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**WEEKLY
SHMUESS
LECH LECHA
Disconnecting**

**DRASHA FROM THE
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Lech Lecha - Disconnecting¹

“Go From Your Land” - The Test of Leaving Behind The Past

In *Parshas Lech Lecha*, Avraham Avinu is told by Hashem, “Go from your land, from your birthplace, from the house of your father, to the land which I will show you.”

Our Sages list this as one of the “ten *nisyonos* (trials)” which Avraham was tested with, and we are also taught by our Sages the rule, “*Maaseh Avos, Siman L’Banim*” – “The actions of the forefathers is a sign for the children.” Just as Avraham Avinu went through ten trials where he was tested by Hashem, so does every soul go through “ten trials”.

This does not mean that we are given the same exact tests as Avraham Avinu, but our tests are a reflection of those tests. We are not always told by Hashem to leave our country and move elsewhere, but the lesson of it always remains true in our own lives, where we are confronted with the spiritual test of having to leave behind our past in general.

Avraham Avinu’s test was that he had to disconnect from his roots, and leave it all behind to go out there into the world. His country, his birthplace, the house of his father, were all different aspects that bound him to his past, and he was told to disconnect from it and leave it all behind, in order to become elevated. This shows us that there exists in the soul an ability to disconnect from that which we are powerfully connected to, to that which we feel permanence in, on This World.

The Journey of The Soul

Before Hashem created the world, He created our souls. The Jewish nation was the “first” of Hashem’s thoughts. Each of our souls has been existing for at least 5,777 years – that’s our real age. However, this does not mean a person will automatically identify with his soul. The Sages say that “Moshiach will not come until all souls of the “*guf*” (the collective “body” of the Jewish people) are used up, and Rashi describes this “*guf*” (collective “body”) as a place where all souls are contained. The souls come down onto this lowly world where they must all do Hashem’s will and serve Him, and then return to Him eventually. But our root is in Heaven. Hashem decrees on our soul to come down here, to leaves its roots - and this is like Avraham’s test of being told to leave his birthplace.

When we first come down here, we didn’t want to be here, and we feel like we’ve been taken away from our home. This is how we start out in life, and the Sages state that this is one of the reasons that an infant cries as soon as it enters the world. A fetus in its mother’s womb learns Torah and it is in a place that is entirely good, and it has no desire to leave. It is forced to leave when Hashem tells it that it must go out into the world. We are born forcibly. The baby’s entrance into

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this world is by force and thus he cries. He has been severed from his source, where everything was good.

A child grows up in his parent's home and now his soul inside has come to get used to this new "home." Then he leaves home at some point and goes to kindergarten and then into first grade. Each time, he goes through some kind of disconnection from a previous state. There is the difficulty of transition from stage to stage. Every year in his development, a person keeps going through disconnections from his previous level. As the years go on, there are more and more disconnections. The child then goes on to *yeshiva* and to *mesivta* (high school); he learns how to be away from his parents, and he feels difficulty with this.

All of our life is a cycle of disconnection, connection, and disconnection again. We are born forcibly, but we are also forced to die when the time comes. We get used to the place we are in – This World – and then we don't want to leave it. We are forced to be born, and then we get used to it and we need to be forced in order to leave the world.

In the way that Hashem has designed it, life moves us around from place to place. A person on this world grows more connected to it with time; he becomes chained to it. He is strongly attached to his family, to his house, to his possessions, to his friends, and to other things. These connections are eventually taken from a person, forcibly; he doesn't want to let go of them.

But Avraham *Avinu* was told "*Go from your land, from your birthplace, from the house of your father.*" The soul becomes disconnected from its root in Heaven in order to come down onto this world, and at death, the soul doesn't want to leave this world, now that it has become attached to it. If a person lived a life in which he grew attached to materialism, he will suffer a disconnection from it upon death. But if a person lived a spiritual life, an internal kind of life, a Torah life – at death, he will only disconnect from this world in the physical sense. The spiritual world, the inner world he had lived through his *neshamah* on this world, does not become severed from him; it continues and it intensifies after death.

One Must Know How To Disconnect From The Past

In whatever stage a person is at in his life, though, there are always disconnections; there is always a cycle of connecting and disconnecting. If a person is not able to leave behind his past like Avraham *Avinu*, he doesn't know how to disconnect, and he won't be able to leave immaturity behind, and he continues his childish antics. There are people who get older and supposedly mature, but they remain with a lot of immaturity, because it is too hard for them to disconnect from the past.

