

"Open my eyes so that I may see the **wonders** of Your Torah"



Issue 217

Wonders

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שַׁבַּת לֶךְ לָךְ יב-יג חֶשׁוֹן תשפ"ז 🌿



“ On Friday, before the onset of Shabbat, Rebbe Zev entered the bathhouse and prepared for himself a bath of hot water. His intention was to linger there in the hope of finding the man. Just then a poor man entered the bathhouse and stood near the blazing stone furnace at its center. Suddenly the man let out a great sigh, so deep that his very bones seemed to crack. Rebbe Zev understood that this was the tzaddik his master had spoken of. ”

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*"...It would be proper
to publish your classes
in book form.
With blessings for success..."*

ברכה
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גנז'ך
בפרסום
ספרותך
נכון
איתחיל
דברים
בשם
השם
הגדול

Wonders

An anthology from the shiurim and farbrengens
of Harav **Yitzchak Ginsburgh**

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Wonders Staff

Editor: R' Moshe Genuth • Associate Editor: Shelli Karzen
Contributing Editor: R. Avraham Arie Trugman • Typesetting: Yoel Broderick

STORY

REBBE ZEV KITZES: A FOUNDATIONAL TZADDIK

Rebbe Zev Wolf Kitzes, among the most distinguished disciples of the Ba'al Shem Tov and his close companion, was born in the year 5455 (1695). He was renowned as a genius and master of all parts of the Torah, with broad knowledge in the wisdom of the world as well. He served as rabbi of Tulchin and later moved to Mezhibuzh, where his father-in-law Rabbi Naftali served. Together with Rabbi David Furkas he led a group of ascetics, until an encounter with the Ba'al Shem Tov revealed to them the depth of the latter's holiness and they became his close disciples. The Ba'al Shem Tov said of him: "Between you and me there is no more than a hair's breadth, but you cannot cross it." His standards of purity were extraordinary, and it was said of him that he immersed all his household vessels in the mikveh, even a needle. He passed away in Mezhibuzh on the 12th of Cheshvan, 5549 (1788), and was buried near the Ba'al Shem Tov.

Once, the Ba'al Shem Tov said to his circle of disciples: "Next week a righteous man will come here—a *tzaddik* who is the foundation of the world. Whoever brings this man some pleasure will merit the World to Come." That week, Rebbe Zev Kitzes set out to find the *tzaddik* his master had spoken of. He searched in the inns and in the communal lodging houses where the poor were sheltered at the community's expense but did not find the man.

On Friday, before the onset of Shabbat, Rebbe Zev entered the bathhouse and prepared for himself a bath of hot water. His intention was to linger there in the hope of finding the man. Just then a poor man entered the bathhouse and stood near the blazing stone furnace at its center. Suddenly the man let out a great sigh, so deep that his very bones seemed to crack. Rebbe Zev understood that this was the *tzaddik* his master had spoken of.

Rebbe Zev saw that the bathhouse attendant was pushing the man away from where he stood, as one would shove aside an idle loiterer. At once he stepped out of the bath he had prepared and gave the poor man the hot water and the bundle of moist branches that bathers use to massage their bodies. Afterward he said to the man: "Come and be my guest for Shabbat."

Rebbe Zev then put on the Shabbat clothes he had brought with him, and gave his weekday garments to the poor man so that he might wear them in place of his tattered clothes. When the poor man refused to accept them, Rebbe Zev said:

"Know that I am considered a man of standing in this community, and it is not fitting that you be a guest in my home in torn garments." The poor man agreed and put on the clothes Rebbe Zev gave him.

Throughout that Shabbat, Rebbe Zev saw nothing out of the ordinary in the poor man's conduct. After Shabbat, he watched as the man began to remove the garments he had received. Rebbe Zev said to him: "These garments are yours as a gift." The poor man refused — until Rebbe Zev said to him: "I am considered a man of standing; it is not fitting that I wear these garments after you." The poor man agreed and accepted the clothes.

Afterward, Rebbe Zev went from house to house through the town collecting money for the poor man, until he had gathered some ten rubles. When he returned home, he found that the poor man had already left his house. Rebbe Zev searched until he found him outside the town, and gave him the money he had collected.

The poor man refused to take the money from Rebbe Zev's hand, but Rebbe Zev pressed him and said: "This is my constant practice, to give a guest a suitable gift." Reluctantly, the poor man agreed and accepted the money.

