

Go for yourself, from your land, from your relatives, and from your father's house. (12:1)

Chazal (Pirkei Avos 5:4) teach that Avraham Avinu earned his distinction by successfully passing ten trials. The first trial which the Torah elaborates, tested his ability to pick himself up, bid farewell to family and friends, and journey to a new land. Hashem was requiring him to start over and set up a new infrastructure for his outreach work. No one will suggest that moving is not difficult, especially if one has spent his entire life in a particular place. Leaving family and friends is equally challenging – for some more than others. Nonetheless, why does the Torah make such a big to-do about *lech lecha*, while practically ignoring Uhr Kasdim, where Avraham was prepared to die for his faith? One would think that risking one's life trumps moving from one community to another.

The commentators, each in his own inimitable manner, address this question and the lessons it imparts. *Horav Shmuel Aharon Yudelevitz, zl (Me'il Shmuel)*, offers a powerful insight into the trial of *lech lecha* and what it meant to our Patriarch to pick up and go. When Avraham walked into the fiery cauldron in Uhr Kasdim, the community was unsure. Was he for real? Were his messages filled with truth? Is there really one G-d Who created the world and Who directs every facet of its existence? Now they would resolve the ambiguities that were plaguing them. If Avraham were to perish, then obviously his beliefs were false. Nimrod was the true king who controlled everything (with the help of his many idols). If Avraham, however, were to emerge unscathed, it would present clear and unequivocal proof that there is a Supreme Creator Who miraculously saved the life of His faithful servant.

Avraham was saved, and a spiritual upheaval occurred. The people became believers. Everything that Avraham had expounded was true! All of a sudden, Hashem commanded Avraham to forsake the people, leave his family and travel to places unknown. How could he leave Charan, which was near Uhr Kasdim, knowing that the Charan community was well aware of the miracle that had saved him? Even if the message which Avraham's salvation had imparted would maintain an influence on the people of Charan, wherever Hashem was sending him, the people there would not know of Uhr Kasdim. He would have to begin his outreach anew, breaking spiritual ground in a new land, with a people who were clueless about Hashem. This was Avraham's test. He had every reason to stay and to continue his holy work. Hashem said, "Go!" and Avraham went. He passed the test.

Horav Aharon Leib Shteinman, zl, offers a novel understanding of the difference between the test of Uhr Kasdim and the test implicit of leaving Charan. He explains that, while the test of Uhr Kasdim involved giving up his life for his beliefs, it was, at the end of the day, a one-time event. He would either live or die. He had no opportunity to follow up. After the very moment that the challenge presented itself, Avraham made an intelligent decision and immediately prepared for death. On the other hand, the test of leaving home and community would be one whose duration would extend for quite some time. Beginning his life's work in a new environment, with new

students, was a life-altering experience that would present daily challenges. Undertaking a challenge that involves a new life, new friends, new students, new methods of outreach would remove Avraham from his established comfort zone. True, ultimately it would provide new vistas for greater success, but it would be a constant uphill climb. Furthermore, Hashem did not inform Avraham of his destination. He just said, "Go!" This was an undertaking that required immense time, consistency, patience and strength of character. This would be a transformative journey for our Patriarch, one that would change his life and prepare him for leadership of a world infested with pagan beliefs.

Avraham's journey spanned time and included many challenges, such as famines, conflicts and personal sacrifices. His patience, founded in his profound belief in Hashem, gave him the fortitude to emerge triumphant. Indeed, his journey was not solely about his own life; it also had a lasting impact on future generations. His faith and commitment through thick and thin lay the foundation for his descendants, so that they, too, could withstand the trials and tribulations that would be part and parcel of their destiny. His story teaches that, while life's journey will present challenges, some of which will be difficult to overcome, with faith, patience and strength of character, one can successfully navigate this journey. Furthermore, it teaches us that, while the journey may be challenging, it is also profoundly rewarding and impactful.