

## **“Go forth from your land, from your birthplace and from your father’s house to the land that I will show you.” (12:1)**

Clearly, Hashem’s command to Avraham *Avinu* to uproot himself from his home and travel to a yet undesignated land serves as a metaphor for his descendants. *Maaseh Avos siman l’banim*, “The deeds of the fathers serve as a sign /portent for their sons/descendants.” We must learn to understand Avraham’s move and its purpose as a model for our own need to move on, move up, and move out – at the appropriate times.

In his *sefer*, *Nitzotzos*, *Horav Yitzchak Hershkowitz, Shlita*, relates a *shmuess*, ethical discourse, given by *Horav Chizkiyahu Mishkovsky, Shlita*, to a gathering of *Lev L’Achim* volunteers. His words are timely; his lesson is significant. The *Rosh Yeshivah* shared the following poignant story with the gathering: In one of the mainstream *yeshivos* in *Eretz Yisrael*, was a young student who unquestionably was destined to achieve great prominence in the Torah world. His life was one long Torah endeavor. Wherever he went, his *Gemora* was with him. Every free minute he spent immersed in Torah study. Literally, a minute was not wasted from his precious Torah. Obviously, during the regular *yeshiva sedorim*, study sessions, his personal study was outstanding and consummate, his devotion – absolutely unreal.

In addition, this promising young man stood out in his service of Hashem, his *tefillah* reflecting a profound sense of commitment and deep understanding of what it means to speak to Hashem. His *kavanah*, intention/devotion was intense; his fervor passionate, expressed from the inner recesses of his heart. His *yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven, was extraordinary, serving Hashem with both love and awe. In short, this was a primary example of a young *gadol baTorah*. At this rate, he would one day be an exceptional Torah scholar who would impact the Torah world.

This student’s demeanor amazed the *hanhalah*, administration of the *yeshivah*, and its entire student body. From where did such a unique student originate? How? What? Why? These questions stymied everyone until one day, the student asked for an appointment to meet with the *Rosh Yeshivah*. Perhaps, he would reveal his secret.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* invited the *bachur* into his office and asked that glasses of tea be placed before them. He was not going to rush this. Let the young man feel as comfortable as possible. It was important that he be relaxed, so that whatever was on his mind could finally surface.

The student began, “I have a question to ask of the *Rosh Yeshivah*. First, however, I feel that it is incumbent that I relate my life story and what brought me to this moment.” The *Rosh Yeshivah* responded, “By all means. Take your time and feel free to share with me whatever you like.”

“I was born in America to parents who were unfortunately irreligious. This is the environment in

which I was raised during my formative years. Shortly after I entered public school, my mother heard an inspirational lecture from a powerful speaker. This rabbi underscored the impact a life devoted to Torah would make on a family. These words brought about a transformation within my mother, arousing within her an inner-yearning to return to Hashem's embrace by living a Torah-oriented life.

"Needless to say, this brought about a certain amount of discord within my family. My father was too far removed from Torah Judaism to make a drastic change. He had no interest in becoming religious, and he said so emphatically. He did agree, however, to allow my mother to practice what she wanted as long as it did not interfere with his lifestyle. Slowly, my mother's relationship with an observant lifestyle increased and strengthened, until she decided her next move: *Shabbos*. She came to my father with two candles and said, "I am lighting candles tonight as the beginning of *Shabbos* observance. Will you join me on this journey?" My father's reply was a loud and resounding "no." Basically, this was the precursor to the end of their marriage, because my father moved out shortly thereafter.

"Now, it was my mother and I, alone in the world. I left public school and was enrolled in a Hebrew Day School, where I absorbed whatever Torah they had to offer. I thrived in that environment, finally feeling a sense of purpose, a sense of value. I had come home! As my eighth-grade year was rapidly coming to a close, my principal spoke to me concerning opportunities for the future. Where would I go for high school? The principal suggested that due to my situation, background and great desire for upward movement, I should consider going to a *yeshivah* in *Eretz Yisrael*. It would be most conducive to my learning. I was willing. The next hurdle was my mother. How would she react? It would mean leaving her all alone.

"The principal met with my mother and me, and, after praising me, he made his suggestion. My mother listened carefully and then asked, "Is there no *yeshivah* in our city, in all of America, where my son could study?" "Yes, there are a number of fine *yeshivos*," the principal responded. "It is just that I feel he will do better studying in the Holy Land." My mother asked for some time to make a decision. A few days of intense soul-searching followed. There were many issues at stake – her being left alone in the world was certainly not one of the least significant. The *yetzer hara*, evil inclination, played his role in the drama: 'Why should he leave for *Eretz Yisrael*, if he can learn just as well in America? Why should you be left all alone if your son could be here with you? Who can replace a mother's care?'

