

Not sufficing with this, Yaakov seeks to imbue the place with further significance:

And Yaakov vowed a vow, saying, “If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and clothing to wear, so that I come back to my father’s house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God, and this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God’s House, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You.” (28:20-22)

He vows that if God’s promise to him is fulfilled, then the stone that he has placed as a pillar will be nothing less than “God’s House.”

Consider that this is not the first time that God has spoken to man. Yet, at no point thus far have we seen such an intensive focus on a place, turning it into a subject in its own right. It is not the content of God’s words that is the subject here, but rather the location – the House of God and gateway to heaven. What is it that causes Yaakov to award such prominence to the “place”? Why is this the subject? What is so special about it?

In this *shiur*, we will attempt to understand the nature of this place – Beit El, the House of God – through a review of our narrative as well as other narratives in *Sefer Bereishit* and in different chapters from the Prophets.

“And he called the name of that place Beit El”

We will begin with Beit El as depicted in our *parasha*. “And Yaakov went out from Beer Sheva, and went to Charan...” The expression “going out” (*yetzia* – “*va-yetzei*”) connotes a severance, while the Hebrew construction “Charana” (to Charan) reflects Yaakov’s orientation towards the place to which his father and mother had sent him.¹ “And he lighted upon a certain place” – unexpectedly, he encounters “a certain place;” at this stage its name – Beit El – is not yet a subject. It is as if the text is telling us that it is not the religiously-loaded Beit El that Yaakov lights upon, but rather “a certain place” (literally, “the place”) – so far anonymous, but which will assume a particular color over the course of this encounter. “And tarried there all night, for the sun had set; and he took of the stones of that place and put them under his head, and lay down in that place to sleep.” Again the text points to the place; he lay down “in that place”. And again, Yaakov takes “of the stones of that place” – not just ordinary stones. And finally he lies “in that place” to sleep.

¹ Rivka instructs him: “Now therefore, my son, obey my voice, and arise, flee to Lavan, my brother, to Charan...” (27:43). Yitzchak also commands him to go: “And Yitzchak called Yaakov, and blessed him, and charged him, and said to him: You shall not take a wife of the daughters of Cana’an. Arise, go to Paddan-Aram, to the house of Betuel, my mother’s father, and take yourself a wife from there of the daughters of Lavan, your mother’s brother... And Yitzchak sent Yaakov off, and he went to Paddan Aram to Lavan, son of Betuel the Aramean, brother of Rivka, mother of Yaakov and Esav” (28:1-5).

What is special about this place? The text does not say, but what we do note is that each time it is mentioned, it is preceded by a description of Yaakov's actions. Yaakov leaves Beer Sheva and goes to Charan; there he alights upon "the place." He lies down to sleep "in that place." He dreams of a ladder with angels of God and of God standing above it, promising him, "The land upon which you lie – to you I will give it, and to your descendants... And behold, I am with you, and will keep you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land."

Quite simply, the subject in these verses is not the place itself, but rather the encounter with man and the place. This fact invites a focus on man and his own inner "place" and position. To put it differently, the path to knowing Beit El passes through prior knowledge of Yaakov's inner position or "place" – where his consciousness was at when he got there.

Yaakov flees from his brother Esav and he sets out from his place (Beer Sheva); his face turned to his destination (Charan). Just before reaching Charan, he lights upon a place – and is empowered by it. He dreams a dream there, in which God appears to him, promising him the land, progeny,² and also protection wherever he goes, until he returns to the land – this land.³ In the wake of these promises, Yaakov makes a vow concerning God Who will be with him, accompanying him on the road that he is now taking and protecting him. God has revealed Himself at this place, and now He will continue to accompany Yaakov on his way.

To summarize: This is Yaakov's first night in his flight from his home and his country, as he flees from his brother. Just before he is torn from these places, in his weakness, he lights upon "the place" – at its best. The sense of severance that surrounds him is replaced by a sense of empowerment: he dreams a dream, God appears to him as a Dweller Whose presence in space is the heart of the matter. In this revelation, God encourages Yaakov, bestowing a blessing for his journey and the strength to live outside of the land, strength to encounter the realities of "this world" without succumbing.

