Jewish Tribune – Vayeitzei

**The Departure of a Tzaddik**

Our sedra opens with the familiar line (Bereishis 28,10)

וַיֵּצֵא יַעֲקֹב מִבְּאֵר שָׁבַע וַיֵּלֶךְ חָרָנָה

Rashi famously comments:

לא היה צריך לכתוב אלא וילך יעקב חרנה, ולמה הזכיר יציאתו, אלא מגיד שיציאת צדיק מן המקום עושה רושם, שבזמן שהצדיק בעיר הוא הודה הוא זיוה הוא הדרה, יצא משם פנה הודה פנה זיוה פנה הדרה

The Torah only had to write “And Yaakov went to Charan.” Why did it mention his  
departure? This tells us the departure of a tzaddik from a place makes an impression,  
for while the tzaddik is in the city, he is its beauty, he is its splendour, he is its  
majesty. When he departs from there, its beauty has departed, its splendour has  
departed, its majesty has departed.

Many meforshim raise an obvious question. This is not the first time a tzaddik has  
travelled. Avrohom and Yitzchok both went from place to place and the word יציאה  
(departing) is not used to convey this message.

Why is the message that the departure of a tzaddik from a place makes an  
impression taught specifically with Yaakov?

The Kil Yakar offers two answers. I thought of his first answer when I heard the sad news of the passing of Dayan Ehrentreu ztl.  
  
When Avraham and Yitzchok travelled, they left the place they had previously lived  
in, bereft of another tzaddik. When Yaakov left Be’er Sheva, Yitzchok and Rivka still  
resided there. I might have thought that in such circumstances, the departure of a  
tzaddik does not make such a big impression. After all, the town still hosts other  
tzaddikim. The Torah comes to teach us this lesson to explain that even though other  
tzaddikim remain, the departure of Yaakov made an impression.  
  
We are blessed with wonderful communities in London and many eminent talmidei chachomim. Selfless Rabbonim and Rebbetzins who dedicate their lives to serve Klal Yisroel.  
  
We are also blessed with laymen of calibre who are involved in all sorts of communal projects and programmes. Their dedication and selflessness is also astounding and invaluable.  
  
But the passing of the Dayan has left so many people feeling bereft. Even though he suffered poor health in recent times and was a shadow of his former self, his very presence was a reassuring blessing.  
  
Together with his remarkable Rebbetzin, the Dayan set the bar high and they became Anglo Jewry's royalty.  
  
It is astonishing what a productive life he lived and how many lives he touched.  
  
Last week's sedra opened with the famous episode of Eisav selling his birthright to Yaakov.  
   
At a closer look, Eisav's fear of assuming this responsibility seems somewhat reasonable. As Rashi describes, Yaakov informs him that this position of responsibility is fraught with danger. There are many risks and penalties if not performed correctly.  
  
Why are Chazal so critical of Eisav?  
  
Rav Moshe Feinstein explains that shirking responsibility and passing up opportunities is disdained by the Torah.  
  
When opportunity knocks and you ignore the call, it is considered a disgrace.  
  
There are several examples of this. Ploni Almoni in Megilas Rus. His choice of not marrying Rus casts  
him into eternal anonymity.  
  
And in more recent times, we have examples of people rising to the challenge. Rav Dessler answering R’Dovid Dryan’s letter and offer to start the Gateshead Kollel.  
  
It was in this kollel that Dayan Ehrehtreu learned and developed into the outstanding talmid chochom we all knew and loved.  
  
The Dayan led Anglo Jewry with warmth, wisdom, and dignity, firmly anchored in Torah values.  
  
The Dayan always heard the call and took responsibility. He was never one to shirk his duty. He touched the lives of so many of us in so many ways.  
  
That is the contrast. Eisav walking away from responsibility and the legacy of the Dayan, of a life well lived ife, one of service and selflessness.  
  
Wishing the Rebbetzen, the family and the Dayan's many admirers much nechama and strength.

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