



From the desk of
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Office of the Rabbinate of Elad, Rosh HaAyin and Herzelia

Religious Court of Elad * Batei Hora'ah * Religious Services * Marriage Licensing * Kashrut * Mikvaot * Eiruvim

TORAT

Parashat Lech Lecha

HAMELECH

1-2-3-Go!

“Hashem told Avram: Go for you from your land and from your birthplace and from your father’s house to the land which I will show you.”

Some ask: Apparently, the order is reversed. Usually, a person would first leave his father’s home, then the city of his birth, and finally, his homeland.

Secondly, why does Hashem need to tell him at all from where to leave; just focus on the future – tell him to where to go?

Some explain (Ohr HaChayim HaKadosh, Tseida Laderech) that the directions were given in the order of easy to difficult, in the realm of emotional detachment. A person is influenced by his surroundings: to a certain extent, by the country in general. To a greater extent, by the inhabitants of the city. To an even greater extent, by members of his household.

When Hashem told Avraham to go, it was not just a command to take a physical journey. Hashem wanted Avraham to sever his emotional connection, first from his land, then from his city and finally from his closest family.

The “Pious” Horse

It seems that Avraham’s journey had two parts. There was part one of detaching himself from the past, distancing himself from the immoral and

idolatrour practices of the prevalent society. But that was not enough. It is not enough simply to avoid transgression. You have to do something positive with your life.

A chossid once came to Reb Yisroel of Ruzhin and began describing in detail all of his self-inflicted suffering and how he had hoped to receive communication from Eliyahu Hanavi in response to his “piety”. He even conducted a ta’anit dibur (abstention from speech) for forty days, but to no avail.

Reb Yisroel told him, “Do you see this horse? Do you know what a pious horse it is? He hasn’t said a comprehensible word for more than forty days, and I do not think that he has received communication from Eliyahu Hanavi!”

He was trying to teach him that silence and abstention and suffering is not what make a person great. They are, at best, “escorts” of true chassidut, as Mesilat Yesharim explains, in Chapter 18.

The Sad Story

In a similar vein, a story is told of a Rav who assumed the mantle of leadership in a small town. The people there were not so religiously inclined. When the Rav tried to encourage them to attend minyanim and shiurim etc., he was met with the response, “Leave us alone. It’s enough that we do not steal and are not immoral.”



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The Rav wanted to encourage them to do a bit better, so he took a dead donkey and wrapped it in a talit and announced that everybody is to assemble for the funeral of a great tsaddik.

All assembled, the Rav began his eulogy: This great tsaddik! Oy! What a loss! What a pious tsaddik! He never spoke a word of Lashon Horah! He never spoke during davening! He never ate meat or wore any fancy clothing. He often went barefoot. He went for weeks and years eating only hay and water! He let others sit on him and kick him and insult him and he never returned nary an insult. Not a single complaint left his lips!"

The townspeople were astounded to hear that they had had such a "tsaddik" in their midst.

"Oy, Rabbotai!" the Rav continued. "It is time that we now reveal the identity of this hidden tsaddik!"

At that, he pulled back the talit – the curtain – and revealed the "tsaddik"'s true identity. The assembled were appalled and began bawling. They realized that their approach to life, stressing only "steer clear from evil" is only half the job, getting you to a level equivalent to that of a faithful, domesticated animal. If you really want to be a "mentsch", you have to do a whole lot more than that.

I'm Good

A person cannot just say, "I do not speak gossip. I do not deal deceitfully. I'll just sleep all day." For

the verse states, "Turn away from evil and do good." And "good" means "Torah" as it says, "For a good purchase I have given to you – My Torah – do not forsake it!" (Avoda Zara 19b)

And in Tehillim (119:3): They did not commit atrocities; they follow in Hashem's ways. Says Rashi: It is not enough simply to avoid sin. You must also be committed to following in Hashem's ways. Then you will be rewarded handsomely.

If the Suit Don't Fit...

In Avot (3:13), Rabbi Akiva teaches: Jest and lightheadedness lead to immorality. Tradition is a fence for Torah, tithing is a fence for wealth, vows is a fence for abstention, a fence for wisdom is silence.

Sefer Be'er Avot points out that Rabbi Akiva includes here two extremes: Fleeing from evil and pursuing levels of piety. Both are necessary components in service of Hashem.

There was once a simpleton called Fishel. He was very excited to have been invited to the upcoming wedding of the wealthy Reb Zalmen's daughter. Fishel decided that it was time for a new suit for the occasion. So he goes to the shop of Mendel the Tailor. Mendel had some suits in stock, which would surely be cheaper than sewing a new one from scratch. Mendel took a look at the burly Fishel and handed him a large suit to try on. He showed him to the dressing room.



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After much huffing and puffing, Fishel screamed out, "This suit is tiny! Not a chance! I cannot begin to get it on me! Give me something bigger!"

Mendel was quite surprised, because he was usually quite good at assessing sizes. But there were always exceptions, so he handed Fishel a larger suit and took back the first one.

Soon enough, Fishel yells out again, "What are you doing to me?! This one is also much too small! Stop playing games with me and give me something my size!"

Mendel responds, "Fishel, that is the largest suit I have in stock. Just put back on your regular clothes and I'll have to take your measurements."

"What do you mean?" yelled Fishel. "Do you actually think I would take off my own clothing in your little store?! Who do you think I am?! I tried on your suits on top of my clothing and they were much too small!"

"Well," said Mendel, "that solves the mystery! How can you expect a nice suit to fit you while you still insist upon keeping on your old burly clothing?!"

So too, before attempting to don raiment of piety, we must disrobe our "soiled garments". We must rid ourselves of past misdeeds and negative character traits.

On the one hand, refraining from sin when opportunity for sin arises is so great that a person is rewarded as if he did a mitzvah (Kidushin 39b). At the same time, only active mitzvot are considered to be akin to a person's progeny (Ayelet HaShachar to Bereishit 6:9).

Real tsaddikim do not suffice with just refraining from sin. They make sure to do good, and a lot of it.

So let's make sure to do both. Let us do our utmost to flee from negative influences of our youth. But let us not suffice with that. Let us actively pursue the path of Torah and mitzvot. Let us work on improving our midot. If we notice negative tendencies in ourselves, let us not give up and say, "Oh, that is who I am, I cannot help it. I have no hope for change."

No, we must believe that we can break bad habits. We can become better people. We can use our talents for good. We can and must improve. Hashem told Avraham to part ways from the negative influences of his youth. We are all descendants of Avraham. We must all hear that call, "Get up and go! Make something out of yourself. Break away from your past and become a better person."

If we take the first step and make the effort, Hashem will surely help us succeed.

**Shabbat Shalom,
Mordechai Malka**