



CHAPTER XXXIX
LECH LECHA

1. NOW THE LORD SAID UNTO ABRAM: GET THEE OUT OF THY COUNTRY, etc. (XII, 1). R. Isaac commenced his discourse with, *Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house* (Ps. XLV, 11). Said R. Isaac: This may be compared to a man who was travelling from place to place when he saw a building in flames.¹ Is it possible that the building lacks a person to look after it? he wondered. The owner of the building looked out and said, 'I am the owner of the building.' Similarly, because Abraham our father said, 'Is it conceivable that the world is without a guide?' the Holy One, blessed be He, looked out and said to him, 'I am the Guide, the Sovereign of the Universe.' *So shall the king desire thy beauty* (*ib.* 12): i.e. to make thee glorious in the world. *For he is thy Lord, and do homage unto him* (*ib.*): hence, THE LORD SAID UNTO ABRAHAM: GET THEE, etc.

2. R. Berekiah commenced: *Thine ointments have a*

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PARSHAT LECH L'CHA

“And God said to Avram, get yourself from your country” (Bereshit, 12:1)

It is written (Yesahya, 44:3), “When I will pour water on the thirsty, and drip moisture on the dry lands, thus I will pour My Spirit” Avraham Avinu began to investigate and seek after the own source of his life, for he realized that it is inconceivable that all the lusts of this world could be called true life, for all this-worldly desires and lusts only serve to remove the numerous anxieties and obstacles we face. Then once all the anxieties have been negated, what will be the true core of life upon which the world was created? Concerning this the blessed God said to him, “*Lech L'cha*,” move yourself forward, meaning to yourself, to your true source, for truly all the matters of this world cannot be termed “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” (Yesahya, 41:16), this is The life.

On this it is written in the Midrash (*Bereshit Rabba*, Ch. 39:1), “Rabbi Yitschok said a parable. A traveler was passing from place to place, and saw a city burning in flames. He said, ‘shall you say that this city has no master?’ The master of the city glanced upon him and said, ‘I am the master of the city.’ So it was that since our forefather Avraham said, ‘shall you say that this world has no master?’ the Holy One, blessed be He, glanced upon him and said, ‘I am the master of the world.’” At first glance it would seem that the Midrash should have said “He looked unto him,” and not “upon him.” However, when our forefather Avraham saw the actions of the generation of the tower of Babel (who thought they could overthrow God Himself), which is the meaning of the city burning in flames, it was a great wonder in his eyes, and pondering who could create this disturbed his soul. Then the master of the city

glanced upon him, meaning that the Holy One, blessed be He, answered him, "Do you not see by yourself that the whole world is not stumped by this difficulty, and there is not one among them who considered asking who made this. Yet for you it is a wonder. From the very infuriation of your heart you may estimate that certainly there must be a Creator who suffers the entire world, and permeates the entire world, and He is the one who awakened your heart to this." And this is the specific use of "upon you," meaning that from your very question you yourself managed to come up with a sufficient answer.

More on the same Midrash. "He saw a city burning in flames, and began to ask, 'could it be that this city has no master?' So the master of the city glanced upon him . . ." Concerning this, when Avraham Avinu began to contemplate the great changes that swept the world with the generation of the flood and the generation of the tower of Babel, he then became deeply agitated in his heart in order to understand who created these. The Holy One, blessed be He, answered him that the portion of Jacob was different from the rest of the world. It is the way of the nations that when they see a major change in the management of the world, then they begin to amend their ways and want to understand the reason for the change. Yet when the world runs according to the way of nature (without any apparent changes), then none among them take it upon themselves to understand, for they do not believe in the blessed God to the extent that the ways of nature are also in His hands. They do not know that without Him nothing has dominion in the world. Yet the portion of Jacob are not like these, for we recognize that He has formed all, meaning that Israel believes that were the blessed God not to suffer the world (and all its imperfections), then nothing would be able to exist even for a moment. Thus it is, when Avraham Avinu wanted to apprehend his Creator based on changes in the natural order, the blessed God said to him, "*Lech L'cha*, get thee away," meaning to the portion of Jacob who recognizes that even the natural order of things are a product of God's greatness. (As in the saying of the holy Baal Shem Tov on *hasgacha pratit* [individual providence], "He sees everything, He knows everything. He knows how many times the leaf will turn over in the dust before the wind comes to take it away." Betsalel.)

