

| PORTION    | DATE         | HEB DATE         | TORAH           | HAFTARAH         | KETUVIM      |
|------------|--------------|------------------|-----------------|------------------|--------------|
| Lech Lecha | 31 Oct. 2020 | 13 Cheshvan 5781 | Gen. 12:1-17:27 | Isa. 40:27-41:16 | John 8:51-58 |

It is written (Gen. 12:1), “Go yourself out of your land, from your relatives and from your father’s house, to a land which I show you.” The phrase “Go yourself” has been translated from לך-לך (*lech-le·cha*). It is also translated as “Go for yourself,” or “Go on your own.”

Rashi said, “Go for yourself” means “Go for your benefit,” meaning that Avraham would find success in his new location. The sages quote from Tehillim, “For neither from east, nor from west ... comes greatness (הָרִים; *harim*)” (Psa. 75:7). Every time the word ‘*harim*’ appears in the Scripture, it means ‘mountains’, except in this verse, it means ‘greatness’. The sages explain that the verse means man does not achieve ‘greatness’ by traveling ‘east’ or ‘west.’ Rather, it is Hashem Who raises and lowers each person, based on what that person deserves. Thus, it would seem that Avraham’s success should not depend on his living in another land, that Hashem should tell him to go elsewhere “for your benefit.”

The Gemara<sup>1</sup> cites the verse as a proof that a relocation can bring about an improvement in one’s fortune. The reason is not because the other land has better qualities, since ‘neither from west nor from east comes greatness.’ Rather, at times Hashem has decreed that a person should receive His blessing only in a certain place. This is why Hashem said, “Go yourself,” i.e., for your benefit, from your land. It was specifically through leaving his land and moving to another location that Avraham’s fortune would improve.

In this vein, the sages<sup>2</sup> said that although we are not permitted to practice divination, there are three things that is permitted to rely on an omen. They are a house, a child, and a wife. The Torah prohibits practicing and relying on divination, such as making decisions based on superstitious signs (Lev. 19:26). Nevertheless, certain things may be used as hints of what the future may bring and one may take these signs into account, along with other factors. For example, one may view that as a sign that he will continue to have success as long as he lives there.

The Talmud<sup>3</sup> further states that if a person’s fortune is bad in one city and he does not move to another city, he may cry out to Hashem, but will not be answered, because he himself is to blame for his predicament, since he can improve his lot by moving elsewhere. Hashem will not answer the prayer of a person who can easily improve his situation but neglects to do so.

When we read the verse, literally, Hashem is commanding Avraham to leave the land of Haran which is filled *avodah zarah* (idol worship) to “a land which I [YHWH] will show” him. This is the meaning of the phrase, “from your father’s house,” that it is always preferable that a person should live in the neighborhood of a lion, rather than in a city with evildoers. The Zohar<sup>4</sup> says that living in the vicinity of evildoers can result in that person suffering along with them when they are punished for their sins.

The phrase, “to a land which I show you,” does not specify the destination of Avraham. This is to test whether Avraham would hurry to fulfill the words of Hashem and embark on the journey as Hashem had commanded without knowing the place to which he should go.

<sup>1</sup> BT, Rosh Hashanah 16b

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., Chullin 95b

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., Bava Metzia 75b

<sup>4</sup> Zohar, Vol. II, 38b

Now, Hashem does not just test a person without a promise of rewarding him for following His commandments. The Hebrew word *לך-לך* (*lech-le-cha*) has a numerical value of 100 (30+20+30+20) which we know that Yitzchak was born when Avraham was 100 years old.

It is written (Gen. 12:1), “And YHWH said to Avram.” As a rule, when Hashem first communicates with a prophet, it begins by saying that He appeared to the prophet. This means that Hashem first granted the prophet a vision of the Shechinah, and only then spoke to him. For example, Yitzchak had a vision of Shechinah before Hashem spoke to him (Gen. 26:12); to Ya’akov (Gen. 28:12-13); and to Moshe (Exo. 3:2-4). But here, the Torah simply begins by saying, “And YHWH said to Avram.” So, a question is raised, why did Hashem not first give Avram a vision of the Shechinah?

Before answering the question, there are actually a number of cases where the Torah says that Hashem spoke to someone without first saying that He appeared to him, i.e., to Adam (Gen. 1:28-29; 2:16), to Kayne (Gen. 4:6); and to Noach (Gen. 6:13). However, these incidences occurred before the Flood when mankind was on an entirely different spiritual level with Hashem. Also, Hashem spoke to Aharon (Exod. 4:27) without saying that He revealed Himself to him. However, while that is the first of Aharon’s prophecies that the Torah mentions, it actually was not the first time that Hashem spoke to Aharon, as he had been a prophet long before that.<sup>5</sup>

Returning to the question, according to the Sefer HaTzaddik (Book of Righteous), Avraham made the effort to recognize Hashem as his Creator at an early age while studying under Shem, the son of Noach, through his own intelligence. Therefore, there was no need for Hashem to reveal Himself to him without any introduction as he already recognized the One Who was speaking to him. However, in verse 7, the Torah says, “And YHWH appeared to Avram” to indicate that Avram was given a greater revelation of His Shechinah than Avraham had arrived at on his own.

