

Rabbeinu Bachya ben Asher z"l (Spain; 1255-1340) introduces his commentary on this week's *Parashah* with the verse (*Mishlei* 13:20), "One who walks with the wise will grow wise, but the companion of fools will be broken." He explains: This verse is cautioning a person to seek the companionship of wise people and to distance himself from fools. The verse says, "walks," in the present tense, to indicate that this is what a person should do always. One who is constantly a companion to wise people cannot help but to become wiser.

R' Bachya continues: When one attaches himself to a wise person, the wise person's wisdom is not diminished. This is why the Torah is likened to a candle; as in the verse (*Tehilim* 119:105), "Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light for my path." No matter how many candles one lights from another candle, the first candle is never diminished. Attaching oneself to a wise person also may be compared to walking through a perfume market. One will come out with his clothes perfumed, though he purchased no perfume. Thus the verse says, "One who walks with the wise will grow wise." The same dynamic exists, only negatively, when one keeps company with fools.

Avraham Avinu wanted to serve G-d and observe His Torah, R' Bachya continues, but he lived among wicked people who subscribed to the foolishness of idolatry. Therefore, *Hashem* commanded Avraham, "*Lech Lecha*"--distance yourself from them and from their filth, leaving your land and your birthplace. This was the first of Avraham's ten tests, R' Bachya writes. (R' Bachya notes that Avraham's tenth test--the *Akeidah*--also was introduced with the words (22:2) "*Lech Lecha*," which teaches us how great this first test was.) (*Midrash Rabbeinu Bachya*)

Shabbat

"This is the praise of the *Shabbat* Day: that on it G-d rested from all His work. And the Seventh Day gives praise, saying (*Tehilim* 92:1-2), 'A psalm, a song for the *Shabbat* Day. It is good to thank *Hashem* . . . ' Therefore, let all that He has fashioned glorify and bless G-d. Praise, honor and greatness let them render to G-d, the King Who fashioned everything." (From the *Shabbat* morning prayers)

R' Menachem Mendel Pomerantz *shlita* (editor-in-chief of the *Mesivta Shas* and *Machon Oz Ve'hadar*, and a prolific author of original Torah works) asks: "Therefore" implies a logical or causal relationship between the preceding phrase ("The Seventh Day gives praise") and the succeeding phrase ("Let all He has fashioned glorify and bless G-d"). How does the latter imperative follow from the former statement?

R' Pomerantz explains, based on the writings of R' Avraham Yehoshua Heschel z"l (1748-1825; the *Apter Rov*, also known as the "*Ohev Yisrael*"): One might wonder how any created thing could take upon itself to praise G-d. After all, what are we compared to the King of Kings, that we should praise Him? But, because "the Seventh Day gives praise . . . therefore" we are able to praise Him as well.

He elaborates: We are taught that the *Mitzvot* we perform have profound spiritual effects on all of existence. However, the effect of a particular *Mitzvah* is realized only when there is "*Itaruta D'le'tata*" / "Awaking from below"--i.e., only when a Jew takes the initiative to perform that *Mitzvah*. Otherwise, the mere existence of a *Mitzvah* does nothing.

One *Mitzvah* is an exception, and that is observing *Shabbat*. Much of *Shabbat* observance is accomplished passively--i.e., by not doing any of the 39 *Melachot* / forbidden activities. This indicates that the profound spiritual effects that *Shabbat* has on existence are not dependent on our actions; they are inherent to *Shabbat*, and they happen "automatically," so long as we do not interfere by violating *Shabbat*. - **Continued in box inside** -

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“How shall I know that I am to inherit it [Eretz Yisrael]?” . . .

“He said to Avram, ‘Know with certainty that your offspring will be aliens in a land not their own . . .’” (15:8, 13)

R’ Joseph B. Soloveitchik z”l (1903-1993) explains Avraham’s question and Hashem’s response. Avraham asked: “How can I be confident that my descendants will remain devoted to the Land which You are promising them?” Hashem answered: “Know with certainty that your children will suffer a long exile during which they will pine for the Land. During the long night of the exile, they will have one dream, one hope--to reach *Eretz Yisrael*. This will ensure that they will remain forever loyal to the Land.”

(Quoted in *Haggadah Shel Pesach: An Exalted Evening* p.55)

“He said to Avram, ‘Know with certainty that your offspring will be aliens in a land not their own . . .’” (15:13)

R’ Yehuda Aszod z”l (1796-1866; rabbi of Szerdahely, Hungary) asks: Once Hashem had told Avraham that his “offspring will be aliens,” why was it necessary to add, “in a land not their own”?