At this place Yaakov later builds a pillar:

² "And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven, and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And behold, the Lord stood above it, and said, 'I am the Lord God of Avraham your father, and the God of Yitzchak: the land upon which you lie – to you will I give it, and to your seed, and your descendants will be as the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north and to the south, and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed'" (28:12-14).

³ "And behold, I am with you, and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land, for I will not leave you until I have done that of which I have spoken to you" (v. 15).

And Yaakov rose up early in the morning and took the stone that he had put under his head, and set it up for a pillar (*matzeva*), and poured oil on the top of it. (28:18)

What is a “*matzeva*”? A *matzeva* is set up at a certain place, and people gather around it, around the message that it embodies. Its very name – “*matzeva*” – denotes importance; it “stands tall” (*nitzevet*) and declares what it has to say. In contrast to a “*mizbeach*” (altar), which symbolizes self-nullification, a *matzeva* symbolizes standing tall; it highlights its presence and that of the people who assemble around it.

Closing the Circle

Yaakov is in Charan; the years go by, and God calls upon him to return to his homeland:

“I am the God of Beit El (*ha-El Beit El*), where you anointed a pillar and made a vow to Me; now arise, go out of this land, and return to the land of your birth.” (*Bereishit* 31:13)

God’s appellation in this unit is notable: “*ha-El Beit El*.” At first, God revealed himself to Yaakov at Beit El; now, at the end of the period of his exile, He reveals Himself to Yaakov in Charan, commanding him to return to his homeland. The reference to Beit El may be understood as pointing to the special spiritual quality attached to Beit El that now commands him to return more than twenty years later:

And God said to Yaakov, “Arise, to up to Beit El, and dwell there, and make there an altar to God Who appeared to you when you fled from before Esav your brother.” (35:1)

From Beit El, Yaakov had made his way to Charan; now, he returns to make an altar to God Who appeared to him when he was fleeing from Esav. He thereby testifies, as it were, to the God Who accompanied him and protected him during his stay in Charan. Yaakov arranges his household and his camp, and views the journey to Beit El as a step that entails sanctification:

And Yaakov said to his household and to all who were with him, “Put away the strange gods that are among you, and make yourselves clean, and change your garments, and let us arise, and go up to Beit El, and I will make there an altar to God, Who answers me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way on which I went.” (35:2-3)

Once again, Beit El is presented as a place of revelation; an elevating, empowering place, such that going up to it makes demands on a person. Yaakov builds an altar and, most remarkably, calls the place “El Beit El,” in honor of God

Who is present in that space: “And he built there an altar, and called the place El Beit El, because there God appeared to him, when he fled from before his brother” (35:7). Yaakov will be empowered even further at this place: God gives him the name “Yisrael” (35:10), promises him progeny (35:11), and also promises him the land (35:12). At the conclusion of the revelation Yaakov sets up a pillar:

And Yaakov set up a pillar (*matzeva*) in the place where He talked with him, a pillar of stone, and he poured a drink offering on it, and he poured oil on it. (35:14)

Once again, there is an emphasis on the connection between the *matzeva* and the place. Finally, Yaakov calls the place Beit El: “And Yaakov called the name of the place where God had spoken with him Beit El” (35:15).

We might summarize by saying that as Yaakov begins his journey, just before he leaves the land, he reaches Beit El and is greatly empowered there. The blessing he receives on the way to Charan is the strength to live among the nations, the strength he will need to survive in exile. Now, upon his return, he experiences “*ha-El Beit El*” – a revelation of God that is related to a place, and this will be most appropriately expressed in the pillar, and the House of God, that will arise there.