One needs to be aware that everything on this world is temporary; every time and period of your life is a temporary situation. There is always past, present and future. One needs to be able to disconnect from the past and embrace a new future, which now becomes his present. Sometimes a person must disconnect totally from the past, and sometimes only partially, but there must always be some disconnection from the past, as part of one's *avodah* (inner task).

The Power of Absolute Connection

To understand this deeply, the depths of our *neshamah* (Divine soul) has a power to connect, on an absolute and eternal level, to Hashem. There are “three ties that are bound with each other – Hashem, Torah, and Yisrael”. Our connection to Hashem, Torah, and Yisrael can never be severed. One does not leave these connections, *chas v’shalom*; there is no need to leave it just as Avraham was told to leave the home of Terach.

Terach was an idol worshipper and he was not a Jewish soul, so it was necessary for Avraham to be severed from his father Terach’s home. But the depths of our *neshamah* contains an absolute connection to Hashem, Torah, and Yisrael. The *nisayon* (test) which we have on this world is: Will we form any absolute connection, other than with Hashem, Torah, and *Klal Yisrael*?

If one feels connected to anything other than Hashem, Torah, and Yisrael, he will be captured by that force, and he won’t be able to fully connect to either Hashem, Torah, or Yisrael. The deep power in the soul to have absolute connection must be channeled to Hashem, Torah, and Yisrael. If it is used for anything else, it cannot fully connect to Hashem, Torah, and Yisrael.

Therefore Hashem made our life in a way that we must constantly disconnect from situations. When one is not a *bar daas* (a sensible, mature person), he has a painful time when he is separated from a situation, because he was never prepared for the disconnection. When he wasn’t prepared for the disconnection, deep down he feels connected to the past situation.

The past is entirely imagination, as Rav Dessler writes. A person is still connected to his past [which presently exists only in an imaginary realm, and not in reality] because he does not want to leave it; according to his perspective, he doesn’t feel emotionally capable of disconnecting from the past. If a person can’t disconnect from the past, he cannot “shake off the dust and rise.” If he can’t disconnect from a previous situation that was good, and surely if he can’t disconnect from a situation in his life that is bad, he is really using his power of absolute connection to remain attached to something that is not to Hashem, Torah, or Yisrael.

One who is a *bar daas* realizes the truth of life, and he knows that there is only one absolute connection we need to have: to Hashem, Torah, and Yisrael. Then he understands that all other connections we have are temporary and that they are not absolute.

The Close Relationships We Enjoy On This World Are Temporary

Even the deepest connections we have on this world to others are not forever. The bond between a father and a son, and a husband and wife, and other close relationships on this world, are not guaranteed to remain in the Next World. A husband and wife in this lifetime won’t necessarily be spouses in another lifetime; there is a concept of *zivug rishon* (first spouse) and *zivug sheini* (second spouse), and *Chazal* say that one must pray for a spouse lest someone else take away his spouse from him; a person’s spouse can be switched for someone else. Just because he is married to this spouse on this world doesn’t mean that they will share a connection that is rooted in Above.

All connections with others that we have on this world to others are not absolute; what purpose, then, do they serve? They are all a *moshol* (parable) to get to the *nimshal* (lesson) – the lesson that they all teach is to show us that we can have an absolute connection - to Hashem, and to his Torah, and to the depth of the *neshamos* of *Klal Yisrael*.

This deep perspective towards life, when one understands it, changes his view entirely. The *nisayon* of Avraham *Avinu*, when he was told to leave his past behind, was not just a *nisayon* for Avraham *Avinu*, but a *nisayon* that comes to all people, for there is a rule of “*maaseh avos siman l’banim*”, “actions of the forefathers are the sign for the children.” All connections on this world are temporary, and they are only here to help us understand what our relationship to Hashem must be like.

The father-son relationship, the father-daughter relationship, and all other close relationships, are all a *nisayon* to us: If we will attach ourselves too much to them, or if we will use them to get closer to Hashem. The father-son relationship, and the husband-wife relationship, and other deep relationships with others, are given to us by Hashem so that we can understand what it is like to have a deep attachment with another. We are meant to channel this power to become attached to Hashem - but not everyone sees it as a *moshol*.

