

Insights from the Meshech Chochma

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פְּרָשַׁת לֶךְ לָךְ תִּשַׁפּ"ו

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אֶל מְקוֹם הַמִּזְבֵּחַ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה שָׁם בְּרֵאשִׁית וַיִּקְרָא שָׁם אֲבְרָם בְּשֵׁם ה' (פרק יג' ד)
(So Avram went up from Mitzraim... He proceeded on his journeys from the south to Beth-el, to the place where his tent had been at first...) to the site of the altar which he had built there at first; and there Avram invoked Hashem by Name.

The Artscroll Stone Edition Chumash editors poignantly describe Avram's return to Eretz Yisrael as follows: "Although it is literally true that Avraham *ascended* because the terrain of *Eretz Yisrael* is higher than that of *Mitzraim*, the Zohar perceives... an additional indication that Avraham ascended *spiritually* from the 'lower degrees' of Mitzraim. He left a place of spiritual pollution and returned to his former, higher condition... To signify this resumption of his original mission of proclaiming G-d's Name, Avraham returned to the altar where he had declared his devotion when he first arrived in the Land."

Several Mefarshim address the superfluous detail in the phrase אֶל מְקוֹם הַמִּזְבֵּחַ i.e., why did the Torah not write just וַיֵּלֶךְ אֶל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ? Radak explains that the Torah is stressing "that Avram did not only return to the mountainous region which he had been earlier told to go but that he returned to *exactly the place* where he had previously prayed. We are to learn from this how important it is for a person to appoint a definitive spot from where to offer his prayers on a regular basis, as it is easier to concentrate when one is in familiar surroundings. Now that he returned to this מְקוֹם, he prayed to Hashem again."

Rav Meir Simcha proposes a different understanding of why the Torah had to add that it was מְקוֹם הַמִּזְבֵּחַ and he bases it on a complicated discussion in מנחות' regarding a *metzora's* purification process. After blood from his הָאֲנָשׁ is placed on his right thumb and big toe, oil must then be put too. With regards to a wealthy *metzora*, the Torah tells the Kohen to place the oil, עַל דָּם הָאֲנָשׁ / *on the blood of the guilt offering*. A few pasukim later, addressing the poor *metzora*, the Torah writes that the oil be placed עַל מְקוֹם דָּם הָאֲנָשׁ / *on the place of the guilt offering's blood*. The Gemara questions why the Torah felt it necessary to repeat the poor *metzora's* oil directive i.e., that the oil be placed on the spots where the blood was put and it answers that עַל מְקוֹם דָּם הָאֲנָשׁ is teaching us that even if the blood was wiped away, the oil is placed upon the *location* of the blood-the blood does not necessarily have to still be on his skin. What Rav Meir Simcha "sees" from this שִׁקְלָא וְטָרְיָא is that when the Torah uses the word מְקוֹם, it is referring to the place, even if the subject matter-in this case the blood-is not present. Applying this to our pasuk, Rav Meir Simcha proposes that the Torah is telling us that Avram returned to the place where he had previously built a מִזְבֵּחַ but it was not around. Why not? He explains that after Avram went to *Mitzraim*, the local idolators likely used his מִזְבֵּחַ to bring sacrifices to their gods. This would defile it and as we read in: עֲבוּדָה זָרָה נִבְּ: "...the

Chasmonians sequestered the Altar stones that the Greeks desecrated. R' Sheishes added: 'They desecrated the stones by using them for idol worship and Temple vessels used in such a manner can no longer be used and must be taken away.'" Similarly, Avram's מִזְבֵּחַ had to be removed, and only then ה' וַיִּקְרָא שֵׁם אֲבְרָם בְּשֵׁם ה'. He was permitted to pray on the מִקְדָּשׁ הַמִּזְבֵּחַ but not use the מִזְבֵּחַ again. And Rav Meir Simcha adds that this is exactly what חז"ל say in אֶת אֱלֹהֵיהֶם: "עבודה זרה מה. "The mitzva to destroy the objects of idolatrous worship applies to עַל הַהָרִים/their gods, upon the high mountains but not to the mountains themselves!"

Rav Meir Simcha uses his understanding of מִקְדָּשׁ to add a deeper insight to a Midrash Aggadah quoted by Rashi earlier in the Parsha: "...וַיַּעֲבֹר אֲבְרָם בְּאֶרֶץ עַד מְקוֹם שְׁכֶם.../Avram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem... and he did so to pray for the sons of Yaakov when they would come to wage war in Shechem." How did the Midrash know that it was this specific incident which Avram davened about? According to Rav Meir Simcha it was because the Torah added the word מִקְדָּשׁ i.e., he davened about a מִקְדָּשׁ which, in the future, Yaakov's sons, after taking revenge for their sister Dina, would clear out and leave desolate-that was Shechem!

Finally, he takes us to ה' אֶהְבֵּתִי מְעוֹן בֵּיתְךָ וּמְקוֹם where Dovid HaMelech writes, מְשֻׁכָּן/Hashem, I love the shelter of Your House, and the dwelling-place of Your glory. Why does he repeat that he loves Hashem's מְשֻׁכָּן after he already informed us that he loves His בֵּיתְךָ? According to Rav Meir Simcha, Dovid HaMelech is referring to the future Beis HaMikdash and by adding מְשֻׁכָּן בְּבֹדֶךָ, וּמְקוֹם מְשֻׁכָּן בְּבֹדֶךָ, he is telling us that even after the Bayis is (just) a מְקוֹם i.e., the Aron HaKodesh and the Shechinah are absent, it maintains its intrinsic קְדוּשָׁה and remains a special place to connect with Hashem. And he tells us to look at a ירושלמי ברכות which supports this: R' Yehoshua ben Levi explained that the awkward phrase in יז מלכים א' ו' that the awkward phrase in יז מלכים א' ו' is, the Sanctuary at the front, could also be understood as describing the Beis HaMikdash as the place wherever in the world one is praying Shemoneh Esrei, one should לִפְנֵי, turn, towards it. Continues the Gemara: "So far when it is standing. In its destruction, from where do we know this? R' Abun said that in שיר השירים the Beis HaMikdash is referred to as תְּלִפְיוֹת because it is a conjugation of תֵּל-a flattened hill i.e., what used to be the Bayis, and that even after it was leveled by our enemies, remains the place to which all פִּיּוֹת, mouths, pray." The מְקוֹם הַבַּיִת will forever be the מְקוֹם הַקְּבוּעָה for all Klal Yisrael's tefillos to be answered by אָבִינוּ נִשְׁבָּשְׁמִים!

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לזכר נשמת אמי מורתי רחל בת ר' אלחנן אביגדור ע"ה
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