"Sleepless nights and tearful days went by before my mother decided that no sacrifice was too great when it involves Torah. My success was more important than all of the other issues. Torah was to dominate my life. I was going! Recognizing my mother's sacrifice and always remembering her parting words, I set myself to learning *b'hasmadah*, with great diligence. I could not waste even one minute. My mother had given up so much for me. Torah study would become my life.

"Just about one year after I arrived in the *yeshivah*, my mother called with frightening news: she

had been diagnosed with a terminal disease. I immediately declared that I was coming home. Her reaction was expressed with her usual strong will: 'No! No sacrifice is too large for Torah. I am prepared for whatever Hashem sends my way, but I will not bring you home from the *yeshivah*. It is your learning *b'hasmadah* that makes it all worth it! You are not interrupting your learning for me! End of conversation.'

"The *Rosh Yeshivah* can imagine what went through my mind. I threw myself with a sense of urgency into my learning. My *davening* and interpersonal relationships took on a renewed objective, as I realized that my mother badly needed *z'chusim*, merits. I would provide whatever I could. This went on for a number of months. My weekly calls to my mother were filled with pain, as I sensed her attempt to cover up her loneliness, fear and despair. Each time I begged her, 'Can I come home?' Each time the reply was the same, 'No! Nothing is too much for Torah. Do all that you can to study and grow in Torah.'

"Then the dread phone call came. My mother told me that her disease had metastasized beyond any form of cure. She was declining rapidly. I again begged, insisting on coming home to be with her in her last weeks, days. She refused. Torah was to dominate.

"*Rebbe*, that was the last phone call. She passed away that week." At that point, the young student broke down in tears. The *Rosh Yeshivah* waited for him to cry himself out, and then he continued: "*Rebbe*, I have related my life story and my overriding commitment to my mother for her overwhelming sacrifice. From the moment I left home, I have dedicated my entire being to Hashem, His Torah and *mitzvos*." He paused and began to weep bitterly as he looked up at the *Rosh Yeshivah* and asked, "Does the *Rosh Yeshivah* feel that I am doing **enough** to carry out my mother's request?"

His penetrating question pierces through the veils of ambiguity and uncertainty. How many of us think that we are "there," that we have made it and achieved what is expected of us? This *bachur* teaches us the key to spiritual growth: Have we done enough? We are never "there." It is a constant uphill climb. At every milestone, when we think that we have achieved, when we think that we have made it, we must ask ourselves: "Have we done enough?"

It was this question that catalyzed this young man's spiritual growth. He was never complacent. He was never finished – whatever he did was insufficient. Time is a compelling and unforgiving taskmaster. We never have enough time. We never know how long our lives will last, when we will be called to task for not doing enough.

Hashem told Avraham, *Lech lecha*, "Go for yourself, from the land, the *artzus*, earthliness/materialism represented by the land; *mi'moladetecha*, from your birthplace, your character which you derive from your birthplace; *mi'bais avicha*, from your father's home, from your passive reliance on familial support. Go out on your own! Where? To the land which I will show you."

*Lech lecha* was not a one-time command given to Avraham. It is a never-ending exhortation to each and every Jew to awaken within himself the upward drive to succeed, to move forward, to pursue Torah and *mitzvos* relentlessly, and to grow in them. Each Jew has a G-d-given mission, a Heavenly mandate. Have we achieved our calling; have we fulfilled our duty; have we done enough? A Jew must be *lech lecha*, constantly moving. There is no rest. There are no vacations. Rest is stagnation. Status quo is death. Are we ever doing enough? No – we can always do more.

There are times when all avenues have been exhausted. The following vignette teaches us the response of *Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl*, to a pressing situation: One of *Eretz Yisrael's* eminent *mechanchim*, Torah educators, came before *Rav Shach* one *Erev Shabbos* in the afternoon. A situation had developed that was rapidly becoming a crisis and could not be ignored.

*Rav Shach* immediately telephoned one of the prominent *rabbanim* in the Holy Land and asked him to do whatever possible to circumvent the issue. The *rav* listened, promised to do what he could, but gave no assurances. *Rav Shach* listened and said goodbye, placed the phone back on the table and began to weep uncontrollably. He raised his hands upward and said, “*Ribono shel olam*, I did my part. Now, You do Yours.”

In his preface to the *Avi Ezri Hilchos Mada*, the *Rosh Yeshivah* writes: “Hashem’s help comes only after man has exhausted all efforts to do what is imposed upon him. Who can say, ‘I have done everything. Now, it is up to Hashem’”? Apparently, when *Rav Shach* made his statement on that fateful *Erev Shabbos*, it was after much introspection that led to the conclusion: “I have done enough.”