

אור פני משה

שיחות מוסר על התורה
מאת הרה"ג ר' משה אליעזר
רבינוביץ זצ"ל

*Shmuessen from
Harav Moshe
Rabinowitz Zt"l*

פרשת לך לך

Volume 7 Issue # 3

**Sponsored by a Talmid
of Ner Yisrael Toronto**
**In honor of his Rebbe
Rav Moshe Eliezer Rabinowitz zt"l**

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וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל אַבְרָם לֵךְ לְךָ מֵאֶרֶץְךָ וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ אֶל
הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֶרְאֶה: (בראשית י"ב א')

רש"י: להנאתך ולטובתך

The Nisayon of Lech Lecha

The *parshah* begins with HaKadosh Boruch Hu commanding Avrom to abandon his entire life and to leave his home, his country and his family completely. Where to? Avrom was not told. 'Just get on the bus and go.' Even when a person uproots himself from just one of these three aspects that Avrom was commanded, it is extremely difficult – and this is even when he has a clear destination ahead of him, which may be far superior than his current one. Changing one's location and circumstances is difficult in all scenarios. For Avrom to completely abandon his household, country as well as family – and all without any known destination – was certainly a difficult undertaking.

Indeed, the wording of Hashem's command was specifically designed to increase the difficulty in the *nisayon*: Hashem instructed Avrom, 'Go from your country, from your birthplace, and from your father's house.' The Ohr Hachaim asks, shouldn't the order have logically been the opposite? After all, when he leaves his country, he has already left his city! Likewise, when he leaves his city, he has already left his father's house. How can he be commanded to leave the specific place after he leaves the general place? The Ohr Hachaim explains that Hashem was not mentioning his sources of departure in their chronological sequence, but in their order of difficulty. It was difficult for him that he was leaving his country, and more so his city, and even more than that, his father's home. Hashem therefore mentioned these aspects in ascending order of difficulty in order for Avrom to continuously hear more difficult aspects of the *nisayon*. Through accepting upon himself each detail of the command mentioned by Hashem with the additional difficulty that was entailed, Avrom was incurring reward for each aspect of the *nisayon*. The Ohr Hachaim explains that it was for this reason that Hashem did not reveal to Avrom what his destination was. Hashem was purposely making it more difficult for Avrom in order to increase his reward.

Not only was the actual command difficult for Avrom, but its fulfillment posed even more difficulties for him. Avrom was promised that when he would reach his destination, he would become a great

nation, he would become blessed with wealth, and that his great name would spread. If he would only pass the *nisayon*, things promised to be wonderful. What did Avrom encounter? Almost immediately after arriving, there was a hunger in Canaan, forcing him to travel to Mitzrayim. When he reached Mitzrayim, his wife Sarai was taken from him, notwithstanding all his precautions to avoid it. Avrom did not question Hashem's words as Rashi tells us, and this certainly added to the difficulty of the *nisayon*.¹

לך/For your Pleasure

Given the above picture of the difficulties that this test entailed for Avrom, let us now attempt to understand the words of Rashi in his explanation on Hashem's command. Hashem told Avrom, לך לך/Go *for you*. Rashi explains the words 'for you', to mean ולהנאתך ולטובתך/*for your pleasure, and your benefit*. The question we can now ask is, how can this *nisayon* be construed as pleasurable for Avrom? The fact that it was for his 'good' for him is understandable; the more struggle that he must undergo, the more reward he will earn in *Olam Haba* and in *Olam Hazeih*, for himself and his future generations. However, how can Hashem tell him that going would be for his pleasure? On the contrary, leaving his home and family was a difficult move, compounded by all the difficulties that he encountered after doing so. Where is the pleasure in this venture?

