

Yaakov left Be'er Sheva and went toward Charan. (28:10)

Obviously, we are well aware of Yaakov *Avinu's* origin, his home from which he was leaving. What is really important for the reader is his destination. Why does the Torah underscore his leaving Be'er Sheva? Quoting *Chazal*, *Rashi* says, "When a righteous person departs from a city, its glory departs." For while the *tzadik* is in the city, he is its glory, splendor and beauty. The commentators, each in his own inimitable manner, offer their understanding and analysis of these terms. I would like to make one observation concerning the emphasis on Yaakov leaving Be'er Sheva. Yaakov left Be'er Sheva; Be'er Sheva did not leave Yaakov. He took the community with him. Yitzchak *Avinu* and Rivkah *Imeinu* had infused the city with *kedushah* and *taharah*.

Second, the word *Rashi* uses to describe "departs" is *panah*, which really means turns. This implies that the splendor, glory and beauty did not completely dissipate, such that they were no longer extant, rather, they turned, no longer focused on the place in which the *tzadik* made his home, but they remained in the community, as the influence of his inspiration left an impact for the future. A city that had been home to a *tzadik* no longer remains just a geographical site. It is a *makom kedushah*, a holy place in which sparks of sanctity have been imbued. Radin will always be special, as will Vilna and Holyoke, Massachusetts, and so many other communities dotting the Eastern seaboard and even in the Midwest and west, in which great *tzaddikim* found shelter from the persecution that was overrunning Europe. Who would think that Buffalo, New York, would be the burial site of America's first *Chassidishe Rebbe*, a place to which hundreds pilgrimage annually to pray for a blessing. If we would take the time to research the cities of early America, we would be surprised to find out how many holy people made their homes in small towns. They left a spiritual influence felt until this day.

Another important lesson that we can derive from *Rashi* is that the true aesthetics of a community are not its architecture, landscape and physical landmarks. A city may be adorned with impressive buildings, lush parks, heart-stopping views and natural wonders; yet, if it lacks men and women of *kedushah*, it is bereft of its deepest potential beauty. The essence of a city's glory does not lie in mortar and stone, nor does its regal setting contribute to its true splendor. It is the *neshamos* of the righteous who have made their home there. Their Torah and *tefillah* have infused the city with its glory, splendor and beauty. The radiance of a *tzadik* illuminates the city. A city's skyline is not to be measured in skyscrapers, but in its souls. The most magnificent city may appear drab externally, but, if Torah flourishes there, it is beautiful. The small basement without the fancy accoutrements becomes a regal center once it is used for Torah and *tefillah*. This does not negate large room edifices dedicated to Torah growth. We must remember, however, that it is not the edifice, but the Torah it generates.

When the distinguished Agudist, communal activist, *Horav Moshe Blau, zl*, visited Vilna in 1930, his first stop was at the home of its *Rav*, *Horav Chaim Ozer Grodzenski, zl*. As *Rav* of Vilna and preeminent Torah giant of the generation, he was involved in every Torah endeavor in Europe and even in *Eretz Yisrael*. After a meaningful conversation, *Rav* Chaim Ozer asked his *gabbai*, *Rav*

Meir Lieberman, to take *Rav Blau* on a tour of Vilna's Jewish community. They walked through the streets, visited the *shuls*, *kollelim* and *yeshivos*, and returned back to *Rav Chaim Ozer* where they reported about all the sites they saw. *Rav Chaim Ozer* looked at *Rav Meir* and asked, "Did you show him *Rav Yeshaya*?" This referred to the *Chazon Ish* who, as a young man, would sit in a *shul* and learn all day. *Rav Chaim Ozer* was very keen on this young man and predicted great things to come from him, "How can you bypass the beauty and splendor of Vilna? If you did not show him the *Chazon Ish*, then you did not show him the beauty of Vilna!"