

Unsettled settlement

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There is the old saying that when it rains it pours. That is what it must have been like for Jacob. He doesn't seem to have one moment where he could just sit down and rest, gain his breath, and find some sense of wholeness.

The Torah tells us that following his rapid departure to Haran, his reunification with his brother, Esau, and everything that happened in between, Jacob was finally able to dwell in the land of his fathers¹. There is so much to unpack in this opening verse, because it seems that everything before it, and everything after it, would indicate a man who was anything but settled.

The Chizkuni tries to tell us that this verse appears solely to advise us that the promise God made to Abraham and Isaac was being fulfilled by virtue of Jacob's living in the land after so much time in exile². The Sforino explains that Jacob was finally at rest from the three things that leave a person with an unsettled mind³.

These two sources indicate some level of stability or rest – however they only tell a fraction of the story of what being settled means for Jacob. The Zohar tells us that Jacob, alongside all the righteous, are never really settled, that sin crouches at the door, and that there are many afflictions that challenge them. The Zohar tells us that when the Torah says that Jacob was settled, it is really trying to tell us the exact opposite⁴.

The Shnei Luchot haBrit chastises Jacob. Jacob wished for tranquillity, for the easy option following his tumultuous life, and as punishment for his complaining of what had come before, he had to live with further challenges⁵.

These sources would indicate a glass half empty approach.

But even in understanding the negativity facing Jacob, the unsettledness of his life, there is a way to look at it through a positive lens. The Likeutei Moharan tells us that rest really means being engaged in holy and meaningful activity. Just like Abraham and Isaac dwelled in the land, and brought people closer to monotheism, so too Jacob followed that pursuit – settled in his active role of unsettling⁶. Further, the Targum Yonatan, one of the translations of the original verse, decides to add the word shalom, peace, into the verse – that Jacob dwelt in peace in the land⁷.

We often think of peace as being calm or still, but in reality shalom, peace, and being settled, means being in a place where one feels calm or grounded, whole, no matter what else is going on. This is Jacob – in the midst of trials and tribulations, he is able to centre himself, to be focussed, and to allow his heart to be still – to be in a place of shleimut, to be settled.

Peace. It does not mean to be in a place where there is no noise, trouble or hard work. It means to be in the midst of those things and still be calm in your heart⁸.

All citations can be found in **A New Page of Talmud**