

## Parshas Lech-Lecha

# What G-d Owns

Parshas Lech Lecha is centered upon Avraham Avinu, the first of three patriarchs of the Jewish people. The Mishna tells of his greatness and that he was considered an acquisition of the Almighty.

The Sages taught in a Tanaic *beraisa*:

### Text 1

The Holy One, Blessed be He acquired five acquisitions in His world. These are: one acquisition is the *Torah*, one acquisition are the heavens and the earth, one acquisition is Avraham, one acquisition is Yisroel (the Jewish people), and one acquisition is the *Beis Hamikdash*. The *Torah*, as it is written<sup>1</sup>, "G-d acquired me as the beginning of His way, before His works of yore." The heavens and the earth, as it is written<sup>2</sup>, "So says G-d: 'The heavens are My throne and the earth is My footstool; what house, then, can you build for Me, and where is My place of rest?'" and it says<sup>3</sup>, "How many are Your works, G-d, You have made them all with wisdom; the earth is filled with Your acquisitions." Avraham, as it is written<sup>4</sup>, "And he blessed him, and said: 'Blessed be Avram to G-d, Most High, acquirer of heavens and earth.'" The Jewish people, as it is written<sup>5</sup>, "Until Your nation, G-d, shall pass, until this nation You have acquired shall pass"; and it says<sup>6</sup>, "To the holy who are upon earth, the noble ones, in whom is all My delight." The *Beis Hamikdash*, as it is written<sup>7</sup>, "The base for Your dwelling that You, G-d, have achieved; the Sanctuary, G-d, that Your hands have established"; and it says<sup>8</sup>, "And

He brought them to His holy domain, this mount His right hand has acquired."

*Pirkei Avos 6:10*

This statement expresses that in the vast world that G-d created, there are five individual things that G-d specifically acquired to be His own.

These five entities are (1) *Torah*; (2) heaven and earth; (3) Avraham; (4) Yisroel (the Jewish people); and (5) the *Beis Hamikdash*.

This statement, however, require further understanding:

Firstly, the wording of the *beraisa* is puzzling. The statement, "G-d acquired five acquisitions *in His world*," seems to insinuate that the entire world *on its own* is not an acquisition of G-d, but rather that He procured separate acquisitions *in His world*. Yet, being that G-d created everything that exists, obviously the entire universe, must already belong to Him!

This is not merely a logical conclusion, but is a concept that is explicitly expressed in Tehillim:

<sup>1</sup> Mishlei 8:22

<sup>2</sup> Yeshaya 66:1

<sup>3</sup> Tehillim 104:25

<sup>4</sup> Bereishis 14:19

<sup>5</sup> Shemos 15:16

<sup>6</sup> Tehillim 16:3

<sup>7</sup> Shemos 15:17

<sup>8</sup> Tehillim 78:54

## Text 2

The land and the fullness thereof are G-d's; the world and those who dwell therein. For He founded it upon seas and established it upon rivers.

Tehillim 24:1-2

There are other difficulties in this teaching as well:

- 1) Heaven and earth are not only individual objects, they include everything that exists in the universe. Once it has already been said that heaven and earth belong to G-d, what else is there outside of these, which are not included?
- 2) Heaven and earth are two separate entities. Why then, are heaven and earth considered one acquisition and not two?
- 3) As a proof that G-d owns heaven and earth, we bring two obscure verses. Why do we not bring the straightforward verse, (which is in fact brought in connection to Avraham) "G-d acquires heaven and earth?"
- 4) Why is it, that Avraham is considered a distinct acquisition, and not simply included in the acquisition of the Jewish people? This would seem particularly fitting, being that Avraham was the primal founder of the Jewish people, and the first of the three patriarchs.
- 5) The verse which is brought to support the acquisition of Avraham seems to make no mention of Avraham being an acquisition of G-d. It seems to merely comment on Avraham's own procurement of heaven and earth!
- 6) Why are each of the five acquisitions continuously prefaced with the words, "one acquisition?" Why does the *bereisa* enumerate them as "one acquisition is the Torah, one

acquisition is heaven and earth, etc.," rather than number them in escalating order (the second acquisition, the third acquisition)? Additionally, why is it necessary to have preceding words before each acquisition at all?

