



TIMELESS TORAH

KINLOSS

Contemporary Perspectives on the Weekly Parsha with Rabbi Dr Yoni Birnbaum

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Parshat Lech Lecha

Searching For The Promised Land: The Foundational Journey of the Jewish People

The Power of a Spiritual Quest

Parshat Lech Lecha tracks the spiritual growth and journey of Avraham Avinu. As we will see, there is much that we can learn from his journey in terms of our own approach to spirituality and life in general.

Hashem instructs Avraham לך לך אל הארץ אשר אראך, *You shall go to the land that I will show you*. Rashi immediately points out that there is no destination specified; לא גילה לו הארץ מיד, *He did not reveal to him at first which land to go to*. This, Rashi explains, was in order that when the land would eventually be revealed, it would be cherished in Avraham's eyes.

In other words, we see from Rashi that Avraham was not informed where he would be going, specifically in order to build up that sense of mission within him. It is something that he had to delve deep within himself in order to find. This is something from which we can learn much, not just about the journey that Avraham goes on, but also regarding our own spiritual quest in life.

The Ramban (Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, 1194-1270) expands on this idea. He takes the view that Avraham and his family knew that they were eventually to arrive in Eretz Canaan. This, contends the Ramban, is explicit in the last verses of the previous *parashah*, where the Torah describes how Terach and Avraham and other members of their family left Ur Kasdim "in order to reach Eretz Canaan." What Avraham did not know was that Hashem intended him to live there permanently. The Ramban writes that Avraham was wandering *כשה אובד*, *like a wandering sheep* from nation to nation and from kingdom to kingdom until he came to Charan, where he stayed for a while, delaying momentarily the plans to migrate all the way to Eretz Canaan. It was here that Hashem told him to continue his journey, and when Avraham did come to Eretz Canaan, Hashem informed him that this was going to be the place that he was to inherit and that he would bequeath to his descendants.

So, this Ramban is really a development of the ideas that we saw in Rashi. Rashi teaches how the journey of Avraham was not initiated by a burst of ecstasy but was built up slowly, with an appreciation for every detail. In the Ramban, we see that sometimes we may have a vague idea of where we are heading, but we find ourselves wandering around, unsure of where to settle, until we come to the realisation that we have come to our final destination. To grow spiritually in life, a person needs to always be ready to move, not necessarily geographically, but certainly conceptually.

Eretz Yisrael & The Gift of Spiritual Sight

Over this past year, since the tragedies of October 7th, we have connected more than ever to these *parshiyot* that discuss our connection with Eretz Yisrael. We are taught again and again how, although Hashem's promise to our forefathers has bound us with the Land, this will be a journey that will not always be easy. Let us have a look at an inspiring idea from the Kli Yakar (Rabbi Shlomo Ephraim Luntschitz (1550 – 1619), who puts some of these thoughts in perspective.

After Lot finally leaves Avraham, Avraham is given the gift of Eretz Canaan. Hashem tells him to “lift up his eyes and look northward and southward and eastward and westward for I will give all of this Land that you see to your descendants for eternity” (13:14-15). Almost immediately after that, in verse 17, Avraham is instructed to walk the length and breadth of the Land “for to you I have given it.”

The Kli Yakar explains that the first point was to develop a spiritual sensitivity. Hashem told him to gaze upon the Promised Land. Create a vision for yourself in this Land. And it seems that this was enough. Merely by doing this, Avraham would acquire the Land. This, says the Kli Yakar, was the process of developing a spiritual connection to Eretz Yisrael. You will not be able to understand the true value of this Land, Hashem is saying to Avraham, unless you can understand it on a spiritual level. You must appreciate that this is not merely a Land, but is a place that will forever allow you to grow and develop. With this appreciation, Avraham was assured that the Land would never leave his descendants. Even after the destruction of the Temple and the Exile, the Heavenly Temple, which is spiritually opposite the site of the physical Temple, was not and will never be removed. For this reason, the Kli Yakar continues, Jews throughout the generations have yearned and desired to stand in this place. The Jewish people have always had that deep connection with their Land. As the verse in Tehillim (102:14) puts it, “They have wanted its very stones.”

Jewish people have forever felt themselves gravitate towards the Land of Israel. The emotions that we feel when we arrive in Eretz Yisrael may not be easily explained, but the fact is that when we arrive there, we feel that we have arrived home. This is an expression of the spiritual sight that we have inherited from Avraham Avinu.

In contrast, verse 17 talks of the physical aspect of the land, the fields and the vineyards. About this aspect of Eretz Canaan, Avraham is told to walk through the land, which is a type of halachic acquisition. Crucially, the Kli Yakar points out, this verse, although it also talks of the gift of Eretz Canaan to Avraham, does not specify that it will be forever.

Why is this? We know that for much of Jewish history, the Land has not been physically ours. Emotionally and conceptually, we have always been bound together with Eretz Yisrael and it is home forever, but we have not always been allowed physical access and proprietorship over the Land. This subtle difference between the two verses gives us a glimpse of the true picture of Eretz Yisrael; its spiritual sensitivity is given to us as an inheritance from Avraham Avinu, but its physical space must be earned by each successive generation.

May we merit to earn the physical bond with the Land we love, building on the gift of spiritual sensitivity which is the unique inheritance of every Jew.