

A TALE OF TWO JOURNEYS

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: #1049 – Honoring Your Wife. Good Shabbos!

A Tale of Two Journeys

The parsha begins with *Hashem* telling Avram, "Go to the Land that I will show you." [Bereishis 12:1] Rabbi Yochanan teaches (in the Medrash) the reason *Hashem* did not tell Avram where he was supposed to be going ahead of time was "to give him reward for each and every step." [Since the mitzvah was *Lech Lecha* (go), for every step he received a new mitzvah!]

Rav Baruch Baer, the great Rosh Yeshiva from Kaminetz, gives a "*lomdishe teretz*" [an explanation based on sophisticated Talmudic analysis] to this teaching of Rabbi Yochanan. He explains that if the *Ribono shel Olam* would have told Avram simply, "Go to the Land of Canaan" then that would have been the definition of the command and each step he took along the way would merely be a *hechsher mitzvah* [preparation for accomplishing the mitzvah i.e. – arrival in *Eretz Yisrael*]. However, now that the mitzvah was formulated as "Go" without being told where to go, then each step of the way was a new mitzvah fulfillment.

If this is true, then we must ask ourselves the following question: There are two times in the Torah where we find the expression "*Lech Lecha*". The first is our *parsha* [Bereishis 12:1] and the second is the *parsha* of the *Akeida* [the Binding of Yitzchak] [Bereishis 22:2] where Avram was directed specifically to go to the Land of Moriah (the location of the future *Beis HaMikdash*). So let us ask ourselves – why by the *Akeida* did *Hashem* not also say to Avraham, "Take Yitzchak and go to the place that I will show you"? Just like the *Ribono shel Olam* is interested in giving Avram reward for every single step on the way to the Land of Canaan and therefore did not specify the destination, let the same formula be utilized regarding the command to go to the *Akeida*?

The Bei Chiya cites an interesting Maharal in his *Nesivos Olam*. The Maharal there says that if you have a Succah that is half a mile away and another Succah that is a mile away, it is not a bigger mitzvah to walk to the Succah that is a mile away. The mitzvah is to eat in the Succah. How you get there is independent of the mitzvah and therefore there is no extra mitzvah to go to the Succah that is farther away. However, the Maharal says, if there is a shul a half mile away and a second shul a mile away it IS a bigger mitzvah to go to the further shul (all other things being equal) because every

single step is a separate mitzvah.

What is the difference between the Succah and the shul? The Maharal explains: *Hashem's* presence is in the shul. A *Beis HaKnesses* is a miniature *Beis HaMikdash* and therefore when a person is walking to shul, he is being drawn to *Hashem* and the very walking is a type of joining (*chibbur*) and clinging (*deveikus*) to Him." When you are going to shul, you are going to be with the *Ribono shel Olam*. The walking is in itself a *mitzvah*.

If this is true, we can understand the difference between the two *Lech Lecha* commands. In our parsha, *Hashem* wanted to give Avram reward for every single step, so He told him, "Go to the Land I will show you (hiding the destination)." Why then by the Akaida, did He tell Avraham, "Go to the Land of the Moriah (specifying the destination)?" The answer is that there Avraham also received reward for every single step because the Divine Presence of G-d was dwelling on Har HaMoriah. Therefore, since Avraham was going to *Hashem*, by definition, every single step was a separate mitzvah. Therefore, there was no need to hide the goal of where he was supposed to go.

Descendants Who Will Be Like The Stars – Each One Unique

At the beginning of Bereishis Chapter 15, the Torah says: "After these events, the word of Hashem came to Avram in a vision, saying 'Fear not, Avram, I am a shield for you; your reward is very great.' And Avram said 'My L-rd, *Hashem/Elokim*: What can You give me being that I go childless, and the steward of my house is Eliezer from Damascus?' Then Avram said, 'See to me You have given no offspring and see, my steward inherits me...' Suddenly the word of *Hashem* came to him, saying 'That one will not inherit you; only the one who shall come forth from within you shall inherit you.' And He took him outside and said, 'Gaze, now, towards the Heavens, and count the stars if you are able to count them!' And He said to him, 'So shall your offspring be!'" [Bereishis 15:1-5]

The Gemara [Yoma 28b] has an interesting homiletic teaching based on the expression "Eliezer of Damascus." The Gemara interprets the Hebrew word for Damascus (*DaMeSeK*) as an acronym for *Doleh uMaShKeh m'Toras Rabbo l'acherim* (he draws out water and gives drink [i.e. – he would learn and teach] from the Torah of his master [i.e. – Avram] to others.

