



## We are All from Yerushalayim

**W**hen beloved Israeli author, Shmuel Yosef “Shai” Agnon was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1966, his famous acceptance speech revolved around his Jewish identity, his relationship to Torah, his love for *Yiddishkeit* and his *kesher* to Yerushalayim.

When asked by Gustav VI, the King of Sweden, where he had been born, Agnon replied, “Your Majesty, like all Jews, I come from Jerusalem.”

In his speech, Agnon addressed the honored assembly and again spoke of his connection to our eternal capital: “As a result of the great catastrophe in which Titus of Rome destroyed the Holy City and Israel was exiled from its Land, I was born in one of the cities of the Exile, Buczacz. But I always regarded myself as one who was born in Jerusalem. In a dream, in a vision of the night, I saw myself standing with my brother Levites in the Holy Temple, singing with them the songs of David, King of Israel...”



In the Torah’s account of Ya’akov Avinu fleeing his brother Eisav’s wrath, Ya’akov is alone, surrounded by darkness, and sleeping on the cold ground. Suddenly, he experiences a “vision of the night”: he sees a ladder to Heaven with angels “ascending and descending,” and realizes he is in the future *Makom haMikdash*, the place of the Holy Temple.

Ya’akov Avinu represents and expresses the *midda* of *tiferet*, ‘splendor,’ which is the quality of the harmonious uniting of opposites. In his night vision, he sees a place and a time in which he and his brother will be in harmony and peace, in which the Jewish family will be reunited. When he awakens, he is inspired to pray, וְשָׁבֹתִי בְּשָׁלוֹם אֶל בַּיִת אָבִי – “and I shall return to my father’s house in peace...” (Bereishit 28:21).

We too, through *shalom* and brotherhood, are charged to restore the splendor and beauty of *Am Yisrael*. ‘Ya’akov’ will then rise up from the ground, the dawn will break, and we will return to בְּיַת אָבִי.

הַשְּׁלִיחַ מִשָּׁמַיִם אֶרֶץ תִּפְאָרַת יִשְׂרָאֵל – “He has cast down from heaven to earth the glory of

Israel” (Eicha 2:1). Reb Shlomo Halberstam, The Bobover Rebbe, explains this *pasuk* in connection to Ya’akov Avinu. The glory (*tiferet*) of Israel (Ya’akov) is our *achdut*, our togetherness, the oneness of our greater family. This is what was cast to the ground. Indeed, as is well known and oft-quoted but tragically not yet internalized, the Temple was destroyed due to *sinat chinam*, baseless hatred (Yoma 9b). The Bobover Rebbe concludes that the rebuilding of the Temple will come through reclaiming our people’s *tiferet*, our *achdut* – our efforts toward *shalom*.

The *halachot* of Tisha B’Av restrict us from *she’eilat shalom*, greeting one another. In any case, how can we wish each other *shalom aleichem* on a day when we deeply feel the lack of *shalom* and *shleimut* in the world?

Consider: is there someone we are estranged from, a former business associate, an old classmate, friend or family member from whom we have grown distant? Perhaps now is the right time, the opportune time, to extend a *she’eilat shalom*.

It has been 2,000 years since our “brother Levites” have sung those songs in the *Beit HaMikdash*. May we extend *shalom* and *achdut* to our neighbors, sisters and brothers, and make efforts toward repairing relationships, and may this bring us closer to our birthplace, our בְּיַת אָבִי, our Father’s home.

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