



5782 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Lech-Lecha / פרשת לך-לך

The Inner Drive Towards Yerushalayim

Our parsha opens rather abruptly with God's command to Avraham to travel to the promised land. We are not told the rationale behind God's choice. Why did God choose Avraham? What did he do to deserve to be the founder of the chosen nation?

The Midrash,¹ though, explains Avraham's prior convictions by means of a parable. There was a person who was traveling from place to place and he sees a palace that is *doleket*. The person is astonished that such a palace can be bereft of a manager and expresses his amazement. The owner of the palace then appears and tells the traveler that he is the owner of the palace. Similarly, Avraham could not fathom that this world was leaderless and therefore God appeared to him and said "I am the Master of the world."

There is much to unpack in this Midrash and the commentators have developed several different approaches to its meaning.² For the moment, let us focus on the initial description of the palace as *doleket*. What does this enigmatic word mean? One straightforward interpretation is that it has something to do with the word fire – perhaps that the palace was beautifully shining like a flame.

There is a beautiful Hasidic approach to this midrash. The Sefat Emmet³ suggests that that word *doleket* stems from the word *dalakta* which means to pursue. Avraham saw that people were always chasing things in this world. Humans have an internal push to achieve, to produce, to be involved in meaningful labor. Avraham was astonished by this activity and toil since intuitively he felt that things should be in a restful and serene state. God then appears and tells Avraham that this world is a place of working towards goals.

¹ Bereishit Rabbah 39:1.

² See the approaches outlined by Rabbi Michael Yammer in his article "*Birah Doleket*" available at <http://shaalvim.co.il/torah/view.asp?id=683>.

³ Sefat Emmet Parshat Lech Lecha.



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It seems that the Sefat Emmet is saying that Avraham's initial encounter with God was through his experience of an inner drive to set goals and achieve. Where would such a drive come from if there was not a general goal and purpose to the world? Such a purpose could only mean the existence of a God who created the world and imbued it with purpose and who created humans with a drive to participate and achieve this divine goal.

Even today we can see a drive that people feel a need to be involved in meaningful and godly work. One way in this is manifest is the desire of the Jewish people to be involved with Yerushalayim. Why would people who do not live in a city love it so much? Why would they work towards its development? The Jewish people have an inner drive to help Yerushalayim grow and succeed. Just as Avraham did so many years ago, it behooves us to take note of this phenomenon and wonder about it. Where does such a drive come from?

Similar to the answer of Avraham's question, the inner drive to Yerushalayim has its root in God. God created us with a desire to connect with Him through the items, ideas and places in this world where He is most present. By working in and for Yerushalayim we are following our inner drive to connect to holiness and divinity.