Some time later, Rebbe Zev met his master the Ba'al Shem Tov. The Ba'al Shem Tov said to him: "You have given me life! Know that this man is a *tzaddik* upon whom the world is founded. He is hidden, while I am revealed. He found it exceedingly difficult to go on living amid his hardship and had sought to depart from this world. Had he done so, I too would have been compelled to leave this world. But you, by giving the man life through everything you did for him, saved my life as well."

Once, the Ba'al Shem Tov said to his wife that he was one of the thirty-six *tzaddikim* of the generation. His wife asked him: "Are you among the thirty-six hidden *tzaddikim* or the thirty-six revealed ones?" He replied: "Among the hidden ones." "But everyone knows you?" she asked. To this the Ba'al Shem Tov replied: "Nonetheless, no one knows even a single drop of the ocean of what I truly am."

If we take the Ba'al Shem Tov's concealed existence a step further, could it be that it is related to our story as well?

Naturally, a story never departs entirely from its plain meaning. On that level, this is a story about an actual person whom the Ba'al Shem Tov and Rebbe Zev met and recognized as a hidden *tzaddik*. And yet, the story invites a deeper reading, one in which the hidden *tzaddik* represents the Ba'al Shem Tov's own concealed dimension. It is as if the hidden *tzaddik* that visited Mezhibuzh and whom Rebbe Zev honored was a projection of the Ba'al Shem Tov's own concealed spiritual dimension (whom he said no one was familiar with).

Interpreted in this way, the story provides a beautiful illustration of the quality of the *sefirah* of foundation within the *sefirah* of foundation. The literal meaning of a foundation is the hidden part, buried in the earth, and upon which all that is visible rests. The *tzaddik* is called “the foundation of the world” (Proverbs 10:25), and for this reason he is normally concealed, unrecognizable by most people. The foundation of the foundation is thus the hidden within the hidden—that dimension that the *tzaddik* usually conceals even from himself, parts of his soul that remain beyond even his ordinary comprehension.

Seen through this lens, the story describes the Ba’al Shem Tov’s inner reckoning with a complex dimension of his own personality: the experience of being what is known as a *tzaddik vera lo* (צדיק וְלוֹ), which refers to being a righteous person who suffers. One of the defining characteristics of a *chasid* is that joy is on his face while his sorrow remains buried in his heart. So too, the Ba’al Shem Tov struck a balance between revealed joy and concealed awe. The balance between joy and awe shifted only during the Ten Days of Repentance (from Rosh HaShanah to Yom Kippur, inclusive, when the joy would recede into the concealed part of the Ba’al Shem Tov’s psyche while the awe was prominently displayed on his face). Though sorrow is not identical to awe, the fact that both must be borne with their

opposites within the innermost chambers of the heart suggests a deep kinship between them.

In the *Tanya*, the phrase *tzaddik vera lo* refers to the remains of the animal soul’s mindset that remain even in a *tzaddik* and prevent him from being completely righteous. Still, we might say that a *tzaddik* who still has some of his animal soul mindset experiences distress and hardship from being in the world personally, as well as from the realization that in general, the Divine Presence is still in exile. This interpretation connects with the plain meaning of the expression a *tzaddik vera lo*, which the Sages applied to the Talmudic sage, Rabbah—the *tzaddik* who experienced so much suffering. This, in contrast to Rav Chisda, the *tzaddik* who was wealthy and abundantly blessed.

The Ba’al Shem Tov does not seek to nullify this dimension of himself, but at times the pain within him overflows its banks and the sense of weariness with life grows stronger. At such moments the Ba’al Shem Tov awakens the *tzaddik vetov lo*—the righteous who is blessed with a good life—that dwells within the *tzaddik vera lo*—through his disciple Rebbe Zev Kitizes. When Rebbe Zev succeeds in infusing joy into the sorrow and sighing of the hidden *tzaddik*, the Ba’al Shem Tov’s characteristic bearing of opposites—weeping on one side and joy on the other—returns to its proper place, and the Ba’al Shem Tov’s life is saved.