During the Period of the Monarchy

A great chasm separates the Beit El in *Sefer Bereishit*, which is viewed as the “House of God” or the “gateway of heaven,” and the Beit El that is described during the period of the kings of Israel, starting from the period of Yerav’am:

And Yerav’am said in his heart, “Now the kingdom shall return to the House of David. If this nation goes up to offer sacrifices in the House of God in Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will return to their lord, to Rechav’am, king of Yehuda, and they will kill me, and go back to Rechav’am, king of Yehuda.” And the king took counsel, and he made two calves of gold, and said to them, “It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem; behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.” And he set the one in Beit El, and the other he put in Dan. (*Melakhim I* 12:26-30)

This was just after the splitting of the kingdom of Israel. Yerav’am was king over ten tribes, while Rechav’am remained king over just two – Yehuda and Binyamin. Yerav’am feared a situation in which the spiritual center of his kingdom would be at the heart of the kingdom of Yehuda. His solution was to turn Beit El, near Binyamin, and Dan, in the north, into official sites for Divine worship, as alternatives to Jerusalem. These would be “border Temples” for the Israelite kingdom, which as a first stage would feature golden calves for Divine worship

and later would become temples of idolatry. Over and over again during the lengthy period of the monarchy, Beit El would be evoked as the site of the calves, as a place of idolatry, as a place far removed from the idea of the “House of God” or “gateway to heaven.” Some examples include the false prophet from Beit El who lies and misleads the man of God who comes to him from Yehuda (*Melakhim* I 13); Chiel of Beit El, who dares to rebuild Jericho, ignoring Yehoshua’s oath and thereby bringing catastrophe upon his family (*Melakhim* I 16:34);⁴ and the small boys who emerge from Beit El when the prophet Elisha goes up there, and jeer at him, and are punished with his curse.⁵

The contrast is glaring: how are we to understand the huge disparity between the “House of God” in *Sefer Bereishit* and the temple of calves and idolatry that lasted through such a long period of Jewish history?

In the simplest sense, Yerav’am wanted a site that would serve as an alternative to Jerusalem, and Beit El was chosen owing to its exalted character, as a place with a spiritual secret, or added spiritual value. Still, we must ask, why is it that Beit El systematically – extending long beyond the period of Yerav’am – turned its back, as it were, on its description in *Bereishit*, becoming instead a city of idolatry?

“You shall not set up for yourself a *matzeva*”

It seems that a closer look at the *matzeva* might shed light on our puzzle. Twice Yaakov builds a *matzeva* at Beit El, and it serves for Divine worship.⁶ However, in *Sefer Devarim* there is a clear prohibition, “You shall not set up for yourself a *matzeva*, which the Lord your God hates” (*Devarim* 16:22). Once again, the contradiction cries out for some solution: Yaakov sets up a *matzeva* in Beit El, but at the same time God hates a *matzeva*! This problem is addressed by *Chazal* in their *midrashim*:

“You shall not set up for yourself a *matzeva*’ – The verse mentions only a *matzeva*; from where do we learn that this relates to idolatry? It is a law; the *matzeva*, although beloved to the forefathers, is hateful for the sons; idolatry, which was hateful to the forefathers, must surely be hateful to the children. (*Sifri Devarim* 146)

⁴ “In his [King Achav’s] days, Chiel of Beit El built Jericho: he laid its foundations with Aviram, his firstborn, and set up its gates with his youngest son, Seguv, according to the word of the Lord, which He spoke through Yehoshua son of Nun.”

⁵ “And he went up from there to Beit El, and as he was going up by the way, some small boys came out of the city and jeered at him, and said to him, “Go up, bald head; go up, bald head.” And he turned back, and looked at them, and cursed them in the Name of the Lord; and two she-bears came out of the wood and tore forty-two of the children...” (*Melakhim* II 2:23-24).

⁶ Of the three forefathers, Yaakov is the only one who sets up a *matzeva*. He establishes a *matzeva* in Beit El for Divine worship, but also sets up others as testimony or as a memorial. Examples include his forging of a pact with Lavan (31:45, 51) and the burial of Rachel (35:20). See also below, n. 8.

