YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**Student summaries of sichot of the Roshei Yeshiva**

**Parashat Lekh Lekha**

**Sicha of HarAV Baruch gigi**

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Dedicated in memory of Rabbi Jack Sable *z”l* and Ambassador Yehuda Avner *z”l*,
by Debbie and David Sable

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**The Selection of Avraham**

Summarized by Itai Weiss

Translated by David Strauss

Now the Lord said to Avram: Get you out of your country, and from your kindred, and from your father's house, to the land that I will show you. (*Bereishit* 12:1)

The commentators note that in general, when God turns to a particular person, it is for one of two reasons: either because of the uniqueness and strength of the person, or because there is an important mission that God wants carried out and he chooses that person to do it.

However, God's call to Avraham does not fit into either of these categories. The Torah does not tell us about Avraham's past actions that would have caused him to be chosen, and the content of the call is God's desire to turn Avraham into a great nation – not an urgent task that he must perform. Why, then, does God turn specifically to him?

Two main approaches to this question emerge from Scripture, *Chazal*’s discussions, and the commentaries. The first approach is that there was no reason for Avraham's selection. This is already implied by Nechemia:

You are the Lord the God, who chose Avram, and brought him forth out of Ur Kasdim, and gave him the name of Avraham; and found his heart faithful before You…. (*Nechemia* 9:7-8)

The sequence of events indicated by the verse is: Avraham's selection, his rescue, and the change of his name. Only after all this was it "discovered" that Avraham's heart was faithful; the fact of his faithfulness is not what caused him to be selected.

The Maharal, who continues this approach, claims that the reason for God's selection of Avraham was deliberately not explained. Only selection that does not depend on anything can bestow eternal status upon the relationship between God and the people of Israel, regardless of their actions.

In contrast to this perspective, the Midrash proposes a different possibility:

"Now the Lord said to Avram: Get you out of your country." "Wisdom is a stronghold to the wise man more than ten men that are in a city" (*Kohelet* 7:19). From among the ten generations from Noach to Avraham, I spoke to none of them but you. "Now the Lord said to Avram: Get you out." (*Bereishit Rabba* 39)

This passage links the choosing of Avraham to wisdom, indicating that Avraham's selection was not random. This is also the position of the Ramban in his commentary to the Torah (Bereishit 12:2).

An interesting approach that emphasizes Avraham's uniqueness is found in the *Zohar*, which is cited by the *Sefat Emet*:

And in the *Zohar*, it seems that this itself is [Avraham's] praise, that he heard the words *Lekh lekha*,"Get you out," that were uttered by God to all people always… And Avraham heard and received [them]. And thus the words are associated only with him, because nobody else heard them, only him. This itself is his praise, that he was prepared to receive [God's] words. (*Sefat Emet Bereishit Parashat Lekh-Lekha*)

The *Zohar* asserts that the call of *Lekh lekha*, "Get you out," was not specifically directed to Avraham, but was present in the world for all to hear. Avraham's unique quality was that he opened his ears to hear this call. Thus, Avraham's uniqueness *is* mentioned in the verses, and is the reason for his selection.

The Rambam takes a similar approach:

After this mighty man was weaned, he began to explore and think. Though he was a child, he began to think [incessantly] throughout the day and night, wondering… His heart was exploring and [gaining] understanding. Ultimately, he appreciated the way of truth and understood the path of righteousness through his accurate comprehension. He realized that there was one God… He knew that the entire world was making a mistake. (Rambam, *Hilkhot Avoda Zara* 1:3)

Avraham arrived at the truth because he was attentive to the call of God that lay in existence itself. And once he reached that point, Avraham did not simply congratulate himself and sit alone with the religious truth that he had uncovered:

When he recognized and knew Him, he began to formulate replies to the inhabitants of Ur Kasdim and debate with them, telling them that they were not following a proper path… He began to call in a loud voice to all people and inform them that there is one God in the entire world and it is proper to serve Him. He would go out and call to the people, gathering them in city after city and country after country, until he came to the land of Canaan – proclaiming [God's existence the entire time], as it is stated: "And He called there in the name of the Lord, the eternal God" (*Bereishit* 21:33)… Ultimately, thousands and myriads gathered around him. These are the men of the house of Avraham. He planted in their hearts this great fundamental principle, and composed texts about it. (Ibid.)

Avraham spreads belief in God among the nations, talks with people, and works to make God present in the world and in the hearts of men.

We are the descendants of Avraham, and we follow in his footsteps. Whether we understand his selection as arbitrary or whether we believe it was due to his actions, we spread God's light, make it present in the world, and fulfill through ourselves:

For I have known him, to the end that he may command his children and his household after him, that they may keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice. (*Bereishit* 18:19)

[This *sicha* was delivered on Shabbat *Parashat* *Lekh Lekha* 5778 (2017).]