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**Parshat HaShavua
Yeshivat Har Etzion**

PARASHAT VAYETZE

In memory of Chana Friedman z"l (Chana bat Yaakov u'Devorah) on her ninth yahrzeit.

In commemoration of the third yahrzeit of my dear sister, Szore Rivka Kitay, on the sixth of Kislev - From those who remember her.

Mazal tov to Rav Aviad and Debra Tabory, currently on shelichut in London, upon the birth of their daughter Talyah Rachel. May they be zocheh to raise her le-Torah, le-chuppa, u-le-ma'asim tovim. May both sets of grandparents – Henry and Syma Weinberg of London, and our own Rav Binyamin and Naomi Tabory, currently on shelichut in New York – enjoy their latest grandchild together with the entire family.

Beit-El

By Rav Yaakov Medan

A. BEIT-EL VS. JERUSALEM – ACCORDING TO RASHI

The Midrash and Rashi appear to have deliberated at length over the place that Beit-El occupies (or should occupy) in our consciousness. A literal reading of the parasha would seem to justify the actions of Yeravam ben-Nevat, who abandoned Jerusalem and built a new religious center for the nation in Beit-El:

"The king took counsel and he made two golden calves, and he said to them: 'It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem; here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt.' He placed one in Beit-El and the other he placed at Dan... He offered upon the altar that he had made at Beit-El on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, in the month which he had invented on his own, and he made a festival for Bnei Yisrael, and went up to the altar to offer incense." (Melakhim I 12:28-33)

In our parasha, we are told explicitly that the House of God that is destined to be built, will be in Beit-El – for there God was revealed to Yaakov; that was the "gateway to heaven," and Yaakov would fulfill his oath by building the house there.

For this reason, the Midrash and Rashi seem to feel obliged to forcibly uproot Beit-El from its central place and to shift the weight of our parasha onto Jerusalem. Let us review their words – and especially the way in which the midrashim of Chazal are reflected in Rashi's commentary:

"Upon which you lie' – God 'rolled up' all of Eretz Yisrael under him, hinting to him that it would be easy for his descendants to conquer."
(Rashi on 28:13)

This suggests to us that it is of no importance where Yaakov actually lay; either way, the entire land was folded up under him. Thus, even if he lay in Beit-El, God may have been speaking to him from Mount Moriah. Rashi adds to this by explaining:

"He happened upon the place' – the text makes no mention of which place it was, rather it refers to 'the place' – which was mentioned elsewhere, i.e., Mount Moriah, concerning which it is written, 'He saw the place from afar.'" (Rashi on 28:11)

Thus, he concludes that the specific place upon which Yaakov alighted was actually Mount Moriah.

Further on, Rashi comments as follows:

"Furthermore, [the Sages] taught: YAAKOV CALLED JERUSALEM 'BEIT-EL.' But this [i.e., where he was] was Luz, not Jerusalem; so from where do they deduce this? I maintain that Mount Moriah was uprooted and brought here; it was a miraculous displacement of land... in which the Temple came to him in Beit-El; this is the meaning of the phrase, 'he alighted upon the place.'

And if we ask: why did Yaakov then not stop when he passed by [the site of] the Temple? He did not pay attention to stop at the place that his forefathers had prayed, but Heaven delayed him there. He went all the way to Charan ... but when he arrived there, he said, 'Perhaps I have passed a place where my forefathers prayed, and I did not pray there?' He decided to return, and when he reached Beit-El the land was uprooted for him." (Rashi, 28:17)

Here Rashi explains that Yaakov did indeed reach Beit-El on his way back from Charan, but the land contracted itself for him and Mount Moriah came to where he was.