"Get yourself from your land . . ." (Bereshit, 12:1)

Meaning, from your place. Avraham Avinu was renowned throughout the entire world for his great wisdom, and there was no other sage like him knowledgeable in all manners of wisdom, as the Midrash states

blessed God showed him that all the world stands upon him, for an angel is one-third of the world, as it is written in the Midrash. (*Bereshit Rabba*, 68:12, where it says that an angel is the high officer [*shalish*, see *Shirat haYam*, *Shemot* 15:4] of the world, and based on the similarity of the words interprets that the size of an angel is a third [*shlish*] of the world, using the verse in Daniel when he saw an angel [10:6], "His body was like *tarshish* [beryl, a brilliant gem in the *urim* and *tummim*, on the high priest's breastplate, and also meaning the finest ship of the ancient world]," and as Rashi notes, like a ship on the high sea, and the ocean is a third of the world.) He showed him that the entire world exists in the merit of Avraham Avinu.

"... and he looked, and he saw three people standing on [in front of] him." (*Bereshit*, 18:2)

Why did the angels come before the birth of Yitschok? The world did not deserve to have born into it a soul as precious as that of Yitschok, for it was as if the very *Shechina*, the divine presence, were descending into the world. Yitschok's attribute is that of *Gevurah* (strength), and the *Shechina* is itself called *Gevurah*, as it says at Mount Sinai, "thus Moshe heard from the mouth of *Gevurah*" (see *Eruvin*, 54b). This necessitated the arrival of the three angels in order that the atmosphere of the world would be filled with *Kedusha* (holiness), for "an angel is a third of the world" (see end of previous passage) and then afterward Yitschok could be born.

✓ *"And Sarah denied it, saying, I did not laugh"* (*Bereshit*, 18:15) ✓

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There is a great depth in this matter. The saying of the Gemara (*Berachot*, 33b), "Rabbi Chanina said, all is in the hands of Heaven, except for the fear of Heaven," applies only to the extent of the understanding of the mortal intellect. Yet truly, everything is in the hands of Heaven including the fear of Heaven, yet God hid His way (this consciousness) in the world. The attribute of Yitschok Avinu was to recognize that even the fear of Heaven comes from God, yet the world was not worthy of a consciousness as precious as this. Therefore Sarah found it necessary to say, "But my lord is old [too old to father children]." Here it seems as if she is denying that all is in the hands of Heaven. Accordingly the Holy One, blessed be He, showed her, measure for measure,

that even the fear of Heaven comes from Him, and were it not for the concealment of this understanding from her and from the world, Yitschok could not have been born into the world. For the preciousness of the attribute of Yitschok was to clarify and to show that even the fear of Heaven comes from God, and even all the transgressions of Israel occurred under the watch of the blessed God's providence. By means of this God's great name is exalted and sanctified! Understand this, for it is exceedingly deep.

(See in the Gemara [*Avoda Zara*, 4b], "Rabbi Yehusha ben Levi said, Israel only made the golden calf to support the position of *ba'alei tshuva* [penitents], as it is written (*Devarim*, 5:26), 'would it were that they gave their hearts . . . to fear Me all the days.' R. Yehoshua ben Levi said in the name of R. Shimon b. Yochai, David was not capable of this action [his sin with Bathsheba] as it is written (*Tehillim*, 109:22), 'my heart is empty [of the evil inclination] within me [and therefore it has no power over me], and Israel was not supposed to be capable of making the golden calf, as it is written, 'would that they gave their hearts to fear Me.' So why did they make it? To show you, that if an individual sinned they say to him that it was entirely up to the individual, and if a whole community sinned then it was the responsibility of the entire community." Rashi comments: "to support the position of *ba'alei tshuva*," that is to say that they were courageous and controlled their evil natures, and it was against their very abilities to give in to the evil inclination; yet it was a decree of the King, for their evil natures to overcome them. Yet it was in order to respond to the penitents, to show that there was value in their return, for perhaps one would sin and say, "there is no need for me to return to the good, for God would not accept me anyway." Then they could say to him, "go and learn from the incident with the golden cow, how they made atonement and their penance was accepted."

And if so, what made it so that the tribes would fulfill the mitzvah of giving the half-shekel, it was to atone for their worship of the golden calf, and if the sin of the golden calf caused them to fulfill the mitzvah of the half-shekel, how much more so would be the effect of the merit of the *mitzvot* that they are doing! And in the Jerusalem Talmud it is written [*Shekalim*, Ch. 2, *halacha* 3], "since they sold the first born of Rachel for twenty silver pieces, thus each one must redeem his first born son for twenty silver pieces." From the emendations of Yerucham Lainer.)

