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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON LECH LICHA - 5770

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October 27, 2009

Finding the Holy

By Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik

"And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Shechem... and the Lord appeared to Abraham and said: To your seed will I give this land; and he built there an altar unto the Lord who appeared to him" (Gen. 12:6-7). Why was it necessary to say "who appeared to him"? The sentence "He built there an altar to the Lord" would have sufficed. The answer is clear. He built the altar because God had confirmed his choice of the land by appearing to him. Abraham knew that his intuitive choice was correct, and he built an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him and sanctioned his choice of the land.

Rashi (Gen. 12:2) says, "He did not reveal the land to him immediately, in order to make it precious in his eyes," and notes in the same comment, "Similarly we find [in Gen. 22:2], 'upon one of the mountains which I shall tell you.'" When Abraham was commanded to offer Isaac on Mount Moriah, God did not identify the mountain on whose top the sacrifice was to take place. Abraham had to search for the mountain and identify it intuitively; only then would God confirm it. The Bible tells us that it took Abraham three days to find and recognize the mount (Gen. 22:4). He found it, and God sanctioned his finding. "And they came to the place of which God told him" (Gen. 22:9). However, prior to the word of God confirming the identity of the place, Abraham had to find it by himself.

King David and the Sanhedrin searched long and hard and decided in favor of Ornan's threshing floor as the site for the Temple. Only afterwards did God sanction their choice through the prophet Gad. "Then the angel of the Lord commanded Gad to say to David that David should go up and rear an altar to the Lord in the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite" (I Chron. 21:18). First one must search for the abode; only then will one be able to establish the sanctuary.

Here is a central idea in Judaism: kedushah attracts. This was perhaps the greatest discovery made by Abraham. The generation of the flood thought that beauty is fascinating and that it is man's duty to respond quickly to the

aesthetic challenge, to succumb to the beautiful and pleasant. The generation of the dispersion thought that power is the idea that overwhelms man; technological achievement takes man prisoner, making him worship the genius who made this kind of achievement possible. Abraham proclaimed to the world that kedushah is the great attractive force.

The Almighty has implanted in the Jew a sensitivity to kedushah, to the holy. We are supposed to react to kedushah the way the eye reacts quickly and sharply to a beam of light. In a word, the covenantal community is supposed to be equipped with a sixth sense enabling it to be spontaneously attracted by the holy and to discriminate between the holy and the profane. Abraham was tested to determine whether or not he possessed the capability. His whole destiny was dependent upon the outcome of these tests, and he came out with flying colors. He identified kedushah even though others, who saw just the surface, did not recognize the mount (Gen. Rabbah 56:2). Knowledge of God is not just abstract in nature. It is dynamic, passionate, experiential, all-powerful, and all-redeeming. It is not knowledge in the ordinary sense of the word; it is ecstatic and perceptual.

Excerpted from Abraham's Journey: Reflections on the Life of the Founding Patriarch by Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik.

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One Day We Will All Be Together – Rabbi Weinreb on Parshat Lech Lecha

OCTOBER 28, 2009

I picked him up at the airport. He was arriving in Baltimore, where I was then a rabbi, to deliver an address and then return home to New York.

The plane was late, so that when he came, I told him that we would have to hurry to be at our destination on time. He was already showing signs of age, so that walking quickly was hard for him. We moved rapidly past the gates, at which other flights were disembarking, including one at which the arriving passengers were being welcomed warmly by friends and family.

That is where he stopped, transfixed. He could not take his eyes off the scene of the small crowds embracing and kissing each other tearfully and emotionally.

Reluctantly, he responded to my rude insistence that we move on, and together we rushed to his appointment.

He was Rav Avrohom Pam, of blessed memory, the late lamented sage, Yeshiva dean, mentor to hundreds of rabbis and scholars, and above all, gentle soul. When we finally were in the car and on our way, I asked him what it was about the airport scene that so fascinated him.

His response was the greatest lesson of the many I learned from him. "The saddest of all human happenings is separation," he said. "And the most wonderful of all is reunion. Whenever I see people, of whatever religion or background, who are joyfully coming together after a long separation, I feel 'spellbound' (that was the word he used), and I must stand by and witness that pure innocent joy as long as I can."

What a powerful teaching! Separation is the greatest human tragedy, although a very common one. Reunion is the greatest joy, rare though it often is.

This week's Torah portion, Lech Lecha, allows us to further reflect upon the phenomenon of separation, in Hebrew, p'reida. The Torah describes the close relationship between Abraham and his nephew, Lot. It is a relationship which began in the "old country" and continued through Abraham's adventurous journey to and through the Land of Canaan. As both prospered, we are told, "Thus they parted from each other; Abram remained in the land of Canaan, while Lot... pitched his tents near Sodom."

This decision to separate was a fateful one for Lot. He settled in Sodom, rose to a prestigious position there, and we will yet learn more about his

new life in next week's portion. He tried to mitigate the effects of the separation by remaining loyal to the precepts he learned in Abraham's tent, a difficult challenge in his new circumstances.

At the same time, Abraham did not forget his nephew. Even after the separation, he stayed in touch with him from afar and rushed to his aid when Lot was captured by a marauding army.

This dramatic story of the separation of two close companions may be the first on record, but it is certainly not the last. Subsequent separation dramas are themes of great literary fiction, and of real human life, which is even stranger than fiction. Sometimes the separation results in estrangement and alienation; sometimes, despite the distance, the separated parties end up in remarkably similar places.

Personally, I have long been intrigued by the stories of siblings separated at an early age who rediscover each other later in life. Often, they learn how different they have become. One example is the reunion of the ninety-year-old Torah sage, Reb Yaakov Kamenetsky, who, after a seventy-year separation, rediscovered his sister in the former Soviet Union. He was steeped in traditional Judaism; she had become totally removed from any semblance of Jewish religion. When one of Reb Yaakov's sons tried to explain to his long-lost aunt what her brother had accomplished in his life, she could only respond that it was a shame that a lad with such youthful promise grew up to become a mere melamed, a school teacher.

But there are poignant examples of separated individuals who, despite growing up in radically different environments, end up so similarly. How well I remember an adolescent psychotherapy patient of mine who was adopted in infancy by a professor of physics and his wife, a noted art historian. They were frustrated by this teenager, who was interested neither in intellectual nor cultural pursuits, but whose goal in life it was to become a fireman, and who spent all his spare time as a fire department volunteer.

After several years, I received a call from the young man telling me that he had since successfully located his biological father. Wouldn't you know that his father was a veteran fireman!

Separation is part of human life, so much so that in Jewish mystical liturgy this world is called the "world of separation," *alma d'piruda*.

Reunions, planned or serendipitous, are thrilling experiences but are frightening because we fear finding out how different we have become from those with whom we once shared such similarity. Abraham and Lot once were very similar. They separated, intentionally. Yet there were bonds that linked them, invisible and mysterious bonds. Of some, we read in the Torah portions of this week and next, but others surface generations later, with the story of Ruth, the descendent of Lot's grandson, Moab, and her reunion with Abraham's people. Ultimately, King David himself becomes the symbol of the reunion of the uncle and nephew of whose separation we read this Shabbat.

No wonder then, that the mystical text that calls this world the *alma d'piruda*, calls the next, better world the *alma d'yichuda*, "the world of reunion", the world in which we will all be together.

http://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/706064/Rabbi_Eli_Baruch_Shulman/Drosho_for_Lech_Lecha_5765

Rabbi Eli Baruch Shulman

Drosho for Lech Lecha 5765

Parshas Lech Lecha 5765

Read about אברהם's miraculous victory, how with a handful of men – 318 men – he overcame the armies of four kings, and saved לוט and his countrymen.

ל go even further – it wasn't 318 men – it was אליעזר whose name is גימטריא 318 – just לוט and אברהם fought the battle – reminded of line in Henry V – would you and I alone could fight this battle royal.

Read how אברהם returns with the freed captives and property and is met by מלך סדום who says – תן לי הנפש והרכוש קח לך. To which he responds – אם מחוט ועד סרוך נעל ואם אקח מכל אשר לך ולא תאמר אנכי העשרתי את אברהם.

Rashi brings סרוך נעל – in merit of חוט merited ציצית, in merit of חוט merited סרוך נעל – and all the מפרשים wonder what is the connection – why is this appropriate reward?

Actually אברהם's behavior is puzzling. Why shouldn't he take a reward from מלך סדום? After all wasn't it coming to him? He had put his life in jeopardy, gone to such great lengths, saved his kingdom – why this fastidiousness?

Especially puzzling – because earlier, when אברהם went to מצרים, he said to שרה: If I say you're my wife they'll kill me, and take you; I'll say you're my sister, I can play them off against each other – and that way – למען ייטב – לי בעבורך – יתנו לי מתנות – פרעה – why does he set himself so against taking from מלך סדום?