The Purpose of Creation

In order to answer this question, let us first review the words of the Mesillas Yesharim in the first *perek*, where he establishes what our purpose was in being created, and why we were placed in this world. The Mesillas Yesharim explains that the real purpose for our being created was in order to bask in the light of the *Shechina*. This, he explains, is the only genuine pleasure that exists, and Hashem in His great goodness, created us to experience this pleasure. In truth, he explains further, this greatest of pleasures can only be experienced in its fullness and in its revealed manner while in the Next World. Why, then, did Hashem place

¹ Why, in fact, was Avrom not granted the immediate fulfillment of Hashem's words? The Ohr Hachaim explains that included in Hashem's command was that Avrom should abandon Lot as well. Avrom, though, did not understand this at first, and allowed Lot to join him. Therefore, the fulfillment of Hashem's promises was delayed until Avrom sent Lot away from him. For Avrom who did not realize this, however, the delay in the fulfillment of the promises certainly added to the *nisayon*.

us in this world? The answer is that if we were to experience the fantastic pleasures of the Next World without having earned them, there would be something lacking in our enjoyment. True, the experience would be pleasurable, but it would be accompanied by the shame of one who has received a gift without having given any form of payment or compensation. The joy of the receiver is marred by his feeling that he does not deserve what he has.

In order to provide us with the fullest possible measure of pleasure, unmarred by feelings of shame, Hashem created this world in which we ourselves can earn our own share in the pleasures of the Next World. Hashem therefore placed many difficulties in this world, all with the intent that we should overcome these difficulties, thereby earning our reward.

Based on the narrative, it follows that we should not anticipate any of this true pleasure while we are still in this world. Indeed, the Gemara tells us (ש"ט: קדושין ל"ט): *There is no reward for mitzvos in This World*. However, an implication emerges from the words of the Mesillas Yesharim: It is possible to reach this pleasure even while on This World. If one works on his *ruchniyus* the way he should be, he will achieve a closeness to Hashem with the pleasure that this entails.

On this point, the question arises, similar to what we asked on the words of Rashi. How can we be told that the *mitzvos* bring us pleasure in this world? True, they accrue reward for us in the Next World, but in this world, clearly what brings pleasure is by fulfilling one's desires. This fact seems so clear and obvious; how can it be claimed to be otherwise?

אם אתה עושה כן / If You Do This

To understand this, let us focus on a *mishnah* in Avos: כך היא דרכה של תורה פת במלח תאכל ומים במשורה תשתה ועל הארץ תישן וחיי צער תחיה ובתורה אתה עמל ואם אתה עושה כן אשריך וטוב לך אשריך בעולם הזה וטוב לך לעולם הבא (אבות ו' ע"ג) *Such is the way of Torah: Eat bread with salt, drink water in small measure, sleep on the ground, live a life of suffering – and toil in Torah. If you will do this, 'Fortunate are you and there will be goodness bestowed upon you.'* 'Fortunate are you' – in this world; 'there will be goodness bestowed upon you,' – in the Next World. The Chazon Ish discusses the conclusion of the *mishnah* - *If you will do this, 'Fortunate are you and there will be goodness bestowed upon you.* Why must the *mishnah* use the words 'If you do this'? It would be sufficient to simply state the reward; we would understand that we must obviously fulfill the stipulated condition in order to receive that reward!

פרשת לך לך

A patient complained to his doctor about an ailment that he had been having. The doctor diagnosed the symptoms and prescribed an appropriate medication. Two weeks later, the patient returned, this time complaining that not only had his symptoms not improved, but they had actually gotten worse. The doctor was concerned.

"Did you take the prescription I wrote for you?"

"No."

"So what did you do with the prescription?"

The patient told the doctor that he had thrown that paper in the garbage.

"So how did you expect to get better?!" the surprised doctor exclaimed.

"You gave me the paper with the medication prescribed," the patient argued, "but you never told me that I needed to actually take the medication!"

The doctor looked at the patient with utter exasperation. "So why do you think I wrote it for you? For my own health?! If I tell you about a medication, it is obviously for you to take it. I don't have to speak out to you that you will only get healed by following the prescription; that is self-evident!"

Similarly, this *mishnah* is 'prescribing' the way of life that is necessary for one to be involved in Torah, with all the reward that is assured for one who does so. Why is it necessary for the *mishnah* to explicitly state, 'If you will do this, you will be fortunate'? Is it not obvious that to receive the reward for the Torah, one must follow the 'prescription' that is given?

Happiness from a Life of Deprivation

The Chazon Ish explains that the intent of the *mishnah* is not to inform us that we will not receive the reward without following the formula; that is indeed obvious. The *mishnah* is rather intending to address a seeming difficulty one may have when learning the *mishnah*. Is it really true that one will lead such a happy and fortunate life when living in the fashion that is described? The *mishnah* describes conditions of difficulty and deprivation; how is it possible that such a life will bring happiness? To this question, the *mishnah* has but one response: True, this is not something which is immediately perceived by one's mind. You will

not understand how it can be so. There is only one way that you can recognize the truth of the *mishnah*'s assertion: Try it! If you will do this, you can be assured that you will see the results!

