



TORAH & PSYCHOLOGY

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Finding our “Why”

The 2026 World Happiness Report ranked Israel eighth out of 147 countries, for the second year in a row. The ranking draws on 2023 to 2025, years that include October 7th and the war that followed.¹ Unquestionably, the Jewish people have been through a lot the last several years and are certainly not free of challenges. Yet life satisfaction remains among the highest in the world. What helps people carry a heavy reality, yet simultaneously feel so happy?

A DESTINATION WITHHELD

Hashem tells Avraham:

לְךָ לָךְ מֵאֶרֶץ וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ
אֲשֶׁר אֶרְאֶה

"Go from your land, from your birthplace, and from your father's house, to the land that I will show you" (Bereishit 12:1).

Hashem does not state the final destination. Many commentators have grappled with this question: Why withhold the destination? If a commander orders a soldier on a mission, or an employer relocates an employee, the first piece of information provided is the final address. Why leave Avraham in suspense?

Rashi (Bereishit 12:2), citing the Midrash, explains:

לֹא גָלָה לוֹ מִיָּד, כְּדִי לְחַבְּבָהּ בְּעֵינָיו, וְלִתֵּת לוֹ שָׂכָר
עַל כָּל דְּבוּר וְדְבוּר

"He did not reveal it to him immediately, in order to endear it in his eyes, and to give him reward for each and every statement"

Rashi highlights this same pattern of communication later on at the Akeidah:

קָחֵנָּה אֶת־בְּנֶךָ אֶת־יִחִידְךָ אֲשֶׁר־אָהַבְתָּ אֶת־יִצְחָק...
עַל אֶחָד הַהָרִים אֲשֶׁר אֹמַר אֵלֶיךָ

"Take your son, your only one, whom you love, Yitzchak... on one of the mountains that I will tell you of" (Bereishit 22:2).

In both journeys, the mission is revealed piece by piece. Rashi is teaching us that Hashem's goal wasn't only to bring Avraham to a particular place, but to make him *love* it before he arrived.²

2. Yet another illustration of this idea can be found regarding the site of the Beit Hamikdash which is not revealed to B'nei Yisrael at any point in the Torah, rather the location is referred to as "הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר ה'" "The place Hashem will choose" (see for example Devarim 12:5). Arguably, here too Hashem intended to engender within us a greater longing for a close relationship with Him. Additionally, the Chizkuni (2:18) notes that Hashem intentionally withheld the creation of Chava until after Adam completed naming all the animals. It was at this moment that Adam personally felt the acute loneliness of his solitary state. Thus, when she was finally brought to him she was beloved in his eyes. It appears that Hashem forced Adam to search, pine, and experience the emptiness of having no counterpart, so that the moment Chava was finally brought to him, he would be overcome with joy. We this from his first comment when he meets her: "זֹאת הִפְעֵם עֵצָם מֵעֵצָמִי וּבָשָׂר מִבָּשָׂרִי" "This time! Bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh!" (Bereshit 2:23).

1. To access the full report: <https://files.worldhappinessreport/WHR26.pdf>

HOW DOES SUSPENSE BUILD LOVE?

The Gur Aryeh (Bereishit 12:2) explains the nuanced mechanism behind building this love. When a goal is withheld or revealed slowly, the mind naturally yearns for it. Every step taken without seeing the destination deepens our emotional investment.

The Radak (Bereishit 12:1) adds yet another dimension. Had Hashem simply shown Avraham an appealing description of a fertile land, following instructions would have been easy. By sending him into the unknown, Hashem magnified Avraham's devotion, because the commitment was to Hashem and not to a guaranteed outcome.

This uncertainty wasn't a flaw in the instructions. It *was* the instrument. Avraham's longing, and his commitment to a mission he couldn't fully see, were being built with every step.

WHY LOVE FIRST?