The solution that *Chazal* propose is to draw a distinction between different periods of history. During the period of the forefathers, a *matzeva* was a positive phenomenon; during the period of their descendants, it becomes hateful. Why? Apparently, the reason has something to do with the nature of the service involving the *matzeva*, which is planted in its place and embodies power, importance, and presence, and imbues all those in the vicinity with importance as well.⁷ It is not the humble service of self-nullification, like that symbolized by the *mizbeach* (altar); it is not a “making way” or “leaving space.” Rather, it reflects presence and power.⁸

This meaning attached to the worship involving the *matzeva* arises from the contexts in which it is mentioned. Yaakov first arrives in Beit El when he is at his weakest, as he flees from Esav. In Beit El he encounters an elevated place,⁹ a place that imbues him with strength and causes him to dream.¹⁰ In his dream of the ladder with angels and of God standing above, God promises him the land, progeny, and protection on his way to Charan, until he returns to his place.¹¹ All of this is related, in Yaakov’s eyes, to the place. It is this special place in the world that has brought him into an encounter with the heavens and gives him increasing strength and confidence. At first he is afraid of the awesome quality of the place, perceiving it as the House of God and the gate of heaven (28:17). He sets up a pillar and pours oil over it, as an expression of the sanctified dimension

⁷ R. Kook, *Iggerot Ha-Re’ayah*, letter 746, pp. 10-12, draws a distinction between a *matzeva* and a *bayit*. He identifies a *matzeva* as a place where the Divine service involves gathering around it, as opposed to a *bayit* (“house” – Temple), whose service involves gathering inside it. The *matzeva* appeals to all of humanity, without distinction, while the *bayit* is unique to Israel, and the service performed within it is limited to those who are permitted to enter.

⁸ The same messages arises from the verses in *Sefer Shemot* describing the twelve *matzevot* that Moshe sets up at Sinai: “And Moshe wrote all the words of the Lord, and he arose early in the morning and built an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel” (*Shemot* 24:4). The context here shows that the purpose is to show the importance of the twelve tribes. More generally, the unit as a whole provides a description of the forging of the covenant, imbuing the participants with a presence and an importance that almost seem problematic. The description concludes: “And they saw the God of Israel, and there was under His feet a kind of paved work of sapphire stone, and as it were the very heaven for clearness. And He did not lay His hand upon the nobles of the children of Israel, and they behold God, and they ate and drank” (24:10-12).

⁹ When Avraham first moves from Elon Moreh in Shekhem to Beit El, the Torah says, “and he removed from there to the mountain...” Beit El is perceived as a high place in relation to Shekhem, and he goes there *inter alia* because it is located on the mountain.

¹⁰ Yaakov awakens from his dream before morning, and he attributes his having experienced the dream to the particular quality of the place itself: “And he was afraid, and he said, How dreadful is this place; this is none other than the House of God, and this is the gateway of heaven” (*Bereishit* 28:17).

¹¹ “... The land upon which you lie – to you will I give it, and to your seed, and your descendants will be as the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north and to the south, and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And behold, I am with you, and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land, for I will not leave you until I have done that of which I have spoken to you” (28:13-15).

of the place (28:18).¹² He calls the place Beit El (28:19), and finally makes a vow that the stone that he has set up as a *matzeva* will, in the future, be a House of God (28:20-22). As noted, God promises to be with him and to protect him during his stay in Charan, and after many years that he spends with Lavan, God indeed appears to him and identifies Himself as “the God of Beit El,” reminding him of the pillar: “I am the God of Beit El, where you anointed a *matzeva*...” (31:13). Upon his return to Beit El, Yaakov once again undertakes a series of uplifting, empowering actions, concluding with the setting up of another *matzeva*: “And Yaakov set up a pillar (*matzeva*) in the place where He talked with him, a pillar of stone, and he poured a drink offering on it, and he poured oil on it” (35:14). Following this, he once again calls the place Beit El.

