

If you will follow My decrees. (26:3)

So much has been written concerning the meaning of this *pasuk*. I would like to submit my understanding. The word *teileichu* is translated here as “to follow.” It also means to walk/go. Together, these meanings imply that we are to walk/go forward using Hashem’s decrees as our GPS, our moral compass, to provide our sense of direction. In other words, a Jew does not “lead,” he follows – Hashem. Having said that, we might take this idea a bit further; *chukim* are *mitzvos* whose reasons defy human rationale. There are reasons for these *mitzvos*, but these reasons are Divine. Hashem has a purpose and reason for every *mitzvah* which He commanded. We are not privy to these reasons. Thus, *chukim* are to be viewed as *afkaata d’Malka*, a decree from the King – in this case the King of the Universe, Hashem.

Hashem wants us to follow His *mitzvos*, even when they defy our understanding. Furthermore, he wants us to take this approach to all *mitzvos*, whether we think we understand them or not. We follow – He leads. At times, we think that we have a better, more advantageous route. This is quite like the new GPS system, which presents alternate routes, but suggests a specific one. It is acutely aware of construction, hazards, accidents and other forms of delays. It gathers all of the information and decides for us what would be the best route to travel.

Life also contains *chukim*, challenges, trials, travail, which we do not understand. We do not question the Almighty. He has a reason for everything that occurs in our lives. We accept these “life” *chukim* in stride as part of our faith in the Almighty. This is the meaning of *bechukosai teileichu* – following Hashem, regardless of what might seem to be bumps in the road.

How does one stay focused on the journey without distraction, without dissipating our energies, becoming restless, questioning every time we hit a bump? The story is told that **Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl**, once left his town and made an unannounced visit to a theatre in Koenigsburg, Germany, where a rope walker was giving exhibitions. The founder of the *mussar*, ethical character refinement movement, unassumingly took his seat among the audience and gazed at the amazing feat before him, a talented ropewalker who risked his life four times each day by walking on a rope tightly drawn across the theatre some hundred feet in the air. One false move, one minute distraction, would spell instant death for him.

After the show, *Rav* Yisrael returned home. It did not take long for word of his trip to spread. It was truly an anomaly that such a great *Rav* and *tzaddik*, an individual who probably was the *gadol hador*, preeminent Torah leader of his generation, “found” the time to leave his Torah study to travel to Koenigsburg to watch a ropewalker do his thing. This feat was primarily performed so that children would stare in amazement, their interest piqued. What was the *gadol hador* doing there? “For years,” he began, “I found it almost impossible to concentrate for five minutes on my *tefillos*, prayers. As soon as I stand *Shemoneh Esrai* or sit down for other prayers, all kinds of things creep into my mind. Yet, here was an ordinary man who, for five rubles a day, risked his life four times daily. The slightest distraction would mean untold suffering and even death, and here I am, at the

risk not of physical death, but of eternal life, and I cannot concentrate for a few moments!"

Rav Yisrael asked the man for his key to success. His response was inspiring, "When I am up there," he said, "I see only one thing before me: the rope. I look at nothing else, because I know that, if my eyes waver from the rope, I am a dead man." Need we say more? When we serve Hashem, our focus should be on nothing else but following His directive.

Indeed, the first command that Hashem gave Avraham *Avinu* (which is recorded in the Torah) is *Lech Lecha*, "Go for yourself." Later, we find Hashem commanding Avraham to *Lech Lecha*, go, to *Har HaMoriah*, to slaughter Yitzchak *Avinu*. We also find concerning the command of *Bris Milah*, *Hishalech lefanai ve'heyey tamim*, "Walk before Me and be perfect." All of this *halicha*, going, walking, defines Judaism. He wants us to follow, to walk behind, with, in front of Him – but, from that very first *Lech Lecha*, it must always be to continue walking. Even when we do not understand how we will make it: the road is filled with potholes; there is danger; it seems very long – *Bechukosai teileichu*, walk in My statutes. You do not have to always understand "why" – but you must walk, follow, keep on going.

On the first occasion of *Lech Lecha* Avraham was standing at the beginning of his career as a Jew: you can make it; fulfillment is within reach; you will be a blessing to the world. There is one criteria to which you must adhere: *Lech lecha*, you must go and show the way; your task must be achieved, regardless of the challenges, the obstacles and the setbacks. How? – *Lech lecha*, "Go into yourself." From within yourself, by introspecting, you will perceive that everything is in order, everything fits perfectly with the other, with remarkable precision. True, at first it does not seem to make sense, but *lech lecha*, go into yourself, stay focused, do not lose sight of your goals, and you will arrive at your destination. *Lech lecha*, from yourself. The Jew has nothing to learn from the outside world. We are not a part of the outside world. We have our own world which begins with ourselves. We teach by example. We do not learn from them. We will neither ever be the recipient of their blessings, nor will we need them. We have Hashem, Who blesses us and, in turn, *ve'heyey brachah*, we are a blessing to the world. Only in faith in *lecha/yourself*, ourselves, will we find faith in Hashem.

We must, however, continue moving. Even when our personal task appears to have been completed, and we are ready to pass it on, we must do so by "*Kach es bincha*, take your son, *v'lech lecha*." He, too, must keep on going. This is how *Klal Yisrael* achieves *bechukosai teileichu*. Our nation has never stopped going forward. We have had setbacks, but we have brushed ourselves off, straightened ourselves up – and forged ahead.

Hashem told Avraham *Hishalech lefanai*, "Go before Me" – you go before Me in the world: loving Me; emulating Me; glorifying Me; knowing Me; and disseminating Me. Perform the *mitzvos*; *teilechu*, go in them; see to it that your children do the same. It may mean sacrifice, hunger, trial and tribulation, but stay focused, and you will get there; you will reach your destination. Indeed, this is the only way that you will achieve your "homecoming."