



Dear Friends,

Parashat Vayetze tells the story of Yaakov leaving home, or rather, escaping from his brother's wrath.

Yaakov does not just leave. He goes to exile. Twenty long years, during which he will marry, have twelve children; get very rich, and most of all, he will miss home. His mother, the architect of the plot to steal the blessing from his father, will never see him again.

Our Sages wrote a great deal about Yaakov's departure - from the tent, from his mother's domain, from Be'er Sheva and from the Promised Land - and they realized that this was not just a simple leave-taking.

Each of the heroes of the Torah has a unique movement that shapes their lives, expressed in a verb or a number of verbs that characterize their life's journey. These verbs or actions are the source of their blessing.

Avraham goes (literally: walks), and in doing so he brings blessing:

“The LORD said to Abram, ‘Go forth from your native land and from your father’s house... And I will bless you; I will make your name great, And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you And curse him that curses you; And all the families of the earth Shall bless themselves by you.’ Abram went forth as the LORD had commanded him...” (Bereishit 12: 1-4)

‘Take your son, your favored one, Isaac, whom you love, and go forth to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering... He split the wood for the burnt offering, and he set out for the place of which God had told him.’
(Bereishit 22: 1-3)

Yitzchak stays, and by doing so he finds HIS blessing:

“The LORD had appeared to him and said, ‘Do not go down to Egypt; stay in the land which I point out to you. Reside in this land, and I will be with you and bless you’... So Isaac stayed in Gerar.” (Bereishit 26: 2-6)

Yoseph finds his blessing when he is aggressively lowered and cast off:

“...and [his brothers] took him and **cast him into the pit....they pulled Joseph up out of the pit. They sold Joseph for twenty pieces of silver to the Ishmaelites who brought Joseph to down to Egypt.**” (Bereishit 37: 24-28)

“Joseph was **taken down to Egypt...The LORD was with Joseph, and he was a successful man...the LORD lent success to everything he undertook... the LORD blessed his [master's] house for Joseph's sake, so that the blessing of the LORD was upon everything that he owned...** (later, after Yoseph is falsely accused of raping his master's wife) **So Joseph's master had him cast into prison...the LORD was with Joseph: He extended kindness to him and disposed the chief jailer favorably toward him.**” (Bereishit 39: 1-21)

Moshe's movement is to come before (as in approach) and to ascend. That is where HIS blessing is to be found:

“**The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, approach [Pharaoh] and tell Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to let the Israelites depart from his land.**” (Sh'mot 6: 10-11).

The LORD said to Moses, come before Pharaoh... (9:1).

Then the LORD said to Moses, come before Pharaoh. For I have hardened his heart... So Moses and Aaron went before Pharaoh and said to him...” (10: 1-3)

“**On the third new moon after the Israelites had gone forth from the land of Egypt... and Moses went up to God. The LORD called to him from the mountain...'you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' ...Moses came forth and summoned the elders of the people and put before them all that the LORD had commanded him... The LORD came down upon Mount Sinai, on the top of the mountain, and the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain and Moses went up..But Moses said to the LORD, 'The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai'... so the LORD said to him, 'Go down, and come back up together with Aaron; but let not the priests or the people break through to come up to the LORD, lest He break out against them.'” (Sh'mot 19, the entire chapter)**

This week we focus on Yaakov's movement: leaving: “**Jacob left Beer-sheba, and set out for Haran.**” (Bereishit 28:10)

Yaakov is a “tam” - innocent and whole - a tent-dweller, his mother's boy. His twin brother Eisav is the one whose natural place is the outdoors: he is the hunter, the man of the field. For Yaakov, the outside world is one of terror and fear.

Yaakov leaves his comfortable place twice in his life: once to Haran, and a second time to Egypt. Each time he leaves a place of security and goodness. Both departures are imposed upon him: he flees to Haran to escape his brother's wrath, and he goes to Egypt because there was drought and hunger in Cana'an.

Yet, despite the difficulty and pain, both departures are a source of blessing for Yaakov and for humanity. Due to the first he meets the love of his life, has children - who will one day

become the Children of Israel - and becomes rich. Because of the second, he is reunited with his beloved son and receives royal treatment.

It appears that every person has a unique life movement. An inner voice summons this motion forth. It is not an easy thing to do, and it does not come naturally. It is challenging and often frightening. A person may be quite happy to ignore it. But at the end of the day, this movement is unavoidable. It may be postponed for many years, but its day will come, because it is the source of blessing.

Our unique movement is God's way of being revealed in the world.

Avraham goes forth, Yitzchak - bound - stays put and deepens the wells his father dug. Yaakov leaves. Yoseph is cast off and lowered to the pit, to Egypt, to prison. Moshe is called upon to come forth and confront. He is also called to ascend, descend, and come forth once more and deliver the Divine word.

Each brought God's blessing by his distinct movement.

What is the motion of your life? You will know it if it is not always comfortable (you may have even tried to avoid it), but from the perspective of age and experience you can see that it brings repeated blessing to you and to the world.

Shabbat Shalom,

Elisha