

GO AWAY!

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

As we discussed last week, the first two *Parshios* (pl. of *Parsha*) in the *Torah* are relevant to all humanity - and *Noah* emerges from the Ark having taught us all a) not to abandon moral values, and b) that there are certain specific Laws that all humans are commanded to obey (and obviously, this is closely related to (a)).

"*Lech-Lecha Me'Artzecha*: Go, get out of your land" are the first words said in the *Torah* to Jews. From now on, it is speaking specifically to Abraham and his descendents. What does it say? Simply translated, *Lech-Lecha* is a repetition - frequently used in Biblical Hebrew for emphasis. *Rashi*, our most prominent commentator, notes that "*Lecha*" means "for you." His explanation reads: "*Lech-Lecha*: For your pleasure and for your benefit."

So what are the first things said to a Jew? 1) Go, get out: separate yourself from your surroundings; and 2) this is for YOUR happiness!

1) We have an obligation to separate ourselves, and to behave differently when the situation demands it. Even if everyone around us is cheating, WE must not. Even if everyone else is going out and getting drunk on Friday nights, WE must not. Even if something is actually fine and moral, but it will merely appear to others that we are doing wrong, we must not do it.

Our obligation is to go - to go forward, to recognize proudly that we are always wearing a badge. Keep it clean! Don't disgrace it! Don't cause a "desecration of G-d's name" - "that's how Jews behave." And...

2) ...all of this is for our own benefit. We are supposed to enjoy being Jewish, and not treat it as a burden. Consider: what are we without our spiritual roots? We see Jews investing themselves in all sorts of charitable and spiritual endeavors. Some of them are of dubious value: cults were very popular 20 years ago, and Jewish membership was far out of proportion. Today, you see Jews on opposite sides of the fence on all sorts of issues, and both will tell you that their position is morally right! What is this innate Jewish "thing" with morals?

The answer is, of course, that such is our nature. We need to feel a spiritual connection and value in what we do. Thus the "midlife crisis" and the need to see psychologists is especially acute for Jews who lack it. Note that this is also present for non-Jews - we all need spirituality! But Jews have an additional push in this direction.

Recognizing it will make us happier. There are diamonds out there, waiting for us to reach for them. King David found such spiritual joy in the Torah, that he was able to declare that "they are more dear to me than gold, to even the finest gold!" So go - for yourself - reach for it!

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