Let's focus on another episode. אברהם returns to battle field, after defeating the מלכים, ועמק השידים בארות חמר. Says Rashi: ונעשה נס למלך סדום שיצא משם, לפי שהיו באומות מקצתן שלא היו מאמינים שניצול אברהם מאור כשדים מכבשן האש, וכיון שיצא זה מן החמר האמינו באברהם למפרע.

Obvious question: How does miracle happening to מלך סדום – idol worshipper – strengthen people's faith in אברהם and what he represents? It's like saying – a miracle should happen to the Pope so people will believe in Yiddishkeit. Wouldn't it have the opposite effect?

Answers – רמב"ן – the נס happened when אברהם returned, as he passed by. So it was clear to an unbiased observer that it was בזכות אברהם, it was because מלך סדום was associated with אברהם, with אברהם's family, because he is in אברהם's orbit – that is why נס happened.

But – as often happens – people choose their own perspective. People see events through the prism of their own biases.

No doubt מלך סדום was saved because of אברהם, but he chose to see it differently –

ויצא מלך סדום לקראתו, אמר ר' אבא בר כהנא התחיל לקשקש לו בזבוב, א"ל מה אתה ירדת לכבשן האש וניצלת אף אני ירדתי לחמר וניצלתי.

The tail began to wag the dog. I'm just as great as you – my god as your G-d.

And so when מלך סדום offered אברהם money אברהם understood that what was at stake was people's perception of the miraculous events that had just occurred.

If אברהם were to take the money, he would be seen as a client of מלך סדום, someone on מלך סדום's payroll. And that would affect the world's perspective of the events that had occurred – מלך סדום's rescue from the בארות חמר – and the victory in general. If אברהם were to be seen as a dependent of מלך סדום – then everything that had happened would be seen as due to מלך סדום and to the power of his ע"ז. Only by proudly refusing – could אברהם make it clear that he was no satellite of מלך סדום, that he was a force of his own, that he was in so sense a client of מלך סדום but, on the contrary, it was מלך סדום who was saved because he was lucky enough to be, for the moment, in the sphere of אברהם.

אברהם understood that what was at stake was חילול השם and קידוש השם.

To take מלך סדום's money would nullify the tremendous חילול השם that had occurred, and transform it into a חילול השם. And so he refused – אם מחוט ועד סרוך נעל, not a red cent.

And so אברהם merited that his children should be given the מצות of ציצית and תפילין. What is the connection?

תפילין the badges of a Jew. In the olden days there were no yarmulkes – knitted or black – nobody wore a black hat – they all wore the same kafiya, probably – but a Jew was instantly recognizable because of the ציצית on the corners of his clothes, and the תפילין on his head.

And that is a tremendous responsibility. Because being recognized as a Jew means that people judge אידישקייט by our behavior. We all know that.

Dickens put it very well, in Our Mutual Friend: "For it is not... with the Jews as with other peoples. Men say, 'This is a bad Greek, but there are good Greeks. This is a bad Turk, but there are good Turks.' Not so with the Jews. Men find the bad among us easily enough – among what peoples are the bad not easily found? – but they take the worst of us as samples of the

best; they take the lowest of us as presentations of the highest; and they say "All Jews are alike."

And so being given these מצות, which so readily identify us for who we are, imposes on us a tremendous responsibility, but they make each one of us a representative of the entire Jewish people, and of the רבש"ע Himself. And so before we could be given such מצות the question had to be asked – could we live up to them? Did we deserve to be given such מצות that would immediately identify us as the רבש"ע's chosen people, instantly recognizable – to carry the responsibility of קידוש השם, even when it might require sacrifice, even when we might be tempted otherwise.

But the assurance that we could come from אברהם. Because he had demonstrated that capacity to forgo fantastic wealth – the booty of five kingdoms – so as not to cause a חילול השם, he inculcated that capacity in his children as well.

And therefore – בשכר שאמר מחוט ועד שרוך נעל – his children could be entrusted with the responsibility of חוט של ציצית ורצועה של תפילין. We no longer wear תפילין the whole day long, nor do all of us wear our ציצית dangling outside of our pants. But we are still instantly recognizable as Jews. Even if we take off our yarmulkes – there's not a gentile who doesn't know instantly what we are.

Each of us represents אידישקייט to the outside world. That imposes tremendous responsibility. It's very natural, sometimes, to want to shirk that responsibility. It's a burden. And, unfortunately, we so often read in the newspapers about Jew who forgot that responsibility, and we cringe at the חילול השם that results.

It's important to remember the standard that אברהם אבינו set for us. However much we might be tempted, the temptation will never be as great as that offered אברהם – who was offered a king's ransom and who didn't have to do anything in return except smile for the camera together with מלך סדום. By refusing he set a standard for all time, and for all time bequeathed us the right and the privilege to wear our identity with pride, with dignity – and in such a way that נקרא עלך ויראו ממך וראו על עמי הארץ כי שם ה' נקרא עלך ויראו ממך.

from **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <ryfrand@torah.org>
genesis@torah.org to ravfrand@torah.org date Wed, Oct 28, 2009 at
6:05 PM subject Rabbi Frand on Parshas Lech Lecha

Rabbi Frand on Parshas Lech Lecha These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 610, The Widow and the Divorcee – How Long Must they wait to remarry?

The Downside of Being "Men Who Are Like Brothers"

Toward the beginning of Parshas Lech Lecha, Lot and Avraham were occupying the same land and their shepherds were grazing their flocks in close proximity to one another. This led to arguments and fights between the two camps. Finally, Avraham suggested to his nephew: "Please, let there be no strife between me and you and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen, for we are men who are brothers." [Bereshis 13:8]

Rashi notes that the simple interpretation of the phrase "we are men who are brothers" is simply that the two were close relatives. However, Rashi cites a Medrash Aggadah that Avraham's concern went beyond their blood relationship: Their facial appearance resembled one another. They could pass as twin brothers. Why should that resemblance necessitate their separation?

The Shemen Tov references the Rashi in the previous pasuk [verse], which elaborates on the cause of the fights between Lot's shepherds and Avraham's shepherds. Lot's shepherds were wickid and allowed their sheep to graze on the private property of others. Avraham's shepherds saw them doing this and chastised them for thievery. The basic issue was that Lot's shepherds stole and Avraham's shepherds did not. But how would one tell the difference between Lot and Avraham? If they looked alike and one

of them was out in the field with his shepherds, the bystander would not know if it was Lot or Avraham. The bottom line is that people would not know if it was Lot or Avraham who was stealing.

Avraham therefore explained the necessity for their separation. "We look alike and I have to avoid even the smallest suspicion of thievery on my part. Think of the great desecration of the Name of G-d that would occur if people thought that I or my shepherds were stealing!" Avraham was the representative on earth of the Master of the Universe. It would be a great Chilul Hashem if he were believed to be a thief.

How Do We Reconcile Avraham's Two Profiles?

Later on in the parsha, the pasuk says: "And the fugitive came and told Avram, the Hebrew (halvri)..." [Bereshis 14:13]. This is a very famous pasuk in that it is the only place in the Torah where Avraham is referred to by the title that became associated with his descendants - the Hebrew (halvri). Our Sages tell us that this title connotes the separation and distinctiveness of Avraham and his descendants. "The entire world was on one side of the river (m'ever echad) and he was on the other side (m'ever hasheni)."

Avraham is the loner among mankind. He is the iconoclast. He is not bothered that he is out of step with the entire world. "This is who I am, these are my opinions, I believe in One G-d and I don't care if the entire world thinks that I am crazy for it." This is one profile our Sages paint of Avraham.

Our Sages paint another profile as well. Avraham is one who influences the masses to follow his ways. He impacts his entire generation and revolutionizes the theology of mankind. He is surrounded by crowds of followers who gathered around him while he was still in Charan! Our Sages contrast Noah who was righteous and influenced his family - but no one beyond his immediate family, with Avraham who influenced the entire world. Avraham is the first Kiruv professional. He influenced everyone with whom he came in contact.

Don't these two images contradict each other? Was Avraham a loner or did he have great influence on people? How can he be both at the same time? We do not usually think of an iconoclast who stands in opposition to the whole world as a person of great influence.

Rav Schach derives a lesson in the correct way to be mekarev [draw people near] to Torah from this contradiction. Some people are tempted to compromise on their own ideals in their zeal to influence others. They feel that it is necessary to "meet these people half way", to join them, and approach them at their own level. Some times, they argue, the ends justify the means.

Avraham teaches us that this is not the proper course to follow. Avraham was an Ivri. He stated who he was and stuck to his ideals and let truth show the way. In the final analysis, it will be Emes [truth] that wins out and influences people. One can have much influence and draw near many people without compromising one's own positions. It is essential, in trying to influence others, to remain committed to one's own principles.

