# HOW GOODLY*

מַה טֹּבוּ אֹהָלֶיךָ יַעֲקֹב

מִשְׁכְּנֹתֶיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל:

How goodly are your tents, O Jacob,
Your dwellings, O Israel.

*How goodly are your tents*—"Tent" is a reference to the marriage relationship (Mo'ed Katan 7b), and outside the tent to being apart from one's mate (15b). As the gentile Bilam looked upon Israel, he saw that the tents were arranged so that "their doors were not directed one opposite the other" (Rashi), ensuring privacy for the sake of modesty and family integrity. "Our rabbis taught: Concerning a man who loves his wife as himself, who guides his sons and daughters in the right path . . . , Scripture says [Job5:24], and you shall know that your tent is in peace" (Yevamot 62b). "How 'good' and not how 'beautiful'"—the arrangement of tents by family and tribe confirmed each child's parentage—because they affirmed a "moral ideal and the true well-being of a nation" (S.R. Hirsch). *O Jacob*—"Jacob" is thus destined to "survive all the nations" and will be present at the "end of days" (Sforno, Gen. 32:29). *Your dwellings*—"Dwellings" refers to a place of prayer or the Sanctuary (Sforno). "Do not read 'mishkenotheka' (your tabernacles) but 'mashkenotheka (your forfeits), O Israel' for the Tabernacle and the Temple were to be forfeited by Israel when they sinned" (Numbers Rabbah 12:14). The tent of Shiloh and the Temple are goodly because in them the children of Israel "make atonement," to be at one with their God (Rashi). *O Israel*—Withal, "Israel" shall prevail over adversaries and adversity in heaven and on earth (Sforno Gen. 32:29).

* Numbers 24:5 (in Balak)

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