A patient complains to the doctor about various ailments and issues. The doctor prescribes him an exercise program for two weeks, after which the patient is to report back for a checkup. The patient, though, does not understand how exercise will help him heal. He protests to the doctor, giving various 'logical arguments' as to why it will not help him.

The doctor does not bother trying to argue with the layman. "Listen," he says, "I will not be to explain the whole concept to you right now. All I can tell you is, do as I say. I assure that if you will follow my instructions, you will see results."

Similarly, the *mishnah* cannot explain the logic. It can only declare with complete confidence that if you will do so, you will see the results.

The Joy of Self-Control

This concept is something that we see clearly through our lives:

Reuven goes through his day with self-control. He pushes himself out of bed bright and early, and he arrives at shul with plenty of time to put on his tallis and tefillin with feeling and devotion. He is stopped by a friend who wishes to shmooze for a couple of minutes before beginning to daven, but Reuven tells him firmly that it will have to wait. Reuven davens properly and learns his full seder afterwards. At breakfast, he concentrates on the brochos and on thanking Hashem for the delicious food. At work, he acts courteously and pleasantly to whom he comes into contact, and he controls himself even when things happen which bother him. Throughout his day, he is careful not to gaze at any inappropriate scenes or images, and he does not allow himself to get caught in speaking or hearing loshon hara. At home, his wonderful behavior continues in his home-activities and in his relationship with his family.

Shimon, in contrast, lives without any control. He arrives late to davening, and still chaps a 15-minute shmooz before starting. He takes off his tefillin almost as soon as he puts them on, and he speeds out the door before davening is over. He mumbles through his brachos as he gobbles his breakfast while listening to the news.

He gets upset at anyone who acts in a manner which is not in accordance with his wishes, and he is rude and inconsiderate. His level of honesty in business dealings is highly questionable. During the Rav's Daf Yomi shiur at night, he can barely keep awake, but afterward he perks up to 'hock around' with all kinds of loshon hara.

Which of these people has a better life? There is no question that 'Reuven' who controls himself, leads a satisfying fulfilling life, whereas 'Shimon's life is one of emptiness and depression. When we fulfill the *Ratzon Hashem*, it brings us a feeling of happiness that is unmatched by any pleasures of this world.

This idea can be appreciated through the following illustration:

There are drunkards who spend almost every evening of their lives in a bar. Each night passes for them in a state of wild drunkenness. They love the pleasure that alcohol gives them, and they cannot part with it.

Decent people, however, do not act this way. Many honorable people have never seen the inside of a bar.

Who leads a better life? The drunkards who have continuous pleasure in their alcohol? Perhaps that is what they think. However, those who control themselves know that their life is worth so much more than that of a drunkard, and they would never give up their fulfilment for the empty pleasure of drunkenness.

Satisfaction is Unrelated to One's Material Situation

A life of satisfaction and contentment is completely unrelated to the amount of material possessions or blessings that one has. It is rather almost entirely based on the way the individual chooses to live his life. If he forces himself to follow the will of Hashem, he will be content. True, his sufferings may present challenges to this contentment, but if he overcomes them, his sense of contentment will only increase as a result of them.

My rebbe, Rav Elya Roth was a master of this middah. His life was full of all different imaginable – and unimaginable – hardships. He had multiple health problems, he had problems within his home, and he lived in abject poverty. Even one of these issues would have been enough to make a common person into a bitter, broken man;

but not so, Rav Elya. He lived with such a simchas hachaim, thanking Hashem for all the gifts He gave him.

Even when he was undergoing terrible yissurim, he thanked Hashem for them with such joy. He understood that Hashem was doing what was absolutely best for him, whether for a kapparah or other reasons unbeknownst to him, and he thanked Hashem for this and loved Him because of it.

Did Rav Elya live a life of suffering? Definitely not. He lived a happy, content life. So many people used to come and speak to him, and all left uplifted with the joy that he exuded.

In the same vein, even those who have all imaginable gifts in their lives can live a life of utter unhappiness and depression, if they do not infuse meaning into their lives.