This idea is buttressed by the following Yalkut from Parshas Yisro. "All that G-d spoke, we will do and we will hear" [Shmos 24:7]. The Yalkut states that it would have made more sense to state "we will hear and (then) we will do". However, the Jews told the Almighty "before we even heard Your words we fulfilled them." In other words, Klal Yisrael justified their saying "we will do and we will hear" by the fact that their forefathers already fulfilled the entire Torah before it was even commanded.

The Yalkut proceeds to demonstrate how the Patriarchs already fulfilled the commandments. For example, the first commandments (I am the L-rd Your G-d... You shall have no other gods before Me. [Shmos 20:2-3]) were fulfilled by Yaakov when he said, "Remove the foreign gods from your midst" [Bereshis 35:2]. The Yalkut proceeds to show how Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, Yosef, and Moshe fulfilled the entire set of the Ten Commandments before the Revelation at Sinai.

As an example of fulfillment of the command, "Do not testify falsely" the Yalkut cites the Patriarch Avraham's testimony to the entire world that G-d was Creator and Master of the Universe.

Someone once asked Rav Weinberg about the meaning of this Medrash. How was Avraham's testimony that G-d was Creator of the world a fulfillment of not testifying falsely? The late Rosh Yeshiva of Ner Israel answered that we see from here that if people say falsehoods, one who does not object to these false hoods, corroborates them. It is as if he has stated the falsehood himself. If the entire world said that there was more than one G-d and Avraham would have stayed in his own 4 cubits without objecting, that would have been acquiescing to falsehood and ultimately corroborating it.

This is the meaning of the Medrash. In fact, Avraham did not keep quiet. He went around and insisted to everyone that Hashem is the One Master of the Universe. Had Avraham not done so, he would have been guilty of the same sheker [falsehood] as everyone else.

This was Avraham's greatness. He had great influence, but he remained true to his ideals. "Everyone was on one side of the river and he was on the other side."

This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. Tapes or a complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information. Transcribed by David Twersky Seattle, WA; Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman, Baltimore, MD RavFrand, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Yissocher Frand and Torah.org. Join the Jewish Learning Revolution! Torah.org: The Judaism Site brings this and a host of other classes to you every week. Visit <http://torah.org> or email learn@torah.org to get your own free copy of this mailing.

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Prologue: He was a one man Teshuva Movement.

Avraham Aveinu was recognized as one who took on the masses. Indeed the Rambam (Hil. Avoda Zara 1:3) chronicles just how Avraham went from place to place in order to inspire monotheism in the world.

So it comes as somewhat of a surprise that the same Avraham Aveinu would reject his nephew Lot. After all, how could the man who never gave up on the world and dedicated his life to spreading Shem Shomayim to one and all, give up on Lot? And over somewhat of a petty financial disagreement no less? Why the rejection by Avraham?

Rav Shlomo Lorencz once noted the difference between different types of people. There are some, who were never shown the light of the truth. These people had to be exposed to Toras Emes and, when given the opportunity certainly would be inspired to better and more spiritual lifestyles. To this group, Avraham never turned his back. However, when dealing with his nephew who grew up in his home and knew Avraham's Emunah, Avraham realized that if his greatest efforts were to no avail then, there would be no hope for him against Lot's shepherds either. As Rabbi Lorencz put it, once there was a call for reform within the Torah way of thinking, Avraham had no choice but to insist that he distance himself from the inherent evil of the reformers.

Sometimes the chance to be Mikarev someone only happens after s/he is gone. Are we to do Kiruv in such an instance? This week's chaburah examines such a scenario. It is entitled:

Too little too late???

Sometimes we find that the first chance we have to keep a Mitzva is after the chance to do it has past. This is certainly the case when one meets many who have never had the chance to fulfill the mitzvah of Bris Milah during their lifetimes. The question arises as to whether one should provide a Bris

prior to burial or perhaps, seeing that the opportunity to fulfill the Mitzva has passed, leave things alone.

In dealing with this question, we note the position of the Geonim cited by the Tur (Y.D. 263) in regard to a child who passes away prior to his eighth day (Rachmana L'tzlan) where the Halacha demands that he receive his Milah posthumously. The Halacha is codified in Shulchan Aruch (Y.D. 263: 5) this way as well. Two basic reasons for the decision are offered as to why the Halacha follows this path: The Kol Bo (cited in Beis Yosef) notes that it would be a terrible embarrassment to bury a Jew with the orlah still present. The Hagahos Maimoniyos (Hil. Mila 1:10) offers a totally different perspective. He maintains that the removal of the Orlah is to protect other Jews who might be less observant. The midrash (Berashis Rabba 48:8) notes that in the future Avrohom Aveinu who sits at the doorway of Geheinom and does not allow anyone with a Bris to enter, will place the orlah from children who did not have Brisim unto those who sin too much and thus they will be held accountable and will go to Geheinom. This odd comment of the Midrash is hinted to in the Torah (Devarim 30:12 and see Baal Haturim there). Accordingly two approaches toward the Mitzva of Mila for the deceased can be established: one for the benefit of the deceased and one for the protection of the sinners within Am Yisroel.

When one does not attempt a bris during the course of his lifetime due to obstinacy, Rav Moshe Feinstein (Igros Moshe O.C. II:33:2) urges communal sanction as Rav Moshe equates one who stays away from Milah to one who separates himself from Klal Yisroel. He tells us not to allow the one who doesn't get the Milah to be given Kibbudim (See Minchas Yitzchak III:65 who concurs). However, Poskim (Shut B"Marah HaBazak IV:30) note that if the person suffered from anxiety and withheld Milah for that reason, he too, should not be sanctioned but rather encouraged to have a Mila while he is alive. What does one do when that individual passes away without Mila? Sefer HaBris cites the position of Shut Yad HaLevi (Y.D. 111) who encourages the posthumous Mila even in these situations even with the sinner who refuses Mila in accord with the reasons for giving a Bris to a child who passed before the opportunity to do Mila came about.

It should be pointed out that the Minhag of Yirushalayim and that which is cited in the Sefer Kores HaBris (Os Bris: 16), is to only do a posthumous Bris on those who did not receive one in their lifetimes as a result of an Ones (an unavoidable situation). Supposedly (See Shut B"Marah HaBazak VI: 71), Hagaon Harav Elyashiv Shlita concurred with this position.

LHalacha, a person who never had the opportunity to receive a Bris when alive should receive one after he has passed away. It should be noted that such a Bris is not a regular Bris, is merely to remove the Orlah (thus can be performed by a woman) and is not performed with the Beracha (See Kores HaBris Os Bris 16-17).

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primarily an anthology, with the essays woven from many classic and modern Torah commentators.

פרשת לך לך

The Heights of the Universe

Most of the book of *Bereishis* (*Genesis*) relates the major events in the lives of our forefathers and the descent of Yaakov and his family to Egypt. In his commentary on the first sentence of the Torah, Rashi asks why the Torah starts with the story of creation, and not with the first commandment that was given to the Jewish nation. Since the purpose of the Torah is to teach the 613 commandments, Rashi wonders why the Torah doesn't begin with a commandment. Similarly, one can question why most of *Bereishis* relates the major events in the lives of our forefathers, instead of proceeding directly to teach the commandments. What is the purpose of the first book of the Torah which is devoted mostly to stories about the lives of our Patriarchs and Matriarchs?

The Ramban was one of the greatest Biblical and Talmudic commentators, as well as a poet, philosopher, Kabbalist, and physician. He was born in Spain in 1194 and died in Israel in 1270. In 1263, he successfully defended Judaism in a public disputation for which King James I of Aragon presented the Ramban with a monetary award. After Pope Clement IV requested that the King penalize him, the Ramban escaped from Spain and immigrated to Israel.

In his commentary on the beginning of the Torah portion (*Parsha*) entitled *Lech Lecha*, the Ramban teaches a principle to help us understand the remainder of the book of *Bereishis*: *I will tell you a principle by which you will understand all the upcoming portions of the Torah* concerning Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. It is indeed a great matter which our Rabbis mentioned briefly, saying: "*Whatever has happened to the Patriarchs is a sign to the children.*" It is for this reason that the verses narrate at great length the account of the journeys of the Patriarchs, the digging of the wells, and other events. Now someone may consider them unnecessary and of no useful purpose, but in truth they all serve as a lesson for the future: when an event happens to any one of the three Patriarchs, that which is decreed to happen to his children can be understood... It is for this reason that the Holy One, Blessed is He, caused Avraham to take possession of the Land [of Israel] and symbolically did to him all that was destined to happen in the future to his children. *Understand this principle.* (Based on the translation by Rabbi Dr. Charles B. Chavel, ש"צ. Italics are my emphasis.)

