

Lech Lecha: "Man is Born to Toil"

Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

In the Torah portion of *Lech Lecha*, G-d promises Avraham: "I shall give your children this land."¹ The *Midrash* comments:² "While Avraham was traveling in Aram Naharayim... he observed the inhabitants eating, drinking and acting frivolously and wantonly. He said: 'I wish to have no part in this land.' When he arrived at the entrance of Tzur, he observed them weeding... cultivating... He said: 'I wish to have my share in this land.' G-d said to him: 'I shall give your children this land.' "

It is understandable that Avraham desired to have his portion among people who toiled and behaved properly, rather than among individuals who spent their lives frivolously.

However, G-d's promise that "I shall give your children this land," meant that the Jewish people would inherit and conquer the entire land. What reason is there for connecting G-d's promise to the conduct of the land's inhabitants during the time of Avraham?

The importance of labor and toil is to be seen from the verse: "Man is born to toil."³ What is so important about toil and labor? Moreover, since G-d is the Essence of Good and it is the nature of one who is good to act in a kind and benevolent manner, it seems strange that He made it necessary for man to work.

It is true that man's nature is such that he derives pleasure from something accomplished through labor and toil, in accordance with the expression:⁴ "A person desires one measure of that which is his more than nine measures of that which belongs to his fellow."

However, we cannot say that this is *why* G-d made man work, for it is man's nature to enjoy the fruits of his labor only because G-d imbued him with this tendency.

So the original question remains: Why did G-d create man in such a way that his greatest joy comes through toil? Why not create him with the ability to be delighted by idleness, for example?

The ultimate achievement of a human being lies not only in realizing his full potential, but in attaining a level such that he is, as it were, similar to his Creator, in line with the saying:⁵ "He becomes a *partner* with G-d in Creation."

It was for this reason that G-d established the world in a manner such that the things which man needs for his existence are not ready-made. For it is through toil and labor that man is able to elevate himself, not only to the highest "recipient" level — the highest possible attainment of a created being — but to the level of a provider and "creator."

This is why man does not derive pleasure from things acquired without effort, but is instead ashamed of them. Toil and effort are the hallmarks of mankind's efforts to improve the world — he can thus enhance Creation and

thereby become a "partner with G-d."

Labor that involves the recognition of and faith in G-d as Creator and Provider⁶ leads to "labor in Torah,"⁷ whereby individuals lift the entire world to a level beyond itself. By doing so, one "creates" a new entity.

In a similar vein, the labor of the Jewish people in *Eretz Yisrael* consisted of working to "create" a *holy* land of Torah out of that which was previously mundane. The first steps taken in this direction were a fitting prelude to G-d's promise that "I shall give your children this land."

Based on *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. XV, pp. 93-99

FOOTNOTES

1. *Bereishis* 12:7.
2. *Bereishis Rabbah* 39:8.
3. *Iyov* 5:7.
4. *Bava Metzia* 38a.
5. *Shabbos* 10a, 119b.
6. See *Kol Adam* 5689 chs. 3, 6; *Or HaTorah*, *Vayeishev* p. 1,111; *Lo Hibat* 5670 (p. 195ff.).
7. See *Sanhedrin* 99b.

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