



# BUILDING A SANCTUARY IN THE HEART

## The Only Absolute Connection We Have

In *Parshas Lech Lecha*, Avraham Avinu is told by Hashem, “Go from your land, from your birthplace, from the house of your father, to the land which I will show you.”

Our Sages list this as one of the “ten *nisyonos* (trials)” which Avraham was tested with, and we are also taught by our Sages the rule, “*Maaseh Avos, Siman L'Banim*” – “The actions of the forefathers is a sign for the children.” Just as Avraham Avinu went through ten trials where he was tested by Hashem, so does every soul go through “ten trials.”

This does not mean that we are given the same exact tests as Avraham Avinu, but our tests are a reflection of those tests. We are not always told by Hashem to leave our country and move elsewhere, but the lesson of it always remains true in our own lives, where we are confronted with the spiritual test of having to leave behind our past in general.

Avraham Avinu’s test was that he had to disconnect from his roots, and leave it all behind to go out there into the world. His country, his birthplace, the house of his father, were all different aspects that bound him to his past, and he was told to disconnect from it and leave it all behind, in order to become elevated. This shows us that

there exists in the soul an ability to disconnect from that which we are powerfully connected to, to that which we feel permanence in, on This World.

Avraham Avinu was told, “Go from your land, from your birthplace, from the house of your father.” The soul becomes disconnected from its root in Heaven in order to come down onto this world, and at death, the soul doesn’t want to leave this world, now that it has become attached to it. If a person lived a life in which he grew attached to materialism, he will suffer a disconnection from it upon death. But if a person lived a spiritual life, an internal kind of life, a Torah life – at death, he will only disconnect from this world in the physical sense. The spiritual world, the inner world he had lived through his *neshamah* on this world, does not become severed from him. It continues and it intensifies after death.

One needs to be aware that everything on this world is temporary; every time and period of your life is a temporary situation. The *nisayon* (test) which we have on this world is: Will we form any absolute connection, other than with Hashem, Torah, and *Klal Yisrael*? The deep power in the soul to have absolute connection must be channeled to Hashem, Torah, and Yisrael.

■ excerpt from the sefer *Bilvavi on the Parshah*

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A carpenter takes a saw in one hand and a board in the other and begins to saw. If while sawing the board, his thoughts are preoccupied with other matters and he does not put his mind to the task, it is likely that the cut will be faulty, the board will slip out of his hand, or he might, G-d forbid, even cut his hand. This may happen even though when he took the saw in hand, he knew clearly what he was doing and why he was doing it, and he knows how to use this saw. Nevertheless, when he is actually sawing, all this escapes his mind, and he is thinking about something else completely.

The same applies to our discussion. *Chazal* have said (*Sanhedrin* 7a) that a judge must imagine that a sword is placed between his thighs (and a small error would be dangerous). Rav Yisrael Salanter *zt"l* has said that this applies to each person, for everyone is a judge over himself. Our work in this world is comparable to the case of the carpenter. If, *chas veshalom*, one is distracted from the purpose and goal of life, he is in constant danger. Thus, after one clarifies the purpose of his life, he must live with this knowledge on a daily basis, hour by hour, literally "tested moment by moment" (*Iyov* 7:18). The knowledge of the purpose of life is not just a fact that one hears about, writes down, and then files away for the record, cleaning off the dust once a year before Pesach. This knowledge must be experienced, lived, and breathed, so that one is totally attuned to it.

## 6

What, in fact, is the purpose of man's life in his world? The purpose of life is well-known, yet it is not really known. It is well-known, because one reads about it, hears about it, and so on. Yet in truth, it is not known. If one would know it properly (the Hebrew word for knowledge is *yediah*, which means connection), and would internalize this knowledge, his whole way of life would necessarily change. If a person would apply the entire weight of his spiritual energy toward this fact and have a burning commitment to the truth, he would take a paper and pen and record for himself the purpose of his life. He would place this paper in his pocket and take it out every quarter of an hour or so, in order to constantly remind himself about it, so that this fact will not be forgotten by him and he will live by it.

## 7

What, in truth, is the purpose of a man in his world? The words of the *Mesillas Yesharim* (Ch. 1) are known. He wrote, "The truth is that the only true perfection is *deveikus* to Hashem. This is what David *Hamelech* declared: "As for me, closeness to Hashem is my good..." (*Tehillim* 73:28). In other words, if one wants to know what makes a man fulfilled, he should consider what David *HaMelech* understood to be good for himself. If it was good for him, it is good for every single one of us. He said, "As for me, closeness to Hashem is my good." ■

**QUESTION** On Yom Kippur I cried from the depths of my heart to Hashem as I uttered the 13 *middos harachamim*, begging Hashem that troubles should not befall me, and I cried so much. I didn't even have *kavanah* at all for what I was *davening* for, I just kept crying. Is it possible that just by crying alone, I was able to circumvent any *nisyonos* (difficulties) from coming to me? I simply do not have the strength for any more *nisyonos*. I have no desire or will to just accept any more *nisyonos* by trying to have more *emunah*. I just want to see the light already, in all that has been happening to me from the last couple of years.