This principle is usually described ... as the happenings of the forefathers are a sign for the children," and is based on the *Midrash Tanchuma* (*Lech Lecha* 9). The Ramban writes that the Torah relates "at great length the account of the journeys of the Patriarchs" because they are a "sign for the children," and that we should "*understand this principle.*" As the Ramban suggests, let us now try to understand this principle, which can be understood on several levels.

The simplest approach is that whatever happened to our forefathers predicts the future of the Jewish nation. For instance, Avraham left his birthplace to live in Israel, and eventually God will give the Land of Israel to the Jewish nation. Just as Avraham traveled to Egypt because of a famine in Israel, so too the Jewish nation will descend to Egypt because of a famine in Israel. Just as Yaakov fought with Eisav, so too will the Jewish nation fight with Eisav's descendants. On a somewhat more complex level, "The happenings of the forefathers are a sign for the children" may be teaching us that *whatever happened to our forefathers is an instructional guide for our future actions.* According to this approach, the actions of our forefathers not only predict the future, but they also serve as a guide for the current and future activities of all Jews. Just as Avraham was known for kindness, so too we should try to be known for kindness. Just as Avraham left his birthplace to go to Israel, so too all of Avraham's descendants should do the same. The Ramban writes in his commentary on the beginning of *Parshas Vayishlach* that just as Yaakov utilized prayer,

gifts, and military preparations in his confrontation with Eisav, so too the Jewish nation should use his multifaceted approach in its future confrontations.

Rabbi Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, ש"צ (1892-1953), was one of the most profound Jewish thinkers of the last century. He was the *Rosh Yeshiva* (Director) of the *Kollel* in Gateshead, England, and later *Mashgiach* (spiritual guide) of the Ponevezh Yeshiva in Israel. Rabbi Dessler's writings were published posthumously in a multi-volume edition entitled *Michtav MiEliyahu*. The first volume of *Michtav MiEliyahu* has been translated into English by Rabbi Aryeh Carmell. Rabbi Dessler was thrilled that he had acquired some insight into understanding "The happenings of the forefathers are a sign for the children" from the commentary that Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin, ש"צ (1749-1821), the most prominent student of the Vilna *Gaon* and founder of the Yeshiva of Volozhin, wrote on *Pirkei Avos* (*Ethics of the Fathers*), Chapter 5, *Mishna* 3. Rabbi Dessler writes in *Michtav MiEliyahu*, Volume 1, in an essay on *The Attribute of Mercy*, "In this particular instance I am happy to say that *Hashem* has given me the merit to discover an important key which will help to elucidate the questions we referred to above..." Rabbi Dessler quotes Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin, "For there are many attributes which the *tsaddik* (the righteous man) labors hard and long to attain, while to his children they come *naturally* and they can achieve them with little effort..." Rabbi Dessler writes regarding this brief comment by Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin that "One might see nothing special in these few words and pass them by hastily without realizing their true significance. *But no, my dear friends; these words stand at the very heights of the universe.*"

Rabbi Dessler returns to the words of Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin:

We have seen with our own eyes on many occasions how ignorant Jews who know nothing of Torah nevertheless readily give up their lives for the sanctification of the Divine Name [that is, they allow themselves to be killed rather than submit to conversion]. This is *ingrained in us* from Avraham, our father, who was ready to give up his life in the furnace of Ur Kasdim, for the sake of his faith (commentary of Rashi on *Bereishis* 11:28, quoting the *Midrash*). And so the purpose of all the ten tests [that God gave to Avraham] was to straighten the road for us [that is, to make it easier for us to arrive at certain spiritual levels]. Why do we find that a Jew is suddenly seized with a desire to immigrate to the Holy Land? This is derived from [Avraham's successful completion of] the test: "Go away from your land, your family and your father's house, to the land I will show you" (*Bereishis* 12:1).

Regarding this explanation by Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin, Rabbi Dessler teaches:

It is indeed amazing, when we come to think of it, that we Jews should have retained our deep love for the Land of Israel after having been exiled from it for two thousand years. The reason is that this attachment is, with us, not a matter of mere nationalism. If it had been only this, we should have forgotten about the Land of Israel many centuries ago. After all, other national groups, uprooted from their countries of origin, have adapted themselves completely to their new environment after two or three generations at the most... *It is a spiritual inheritance from Avraham*, our father, derived from the test of *Lech Lecha*. (This test, which required him to leave his birthplace and his old father for an unknown destination, called for much faith and self-sacrifice on his part.)

Thus, Rabbi Dessler explains, based on the comments of Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin "*The happenings of the forefathers are a sign for the children*" because the attributes and spiritual greatness of the forefathers are ingrained in the nature of the Jewish nation. The natural instincts of the Jewish nation are based on the happenings of the forefathers." Because Avraham was willing to give up his life to sanctify God and leave his birthplace to move to Israel, *the personality of the Jew was modified so that it was less difficult for Jews over the centuries to do the same.*

The *Gemora* in *Yevamos* 79a teaches There are three signs [of the nature of the Jewish personality] in this nation: they are merciful, bashful, and they do acts of kindness." It's fascinating that this *Gemora* uses the word סימן, and not the word מדות, which is the usual word for personality traits. The use of the word סימן in the *Gemora* in *Yevamos* 79a is reminiscent of the word "The happenings of the forefathers are a sign (סימן) for the children." This is easier to understand according to the theory of Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin discussed above, that the traits of the forefathers are ingrained in the nature of the Jewish nation. According to Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin, it's possible that the "מעשי אבות" "*happenings of the forefathers*" changed the סימנים (*signs or personality traits*) of their בנים (*children*) so that it is easier for them to be "*merciful, bashful, and people who do acts of kindness.*" Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin teaches that the "מעשי אבות" "*happenings of the forefathers*" changed the very essence of the Jewish people, so that certain difficult things, like moving to Israel or being prepared to give up everything to sanctify the name of God, will be less difficult for them in the future, because it is part of their nature.

The Ramban, quoted at the beginning of this essay, suggested that "The happenings of the forefathers are a sign for the children," is an important principle that explains the purpose of most of the book of *Bereishis* and that we should try to "*understand this principle.*" Hopefully this essay, at least to some small degree, fulfills the suggestion of the Ramban, as it explains that this principle can be understood on at least three levels:

1) The most simplistic level is that the "happenings of the forefathers are a sign for the children" because they predict future events that will occur to their descendants, the Jewish nation.

2) On a somewhat more complex level, the "happenings of the forefathers are a sign for the children" because they are an instructional guide for the current and future activities of all Jews. 3) A third approach is suggested by Rabbi Dessler, based on the writings of Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin, who teaches that the "happenings of the forefathers are a sign for the children" because they changed the essence of the Jewish nation, so that following God's *mitzvos* (commandments) will be easier because it is part of their nature.

As the Ramban, quoted above, writes, this is "*a principle by which you will understand all the...*" stories in the book of *Bereishis*. As Rabbi Dessler teaches regarding Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin's explanation, "*...these words stand at the very heights of the universe.*" (If

desired, see related essay on *Parshas Vayechi*, entitled "A Principle by Which You Will Understand the Book of *Bereishis*.")

Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom Lech Licha

I INTRODUCTION As we mentioned in the preface to last week's essay, the series of analyses on Sefer B'resheet will focus on fundamental issues of our relationship with the text of T'nakh. In future issues we will explore the relationship of traditional biblical scholarship with archeology, geography and other disciplines. In this issue, we will visit an older problem, one which addresses the entire enterprise of tradition and its reliability. That genre of Rabbinic literature commonly known as "Midrash" has been widely misunderstood - and has taken a proverbial "beating" in more than one circle of late. In order to properly assay the issue and begin our inquiry, we must first clarify and distinguish between two terms which are often confused in discussions of Rabbinic homiletics. The term "Midrash", which means exegesis, a particular type of textual expansion and application, is properly used to describe any of a number of exegetical methods. Generally speaking, there are two types of Midrash - Midrash Halakhah and Midrash Aggadah. Midrash Halakhah is an exegetical analysis of a Halakhic text with a normative result.. For instance,

when the Midrash Halakhah infers from the word vnvcv in (of the animals) at the opening of the laws of offerings (Vayyikra 1:2) that not all animals are fit to be brought to the altar (and then goes on to list which are excluded), that is Midrash Halakhah. Since the results of a Halakhic discussion are practical, the exegetical method is (relatively) tightly defined and is subject to challenge and dispute. Midrash Aggadah can be loosely defined as any other sort of exegesis on T'nakh text. This includes exhortative, poetic, prophetic, narrative, epic and any other non-normative text in T'nakh. As expected, the range of texts available for Midrash Aggadah is much broader and the methodology is less strictly defined than Midrash Halakhah. In addition, multiple approaches can be tolerated and even welcomed since there is generally no Halakhic implication to the inference. Even in those cases where such an inference may be claimed, the general methodology of the study of Midrash Aggadah allows (indeed, encourages) a wider range of approaches and perspectives. As such, we may find a series of alternate Midr'shei Aggadah on a given passage (e.g. the "test" of Avraham in B'resheet 22:1) which, although representing different perspectives, do not necessarily preclude one another. Hence, the term "Halakhah" when standing alone (and describing a type of Rabbinic statement) would most properly be associated with a normative statement independent of the text. The word "Aggadah" refers to a statement which is non-normative and, again, is not derived from or associated with a given text. The study of Midrash Aggadah has always been challenging - to identify which interpretations are interpretive and an attempt to discern the straightforward meaning of the text, which are polemic (typically against the early Christians), which are veiled attacks (e.g. on the Roman Empire), which are traditional lore that the homileticist is "hanging" on a particular text etc. Much of the derision shown by many towards statements in the Midrash Aggadah (indicated by phrases such as "it's only a Midrash") is rooted in an inability (or unwillingness) to rigorously address the text and analyze its various components; understanding that some are intended as literal interpretations and an actual retelling of history while others are poetic and artistic devices intended to drive home a critical point. R.

