

On his journey to Laban's house, Jacob spent a night on Mount Moriah, the site of *Akeidat Yitzchak* and the future site of the two Temples. Gd appeared to him for the first time in a dream, promising to protect him in his upcoming journey and return him safely to the land of his fathers. Jacob became the third leg in the patriarchal triad to receive the promise that his children would inherit the Land of Canaan. Upon awaking, Jacob was awe-struck and frightened at having spent the night at such a holy place. He took an oath that if Gd will accompany and protect him on his perilous journey and return him to his father's house, he will tithe his possessions.

What did Jacob mean when he realized the sanctity of the place he slept and declared it to be the House of Gd, בית אלקים? What is the significance of renaming the city *Beit El*? Why did Jacob condition his tithing on returning to the House of his father?

The Mishna (Brachot 30b) says that the pious men would not rush into prayer. They would prepare themselves for a period of time before and after prayer. This is one of the sources that a Jew must be careful to complete his prayers prior to removing his phylacteries and he should not hastily depart the synagogue to avoid the appearance that prayer in the synagogue is a burden. The Talmud (ibid 32b) bases the contemplative period prior to prayer on the verse 'Happy are they that dwell in Thy house', אשרי יושבי ביתך (Psalms 84). The contemplative period after prayer is based on the verse 'Surely the righteous shall give thanks unto Thy name, the upright shall dwell in Thy presence' (Psalms 144). Another example of adding additional time to a sanctified activity, similar to prayer, is starting the Sabbath early and ending late. We do not enter the Holy Sabbath in a harried state, nor do we separate from the Sabbath at the earliest opportunity. Prior to receiving the Torah at Sinai, the Jewish People required 3 days to prepare themselves for their encounter with Gd. Aaron, the High Priest, could only enter the Holy of Holies once a year after he prepared himself appropriately by immersing in a *Mikva* and changed his clothes. The concept of *Muktza* is based on the lack of preparation prior to Sabbath or a Festival. The same principle applies to prayer. One who yearns to pour out his heart before Gd can only approach Him after proper preparation.

Attaining the proper mood that stimulates prayer and surrender to Gd requires the Jew to feel comfortable in his surroundings. After proper preparation, the synagogue assumes the personality of a welcoming home, **אשרי יושבי ביתך**. Beautiful pews, carpets and lights are irrelevant. One who rushes into the synagogue and begins to pray simply lacks the preparation required to attain a level of comfort in his surroundings that can empower his prayer with sanctity. However, the attachment to sanctity is not limited to the start of prayer or the start of the Sabbath. The original pious people also found it difficult to leave the House of Gd after prayer. Hassidic Jews in Europe were deeply attached to the Sabbath. They found it most difficult to relinquish the connection they attained to **קדושת שבת**.

King David said 'How beloved are Your dwelling places. My soul yearns for Gd's courtyards. Even the bird finds its home and the swallow her nest' (Psalms 84). David yearned for the Temple, a **House** where he could feel comfortable and close to Gd. The Temple represented for him a protective sanctuary, where nothing and no one could harm him. He compared himself to a bird whose flimsy nest provides minimal protection, constantly threatened even when nestled in that nest. A bird surrounded by a sturdy house feels protected. However when it leaves the protective walls, even to attend to its needs, it is confronted by exile and tension. David yearned to build Gd's house, to be in His presence, where he can proclaim 'Happy are they that dwell in Thy house'. Like the Temple to David, the synagogue represents the embracing environment that allows us to rendezvous with Gd through prayer. We connect with Gd at the highest level by observing the Sabbath sanctity. We can only reach these heights in our relationship with Gd through proper preparation.

After spending the night on what would become the Temple Mount, the ultimate House of Prayer, Jacob expressed remorse for his lack of preparation prior to entering such a holy place. He was frightened by his surroundings as he felt cut off from the protection of his father's house upon fleeing from Esau. After the dream, he appreciated that this place was the true *Bayit*, House of Gd, where he could feel comfortable in Gd's embrace and pour out his soul in prayer. He yearned to stay there, to dwell in that House. He renamed the area *Beit El*, indicating that this is his family's home, the House of Gd, a house that facilitates prayer, where he and they can feel safe. However, Jacob realized that he must leave that protective house and

travel to Laban's house; he had to go into exile like the bird leaving his protective home and expose himself to danger. He prayed to return in peace, to again bask in the warmth of the house that facilitates his complete relationship with Gd. Then he can fulfill his promise to tithe whatever he acquires, and proclaim 'Happy are they that dwell in Thy house'.

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