### Belonging to G-d

There are commentators<sup>9</sup> who explain that the intent of the term "acquisition" here is not to express that these five things are simply in G-d's jurisdiction—as this applies to all of creation equally. Rather, the idea conveyed in this statement is something more profound.

All other objects in the world, though under the Almighty's authority, have their own identities. They are called G-d's property in the sense that He is the Master of the world, and He is able to do with them as He sees fit. They themselves though, are not particularly expressive of G-dliness.

These five acquisitions however, in their very *definition* are property of G-d. Their whole being is to be expressive of G-dliness and to serve a divine purpose.

### G-d's objects

According to the above, we can explain the seemingly contradictory statement found in the *bereisa*.

It begins with the words, "G-d acquired five acquisitions in His world," yet this statement is inherently contradictory. If the world is already His—as the Mishna clearly states—how is it possible to acquire anything in it?!

The *bereisa* could have said that G-d acquired five things in *the* world, without using the word "His." From the fact though that it did express this statement in this curious manner, it is understood that the *bereisa* is teaching

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<sup>9</sup> See Derech Chaim (Maharal).

something that otherwise would not have been known.

According to the explanation presented above, the answer to this question is readily apparent. The *beraisa* is indicating, that what is being discussed is a deeper level of ownership—an acquisition where the identity of the object is *solely* to express its owner.

The rest of creation, even when it does express the authority of the Almighty and its being possessed by Him, the expression is in a way in which it still retains its own identity. Any G-dly revelation is merely superimposed on its essential nature.

The world, by definition, is a place that conceals G-dliness to the point that G-d's presence is not readily observed within it.

This is expressed in the term for "world" in *Lashon Hakodesh* (The Holy Tongue). The word "*olam*," world, is made up of the same letters and shares the same meaning as the word "*helem*," meaning hidden. See figure 1.

### Figure 1

עולם העלם

Yet, these five acquisitions that G-d acquired in this world have no identity separate from Him. Rather, their existence from the onset is to express the Almighty.

This idea can be observed within each of the five items:

**Torah** is the wisdom and will of the Almighty and is therefore completely one with him. This idea is discussed in Chassidic thought as follows:

### Text 3

...The Torah and the Holy One, blessed be He, are one. The meaning of this is that the Torah—which is the wisdom and will of the Holy One, blessed be He—and His glorious Essence are one, since He is the Knower and Knowledge, and so on...

*Tanya, Chapter 4*

**The Jewish people (and Avraham)** as well, are considered a second acquisition. Being that the souls of the Jewish people are a piece of G-dliness, therefore a Jewish person's essence is to be expressive of G-d:

### Text 4

The second soul of a Jew is truly a part of G-d above, as it is written, "And He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life," and "You blew it into me." And it is written in the Zohar, "He who exhales, exhales from within him," that is to say, from his inwardness and his innermost, for it is something of his internal and innermost vitality that man emits through exhaling with force.

*Tanya, Chapter 2*

**The Beis Hamikdash**, too, serves as the place where G-d resides and therefore has no separate identity of its own, as is articulated in the commandment to erect the temple:

### Text 5

And they shall make Me a sanctuary and I will dwell in their midst.

*Shemos 25:8*

**Heaven and earth** are expressive of the Almighty, in the sense that they serve as a conduit to reveal G-dliness in the world. For this reason they are called *His* chair and *His* footstool.

This does not mean that the earth in its entirety is an acquisition of G-d in this manner, rather, the *aspect* of heaven and earth which serves to express G-dliness is an acquisition of the Almighty.

Based on the above, we can resolve four out of the six above-mentioned questions:

**1)** Although usually heaven and earth are all-inclusive of creation, in this illustration where only one trait of heaven and earth is discussed, they are not.

**2)** Heaven and earth are considered one entity, for they are likened to a chair and a footstool that is expressive of a singular concept.

