

The CHASSIDUS PERSPECTIVE with Reb Yoel Kahn

Prepared by
Rabbi Yehudah Leib Altein



To hear this talk in Yiddish, visit:
MerkazAnash.com/cp/lechlecha5780

DESCENDING UPWARDS

Why do the *parshiyos* have names?

Many assume the names are there simply to make it easier to refer to the *parshiyos*. Words were chosen from the beginning of each *parshah*, and it was decided that these words would serve as the names of the *parshiyos*.

However, even if we will assume that this is how the names came about, they are certainly more than just methods of reference. This can be deduced with a *kal vachomer* from the *halachah* that if a person is called by a certain name for at least thirty days, it is considered to be his name. If thirty days of usage can make a name become Torah-sanctioned, all the more so the names of the *parshiyos*, which have been around for much, much longer!

These names were already used by the Rishonim—Rav Saadia Gaon and the Rambam, among others—and some of them can even be found in Mishnayos and Gemara. The *parshiyos* have been referred to in this way by Klal Yisroel and Gedolei Yisroel for more than a thousand years. It is clear that they are replete with meaning.

NOT JUST A NAME

All this is true even if we were to assume that these names were chosen simply to serve as names. In truth, however, it can be argued that there was a deeper intention: Specific names were selected that mirror the content of each *parshah*.

Here's one proof that this is the case:

Parshas Noach and Parshas Toldos both begin in a similar fashion—*Eileh toldos Noach* and *Eileh toldos Yitzchak*. *Eileh* alone cannot be a name, so we move on to the next words. Now, if the motive would simply be to choose a name, then logic dictates that the second word—Toldos—would be given to the earlier *parshah* (Noach). Since an identical name cannot be given to two *parshiyos*, when reaching the later *parshah*, the name that should be chosen is Yitzchak! Instead, however, the first *parshah* is called Noach and the second, Toldos!

This indicates that the reason certain names were selected was because they express the specific theme of that *parshah*.

ASCEND TO YOURSELF

Let's see how this idea applies to Parshas Lech Lecha.

"Lech" means to go. When used in reference to a *tzaddik* like

Avraham, it is obvious that the type of journeying meant by "Lech" is a positive one—traveling ever higher and higher and reaching ever greater heights.

Lech Lecha means that
we must "travel" until we
reach our true selves.

Moreover, the *parshah's* name is Lech Lecha, which can be translated as "go to yourself." What does this mean? Only a small part of the *neshamah* enters the physical body, while the main part remains Above. "Go to yourself" is a message for Avraham as well as for every Jew, that we must "travel" until we reach our true selves, namely, our *neshamah* as it exists Above.

It follows that the theme of Parshas Lech Lecha—as expressed in its name—is Avraham's journey to achieve increasingly higher and greater levels.

This fits very nicely with the beginning of the *parshah*, which states that Avraham traveled "*hanegbah*," southward. Rashi explains that this refers to Yerushalayim, and the Midrash adds that Avraham directed his steps to the future site of the Beis Hamikdash. Avraham's efforts to make his way closer to the *shechinah* certainly matches the *parshah's* name.

However, the very next *possuk* relates something quite different: "There was a famine in the land, and Avram descended to Mitzrayim." Instead of ascending higher (an *aliyah*), Avraham left Eretz Yisroel and descended to Mitzrayim (a *yeridah*)!

AVRAHAM'S FAME

The question gets stronger:

The objective of Avraham's journey to Eretz Yisroel was "*va'agallah shemecha*," to increase Avraham's fame. (The Midrash gives a metaphor from a flask of sweet-smelling herbs. When the flask is stationary, its scent is not felt, but when it is moved around, it gives off a pleasant aroma.)

Did Avraham care about fame and glory? Of course not. Avraham epitomized *bittul* and humility. What mattered to Avraham was that when *he* would become famous, Hashem's greatness would become known as well.