*"All who hear will laugh from
rejoicing in me"* (Bereshit, 21:6)

"Hearing" means understanding. It is said (*Bereshit Rabba*, 45:8),

too did Yosef conduct himself with this attribute, and with humility, like his father.

For this reason the blessed God was also exacting with Yosef haTsaddik down to a hairsbreadth, for even though these attributes are good, one must anyhow trust in God also, for the actions done on the part of man are not an everlasting structure. Even though Yosef guarded himself greatly, and from him emerged all the kings of Israel who were called great, as it says in the Midrash (*Bereshit Rabba*, 84:14), "It was the custom of great men to wear sackcloth [to suffer], for Yehoram dressed in sackcloth," yet still, it is said of them (*Kings* 1, 11:39), "yet not all the days." This means that (even through all their suffering) an everlasting structure was not to be in their portion, but rather in the portion of Yehuda. Even though he (Yosef) acted so his righteousness would stand in the world throughout the 6,000 years (until the redemption), still, the everlasting structure was the portion of Yehuda. And Yosef haTsaddik continually voiced the complaint—why is it that the blessed God causes all the actions of my brother Yehuda to succeed, yet with me, the Holy One, blessed be He, is exacting down to a hairsbreadth?

So, in an answer to his query, the blessed God showed him the example of the wine steward and the baker. Every king has two attendants, one a wine steward and the other a baker. Truly, with the wine steward, if the king finds a fly in his cup it is not proper to punish him, for what could he do? The fly is an independent living creature, and if once the cup has been passed to the king the fly decides to land into the cup, then it is not possible to guard from it. Yet with the baker, if there is a pebble in the bread, isn't it his fault, for the pebble is not a living being and he could have prevented it? In this the blessed God shows Yosef that he corresponds to the baker, for the blessed God established him in a bright and clean place over against Eisav, in order that Eisav would not have any room for accusation. This is why established Yosef against him, clean in all respects, as it is written (*Ovadiyah*, 1:18), "and the house of Yosef is a flame [and the house of Eisav straw . . . and they shall devour them]." He gave him strength to be able to overcome all his desires. Then if some (impure) aspect comes to him from without, it is counted against him as a crime. Only out of the blessed God's love for Yosef did He put another man in his place, and kill the baker, as it is written (*Yesahya*, 43:4), "and I will give men in your place." From this he understood the matter.

Yehuda corresponds to the wine steward, for King David is called "the King's jester" (*Zohar Shemot*, 107a), and the songs of David are sung over the wine libation offerings. Truly, with Yehuda, concerning the incident with Tamar and all the happenings of the tribe of Yehuda

that from this would emerge

“And Yehuda drew close to him.” (Bereshit, 44:18)

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The power that the blessed God instilled in the tribe of Yehuda is that he will never give up, even if he fears certain things will overcome him. We find in the previous *Parsha* that he said, “we are my lord’s servants,” (*Bereshit* 45:16) and it seems as if he began to give up hope, thinking to himself that it was a mistake making himself liable to losing his share in two worlds over Binyamin. In this *Parsha* he strengthens himself greatly before the blessed God by saying, even though I have done improperly, still, it is in the ability of the blessed God to save me. This is, “and Yehuda drew close to him,” “to him” meaning to the innermost depths of Yosef’s heart, to such an extent that he would be forced to reveal himself to them. For all these verses (at the beginning of the *Parsha*) are a claim against the blessed God, with Yehuda supposing all the while that he was standing before and arguing with a

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Gentile king. Then when the blessed God sent them the salvation, then they saw that even in retrospect they were never in danger, for truly they were arguing with their brother.

Thus it will be in the future, when the blessed God will save us and redeem us, then God will show us that we were never in exile, and that a foreign nation never ruled over us, only God alone. This is the meaning of the verse (Tehillim, 37:10), "and a little more, and there is no evil one, and you considered his place, and there is nothing there," meaning that very soon evil will be banished. "And you considered," meaning the understanding of the heart, for if you want to understand its place, "there is nothing there," meaning that in it there was no power of governance over you.