He answers: The *Gemara* (*Sanhedrin* 91a) teaches that the wealth that *Bnei Yisrael* took with them when they left Egypt was payment for their servitude. But, did every Egyptian enslave *Bnei Yisrael*? Why did Egyptians who had not enslaved anyone need to pay reparations to *Bnei Yisrael*?

The answer is that the wealth *Bnei Yisrael* took did not belong to individual Egyptians; it all belonged to Pharaoh because Yosef had acquired it for the throne during the famine that preceded *Bnei Yisrael*’s arrival in Egypt (see *Bereishit* 47:13-20). Therefore, there was no unfairness in *Bnei Yisrael*’s receiving that wealth as payment for their work. That is what Hashem is telling Avraham in our verse: “Your offspring will be aliens in a land not their own”--meaning, in a land that does not belong to the people who live there, *i.e.*, the individual Egyptians.

(Quoted in *Haggadah Shel Pesach Aish Dat Yehuda* p.62)

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As such, R’ Pomerantz concludes in the name of the *Apter Rov*, we can better understand the language of our prayers, as follows: If *Itaruta D’le’tata* were required to make *Shabbat* a holy day, who could ever say that he had purified himself sufficiently and observed *Shabbat* well enough to give *Shabbat* its rightful holiness? However, *Shabbat*’s holiness in not dependent on us. “The Seventh Day [already] gives praise.” Therefore, we can attach ourselves to that holiness and praise Hashem also without fear that we are overstepping or overreaching.

(*Mesivta Zemirot Shabbat*, Introduction)

“Hashem said to Avram, ‘Go for yourself from your land, from your birthplace, and from your father’s house to the land that I will show you.’” (12:1)

We read (*Yehoshua* 24:2-3--quoted in the *Pesach Haggadah*): “Your forefathers--Terach, the father of Avraham and the father of Nachor--*Mei’olam* / always dwelt beyond the [Euphrates] River and they served the gods of others. But I took your forefather, Avraham, from beyond the River and lead him throughout the land of Canaan . . .” R’ Yedidiah Tiah Weil z”l (1721-1805; rabbi of Karlsruhe, Germany) asks: Why does the verse call Terach our “forefather”--does not the *Gemara* (*Berachot* 16b) teach that only Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov are properly called our “*Avot*” / forefathers? Also, why does the verse say, seemingly redundantly, “Your forefather, Avraham,” when it could have said simply, “Avraham”? Lastly, what is the taught by saying that our forefathers “always” dwelt beyond the River?

R’ Weil answers: Before our Patriarchs arrived on the scene, earlier generations could indeed be called the *Avot* / forefathers of their progeny. But, when Avraham came of age and lit up the world with his recognition of the Creator, our earlier biological ancestors lost the right and the privilege to be called our *Avot*. In Hashem’s great love for the Jewish People, He, so-to-speak, took the good fruits and threw away the peels.

Thus, continues R’ Weil, we say in the *Pesach Haggadah*, based on the verses in *Yehoshua*: “Originally, idol worshipers were our ancestors, but now the Omnipresent has brought us near to His service.” “Now,” R’ Weil writes, those earlier generations cannot be called our *Avot*. Only Avraham can be called our “Forefather”; hence the seemingly redundant, “Your forefather, Avraham.”

In light of the above, R’ Weil writes, we understand why the *Haggadah*’s author chose to quote a verse in *Yehoshua* about the selection of Avraham rather than a verse in the Torah, such as the opening verse of our *Parashah*. It is because the verse in *Yehoshua* teaches also that, beginning with Avraham, earlier generations are not called “*Avot*.”

R’ Weil adds: With this we can understand also why Terach’s third son, Haran, is not mentioned. *Yehoshua* wishes to contrast Avraham and his idolatrous family members, Terach and Nachor. Haran, our Sages tell us, had no strong convictions; he said that he would follow Avraham if the latter survived Nimrod’s furnace, and, if not, he would worship idols.

(*Haggadah Shel Pesach Marbeh Le’sapper*)

R’ Weil does not answer his own third question (Why does the verse say that our forefathers “always” dwelt beyond the River?). However, R’ David Cohen *shlita* (*Rosh Yeshiva* of the Chevron Yeshiva) answers based R’ Weil’s ideas: The verse is highlighting that there was a significant transition from what “always” was to what is “now,” after Hashem has chosen Avraham Avinu and his descendants. (*Haggadah Shel Pesach Leil Hitkadesh Chag* p. 238)