

A House and a Gate

Shalom Rav

ויירא ויאמר מה נורא המקום הזה: אין זה כי אם בית אלקים וזה שער השמים. (בראשית כח:יז)

And he was frightened, and he said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." (*Bereshit* 28:17)

Yaakov awoke from his dream in which he visualized angels ascending and descending a ladder, and he immediately realized this was not an ordinary occurrence; he exclaimed: "How awesome is this place!" "This place" where Yaakov was located, was the site where the two *Batei HaMikdash* stood and where the third will stand. Yaakov refers to this location as both a house (*bayit*) and a gate (*shaar*). These are two different descriptions of the same location.

I once heard Rav Aharon Lichtenstein explain as follows: A *bayit* is an ultimate destination, an end. We embark on a journey and we arrive at our destination – a house.

A *shaar* (gate), on the other hand, is not a place we go to, but something we go through. A gate is a means, not an end. The *Beit HaMikdash* was both a house and a gate. It was a *bayit* in that it was a place we went to, on the *Shalosh Regalim*, to bring offerings and to see the *kohanim*. But it was also a gate. We used the experience of having been at the

Parashat Vayetzeh

bayit as a means to get even closer to HaKadosh Barukh Hu, to bring the inspiration back home with us. In that sense, the *Beit HaMikdash* was a gate, a *shaar*. It is meant to be both an end, a *bayit*, and a means, the gateway to heaven.

When we experience any spiritual high, during *davening*, at a *shiur*, doing an act of *hesed*, accomplishing that experience may be an end within itself, yet we need to take it with us. We must internalize it and utilize it as a means to enhance our spirituality in other areas as well. As Yaakov began his journey to the house of Lavan, he understood that he needed to carry with him the spiritual sensation he was experiencing at that location.

This is how we should view each station of life's spiritual journey: as both a *bayit* and a *shaar*.