(Based on a class from the 26th of Iyar, 5780)

WONDERS OF THE HEBREW LANGUAGE

HEBREW, COPY/PASTE, DNA, AND SARAH

THE ORIGIN OF HEBREW

Everyone knows that Jews are Hebrews and Hebrews are Jews. They are almost interchangeable, almost synonymous. Yet, “Hebrew” is first mentioned in our Torah portion, long before “Jew” (יהודי, pronounced: *Yehudi*) which derives from Judah (יהודה). After the first global-scale conflict between the kings of Mesopotamia and the kings of the Jordan River Valley, which back then was known as the Valley of Sidim, Abram’s nephew Lot was taken captive and “the sole survivor came and told Abram, the Hebrew...”¹ (וַיְבֹא הַפְּלִיט וַיַּגֵּד (לְאַבְרָם הָעֵבֶר)).

Why was Abram called “the Hebrew” (הָעֵבֶר)? The word itself stems from the 3-letter root עבר,² which generally means “to cross over,”³ or to “move through.” What did Abram (Abraham) cross over that was so important it became part of his name? The Torah tells us that, he (together with his father and brothers⁴) crossed over

the Euphrates River, a major geographical demarcation line between Mesopotamia (the land between the rivers—between the Euphrates and the Tigris rivers, or present-day Iraq⁵). But Abram did not just cross over the Euphrates. He continued, on God’s instruction, to travel south into the Land of Canaan, the land between the river (this time the Jordan River) and the Mediterranean Sea and once there, he carried on moving through the land (from north to south), “Abram moved through the land”⁶ (וַיַּעֲבֹר אַבְרָם בְּאֶרֶץ). Moving through, as noted, uses the same verb as crossing over.

The same verb also means “the past” (עָבַר, pronounced *avar*), as well as sin (עֲבִירָה), because a sin means crossing over a forbidden line. Because of this a delinquent or “sinner” is known as an *avaryan* (עֲבָרִין), which could also mean that someone who feels like a sinner is stuck to their past. Because God gave us the incredible remedy known as *teshuvah*, returning to Him, by confessing our sins (in the present) and taking upon ourselves to refrain from them in the future. Learn from Abram the Hebrew—the one who crosses over: If

1. Genesis 14:13.

2. Incidentally, this is the first appearance of the word “Hebrew” and its three-letter root in the entire Bible.

3. It is easy to hear the phonetic similarity of *over* to עבר, pronounced *avar*. We will see many such phonetic resemblances in this series. They all apparently stem from ages past, when the Torah tells us that humanity spoke a single language—the one spoken since Adam and Eve: Hebrew.

4. Genesis 11:27. See also Joshua 24:2, “Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the river [Euphrates]—

Terach, father of Abraham and father of Nachor—and they served other Gods.”

5. If you ever hear someone say that Abraham—and by extension all Jews, his descendants—was Iraqi, this is the reason.

6. Genesis 12:6.

you find yourself stuck in your past, do *teshuvah* and cross over the river of time to the present and to the future. Do not live in a subconscious past.

Indeed, it takes faith to believe that God wants to forgive our sins. Abram's faith was so unique that the Sages explain the word "Hebrew" (עברי) to mean that Abram not only crossed over a physical river, he also crossed over a cultural and religious barrier, moving beyond the boundaries of accepted thought by choosing to believe in one God who is everything.⁷

One more point about "Hebrew." Abram was the 20th generation of humanity from Adam. His forefather was a man named Ever (עבר),⁸ whose two sons were Peleg and Yoktan.⁹ So being a Hebrew also indicates that one is a descendant of Ever. In fact, the value of "Hebrew" (עברי), 282 is the sum of the names Peleg (פלג) and Yoktan (יֶקְטָן)!

THE FIRST COPY/PASTE IN HISTORY

Since the introduction of the graphic desktop somewhere in the last quarter of the previous century, copying and pasting has become a staple of life. How do you say "copy/paste" in Modern Hebrew? We say *ha'atek/hadbek* (העתק/הדבק). The first word, *ha'atek* literally means "copy." Its three-letter root is עתק, and its first mention in the Bible is in our *parashah*, "From there he [Abram] moved [copied his camp] to the mountains east of Bethel"¹⁰

(וַיַּעֲתֶק מִשָּׁם הָהָרָה מִקֶּדֶם לְבֵית אֵל). There is only one additional instance of this root used in the Pentateuch, this one regarding Isaac, "He moved from there and dug another well" (וַיַּעֲתֶק מִשָּׁם וַיַּחְפֹּר בְּאֵר אֲחֵרָת).

In these two verses, the root means "to move." Later in the Tanach, it takes on other meanings, but before we look at these notice that whereas Abraham moves to ascend the mountain, Isaac moves to descend to a place where he can dig a new well. These are opposite directions. You can move/copy yourself up to a higher place, or you can move/copy yourself down to a lower place.