Avraham ben haRambam neatly divided the students of Aggadah into three groups - those who take everything literally, who are fools, those who take nothing literally, who are heretics - and those who wisely analyze each passage and discern how each passage ought to be studied. A proper and incisive approach to the study of Midrash Aggadah - knowing which passage to approach with which perspective - consistently rewards the student with a discovery of depths of wisdom and profound sensitivity

AVRAHAM: THE EARLY YEARS

by Yitzchak Etshalom

A proper presentation of the various facets of Midrash Aggadah is well beyond the scope of this forum; however, that does not exempt us from, at the very least, reexamining our attitude towards this central branch of Rabbinic literature and strengthening our awareness of the sagacity and trust of Haza"l which is, after all, one of the forty-eight methods through which Torah is acquired. To that end, we will assay a famous Midrash Aggadah (which is, prima facie, nearly bereft of Midrashic method) whose point of origin is an oblique reference at the end of our Parashah. The central thesis here is that there is, of course, much more to the Midrash Aggadah than meets the eye - the fuller thesis will be presented after the text, below.

II

THE MIDRASH

A: PREFACE

One of the central figures - if not the pivotal one - in Sefer B'resheet is Avram/Avraham. We are given rich descriptions of his interactions with kings, family members, angels and G-d Himself - but all of that begins with his selection at age 75. We are told nothing, in the text, about his early life. The few sketchy verses at the end of our Parashah help little (if at all) in explaining why this son of Terach, scion of Shem, was selected as the progenitor of G-d's people. There are several well-known Aggadot which

partially fill in the “missing years” of Avraham’s youth. Perhaps the most well-known Aggadah appears in several versions and has, as its point of departure, a minor difficulty in the Torah’s retelling of Avraham’s family life: And Terach lived seventy years, and fathered Avram, Nachor, and Haran. Now these are the generations of Terach; Terach fathered Avram, Nachor, and Haran; and Haran fathered Lot. And Haran died before his father Terach in the land of his birth, in Ur of the Chaldeans. And Avram and Nachor took wives; the name of Avram’s wife was Sarai; and the name of Nachor’s wife, Milkah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milkah, and the father of Yiskah. But Sarai was barren; she had no child. And Terach took Avram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Avram’s wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldeans, to go to the land of K’na’an; and they came to Charan, and lived there. And the days of Terach were two hundred and five years; and Terach died in Charan. (11:26-32) The death of Haran (not to be confused with the place Charan, located in northern Syria or southern Turkey) during the life (literally “in the face of”) his father was a first. Although Hevel died before Adam, we’re not given any information about the relationship between the bereaved father and his murdered child. Here, the text clearly marks the death of Haran as happening before the death of Terach - the first recorded case of a child predeceasing his father where we can actually place the two of them in any sort of relationship. The question raised by anyone sensitive enough to note the irregularity here is why, of all people, the future father of our people would claim as father and brother the first instance of such tragedy. The Midrash addresses this problem - the premature death of Haran - and, along the way, does much to inform us of Avraham’s life before the command of “Lekh L’kha” (12:1).

B: THE TEXT OF THE MIDRASH (B’resheet Rabbah 38:16) And Haran died in front of Terach his father. R. Hiyya the grandson of R. Ada of Yafu [said]: Terach was an idolater. One day he went out somewhere, and put Avraham in charge of selling [the idols]. When a man would come who wanted to purchase, he would say to him: “How old are you”? [The customer] would answer: “Fifty or sixty years old”. [Avraham] would say: “Woe to the man who is sixty years old And desires to worship something one day old.” [The customer] would be ashamed and leave. One day a woman came, carrying in her hand a basket of fine flour. She said: “Here, offer it before them.” Abraham siezed a stick, And smashed all the idols, And placed the stick in the hand of the biggest of them. When his father came, he said to him: “Who did this to them”? [Avraham] said:, “Would I hide anything from my father? a woman came, carrying in her hand a basket of fine flour. She said: “Here, offer it before them.” When I offered it, one god said: “I will eat first,” And another said, “No, I will eat first.” Then the biggest of them rose up and smashed all the others. [His father] said:, “Are you making fun of me? Do they know anything?” [Avraham] answered: Shall your ears not hear what your mouth is saying? He took [Avraham] and handed him over to Nimrod. [Nimrod] said to him: “Let us worship the fire”. [Avraham said to him: “If so, let us worship the water which extinguishes the fire.” [Nimrod] said to him: “Let us worship the water”. [Avraham said to him: “If so, let us worship the clouds which bear the water.” [Nimrod] said to him: “Let us worship the clouds”. [Avraham said to him: “If so, let us worship the wind which scatters the clouds.” [Nimrod] said to him: “Let us worship the wind”. [Avraham said to him: “If so, let us worship man who withstands the wind.” [Nimrod] said to him: “You are speaking nonsense; I only bow to the fire. “I will throw you into it. “Let the G-d to Whom you bow come and save you from it.” Haran was there. He said [to himself] Either way; If Avraham is successful, I will say that I am with Avraham; If Nimrod is successful, I will say that I am with Nimrod. Once Avraham went into the furnace and was saved, They asked [Haran]: “With which one are you [allied]”? He said to them: “I am with Avraham.” They took him and threw him into the fire and his bowels were burned out. He came out and died in front of Terach his father. This is the meaning of the verse: And Haran died in front of Terach.

C: THE OVERALL QUESTION Reading this Aggadah, one is immediately struck by the non-Midrashic style. There is absolutely no association with text here. Instead, there is a detailed story, down to the specifics of the debate between Avraham and Nimrod, the manner in which Avraham would shame his customers and the story he concocted to explain the decimation of the “inventory” to his father. The question one must pose here is one of source - from where did the rabbis derive this information? How do they know that Terach was an idolsalesman; that Avraham spoke this way to his customers, the other way to his father, in such a manner to Nimrod - and why would we even think that Avraham and Nimrod ever met? The one answer which is always available and seems an “easy way out” is “Mesorah”. To with, the rabbis had a reliable tradition going back to Avraham himself that this is how this particular series of events played out. That is appealing - although anyone embracing this approach would have to contend with variations in alternate versions - yet there are two serious problems with this response. First of all, if this was a reliable tradition dating back to Avraham, why isn’t that mentioned in the text of the Aggadah? After all, when the Rabbis have reliable traditions dating back to a much more recent time, they indicate this (see, inter alia, M. Peah 2:6) or, at the very least, refer to the statement as “Gemara” or *hbhxx vank vfkv o r*, in Aggadic contexts - *ubhshc ,ruxn vz rcs* (BT Yoma 21a). Second of all, why is the entire Aggadah credited to one authority (R. Hiyya the grandson of R. Ada of Yafu)? Shouldn’t it be presented as an anonymous text? There is another direction - perhaps as much to the “skeptical” side as the first answer was to the “believer” side - that has its roots in some rabbinic scholarship, although certainly not the mainstream. Some will suggest that this Aggadah reflects a polemic against idolatry, is a product of its time in the sense that it stakes no claim to knowing anything about Avraham’s actual activities, but uses Avraham as a convenient foil for “making a point” about principles, idols, loyalty etc. As stated, this is not as foreign an idea as one might think and is sometimes the most appropriate way to view an Aggadah - but is often another “easy way out” of contending with the difficult question of “how did they know this”? I would like to suggest an alternative approach to understanding this Midrash, one which maintains the integrity of the report and its association to the historic character of Avraham, while defending against the two challenges raised above to the “Mesorah” argument noted above.

