

Rav Moshe Feinstein, Zt'l, on Lech Lecha
Even Going to Eretz Yisroel Must Be at Hashem's Command
by Rabbi Eliyahu Kirsh

The Parsha of Lech Lecha opens with Hashem telling Avraham Avinu to leave his land, upbringing and family to go to the land that he will be shown. While leaving his home and background was one of the ten trials of Avraham which he did pass, this time was not the first time that he was in Eretz Yisroel. In fact, Chazal calculate that that Avraham had actually been in Eretz Yisroel five years earlier at the time of the bris bain habsarim. At that time, Avraham had already been told that his descendents would be enslaved, redeemed and returned to Eretz Yisroel. So why was Eretz Yisroel made to seem to Avraham like a totally new and unfamiliar place?

This question was asked by my Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Moshe Feinstein, Zt'l, and he answered it in the following way. Avraham had indeed traveled all over the world seeking Hashem's presence. He found it in Eretz Yisroel. Hashem certainly wanted that this is what should happen. However, it was still Avraham's own that he found Hashem's presence manifested in Eretz Yisroel more than the rest of the world. It was not a commandment from Hashem that he should go to Eretz Yisroel. There was a need to go to Eretz Yisroel as a command from Hashem and not because he found its hallowed riches on his own. Even a noble pursuit of going to Eretz Yisroel to bask in the kedusha must only be because Hashem commanded it. We see that even doing great mitzvos that give us that special satisfaction and closeness to Hashem must be done because Hashem commanded them. The closeness to Hashem is the result, to be sure, but Hashem's command is the most important component in growing spiritually.

Once the command was given to Avraham, then new holiness was added to the land so that the high level of immorality that was there at the time should not influence Avraham and his family. This holiness was manifested in the fact that the land has so many special mitzvos such as Shmitta, terumos and maasros among others, that do not apply to land anywhere else in the world. Furthermore, once Eretz Yisroel was conquered in the days of Yehoshua, prophecy could only be initiated and semicha could only be given in Eretz Yisroel. But we must still remember, Eretz Yisroel, with all of its loftiness, is holy, not intrinsically or magically, but because of Hashem's command alone.