



ארגון רבני צהר



ההסתדרות הציונית העולמית  
המערך לשירותים רוחניים בתפוצות

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## Parashat Lech Lecha

### I Will Glorify Your Name

-Rabbanit Dr. Michal Tikochinsky-

Hashem addresses Avraham and commands him to collect his staff and depart on a journey to an unknown destination. **“Go forth from your land and from your birthplace and from your father’s house, to the land that I will show you.”** The commandment to travel the world is familiar to us from Adam, who was expelled from the Garden of Eden, his haven of safety, and from Cain, who murdered his brother and was sentenced to expulsion. On a deep personal level, wandering creates a lack of identity and belonging. It uproots one’s personal anchor and erodes their sense of stability.

However, Hashem promises Avraham that he will be blessed in all manner of ways: he will become wealthy, he will be blessed with offspring and he will merit a good name. **“And I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you, and I will glorify your name, and [you shall] be a blessing.”** Rashi notes that the blessing was granted in order to encourage Avraham and to assuage the concerns that accompany the wanderer. According to Rashi and Rabbi Hiyya in the midrash, travel causes three things: it limits procreation, reduces wealth and property and prevents the traveler from creating a good name and reputation for himself (Bereishit Rabbah, Lech Lecha 39).

Common perception is that a person who moves from place to place becomes a relative unknown. Everything that person created and built in their lifetime is wiped away because he is a stranger to those around him. They do not credit him with his accomplishments because, as far as they are concerned, there are none. He and they have no shared experiences. In general, such a person is considered a stranger and foreigner, always perceived as a threat in every new stop since he is occupying living space created and developed through joint effort and hard work by the local population. A stranger is not viewed as someone who is naturally entitled to share in a community’s wealth and property, which was acquired through joint diligence, restraint and responsibility. The stranger is also unfamiliar with local culture and did not contribute to its development, and the customs he brings with him do not parallel local accepted practice. A person who sets roots in one place makes a name for himself through years of hard work and development of a relationship with his surroundings in all of the aforementioned ways, including shared experiences, responsibility and culture. With this in mind, Avraham is commanded to uproot himself and to effectively forgo his livelihood, his local roots and his good name. In his new state, even all of his wealth and property will become a burden on his mobility. For all of these reasons, Hashem promises Avraham that He will glorify his name among the nations of the world. However, this promise stands in contrast to common cause and effect and the natural result of the commandment to leave home.

The midrash also cites the opinion of Rabbi Berachya: “And Hashem said unto Avraham. Rabbi Berachya said as follows: ‘Thine ointments have a goodly fragrance; Thy name is as ointment poured forth; Therefore do the maidens love thee’ (Song of Songs 1). Said Rabbi Berachya: to what may we compare Avraham, our forefather? To a sealed dish of fragrant perfume set aside in a corner that did not emit an aroma. Once it was moved it began to emit an aroma. Thus said Hashem to Avraham: take yourself from one place to another and your name will be glorified in the world (ibid).”

This teaching, as opposed to the previously mentioned one, identifies the potential benefit in wandering. It does not focus on Avraham’s discomfort and the personal price he is forced to pay, but rather on the benefit he and the rest of the world will derive from his travels. Avraham embodies a number of powerful strengths. These strengths may be kept in a corner and not be revealed or expressed. The only way to discover these strengths is through shake-up and change.

Wandering changes a person’s character. He experiences shocks and new stresses. The pace of his life is no longer stable and every new experience is reflected to some degree in his day to day life. He must be more in tune to what goes on around him; he must learn to be open to the changing needs of a variety of people. He must identify new perspectives and ideas and he develops a keen understanding of the motives of the people



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in his vicinity. This explains the description of the various events experienced by Avraham and described in our parasha. In Egypt in dealing with Pharaoh, in Avraham's decision to separate from Lot, in the battle against the four kings, in his dealings with Malkitzedek and the king of Sodom, and in his resolution to send away Hagar. All of the aforementioned events were experienced by a person who had wandered the world and encountered different cultures and people. It is interesting to trace Avraham's responses to the various events. The "lie" he told in reference to Sarah and his avoidance of a moral challenge, as opposed to his decisiveness with respect to Lot, to whom he also had feelings of devotion and responsibility. At the same time, we see Avraham express an extreme ethical commitment in his treatment of the spoils of war. All of these collectively form the aroma of Avraham.

The value of permanence is in the security and stability that it provides. The value of wandering is in the awareness, freshness and competitiveness that it elicits. Man in his "purest" form, absent the protection of society and surroundings, finds himself face to face with various situations that require a level of elusiveness, resourcefulness, independence, honesty, generosity and steadfastness. The variety of the nature of events faced by man permits him to find expression for his different character traits. The divine endeavor, which extracted Avraham from his natural surroundings, effected two results. It allowed for Avraham to identify and sharpen the quality of the Hebrew (*ivri*), while at the same time made him the "father of all nations," a cosmopolitan figure.

Cosmopolitanism is a byproduct of one's disengagement from his original state of belonging. It causes man to recognize the various interests of each nation, to bring its humanness and right to exist to the fore and to absorb multiculturalism. Ultimately, it also lays the foundation for ideas of unity and solidarity in the world. By virtue of all of these Avraham became the model leader for all of the nations of the world, the "father of all nations."

The fate of the Jewish people does not significantly differ from that of Avraham himself. The various expulsions and instabilities experienced and absorbed by the Jews throughout history have painted the Jewish core with a multicolored palette and have diversified its reactions and responses. This also permits the Jews to leave their mark all over the world and refines in us the call for dedication and responsibility for a love of man and for leading the world to a better place.

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