**3)** The verse<sup>10</sup>, “The heavens are My throne...” is used as a proof for heaven and earth being G-d’s acquisition, and not the verse<sup>11</sup> which states that G-d “acquires heaven and earth.” The reason being, that when the *bereisa* says that heaven and earth are G-d’s acquisition, it is only referring to the specific aspect that they possess with which they reveal G-dliness, and is not referring to heaven and earth in general.

**4)** The above also explains why the *tana* (Mishnaic sage) refers to each of the five entities as, “one acquisition,” expressing that their purpose is to reveal the Almighty’s *oneness*.

### **Not enough**

This, however, is not an adequate explanation.

From the fact that the author of the *bereisa* expressly stated that “G-d *acquired* five things,” as opposed to writing that G-d *possesses* five things, is indicative that these things were

actively acquired by G-d—as if to say, that prior to G-d acquiring them, these five entities had been, so to speak, under a different jurisdiction.

However, after the above explanation regarding the inseparable character that these entities share with G-d, and the idea that they are totally one with the Almighty, how were they able to be acquired?!

On the contrary, according to the above explanation, the entire reason that they were able to be considered acquisitions was because they were one with the Creator from the onset.

### **Transfer of objects**

In order to properly understand this *bereisa*, we must define the term “acquisition” in a different manner than we had previously.

An acquisition connotes the transfer of ownership from one owner to the next, without the object itself undergoing any change whatsoever.

All that changes is the one *who* owns it, not *what* is owned. Before the object had been under one jurisdiction, and afterwards it comes into another individual’s dominion.

The author of the *bereisa* is discussing the manner in which these five objects become G-d’s possessions. He is specifically discussing the way that “G-d acquired these five acquisitions in His *world*.”

Meaning to say, that although he is referring to the way these objects are manifest in a physical world, in order for them to become the Almighty’s they need only to be *acquired* and must not be transformed in any drastic manner.

In order for other aspects of this world to become G-dly, they must go through a certain transformation. They must nullify their ego and

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<sup>10</sup> Yeshaya 66:1

<sup>11</sup> Bereishis 14:19

sense of personal identity and submit to G-d. There is a certain process of refinement which must take place before they can be called G-dly. With the above five entities, however, they need not go through that process; they must merely be acquired by G-d.

The Torah, heaven and earth, Avraham, the Jewish People, and the *Beis Hamikdash* are G-dly, even when they are in a physical and corporeal world. They do not have to *change* their being to become G-d's, they need only be *acquired*. This is their unique quality and for this reason the *bereisa* employs this language.

### What G-d acquired

**The Torah:** Concerning the Torah we are taught, that originally it was purely spiritual, and only after many contractions from its original form, could the Torah discuss the physical matter of the world.

### Text 6

...The Torah has been compared to water, for just as water descends from a higher to a lower level, so has the Torah descended from its place of glory, which is His blessed will and wisdom; [for] the Torah and the Holy One, blessed be He, are one and the same and no thought can apprehend Him at all. From there [the Torah] has progressively descended through hidden stages, stage after stage, with the descent of the worlds, until it clothed itself in corporeal substances and in things of this world, comprising almost all of the commandments of the Torah, their laws, and in the combinations of material letters, written with ink in a book, namely, the 24 volumes of the Torah, *Nevi'im* and *Kesuvim*.

*Tanya, Chapter 4*

<sup>12</sup> Tehillim 16:3

One could mistakenly think that the Torah has changed through this process and that in order to connect Torah with the Almighty we must nullify the corporeality of the Torah. This *bereisa* teaches us however, that this notion is incorrect. The Torah remains one with the Holy One, blessed be He, even when engrossed in corporeal matters.

### Text 7

R. Yehudah ben Baseira used to say: "Words of Torah are not susceptible to uncleanness...as it says, 'Is not My word like as fire?' Just as fire is not susceptible to uncleanness, so words of Torah are not susceptible of uncleanness.

*Talmud, Berachos 22a*

Even when the *Torah* is en clothed in physical discussion, it is described as the fiery word of G-d.

**The Jewish people:** The soul of the Jew is "a part of G-d," not only before it comes into the body, but even after it is en clothed in physicality. Still then, it is a part of G-d.

