

(1) God said to Avram, “Go yourself [לך], from your land and from your birthplace and from your father’s home to the Land that I will show you.”

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LIFE INSIDE AND OUTSIDE OF THE LAND OF ISRAEL

Consider the following questions:

1. Why does the *pasuk* not mention that God appeared to Avram, before telling us that He spoke to him? This would have been particularly appropriate in light of the fact that this is the very first time that God communicated with Avram.
2. Why does the verse say “לך לך,” Go “*yourself*”? It seems superfluous.
3. Why did Avram need to be told to leave: (a) his land; (b) his birthplace; and (c) his father’s home? Having being instructed to go to the Land that God would show him, it is obvious that he would have to leave these three places.
4. Why are the three places listed in reverse order? A person first leaves his home, then his birthplace (town), and only lastly his land (country)!
5. Why does God say, “to the Land that I will **show** you” and not “to the Land that I will tell you”? After all, this is how God expressed Himself to Avram when He told him to sacrifice Yitzchak *on one of the mountains that I will tell you* (Bereishis 22:2), and how He expressed Himself to Yitzchak when he told him, “*Dwell in the Land which I will tell you*” (*ibid.* 26:2).

(א) וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל־אַבְרָם לֵךְ־לְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ־עוֹרְכֵי וּמִמּוֹלְדֹתֶיךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ אֶל־
הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲרָאָה׃

The answer to all these questions is based on the fact that God wanted to teach Avram (and all future generations) the fundamental difference between life in the Land of Israel and life outside the Land of Israel.

There are four domains where it may be difficult to appreciate the advantage of being in the Land of Israel: (1) that of the individual; (2) that of the Land; (3) that of the constellations; and (4) that of the higher spiritual realms.

- (1) A person might say of himself, “I can be just as fine a person in the Diaspora as I can be in the Land of Israel. How does being in the Land of Israel give me anything extra?”
- (2) A person might say of the Land, “The physical body of land is all one, stretching out north, south, east, and west; all of it is joined together in one mass. What difference is there between one section of it and another, between the part inside the borders of the Land of Israel and outside of it?”
- (3) A person might say regarding the stars, “Why should the influence that the constellations exert over our lives be any less in the Land of Israel than in the rest of the world?¹ Do the constellations not revolve around the entire earth?”

1. The Alshich is referring to the fact that God has appointed different constellations to guide the affairs of different lands; and he is asking how the Land of Israel is different. See Ramban, *Vayikra* 18:25 at length. [It should be understood that it is not the constellations themselves that exert influence, but rather the angels that serve as the ministers over those constellations. See Ramban *ibid.*; see also Ramban, *Vayikra* 16:8, where he writes that the angels are in effect the “souls” of the heavenly “bodies.”]

- (4) A person might philosophize, “What difference can there be between the higher spiritual realm that corresponds to the Land of Israel and the higher spiritual realm that corresponds to the rest of the world? All the spiritual realms exist at a most lofty level, infinitely elevated above our lowly world. How can any differences between them be of relevance to us?”

It is the specific wording of our *pasuk* that brings us to a true understanding of all these matters.

The Person

God tells Avram, “לך לך,” literally, “Go to yourself.” You must realize that you are not the same person outside the Land of Israel as you are inside the Land.

Anyone who possesses true wisdom knows that the souls of Avram and his descendants — the Jewish people — are not like the souls of the people of other nations. The former come from the realm of holiness, the World of Unity, whereas the latter come from the “external realms,” the World of Separation.² For this reason all the souls of the Jewish people are considered as if they are one, as it says, *All the soul* [נַפְשׁוֹ, in the singular] *that came with Yaakov to Egypt ... numbered sixty-six* (*Bereishis* 46:26). This does not apply to the other nations, as it says, *Eisav took ... all the souls* [נַפְשׁוֹת, in the plural] *of his household* (*Bereishis* 36:6).³

Furthermore, the Kabbalistic masters have said that a spiritual

2. From the Alshich’s remarks later in his commentary to our *pasuk*, it appears that the term “external realms” (חיצוניים) refers to an inferior and impure part of the realm of angels. [The Alshich discusses this more in depth in his commentary at the end of *Parashas Noach*.] As mentioned below, the souls of the people of other nations come from these realms, as the angels of impurity who dwell there have jurisdiction over those nations, while the souls of the people of Israel come from under the throne of God Himself, Who rules alone over the Jewish people.

