

# Gratitude from the Torah

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha

## Parashat Lech Lecha

Elevation Through Hardships and Lowliness

### Fixing the Feature of Going Forward from Strength to Strength

I'm so elated and thankful for how our holy people in Israel respond to crises and hardships. The polarization and tension between the opposing camps had been unbearable. It was escalating to the degree that I was concerned that it would end in civil war, G-d forbid. Hashem returned unity to our people by bringing us together to fight our mutual enemy. We all wish we wouldn't need this war to bring our holy people together and reignite our love of the land of Israel. This love, devotion, and emunah that has been sparked by our current state of war is a spiritual inheritance from Avraham our Father, more specifically from his response to his first mitzvah.

**ספר בראשית פרק יב פסוק א**

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל אַבְרָם לֵךְ לְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֶרְאֶה:

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

Since Hashem charged Avraham to go from his land, birthplace, and the house of his father, we are called upon to keep walking in his footsteps. Rav Tzaddok of Lublin asks why it states לך/lech lecha - "go from your land"? The word לך/lech in Hebrew means to go toward a place or goal, whereas the Hebrew word צא/tze - 'leave' is used to indicate going from a place. Didn't Avraham need to go out and leave his environment completely before he could go toward the Holy Land? It should therefore have rather stated, צא מֵאֶרֶץ וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ - 'go out from' (leave) your land, your birthplace, and your father's house,' and only then לך אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֶרְאֶה - 'go to the land I will show you.' Rav Tzaddok answers his question by sharing a deep concept from the *Zohar* regarding going forward and elevating ourselves specifically through hardships. Avraham was commanded to rectify the level of going. Although Terach was an idol-worshipper of the highest caliber, Avraham was commanded to distance himself and detach completely from him both spiritually and physically as well as from everything else in his environment. He had the ability to go forward with an even greater strength not despite, but explicitly because of his lowly background (*Pri Tzaddik, Parashat Lech Lecha* 1). Like Avraham, our Father, the darkness of the current murderous attacks is propelling *Am Yisrael* (the people of Israel) to go forward both physically and spiritually from strength to strength.

### Darkness serves as a springboard to Propel Us to our Higher Selves

I have treated many women for traumas and childhood wounds and helped them realize how their hardships brought them to become the refined compassionate women they are today. We are now witnessing how the Jewish people in the entire Land of Israel and abroad are transforming our pain and fright into prayer and spiritual growth. No matter how much throbbing pain and fear we experience, this place of darkness serves as a springboard to go forward and propel ourselves to our elevated higher selves. The more a rubber band is pulled back the higher it will fly when it is finally released, as we learn from Yosef, who rose straight from prison to become second in charge to Pharaoh. Rav Shlomo Carlebach tells the following story, which illustrates how it is our lowliness that brings us to the highest place. During the Lebanon war, Rav Shlomo went to give *chizuk* (spiritually strengthen) to the soldiers. When he

approached the military Rabbi, he told him that the food was kosher. Rav Shlomo replied, “I didn’t come here to eat, neither did the soldiers. I am asking you how the souls of the soldiers are doing. Are you learning Torah with them?” “No,” said the Rav, they are not interested. Rav Shlomo told him, “If I ask the soldier furthest away from Torah to learn with me *Orot Hakodesh* of Rav Kook, I bet he will be interested.” So, Rav Shlomo took a soldier aside who clearly looked like someone who would eat Chametz on Pesach and pork on Yom Kippur. Yet, Rav Shlomo understood that this guy was willing to die for the sake of the Holy Land, he was not a simple guy. Rav Shlomo had learned *Orot Hakodesh* with many people beforehand, but never with a person who mamash cried, not only at every word but at every letter of *Orot Hakodesh*. I’m grateful to our neighbors and friends with whom we share so much love and prayer at this time. Our hearts have been opened to feel so much more kinship and love for everyone we know as well as for those we don’t know personally. The burdensome tension and accusations between fellow Jews have been exchanged with kindness and sisterhood. My heart is filled with love, admiration, and gratitude to my students who are remaining faithful to the Land of Israel and to their soldier duty to learn Torah even more fervently than ever before!

### **Leaving Behind our Blocking Impurities by Going Forward Toward Pure Holiness**

Although the low place that we came from can help us achieve even greater heights, we still do need to detach ourselves from whatever impurities we originated to move forward, climbing the highest Torah path. In Egypt when we became a people by receiving our first collective mitzvah, Hashem took us out of the fifty gates of impurity and brought us to the fifty gates of understanding. The Exodus was only possible due to Avraham paving the way. “The deeds of our Patriarchs (and Matriarchs) are the signs for the children.” Prior to the Exodus, Avraham was commanded to detach himself from the fifty gates of impurity and go forward to the fifty gates of understanding, through his first mitzvah of, לך לך/lech lecha. This is alluded to in the numerical value of לך לך/lech lecha. These words have the gematria of 50 + 50 teaching all of us to go toward the fifty gates of purity and to leave the fifty gates of impurity behind. Through Avraham’s going forward toward Hashem’s command, he was able to remove himself from his past as it states:

**ספר בראשית פרק יב פסוק ד**

וַיֵּלֶךְ אַבְרָם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיֵּלֶךְ אִתּוֹ לוֹט וְאַבְרָם בֶּן חֲמִשׁ שָׁנַיִם וְשִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה בְּצֵאתוֹ מִחָרָן:

“So Avram went, as the Eternal had spoken to him; and Lot went with him: and Avram was 75 years old when he went out from Haran” (*Bereishit* 12:4).

