

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter VII: Vavetzei (Gen. 28:10-32:3)

Essay 6. The gateway to Heaven

פְּסוּק "מה־נִוְרָא הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה אֵין זֶה כִּי אִם־בֵּית אֱלֹהִים". קִשָּׁה לְמָה אָמַר בְּלִישׁוֹן שְׁלִילָה "אֵין זֶה", הִזָּה לוֹ לומר "זֶה בֵּית אֱלֹהִים", וְעוֹד לְמָה דְּנִקָּא אָמַר הַשֶּׁבַח שֶׁל "נִוְרָא", וּמָהוּ "מֵה־נִוְרָא" דְּמִשְׁמַע נִוְרָא בְּיוֹתֵר. וְכַתּוּב הַבַּיִת יוֹסֵף (אוֹרַח חַיִּים סִימָן תַּקנ"ה) בְּשֵׁם הַגְּהוֹת מְרַדְכִי, יֵשׁ בְּנֵי אָדָם שְׁמִשְׁימִין אָבָן תַּחַת רַאשֵׁם לִיל ט' בָּאָב, וְרָמְזוּ לְדָבָר "וַיִּקַּח מֵאֲבָנֵי הַמָּקוֹם", וּבֵית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ רָאָה דְּכַתִּיב "מֵה־נִוְרָא הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה" וְחָרְבָן רָאָה עַכ"ל. וְקִשָּׁה הֵיכָא רְמִיזָא בְּפִסְוִק שְׁיַעֲקֹב רָאָה הַחָרְבָן?

There is a verse: Jacob said **“How awesome is this place! This is none other than the abode of G-d, and that is the gateway to Heaven.”**¹ A question is why does it speak in the negative language of **“this is none other”**? It could have said **“This is the abode of G-d.”** Also, why does it specifically utter the praise of **“awesome”**? Also, why **“How awesome,”** which has the meaning of **“especially awesome.”**

The Beit Yosef² wrote (in Orach Chaim, Siman 555), in the name of the glosses of the Mordechai,³ that **“there are people who place a stone under their heads on the evening of the fast day of Tisha B’av. This is hinted at by the verse, ‘He came upon a certain place and stopped there for the night, for the sun had set; taking one of the stones of that place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place.’**⁴ **He saw the Temple, as it is written, ‘How awesome is this place,’ and he saw the ruin of the Temple.”**

It is difficult to understand where the allusion is in this verse that Jacob saw the ruin of the Temple.

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¹ Gen. 28:17.

² Joseph Karo (1488–1575), author of the *Beit Yosef*, a commentary on Jacob ben Asher’s *Arba'ah Turim*, and the condensed summary, the *Shulchan Aruch*.

³ Mordechai ben Hillel HaKohen (c. 1250–98), 13th-century German rabbi. His commentary on the Talmud is one of the sources of the *Shulchan Aruch*.

⁴ Gen. 28:11.

אֵלָא כַּד פִּירוּשׁוֹ, "מֵה־נּוֹרָא הַמְקוֹם הַזֶּה" הֵינּוּ הַבַּיִת הַמְקַדָּשׁ שְׂרָאָה, וְאַחַר שְׂרָאָה הַבַּיִת הַמְקַדָּשׁ לֹא אָמַר "זֶה בַּיִת אֱלֹהִים", אֵלָא אֵין זֶה אוֹתוֹ הַבַּיִת הַמְקַדָּשׁ שְׂיִהְיֶה קַיִים לְעַד, שְׂזֵה עֲתִיד לִיִּחְרַב. וּמֵהוּ הַבַּיִת הַמְקַדָּשׁ שְׂיִתְקַנֵּים, מֵה שְׂיִבְנֶה הַקֵּב"ה מֵעַצְמוֹ, "כִּי אִם־בַּיִת אֱלֹהִים", אֲמַנָּם מְקוֹם זֶה לְעוֹלָם הוּא "שְׂעַר הַשָּׁמַיִם" וְכוּלֵי עֲלֵמָא מְכוּוֹנִים לְבָם בְּתַפְלִתָם דְּרַדּוּ בַּיִת קִדָּשׁ הַקְּדוּשִׁים.

Rather, it means this, “How awesome is this place,” which was the Temple that he saw, and after he saw the Temple, he didn’t say, “this is the House of the L-rd,” rather, this is not the same Temple that will exist forever, for it is destined to be destroyed. What is the Temple that will exist? The one that the Holy One, Blessed be He, will build by Himself, i.e., the Third Temple, “This is the abode of G-d.”

