

# NO PAIN, NO GAIN

by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

This weeks parsha, Lech Lecha, deals with the 'nisyonos', the tests of Avrohom Avinu. The first test was alluded to at the end of Noach, last week's parsha. Avram (his name was later changed to Avrohom) had recognized the undeniable existence of Hashem at the age of three. King Nimrod, unhappy with his ideas and the influence he was having, threatened to throw him into a fiery furnace if he wouldn't renounce his beliefs. Avram was willing to sacrifice his life in order to avoid renouncing this G-d that he so firmly believed in. He was thrown into the furnace and emerged unscathed.

Our parsha begins with Hashem's first words to Avram, telling him of his second nisayon.

*"Lech l'cha me'artz'cha, u'me'moladt'cha u'me'beis avicha el ha'aretz asher ar'eka (12:1) - go, for you, from your land and from your birthplace and from the house of your father to the land that I will show you.*

Rashi explains the word "l'cha" - for you - to mean for your own benefit, but, perhaps our understanding of nisayon in general will allow for a different explanation.

There is often much confusion in understanding nisyanos. Being that Hashem knows precisely what we are going to choose to do, why does He need to put us through this seemingly pointless exercise of actually acting it out!?

The Ohr Gedalyahu explains that the answer can be gleaned from the word nisayon. The root of the word is 'ness' - to uplift. Every single act that we perform in our lifetime affects, changes and to a certain degree, defines who we are.

Every individual is born with a tremendous amount of potential. That potential remains latent in this unrealized state until some circumstance causes a person to decide which way he will act. This decision and the subsequent stand that is taken changes the person and uplifts him in a way that otherwise would not have happened.

True, Hashem knows what we will choose but that doesn't uplift us! It would be like a person trying to get stronger by reading manuals and watching videos on bodybuilding. He might know exactly what he should do but, unless he does it, he will remain the same. No pain, no gain.

With this we can understand some basic difficulties in Hashem's command to Avram. The order of leaving that Hashem commanded Avram seems to be reversed. One first leaves his fathers house, then his birthplace and finally his land. Why was Avram commanded to leave his land, then his

birthplace and finally, his parents house? Furthermore, without Hashem specifying where he should go to, Avram started to travel to the Land of Canaan, Eretz Yisroel. How did he know that Hashem wanted him to go there?

The reversed order of Avram's leaving reveals to us the true nature of his odyssey. In a physical sense one first leaves his fathers house, then his birthplace and finally his land. However, Avram needed to journey away from the idolatrous influences that had been surrounding him. One can first shake off the society and influences of his land. It isn't such an intrinsic part of a person's makeup. The next, more difficult step is to remove the influences of one's birthplace. This has a much greater effect on the person and affects his views and who he is to a much stronger degree. Only after these first two steps have been taken can a person take the final step. Leave your parents home. That which had nurtured him, that which he had been soaking in from the moment he was born, those influences which had shaped and molded him, from them Avram had to depart.

Avram understood that this odyssey was meant to change and uplift him. As the Ramban states, Avram knew that Eretz Canaan was the Holy land. That was the place which afforded the spiritual environment where he could fully realize this uplifting process. Once he understood what he had to leave, it became very clear to him, without Hashem needing to specify, that the place to go to was Eretz Yisroel.

Shake off the erroneous beliefs that have surrounded you. Leave all of those corrupt influences. Realize who you are and who you can potentially become. As the Ohr Gedalyahu explains: "Lech l'cha" - go to you! Discover yourself! Plumb the depths of your very essence, appreciate all that is there and recognize the responsibility that accompanies those capabilities.

The story is told of a poor Jew, Reb Izaak from Krakow, who kept having a recurring dream. In his dream he saw a treasure buried beneath the bridge near the king's palace in Prague. Unable to ignore the dream he decided to make the trip and see if this treasure was really there. He travelled to Prague and saw the exact spot where he had dreamed that the treasure was. However, the bridge was heavily guarded by soldiers and he had no opportunity to dig for this treasure. After a few days of wandering around the area and realizing the hopelessness of the situation he decided that he'd have to return home without ever knowing if his dream was true or not. Just then, he was approached by a soldier who demanded to know why he kept wandering near the bridge. He bashfully told him that he had dreamt that there was a treasure buried beneath the bridge. The soldier let out a roar of a laugh, exclaiming that he too had a dream that a treasure was buried beneath the oven of a Jew named Izaak from Krakow, but he certainly wasn't foolish enough to travel there to try to find it. Upon hearing that, Reb Izaak rushed home and dug up the treasure from beneath his oven.

Lech l'cha - go to you! Sometimes a very long distance must be travelled in order to realize that the greatest treasure is within us.

Avram needed to abandon his home in order to uplift himself. He, by ultimately becoming the father of our nation, bequeathed to us the 'Spark of Avrohom', the strength that we find in ourselves to draw close to Hashem. These spiritual characteristics are transmitted from parent to child, planting the seeds of the individual potential. We unleash our potential and uplift ourselves by connecting to our 'home', our roots.

Further in the parsha, Avram fights a battle to free his nephew Lot who had been captured. In the battle, Avram had also gained control of the people and the belongings of S'dom. The King of S'dom offered Avram to keep all of the belongings but asked him to return the people. Avram, not wanting to receive any gifts from S'dom proclaimed he wouldn't take even "Me'chut v'ad sroch na'al (14:23)" - not even a string nor a leather shoe strap.

The Gemoroh teaches that in the merit of Avram's refusal to receive even a string, we, his descendants merited the strings of tzitzis. In the merit of his refusal to receive even a leather strap, we merited the leather straps of t'filin.

This, however, seems to contradict another chaza"l from last weeks parsha. Noach, after coming out of the ark, drank wine and became drunk (9:21). As he was lying uncovered in his tent, two of his sons, Shem and Yefes came to cover him. Each received reward, with Shem's being the covering of tzitzis that his children would wear.

Did we merit the tzitzis because of the act of Shem or because of the act of Avram? Rav Chaim Shmuelovitz explains that the seed was planted by the act of Shem but it only reached fruition due to the act of Avram. Shem's act created the potential that was actualized through Avram.

Each of us are comprised of these seeds planted by the Avos and Imahos, our predecessors, our parents, our teachers and our friends. If we're feeling frustrated by our trying to help others and not seeing immediate results, we must realize that none of our efforts go to waste. We are planting seeds... some may sprout quickly, others may lay dormant for a while, but all have their influence.

May we recognize and actualize the abilities that we have, may we help others to realize what they can accomplish and may we all together become the uplifted nation of Hashem.

Good Shabbos.

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