### **What is the Great Merit of the Politically Incorrect Term Obedience?**

The uniqueness of Avraham is not his profound realization of the One G-d in his mind, but his profound responsibility to the Living G-d in action. The first greatness ascribed to Avraham, our Father in the Torah is: “*Avraham went as Hashem told him.*” The Torah’s evasion of Avraham’s past clearly indicates that his chosen-ness was not based on his past. The reason for his selection is specifically Avraham’s readiness to be a soldier of Hashem obeying his very first command to detach from his past and go to an unknown future in the land of Israel. It is not the Avraham of the past who is chosen, but the Avraham of the present and the future, who in saying, “yes” as he transforms himself into the ‘chosen.’ Avraham chose to obey Hashem and be in a relationship with him. His going out (צֵא/tze) could only take place after his going forward לך לך/lech. The way of the Torah is always to continue to be in לך לך/lech lecha – “Go to yourself” – ‘go to your higher self and

activate the divine spark of your soul.’ In the Torah world, we talk about being on or off the דֶרֶךְ/*derech* – ‘path.’ Keeping the Torah laws is called הֲלָכָה/*halacha* – ‘going.’ The power of the mitzvot is to keep us going on the path of truth. The word mitzvah comes from the Hebrew word צָוָה/*tzavta*, meaning to connect or be with, in a צֵוֶת/*tzevet* – ‘team.’ Through walking in the way of the mitzvot we connect to Hashem in the deepest way. The mitzvot we take on becomes our garment replacing the impurity of our past. The success of war depends on the unity of the soldiers, which requires perfectly obeying their commands. The action of soldering different parts together requires first smoothing out the sharp edges. Similarly, in the process of uniting to become one we need to remove the sharp edges of our ego that prevent us from obeying Hashem’s command. Avraham’s *lech lecha*, not only empowered his descendants to go out of their Egyptian enslavement in the past, but he continues to empower us to leave our exile mentality behind and jointly go forward toward the final geulah (redemption).

### Gratitude Focus for the Week of Parashat Lech Lecha

**Leaving Behind the Pain of the Past – Past traumas and childhood wounds have the ability to propel you forward to your higher selves.**

- **Letting go** – Visualize the energy of your trauma as leaving your body.
- **Grounding** – Find a relaxing, safe place, sit comfortably, and take several deep breaths. Bring your attention to your body, tense and release your muscles, and allow yourself to feel connected to the ground beneath you. Imagine energy flowing from your tailbone to the center of the earth.
- **Recalling** – Think of a situation that has upset you recently. Revisit the sequence of events in detail and envision yourself back in this time and place. Imagine this experience with your senses.
- **Sensing** – Scan your body for sensations, and curiously observe each of these physical reactions. Silently describe them to yourself.
- **Naming** – Connect your sensations to emotions. It may be helpful to view a list of emotions before this step.
- **Accepting and Loving** – Accept your feelings. Repeat, “I love myself for feeling \_\_\_\_\_.”
- **Feeling** – Allow your feelings to come and go. Observe and acknowledge them and express your emotions constructively.
- **Receiving Wisdom** – Connect your current emotions with past experiences. Do they provide insight? Ask yourself, “What is this sensation or emotion saying to me?” Which points of light surface through my darkness?
- **Thanking** – Thank Hashem for the good points within your pain, realizing how whatever hardships you have been going through are refining you to become the compassionate caring person you are today.
- **Directing your Acceptance of Past Pains into Personal Prayer** – Gratitude is the most important element of personal prayer. The yetzer hara incites us to cut our expressions of gratitude short and to focus on praying for release from our problems. Expressions of gratitude can be more conducive to arousing Divine compassion than tears because focusing on our troubles is spurred by gratitude.
- **Prayer of Gratitude** – Ask Hashem to help us understand how everything in our life is for the very best and to thank Him for it. Begin with the fixed blessings in our lives such as our parents, our spouses, and our children. Take nothing for granted and don’t forget to thank Hashem for your lungs and the air you breathe. Afterward, you can thank Hashem for the particular blessings of the past 24 hours.

· **Thanking Hashem for your Mistakes, Setbacks, and Hardships** – Only after being in darkness can we appreciate the light. “Master of the World, beloved Father in Heaven, thank You for Your wonderful and personal intervention in my life. Thank You for showing me my shortcomings by letting me make mistakes. Thank You for arousing me to make a greater effort to get close to You. I wouldn’t have made this effort if I hadn’t experienced the setback. Thank You for my periodic difficulties, my occasional setbacks, and for the times when I don’t feel happy, because everything is for my ultimate benefit, even if I don’t see that it’s always for my best. Thank You for the times of hardships because they enable me to fully appreciate the good times.”

· **Gratitude for Being Able to Keep Hashem’s Mitzvot** – Thank You for giving me the strength to observe Your mitzvot, to do good deeds, and to pray. Empower me with humility to always obey you even when I don’t understand the reason for Your mitzvah. Thank You for all the times You helped me, and I didn’t know how to say, “Thank You.”