Indeed, this place will always be the “gateway to Heaven,” even if the Temple is not standing, and the entire world directs their hearts in their prayers by the way of the Holy of Holies. Thus, the Zera Shimshon understands Jacob is saying that the location is awesome and is the gateway to Heaven.

וְנִדְוַע שְׂיִרְמְנֶה וְדִנְגֵאל לְאַחַר הַחֲרָבָן לֹא הָיוּ רוֹצִים לֹאמַר "גְּבוּר וְנוֹרָא", וְנָאֲתוּ אֲנָשִׁי כְּנֶסֶת הַגְּדוּלָה וְאָמְרוּ הֵן הֵן נוֹרָאוּתֵינוּ. וּמִדָּת נוֹרָא הֵינּוּ מִדָּתוֹ שֶׁל יַעֲקֹב כְּנֹדַע בְּסוּד הַעֲמִידָה, "הָאֵל הַגְּדוֹל הַגְּבוּר וְהַנּוֹרָא" אַחַר "אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹרָהֶם יִצְחָק וְיַעֲקֹב", וְלָכֵן אָמַר "מֵה־נּוֹרָא הַמְקוֹם הַזֶּה", אַף בְּזִמְנֵן שְׂאִין זֶה כְּלוּמַר שְׂיִהְיֶה חֶרֶב, אֲזִי יִהְיֶה יוֹמֵר נוֹרָא, שְׂהֵן הֵן נוֹרָאוּתֵינוּ. וְיֵשׁ לֹאמַר עוֹד שְׂרָצָה לְרִמּוּז אֵף לְמִלַת "גְּבוּר", שְׂגַם בְּזֵה אָמְרוּ הֵן הֵן גְּבוּרָתֵנוּ, וּמִלַת "נוֹרָא" רוּמְזַת נְמִי לְמִלַת "גְּבוּר", כְּנֹדַע בְּסוּד "וַיִּשְׁמַד נוֹרָא עַל כָּל מֵה שְׂבָרָתָה", שְׂהוּא יַעֲקֹב הַמְשַׁתְּפָה עִם יִצְחָק.

Moses had referred to “the great, mighty, and awesome G-d,”⁵ but **it’s known that Jeremiah and Daniel after the destruction of the Temple hadn’t wanted to say “mighty and awesome.”** Jeremiah had said “great and mighty,”⁶ omitting the word “awesome” [נוֹרָא], for he saw the destruction of the Temple, and Daniel said, “great and awesome,”⁷ omitting the word “mighty” [גְּבוּר], for he saw the Jewish people in exile.

The Men of the Great Assembly came and said both His might and His awesomeness in composing the text of the Amidah (“Shemona Esreh”) prayer.⁸ The characteristic of “awesome” is the characteristic of Jacob, as is known from the esoteric secret of the Amidah prayer, “the great, mighty, and awesome G-d,” which is stated after “the G-d of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,” i.e., the parallelism leads to a Kabbalistic interpretation that praising G-d as “great” is associated with Abraham; praising Him as “mighty” is associated with Isaac; and praising Him as “awesome” is associated with Jacob. **Therefore [Jacob] said “How awesome is this place.”**

⁵ Deut. 10:17.

⁶ Jer. 32:18.

⁷ Dan. 9:4.

⁸ Yoma 69b; Bartenura on Pirkei Avot 1:1.

Even in the time when this was not there, which is to say when there was destruction of the Temple, it was more awesome, that this was His awesomeness. I.e., one might expect that if a people's land and capital and principal place of worship is captured and destroyed, that the people can be wiped out. But G-d arranged it that even in conquest and Exile, the Jewish people survived, and that reflects G-d's quality of awesomeness.

It can also be said that [Jacob] wanted to hint even at the word of "mighty," that also in this [the Men of the Great Assembly] said, "this is His might." The word "awesome" hints also at the word "mighty," as is known from the esoteric secret of the term "and Your Name is awesome over all You have created," which appears in the morning Amidah for Rosh Hashana, **which is Jacob**, representing G-d's "awesomeness," **joining** in combination **with Isaac**, representing G-d's might. This is discussed further in the teachings of the Arizal.⁹

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⁹ Chaim Vital, *Pri Etz Chaim*, Gate of the Prayers of Rosh Hashana, chapter 7.