

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION  
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**SURVIVAL AND FULFILLMENT  
THOUGHTS ON YOM HAATZMA'UT**

**Based on a sicha by Harav Aharon Lichtenstein zt"l**

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The Torah describes two journeys of *aliya* undertaken by Avraham to reach the land of Canaan. On the first journey, described at the end of *Parashat Noach*, Avraham sets out of his own free will:

And they went out with them from Ur-Kasdim, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came to Haran, and dwelt there. (*Bereishit* 11:31)

The second journey, described at the beginning of *Parashat Lekh-Lekha*, Avraham undertakes at God's command:

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 Ramban at the end of *Parashat Noach* explains (*Bereishit* 11:28):

His father Terach and Avraham had in mind from the day that he was saved [in Ur-Kasdim] to go to the land of Canaan in order to distance themselves from the land of the Kasdim for fear of the king. For Haran was close to them, and they were all one people and one language, the Aramaic language being spoken in both places, and they wanted to go to a people [in Canaan] who would not understand the language of that king and his people. This is the meaning of: "And they went out with them from Ur-Kasdim, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came to Haran" (*Bereishit* 11:31), where their families and forefathers had always lived, and they dwelt among them, and stayed there for many days. There Avraham was commanded to do what he had intended to do, to go to the land of Canaan. He left his father, who died there in Haran his country, for he went with his wife and with his nephew Lot to the land of Canaan. This is what the verse states: "And I took your father Avraham, from the other side of the river, and led him through the whole land of Canaan" (*Yehoshua* 24:3). For he was commanded about this on the other side of the river, and it is from there that He took him and led him through the whole land of Canaan.

Avraham's *aliya* began in the same way as did Herzl's Zionist movement. There is persecution because of Jewish identity and because of adherence to God, based on faith and values, and Avraham feels the need to escape. His starting point is not the attraction and the vision of the land of

Israel, but rather escape from Ur-Kasdim. Avraham makes *aliya* from a country of distress, from a vale of tears.

But while Avraham is in Haran, he is commanded "to do what he had intended to do, to go to the land of Canaan." The spirit of God breathes life into his pragmatic plan. Here is the intersection between Avraham's plan and God's providential plan to plant him in the land of Israel. Avraham's starting point is to run away, to survive, to exist, and this plan becomes the foundation for fulfilling the will of God. Avraham's vision-less plan takes on flesh and bones, and the dimension of actualizing God's will is added to it, both on the individual and the national levels.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik distinguishes between two covenants that exist between God and the Jewish people – the covenant of fate and the covenant of destiny. Avraham's initial plan and departure from Ur-Kasdim fall into the framework of the covenant of fate. The command of "*Lekh Lekha*" turns the framework of fate into a framework of destiny; it turns the place that was meant to serve as a place of refuge into God's inheritance.

We occasionally hear harsh criticism of the State of Israel voiced by some in the religious community. They claim that the state lacks a moral vision, that it is devoid of spirituality and is guided exclusively by a drive for power. A country was established that merely meets the ordinary needs met by all other countries. A state that we would have expected to be a state of vision became a state of refugees, a political asylum.

Classical Zionism indeed had the same aspiration as did Avraham when he started out – to escape from Ur-Kasdim, to provide a political refuge for the Jews, to reach a place where it would be possible to exist, to grow stronger, and to fashion ourselves into a nation. It would be absurd to say that this goal is not legitimate.

But despite the fact that Zionism's primary goal was to establish a political refuge for the Jewish people, it should be remembered that the aspiration to achieve this goal specifically in the land of Israel drew on the yearnings of all the generations to return to the Promised Land. The Ramban says in his commentary to the beginning of *Parashat Lekh-Lekha*:

It is possible to say that Avraham knew from the outset that the land of Canaan is God's inheritance, and there God would give him his portion, and he believed that "to the land that I will show you" was an allusion to the land of Canaan...

Avraham intuitively felt that the land of Canaan is God's inheritance, and therefore he preferred it to all other places and set his eyes toward it when he ran away from Ur-Kasdim. While there is no comparison between the faith of Avraham and the faith (or lack of faith) of the early Zionist ideologues and dreamers, no Jew, after the command of *Lekh Lekha*, could think about the land of Israel as anything but a special country, the land of God's inheritance. This feeling penetrates deeply even within secular Zionism.

We, believers who are descendants of believers, must understand that while it is possible that Herzl and those who followed in his footsteps viewed the land of Israel in the same way that Avraham did at the outset, there is still no doubt that their hearts throbbed with a certain sense of fulfillment of a prophetic vision, of being connected to the land of Israel as God's inheritance. But even one who is not prepared to accept this must understand that, at the very least, even if the builders of Israel viewed the land exclusively in the framework of the covenant of fate, God adds to this framework the covenant of destiny.

We stand in constant tension between these two factors, between the consciousness that we are in need of a refuge and an assurance of our existence, and the full adherence to the vision to which God dedicated the command: "Get you out of your country, and from your kindred, and from your father's house, to the land that I will show you." We must maintain our presence in the Holy Land based on the consciousness that it is God's inheritance, and based on a sense of mission. But at the same time, we must not ignore the other dimension – the need for a land of refuge and survival. It is clear that after the command, after the land is already "the land that I will show you," we are incapable of viewing it in a completely secular fashion that distinguishes between religion and destiny.

From time to time we need to be reminded that we must not veer from the boundaries of this dialectic, neither toward excessive use of force, nor to excessive spirituality. We need a reminder that will restore for us the proper proportions and perspective. Yom HaAtzma'ut restores for us with full force and depth the consciousness that here, in God's inheritance, we can fulfill visions, but also exist; we can realize dreams but also live.

(This sicha was delivered on Yom HaAtzmaut 5748 [1988].)

For more *sichot* by Harav Lichtenstein *zt"l* on Yom HaAtzma'ut, see here: <http://etzion.org.il/en/topics/yom-haatzmaut?combine=aharon+lichtenstein>