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PARSHAT ACHARAI MOT

*“And it was, after the death of
the two sons of Aharon . . .
Speak to Aharon, do not come at all times
into the Holy Place” (Vayikra, 16:1–2)*

The explanation of “at all times,” *“b’col eit,”* is like “with all the desires of your soul,” *“b’col avat nafsheicha.”* (Be careful how you proceed) now that you have seen how all the *Kedusha* (holiness) of Nadav and Avihu did not save them from something that had the outward appearance of a sin in their coming close before God, for in their hearts there was an overpowering of love more than fear. Concerning this, He warned Aharon not to imagine in his soul that he had the power to save himself from their fate. Rather, he needed to guard himself more than them, to be extremely vigilant of this, and know that he must always look toward divine assistance. “Yet thus shall Aharon go” (next verse) teaches that Aharon should go before God in the same way that Nadav and Avihu did, with *Kedusha*, purity, and great trepidation.²⁵ However, in addition to how they went, God advised him to go with, “a bull for atonement.”

“Thus shall Aharon go” (Vayikra, 16:3)

It is written in the Midrash (*Bamidbar Rabba, Acharei Mot, 21*), “If you have made bundles of sins, make bundles of *mitzvot* corresponding to them. If you have been jealous [“high eyes,” meaning looking at what someone else has with jealousy], than place *totafot* [*tefillin*] between your eyes...” It would seem that the mitzvah corresponding to jealousy (“high eyes”) would be *tsitsit*, of which it is written, “and you shall see

(They have spoken well,) even though it seems like a kind of “bad eye,” God forbid, that they should be so exacting as to worry that the portion of their tribe would be a little smaller. Yet it is, that the land of Israel hints at the world to come, and then everything will be exact down to a hair’s breadth. For now (in this world) God has commanded us to extend ourselves and give charity, for the dimensions of one’s portion is not known. Yet in the days to come, “each one will be seated in his canopy, and [if one extends his boundaries] he will be burned by the canopy of his neighbor that is not his” (*Baba Batra* 75a).⁸⁶ Here, in the division of the land of Israel that hints at the world to come, it will be similar, and that is why the tribe of Yosef took care to be so exact.

✓ “... the tribe of the children of Yosef have spoken well.” (*Bamidbar*, 36:5)

DB 7

Why was the section of the tribe of Yosef’s claim written at the completion of the Torah?⁸⁷ Since it was only a temporary measure (for the generation entering the land), is to show Israel that “not by bread alone does man live, but by all that comes out of the mouth of God does man live” (*Devarim*, 8:3). “Bread” symbolizes the words of Torah, which are the principles necessary at all times for all souls without the slightest deviation from the source. These are the 613 *mitzvot*. The whole point is to understand at every moment the will of God in the words of Torah, knowing His will at all times, within the context of that particular time. Thus light emanates from the words of Torah to the hearts of Israel in order for them to understand the depth of the will of God, according to the time. Therefore this section was written after the completion of the entire Torah, in order to let Israel understand that details emerge from the Torah at all times, at each moment. The words of the Torah are words of advice to let man understand what the blessed God wants of us now, and to do it. Therefore this section was written (at the end), for it too is active only for a specific time.

NOTES

1. This Zohar is discussed in the *Mei HaShiloach* in *Parshat Ki Teitse*, “if you happen on a bird’s nest.”
2. Eyes hint at the Sanhedrin, as it is written in the *Eyts Chaiim* of the Ari’zal, (Gate 8, Ch. 1) the eye corresponds to wisdom, which are the vowels, and



PARSHAT KI TEITSEI

✓ *“When you go out to war against your enemy . . . and you take them captive”* (Devarim, 21:10)

(What is taken captive is) the good that exists in that nation. In each nation exists a good power, yet all the while it is among them it is in captivity. Then when it is brought into Israel it becomes good in its completeness. The good that exists with them is the desire. Any real power in that good is only temporary, yet the desire that is with them comes from the understanding that the power is lacking in completeness and must be entered into Israel. Thus, all the while that the desire is among them it is in captivity, for the power of desire comes only from the blessed God, and does not pertain to them, only to Israel.

“ . . . and you desire her, and take her for a wife, and bring her home . . . and shave her head . . . and remove her garment of captivity from her” (Devarim, 21:11-13)

In truth, everything that is pleasing in the eyes of Israel surely must have something good in it. Then afterward, one must undergo a process of clarification to determine if what is pleasing is an external appearance and not true beauty. This is the commandment (to remove her hair and enticing garments) to remove all external appearances. If she is then still pleasing in his eyes, then surely she contains something good.