This is also demonstrated by the supporting verse<sup>12</sup> used here in the *bereisa*: "To the holy who are upon earth, the noble ones, in whom is all My delight." The verse conveys that even when the Jewish people are *upon the earth*, and involved in corporeality, they are still referred to as *holy*.

**The *Beis Hamikdash*:** Although the *Beis Hamikdash* is made up of physical material, this does not hinder its G-dliness. On the contrary, not only did the G-dliness that was in the *Beis Hamikdash* affect its physical attributes, but the rest of the world as well, was in turn influenced by its G-dliness<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> See Menachos 86b.

This concept is articulated in the two verses that are brought concerning the *Beis Hamikdash*.

The first verse<sup>14</sup>, "The base for Your *dwelling* that you, G-d, have achieved; the *Sanctuary*, O L-rd, that Your hands have established," is expressive of the fact that the actual Sanctuary is holy. The second<sup>15</sup>, "And He brought them to His holy *domain*, this *mount* His right hand has acquired," communicates that this holiness extends to the mountain as well, and that it is ultimately expressed throughout the entire land of Israel.

**The heaven and earth:** G-dliness is not only expressed in the supernal heaven and earth, but the physical heaven and earth is expressive of the Almighty as well. Even the physical earth proclaims the deepest levels of G-dliness.

The Talmud<sup>16</sup> tells us that the heavens today, thousands of years after they were created, are as sturdy as they were in the moment of their formation. This is expressive of G-dliness the way it surpasses the confines of worldly definition.

The same too, is found in the earth, where G-d's involvement can be explicitly seen through the earth's ability to produce constant growth.

### Text 8

This is the constant and everlasting effect, throughout the earth, of the fiat, "Let the earth bring forth herbs..." "...To make herbs and trees, and fruits, sprout ex nihilo into substantiality, constantly, from year to year. This is a kind of degree of infinity; for if this world will subsist for myriads of myriads of years, they will still sprout forth from year to year.

*Tanya, Igeres Hakodesh, Epistle 20*

<sup>14</sup> Shemos 15:17

<sup>15</sup> Tehillim 78:54

**Avraham Avinu:** Although Avraham is already included as an acquisition of the Almighty by the fact that he possessed a G-dly soul like the rest of the Jewish people—a soul which expresses the Divine in this corporeal world—he is nonetheless enumerated as a separate acquisition.

Avraham was unique in that he was able to bring G-dliness to a pre-Torah world and is therefore enumerated independently from the Jewish people. The Jewish people are considered an acquisition in that they *remain* holy in a corporeal world. Avraham though was considered an acquisition in that was able to *bring* holiness to the world as well.

### Text 9

And he blessed him, and said: "Blessed be Avram to G-d, Most High, acquirer of heaven and earth." From whom did he acquire them?...R' Yitzchak said, "He would greet wayfarers, and once they had finished eating he would tell them, "Thank [G-d]," and they would ask him, "What should we say?" He would tell them, "Say: Blessed is the G-d of the world from whose [food] we ate." G-d said to him, "My Name had not been recognized amongst My creatures and you made Me known amongst My creatures. I therefore consider it as if you are My partner in the creation of the world."

*Bereishis Rabba 43:7*

The Jewish people are called G-d's acquisition, for even when they are corporeal, they are still G-dly. Avraham was considered the acquisition of G-d because of his ability to bring about a recognition of G-dliness in creation even *before* the giving of the Torah. For this reason, the

<sup>16</sup> See Jerusalem Talmud, Berachos 1:1

*bereisa's* supporting verse regarding Avraham is one that relays this point—that Avraham brought G-dliness to the rest of the world.

The ability that he had to bring this about demonstrates the deep unity that he had with the Almighty, to the point that not only was he not affected by the world, but he affected it. He is therefore referred to as G-d's acquisition.

*(Based on Likutei Sichos 35, p. 35ff reworked by Rabbi Dovid Markel. To see other projects and to partner in our work, see: [www.Neirot.com](http://www.Neirot.com). )*