All of this relates to the period of the forefathers, up until *Sefer Devarim*.¹³ In *Sefer Devarim*, we encounter a unit that rules out the form of worship involving a *matzeva*. The context is *Parashat Shoftim*, which opens with the exhortation, “Judges and officers shall you place for yourselves in all your gates.” It is not the individual, nor even a group of individuals, who stand at the center of this *parasha*, but rather the community, the public. The *parasha* sets down four authorities, comprising the nation’s public leadership: the judge, the king, the *kohen*, and the prophet.¹⁴ In these units we once again find repeated use of the expression “the place which the Lord shall choose,” representing the conclusion of a long process that the nation undergoes, following which God will choose a place, out of all the places, or all the tribes.¹⁵ It is not a place of standing tall,¹⁶ of

¹² In a manner reminiscent of the ceremonial anointing of the vessels of the Temple, the *kohanim*, and the king.

¹³ As noted, at the Revelation at Sinai, Moshe sets up *matzevot* on the mountain. In *Sefer Vayikra*, we find a prohibition on a *matzeva*: “You shall not make for yourselves idols, nor shall you set up a carved idol (*pesel*), nor a pillar (*matzeva*), nor shall you set up a figured stone (*even maskit*) in your land, to bow down upon it, for I am the Lord your God” (*Vayikra* 26:1). Here the context is clearly one of idolatry, while the parallel prohibition in *Sefer Devarim* seems to say that even in the service of God, it is forbidden to worship in this way.

¹⁴ The prohibition against a *matzeva* appears after the opening command, “Judges and officers shall you place for yourself in all your gates which the Lord your God gives you for your tribes, and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment” (*Devarim* 16:18), as part of the unit whose subject is the legal system.

¹⁵ The expression is repeated many times in *Sefer Devarim*, and it refers to the Divine choice to come and dwell in a place prepared for Him by human hands. The references to it in the future tense arise from the chain of human actions that precede this Divine choice, which may come in response to them. David chooses Jerusalem as his capital (*Shmuel* II 5), brings the Ark (chapter 6), and even builds infrastructure for the Temple (several chapters in *Divrei Ha-yamim*) – and yet it is only in the days of Shlomo that God chooses to allow His Name to dwell in this city: “And the Lord appeared to Shlomo by night, and He said to him: I have heard your prayer, and have chosen this place for Myself, for a house of sacrifice” (*Divrei Ha-yamim* II 7:12). Or, in slightly less overt form, in Shlomo’s prayer upon completion of the building of the Temple, in *Sefer Melakhim*: “And the king turned his face and blessed all the congregation of Israel, and all the congregation of Israel stood, and he said, ‘Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, Who spoke with His mouth to David, my father, and has with His hand fulfilled, it, saying, Since the day that I brought forth My people, Israel, out of Egypt, I chose no city out of all the tribes of Israel to build a house, that My Name might be there, but I chose David to be over My people Israel...’” (*Melakhim* I 8:14-16).

presence; rather, it expresses the opposite inner movement – one of being part of a whole, a humility that binds a person to the nation and to all of humanity.¹⁷

Conclusion

The question we posed at the outset was what caused Yaakov to focus on “the place.” What was so special about this city? Now we can see that Beit El was a city of central importance, beloved both to the forefathers and to God. It was the first place that was viewed as a place for calling to God;¹⁸ it is perceived as God’s House and as the gateway to heaven. In this place Yaakov sets up a *matzeva*, inspired by the place with the inner fortitude to face the challenges that await him. Later on, *Am Yisrael* enter the land and Beit El is given its due place: over and over again it is mentioned in a positive way.¹⁹ And then the kingdom is divided in half, with the House of God in Jerusalem on one side, while Beit El passes to the Kingdom of Israel, headed by Yerav’am, on the other. Now the unique spiritual qualities of the place are a disadvantage. The city that until now has given strength and fortitude to those who visited it now assumes the status of an alternative to Jerusalem.²⁰

The tension between these two poles is reflected in the following *midrash*:

“And Yaakov arose early in the morning, and he took the stone... and poured oil over it” [...] That Luz is the same Luz where the *tekhelet* (blue) dye was produced; that is the same Luz where Sancheriv went up but which he was unable to overturn and which Nevukhadnetzar was unable to destroy. It is the same Luz where the Angel of Death never had any control; when people grew very old, they were taken outside of the [city] wall, and there they would die. R. Abba bar Kahana said: Why was it called Luz? Because anyone who entered the city sprouted *mitzvot* and good deeds like a luz [tree]. And our Sages taught: Just as a luz [nut] has

¹⁶ Continuing the same concept, the commandment concerning pilgrimage to Jerusalem says, “all your males shall show themselves (literally, “be seen”)” before God. This expresses passive submission rather than a proud presentation of oneself.

¹⁷ There are many sources in which humanity as a whole is connected to the Temple. An example is the prayer offered by Shlomo, at the inauguration of the Temple: “And also concerning the stranger who is not of Your people, Israel, but comes from a far country for Your Name’s sake (for they shall hear of Your great Name, and of Your strong hand, and of Your outstretched arm) – when he comes and prays towards this House – hear, You in heaven Your dwelling place, and do according to all that the stranger calls to You for, in order that all the people of the earth may know Your Name, to fear You, as do Your people Israel, and that they may know that this House, which I have built, is called by Your Name” (*Melakhim I* 8:41-43).

¹⁸ Twice Avraham calls upon God’s Name in Beit El (12:8; 13:4).

¹⁹ Some examples: Shmuel follows a circuit that includes Beit El, Mitzpeh and Gilgal (*Shmuel I* 7:16), or – as he describes the three signs to Shaul: “Then you shall go on forward from there, and you shall come to the oak of Tavor, and there shall meet you three men going up to God, to Beit El – one carrying three kids, another carrying three loaves of bread, and another carrying a bottle of wine...” (*Shmuel I* 10:3).

²⁰ Yerav’am sets up two calves, in Beit El and in Dan, but within a short time it is Beit El that becomes the new focus.

no mouth, so no man could stand at the gateway to the city. (*Bereishit Rabba* 69)

The midrash depicts Beit El as a place possessing a great measure of spirituality and eternity: the *tekhelet*, resembling the firmament and calling to mind the glory of God's Throne, is from there; Sancheriv could not overturn the city, nor could Nevukhadnetzar destroy it; life in Beit El is eternal – the Angel of Death has no power there and the elderly pass away outside of the city. This is a most wondrous place! But at the same time, the *midrash* also points out the disadvantage of Beit El – it “has no mouth.” No one could stand at its entrance; it is inaccessible. This disadvantage would seem to be directly related to its special qualities. To the extent that these qualities are truly wondrous, to the extent that the city belongs to the realm of exalted spirituality and eternity – to that extent it is severed from the world and its deficient reality. This disconnect is represented by the image of a person who exists in the world and cannot find “the entrance” to this city; he cannot locate the point of contact between himself and this special place.

The special qualities of Beit El as enumerated in the *midrash* add another layer of meaning to the story of the divine revelation that Yaakov experiences during the night he spends in Beit El, as well as to the *matzeva* that he sets up there in the wake of his dream. Yaakov emphasizes here a Divine service that involves importance and stature for those who attach themselves to it. It is not a service of inclusion – the service that characterizes Jerusalem, the city that is “joined together.” Rather, it is a service of focus and, to a certain degree, standing apart. In this sense, Beit El faces a sort of test: to what extent will the focus of the city be turned to its own, inner spiritual advantages – which will have the effect of placing a barrier between its essence and the environment, the people, even those who visit it? Yerav'am fails this test, presenting Beit El as a capital city to rival Jerusalem. The result is that the essence of Beit El is removed and cut off from the people and also distanced from the sanctity of Jerusalem. But a Beit El that exists alongside and in harmony with Jerusalem could recognize the value of the monarchy and the value of the Temple that is attached to it; it could align itself with that authority and still have its say.

Translated by Kaeren Fish