Eliezer was a faithful disciple of the Patriarch Avraham who said over for others the teachings and practices of his teacher. He was not just a porter. He was Avram's publicist and right hand man, a stand-in for the teacher!

If that is the case, the above quoted *pasuk* seems strange. Avram asks desperately "What is going to become of me? I have no heir only the steward of my house who will (apparently) inherit me." Then he throws in "He is Eliezer of Damascus" which the Talmud interprets homiletically as if to say "He knows every piece of Torah that I ever said; he transmits it faithfully to others; he is my personal stand-in." How does that fit in with Avram's desperate plea for an heir?

The Rabbeinu Bechaya on the *pasuk* "Gaze now toward the Heavens and count the stars... so shall

your offspring be." says a beautiful idea. He writes that just as every star is unique in color and shape, so too will be the case with the Sages of Israel. They will be individuals, not clones of one another. They will each be unique in spirituality and unique in terms of their insight. The Sages of Israel, writes Rabbeinu Bechaya are not going to be monolithic. They are not going to have all the same ideas and all the same components of wisdom.

The *Chozeh* (Seer) of Lublin said, that now we can understand what Avraham *Avinu* meant. Avraham said, I have no children, I have only Eliezer. Eliezer knows my Torah, but he is merely a parrot. He is just a clone of me. I do not want that from my descendants. I want my descendants to be different, to add something. I want each one to be an individual. I do not want a "one size fits all" *Yiddishkeit*. There need to be "different strokes for different folks" – just as no two faces are exactly alike so too no two opinions are exactly alike.

Yes, Eliezer knows all my Torah, but that is not what I am seeking. If I am going to build a Nation, I need offspring that will be more than just exact replicas of their ancestor. When Yitzchak was born, his mode of Service to the Almighty was totally different from that of his father. Avraham's approach was *Chessed* [Outward directed Kindness]; Yitzchak's approach was *Gevurah* [Inner directed Strength]. When Yaakov *Avinu* was born, he too was totally different and each of his twelve sons had their own unique path and method of Divine Service. We have 12 windows in our synagogues – representing these 12 approaches to Judaism, represented by the Twelve Tribes of Israel.

This was Avraham's request when he complained that he did not have an heir – only Eliezer of Damascus. He wanted diversity among his offspring, not just clones. To that, Hashem responded, "Go outside and look at the stars. Thus will your offspring be." Do not worry. You will have children and they will be different from one another. Oh, will they be different! You will have *Gedolei Yisrael* [great men of Israel] who will have differing opinions. This one will stress this aspect and this one will stress that aspect. Do not worry, Avraham, you will have descendants whose differences will span as broad a spectrum as the light of the stars.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com

Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org

This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Lech Lecha is provided below:

- # 028 - Conversion (Geirus)
- # 070 - Bris Milah: The Metzizah Controversy
- # 119 - Conversion for Ulterior Motives
- # 166 - The Childless Couple in Halacha
- # 212 - Non-Jews and the Mitzvah of Kibbud Av

- # 256 - Mohel and Baby: Who Goes to Whom
- # 302 - The Mitzvah of Yishuv Eretz Yisroel
- # 346 - Trading Terrorists for Hostages
- # 390 - Geirus -- Mitzvah, Reshus, or Issur?
- # 434 - Anesthesia During Milah
- # 478 - Sandik -- Can You Change Your Mind?
- # 522 - Calling Avraham, Avrum
- # 566 - Learning Vs. Saving A Life
- # 610 - The Widow & the Divorcee: How Long Must they wait to remarry
- # 654 - Sonei Matonos Yichye - Refusing Gifts
- # 698 - Did the Avos Keep the Torah?
- # 742 - Can You Change Your Mazel?
- # 786 - The On-Time vs. the Delayed Bris
- # 830 - Standing for A Chosen and Kallah At The Chupah
- # 874 - Saving Some-One's Soul- How Far Must You Go?
- # 918 - Hidur Mitzvah - How Important?
- # 961 - Tying Shoes - Not As Simple As You Think
- #1005 - Inviting People to a Bris - Good Idea or Bad?
- #1049 - Honoring Your Wife
- #1092 - The Baal Teshuva Who Wants To Convert His Non-Jewish Girlfriend
- #1135 - "Schar Pe'sios" - Should You Walk Or Drive To Shul (on weekdays)
- #1178 - Shabbos Milah of A Child Whose Parents Are Not Shomrei Shabbos
- #1222 - Milah For The Son of a Jewish Father and a Non Jewish Mother
- #1266 - The Syrian Sefardic Community's Ban on Conversion

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