Another possible answer lies in fact that until Avraham, for in the ten generations that preceded him, there was no one who recognized Hashem and to whom Hashem spoke. Therefore, Hashem did not reveal His Shechinah to Avraham until He tested him to see whether he would fulfill His commands, “*Lech Lecha* out of your land.” (Gen. 12:1). However, once Avraham fulfilled Hashem’s instructions by leaving the land and going to the land of Kanaan, thus proving that he was His faithful servant, then Hashem did reveal Himself to him, as said “And YHWH appeared to Avram” (v. 7).

This approach fits with the words of the sages<sup>6</sup> who explained the verse, “Hear, O daughter, and see, and incline your ear, forget your people and your father’s house” (Psa. 45:11). This verse refers to Avraham, who was commanded to leave his father’s home. The sages explain the verse, “Hear, O daughter,” which refers to our verse, “YHWH said to” Avram, meaning, that He began by ‘speaking’ to Avraham and expecting him to “hear”, i.e., obey, His command. And only after that did Hashem revealed Himself to Avraham as stated in verse 7, “And YHWH appeared to Avram,” when it says, “and see.” That verse also alludes that Avraham’s ‘hearing’ Hashem’s command and his ‘seeing’ the Shechinah did not both occur at the same time, rather, there was a break between them. The ‘break’ was that Avraham obeyed Hashem’s command. That is why the verse (Psa. 45:11) does not say, “Hear and see, O daughter,” or, “O daughter, hear and see.” Rather, it breaks up the words “hear” and “see” with “O daughter.” This indicates that through hearing, i.e., obeying, Hashem’s command, Avraham merited to be called His beloved “daughter,” and only then did the Shechinah appear to him.

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<sup>5</sup> Shemos Rabbah 3:16; Rashi to Shemos 4:10

<sup>6</sup> Beresheis Rabbah 39:1

It is written (Gen. 12:4), “And Lot went with him [Avram]”. Then in verse 5, the Torah says, “And Avram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother’s son.” There are many questions that need to be answered. What does it mean “Lot went with him” verse 4 and “Avram took ... Lot” in verse 5? Hashem said in verse 1, “Go yourself out of your land, from your relatives and from your father’s house, to a land which I show you.”

What was the reason Hashem specifically saying, “Go yourself”? To understand this phrase, we need to understand how Avram’s father, Terach brought his family to Haran. When Terach left Ur Kasdim, he took his son Avram, his grandson Lot, and his daughter-in-law Sarai along. During his journey, he stopped at Haran and decided to live there. Thus, Hashem command to Avram to leave Haran by saying “Go yourself”. Needless to say, Sarai, being Avram’s wife would go along with him.

However, Lot was not invited. Lot discovered his uncle Avram was leaving Haran without him. Thus, he clung onto Avram and begged him to leave with him. This is the meaning of verse 4 when it says, “Lot went with him.” With much begging and cajoling, Avram relented and “Avram took ... Lot.” This is the meaning of verse 5.

Avram also took “the beings whom they had acquired in Haran.” The “beings” are the people whom Avram converted to worship Hashem. Avram was already affluent and arrived at Yerushalem where “he built an altar to YHWH” (v. 8). Hashem tested Avram by bringing draught to the land. Instead of complaining to Hashem, Avram took his family to Mitzrayim. He asked his wife to be “his sister” (v. 13) because she was a beautiful woman.

It is said that Avram was afraid for his life and asked Sarai to lie. It was a custom during that period and many other kingdoms to take a beautiful woman to their king to gift him as a present. However, Avram did not lie as Sarai is his half-sister (Gen. 20:12). The Pharaoh after the plague and discovering Sarai’s marital status, he gave all the dowry to Avram and Hagar, his daughter as a gift to him and escorted Avram’s family out of Mitzrayim.

Now, as Avram said that if the Mitzrim discovered that Sarai was his wife, he was sure that he would be killed to claim Sarai as a widow (vv. 12-13). To prevent any injuries to his family, Avram removed the obstacle by saying that Sarai was his sister. They would say their spouse was waiting for them in Canaan, Pharaoh would not send assassins to kill them. During the final confrontation, Avram told the truth because deceiving Pharaoh at this time, would easily be discovered by sending messengers to Canaan.

Shortly after returning to Yerushalem, Lot’s shepherds quarreled with Avram’s. How rich was Lot that he has his own shepherds. Rather, they belonged to Avram but Lot was tasked to watch over Avram’s assets along with shepherds. Since Lot lived under Avram’s tent and being a nephew to Avram, he was well off but not affluent enough. Avram who waited for an opportunity, as he was told by Hashem “to leave his family”, to separate from Lot, told Lot to choose the Land. Only then, did Hashem appear to Avram. Lot went to Sodom and lived outside the city until he was led away by the angels to escape destruction of Sodom.

Now, a question is raised as to why Lot was saved. Was it because the Messiah would come from him? The sages say that is not the case. Lot’s merit came from Mitzrayim when he remained silent to protect Avram and Sarai. For this, he was rewarded with the coming of the Messiah.

