



**RABBI AARON**

Editor, Torah Tidbits

**GOLDSCHIEDER**

# Attracted to *Kedusha*

Two simple words have resonated in the minds and hearts of our people for thousands of years: *Lech Lecha*.

The famed Chassidic Master, the Rebbe of Kotzk, once taught, “Not only did Avraham hear this call from heaven, but in every generation we are summoned to hear these words and allow them to pierce our hearts.”

What do these two words mean? What deeper message is contained within them?

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveichik zt”l (1903-1993) suggested three penetrating interpretations to explain its meaning (*Abraham’s Journey* pp. 49-50):

## 1. Transformed In the Land

*Rashi* spotlights the significance of the second term in the phrase *lech* (go) *lecha* (for you). The verse could have simply have stated “lech”, “Go to the land that I will show you.” What does it mean ‘go for you?’ *Rashi* answers that “you [Avraham] will only have the privilege of bearing a child in the land of Canaan. If you remain in *Ur Chasdim* this gift will never be yours.

A child will require a special *zechut*, a merit, that only presents when one is situated in the Land. Only there does one receive this benefit.”

Evidence of this notion is found in the Talmud where it explicitly states that it was the special merit of the holy Land that benefited Avraham (*Rosh Hashanah 16b*). The special merit of being in the land affords Avraham the opportunity to become the father of a great nation.

We are compelled to ask why was it necessary to be in the Land to receive the blessing? In response to this query The Rav quotes Yehudah Halevi, in his *Kuzari*, who explained that the uniqueness of the Land of Israel is that it is the ideal Land for the meeting between God and man (*Sefer Kuzari*, 2:9-14, 22 24). The *Kuzari* attributes metaphysical qualities to the Land and endows it with a spiritual climate: “The air of your land is the breath of life for our souls (*hayyei neshamot avir artzech*, Yehuda Halevi, *Tzion ha-lo tish’ali, Tisha Be’Av kinot*). The Ramban, in his commentary to Vayikra 18:25, followed in Halevi’s footsteps, as did the mystics. For them, the attribute of *kedusha*, holiness, ascribed to the Land of Israel is an objective metaphysical quality inherent in the Land (The Emergence of Ethical Man, pp.149-150).

The Rav once told the following story calling attention to the metaphysical quality contained in the Land. He shared the following in his eulogy for Rabbi Zev Gold, who was a leading figure in the Religious Zionist movement and one of the signatories of the Israeli Declaration of Independence.

Apparently, suggested the Rav, the term “Hebrew” embraces more than a geographical designation. It represents one who stands in a distinctive and a particular place

“I will never forget the evening in 5695 [1935] when I visited Rabbi [Zev] Gold in Ramat Gan in Eretz Yisrael. He took me out to the orange groves near his house. It was a beautiful night, the sky was a perfect blue and there were endless stars. The bright moon of Eretz Yisrael shone all over the enchanted beauty, from afar we could see the lights of the all-Jewish city of Tel Aviv glistening in the dark. The lights were telling us the thrilling and intoxicating news of the rebuilding of the Holy Land. Overwhelmed with emotion, Rabbi Gold gazed toward the horizon and then turned to me and said: “Whoever does not feel the presence of God in Eretz Yisrael on this beautiful night while looking at the magnificent moon and at these beckoning stars, breathing the clear and pure air filled with fragrance of blossoming growth, and above all when



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looking at the the glistening lights of the city that was built entirely by Jews, is simply blind.”

Rabbi Gold continued, “Rav Yehudah Halevi [1075-1141] was right when he said that prophecy flows unhindered in Eretz Yisrael and we need only a proper vessel to receive its message” [Kuzari 2:8-11].

As we stood there, Rabbi Gold picked up a small pebble and kissed it, to fulfill Rav Abba’s dictum in the Talmud that he would kiss the rocks of Akko [Ketuvot 112a]. That night, I thought to myself how insignificant I was compared to this special Jew who was able to experience the glory of God through the grandeur of the landscape of the Land of Israel” (The Rav, Vol. 2, Rakeffet, p. 118).

In sum, the Rav also expressed this exalted idea in these terms:

“Our relationship to Eretz Yisrael is that of *segulah*. Whenever *segulah* comes to the forefront, to the foreground, ratiocination resigns. You cannot rationalize events which revolve around *segulah*. There is an element of *diminuendos*, of the

frightening strange, and of the hidden ineffable in the *segulah’s* charisma” (Related by the Rav in a lecture at the RCA Annual Convention, 1975. ‘The Rav’ Vol. 2, Rakeffet, p.105).

## 2. The Ultimate Destination

The additional term *Lecha* (for you) in the phrase *Lech Lecha*, suggested the Rav, alludes to an act that will not be repeated but is final and complete. If God would have only said *lech*, it may have been understood to mean that Avraham was to journey to that place but could then choose to journey to another location.

The Rav quotes from the Song of Songs where the Shulamite continues to use different excuses not to join her beloved. The lover then knocks on the door and says: “Rise up, *kumi lach...*(2:10).” *Lach* in this context emphasizes the finality of the action.

Similarly the term *lecha*, in the context of Avraham’s journey to the Land suggests that it is final. There is great importance and significance to this act in the sense that one is not entitled to retreat from it or compromise. This same notion appears in the classic commentary of *B’chor Shor*; the emphasis of the command being: ‘Abandon your land entirely; do not entertain the notion of ever returning to it!’

## 3. To Be An Ivri

The word *Lecha*, ‘for you’, connotes going alone; *for you* in the singular tense. The act of leaving meant that Avraham would be required to make a break with his past and start anew. He would leave family



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and friends, his familiar surroundings. This idea is clearly spelled out in the words that follow the directive *lech lecha*: Go forth from your Land, and from your birthplace, and from your father's house. In other words, detach yourself from all your previous connections.

This notion is in consonance with the well known designation we attribute to Avraham; *Avraham* is called *Avraham Ha'ivri*. We as Jews are known as *ivrim*. What does the term *ivri* mean?

The Rav explained that the literal meaning of the word is a reference to the fact that Avraham came from the other side of the river (*Ivri* and *ever*, side, have a common root). His origin was Ur Kasdim. In other words, he was an immigrant to Canaan. But there must be greater importance than the fact that he came from over the river. Apparently, suggested the Rav, the term "Hebrew" embraces more than a geographical designation. It represents one who stands in a distinctive and a particular place. One who charts out a distinctive lifestyle which often stands in stark contrast to those who surround him. The Jew will forever be called *ivrim*, a people who pursue unique goals and aspirations. (The Rav Speaks, 5743, pp. 115-116).

For many of us who are living in the Land of Israel today, the words *Lech Lecha*, have special relevance and meaning. May each of us continue to be inspired and uplifted knowing that our journey to the Holy Land is the most sacred pursuit - may it bring us only blessing and joy! ■

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