



**RABBI JUDAH**

**MISCHEL**

Mashpiah, OU-NCSY  
Executive Director, Camp HASC  
Author of *Baderech: Along the Path of Teshuva* (Mosaica 2021)

## Lech Lecha: *Baderech...* On the Path

Reb Hillel Paritcher was a *baal avodah* and dedicated *chasid* of the Alter Rebbe and his successors. A Chasidic master in his own right, Reb Hillel was an intense *eved Hashem* known for his lengthy, meditative tefillah and his dedication and attachment to *tzadikim*.

One Wednesday morning while learning Torah in his hometown of Bobroisk, Reb Hillel was moved by a deep desire to spend Shabbos with his Rebbe in the city of Lubavitch, many miles away. But making it there in time for Shabbos was highly unlikely.

A young chassid eager to assist Reb Hillel offered to bring Reb Hillel to Lubavitch with his strong horses and new carriage; they could make it for Shabbos if they left right away and on condition that Reb Hillel would not take too much time in his

davening. They embarked on the journey and spent the night at a *kretchma*, a roadside inn.

In the morning, long after the young man had finished davening and his breakfast, Reb Hillel was still deeply engrossed in tefillah. Hours went by, and Reb Hillel showed no signs of letting up. The driver continuously checked on Reb Hillel, who remained in a state of *dveykus*, completely oblivious to the passing time.

When Reb Hillel finally completed his davening, the young man struggled to maintain his respectful tone and composure: “I just don’t understand! You so wanted to spend Shabbos with the Rebbe, and you promised to not shlep out your davening. It’s now well after noon, and there is no chance we will make it Lubavitch in time for Shabbos. We’ll have to stay here, or head back home! *Chaval!*”

“Young man,” sighed Reb Hillel, “let’s say you set out to Leipzig Fair with the intention of buying some rare and exclusive merchandise. While *ba-derech*, on the way, you happened to meet another merchant offering those very wares at a below-market price. What a find! Imagine how foolish one would have to be to insist

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on continuing on to Leipzig. The entire purpose of the journey is not to arrive at some city or another, but to acquire the intended merchandise.”

Reb Hillel's intense glare then focused on the young man: “Why does one go to their rebbe, if not to draw spirituality and direction in *avodas Hashem*, and to strengthen himself in *tefillah*? The goal and purpose of heading to Lubavitch was to be uplifted. I ask you: if on the way there — right here in this inn — my davening is strong and inspired, should I dump the merchandise and run to ‘Leipzig’?”

.....  
 מאל הארץ אשר ארא...

“...To the land that I will show you” (12:1)

Medrash Rabbah (*Bereishis Rabbah*, 39:1) compares Avraham Avinu's experience in our sedra to a wayfarer who encounters a palace aflame. As the palace burns and there seems to be no one who has taken responsibility, the wayfarer wonders aloud, “Is there no owner of this palace?!” Immediately, a window in the palace opens and the *ba'al ha-birah*, the master of the house, appears in it, gazing calmly at the wayfarer: “I am the owner of this palace.”

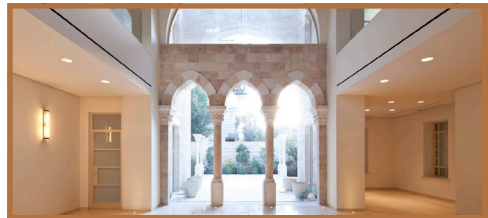
Avraham Avinu finds the world in

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urgent need of rectification, in an incomplete state. He recognizes that everything is ablaze, in a state of chaos and disorder. The fires of idolatry and displaced priorities engulf the palace of Creation. Not only has humanity seemed to turn its back on Hashem, but Hashem, the *Baal haBirah*, seems to be absent.

The Sefas Emes, Rebbe Yehuda Aryeh Leib Alter, zy'a, points out that it is this specific setting that spurred on the great mission Avraham Avinu was to undertake. Avraham needed to see the world as a burning palace, in dire need of salvation, yet with no caretaker. He also needed to “go out” of his land of birth without any specific instructions on what to do or where to go.

By responding to the non-specific, ambiguous call of *Lech Lecha*, the Sefas Emes explains that Avraham Avinu has already essentially accomplished his task. More than achieving a specific goal or reaching a defined destination, our main calling in Divine service is simply cultivating a desire to draw close Hashem. Hashem ‘enjoys’ more *nachas ruach*, satisfaction, as it were, from our *ratzon* and intention to “go out” and fulfill His will, than He does when we actually fulfill it.

Renowned psychologist and mindfulness guide, Rabbi Dr. Ben Epstein, has referenced Shel Silverstein’s “The Missing Piece”, the story of a Pacman-esque figure, an incomplete circle searching for love

and purpose, its “missing piece”. Hinted in this children’s classic is our misled search for completion. This is our “fundamental flaw”: our perceived demand for completion and our seeking in the outside world for it. The implied lesson is that it is possible to achieve meaning and wholeness, even without acquiring a specific “missing piece”. Even when we have not reached a particular destination or achieved a desired bottom line, and our mission seems “incomplete,” — the journey itself is part of Hashem’s plan, and perfect in its own way.

Rebbe Yitzchak Meir zy'a, the *Chidushei haRim* (grandfather of the Sefas Emes), shares insight from the wording of the above-mentioned Medrash. The palace is דולקת, ‘burning’, and this is the same term used by the Torah to describe Lavan’s pursuing of Yaakov Avinu: דלקת אַחֲרַי (*Bereishis*, 31:36). All of us, and everything in Creation is in a constant state of yearning and chasing after something.

While in pursuit of wholeness, through cultivating sincere *ratzon* and yearning, we may find completion in our current state, exactly where we are... even if we won’t “make it to the town of Lubavitch in time for Shabbos”. ■

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