

Walk through the Parsha

with **Rabbi David Walk**



LECH L'CHA

Process or Purpose

When God tells Avram, pre-Avraham, LECH L'CHA ('Go for yourself', 'Get thee out', 'Get yourself going'), what is God asking or demanding? Is this a request which serves as an end in itself (a purpose) or is it the beginning of a journey which will unfold over time (a process)? Would you believe that our Sages have debated this issue over many generations? That would be akin to believing that the sun rises in the East or the Pope is Catholic (and from Chicago, Wow!)

Indeed, there have been many debates on this topic. Most of the Rabbis who claim 'purpose' follow the opinion of the Ramban who posits that Avraham and his father had already aimed to settle in the Land of Canaan; he was now commanded to finish that journey. In this view, the purpose is called Zionism.

However, many rabbis disagree. They believe that Avraham was instructed to go to enhance his role as founder and father of the Chosen People. The simplest and most famous interpretation comes from Rashi: Go for your own benefit, for your own good! Somehow this trip will enhance and

enrich Avraham. There are tough experiences which make us better and stronger. This journey would do that for Avraham.

A well-known Midrash illustrates Avraham's growth through this travel: A traveler observes a palace with a fire burning within, and wonders: 'Is it possible that this building has no one in charge of it?' The owner of the building looked out at him and said: 'I am the owner of the building.' Similarly, Avraham our Patriarch inquired: 'Is it possible that this world is without someone in charge?' The Holy One, blessed be He, looked at him and said, 'I am the owner of the world.' 'Then the King will desire your beauty, for He is your master' (T'hilim 45:12) - showcasing your beauty in the world. (B'reishit Rabba 39:1)

The S'fat Emet commented on this Midrash many times. In one interpretation, he wrote: Similarly to the palace with the fire, Avraham observed Creation and yet it seemed incomplete, so he asks if there was no one in charge. God responded with LECH L'CHA, Avraham must continue his journey to detach from worldliness to repair this world. This self-sacrifice for God surpasses wisdom... The verse signifies the awakening from God that people experience. Then, one must connect to the Divine and detach from everything else.

Only then can one expand this point, acknowledging that everything in their life comes from God... This concept also resonates in every Shabbat, which resembles a mini LECH L'CHA. When one refrains from work by accepting Shabbat there is a nullification of the material, which repairs the days of the week. Dedication to Shabbat, empowers the repair of the week.

Great! We all experience and create our own LECH L'CHA moments! We do it whenever we allow a Mitzva experience (in the Rebbe's example Shabbat) to remove us from worldly demands. It can be learning or davening. Whenever we allow ourselves to be drawn away from earthly concerns and become immersed in God's demands, we align with our Alte Zeidie's path.

Reb Elimelech of Lizhensk sees the triple command (leave homeland, birthplace, and family hearth) as preparation for serving God on three spiritual levels:

1. One needs to break the hold of natural desires...
2. A person must constantly seek and search, in order to observe the greatness of God in everything...
3. One needs to detach from personal choices so as to use their traits only for holiness; only then can they truly understand and observe God's greatness.

So far it seems that everyone views this journey as either for the 'purpose' of Zionism or the 'process' of spiritual growth. Rav Shimshon Rephael Hirsch provides a different perspective. He explains the verse as not telling us to go to any specific place. He translates the LECH L'CHA phrase as: Avram isolate yourself. If the purpose were merely to leave, the correct verb would be TZEI. He goes on: The word LECH implies separating from one's present location. This can be a means to get somewhere else or it can be a purpose in itself, simply to escape where one is. The addition of the pronoun (L'CHA), emphasized this idea: Go for yourself, Go to yourself, Isolate yourself... This demand makes leaving, its own purpose.

Now for those who think that this idea was specifically to go to Eretz Yisrael, like the Ramban, Rav Chaim Navon adds a linguistic touch to what Rav Hirsch said: Eretz Yisrael is not presented here as Israel's homeland. On the contrary, Eretz Yisrael is portrayed here as the land on behalf of which one leaves one's house and homeland. Eretz Yisrael is presented as the antithesis of a homeland, as Avraham's place of "exile", as a place whose name is not even mentioned. Eretz Yisrael is not the natural homeland of the Jewish people, but rather the land that God gave them so that they may serve Him there.

The Torah emphasizes the fact that Eretz Yisrael is not our natural homeland.

This idea aligns well with Rav Soloveitchik's unusual explanation of the sanctity of Eretz Yisrael: K'dusha, under a halachic aspect, is man-made; it is a historical category. A soil is sanctified by deeds performed by a sacred people, never by any primordial superiority. The halachic term KEDUSHAT HA-ARETZ, the sanctity of the land, denotes the consequence of a human act, either conquest (heroic deeds) or the mere presence of the people in that land (intimacy of man and nature).

According to the Rav, starting with Avraham, WE made Eretz Yisrael into the Holy Land. In this view, we get a brand new perspective. The journey was neither a 'process' nor a 'purpose'. It was to create a 'partnership' in the eternal enterprise of the Jewish people: Create and spread K'DUSHA! 