It is explained in *sefarim hakedoshim* that a father and son might have even been enemies in a previous lifetime, and in the next lifetime, the father becomes the son and the son becomes the father. Or, it could be that their souls do not share the same soul root from Above, and they really have little to do with each other [in the higher, spiritual dimension]. If so, why are they brought together on this world into a father-son relationship? It serves as a *moshol* (parable) to get to the *nimshal* (lesson). It is to show them that if a deep connection can be formed between a father and son [who may not even bear any relation in their soul root], there must be a deep connection that one can have with Hashem.

The Determining Factor

The less a person is aware of this, the more connected to the world he will be, and leaving the world will feel very hard for him. The *Gemara* says that *tzaddikim* have an easy time leaving this world, whereas the wicked have a painful time leaving the world, because the wicked have become very connected to this world as they were here. But if someone lived internally – if he was connected to Hashem, to Torah, to *ruchniyus* (spirituality), he has a much easier time leaving the world when his time comes, because he feels less connected to this world.

That is the simple understanding of it, and now we are saying a deeper understanding: the transition at death is not simply affected by how connected a person was to this world or not. It is an issue of *what a person has acquired for his soul* as he lived on this world. If he realized on this world that all “connections” here are but temporary, he has an easier time disconnecting from it at death.

Even Gan Eden Is Not Forever

Here is an example of the difference between a temporary connection and a permanent connection.

We know that whatever connection we have to anything on this world must only be temporary, and this it is not forever. What about our soul, when it comes to settle in *Gan Eden* (and not *Gehinnom*, for *Gehinnom* is also a stage of transition in between this world and the next world, thus it is also temporary)? How much connection must it have to *Gan Eden*?

It would seem, simply speaking, that if we should view This World as a temporary dwelling that we are living in, *Gan Eden* is our true place where we live permanently. *Gan Eden* is the place where the *neshamos* enjoy spiritual bliss; it sounds like a place which we become eternally connected to, after we go there. But *Gan Eden* only lasts within this 6000 year era we are in.² How much time do we have until the year 6000? After the year 6000, Hashem renews the world. Then what?

After 6000, the world is ‘destroyed’,³ which is explained as a renewed world, and it will be the eternal *Olam HaBa*. So even *Gan Eden* is temporary! And even when a soul is in *Gan Eden*, it is not always there, because Chazal state that Torah scholars never have total *menuchah* (serenity), not in this world and not in the next.⁴ So even a person’s place in *Gan Eden* does not stay the same.

Just as a person can wander in this world between different cities, towns, countries, so can the soul wander from place to place in *Gan Eden*. *Chazal* explain that sometimes a person’s soul is judged on the day of his death and he receives a verdict from Heaven that he is not worthy of rising to the higher realms, and instead he is sent back as a *gilgul* (soul reincarnation) on this world, in order to become meritorious, by having more Torah and mitzvos.

In either case, the soul does not always stay in one place in *Gan Eden*. If a person doesn’t merit going to *Gan Eden*, he comes back to this world again – either so that he can become more meritorious for himself, or because he is needed for others (which is a separate discussion). If he is meritorious, he rises to higher realms, but he does not stay in one place there. He may come back down to this world in order to become meritorious for himself, or because he is needed for others, or because he is needed in the communal sense (which is the *avodah* of *tzaddikim*), or he merits to rise to higher realms (and all souls will one day leave *Gan Eden* and go to *Olam HaBa*). But in either case, the soul never stays permanently in one place.

The superficial perspective is that this world is temporary and *Gan Eden* is permanent, but the truer and deeper perspective is that all connections are temporary. This is a huge overhaul in perspective.

² As explained by the Ramchal in *Derech Hashem* and *Daas Tevunos*

³ *Sanhedrin* 97b

⁴ *Berachos* 64a

The Deeper Perspective

If one looks at This World as temporary connection, he might think that he does have permanent connections to other things which are spiritual, so he will separate himself from the connection to this world, which is a mixture of good and evil; and it is mostly evil and only partially good. It is a wonderful level if one reaches this understanding. However, it is still not the truthful perspective; it is like a body without a soul, because he is missing the deeper perspective.

The true perspective is that must not feel connected to anything, other than Hashem. When Avraham Avinu was told to leave his homeland, his *nisayon* was that he was being told not to feel connected to anything except for Hashem. Not only was he being told to disconnect from his physical homeland and family. He was being told that he must make an inward change: not to feel connected to anything except for Hashem, Torah, and Yisrael.

