

“Returning Home”

By Rabbi David Wolpe

In leaving there is discovery: Only when he wanders is Jacob granted a vision. Moses must go to Midian to find God. The Israelites throughout history have only in exile grasped the spiritual contours of home.

All of us raise children in the hope that they will treasure the values we have taught them at home. But we also realize that those values will never be fully realized until our children go off on their own. You cannot know your home if your home is all you know. Out in the world, amid the jostling of other values, ideas and rich possibilities, is the potential to appreciate what one has already learned.

Abraham was told that his descendants would need to one day leave Israel, endure hardship and return to savor its beauty. This is the reverse wisdom of Thomas Wolfe’s admonition that you cannot go home again. At times that is true; yet equally if paradoxically, you cannot truly understand home until you have left and go home again.

As Eliot wrote in “Little Gidding,” the last of his four quartets:

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.*