חסידות

From the Chassidic Courts

NADVORNA · ARVEI NACHAL, LECH LECHA

Why Lech Lecha means stripping away the soul's coverings

Arvei Nachal

The neshamah (soul) comes clothed in three increasingly coarse "garments" — from the father's desire, the mother's gestation, and one's own bodily growth — and the Divine command "Lech Lecha" calls Avraham (and every person) to strip away these garments in order, from one's own earthliness, then the mother's, then the father's, so as to serve Hashem (G-d) above nature rather than within it. Only one who achieves this complete divestment of corporeality can draw down change beyond nature and have the Divine Name unified upon him in his lifetime, and he can likewise transmit this elevated, supra-natural sanctity to his children and grandchildren. AI SUMMARY

"And Hashem said to Avram: Lech Lecha (Go forth), etc." The grammatical details are explained [elsewhere]. But it is necessary to understand this: Behold, the neshamah (soul), when it goes out to come into this world, is pure, clear, and refined, except that the garments of this world which clothe it make it turbid (and this is in order that there be bechirah [free choice]). And these garments are three, each one coarser and more turbid than the other.

The first: the desire and thought of the father at the time he sowed the seed, as it is said (Tehillim 51:7), "Behold, in avon (iniquity) I was brought forth" — and through the drawing forth of the drop from the brain, the neshamah is drawn from its source and becomes clothed, and this is the first garment. The second garment, coarser than the first, is when the drop comes to the womb and begins to take physical form and to grow, and to be nourished from the foods and blood of the woman — all of this is a garment for the neshamah, and it is coarser than the first, as it is said, "and in chet (sin) my mother conceived me."

And [Scripture] called the first avon and the second chet, even though the second is coarser, in the manner of (Yeshayahu 5:18), "Those who draw avon with cords of falsehood, and sin as with cart ropes." The third garment is when a person comes into this world, and the yetzer hara (evil inclination) clothes itself within him, and the body of a person grows day by day, and the earthliness and corporeality within him increase very greatly — and this is a garment far coarser and thicker than the first two.

It follows that there are these three garments — namely, from his father, from his mother, and from himself — and each one is coarser than the other, and these garments nullify it from its service and from its proper and good will to incline a person toward [free] choice.

And it is the will of the Blessed Name that a person choose the good and strip away these three kinds of garments, until his thought becomes pure. This is the matter of the "stripping away of corporeality," and this must be done in its proper order: first he weakens and strips away the garment and earthliness of himself, and breaks the desires he became accustomed to on his own account;

afterward he strips away from himself also what came to him from his mother; and afterward also what came to him from his father. Then the stripping away of corporeality is complete, and he serves Hashem above nature, according to the will of the neshamah (soul), with nothing hindering.

But one who is still clothed in one of these three garments — even though he serves the Blessed Name, his service is only within nature. And we have already written elsewhere that one who serves Hashem within nature, the Blessed Name also conducts Himself with him accordingly: even when He does good for him, it is all by way of nature, and such a tzaddik (righteous person) cannot cause a change in nature.

But one who serves the Blessed Name above nature — Hashem also conducts Himself with him accordingly, and for such a tzaddik the natural order of the world changes, as in the matter of "He said to the sun, be still," and the like.

This is the statement of the Holy One to Avraham, alluding to the neshamah (soul), as it is written in the holy Zohar (Zohar I, 135a). And also according to the peshat (plain meaning), to Avraham Avinu, peace be upon him, He spoke thus: "Lech lecha" (go for yourself), meaning that he should go to himself — that is, the paths of his neshamah, which is the essence of a person — that it should divest itself from these three things and go from them. And it shall be in this order: first he shall divest himself from "your land," that is, from the earthliness of himself; and afterward from "your birthplace," that is, from the garment that is from the side of the mother; and afterward from "your father's house" to "the land that I will show you," which is the land of life. And the intent is that these three earthly attachments shall not remain with him, and he shall divest himself from them toward the earthliness of "that I will show you" — meaning that even the earthliness shall be the subtlest of the subtle, similar to the matter stated in the Zohar (Zohar III, 239b), that the chaverim (fellows/sages) are nourished from the sustenance of Torah.

And concerning this our Rabbis, of blessed memory, said (Rosh Hashanah 16b): "Here you will not merit children" — meaning that according to the nature and mazal (astrological fate) of Avraham Avinu, peace be upon him, it was that he would not father children, and a change of nature was required for him to father children. Therefore He said to him, "Here you will not merit children," meaning: as long as you are clothed in these, or even in one of these garments, the service is called "within nature," and it is impossible for a change of nature to be drawn down to you.

And furthermore, that I will make your nature known in the world — for this is difficult, for what does it matter to Avraham Avinu whether he has a name [in the world]? And further, what is meant by "your nature"? With what has been said, this can be understood.

For earlier, in Parashat Bereishit, on the first verse, we wrote an explanation of the words of David HaMelech, peace be upon him (II Samuel 6:22): "And I will be yet more vile than this, and will be base in my own sight, etc." And what emerges from there is that a person is not permitted to reveal his full level before other people — see there.

Behold: all service of Hashem (G-d) which is from the side of nature — "each man shall teach his fellow" and "to his brother he shall say, be strong" — this is something that a person is able to convey intellectually to his fellow. But service of Hashem which is above nature, this is ruach hakodesh (the holy spirit), and this cannot be conveyed intellectually from one man to another, but only from within oneself, when a spirit from on high shines upon him.

Now, Avraham Avinu, peace be upon him, longed all his days to bring mankind back to the service of the Blessed Name, and he would convert people, as the verse states (Bereishit 12:5), "and the souls that they had made in Charan." He would rebuke and teach people the service of Hashem all his days, and this was his longing forever. Even so, he could not fulfill the whole of his longing so long as his service was still within nature, for then he had to conceal his own level and could not convey or teach people all that was in his heart.

For this reason He said to him now: that when your service will be above nature, "I will make your nature known in the world" — meaning, that all

service which is within nature he is able to make known and to teach to all who come into the world, but the service which is above nature, he must conceal, for in any case this matter cannot be taught — as if to say, and understand this well.

Arvei Nachal, Lech Lecha "And I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you," etc. Our sages, may their memory be blessed, said: this is why we say "Elohei Avraham" (the God of Abraham), etc. This can also be understood together with what has been said, namely: it is known that the Holy One, blessed be He, does not unify His Name upon one who is alive, because of "do not believe in yourself." And all this applies while the person is still clothed, even slightly, in one of these three garments — for then it could happen that at some time that garment would overpower him. But once he is already stripped of it entirely, there is no longer any concern, and the Holy One, blessed be He, can unify His Name upon him even while he is still alive.

He further said that it is not enough for him himself to merit this level, but that through this he draws down also upon his son a spirit of purity and holiness, until his son too attains this level, that he too will not be clothed at all in physicality — and likewise his son's son.

And it says, "and you shall be a blessing" (v'heyeh berachah), and our sages, may their memory be blessed, said: one might think that they [the other patriarchs] would also be used in sealing [the blessing]; therefore Scripture says "and you shall be a blessing" — meaning, that the blessing is recited only concerning you.

Translation: translated by AI (anthropic/claude-sonnet-5)