However, when Avraham was forced to leave Eretz Yisroel, people had reason to voice complaints against Hashem: "Is this what happens when Your servant comes to our land? This results in a famine?!"

Entering Mitzrayim was thus a *yeridah* not just for Avraham himself, but also for the glory of Hashem's name. To make matters worse, Sarah was then abducted by Pharaoh. True, he was unable to touch her, but it was not a pleasant occurrence.

Yet, the name of the *entire parshah*—including these events—is Lech Lecha, which indicates *aliyah*!

A YERIDAH WITH A PURPOSE

Maaseh avos siman labanim. Whatever occurred to our forefathers is what will occur to their offspring.

The Zohar details how this is so. Avraham's descent into Mitzrayim foretold the Egyptian exile. Avraham's subsequent departure signified the redemption from Mitzrayim. Just as Pharaoh showered Avraham with gifts, the Jews left Mitzrayim with great riches. And just as Pharaoh was unable to touch Sarah, the Egyptians had no control over the Jewish women.

Let's take a look at Golus Mitzrayim. At first glance, it was a tremendous *yeridah*. However, this *yeridah* enabled Bnei Yisroel to achieve an even greater *aliyah*—receiving the Torah at Har Sinai.

The Arizal explains that the Jews left Mitzrayim not only with material wealth, but also with spiritual treasures. Through being enslaved there for 210 years, they were able to collect the lofty sparks of holiness concealed within Mitzrayim, and this prepared them for Mattan Torah.

The same is true with Avraham. All the *yeridos* he underwent—the descent to Mitzrayim, the accompanying *chilul Hashem*, and Sarah's abduction—were only there so that he could achieve a greater *aliyah*: Avraham left Mitzrayim with great wealth, and everyone got the clear message not to mess around with Sarah.

BACKWARD PROGRESS

When a *yeridah* leads to an *aliyah*, it's not that the *yeridah* is separate from the *aliyah* and merely *leads* to it. Essentially, the *yeridah* itself is part of the *aliyah*.

Once, during *yechidus*, someone complained to the Rebbe that he

sometimes experiences *yeridos*. In reply, the Rebbe instructed him to try to jump across the table standing between them.

At first, the person didn't understand what the Rebbe wanted, but the Rebbe repeated his request that he jump over the table.

In preparation for the leap, the person took a step backward. Seeing this, the Rebbe stopped him and said, "You see? You wanted to move forward, yet, to do so, you took a step backward. Sometimes a *yeridah* is merely the first step of an *aliyah*!"

This is the key point: The *aliyah* is not just what the *yeridah* is *for*, but what it *is*.

UPWARDS TO GEULAH!

This is why the name of the *parshah* is Lech Lecha. Every event related in the *parshah* was part of Avraham's upward journey. But we don't understand Hashem's ways. Sometimes the journey takes the form of obvious *aliyos*, while at other times it involves challenges that seem to be *yeridos*. However, in truth they, too, were steps in Avraham's *aliyah* to Yerushalayim, to the Beis Hamikdash, and to *lecha*—his inner essence.

Maaseh avos siman labanim. The same is true with Golus Mitzrayim, as well as the dark *golus* in which we find ourselves today.

Just as Golus Mitzrayim was a preparation for Mattan Torah, the present *golus* is paving the way for the new depths of Torah that will be revealed when Moshiach comes. At times it might seem that we are going through dark and difficult times. However, we must know

that in essence they are all part of the *aliyah* toward the *geulah*. Our journey is bringing us ever closer to Yerushalayim and the third Beis Hamikdash!

For further study, see Likkutei Sichos, vol. 5, pp. 57–63

The challenges we encounter
in *golus* are all part of the
aliyah toward the *geulah*.

merkazanash.com
info@merkazanash.com
347.471.1770

Dedicated in honor of
the tireless director of Sichos In English

Rabbi Yonah Avtzon עי"ה
who led the way in disseminating
English Chassidus

by his children
Rabbi Yitzchok and Chanie Wolf שי"ח