OUR GENETIC CODE

The same root, עתק, also means "ancient,"¹¹ as in the verse, "And the records are ancient"¹² (וְהַדְּבָרִים עֲתִיקִים). It also means "intense" or "robust," as in the verse, "Be silent those lying lips that speak intensely against the *tzaddik* with arrogance and disdain"¹³ (תִּשְׁקֹט הַלִּשָּׁנָה שֶׁפְּתֵי שָׁקֶר). Sometimes it also means an "abundance" as in, "Riches and honor belong to me, an abundance of wealth and success"¹⁴ (עֲשֹׂר וְכִבּוֹד אֵתִי הוּן). There is even one source that implies "copying" a text(!), in the verse, "these too are the proverbs of Solomon that were copied by the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah"¹⁵ (גַּם אֵלֶּה מִשְׁלֵי שְׁלֹמֹה אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱתִיקוּ אַנְשֵׁי חֶזְקִיָּה מֶלֶךְ יְהוּדָה).

7. *Bereishit Rabbah* 42:13; *The Inner Dimension*, p. 36.

8. Genesis 11:16.

9. Peleg was so named because the Tower of Babylon was built in his generation and his descendants dispersed from there having lost the ability to communicate in one language; see note 3 above.

10. Genesis 12:8.

11. For the various meanings of three-letter roots in the Tanach, we normally consult Rabbi David Kimchi's *Sefer HaShorashim*. Another important reference is *Mandelkern's Concordance of the Tanach*.

12. 1 Chronicles 4:23.

13. Psalms 31:19 and elsewhere.

14. Proverbs 8:18.

15. Ibid. 25:1.

When we combine these meanings together, they suggest another modern connection to one of the greatest scientific discoveries: our genetic code, which is copied from parent to child in all forms of life. The genetic code (DNA) is the most robust part of all living organisms, and it is also the most abundant, replicated in every cell in the organism. There is no Hebrew word for DNA. In fact, “genetic code” is boringly translated as, *tzofen genet* (צפון גנטי). But Torah speaks of a similar concept, which it calls “the Luz bone”¹⁶ and from which the entire body will be reconstructed during the Resurrection of the Dead, when God chooses to recreate those who merit life in the World to Come. Like the present theory regarding DNA, the Luz bone can be used to recreate the entire body. Incredibly, the value of “Luz bone” (עצם הלuz) is 248, the number of organs in the (male) body and the value of “Abraham” (אַבְרָהָם), the first to copy/paste as above.

THE HIGHEST CROWN

There is one more meaning of עתק that became the most important in Kabbalah. Its origin is in the verse, “and cover the Ancient One”¹⁷ (וּלְמַכְסֵה עִתִּיק).

16. *Vayikra Rabbah* 18:1:

The emperor Hadrian asked Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya: “From where will the Holy blessed One make man blossom in the future?” He replied: “From the Luz bone attached to the spine.” He said to him: “Can you prove this to me?” He brought one before him. He placed it in water, but it did not dissolve. He ground it in a mill, but it was not ground. He placed it in fire, but it did not burn. He placed it on an anvil and began striking it with a hammer. The anvil divided and the hammer split, but it was to no avail.

17. Isaiah 23:18.

Although most translators of Isaiah render these words as referring to “durable [or stately] clothing,” the Sages say¹⁸ that they refer to either “one who conceals [covers] what the Ancient of Days concealed” or to “one who reveals what the Ancient of Days concealed.” Without trying to reconcile the opposite interpretations, both agree that they refer to God, who is referred to in the Book of Daniel¹⁹ as the “Ancient of Days” (עֲתִיק יוֹמִין), pronounced *Atik Yomin*. Going back to our original explanation of this verb, עתק, as (re)move, this can also mean “He who is removed from days,” i.e., “He who is above time.” In either case, in Kabbalah, based on the Zohar’s many references to this term, *Atik Yomin* is considered the upper half of the *sefirah* of crown, the source of all types of spiritual pleasure.

Returning to the two opinions regarding “and cover the Ancient One”²⁰ (וּלְמַכְסֵה עִתִּיק). It turns out that both are represented in Kabbalah. In the description of *Atik Yomin* in the *Zohar*, part of it (the top) is revealed and part of it (the bottom) is concealed. Still, how did “cover the Ancient One” become revealing what the Ancient One concealed? One of the most important principles in Kabbalah is that to be revealed, one must be concealed. How is that, you ask? In our reality, to

18. *Pesachim* 119a.