D: THE THESIS Although direct derivations are not found in this Aggadah (albeit the opening and closing lines anchor the Aggadah in a Midrashic attempt to identify the reason for Haran’s early demise), I’d like to suggest that the entire reconstruction of Avraham’s life here is the result of Parshanut - textual interpretation. In other words, every one of the major components of this selection is the result of a reasonable read of T’nakh. In order to accomplish this, each text in the Avraham narrative (and other selections which shed light on this period) must be read carefully, keeping an eye out for parallel texts and allusions to related passages.

III RECONSTRUCTING THE MIDRASH There are six principle components to the Aggadah; we will demonstrate that each of them can be supported by a sensitive and careful read of the Avrahamic narrative and related texts: A: Terach the idolater B: Terach the salesman C: Avraham’s style of argumentation D: Avraham’s meeting with Nimrod E: Avraham in the fire F: Haran and “Pascal’s Wager” A: Terach the Idolater The source for this one is an explicit text (Yehoshua 24:2). At the end of his life, Yehoshua related a historiography to the people, which began with a line familiar to us from the Haggadah: And Yehoshua said to all the people, Thus said Hashem, G-d of Yisra’el, Your fathers lived on the other side of the river in old time, Terach, the father of Avraham, and the father of Nachor; and they served other gods. Even though this translation renders the last pronoun unclear, such that we do not know who worshipped foreign gods (it may have been Nachor and Avraham, which would give us a whole different history...), the Ta’amei haMikra (trope marks) make it clear that those who worshipped foreign gods are “your fathers”; Terach is the representative of that group mentioned by name. When the Aggadah

begins by stating “Terach was an idolater”, it isn’t innovating a new idea or revising history - this is the information found in Yehoshua’s farewell address.

B: Terach the Salesman This one is not as straightforward and accessible as Terach’s idolatrous affiliation. A few pieces of information about the ancient world which can be inferred from the text will help us. First of all, society in the ancient world was not transient. People stayed in one area for generations except for cases of war or famine (which is why the call to Avraham of “Lekh L’kha” is so extravagant and reckoned as the first of his tests.) Only people whose livelihood allowed them to move easily did so - and, as the text tells us, Terach took his family from Ur towards K’na’an, getting only as far as Charan. Terach was the first person to uproot from one location to another without direct Divine intervention (such as Adam, Kayin and the people in Shin’ar who were exiled). Hence, he must have had a profession which allowed him to easily move - which leaves him either as a shepherd, an artisan or a salesman. As we demonstrated in an earlier shiur (V’ shinantam 3/6), Avraham and Ya’akov were traders whose chief livelihood and fortune were made in that fashion. In addition, we have other records of idolaters who were, in addition to devotees of the pagan religion, men who engaged in the sale of ritual objects. In Shoftim 17-18, we are told the story of Mikhah who lived on Har Ephraim. He took money given to him by his mother and had an idol fashioned which he then set up in a temple. When his idol, its appurtenances and his priest were seized (by members of Dan - a story we will revisit next week), the townspeople chased after the thieves to try to restore their goods. Although not stated explicitly, it seems that the reason for their distress at the loss of the idol and its “support system” was an issue of livelihood. Evidently, the temple was a source of revenue for the town; whether as a result of travelers staying there or because they sold T’raphim (household gods); in any case, the association between idolatry and trade seems clear.

C: Avraham’s style of argumentation At three points in the Aggadah, Avraham engages in some form of theological debate (or rebuke) - with the usual customer, with his father and with Nimrod. His style of arguing is consistent - at no point does he come out and state his beliefs, strong though they may be. Instead, he elicits information from his disputant, and then, in classical Socratic fashion, turns his own words against him, using his disputant’s premise to bolster his own argument. For instance, he doesn’t ridicule or rebuke the customer for purchasing a “god fresh from the kiln”; rather he asks him (seemingly off-handedly) as to his age. One almost gets the sense that Avraham’s response is muttered under his breath - “how ridiculous, a man of fifty worshipping a day-old idol” - and then, in shame, the customer slinks out of the shop. That we have every reason to believe that Avraham would have worked to promote the belief in one G-d is evident from the verses which highlight his selection (12:1-3) and his activities in K’na’an (calling out in the name of G-d). We don’t need to look far to find sources that support the content of his interactions - but how do the authors of this Midrash Aggadah know his somewhat unconventional form of argumentation? The answer can be found, I believe, in the interaction between Avraham and Avimelekh (Chapter 20). Unlike the first “wife-sister” episode (in Egypt), which was necessitated by the famine, there is no reason given for Avraham’s descent to G’rar (20:1). Avraham knew, in advance, that he would have to utilize the “wife/sister” ruse in order to spare his life (v. 11) - but why go there at all? Note that in that interaction, Avraham does not rebuke the king (and, indirectly, his constituents) for their moral turpitude until they come to him, ready to hear an explanation for his curious behavior. If he went to G’rar in order to spread the word and attract more adherents (see Rashi at 12:5 and S’forno at 12:9), why didn’t he immediately come in and decry their low standards? Alternatively, if he knew that Sarah would be endangered as a result, why go there at all? It seems that Avraham went there in order to engage in debate, a debate which could only begin once the people challenged him and were receptive (as a result of their great fear) to what he had to say. It seems to have succeeded, at least partially, because Avimelekh (or his son)

recognized G-d’s support for Yitzchak (26:28), implying that they had some understanding of - and respect for - the G-d of Avraham. Utilizing the one instance we have of argumentation and chastisement in which Avraham participated which is explicit in the text, the Ba’alei haMidrash are able to apply that style to earlier interactions in Avraham’s life. (The claim here is not that each of the specific events - or the details, such as the age of the customers - can be inferred from the text, nor that we need accept each of them as an exact historic record; the thesis is merely that the general information and messages of the Aggadah are the result of a careful reading of text).

D: Avraham’s meeting with Nimrod The Torah is not only silent about any meeting between these two, the entire Nimrod biography (10:8-12) is completed well before Avraham is even introduced in the text. From where did the Ba’alei haMidrash get the notion that Nimrod and Avraham had any direct interaction? One feature shared by these two men is power - both were recognized as kings. Indeed, Nimrod was the first person to be considered a king: And Kush fathered Nimrod; he was the first on earth to be a mighty one. He was a mighty hunter before Hashem; therefore it is said, As Nimrod the mighty hunter before Hashem. And the beginning of his kingdom was Bavel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. Avraham is also considered royalty: And the Hittites answered Avraham, saying to him, Hear us, my lord; you are a mighty prince among us... (23:5-6) There is one more component to the Nimrod story which is vital for understanding the Aggadah. The attitude of the T’nakh is generally negative towards human rulers - note Gid’on’s response to the people of Menasheh in Shoftim 8, and Sh’mu’el’s diatribe against the people’s demand for a king in I Sh’mu’el 8. Nimrod being the first self-declared king, he was also the first to form a direct challenge to the Rule of the one true King, haKadosh Barukh Hu. Avraham’s entire life was dedicated to teaching the world about the one true G-d and to encouraging everyone to accept His rule. As such, Avraham and Nimrod are natural combatants and antagonists. Since Nimrod’s life overlapped that of Avraham, and he ruled in the district where Avraham operated (at least during part of his younger years), the land of the Chaldeans, it is most reasonable that the two of them would have interacted. Once we add in the salvation from fire (see next section), following the model of the latter-day king of the same area (Nevukhadnezzar) throwing loyal monotheists into the fire, their meeting is almost a foregone conclusion. **E: Avraham in the fire** When G-d addresses Avraham in anticipation of the first covenant (chapter 15), He states: I am Hashem who took you out of Ur Kasdim (15:7). Before assessing the allusion to a later verse, we need to clarify the meaning of “Ur Kasdim”. The word “Ur” may be a place-name (hence “Ur of the Chaldeans” in most translations); alternatively, it may mean “the UR which is in Kasdim” - the word UR meaning furnace (cf. Yeshaya 31:9, 50:11). Even if it is a place name, it may have been named after a great furnace found there. In any case, G-d took Avraham out of this place - how do we understand the verb lh,tmuv’? (I took you out)? Does it refer to the command to Get thee from thy land...? Does it allude, perhaps, to a more direct and interventionist evacuation? The only other place in the Torah where the phrase lh,tmuv rat appears is in the first statement of the Decalogue: I am Hashem your G-d who took you out of the Land of Egypt...(Sh’mot 20:2, D’varim 5:6) In that case, the “taking out” was accomplished through miraculous, interventionist means. If we accept the theory (which we have explained and used countless times in this forum) that unspecified terms in T’nakh are best clarified through parallel passages in T’nakh where those same terms are used, then we have a clearer picture of the “exodus” of Avraham from Kasdim. G-d intervened, miraculously, to save him, in some manner which would later be approximated in Egypt. While we have much information about the miracles leading up to the Exodus, there is little in T’nakh to describe the servitude from which we were redeemed. There is, however, one description of the Egyptian sojourn which appears in three places in T’nakh. In D’varim 4:20, I Melakhim 8:51 and Yirmiyah 11:4, the Egypt from which we were redeemed is called

