

Torah Table Talk

Righteous People Make a Difference

Parshat Vayetze
Genesis, Chapter 28:10 – 32:3



Jacob's flight from his parental home begins on a barren mountain top with a mysterious dream in which he sees a ladder based upon the earth whose top reaches heaven. Angels ascend and descend the ladder as God promises our forefather that the land upon which he is lying will eventually be his, and that he will become a great and populous nation. Jacob's journey is not an easy one. He must learn to deal with deceit, family conflict, and intrigue. Through years of exile Jacob grows and matures. He is humbled by his experience and develops into the great leader we now remember.

Genesis 28:10-11

Jacob left Beer-sheba and set out for Haran. He came to a certain place and stopped there for the night, for the sun had set.

Rashi: And he went out: It was necessary (for Scripture) to write only, "And Jacob went toward Haran." Why then does (Scripture) mention his departure ("Jacob left...")? It is to teach us that the departure of a righteous man from any place makes an impression. For during the time that the righteous person is in the city he constitutes its glory, he is its splendor, he is its crown; but when he departs from there, there departs its glory, there departs its splendor, there departs its crown....

1. Rashi speaks about a righteous person in this passage. What makes someone a righteous person? What qualities and characteristics does this person have? How does he have an impact on the place in which he lives?
2. Would you consider Jacob 'a righteous person?' Why or why not?
3. Rashi speaks of this person embodying the qualities of glory, splendor, and crown. What do you think these three terms refer to?

Rabbi Z. Sorotzkin: "There is a righteous person who dwells in a city but does not worry about what happens in the city. Rather he worries about his place in the world to come. When such a righteous person leaves the city, his absence is not noted. But when a truly righteous person leaves a city - that is a righteous person who was truly a part of the place, and was active and influence upon the place - he going out makes a great impression." (*Otzar HaHayim*)

1. Sorotzkin speaks about two different types of righteous people. How are they different from one another? Do you think a person who is only concerned about his own salvation can truly be considered a righteous person?
2. The Jewish tradition speaks of thirty six righteous people who inhabit the world, without whom the world would be destroyed. The implication of this teaching is that the highest form of righteousness is the type which is practiced quietly and anonymously. How does this teaching compare with Rabbi Sorotzkin's suggestion that only the activist makes an impression on the community? Should righteous people be public in what they do?

Hatam Sofer – We are not told that Abraham “went out” when he left Haran (as we are told about Jacob.) Didn’t Abraham’s action as a righteous person make an impression on others? The Hatam Sofer explained that when Jacob “went out” he left his parents Isaac and Rebecca. His exit from their home made a deep impression on them. Abraham, on the other hand, left a place where he was surrounded by idol worshippers who could not recognize his greatness or his glory when he dwelled among them. They did not notice any difference when he left. (*Otzar HaHayim*)

1. Rashi and the other commentators teach us that a righteous person makes a difference on the place in which he lives. Yet what is the Hatam Sofer telling us about the choice of place that a righteous place lives is also important. How so?
2. Is it harder to be a righteous person in a place where Isaac and Rebecca live or in a place of idolatry?
3. How do righteous people influence the place in which they live? How can you make a difference in your community?

Glossary

Hatam Sofer – Moses Sofer (1762 – 1839); Leading figure of Hungarian Orthodox community; He is best known by the title of his celebrated book, the Hatam Sofer.

Otzar HaHayim, a contemporary collection of teachings on the weekly Parshah.

Zalman Sorotzkin (1881-1966) [Sorotzkin](#) was a Lithuanian rabbi and communal leader. His was a brilliant Talmudic scholar and a leader of [Agudat Israel](#). When World War II broke out he went to [Vilna](#) and then to Eretz Israel

How to use Torah Table Talk

1. *Read the sheet out loud to one another. Discuss what it has to say.*
2. *Focus on the text in the box. It is taken from Biblical, post-biblical and modern Jewish sources. What does it mean? How does it make you feel?*
3. *Try to answer the questions following the text.*
4. *This is not a test and there are many correct answers and interpretations to each question. Share your ideas with one another. Be open and honest in sharing your ideas.*

***“All it takes to study Torah is an open heart, a curious mind
and a desire to grow a Jewish soul.”***

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