

The Rebbe's Discourses

Summaries of points from the Rebbe's Chassidic Discourses בלי אחריות כלל וכלל
פרשת לך לך תשמ"ה ד"ה ויאמר ה' גו' לך לך
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DOUBLE JOURNEY

THE TORAH TELLS US THAT G-D SAID TO ABRAHAM (THEN STILL CALLED ABRAM): LECH LECHA, GO FOR YOURSELF, from your land, your birthplace and your father's house, to the Land which I will show you. I will bless you... And you will be for a blessing.

Torah Or and later Chassidic teachings ask two main questions. Why is there a double term, go for yourself, rather than just go? In Hebrew the two words translated 'go' and 'for yourself' are identical: לך לך. As if the text read 'go, go'. What does that mean? A second question is, why is the order 'your land', then your birthplace and then your father's house? This seems the reverse of the logical order of leaving one's home, one's neighbourhood, and finally one's country.

The explanation of the first point is that two kinds of movement are being described: from below to above and from above to below. Since this is in the Torah, it applies not only to Abraham, but also to every Jew. Especially since every Jewish man and woman is a descendent of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs. Their actions were a sign for their children², which also means an empowerment to their children, enabling them to make the same steps themselves.

The explanation of the second point is that these terms refer to specific aspects of the person's natural identity: one's Will, (eretz, land, like ratzon, will), one's Mind, the 'birthplace' of the emotions, and then the emotions themselves (which inhabit one's father's house).

In his journey from below to above, Abraham had to leave all of these in order to come closer to G-d, which is the meaning of his journey from below to above. In this spiritual journey, at

¹ Maamar Lech Lecha 5745 (1984). It was printed in Dvar Malchut Lech Lecha 5775. It was not edited by the Rebbe.

² See Ramban to Gen. 12:6.

one stage he built an altar ‘for G-d Who was revealed to him’³, and then at a further stage he built an altar ‘for G-d’⁴, at a higher level, beyond revelation. This expresses something of his journey from below to above.

His spiritual journey from above to below is that the Hidden Intellect, expressed in the name Abram אַבְרָם Av Ram, exalted father, should be revealed below, in the sefira Malchut, kingship, leading to its expression in the physical land of Israel.

These two kinds of movement apply in the life of each individual. The movement from below to above is expressed in Prayer, which reaches upwards, like the ladder in Jacob’s dream, which stood on the ground and reached to Heaven, and also in carrying out Mitzvot. When one does a Mitzva one is elevating something physical, so that it becomes either the setting and preparation for a Mitzva [eg preparing one’s home as a setting for celebrating Shabbat], or in physical terms it becomes the Mitzva itself [eg the food which is eaten on Shabbat, expressing the Mitzva of ‘oneg Shabbat’, making Shabbat a day of delight]. The discourse cites the words of the Zohar about the spiritual effect of an offering in the Temple: ‘the secret of the Offering rises to the secret of Ein Sof’⁵. This sublime concept is applied to the daily Mitzvot carried out by each individual.

The movement from above to below is Torah, which is revealed to us from G-d in Heaven, and then is transmitted through a chain of teachers till it reaches each of us. The flow of Torah from above empowers the individual so that he or she can respond by reaching to G-d from below. This mirrors the simple fact that by studying Torah, which is a guide to Jewish life, one understands what Mitzvot one should carry out, and how to do so.

In each of these kinds of movement, one has to go beyond one’s Will, one’s Mind, and one’s Emotions. This means acting with total bitul, selflessness. This applies in Torah study, as we say in the meditation at the end of the Amidah ‘let my soul be as dust to everything’, and then ‘open my heart to Your Torah’. Thus we need to transcend our selves in order to really study Torah, as expressed in the teaching ‘anyone who keeps Torah in poverty will eventually keep it in wealth’⁶. The ‘poverty’ means selflessness, and the ‘wealth’ means spiritual wealth, including discovering new dimensions in Torah, writing ‘chiddushim’, new insights.

This also applies in prayer: through selflessness in prayer one attains the greatest levels of cleaving to the Divine.

Through this service, G-d responds to us: He brings us to the Land where He ‘shows’ us, revealing our essence, which draws down blessing from the Divine. G-d grants that we ourselves become a channel of blessing, for everyone, acting as His emissary.

This links with what it says in the Midrash, that the double expression Lech Lecha relates to the Redemption. For the Redemption expresses the quality of being ‘double’, like the double letters in the Hebrew alphabet (an ordinary letter and a final form) and also Shabbat which is ‘double’ (like two loaves of bread). This is because the Redemption signifies the union of the upper Sefirot with Malchut (Kingship), which is also the union of the Transcendent Radiance of the Divine with the inner Immanent Radiance (Sovev and Memaleh)⁷.

³ Gen.12:7.

⁴ Gen.12:8.

⁵ See Zohar II 239b, Zohar III 26b.

⁶ Ethics 4:9.

⁷ The immanent radiance is the Divine energy which fills all existence and gives life to it. The transcendent

Abram's journey had a redemptive dimension, as we see from the fact that he taught the idea that not only is G-d the G-d of the world, but even more, that He is the Essence of all existence⁸. This will be fully revealed in the Redemption.

And this double journey is indeed the task of each individual Jewish man and woman, through which one comes to the revelations of the Future when G-d will be revealed to all humanity, and all will unite in service of G-d. Then the ultimate Divine radiance will shine, with the coming of Moshiach, speedily in our days.

Torah teachings are holy – please treat these pages with care

radiance is beyond physical existence, but is the source of Torah.

⁸ See the Chassidic explanation of Gen.21:33 in Likkutei Torah Ki Tavo 42d, 43c.