

Vayeitzei, Rabbi David Mahler

Some of us are *Avraham* type Jews. Others subscribe to the *Yitzchak* vision of the world. A third segment of our community identify most with *Yaakov*. Over the last nine months, whether we like it or not, we've all become *Yaakov* Jews.

The *gemara* in *Pesachim* (88a) takes note of the fact that all 3 of the *Avos* encountered *Har HaBayis* – the Temple Mount. *Avraham* at the *Akeida*, *Yitzchak* immediately before meeting *Rivka*, and *Yaakov*, at the beginning of this week's *parsha*, when he lays down and dreams of angels ascending and descending a ladder that reached to the heavens.

Each of our *Avos* employ a different metaphor to describe the *makom hamikdash*, the holiest place on earth. *Avraham* sees it as a mountain – “*B’har Hashem Yeraeh*”. *Yitzchak* associates the site as a field – “*Vayeitzei Yitzchak lasuach BaSadeh*” and *Yaakov* sees it as a home – “*Vayikra et shem hamakom hahu Beit el*”.

Rabbi Bernard Weinberger, in his *sefer*, *Shemen HaTov*, interprets the *gemara* in a fascinating way. Based on his approach, what the *gemara* finds interesting, I find unbelievably moving and instructive.

Rabbi Weinberger argues that each forefather wasn't simply employing a different metaphor or description of the Temple Mount, rather they were symbolically stating what they believed to be the most important aspect of Judaism.

According to *Avraham*, it was the struggle to constantly improve – to climb the mountain. The metaphor of the mountain was to inspire us to be ambitious in our religious lives - to strive for greatness. *Avraham* signified this approach as he was the first *baal teshuva*, turning to a life cognizant of his Creator and passing test after test given to him by *Hashem*. He was aspirational in his trek up the mountain.

Yitzchak selects a field which represents the grandeur and majesty of G-d. When you are alone in the field and stop to look around at all of G-d's creations, one cannot dismiss the awesomeness of *Hashem* and the world He created. *Yitzchak* was taken to be a sacrifice by his father. Only a person who sees G-d as omnipresent and omnipotent would allow themselves to be bound on an altar. Imagine the vastness of the open road while driving cross-country. *Mah Rabu Ma'asecha Hashem* – How wonderful are His creations!

Lastly, when *Yaakov* encounters the holiest place on earth, he doesn't feel a shul or a *beit midrash*. He doesn't feel a *mikveh* or *chagigah*. *Yaakov* feels the home – the Jewish home.

According to *Yaakov Avinu*, the most sublime place on earth must be our homes.

Interestingly, the *Torah* tells us why *Hashem* loved *Avraham* so much. I would've thought it was obvious. He left his home to follow G-d to an unknown destination, jumped into a fiery furnace exhibiting his unwavering devotion and was willing to sacrifice his son. However, *Hashem* unequivocally states that I love *Avraham* because he invests in his family (18:19). His family is his priority.

That being said, it is *Yaakov Avinu* who raises the first complete Jewish family. He raises neither a *Yishmael* nor an *Esav*. He sees the home as the central location for every Jew. *Yaakov* saw his primary responsibility in this world as building his Jewish home, his family.

One of the wonderful aspects of the pandemic is the fact that I have been able to be home so much more often. Like many of us, I have many communal responsibilities – dinners, fundraisers, *smachot*, open houses, etc. Some of those now take place over zoom and others have been postponed or cancelled. Though that is not a positive and many organizations are suffering, there is a silver lining. We can focus more of our attention and time – both in terms of quantity and quality – inside our homes.

Community is important and everyone needs to play a role because every role is pivotal. However, every time we choose to be away from our homes (even doing holy work), there is a cost. And we need to be mindful of that.

When we, the Jewish people, refer to ourselves, it is most often with one of the following phrases: ***Bnei Yisrael***, ***Beis Yisrael***, ***Beis Yaakov***. It's never theological. It's always familial.

May *Hashem* bless us all with Herculean energy. After this pandemic finally comes to an end, may we be able to involve ourselves thoroughly into the great organizations of our community while raising beautiful, religiously inspired and ambitious families.

But if we should ever find that time is a limited resource, please remember that family comes first. We must be always be *Yaakov* Jews.