3. The Alshich adds that it is due to the fact that all of Israel share one soul that the halachah declares, כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל עֲרֵבִים זֶה לָזֶה, “All Jews are responsible for one another.”

entity does not remove itself completely from its original location when it transfers to a new venue. Its root remains in place while the rest of it expands and stretches outward, as it were, to its new location. Therefore, even when the lofty souls of the Jewish people descend to this lowly world, the roots (i.e., the original, higher parts) of their souls remain beneath the wings of the *Shechinah*, close to God.⁴ Even while living in this world, a righteous and holy person remains attached to the higher parts of his soul above, and through this to God Himself. He is therefore considered truly alive, for he is connected to the Living God. On the other hand, the sins of an evil person create a barrier of impurity between himself and the higher parts of his soul above. In this way he detaches himself from the Living God and is considered spiritually dead.⁵

However, the ability of a righteous person to remain attached to the higher parts of his soul above also depends on where he resides in the world below. The Land of Israel is holy and directly parallels the upper worlds where the souls of the Jewish people are rooted.⁶ In addition, since the very air of the Land of Israel is holy, the loftier parts of the soul can be “drawn down” and connected to its lower parts. In this way, the *tzaddik* becomes truly complete, without any separation between the different components of his soul.

However, if he lives outside of the Land of Israel, the spiritually impure air⁷ acts as a barrier that prevents the higher parts

4. There are three basic parts, or levels, to the soul: *nefesh*, *ruach*, and *neshamah*. There are two additional levels of the soul that are higher still: *chayah* and *yechidah*. These levels belong to supernal realms and remain completely in Heaven.

5. Compare *Berachos* 18b, where the Gemara states that the wicked are called “dead” even while they are still alive.

6. It is for this reason, the Alshich writes, that both the Land of Israel and the upper spiritual world are both called אֶרֶץ הַחַיִּים, the land of the living (see, respectively, *Tehillim* 116:9 and 27:13 with Rashi).

7. The Sages decreed that the lands outside Eretz Yisrael, and even their airspace, are *tamei*. See *Ohalos* 2:3, *Shabbos* 15b.

of his soul from uniting with him directly and completely. The upper spiritual realm has no direct connection to the lands of other nations; the soul must traverse a twisted path through the impure air of an impure land to reach the Jewish person who is dwelling there amidst impurity.

Now we can understand what God is telling Avram: “Don’t think for a moment that you are the same person outside the Land of Israel as you will be when you get to it. At present you cannot fully attach yourself to the roots of your soul; you are therefore incomplete, separated from your true self. But when you go to the Land of Israel, as I am commanding you, you will be able to attach yourself completely to those roots; you will become wholly connected to your true self. Therefore, God told Avram, “*לך לך*,” “Go to yourself!” You are going on a journey to a land where you will connect with yourself, where you will attach yourself to your higher spiritual roots — and through this to Me. By doing this you will perfect and elevate yourself to a higher level of being.” [This answers Question 2.]

Answer to
Question 2

The Land

God told Avram, “Go... *from your land*.” He was telling him: “Even though the physical world is all one mass, don’t imagine that when you travel away from your home you will still be in the same land. That is not the case. When you travel from here to the Land of Israel, you will be leaving “your [previous] land,” for the Land of Israel is a completely separate entity from the rest of the world. This is especially so according to the view of the Sages (*Yalkut Shimoni*, *Mishlei* #943) who hold that God created the Land of Israel before all the other lands.⁸ [This answers Question 3a.]

Answer to
Question 3a

8. *Mishlei* 8:25–26 states: *I [the Torah] was created... before God made the Land and its environs*. These Sages explain that “the Land” refers to the Land of Israel and “its environs” refers to all the other lands.

The Constellations

God told Avram, “Go ... *from*” מוֹלְדֶּךָ — normally translated as “*your birthplace*.” But the word מוֹלְדֶּךָ can also mean the constellation under the influence of which a person is born. Accordingly, this phrase means: “Go out from [under the influence of] your constellation.” By leaving his present residence and moving to Eretz Yisrael, Avram would be removing himself from the influence of the stars.⁹ He would thereby gain tremendously, for according to his constellation he was not destined to have children, and in the Land of Israel he would be able to have them. [This answers Question 3b.]

