LEKH LEKHA: Walk Before Me

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“Walk before Me with integrity.”

ABRAHAM AND NOAH

When the Torah describes the relationship between God and Noah the text says: “ET HAELOQIM HITHALEKH NOAH”, which means: “And Noah walked *with* God.” Our Sages explained that this means that Noah relied on God, and the Creator rescued him from his problems. Noah obeyed God and created a healthy dependence on Divine assistance. His greatest aspiration was for God to hold his hand, lead him, and draw him out of the hole if he ever fell. On the other hand, when the biblical text describes in this Parasha the dynamics between God and Abraham, we don’t see this kind of relationship. God says to Abraham, “HITHALEKH LEFANAI”, “Walk *before* Me …” What does this mean? What is the meaning “before” Me ? There are several profound interpretations, and I will present just two opinions.

LIVE UNDER MY SIGHT

We can understand this text in the first place as “Walk before My Presence,” that is, live a life aware of My presence. Knowing that I am always watching you. It is like what King David said in Tehillim “SHIVITI HASHEM LENEGDI TAMID”, “I have HaShem in my mind / before Me, permanently.” This interpretation is compatible with the end of that verse that says VEHEYE TAMIM, that is to say: “*[conduct yourself] … with integrity* “. In other words: in every step you take in your life, keep My existence in mind and live with integrity. Acting according to what God indicates is a way of promoting the idea of □□His existence. Acting honestly, with nobility and generosity, when other people know that one is guided by Divine instruction has an effect of “admiration” for God and a desire to emulate that behavior. This is called in Hebrew

“Qiddush HaShem”, sanctifying His name, that is, increasing the reputation of the Creator through our actions.

SHOWING GOD TO THE WORLD

Another interpretation is neither less profound nor less beautiful. These words □□□□ □□□□ □□□□ □□□□□ can also be translated as: “Walk before Me” as when one person says to another: “Walk ahead of me, and I will follow you …” But, how should Abraham walk ahead of God? A Midrash says that God asked Abraham to go ahead of Him to show the world the presence of God. “Like a servant that goes ahead of the royal carriage at night, illuminating the presence of the King with his lamp so that the King’s subjects can see him”. But showing the rest of the world God’s existence is not an easy task …

DEMAGOGY

Abraham’s first mission was to show humanity that Aboda Zara, idolatry, was false. As Maimonides explains, the religious pagan leaders made up rituals and beliefs to control and manipulate people with fears and fetishism. These people were charlatans who used superstitions – which they had invented – to dominate and obtain power. When Abraham denounced the falsehood of idolatry, he made many enemies like King Nimrod.

IMAGE OF GOD

Abraham had another mission. Demonstrate that God cannot be seen and that it is absurd to represent Him with idols and statues. Now he had to make them understand that although God cannot be seen, God exists and can definitely see us! Abraham taught that to “discover” the Creator, we must observe Creation and regain our capacity for wonder.

EVOLUTION OR CREATION?

Abraham also demonstrated the existence of God by practicing *hesed*, benevolence. Abraham was dedicated to

hosting guests in his tent, offering shade, water, and food to strangers. And when they thanked him for his hospitality, Abraham would say to them: "Don't thank me," *nebarekh sheakhalnu mishelo,* "Let us bless the Highest, God, who provided us with this food." Practicing good is a way of expressing our belief in God. Why? Because if there is no Creator, if we are only evolved animals, then we must be guided by the fundamental law of nature: "the survival of the fittest." As Nietzsche said (and as the Nazis did): *"Having mercy on the weakest will make you weaker. The man without God must use all his means and efforts to make the already strong stronger and not waste his efforts on helping the weak".* On the other hand, hesed, doing good selflessly, is only justified when we affirm that Creation is Divine, and that the Creator is the "Father" of humanity, and as a father who loves his children, expects us to take care of each other.

IMPOSSIBLE MISSIONS

Abraham has several challenging missions: 1. To live, think, and act with integrity so that his behavior projects the existence of God onto the world. 2. Intellectually enlighten humanity to displace the lies of opportunists and help men and women to discover the Creator 3. Doing good and behaving with integrity towards others as the best way to put belief in God into practice.