Rashi comments further:

"But the house of God' – Rabbi Elazar said in the name of Rabbi Yossi ben Zimra: This ladder rested with its foot in Be'er Sheva, while the middle of it hung over the [site of the] Temple. For Be'er Sheva is in the southern part of Yehuda, with Jerusalem in its northern part, on the border between Yehuda and Binyamin. Beit-El is in the northern part of the portion of Binyamin, on the border between Binyamin and the children of Yosef. Thus the foot of the ladder was in Be'er Sheva and its head in Beit-El, such that the middle of it stretched over Jerusalem."
(Rashi on 28:17)

In other words, Yaakov did indeed sleep in Beit-El, but the "gateway to heaven" he saw at an incline over Mount Moriah. Thus, Yaakov actually directed his heart towards Mount Moriah, for this is the place that God chose.

Altogether, Rashi provides four different ways of turning the "Beit-El" of the literal text into Mount Moriah in Jerusalem. And all this just to prevent any possibility of our deducing from our parasha that the place that God chooses for the establishment of the Temple is the city of Beit-El.

Since the scope of this shiur is limited, we shall discuss only the latter two explanations that he offers: firstly, that Mount Moriah was uprooted and came towards Yaakov as he returned from Charan; and secondly – that Mount Moriah was situated under the center of Yaakov's ladder.

B. THE UPROOTED MOUNTAIN

How are we to understand Rashi's words? The first way of understanding this teaching is that Yaakov did not dare to pray at Mount Moriah on his way from Be'er Sheva to Charan; he walked the entire long journey – about eight hundred kilometers – until he reached Charan. Only when he got there did he regret not having prayed at Mount Moriah, and so he wanted to walk all the way back there. But God had mercy on him; Mount Moriah jumped to Beit-El, and thus his journey was shortened by about 15 kilometers.

This explanation leaves us asking: what was the point of all of this? Why did Yaakov originally refrain from praying at Mount Moriah, and why did he decide afterwards to go back and pray there? Moreover, on his long return journey from Charan to Eretz Yisrael, what is the point of so marginal a contraction of the way as the distance between Beit-El and Jerusalem?

Perhaps Rashi's explanation here ties in with his teaching at the end of the previous parasha, Toldot, concerning the discrepancy of fourteen years between Yaakov's departure from Be'er Sheva and his arrival in Charan. According to Rashi, Yaakov spent those years learning Torah in the Beit Midrash of Shem and Ever:

"We learn that Yaakov was, at that time, sixty-three years old: Yishmael was seventy-four years old when Yaakov was born, Yishmael was fourteen years older than Yitzchak, and Yitzchak was sixty when his sons were born – thus we arrive at seventy-four [as Yishmael's age]. And he lived a total of a hundred and thirty-seven years, as it is written, 'These are the years of Yishmael's life....' Thus, when Yishmael died Yaakov was sixty-three years old. And we learn from here that he remained in the house of Ever for fourteen years, and then went to Charan." (Rashi on 28:9)

It seems that the Beit Midrash of Shem and Ever was in the north [1], while Yaakov, in panic-stricken flight from Esav, did not stop to pray at Mount Moriah (perhaps not even knowing where this mountain was located). The Beit Midrash of Shem and Ever was not far from Charan, and after studying there for fourteen years and deciding to go and find a wife from amongst the household of Lavan, his mother's brother,

Yaakov longed for Beit-El – the place where his forefathers had been, and so he returned to Eretz Yisrael to seek out the place.

We learn more from Rashi as to what happened to Yaakov in Beit-El:

"'He lay down in that place' – this is a succinct hint at something much bigger: IN THAT PLACE he lay down – but for the fourteen years that he spent in Ever's yeshiva he did not lie down at night, for he was completely engaged in Torah." (Rashi, 28:11)

Our initial impression is that Rashi is praising Yaakov for his conscientious dedication to Torah, not wasting any time and therefore not sleeping at all during his stay at the Beit Midrash. Only when he left to seek the place where his forefathers had prayed did he permit himself to sleep. Once again we ask: what possible lesson can we learn from Yaakov's conscientiousness in Torah study, which was not of this world?