Practically Working On This Concept (Detaching From This World)

Now let us understand how we can live by this concept on a more practical level: One needs to slowly go about detaching from This World, and in a sensible manner, without acting too extreme.

But it is not only This World that we need to feel disconnected from. That is only the external part of our job. The inner part of our job is to acquire the deep perspective that we must not feel powerfully connected to anything other than Hashem.

Compare this to a person who needs to build a house, and he first has to buy a plot of land for the house to go in. Does he buy a few inches of land, or a mound of dirt, or a bigger space of land? He will only be able to build the house if he buys a considerable amount of land. When one disconnects himself from This World, there are two different attitudes he can have. Either he will want to disconnect from just This World, or he will take this perspective even deeper, and he will be ready to disconnect from everything, even from good things – because he realizes that the only powerful connection he must feel is towards Hashem, Torah, and Yisrael.

One needs *daas* (mental awareness) in order to acquire anything. The more *daas* a person has, the better of a quality his acquisition will have. Disconnecting from this world enables a person to “acquire” [the Next World]. But what will he acquire? He will acquire [the Next World] according to the quality of his *daas* – according to how much he was willing to disconnect from.

These are deep words about the soul. Avraham Avinu is compared to the *neshamah* (soul) and Sarah is compared to the *guf* (body). A Torah scholar is also called “*neshamah*”, and the Torah is called the “*neshamah*” of the world. In order to live a life of *neshamah* on This World (in spite of the fact that we also have a body), a person must not only feel disconnected from the materialism of This World, but he must ultimately feel a disconnection from anything other than Hashem, Torah, and Yisrael.

Leaving Behind The Sukkah

Here is a practical example that may help us actualize this concept.

We have just left Rosh HaShanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkos. On Sukkos, when a person takes the Four Species and he sat in the *sukkah*, if he feels even a little holiness, he could feel a connection to the Four Species and to the *sukkah*. It is hard to leave behind the *sukkah* and the four species. If someone didn't feel that it was hard to disconnect from it, he is simply not sensitive to the spiritual. But if someone did feel that it was hard to part from the *sukkah* and from the four species, he now has an *avodah* to go deeper than this. He can be aware that "Although I have parted ways from the *sukkah* and from the Four Species, I am not parting ways from the presence of the *Shechinah* which had settled upon the *sukkah*!"

We cannot invalidate the difficulty in leaving behind the holy objects used in our performance of *mitzvos*. There is a well-known story about the Vilna *Gaon* on his deathbed, when he was holding tightly onto his *tzitzis* and he cried over how much he did not want to part from it. But it is this pain of disconnection which brings a person to the true perspective. A person leaves the *sukkah* and he will miss it, and he certainly needs to feel pained at leaving it. But we also know that the *Shechinah* comes to dwell on the *sukkah*, as the *Gemara* says; and a person can always remain connected to it.

In Summary

This is the depth about life.

When it comes to disconnecting from the materialism of this world, one needs to disconnect from it slowly and sensibly. It is painful for a person to detach from it, but that is man's *avodah*. He must eventually reach the point where it does not feel painful for him to be disconnected from This World, and that will be the root his spiritual success on this world.

The next stage in the *avodah* is to disconnect even from our connection to the spiritual, such as the example of leaving the *sukkah* behind. At first a person must certainly feel that it is painful to leave behind a *mitzvah*; he had been connected to it and now he is leaving it, so it should certainly feel painful. He must feel that he will miss the *sukkah* when he leaves it. But after he feels this pain, he must then realize that this pain can bring him to the more inner understanding: although he is leaving behind the *sukkah*, he is not becoming disconnected from the *Shechinah* that came to the *sukkah*.

This is only one example, but there are many more examples of this concept. When a person loses a parent, this is very hard and painful for him; he is aware of the loss. But along with the pain, he can come to understand who his real "Father" is – his eternal Father whom he will always have. He has then succeeded in using the parent-child relationship as a *moshol* (parable) to get to the *nimshal* (lesson).

In Conclusion

This deep way to live life enables a person to detach from the materialism of This World, from the view of the body, and to instead use the “tools” and “garments” which Hashem has given us, as a way to disconnect from everything else that is other than Hashem, Torah, and *Klal Yisrael*; so that we can channel the power of absolute connection towards a complete, true connection with Hashem.