**ANSWER** Whenever your *davening* is accompanied by tears, especially during the Yomim Noraim and especially on Yom Kippur, there is a special power of such *tefillos* to tear up any harsh decrees, as Chazal taught. It is not guaranteed to erase the decree entirely [but your tears during *davening* always have a significantly good effect for you].

You will always need to live a life of *emunah* (faith in G-d), whether you are in a more pleasant situation or a less pleasant situation. Build a life of pure, unquestioning trust in Hashem, and it should not matter to what your life is looking like, whether you are experiencing a lot of *nisyonos* or not as much. You want to see the "light" already, but the main thing you really need to experience is the light of *emunah*! ■ from the Q & A archive [www.question.bilvavi.net](http://www.question.bilvavi.net)

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In *Getting To Know Your Children*, we explained how the parent needs to love the child based on the Torah's commandment of "*V'ohavta l'reiacha kamoicha*", "Love your friend as you love yourself." However, without viewing the child as a *neshamah*, parents will have a very hard time treating their children with love and respect. The parents naturally see themselves as higher than the children, and it can feel demeaning for the parent to be careful with the child's honor and to love him as a "friend" like the Torah says.

However, although the parents are right for feeling that they are the higher authority over the children, when they realize that their child has a *neshamah* and they are aware of what this means, they will have a much easier time relating to their children with love and respect. Every person has a *neshamah*, which is called a "portion of G-d above." Every person is created with a *tzelem elokim*, "in G-d's image", (*Beraishis 1:26*) and the Sages teach that "Man is precious, for he was created in G-d's image." (*Avos - Ethics of our Fathers 3:14*) The parents can learn to see their child in this way, and then it is much easier to act loving towards him and to be careful not to slight his honor. But if the parents simply focus on the fact that they are higher than the children and they feel that it's unfair to view the child as an equal to them, this perspective is a view that comes from the *guf* (the body), which ignores the *neshamah* dimension. ■ Chapter Six - printed for the first time from the *sefer* דע את ילדך

One of the reasons that the previous generations slackened off from Torah study was because they did not understand what Torah is, thus they did not clarify to themselves what it means to have a personal connection with Torah.

The results from this were, as the *Nefesh HaChaim* continues: people were totally abandoning learning Torah, in the pursuit of making *parnassah* (livelihood).

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The people who were working to make *parnassah* during those times did not have time to learn Torah, and that was one reason why study of Torah was being abandoned. But the *Nefesh HaChaim* writes that even those who desired to serve Hashem were slackening off from Torah study, for they desired instead to learn all day the *sefarim* that explain *yirah* (fear of Hashem) and *mussar* (self-discipline).

How did this happen, that people began to learn *mussar* all day, instead of Torah? It was because they did not understand what the Torah is! If a person would know what is really in the Torah, he would involve himself with learning it.

Of course, we surely need to learn *mussar*, but as the *Nefesh HaChaim* himself explains later on, *mussar* is the "*kav chumtin*", it is like an herbal treatment which is only good when prescribed in small amounts, which should not be overdosed. The main body of our study should be spent on learning Torah, day and night, with exertion.

When one does not search for truth, he doesn't see a need to learn Torah. When one is involved with making *parnassah* and thus he has no time to learn Torah, here there is an external reason that is causing him not to learn Torah. But even those who wanted to be close to Hashem were not learning Torah, the *Nefesh HaChaim* says. It was because they did not understand what is contained in the Torah.

Maybe you will think that this problem only existed with those who learned *mussar* all day. But in fact, the very same problematic attitude can exist even with those who learn Torah all day: when one is not aware of what Torah is and why one must learn Torah.

This is the meaning of the verse, "*Those who grasp Torah do not know Me.*" It is referring to people who learn Torah all day, but they do not know what the Torah even is! On a simple level it is referring to how people learn Torah but they don't become close to Hashem through it. But it can also mean that people are learning Torah yet they don't know what the Torah is all about. The *Ohr HaChaim* famously wrote that if a person would know that he would run after it as if he's pursuing treasure.

There are levels within levels to one's connection to Torah. But it all starts with knowing what Torah is in the first place. It must be clarified, first intellectually, and then personally in one's soul ■

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