Aside from Yaakov, legend tells of another phenomenally conscientious Torah scholar – King David:

"[David] said: I have never been asleep at midnight. Rabbi Zeira said: Until midnight he would doze like a horse; from that time onwards – he would fight it off like a lion. Rav Ashi said: Until midnight he was engaged in Torah; from then onwards – in song and praise." (Berakhot 3b)

The same question we posed concerning Yaakov would apply to David.

It appears to me that this is meant to teach us not only about conscientiousness in Torah, but also – principally – about the fulfillment of David's oath and vow:

"A song of ascents: Remember, O God, to David all his affliction, that he swore to God and vowed to the mighty God of Yaakov: Surely I shall not come into the sanctuary of my own house, nor go up to my bed; nor give sleep to my eyes or rest to my eyelids, until I find a place for God, a dwelling place for the mighty God of Yaakov. Behold, we heard of it in Efrat, we found it in Sde-Ya'ar: we shall come to His dwelling places, we shall bow down at His footstool. Arise, O God, to Your resting place – You and the Ark of Your strength." (Tehillim 132:1-8)

David is disturbed by the question of how he can live in his house and sleep upon his bed while the Master of the house is like a guest in a temporary lodging, and His Ark has no fixed place. He does not know where the place of the Shekhina is; he does not know where to establish its place. David is certainly aware of the story of the akeida at Mount Moriah, and he must surely know that it is with regard to this mountain that it is written, "Concerning which it is said to this day – on the mountain God will appear." But he does not know which mountain it is, and which place God will choose. David promises that he will not lie down to sleep until he finds a place for God's Ark to rest.

It is for this reason that David did not go to bed all those years. And since a person cannot function without sleep, he used to doze off like a horse – i.e., standing, but would not lie down on his bed.

Yaakov was in a similar situation. He was sent by his mother to establish himself a home, but having come to learn Torah, he understood that he could not build a home until he had found God's home. Perhaps the midrash is suggesting that Yaakov made a similar oath to that of his royal descendant – King David. During that time, throughout the fourteen years during which he tried to find the place of the Shekhina, of the God of his fathers, Yaakov refused to lie down and sleep; he, too, would doze upright, like a horse.

After the fourteen years, Yaakov decided to go back and seek out the place that God would choose, and he did not know where it was. In Beit-El he suddenly felt sleepy, and for the first time in fourteen years, he lay down to sleep. He dreamed a dream, and when he awoke, he understood its meaning, and the meaning of his first sleep in so many years: he had indeed found the place of the Shekhina, the resting place of God's Ark, and thus he had also found rest for his soul and license for his body to lie and sleep.

Mount Moriah was uprooted and brought to him not in order to shorten his journey, but rather in order to show Yaakov the place that he was unable to locate on his own.

"Not like Avraham, [who called God's House a mountain,] as it is written, 'In the mountain God will appear,' and not like Yitzchak, who called it a 'field,' as it is written, 'Yitzchak went out to meditate in the field,' but like Yaakov, who called it a house, as it is written, 'He called the place El Beit-El.'" (Yalkut Shimoni Mikha 552)

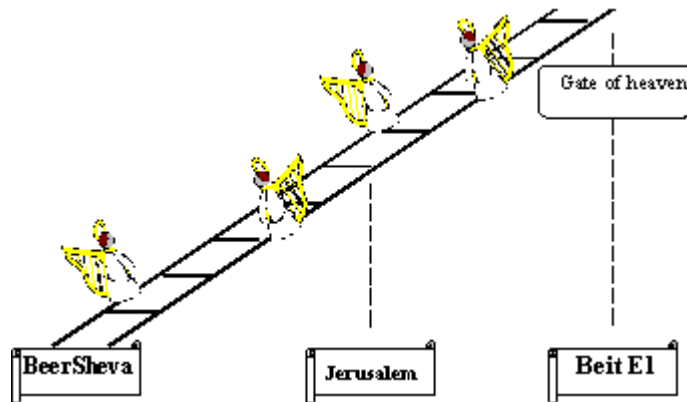
C. THE SLANTING LADDER

"Yaakov set out from Be'er sheva' – The Torah need only have said, 'Yaakov went to Charan;' why is [specific] mention made of his leaving? It teaches that the departure of a righteous person from a place has an effect. For so long as the righteous person is in the city, he is its glory, he is its radiance, and he is its majesty. When he leaves, its glory, its radiance and its majesty all pass away." (Rashi, 28:10)

