

What Are You Building—and Who Are You Becoming?

Parshas Lech Lecha | Sources • Rabbi Yossi Michalowicz

1. Bereishis 12:1, 4

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל אַבְרָם לֵךְ מֵאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֹרָאָה... וַיֵּלֶךְ אַבְרָם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֱלֹהֵי ה'

Hashem said to Avram: "Go forth from your land, your birthplace, and your father's house, to the land that I will show you." "Avram went as Hashem had spoken to him..."

2. Rashi on Bereishis 12:1 — "Lech lecha"

לְהַנָּאתְךָ וּלְטוֹבָתְךָ, וְשֵׁם אֶעֱשֶׂה לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל, כֵּאֵן אִי אֶתָּה זֹכָה לְבָנִים. וְעוֹד שְׂאוֹדִיעַ טְבַעְךָ בְּעוֹלָם

For your benefit and your good. There I will make you into a great nation; here you will not merit children. Furthermore, I will make your reputation known throughout the world.

3. Zohar, Mishpatim II 112b — Who is a chassid?

אֵיזֶהוּ חֲסִיד? הַמִּתְחַסֵּד עִם קוֹנוֹ

Who is a chassid? One who acts with kindness toward his Creator.

4. Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer, chapter 24 — The Tower of Babel

וְאִם נָפַל אָדָם וּמָת לֹא שָׁמִי אֶת לְבָבִי עָלָיו, וְאִם נָפַלָה לְבָנָה אַחַת הָיוּ יוֹשְׁבֵינָה וְבוֹכִין וְאוֹמְרִין: אוֹי לָנוּ, אֵימָתִי תַעֲלֶה אַחֲרֵת תַּחְתֶּיהָ

If a person fell and died, they paid him no attention. But if a single brick fell, they would sit and weep, saying: "Woe to us! When will another be brought up in its place?"

5. Avodah Zarah 18a — Rabbi Chanina ben Teradyon (excerpts)

...תָּנוּ רַבָּנִן: כְּשָׁחֲלָה רַבִּי יוֹסִי בֶן קִיסְמָא, הָלַךְ רַבִּי חֲנִינָא בֶן תֶּרְדִּיּוֹן לְבַקְרוֹ
אָמַר לוֹ: רַבִּי, מָה אֲנִי לַחֲיֵי הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא? אָמַר לוֹ: כְּלוּם מַעֲשֶׂה בֹא לִידֶיךָ? אָמַר לוֹ: מַעוֹת שֶׁל פּוּרִים נִתְחַלְפוּ לִי
בַּמַּעוֹת שֶׁל צְדָקָה וְחֻלְקִיתִים לַעֲנִיִּים. אָמַר לוֹ: אִם כֵּן, מִחֻלְקֶיךָ יֵהי חֻלְקִי וּמִגּוֹרְלֶיךָ יֵהי גּוֹרְלִי

The Sages taught: When Rabbi Yosi ben Kisma became ill, Rabbi Chanina ben Teradyon went to visit him... Rabbi Chanina asked: "My teacher, what is my standing concerning life in the World to Come?" Rabbi Yosi answered: "Did a particular deed come your way?" Rabbi Chanina replied: "My Purim money became mixed up with charity money, and I distributed it to the poor." Rabbi Yosi said: "If so, may my portion be from your portion, and my lot from your lot."

Rashi explains: He distributed money set aside for his Purim meal, thinking it was charity money, and did not reimburse himself from the charity purse.

6. Rav Shimshon Pinkus — Tiferes Shimshon, Lech Lecha, p. קסד

וְאִמְנָם אֵין הַכוֹוֶנָה, חֲלִילָה, שְׁאֲבִרְהֵם לֹא הָיָה צָרִיךְ לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת כָּל הַמַּעֲשִׂים הַטּוֹבִים שֶׁעָשָׂה, כִּי וּדְאִי שֶׁלֵּלָא עֲשִׂיתִים
לֹא הָיָה בּוֹנֶה אֶת עַצְמוֹ. אֲבָל הַיּוֹפִי שֶׁל הַכֹּל, הַדָּבָר שֶׁבְּמִיּוּחַד חָפֵץ בּוֹ הַשֵּׁי"ת הוּא שֶׁבִּנְיָן אֶת עַצְמוֹ, כְּלוֹמֵר, הָעֵיקָר
לֹא מֶה שְׁאֵתָה עוֹשֶׂה, אֲלֵא מֶה שְׁאֵתָה בּוֹנֶה אֶת עַצְמֶךָ

This certainly does not mean, Heaven forbid, that Avraham did not need to perform all the good deeds he performed; without doing them, he certainly would not have developed himself. But the beauty of it all, what Hashem especially desires, is that he developed himself. In other words, the essential point is not what you do, but how you build yourself!

Questions: Why emphasise Avraham's benefit? What can we give Hashem? Why ask about this deed after Rabbi Chanina's public self-sacrifice for Torah?