19. Daniel 7:9, “As I looked on, thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days sat, His garment like white snow.” Obviously, this is metaphoric language used to describe some aspect of Godliness that Daniel saw in his mind’s eye. See also the beautiful blessing that was given by the Sages including this aspect of “the Ancient of Days” in *Berachot* 17a.

20. Isaiah 23:18.

be seen, to be understood, to become public requires some sort of covering. To be seen, we put on clothing—the naked body cannot be tolerated. To understand a concept, we couch it in a metaphor or allegory—our minds grasp things more easily when they are presented in familiar terms. To become a public icon, one needs to have a “trademark”—we need some regular emblem or logo with which to associate a person or thing. Consider sunlight: to provide light and warmth, there must be a vessel into which sunlight enters, for example the Earth’s atmosphere. Otherwise, as energetic as sunlight is, the interplanetary space through which it travels (from the Sun to the Earth) remains cold and dark.

This is the Kabbalistic principle known as enclothement (התלבשות). The revealed, higher part of *Atik Yomin* identified in Chasidut with our faculty of faith has no vessel, it has no enclothement. Faith without “faith in...” something (like the 13 Principles of Faith written by Maimonides or the 9 Principles of Faith of the Torah’s inner dimension²¹) remains ephemeral and only a vague feeling inside us. But when enclothed within concrete principles, faith becomes the most potent force of life. At the same time, the lower part of *Atik Yomin*, identified with all manners of spiritual pleasure in Chasidut, is encased in a very tight vessel that usually prevents us from feeling the pleasure inherent in serving God.

The connection between *Atik Yomin*

(specifically its higher part) and faith is beautifully illustrated in the first appearance of the three-letter root of the word faith (אמונה) in the Torah, also in our *parashah*. Not surprisingly, Abraham is the first to believe and is therefore known as the head of all believers.²² At the age of 86, God promised him a son, and he believed God’s promise, despite the clear limitations of his age. Incredibly, the value of the entire verse, “And he had faith in Havayah and He considered it a kindness”²³ (והאמן ביהוה ויחשבה לו צדקה) is the same as the value of *Atik Yomin* (עתיק יומין)—both equal 696. In fact, though conjugated as a verb, “and he had faith,” the letters of the first appearance in the Torah of the root of “faith” (והאמן) can be permuted to spell the noun “faith” (אמונה).

SARAH SEES THE FUTURE

In the Torah, Sarah, Abraham’s wife and partner in his spiritual mission, is also referred to as Yiscah.²⁴ *Rashi* affirms that Yiscah is in fact Sarah and that she was named Yiscah (יסכה), from the three-letter root שכה, which means “to gaze,” because she could see the future through Divine inspiration.²⁵ Notice that the left-sided *shin*, called *sin* is changed into a *samech* in Yiscah. This is common in Hebrew, since both letters are pronounced the same.²⁶

22. Based on Song of Songs 4:8, which refers to Abraham (*Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 4:3).

23. Genesis 15:7.

24. Ibid. 11:29.

25. *Megillah* 14a.

26. In fact, because the *samech* is interchangeable with the *sin*, there are Torah scholars who discount it as an independent letter (together with the letter *tet*—ט); these are the only two letters that appear less than 2000 times in the Pentateuch.

21. See our series on these two sets of principles of faith beginning with *Wonders* (issue 198) for *parashat Shelach*, 5786.

Sarah's ability to see the future is particularly revealed when she sought to banish Hagar and Yishmael due to the negative influence she perceived they were exerting upon Isaac.²⁷ This brought great anguish to Abraham, whose greatest trait was loving-kindness. Yet in this case, his love blinded him to certain negative realities that only Sarah was able to see clearly. God in fact directly commands Abraham to listen to Sarah's voice in this matter.²⁸ Sarah is considered by tradition to not only have been an equal to the spiritual stature of Abraham, but even to have superseded him in the realm of prophecy.²⁹

SARAH IS ROOTED IN "ISRAEL"

The two-letter root or gate (*sha'ar*) of the word Israel is שר, which is also the two-letter root of "ruler," or "sovereign." Thus, her name Sarah, can be translated as "princess."³⁰ The Jewish people are God's emissaries to infuse the world with an awareness and appreciation of God and His Oneness.

