

"THE PLACE THAT I WILL SHOW YOU!"

by Rabbi Label Lam

And HASHEM said to Avram, "Go for (or) to yourself from your land and from your birthplace and from your father's house to the place that I will show you!" (Breishis 12:1)

Why was Avram not told immediately where he was going? HASHEM wanted to intensify the test of his leaving ... to place a test within a test. Is there a person that goes and doesn't know where he is going? (Midrash Tanchuma)

A few years back I went to Israel during the week of Parshas Lech Lecha with one of my boys in spite of the fact that violence against Jews in Israel was just starting to gain a terrifying momentum. We heard that Rabbi Nosson Tzvi Finkel the Rosh HaYeshiva of Mir in Jerusalem gave a class on the weekly portion at his house Erev Shabbos, in English. We made sure to get there early to get a good seat. The room filled and then the Rebbe entered. Weak but courageous and barely audible even at close range he began to read and translate, "And HASHEM said to Avram, 'Go for yourself from your land from your birthplace from your fathers' house to the land that I will show you.'" When he translated those last words, "to the land that I will show you" he took a deep and eerie swallow and with almost an otherworldly look he said, "It's not easy not knowing where you are going!" I thought to myself, "Is he speaking to the assembled students and all their unanswered questions of life like marriage and livelihood, or was he talking about the situation of the Jewish People in Israel, or was he reflecting aloud as an elder burdened with disabilities, on the ultimate journey of life? After a brief discussion with my son afterwards we concluded "all of the above".

These words installed in the heart Avraham 3700 years ago remain within each of us today, and so the questions remain, "Why not tell someone where they are going? Is there a person that goes and does not know where he is going? This is our uneasiness.

Anyone who has ever invited a non-Shabbos observer for a Shabbos may have confronted a similar situation. How can you describe a Shabbos? Fish! Song! Soup! Challah! Sleep! These words ring hollow till the initiate tastes the soup, revels in the songs of the night, and plumbs the depth of a restful Shabbos sleep! "Ahhhh! That's what you wanted to me to know!" is the response we would expect but only afterwards.

Explaining the spiritual essence of the Holy Land or the lure of the Western Wall is an exercise in futility like defining fire for a fish or talking colors with a blind man. It's woefully impossible to describe to someone a thing that is qualitatively beyond what they have ever experienced.

We may have an inkling, or a vague sense that there is something more but to describe what it is in positive terms is a steep challenge. Therefore it is better left undefined. "You'll know it when you see it, that it is right and good for you, like a Shidduch!" Until then, there's just a gnawing and nagging sense that "something's missing".

Rabbi Pinchus of Koritz said that it was not natural for a man not to yearn for the Land of Israel. Rebbe Nachman from Breslov said, "Wherever I am going, I am going to Jerusalem!" And as a post-script Rabbi Meir Kalish of Amshinov is quoted as having said, "Now that I live in Jerusalem the only thing I miss is the yearning to go live in the Land of Israel."

Perhaps we can appreciate now these initial words which launched our gigantic journey. Sure it's not easy not knowing where you are going, but what we are being told is that by growing beyond our peculiar political- economic, sociological, and psychological happenstance and circumstance, by going to our profoundly spiritual self, we will each automatically be magnetized and attracted to seek out and to ultimately find "the place that I will show you". Text Copyright © 2006 by Rabbi Label Lam and **Torah.org**.