I know of a story in which there was a woman who was wealthy, had a beautiful family and had excellent health. However, despite all the gifts that she had, she was so depressed that she tried to commit suicide by jumping off a building. She survived the fall, but she was crippled for the rest of her life. All her blessings did not bring her the fulfillment that she sought.

The Superiority of a Life of Torah

The following two anecdotes further illustrate the point we are discussing.

Rav Yankel Galinsky would often recount a conversation that took place at a seminar for baalei teshuvah in Eretz Yisroel. The exchange occurred between a secular journalist who was covering the event, and an attendee of the seminar who had become frum not long before then.

The journalist had posed the following question to the baal teshuvah: "Tell me, who is destined to receive more reward at the end of his life. Is it you, who surrendered all the pleasures of the outside world in order to live a life of Torah, or a sheltered child who was raised frum from his youth, and was never exposed to the outside world?"

The baal teshuvah answered promptly. "Clearly the sheltered child will receive more reward."

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This response caught the journalist by surprise. "But why?" he questioned. "After all, you gave up so much from your life. Does that not deserve a bigger reward?"

"That is exactly the point," countered the baal teshuvah. "The child who was frum all his life has never seen the outside world. He therefore oftentimes wonders if maybe there is something that that world has to offer. He then banishes these thoughts from his mind and clings to what he understands to be the truth. That struggle is indeed deserving of reward. I, however, have seen the 'world' and I recognize it for all its emptiness and nothingness. For me, there is no choice. I will certainly choose the life of true fulfillment and happiness over one that is devoid of any meaning or happiness.

Rav Moshe Ahron Stern would relate the following incident which he knew first-hand:

Roni was an irreligious man living, in Tel Aviv, who spent his life completely focused pursuing as much earthly pleasures as he possibly could. He made it his life's mission to experience all sorts of different enjoyments and indulgences without any limits.

It happened once that Roni heard about a certain store in Chaifa which was reputed to be top-of-the-line in in the desire-gratification market. The store sold the most perverse items imaginable. When Roni heard about the store, he knew that he just had to be there. At the first possible opportunity, he made a trip towards Chaifa, and he made his way toward the store with great anticipation. However, as Roni neared the store, he noticed an interesting sight unfold. A religious looking man was also walking on the sidewalk in the direction of the store. However, Roni noticed that as the man neared the store, he did not look inside, or even gaze for a few moments at the images plastered on the window. Instead, he faced the other direction as he passed by, and he walked as near to the street as possible, keeping a wide space between himself and the store. Roni could not believe his eyes. What could possibly have caused this man to purposely turn away from something which would provide him with such enjoyment? He could not contain his curiosity, and he approached the man with his question.

"Excuse me," he said, "but I just watched how you so purposely avoided that store as if it were your worst enemy. Why did you act that way? Can't you see how much fun and enjoyment is inside there?"

The religious man pointed at the store with a look of revulsion. "I should enter that store?!" he asked in shock. "I can never step inside there! I am in the middle of trying to understand a Tosfos. There is no greater pleasure for me than working on a sugya until I merit to reach an understanding. If I go into that store, my mind will be diverted by all that trash, and I will be prevented from achieving the wonderful goal that I am trying to reach! Why would I do such a thing to myself?!"

The man's answer intrigued Roni. Apparently, that religious man had something in his life which was so much better than what that store was offering, such that he could not allow himself to be distracted by even looking at that store. This posed a problem for Roni. Here he was, trying to attain every pleasure imaginable, and yet there was a whole world out there which turned his own pleasures into harmful distractions! He must find out about this superior form of pleasure!

Roni began looking into his heritage, and eventually he became a full-fledged frum, Torahdige yid.

Both these anecdotes demonstrate how the life of one who controls himself and follows the will of Hashem is far superior to that of one who gratifies his own desires. This is not only in the Next World, but even one's life in this world is elevated and meaningful, bringing him contentment and serenity that he would never experience when he follows his own desires.

