חסידות

From the Chassidic Courts

GER · LECH LECHA, SEFAT EMET

Why holiness works through one chosen part, not everything equally

Sefat Emet

True devekut (attachment/cleaving) to HaShem does not come through drawing all of creation equally toward Him, as Avraham Avinu first imagined, but through HaShem choosing a particular nation — and within each person, some particular good point — through which all else is rectified by being nullified and set aside; this is why "Lech lecha" calls Avraham to leave his land and people, teaching that recognition of Divine Kingship comes specifically through distancing oneself from the external. This corresponds to the two levels of "hearing": the first, natural hearing of truth through the intellect, which even the tzaddikim (righteous ones) of the nations attain for their own self-improvement, and the second, higher hearing unique to Bnei Yisrael (the Children of Israel), who, even after grasping the truth, do not rest in it for their own sake but use it only to nullify themselves further before HaShem, continually preparing to hear still more. AI SUMMARY

In the midrash: "Listen, daughter, and see, and incline your ear, etc." — "a palace burning/lit up, etc." This is difficult: why say "incline your ear" after already saying "listen"? It proves that there are two types/levels of listening, as it is written "shamoa tishme'u" (you shall surely hear) — a doubled expression.

For at first HaKadosh Baruch Hu (the Holy One, Blessed be He) causes a small illumination to be heard by a person when he exerts himself to come to the truth. Afterward one must observe with the eye of the intellect this feeling, and understand that it is the essence of everything, and set aside all other feelings — and this is "Listen and see and incline your ear." That is: all the power of hearing should be focused so that nothing else at all is heard, and through this one merits to hear the truth. For what HaKadosh Baruch Hu causes to be heard at first is only in order to teach hachna'ah (humility/self-submission), so that a person understands that there is something to hear which is above his own grasp, and thereby comes to nullify himself and merits true hearing.

Now, Avraham Avinu (Abraham our father), peace be upon him, greatly desired to incline all creatures toward Him, may He be blessed. And HaShem said to him, "Lech lecha" (Go forth), etc., "and I will make you into a great nation," etc., "and I will bless those who bless you," etc. Avraham Avinu, peace be upon him, held that it would be better for the entire world to be united to Him, may He be blessed, with no opposition at all. But HaShem showed him that it is better that there be a chosen nation unto Him, may He be blessed, in the best possible way, with some blessing and some cursing, and the chosen nation would ultimately prevail over all.

This itself is the matter of the "palace burning/lit up" — for simple reason dictates that there should be nothing without permanence/endurance, and therefore Avraham Avinu thought that all created

things, even all externality, should be inclined toward Him, may He be blessed, so that no creature would be lost. But HaShem showed him: "I am the Master of the palace," and such is His will, blessed be He — that He created many things whose very endurance consists in their being nullified, in that man negates them and distances himself from them.

This is the meaning of "Lech lecha... and forget your people... for He is your Master" — for from this comes the recognition of the Kingship of Heaven: that there is externality, and man distances himself from it. Likewise, regarding devekut (attachment/cleaving) to Him, may He be blessed — it cannot be otherwise except through there being a chosen nation unto Him, blessed be He, and through this, whoever wishes may also attach himself in nullification to this nation. This is a great principle, and it applies also in the particular, to each individual of Yisrael: since it is impossible to be complete all at once as one ought, it is only through finding some good conduct or trait in a person that one can, through it, rectify all his other traits toward this single point.

This itself is the matter of the two types of "hearing" mentioned above: for at first Avraham Avinu, peace be upon him, was searching by way of the intellect to arrive at the truth. This is the level of created beings as they are from the side of nature, and he merited to recognize the truth. Afterward HaShem said to him, "Lech lecha," etc.

— referring to the second level of hearing, which pertains only to Bnei Yisrael (the Children of Israel): to nullify all hearing entirely unto Him, blessed be He, such that the intention is not to improve oneself — for that is called "for their own sake" (le-garmaihu), and that is the way of the tzaddikim (righteous ones) of the nations of the world. But Bnei Yisrael seek only to be nullified unto Him, blessed be He.

Therefore, after hearing and recognizing the truth, one does not content himself with this in order to feel pride, as is the way of the idolatrous nations, who wish to know in order to feel pride, and all their humility is only in order to attain [more knowledge]. But Bnei Yisrael are the opposite: everything they wish to attain is in order to nullify themselves before Him, blessed be He. Therefore, after this hearing, they prepare themselves even more to hear, as above.

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