an iron furnace (kzrc ruf). So...if G-d presents Himself, as it were, to Avraham, with the words "that took you out" and we have no information as to what it was from which Avraham was saved, we can look at the parallel passage and, using the description of Egypt found throughout T'nakh, conclude that Avraham was saved from - a furnace! F: Haran and "Pascal's Wager" The final point in the Midrash which we will address is the role of Haran here. He engages in what is commonly referred to as Pascal's Wager. Blaise Pascal (1623 - 1662), a French mathematician and logician, suggested that it is a good idea to believe in G-d, based on "the odds". If one doesn't believe in G-d and turns out to have erred, he will be eternally damned. If, on the other hand, he is right, he will achieve salvation. If, on the other hand, he believes in G-d and turns out to have erred, he will have lost nothing... Haran's faith, unlike that of Avraham, is depicted as opportunistic. The point of this segment of the Aggadah is quite clear - declarations of faith are not cut from one cloth and the faith which can withstand the furnace is one which has already been forged by the crucible - not one of momentary convenience. How do the Ba'alei haMidrash know that this was Haran's failing? Why couldn't he have predeceased his father for some other sin? Since we have no other information about Haran in the text, we have to go to the next best source - Lot, his son. As we find out throughout the Avrahamic narratives, Lot is someone who always took the easy path and the most convenient road - even if it affected the society he would join and his family. When Avraham and Lot needed to separate, Avraham offered Lot his choice: "If you go to the left, I will go to the right; if you go to the right, I will take the left" - meaning that they will divide up the mountain range between north (left) and south (right). Avraham abjured Lot to remain in the mountains, a place of greater faith and solitude (see, inter alia, D'varim 11:10-12). Instead, Lot chose the "easy life" of S'dom, which, at the time, appeared as "the garden of Hashem, the land of Egypt" - lush and fertile. We have discussed the attitudinal implications of his choice elsewhere. When fleeing from that selfsame city, he begs the angels to allow him to stay nearby, as he cannot go further - and that leads to the shameful scene in which his daughters get him drunk and become pregnant. We don't know a lot about Haran, but his son bears the shameful badge of an opportunist - hence, the first child to predecease his father (aside from murder) dies as a result of that opportunistic attitude when applied to the great faith of Avraham.

from Shema Yisrael Torah Network <shemalist@shemayisrael.com>
to Peninim <peninim@shemayisrael.com>
date Thu, Oct 29, 2009 at 3:55 AM
subject Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum - Parshas Lech Lecha

PARSHAS LECH LECHA

Go for yourself - from your land, from your relatives, and from your father's house. (12:1)

In describing Avraham Avinu's home, the Torah seems to focus on how much Avraham was leaving behind him. The objective is clear: the greater the sacrifice, the greater the reward. We find that the Torah expresses a similar idea when Hashem instructs Avraham concerning the Akeidah. At that point, Hashem underscores Avraham's love for his only son. By doing so, he intensifies the extent of the sacrifice, thus increasing the reward. When we consider it, it is a sparse comparison between Yitzchak, Avraham's beloved son, and the city of Uhr Kasdim. It is not as if Avraham would have harbored fond memories of the place where he had been thrown into a fiery cauldron for repudiating idol worship. The city was spiritually bankrupt. Why would Avraham be attached to such an ignominious place?

Horav A. Henoch Leibowitz, zl, explains that, despite Avraham's righteousness, he was still a human being with natural emotions and sensitivities. As a pious, committed Jew, he had learned to channel his

feelings in a positive direction and to direct his instincts towards Hashem. As a human being, he still had an innate love for his homeland, his birthplace, land of his family. This love coexisted with his even greater drive to serve Hashem. Likewise, when Avraham was about to slaughter Yitzchak, he did not go about it in a cold, detached - almost ruthless - manner. Chazal say that tears were flowing down his face, as he prepared for the slaughter. He did not suppress his love for Yitzchak. He simply had greater love for Hashem.

Hashem has endowed each and every individual with powerful emotions. They include love for: one's family, parents, siblings and children; one's home; and other natural gifts that define our humanness. We are to cultivate and nurture these feelings, so that we become better people capable, of greater love and sensitivity toward our fellow man and toward Hashem and His Torah. To smother our senses will only achieve a dehumanizing effect on ourselves, which will ultimately harm our relationship with Hashem. He wants sincere, caring, feeling people to serve Him with sincerity, sensitivity and emotion. Otherwise, He would have created us as angels. We must learn to channel our emotions - not tune them out. In this way we will be able to serve the Almighty more completely.

Go for yourself - from your land, from your relatives, and from your father's house. (12:1)

Hashem tells Avraham Avinu to uproot himself from his home and familiar surroundings in order to travel to an unspecified destination. The Torah goes into great detail concerning Avraham's point of departure - his land, his relatives, and his father's house. With regard to his destination, however, it says very little, if anything: "to the land that I will show you." It would seem that one's destination should be expounded upon and detailed, not his point of departure. When we plan a trip, the conversation is solely about where we are going, not from where we are leaving. In the Sifrei Chassidus, this pasuk is used as a paradigm for the personal journey of each Jew, his journey of self-discovery, his journey in search of the Source of his essence.

Every Jew is imbued with a Divine neshamah, soul. Some have lost sight of the Divine spark within themselves, allowing it to become subdued with physicality and materialism which, in effect, distances them from Hashem, the Divine Source of all spirituality. In order to succeed in one's quest, he must take as little baggage as possible. The baggage is his past, his home, his friends, his environment, all pulling him in a different direction than the one prescribed for him and needed by his soul. Thus, his first requirement is to divest himself of his past, so that, even if things do not exactly work out, such that he does not reach his goal, he, at least, will not end up reverting to his old patterns and original way of life.

The key to successful change is not necessarily knowing our destination. Many who have returned had no clue concerning where they were going or what were their goals. They knew one thing, however: they had to divest themselves of the past. The future would play itself out. The key to meaningful change is not to repeat one's old habits, one's old mistakes, not to permit the past to shape the future. This was Hashem's message to Avraham. Leave everything: your land, your relatives, and your father's house. Only then will you be able to journey to the land that I will show you.

This brings us to the concept of teshuvah, popularly mistranslated as repentance, but which really should be defined as return to one's source: Hashem. The baal teshuvah undergoes a transformation, beginning with his struggle to blot out his previous life, and then reconstructing a new life of meaning and values based on Torah and mitzvos. Frequently, teshuvah casts a harsh view of one's past to the point that he shuns every memory, relationship, dream and action, perceiving them as interfering with the future, a distraction that distorts and impugns his new destination. The baal teshuvah often fears returning to his old haunts, renewing his old ties, picking up where he left off, lest they prove burdensome and difficult to

overcome.

In reality, while expunging the past is important - and perhaps even essential - it is extremely difficult. Teshuvah is a process in which one begins with a leap of disengagement, a liberation from the fetters of the past, followed immediately by a lengthy process of amending and constant improving, recalibrating, and reprogramming oneself to adopt a new way of life. With each step forward in the process of rectification, one further breaks with the past, until he is no longer tempted, provoked or seduced by his previous lifestyle.

How long does the process take? It all depends upon the returnee's sense of security in his new identity and his comfort zone with his new way of life. For some, it is a long, drawn-out process, very much like recuperating from a serious illness or surgery. Some of us just have a difficult time accepting change. The fear of the unknown, of acceptance, is so compelling that we often take baby steps when giant leaps are in order. While taking one's time builds up a solid foundation, taking too long can leave one in severe depression, floundering between his past, which is his security blanket, and the future, which remains obscure. All of this is part of the journey of self-discovery, which is a trip that everyone, regardless of background, should take some time in his life.

Go for yourself - from your land, from your relatives, and from your father's house. (12:1)

Rashi interprets lech lecha as "go for yourself" - l'hanaascha u'le'tovasecha, "for your pleasure and for your benefit." Hashem commanded Avraham Avinu to go for his own pleasure, but, according to some commentators, he did not follow instructions. He went simply because Hashem told him to go. Avraham went l'shem Shomayim, for the sake of Heaven. Horav Shimshon Pincus, zl, feels that, although this might be a nice thought and a tribute to our Patriarch, it is not correct. It does not sit right to suggest that Avraham did not follow Hashem's instruction. Indeed, in pasuk 4, the Torah writes, "So Avram went as Hashem had spoken to him." Hashem instructed him to go for his own pleasure and benefit. Avraham certainly did so. What is the Torah teaching us?

