

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

Logic dictates that upon leaving his environment, an individual begins by contemplating that which is closest to him, his father's home. He then proceeds to separate himself from his birthplace, and, lastly, from his land. Why does the *pasuk* list a sequence that seems unnatural? First, Hashem tells Avraham to leave the land, then his birthplace, and finally his father's home.

A number of commentators respond to this question. The *Maor Vashemesh* cites the *Rambam* in *Hilchos De'os* who posits that a person's character is influenced by his surroundings. Obviously, the closer and more intense one's relationship is to his surroundings, the greater and more dominating is the influence. Consequently, one's parents exert the greatest influence. The impressions one holds of his childhood, growing up in his parent's home, leave a lasting effect upon his personality. The filial bond a child develops with his parents makes him susceptible to their influence. The second level of influence is one's immediate surroundings, his family, friends, neighbors and those acquaintances with whom he comes in contact on a daily basis. True, they are not as close as one's parents, but they do play an integral role in shaping one's personality and perspective. Last, is the environment and culture one lives in. The people in one's country, their spiritual/moral outlook, their character traits, and the entire communal atmosphere create a predisposition towards a certain way of life.

Bearing the above in mind, the sequence of the *pesukim* is understandable. They indicate the ascending power of the various negative influences from which Avraham *Avinu* had to divorce himself. What does one do if he is surrounded by family and friends, an entire community whose way of life is antithetical to *Torah* dictate? The response is to break away slowly, first to remove oneself from those influences from which it is easiest to separate. It is much easier to ignore one's community than it is to isolate oneself from his family and close friends. Furthermore, one's inner circle of friends and family do not exert as imposing an influence as one's parents. Only through a systematic, step-by-step weaning of one's relationship from negative influences will one emerge successful.

One question regarding Avraham *Avinu's* behavior should be addressed. If the environment was so evil, if idolatry was so rampant, why did Avraham permit himself to remain there? Why was it necessary for Hashem to command him to leave? He should have realized on his own that in order to maintain his beliefs he must abandon his home. We may suggest that Avraham, as devoted as he was to his fellow man, was concerned for the spiritual welfare of his community. He felt that he must do everything possible to reach out to them. Hashem told him that there is a time and place for everything. Being all alone in a decadent society was detrimental to his own spiritual growth. We are regrettably not always aware that while we are trying to save the world, we might be damaging ourselves in the process.