The immediate question is: why does Rashi say that the glory of Be'er Sheva departed – after all, Yitzchak was still alive and living there! Let us return to the Midrash of R. Yossi ben Zimra:

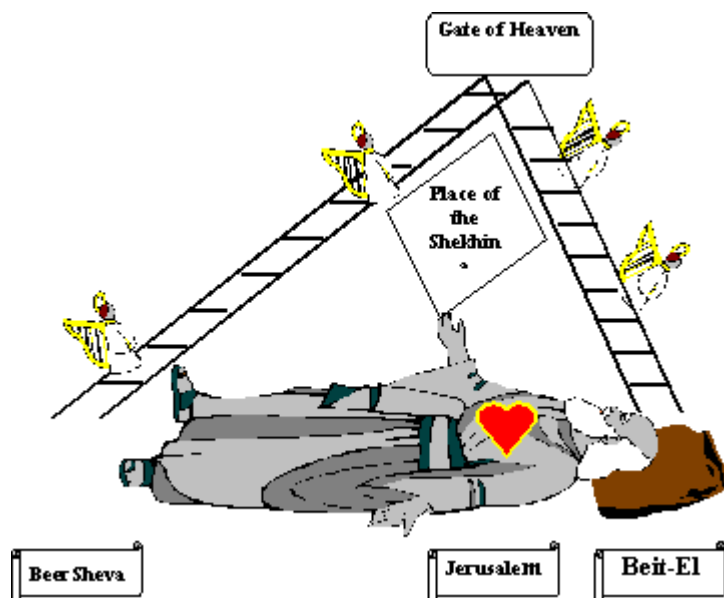
"This ladder rested with its feet in Be'er Sheva, while the middle of it hung over the [site of the] Temple. For Be'er Sheva is in the southern part of Yehuda, with Jerusalem in its northern part, on the border between Yehuda and Binyamin. Beit-El is in the northern part of the portion of Binyamin, on the border between Binyamin and the children of Yosef. Thus the foot of the ladder was in Be'er Sheva and its head in Beit-El, such that the middle of it stretched over Jerusalem."

The usual interpretation of this Midrash is that it depicts a long, inclined ladder, like a fireman's ladder, with its foot in Be'er Sheva and reaching up to the heaven above Beit-El. We may sketch this ladder as follows, with the angels ascending and descending on it:



The problem with this picture is that the central point of the incline, marked as stretching over Jerusalem, is rendered insignificant. Moreover, in actual fact Jerusalem is not halfway between Be'er Sheva and Beit-El. It is closer to Beit-El and further away from Be'er Sheva. The angels ascending and descending also present a problem; in reality, such a situation would be almost impossible.

Let us present a different perception of the ladder – rather like the sort of step-ladder that we use at home, with two legs. In addition to the angels, let us add Yaakov, lying under the ladder, and Eretz Yisrael rolled up under him:



This interpretation would seem to offer several advantages:

- i. The center of the ladder's incline is its uppermost point; this is what the ladder leads to - it reaches to the heaven. It is the center of the incline in the sense that up to this point the slope ascends, and from the point onwards it descends.

ii. The legs need not be of equal length, and there is nothing preventing the "Gateway to heaven" – the most important point in this dream-vision – from being suspended over Jerusalem, which is the most important of the three cities that appear in the dream, according to the midrash.