So why was it necessary for the love to develop so early in this process even before Avraham arrived? Hashem knew what awaited him. The Gemara teaches:

שְׁלֹשׁ מִתְּנוּת טוֹבוֹת נִתְּן הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא
לְיִשְׂרָאֵל, וְכֵלֶן לֹא נִתְּנָן אֲלָא עַל יְדֵי יְסוּרֵינוּ: תּוֹרָה,
וְאֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְהָעוֹלָם הַבָּא

"Three precious gifts did the Holy One Blessed be He give to Israel, and none were given except through hardships: Torah, the Land of Israel, and the World to Come" (Berachos 5a).

Avraham's welcome to the land was a famine that forced him out (Bereishit

12:10). His life there would hold conflict and trials, and his descendants would face exile, war, and far greater challenges. Had Eretz Yisrael been just a destination on a map, the first famine might have broken him. But the land was beloved before it was difficult. Hashem didn't remove the hardship. He made sure Avraham met it already carrying a reason and it was this reason that provided him with the best possible tool in enabling him to rise to the challenge at hand.³

THE PSYCHOLOGY:

MEANING CHANGES THE TASK

This is the central insight of Dr. Viktor Frankl's logotherapy. Frankl, an insightful psychiatrist who survived the Holocaust, built his work on his own experiences as a trained psychiatrist and then as a survivor of Auschwitz. A core observation he noted was that people are driven most by a search for meaning, not comfort. He developed logotherapy with this central theory in mind, that meaning in life and working towards our personal values is what fosters purpose and well-being in individuals. He quotes Nietzsche: "He who has a 'why' to live for, can bear almost any 'how'".

With this principle, note what Frankl is *not* saying. He isn't saying the "how" gets easier if we have a clear "why." He's saying the same difficulty feels different depending on whether we can name what it is for. He is highlighting that even when an experience feels tremendously overwhelming, we can transcend it when we have a clear purpose and vision.

See the full Rashi to Bereshit 12:2 for one additional example of this phenomena regarding Hashem's second set of instructions to Yonah (following Yonah's previously failed mission).

3. See *אמרי ברוך*, פרשת לך לך, מאמר א where Rabbi Baruch Simon develops this idea and adds that it is for this reason that the Torah, which is also acquired via *יסורין*, requires *חביבות יתירה* as well.

Think of a diaper change at 3:00 AM. In isolation, it's tedious, thankless work. Yet parents do it night after night without despair due to this exact principle. When this experience is connected to a child they love, and they're able to make that clear in their mind, the whole experience shifts. It's not about the specific physical task, but rather how it connects back to our values, what's important to us, that "why."

This is exactly Rashi's sequence. Avraham got the "why" before the "how," and Rashi's phrase "each and every statement" tells us that the "how" came one step at a time. Avraham never needed the whole map, only the next step and the reason for taking it.

NAME THE "WHY" BEFORE YOU NEED IT

Most of us only reach for our "why" in the middle of the difficulty, when we're depleted and it's hardest to find. Avraham's journey shows us a more effective practice:

1. **Build it in advance.** Identify one recurring difficulty, such as night wake-ups, a draining commute, keeping up a learning seder, or the pressures of life in Israel. Ask: *what do I love that this serves?* Spend time with that answer when you're not under strain.
2. **Name it at the moment of the task.** As

you begin, say it in one sentence: "I'm doing this because ____." This reconnects the task to the story it belongs to. Focusing our attention on the purpose and meaning behind us recenters us with purposeful intention.

This doesn't make the task painless. Avraham still faced a famine. But a hardship we can name a purpose for no longer defines the whole experience.

HOLDING TIGHT TO OUR "WHY"

Perhaps the Happiness Report is pointing to this very idea. Whether born in Eretz Yisrael or having found the courage to pack up their belongings and return to their homeland, those who live here in Eretz Yisrael have found their "why": a connection to the land, the people, and a purpose larger than themselves. That purpose provides the strength and resilience to carry a heavy reality with a smile.

May we be zoche to find our "why" and continue to hold tight to it, carrying it with us every step of our journey. ■

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