

HOW TO AFFECT YOUR ENVIRONMENT

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

The first verse of this parsha tells us that "Jacob went out of *Be'er Sheva*, and went towards *Charan*." In English, the question is even more obvious than in the original: why must the *Torah* tell us that Jacob left *Be'er Sheva* (and say "went" twice)? Let it merely indicate that he went to *Charan*, and we will know that (obviously) he left *Be'er Sheva*.

Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchoki, 11th C. C.E.) explains that what the *Torah* is indicating is that the departure of a holy person has an effect. The presence of a holy scholar sets standards for a city, and has a positive effect on those around him. Our own moral conduct has an effect on our neighbors - and having an outstanding model to emulate affects each one of us.

Rabbi Yissachar Frand (whose *Divrei Torah* appear on the list *RavFrاند*) once asked why the *Torah* never said this about *Avraham*, but waited for *Yaakov*. He answered that in the case of *Avraham*, it was obvious: he devoted his greatest efforts on behalf of the world around him. The *Midrash* says about *Avraham* in particular that he was very involved with improving moral conduct and spreading belief in the one G-d.

Yaakov, on the other hand, represented the opposite extreme: he was a "dweller in tents", involved primarily in his own service. So it might surprise us to learn that even a "*Yaakov*", a person who spends his time on his own, is also helping to improve and direct the conduct of his neighbors. This is also considered serving the world. On a practical level, we need to strike a balance between worrying about our own needs, and affecting others around us - but in either case, we should hope to have a positive effect on our world.

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The author is the Director of Project Genesis.