iii. The angels that are ascending, which Rashi understands to be the angels of Eretz Yisrael who have completed their task of guarding over Yaakov, ascend a different path than the one used by the angels responsible for other countries, which now descend from the heavens to accompany Yaakov as he leaves Eretz Yisrael. The angels of Eretz Yisrael ascend from Be'er Sheva as soon as Yaakov leaves there and they return to heaven above Mount Moriah, while the angels responsible for his safety outside of the Holy Land descend from there to Beit-El, which is Yaakov's final stop in Eretz Yisrael.

iv. Rashi's statement that when Yaakov leaves Be'er Sheva the place loses its glory, now makes sense: the heavenly angels leave the city together with Yaakov, and they ascend heavenward. Although Yitzchak remains in Be'er Sheva, these angels were sent specifically to watch over Yaakov, and now that they have left, the city has lost its glory.

v. The midrash that teaches that God folded all of Eretz Yisrael under Yaakov's head now assumes new significance with relation to the dream of the ladder. Yaakov's head is in Beit-El, under the head of the ladder horizontally – for it is there that his mind is active. The legs of the ladder, horizontally, are in Be'er Sheva, where Yaakov's feet are also resting. The middle of the ladder's incline, which is the vertical head of the ladder, is at the gateway to heaven – above Mount Moriah.

vi. If we assume (as certain commentators do) that the Beit-El that Yaakov knew is about ten kilometers north of Beit-El as we know it today, a physical measurement demonstrates that the 'gateway to heaven,' suspended over Jerusalem, IS OVER YAAKOV'S HEART – with all the significance of God's revelation and the location of Mount Moriah and Jerusalem over his heart.

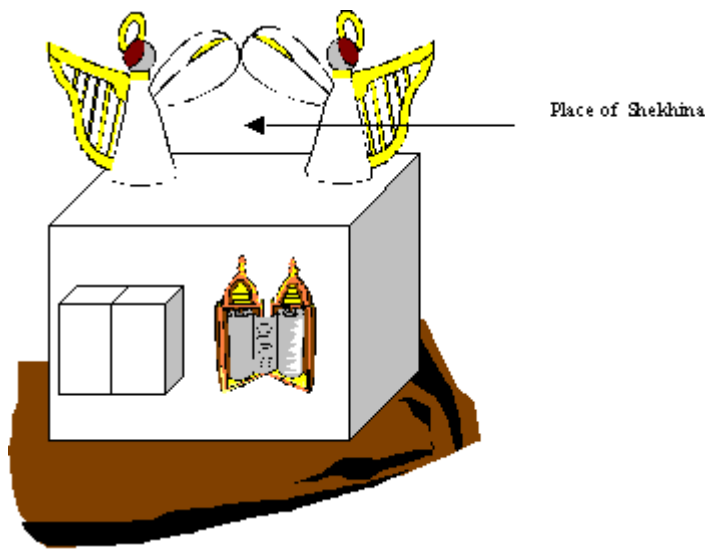
The picture that we have proposed creates an obvious parallel to the structure of the Kodesh ha-Kodashim (Holy of Holies), the permanent location of the revelation of the Shekhina. For this purpose we need only convert the sketch according to the following key:

i. The stone under Yaakov's head corresponds to the "foundation stone," upon which the Kodesh ha-Kodashim rests.

ii. Yaakov, who is the chariot of the Shekhina and the guardian of God's covenant to the forefathers, corresponds to the Ark of the Covenant with its Tablets.

iii. The angels on the ladder, above and on both sides of Yaakov, correspond to the keruvim, who stand above and on both sides of the Ark of the Covenant [3].

iv. God, Who stands over Yaakov in the dream in between the angels on the two legs of the ladder, corresponds to the Voice of God, which emerges from above the covering between the two keruvim.



D. WHERE IS BEIT-EL?

Beit-El (lit. "the house of God") is a general name that may be given to more than one place. We know that Avraham dwelled in between "Beit-El" and Ai (chapters 12 and 13), and we note that this place had always been called "Beit-El". This site is identified as being close to the settlement of Beit-El today, slightly east of it, in the Arab village of Bittin.

