חסידות

From the Chassidic Courts

RUZHIN · LECH LECHA, IRIN KADISHIN

Why believing you've barely started serving God is righteousness

Irin Kadishin

True tzaddikim (righteous ones) seek no credit for their own deeds but see themselves as having not yet even begun to serve Hashem, relying solely on matnat chinam (an unearned gift); this humble emunah (faith)—beyond intellectual grasp—is what Hashem counted to Avraham as tzedakah (righteousness). "Lech lecha" thus calls every person to continually leave behind complacency and pride, renewing their service each day through such emunah. AI SUMMARY

And Hashem said to Avram: "Lech lecha (go forth) from your land, and from your birthplace, and from your father's house, to the land that I will show you." It is written (Bereishit 15), "Vehe'emin baHashem vayachsheveha lo tzedakah" (and he believed in Hashem, and He counted it to him as righteousness).

I say that emunah (faith) is above hasagah (comprehension), for that which a person grasps with his intellect is like something he sees with his eyes. But emunah is something that a person cannot grasp through intellect; rather, through emunah one is able to cleave to the matter. And this is the meaning of "vehe'emin baHashem vayachsheveha lo tzedakah."

As it is stated: tzaddikim (righteous ones), even though they have grounds to rely upon their good deeds, seek nothing but matnat chinam (an unearned gift). For the tzaddik, even though he serves HaShem Yitbarach (the Blessed Name) in all things, nevertheless regards himself as not yet having begun at all to serve HaShem Yitbarach, and he asks for nothing but a matnat chinam.

And this is "vayachsheveha lo tzedakah" — the explanation being that HaKadosh Baruch Hu (the Holy One, Blessed be He) counted it to him as tzedakah (righteousness/charity), namely, because he believed that he had not yet begun to serve HaShem Yitbarach, HaShem Yitbarach likewise bestowed upon him from above, from the place of matnat chinam.

We can also explain that it was reckoned to Avraham as tzedakah (righteousness) because everything he received from Hashem was considered in his eyes a free gift that did not belong to him at all, since he had not yet even begun to serve Hashem. This is the meaning of (Tehillim 115) "I will walk before Hashem," as it is written (ibid. 114), "The heavens are heavens to Hashem, but the earth He gave to the children of man." For "earth" is called emunah (faith/belief), as it is written, "and the earth stands forever." And it is stated that Chavakuk came and established them all upon one principle: "and a tzaddik (righteous person) lives by his emunah." And emunah is the gate, as it is written (ibid. 118), "This is the gate to Hashem, etc."

For a person must believe that he has not yet begun to serve Hashem, for when a person engages in Torah and avodah (service/worship) and comes to any measure of gaavah (pride), this is called a nefilah (fall), chas v'shalom (Heaven forbid). But when a person sees, in the midst of all his service to Hashem, the greatness of his own lowliness, and

that he has not yet accomplished anything at all, and begins anew each time to serve Hashem, this is called "walking" (holech).

This is the meaning of "and He said, etc., Avraham" — for Avraham was the head of the believers (ma'aminim). And when he arrived at this attainment (hasagah), Hashem said to him, "Lech lecha" (Go for yourself) from your land and from your father's house — meaning that he should believe that he has not yet accomplished anything at all. For the Avot (Patriarchs) are called mochin (mental faculties/intellect), as it is written, "et Avraham, et Yitzchak, v'et Yaakov." "To the land that I will show you" means that he should believe, through emunah, that he has not yet accomplished anything at all. And this applies "to tzaddikim and to simple people" — "I say to you, Lech lecha, etc."

"I will show you" — Rashi explains: "for your benefit and for your good" — meaning that he must complete all the pleasures (hana'ot) and benefits of this world. For there are three partners in a person: the portion of the Holy One, Blessed be He, and the portion of father and mother. And concerning the Holy One, Blessed be He, it is said, "evil shall not dwell with You." But in the portion of father and mother there is a mixture of good and evil, for everything is intermingled from good and evil; he also has bechirah (free choice), and he also has chomer (physical matter). This is "Lech lecha, etc., from your father's house" — to complete the physicality — "to the land, etc." — meaning that through this he can come to the land, to the aspect of yirah (fear/awe).

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