

“ויאמר ד' אל אברם לך לך מארצך וממולדתך ומבית אביך” בראשית יב:א

“Hashem said to Avram, go from your land from your birthplace and your father’s house” Bereishis 12:1

The Mishnah in Pirkei Avos states that Hashem tested Avraham Avinu ten times and that Avraham passed them all with flying colors. There are many opinions as to which particular events the ten challenges consist of. The Bartenura for example, contends that the first test was when Nimrod tossed Avram into a fiery furnace and the second test occurred at our current standpoint, when Hashem commanded Avram, “לך לך מארצך”.

Rashi on the words לך לך explains that Hashem was commanding Avram to go for his own sake and for his benefit; “להנאתך ולטובתך”, for the pasuk continues “ואעשה לגוי גדול” – “I will make you into a great nation”. The question is, that most authorities explain that the command of לך לך was meant to test Avraham Avinu. If so, why would Hashem list all of the good that He planned to shower upon Avram at the completion of the journey? Perhaps we can answer through the words of the Rambam in פירוש המשניות. The Rambam counts the ten tests slightly differently than the other commentators. The Rambam agrees that לך לך was a test; in fact the Rambam holds that לך לך was the *first* test that was thrown Avram’s way. The Rambam continues that the second test was that upon Avram’s arrival in the Land of Canaan, he found the land to be in the midst of a great famine. This was after Hashem had promised Avram “ואעשה לגוי גדול”, in return for his complying with the command of לך לך. The words of the Rambam are “זוה נסיון גדול” – “This was a great test”. According to the Rambam, we can understand the test of לך לך. Even though Hashem promised Avram a great reward, the challenge of לך לך was a set-up of sorts, a lure, if you will, leading up to the even greater test of “רעב בארץ”

This answers our question if we view these first two נסיונות as being somewhat connected, a one-two punch. However, it does not suffice as an explanation as to why לך לך *itself* could be considered a test. It must surely have been hard for Avram to abandon his homeland (friends), birthplace and father’s house (family) to set off towards an unknown land, but with the promise of such a great reward waiting for him upon his arrival, what was the question? Of course Avram would go for it. Remember, the promise came from Hashem, and Avraham Avinu was the inventor of monotheism. Avram knew and believed without a shadow of a doubt that Hashem’s promise would be fulfilled.

The מעינה של תורה answers with a fundamental concept. The test of לך לך was *not* for Avram to overcome the emotional trauma of leaving home. To the contrary, Avram may have delighted that Hashem had come down from on High to command him to skip right out of his idolatrous town. Rather, Avram’s test was that even though he knew that he would be rewarded for his efforts, he still undertook the journey solely for the sake of fulfilling רצון ד' – The will of Hashem, without allowing an ulterior motive (which Hashem Himself had built in to the command), to divert him from serving Hashem בלב שלם.

Perhaps the hardest tests are found within ourselves. Our internal struggles, not only to do the right thing, but as we see in this week’s Parsha, even as we do רצון ד', it is imperative to ensure that we are doing the mitzvos strictly for the purpose of fulfilling Hashem’s will and not for our own personal gains. The physical reward may or may not be granted. But even if we do know that we will be rewarded for our good deeds, our focus should still be that we are doing it because Hashem said so.