It is significant that of all the Patriarchs and Matriarchs, it is Sarah who is the most intrinsically connected to the name "Israel." According to Jewish law, Jewishness is determined through the mother. This is one allusion derived from

the name of Sarah woven into the name Israel. At the very beginning of Jewish history, it was in fact Sarah who forced the issue that Isaac, the son of Abraham and Sarah, would be the inheritor of the new path that Abraham and Sarah had forged in the world, as discussed above.

FROM SARAI TO SARAH

One final insight about Sarah's name. When Moses sent the twelve spies, he added the letter *yud* to Hosea's name (הושע) to strengthen him, and thus it became Yehoshua (יהושע), or Joshua.³¹ The Sages trace the *yud* added to Hosea's name to Sarah, whose name was initially Sarai. When God commanded Abraham to circumcise, he also told him that from now on, his wife Sarai (שרי) would be known as Sarah (שרה).³² The Sages explain that the letter *yud* has masculine energy which Joshua needed, but which was preventing Sarai from giving birth. The letter *hei* on the other hand represents feminine energy.³³ Once the change had been made, Sarah could give birth to Isaac and Joshua could become the conqueror of the Land of Canaan.

27. Genesis 21:9–13; *Bava Batra* 58a.

28. *Ibid.* 21:12.

29. *Shemot Rabbah* 1:1; *The Hebrew Letters*, p.111.

30. *Tosefta Berachot* 1:14.

31. Numbers 13:16.

32. *Bereishit Rabbah* 47:1.

33. The differences in energy between the letters are clearly demonstrated in God's essential Name, *Havayah*, where *yud* is the father principle (*Abba*) and the two letters *hei* are the mother principle (*Imma*) and the feminine counterpart (*Nukva*).

LECH LECHA GO TO YOURSELF

This article appeared as a small pamphlet titled Lech Lecha in 5757 (1997) and was later published by Gal Einai as part of the collection of HaRav Ginsburgh's articles known as Essa Einai in 5758 (1998). This article is based on some of the same foundations as another article titled, "Openness, Identity, and Maturity" also printed in Essa Einai.

It is being published here in English for the first time, in relation to parashat Lech Lecha and with some minor editorial changes.

FINDING YOUR TRUE SELF

God's first words to Abraham, the first Jew, are *Lech Lecha*, "Go to yourself":

Go [to] yourself from your land, from your birthplace, and from your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you, and I will make your name great, and you shall be a blessing. And I will bless those who bless you, and he who curses you I will curse, and all the families of the earth shall be blessed through you.¹

The Torah is eternal and its message is meant for every soul, in every generation, in every part of the world. Thus, God's first words to Abraham resonate and reverberate through history with an eternal message. First and foremost, the Jew hears this Divine command to Abraham and understands that God is instructing him or her personally, that they too must be independent and free of all dependence upon the illusory, so-called natural values of society, culture, and family. Every

individual must set out on the path of life in search of his true self—"go to yourself."²

The essence can only be revealed in the place where God chooses to make the individual's name known. Only there, can the person be shown to the world—"to the land that [i.e., where] I will show you." There, his true *mazal* and destiny³ await him—it is there that "I will make you into a great nation, etc."—and there

2 *Mei HaShilo'ach* writes in the beginning of his commentary on *Lech Lecha*:

Our patriarch Abraham began to investigate and seek after the root of his life once he realized that it is inconceivable that all the desires of this world cannot be defined as "true life." For all worldly desires only serve to remove the numerous worries and obstacles we face. Once all worries are negated, what is the true core of life upon which the world was created? To answer this question, God said to him, "*Lech Lecha*," meaning "Go forward" to yourself, to your true source, for truly anything else in this world cannot be called "life," and the main point of life you shall find in yourself. "You will rejoice in God, in the holy One of Israel you will glory" (Isaiah 41:16), this is what life is.

3 Note that the Land of Israel was divided into plots by a lottery (Numbers 26:55), indicating that the connection between individuals and the plots where they live in the Land of Israel was determined with super-rational authority.

1 Genesis 12:1–3.

he will become an influencer, a light that illuminates the many—“and all the families of the earth shall be blessed through you.”