Answer to
Question 3b

The Higher Spiritual Realms

God said to Avram, “Go ... *from your father’s home*.” Now, a person has no real home in this transient world; here he is just a visitor, and his days are like a passing shadow.¹⁰ When speaking of a man’s “home,” we are speaking of his true and eternal home, which is in the spiritual realms above.¹¹ However, while the eternal home of a Jew is located under the wings of the *Shechinah*, the eternal home of the rest of humanity is located beneath the guardian angels of the nations — in the exterior part of the world of the angels. Accordingly, when God said to Avram, “Go ... *from your father’s home*,” He was telling him: “When you leave your current dwelling place and go to Eretz Yisrael, it is as if you are also making a corresponding move in the higher worlds, from the realm of the angels of impurity (which corresponds to your current location) to a place closer to God, the realm of the *Shechinah* (which corresponds to the Land of Israel). Similarly, you will be moving away from the level of “*your father’s home*,” which is the level of Terach, who did

9. For Hashem oversees Eretz Yisrael Himself, without using intermediaries. See Ramban, *Vayikra* 18:25.

10. See *Tehillim* 144:4.

11. As in *Koheles* 12:5, which speaks of man going “to his eternal home” (Alshich).

(2) “And I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you and I will make your name great, and you will be a *berachah*.”

(3) “And I will bless those who bless you and those who curse you I will curse and through you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

(4) And Avram went as God instructed him and Lot went with him; and Avram was seventy five years old when he left Haran.

not convert as you did and thus remained under the jurisdiction of the guardian angels. You will reach a new level that corresponds to your Jewish status — i.e., under the direct jurisdiction of Hashem. [This answers Questions 3c and 4.]¹²

We asked two other questions above: Why doesn't the *pasuk* say first that God appeared to Avram before telling us that He spoke to him (Question 1)? And why does the *pasuk* say “to the Land that I will show you” and not “to the Land that I will tell you” (Question 5)?

The answer is that the Torah is once again teaching us that Avram would attain a much higher level when he reached the Land of Israel. Now he was still in an impure land where the *Shechinah* did not dwell and where his soul was separated from its more exalted roots (as explained above). As a result, while Avram was worthy of having God speak to him, he was not worthy of having God appear to him. Only in Eretz Yisrael would he merit to experience an actual vision of the Divine.¹³ [This answers Question 1.]

12. In Question 4 we noted that the three (*land*, *birthplace*, and *home*) seem to be stated in reverse order. But based on the above discussion, the order is completely valid: the first (*land*) addresses the physical earth; the second (*birthplace*) addresses the higher realm of the constellations; and the third (*home*) addresses the highest, spiritual realm.

13. The Alshich points out that we also find much the same phenomenon with respect to Ya'akov. When he was still living with Lavan in Charan the Torah states, *An angel of God said to me in the dream, “Yaakov!”* (Bereishis 31:11). But when he returned to Eretz Yisrael, it states, *God [Himself] appeared to him again* (ibid. 35:9).

- (ב) וְאֶעֱשֶׂה לְגוֹי גָדוֹל וְאֶבְרַכְךָ וְאֶגְדְּלָה שְׁמִי וְהָיָה בְרַכָּה.
 (ג) וְאֶבְרַכְּהָ מִבְּרַכְיֶךָ וּמִמְקַלְלֶךָ אֲדָר וְנִבְרַכְוּ בְךָ כָּל מִשְׁפַּחַת הָאָדָמָה.
 (ד) וַיֵּלֶךְ אַבְרָם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֱלֹהֵי ה' וַיֵּלֶךְ אֶתוֹ לוֹט וְאַבְרָם בְּיַחְמֹשׁ שָׁנִים וְשִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה בְּצֵאתוֹ מִחָרָן.

However, God did not want Avram to think that it was a sign of Divine displeasure that He had not yet appeared to him. He wanted Avram to understand that it was merely due to the fact that he was still outside the Land of Israel. God therefore told him, לך לך — go to the Land of Israel and “connect to yourself,” to your higher spiritual roots; there you will see actual Divine visions and not just hear a Divine voice.” This is the meaning of the phrase, “to the Land that I will show you”: Hashem was saying, “Go to the Land where I will show you visions, the Land where you will attain a greater closeness to Me and experience a higher level of Divine revelation.”¹⁴ [This answers Question 5.]

Answer to
Question 5

GOD'S BLESSING TO AVRAM

Consider the following questions:

1. Why did God need to promise Avram all these rewards? Surely Avram would do God's bidding without any promise of reward, just as he had done at the *Akeidah*.

14. The Alshich notes that the Torah makes a point of telling us that this indeed occurred when Avram arrived at his destination. For verses 12:6–7 state, *Avram traveled though the Land [of Israel] ... and God appeared to him and said ... Avram built an altar there to God Who had appeared to him*. The seemingly redundant terminology is not redundant at all: Avram built an altar to thank God for appearing to him — an experience he had not had during his years of living in *chutz la'aretz*.