

PARSHAS LECH LECHA

by Rabbi Dr. Meir Tamari

The commandment to leave his homeland came to Avraham after he had already begun his journey there, as pointed out by Rashi. Why was it not sufficient to command him just to leave his fathers house? We may find the answer in the spherical form of the Earth that hangs in space. Physically when one object wishes to draw closer to another one and that one rejects it, the power of these two conflicting forces keeps them apart. The Earth was created round so that these powers of rejection and attraction are evenly distributed, and the Earth is hanging in space as it were. This physicality is reflected in spirituality since this material world is a reflection of the spiritual world above.

In his commentary on parshat Bereishit, the Or Hachaim, explains that the Earth, despite its gross materialism has a powerful desire to draw close to the religiosity of the Heavens; Eretz being derived from ratz, to run after or to pursue. Other Sages see the Heavens, being unable to tolerate anything non- spiritual, as constantly rejecting the desire of the Earth. This rejection applies to the countries of the Nations of the world, whose spirituality is limited to 'Eretz', from 'ratzon, obligated to obeying the will of HaShem, and are only capable of achieving the kedushah that flows from the rejection of materialism. The Land of Israel, however, possesses a spirituality of its own that urges it to pursue the Heavens as explained by the Or Hachaim. Through this intrinsic spirituality, in addition to the aversion to materialism common to all other lands, even the most material of things acquire an ability to reach HaShem. As long as Avraham remained outside Eretz Yisrael, he could only achieve the spirituality of the 70 Nations, who would thereby continue to have a connection with him. It would not be possible for him to sever himself from his 'father's house' and achieve his own desire to come close to HaShem. Therefore it was necessary to command him to 'go to the Land that I will show you', even though his journey had already commenced.

It was only when Avraham entered Eretz Yisrael that G-d revealed Himself to him. There, through the power of rejection and pursuit that flows from the two forms of Eretz that exist only there, was it possible for Hashem to reveal himself to him. Because the Land of Israel possesses this special and intrinsic desire to reach the holiness of HaShem, that revelation through prophecy is possible. In contrast there cannot be prophecy in any other those lands, since they do not run towards achieving Kedushah and possess only the limited sanctity that flows from Heaven's rejection of material things. Temporarily, after the destruction of the First Temple, the Nations of the world had the ability to obscure the special sanctity of Eretz Yisrael, and clouded over the kedushah, till there was a return of prophecy.

We know that 'makom-world', 'shanah-time [year]', and nefesh constitute an entity. Makom is the place able to receive Revelation- Eretz Yisrael-, shanah is the time that is appropriate to such revelations- Shabbat and Chagim-, and nefesh is the circumcised Adam (Zohar, Reah). Similarly, there is body-guf, seichel- intellect and there is nefesh. Eretz Yisrael is the guf as one enters it with one's whole body and the body is sustained through its fruits. However, as distinct from the other living creatures who also receive their food from the Land, only people are able, in addition, to also receive spiritual revelation in that Land [Perhaps this lies behind the teshuvah of the Avnei Nezer that one only fulfills the mitzvah of Yishuv Haaretz if one earns one's living there (Yoreh Deah, section 458, subsection 24). Milah refers to nefesh since it is placed in the source of lusts- 'if it is your desire 'nafshoteichem' (Bereishit, 23: 8) and Shabbat refers to mind or intelligence as it is a day that is total Torah.

All these are found in Avraham, who was perfect in guf, nefesh and seichel, and possessed Eretz Yisrael, Milah and Shabbat. We learn Avraham's knowledge and observance of Shabbat from, 'and observe my commandments' (Yuma, 28b). We see that Israel was not taught about techumin on Shabbat at Marah together with the laws of Shabbat taught there (Shabbat, 87b). The Avnei Nezer taught that according to Tosaphot carrying from reshut to reshut is not a change in the material content but only in its form, and until Matan Torah Israel did not have the seichel to understand a change in form. Avraham however did and therefore achieved even this aspect of Shabbat.

Avraham bequeathed all these three to his descendants and therefore we find that every Jew has Shabbat, Milah and Eretz Yisrael. Every place that a person's heart desires to be in, he in fact is, as we learn from the Mishnah. 'One who recognizes or designates a certain tree or fence and projects his abode there, it is as though he acquires shvitah there' (Eruvin, chapter 4, mishnah 7). So one who dwells outside Eretz Yisrael but deeply desires in his heart to be there, it is as though he shares in its spirituality. One who lives there but has no desire to do so, however, has nothing of its spirituality.

These three bequests of Avraham enable us to understand the midrash on the verse, 'I will give to you and to your descendants the Land that you dwell in' (Bereishit 17:8). If they enter Eretz Yisrael they will receive My Divinity but if they do not enter they will not receive it. If they accept the Shabbat they will enter the Land and if they observe the Milah they will enter the Land. If they do not they will not enter the Land of Israel.

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