In the education of a Jewish child (and likewise an adult), this essential teaching and its practical directives for all generations, are governed by the quintessential instruction regarding education: “educate a youth according to his way; even when he grows old, he will not depart from it.”⁴ It is incumbent upon the educator who is genuinely devoted to his student to inquire into and seek out each child’s essential charge, his individual character, and his unique mission in life, to help him develop his own senses and talents, through which he will merit to find his portion and inheritance in Torah and in God so that Godliness will be revealed within his heart. This principle is further illustrated by the Chasidic explanation of the phrase, “our God, and the God of our fathers”⁵: first, one is obligated to connect with “our God,” and only afterward, to the “God of our fathers.” There is a verse in the Torah that demonstrates the same principle, “this is my God, and I will glorify Him; the God of my father, and I will exalt Him,”⁶—first “my God,” and only afterward “the God of my father.”

SELF-IMAGE AND THE COLLECTIVE BOND

In the search for one’s true self, *lech lecha*—“go to yourself”—there are two interpretations in Chasidut.⁷ One interpretation (according to the Arizal)

explains “*lech lecha*” as a movement from below to above, from the mundane to the supernal. According to this interpretation, “to the land that I will show you” refers to the supernal land, which is actually the supernal Congregation of Israel, the source of the souls of the entire House of Israel. A second interpretation (according to the *Zohar*) explains “*lech lecha*” as a movement from above to below. According to this interpretation, “to the land that I will show you” refers specifically to the physical Land of Israel in this world.⁸ Both “these and these are the words of the living God.”⁹ Additionally, King David said, “I shall walk before *Havayah* in the lands of the living.”¹⁰ “I shall walk” (אֶתְהַלֵּךְ) is in the reflexive form and thus refers to walking to oneself, just like “*lech lecha*.”¹¹ The reference to “the lands of the living” in the plural also refers to two aspects of “land”: to the supernal land and to the physical land.

These two lands also allude to two aspects of will, because the word “land” (אֶרֶץ) in Hebrew connotes will—“why is it called land (אֶרֶץ)? Because it desired (רָצָה) to do the will of its Creator.”¹² The supernal will within the soul is the desire to be included within God’s essence, which is above all reason and knowledge, even the reason and knowledge that is according to the revealed Torah given to us. The lower mundane will, the will associated with the physical land is the lower will within our soul, which follows the rationale of the

4 Proverbs 22:6.

5 *Amidah*, first blessing.

6 Exodus 15:2.

7 See Rebbe Hillel of Paritch, *Pelach HaRimon*, beginning of *Lech Lecha*.

8 See *Keter Shem Tov* (Kehot ed.), 26.

9 *Eiruvim* 13b.

10 Psalms 116:9.

11 Yechezkel 1:14.

12 *Bereishit Rabbah* 5:8.

mitzvot of our holy Torah, all of which are practical *mitzvot* to be performed in the mundane and physical reality.

According to the two interpretations above, the service of “*lech lecha*” calls upon us to free ourselves from our self-image—composed of both our innate self-image, together with the self-image that has been shaped over the course of years spent in pursuit of material and spiritual success for the sake of aggrandizing ourselves both to ourselves and to others—and to see our individual self as it is rooted and included within the all-inclusive Congregation of Israel (“go forth and see”¹³).

“*Lech lecha*” from below to above means his going out from the separate individual to the collective—to the general soul of the generation, the soul of the “*tzaddik yesod olam*” [the *tzaddik* who is the foundation of the world],¹⁴ the extension of Moses that is present in every single generation.¹⁵ That is, he identifies with the collective inasmuch as he is “bound up” [*achid*] within the soul of the Nasi, the leader of the generation, who stands, from his shoulders upward, taller as it were than all the people of his generation,¹⁶ except that from the height of his stature he continually descends, “from the mountain to the people,”¹⁷ to provide the people, all types of goodness, whether physical or spiritual. Every single person must see himself as included within the soul of the *tzaddik* from which we learn the service of complete submission and giving over of oneself to fulfill the instructions of

the *tzaddik* to his generation.

“*Lech lecha*” from above to below means his going out from himself, as a man of stature, to identify, with everlasting honesty, with the collective specifically as it is reflected in the plain folk, to feel himself dwelling among his people (in his land), giving of himself to the other (who appears lower than him) with a true love of Israel, with all his heart and soul, to do good for him with all that is within his power, in body and in soul. Here his own essence is reflected in the other who is lower than him in particular, and, in general, in the people of his generation, according to their condition and standing wherever they may be (“and you shall seek from there”¹⁸, and consider this well).

