

And Yaakov departed from Beer-Sheva. (28:10)

Rashi notes the Torah's emphasis on Yaakov *Avinu's* departure from Beer-Sheva, when it needed only to have written where he was going. A departure on its own merit is not notable; it is where one is going that should be indicated. He explains that the Torah teaches us that the departure of a righteous person makes an impression. His departure leaves a vacuum within the community in which he has resided, for, at the time that a righteous person is in a city, he is its magnificence; he is its splendor; he is its grandeur. Once he departs from that place, its magnificence fades away; its splendor goes away; its grandeur recedes. Is this really true? How often is it that a virtuous person, a Torah scholar of note, leaves a community, and one does not sense the loss; that the people just do not perceive the vacuum which should have been created by his departure or demise?

I found the answer in an anecdote which served as the rebuttal of the *Malbim* to the *Maskillim*, Enlightened heretics, of his community. **Horav Meir Leibush Malbim, zl**, was a brilliant Torah scholar without peer. Sadly, he suffered greatly from the *Maskillim* who went out of their way to vilify anyone who was observant, and especially the individual who, as a result of his scholarship and virtue, could hurt their cause. The *Malbim* was *Rav* in Bucharest, Romania, but, as a result of the egregious slander which spewed forth from the malignant mouths of these self-loathing Jews, he just had to leave. As he was bidding farewell to his friends and supporters, one of these heretics reared his ugly head, and, in an attempt to get in one last lick, said, "Rabbi, I am sure you are quite aware of *Rashi's* comment concerning Yaakov's departure from Beer-Sheva." The man remarked rhetorically, "Considering what *Rashi* says concerning the departure of a saintly person, I wonder why the city of Bucharest does not seem to have experienced this change in its splendor, magnificence or grandeur with your departure." With this jab, the man sat back and smugly waited for the *Malbim* to reply.

The *Malbim* looked the man in the eye and responded, "Your point is well-taken, but, as usual, you are missing the depth of *Rashi's* commentary. Avraham *Avinu* and Yitzchak *Avinu* both left their respective communities to move elsewhere. Yet, concerning neither of them does the Torah write, *Vayeitzei*, 'And he departed.' Was their departure any less worthy of note? Were they lesser *tzaddikim* than Yaakov?"

The answer is that when Yaakov departed Beer-Sheva, he left present other *tzaddikim*, such as Yitzchak and Rivkah *Imeinu*, who would recognize the impact a righteous person had made on an environment. Only someone who values the *tzaddik's* presence could appreciate his loss. When Avraham and Yitzchak left, their communities became bereft of whatever positive spirituality had existed there. Wicked people do not value virtue, and, hence, sustain no loss when it is vacated. Thus, when a *tzaddik* departs a city filled with wicked people, one cannot expect a sustained reaction to his departure.

The *Malbim* made his point. Individuals who are not themselves of impeccable character do not value one who is. Today, more than ever, this goes without saying. We are confronting a new

phenomenon. I am referring to the community whose members think that they have outgrown their original leadership. When it involves oneself, people suddenly have very short memories, refusing to look back two decades to a time in which they were different and their community was different. People forget how their mode of dress evolved into what it is today; how their *hashkafos*, outlook on life in general and *Yiddishkeit* in particular, has been altered. They conveniently forget the individual or individuals who catalyzed this change. One who values the spiritual transformation which he experienced will, in turn, appreciate the individual who motivates this metamorphosis. To one, however, to whom the alteration is external, more consistent with the wave of the times, rather than intrinsic change from within, the appreciation will not be present because one cannot appreciate what he himself does not possess.

As an aside, according to the *Malbim*, the departure of a *tzaddik* from an environment which is spiritually defective will not leave an impression. This does not seem consistent with *Rashi's* proof from *Rus* 1:7, which states *Va'teitzei min ha'makom*, "And she departed from the place," which is a reference to the departure of Naomi and Rus from Moav. Surely, Naomi and Rus did not leave other righteous people behind in Moav.