The Pleasure of Passing a Difficult Nisayon

Let us return to our original question. We asked how Avrom leaving his homeland for Eretz Canaan could be considered for his own pleasure. After all, there were hardships involved, both in the actual command, and in Avrom's fulfillment of it. We can now understand the answer. True, there were hardships, and they were certainly difficult for Avrom. However, these difficulties did not take away from the pleasure Avrom acquired through undergoing the *nisayon*. On the contrary, through each difficulty which he forced himself to undergo, he was fulfilling the will of Hashem on an even more elevated level, and he was

thus increasing his pleasure. The harder the *nisayon* is the more pleasure it brings – not the opposite.

Why Ruchniyus Brings Pleasure in This World

We have thus far demonstrated that undergoing a *nisayon* properly brings one pleasure even in this world. What is the understanding of this? If the reward was designed to be paid in *Olam Haba*, how can it be that the self-control brings pleasure even in the present world?

To understand this point, let us learn the words of a Malbim in this *parshah*. The Malbim is discussing the *pessukim* ('פרק ט"ו פסוק א'-ב') at the beginning of the *בתרים* בין ברית where Hashem told Avrom אל תירא אַבְרָם אֲנִי מְגֹן לְךָ שְׂכָרְךָ הַרְבֵּה מְאֹד / *'Do not fear, Avrom; your reward is very much!'* To this, Avrom replied with a question. מַה תִּתֶּן לִי וְאֲנִי הוֹלֵךְ עֲרִירִי / *'What can you give me, for I am childless!'* i.e. 'How can there possibly be a reward which will have any value as long as there will not be a continuity through future generations?' On this question of Avrom, the Malbim is troubled. True, in this world, there may be nothing of lasting value if it will not continue to future generations. However, in *Olam Haba*, there is certainly value to the reward, because *Olam Haba* is everlasting. If so, why was Avrom assuming that Hashem was referring to reward in this world? After all, the primary place of reward is in the Next World; why shouldn't it be assumed that that is the place to which what Hashem was referring?

The Malbim explains that the *schar* in *Olam Haba* is not a payment, but rather that which was created by the person's own actions. It is therefore unfitting for Hashem to promise the pleasures of *Olam Haba* as a reward.

A father will often tell his young son, "If you finish this perek of Mishnayos, I will buy you a new bicycle as a prize!" This serves as an incentive for the child to learn.

What if, however, the father promises his son, "If you learn the perek, you will know it well!" – The son will react by complaining, "Firstly, that is obvious; and secondly, it's not from you. If you want to give me an incentive, you need to add a prize of your own!"

Similarly, the *mitzvos* by their very nature, bring us close to Hashem in *Olam Haba*. If Hashem is promising a reward, it must be an additional reward in *Olam Haze*.

Mitzvos Bring Closeness to Hashem in Olam Haba and Olam Hazeih

Based on this idea, we can also understand why the *mitzvos* bring us pleasure even in this world. The *mitzvos*, as explained, bring one closer to Hashem. The state of closeness to Hashem is not limited to the Next World. True, in the Next World it is clearer and more revealed, and there are no forces of falsehood which deny the very concept of closeness to Hashem. In this world, the truth is hidden and unclear. However, the actual reality is the same. The *mitzvos* bring closeness to Hashem wherever the person is.

Rav Chaim Brim would describe the life of a yeshiva bachur as a veritable Gan-Eden. All the bachur's needs are attended to, and all he needs to do is absorb himself completely in the world of Torah. His life is one of serenity, with Torah and Avodas Hashem as the complete focus. When the bachur reaches the Next World, he will be taken to Gan Eden – and he will react with complete surprise.

'This is Gan Eden?! I just came from there!' Indeed, he will discover that Gan Eden is a continuation of the tremendously fulfilling life that he was leading!

A sinner, on the other hand, lives a hard, difficult life in this world. He is in competition with whomever he meets, and he is always pursuing more pleasures and possessions from which he never achieves satisfaction. It is always attempting to achieve another pleasure, only to discover when he finally attains it, that it, too, did not bring him satisfaction.

When he reaches the Next World, they will bring him to Gehinom – and he will also feel that he recognizes his new surroundings.

'This is Gehinnom?! It looks like exactly where I came from!' He, too, will realize that Gehinnom is merely a continuation of the unhappy life he led in this world!

When we fulfill the *mitzvos* and the will of Hashem, we are creating our closeness to Hashem – the only genuine goodness that exists. Let us strive to live such lives, and bs'd we should be *zoche* to true closeness to Hashem, both in this world and the Next.

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