DISCOVERING ONE’S TALENTS

We thus find that in the instruction of “*lech lecha*” there is, as it were, a thing and its opposite. On the one hand, man is instructed to be independent—free of all dependencies. On the other hand, he is shown that the way to this is the way of absolute nullification of the sense of having a separate ego. The opposites point to freeing yourself from your false separate and particular self and aspiring toward your true self, which is rooted within the collective—both the collective that is above you, whose embodiment in our world is the *tzaddik* of the generation, and the collective as it seemingly stands below you, the people of your generation as they are.

The truth itself provides the guidance and instructions needed to pursue it. There

13 Song of Songs 3:11.

14 Proverbs 10:25.

15 *Tikkunei Zohar*, 69.

16 1 Samuel 9:2; 10:23.

17 Exodus 19:14.

18 Deuteronomy 4:29.

can be no independence for a Jew—not for the individual nor for the collective—except by nullifying the ego and returning to Zion and to Jerusalem.

Returning to Zion refers to a return to “the point of Zion”—also known as the inner point of the heart—where the will, the deepest yearning of the heart (רעוּתַּא דְּלִבָּא) can be found. This is where one experiences the supernal will within the soul, will that lies above all rational thought. Likewise, the value of “Zion” (צִיּוֹן) is the same as “Joseph” (יוֹסֵף)—for he is the *tzaddik yesod olam*, the *tzaddik* who is a foundation of the world for that generation.

Returning to Jerusalem, whose name literally means “the wholeness of awe [of God],” within the people of Israel, regardless of their state. Regarding each individual, Jerusalem refers to the lower will, which follows the Torah’s rationale and the knowledge it reveals. Practically speaking, Jerusalem reflects the service of *tzedakah*, both spiritually and physically, the commandment referred to simply as “the *mitzvah*” in the Jerusalem Talmud.

Parents must entrust their children with true educators who are aware and dedicated to their role¹⁹: to help his student develop the special talent with which he was graced from Heaven out of an awareness (which flows from the educator to the student) that the entire purpose of the use of his talent is not in order to build his character—that is, to cultivate a separate ego, God forbid—but rather to serve as a means of going out from his first

self (his first nature), in search of his true self, as it is included within the collective.

The student must understand that his talent or talents were entrusted in his hands from Above in order to bring about *nachat ru’ach* above and *nachat ru’ach* below. To the extent that he devotes his talents, and their utility, for holiness, for God, for His Torah, and for His people, so will he fulfill within his soul, “go to yourself, from your land, etc., to the land that I will show you.”

A PARTNER IN CREATION

Once the student merits coming to his Promised Land, he will be able to reach a complete and true actualization of his talent; he merits to express his innermost and truest self through the use of his own special talent, a thing that was not at all possible for him before his coming to the land.

The story of Genesis, as it precedes Abraham and continues through his life, parallels the stages in the development of every individual’s special talent:

Before arriving in the Promised Land, the individual resembles Noah who is described as one of “those with little faith”²⁰ (מִקְטְנֵי אֱמֶנָה)—which can also be read as “those of little artistry” (מִקְטְנֵי אֶמְנוּת)—indicating that he is not yet capable of fully bringing forth his true artistic talent. Indeed, the calling of every Jew is to be a partner with the Holy blessed One in the work of Creation—“the work of an artist’s hands.”²¹ The Sages interpret the verse,

²⁰ *Sotah* 48b.

²¹ From the liturgy of Yom Kippur (“as clay in the hand of the potter”).

¹⁹ An individual who did not benefit from such a relationship must at least become his own educator.

“[working] with the king in his craft”²² as describing the souls of the righteous whom God consulted before Creation. However, the more literal meaning of the verse is that those who are close to the king are those who work with him in his craft. Thus, the goal of every Jew should be to become a partner in Creation, using his or her talents to benefit all of Creation.

When that happens, one merits to see how the promise God made to Abraham—“all the families of the earth shall be blessed through you”—comes about automatically and of its own accord, i.e., without the

need to aggrandize oneself before others. Rather, when the individual’s talent is fully revealed and applied, “I will make your name great” and its influence spreads over the entire world.²³ This is also what happened to Abraham who ultimately came to “*Emek Shaveh*, that is, the King’s Valley.” It was so named because it was “the valley where all the nations agreed and crowned Abraham over them.”²⁴

22 1 Chronicles 4:23.

23 A well-known Chasidic expression, in the name of the Rebbe Rayatz.

24 *Rashi* on Bereishit 14:17 (based on *Bereishit Rabbah*).

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