But Yaakov gave the name "Beit-El" to a place that had formerly been called "Luz," and this may be a different place. Perhaps we may locate it north of Beit-El today, in the mountains overlooking the settlement of Shilo from the south (indeed, the name offers us the possibility of matching them). Shilo is not a specific, defined, bounded location – for consecrated food may be eaten in any place from which Shilo (the place of the Sanctuary before the Temple in Jerusalem was built) may be seen. We assume that Yaakov's Beit-El is related to and anchored in the sanctity of Shilo in later generations. Support for this thesis is to be found in the verses describing the war over the concubine in Giv'a:

"Bnei Yisrael and all the nation went up AND CAME TO BEIT-EL, and they wept and sat there before God and fasted on that day until the evening, and they offered up burnt offerings and peace offerings before God. And Bnei Yisrael asked of God, for there the Ark of God's Covenant was in those days. And Pinchas, the son of Elazar, the son of Aharon, stood before Him in those days..." (Shoftim 20:26-28)

Here all the commentaries note, correctly, that Bnei Yisrael gathered at Shilo, for there the Ark of the Covenant was located, and Pinchas with it.

If we accept this assumption, then the Beit-El of our parasha is not left orphaned and alone, and God's revelation to Yaakov in Beit-El – both in our parasha and in next

week's parasha, when Yaakov returns from Padan-Aram – are not left devoid of meaning for all future generations.

We find an answer to our question: why did the congregation of Bnei Yisrael gather at Shilo and establish God's Ark there in the days of Yehoshua? After all, no mention is made until then of anything special related to Shilo; why, then, was this place chosen for the Sanctuary to be erected?

We can also now understand Yaakov's mysterious words to Yehuda, in his deathbed blessing:

"The staff shall not depart from Yehuda nor the scepter from his descendants, until Shilo will come – and the people will obey him."
(Bereishit 49:10)

The commentators have difficulty explaining this verse. In my view, Yaakov handed over kingship to Yehuda until God would rest His Shekhina in Shilo, which Yaakov knew from the dream of the ladder in Beit-El, which is Shilo. >From the moment that the Ark came to Shilo, God Himself would lead Israel, not any one of the tribes. And the place of Shilo was given by Yaakov to his favorite son – Yosef, the firstborn of Rachel, whom he dedicated to the priestly service. Therefore, he raised him as "the nazirite of his brothers," in the same way that Channa raised Shmuel.

Of Yosef's two sons, Yaakov chose Efraim:

"Yisrael put forth his right hand and he stretched it over the head of Efraim – who was the younger, and his left hand over the head of Menashe; he crossed his hands, for Menashe was the firstborn."
(48:14)

To my mind, Yaakov placed his right hand over Efraim's head in order to hint that he would receive the southern portion (= right side) of Yosef's inheritance in the land – the portion in which Shilo is located.

We may ask: why did Yaakov not also mention Jerusalem, which is more important than Shilo-Beit-El, and which was given to Yehuda and Binyamin?

I believe that this is the significance of Chazal's teaching that Yaakov sought to "reveal the end," but it was hidden from him. Yaakov saw, in his prophecy, as far as Shilo, but he did not see the future beyond that – Jerusalem. Perhaps this was a punishment to him for his instinctive, unauthorized selection of Yosef, and of Rachel, his mother. After all, God chose both Rachel and Leah, both of whom together established the House of Israel. He also went on to choose Jerusalem, where Rachel and Leah were joined together, in the persons of Yehuda and Binyamin. This is the Jerusalem that we pray for God to give us the merit to see rebuilt, in all its glory – soon and in our days, Amen.

NOTES:

[1] There is reason to identify the location of this Beit Midrash as Avela, in northern Syria. I shall not elaborate here on the reasons for this identification; I learned this idea from Rav Yoel bin-Nun.

[2] The angels watched over Yaakov just as the keruvim watched over the Tablets of the Covenant. Compare Bereishit 3:24 concerning the keruvim guarding the way to the Tree of Life.

Translated by Kaeren Fish