Rav Pincus explains that when a person performs an act of kindness, such as giving a dollar to a poor man, two considerations are in play regarding this charitable act. First, he achieved an act of chesed, loving-kindness. He availed a poor person the opportunity to purchase a slice of bread. Second, he elevated his own spiritual persona. He made himself into a baal chesed. Now, we may ask ourselves, which of these two achievements has greater significance: his completing an act of chesed which made the world a better place, or his own spiritual actualization? The pasuk answers our question with: Lech lecha - go for yourself. As far as Hashem is concerned, He wanted Avraham to act for himself. He wanted the Patriarch to refine himself, to elevate his own ishkus, humanness. This is what was important to Hashem. Why? Avraham was the pillar of chesed. The Zohar HaKodesh defines true chesed as, ha'mishched im Kono, "One who acts kindly with his Creator." Authentic chesed is the act of kindness one performs for Hashem.

Rav Pincus explains the concept of acting kindly with Hashem in the following manner. Bona fide chesed is the act of providing a service or commodity for someone which they would otherwise not have. On his own, the service entity is unobtainable for him. For example, giving someone a candy when, in fact, he has a candy in his pocket, might be an act of chesed, but it certainly is not the embodiment of chesed. If the individual has no candy - and has no way of obtaining any candy - then the act is the typification of chesed.

Chazal are teaching us that Hashem is the only "One" who lacks one thing, and it is something which He cannot secure without man's cooperation: the perfection that man achieves for himself. When man perfects himself, when he makes himself a better person, he performs a chesed for Hashem. This is the meaning of Lech lecha, "go for yourself." Hashem's wish is that Avraham evolve himself into a better person. Hashem is capable of doing

all of the wonderful things that Avraham is doing for the world. He can provide anything. He cannot, however, make Avraham a better person, because to do so would mean that Avraham is now a robot. He did nothing to better himself; Hashem did it for him. Thus, Avraham must personally act kindly towards others, so that, in turn, he becomes a better person. Hashem's focus was on Avraham's lecha, "yourself"/himself. He wanted the Patriarch to act in a manner that would elevate his own personal spiritual stature. Avraham did, in fact, follow instructions.

Avraham understood what Hashem demanded of Avraham - perfection. Hashem does not need man to build and develop the world. Hashem can do that Himself. He does not need man to support the poor, feed the ill, and care for the needy. Hashem can do that. There is only one thing that man can do which Hashem cannot do and still allow man to continue functioning as a man: perfect himself. In this manner, Avraham viewed every human being with awe and reverence. Each of them is capable of so much. Each could give Hashem what He desires, what He Himself cannot do. This is how Avraham stood in contradistinction to the rest of the world. He valued people. He saw their incredible potential.

This is where the members of secular society have distanced themselves from what Hashem has planned for them. We are able to send a man to the moon, to establish space stations in the distant solar system, but has it had any effect on mankind? Have we become better people? Scientifically, we are light years beyond our primitive ancestors; we are still slaves to lust, greed, and every form of mind-altering narcotics, but we can fly to Mars! We have done nothing to better ourselves. Regrettably, some of the effects of the secular society has crept into our own Torah world, which seems to distinguish between mitzvos that are Heaven-oriented and those that deal with our fellow man.

Rav Pincus emphasizes that an individual's distinction is not measured by the great things that he does, his great acts of charity, his incredible diligence in Torah study and brilliance in Torah erudition. No, it is determined by the little, simple things, the subtle acts of kindness, the innocuous acts of thoughtfulness which no one recognizes - often not even the benefactor, where no plaques are dedicated and no dinners are proffered in his honor. It is the little things that one does which demonstrate the "real" person. These are the actions that serve to elevate him and make him a better person. It is these acts of kindness that are an expression of "acting kindly with Hashem."

Rav Pincus relates three vignettes which are very telling and give us a perspective on the meaning of the "little things." Rav Yosef Liss, zl, a distinguished Torah scholar in Yerushalayim, was a close student of the Brisker Rav, zl, a survivor of the European inferno that killed so many of our brethren. His first wife and children had perished in the flames of the Holocaust. He was no longer a young man when he married a second time in Eretz Yisrael. His wife's first marriage had ended in her widowhood, after she had been married for over a decade without being blessed with children.

Originally, Rav Yosef was wary about remarrying, because he did not have incontrovertible proof that his wife had died. The Brisker Rav, however, urged him to remarry, so he listened to his rebbe. They were married for eight years without bearing children. Then, a miracle occurred, and they were blessed with a boy and a girl, respectively. When Rav Pincus asked him "who" was responsible for this miracle, he replied, "I was. It is because the entire time that I was not blessed with a child, I never once complained or asked the Brisker Rav for a brachah, blessing, lest he think that I held him 'responsible' for convincing me to get married. I did not want to cause my rebbe any grief." True greatness!

Second story: The famous mekubal, mystic, in Yerushalayim, the Baal HaLeshem, zl, was a holy man who was well versed in every area of Torah, both revealed and mystical. He was the author of a variety of treatises on all areas of Torah. His daughter was unable to conceive. When she went to the doctor, he gave her a grim verdict: she would never have children. Understandably, she was heartbroken. When she arrived home, she saw her

holy father engrossed in his Torah study, and - not wanting to disturb him - she went outside and sat down in the corner of the alleyway and broke down in uncontrollable weeping.

After awhile, her father decided to go outside for some air. Imagine how he felt when he saw his daughter sitting in a corner weeping bitterly. "Why are you crying?" he asked. "The doctor told me I will never have children." "Why did you not sit in the house and cry? Why in the alley?" he asked. "I did not want to disturb your learning," she answered. "If that is the case, you will be blessed with a child," her father said. Her grandson is the poseik ha'dor, Horav Yosef Sholom Elyashiv, Shlita. Once again, the little things made the difference.

Last story: A Jew living in Yerushalayim was not yet blessed with children. He heard that in Bnei Brak there was a holy chassidische Rebbe, who was a miracle worker. Apparently, whoever was fortunate to receive Maftir on the first day of Rosh Hashanah, was blessed that year with a child. That Maftir is considered to be a segulah, remedy, for childlessness, since it relates the story of Chanah, Shmuel HaNavi's mother, who for many years been barren.

The man related his unfortunate circumstance to the Rebbe, who suggested that he come to Bnei Brak for Rosh Hashanah, and he would receive Maftir. After Maariv on the first night of Rosh Hashanah, he met a Jew who had come to the Rebbe for the same reason. He was hoping to secure for himself Maftir of the following day, since he had no choice. When the first Jew - who had already been promised Maftir by the Rebbe - heard this, he decided not to daven there the next day, in order not to hurt the chances of the other Jew to get Maftir. He relinquished his right to Maftir and davened elsewhere! That year he was blessed with a daughter. It is the little things that determine one's greatness. Lech lecha, "go for yourself," make yourself a better person.

Avram passed into the land as far as the site of Shechem, until the plain of Moreh. (12:6)

Rashi teaches that Avraham Avinu's stopover in Shechem was intentional, so that he could pray for his descendants, Yaakov Avinu's sons, Shimon and Levi, who would one day battle against Shechem. Sifsei Chachamim questions this statement. It seems apparent that Avraham was aware that he would have offspring. Otherwise, why would he pray for them? If this is the case, what is the meaning of the pasuk later on in the parsha, when Avraham asks Hashem, "What can You give me, seeing that I go childless, and the steward of my house is (the) Damesek Eliezer?" (ibid.15:2). They reply that Avraham was concerned lest he father a child at an advanced age, whereby Eliezer would take his money. It seems far-fetched that this would be Avraham's greatest worry.

The Netziv, zl, explains that Avraham's concern was primarily for the education of his offspring. He wanted to be the one to transmit the mesorah, teachings of "Avraham," to the next generation of Jewish progeny. He feared that by the time he would have children, he would be so old that either he would not be able to impart it properly or the constraint of "time" would be a serious factor in limiting his children's long-term development. Avraham felt that his greatest "possession" was his spiritual dimension, which would be inherited primarily by Eliezer, who was a fine student and a righteous human being, but not his son. Avraham wanted to implant the concept of emunah, faith in Hashem, using his children as the vehicle for dissemination. His prized possession was his spirituality, and this is what he sought to bequeath to his offspring - not to his trusted servant.

Horav Chaim Elazary, zl, derives two powerful lessons from the Netziv's exposition. First, Avraham's tefillos, prayers, to have children were not simply a reflection of his desire to have children. He wanted children whom he could teach and to whom he could transmit the Torah of Hashem. Avraham's raison d'etre in life was to transmit the Torah legacy of Judaism to the world. Indeed, as the Netziv cites from the Midrash Rabbah, Avraham said to Hashem, "If You grant me progeny who will do nothing but anger You, better I should be childless." This was Avraham's lofty

concept of fatherhood. He was a man on a mission, and he would do whatever is necessary to realize the goals of that mission.

Second, Avraham himself wanted to be the one who taught his children - not even Eliezer, his faithful servant, who would certainly perform royally with complete fidelity to the Abrahamatic tradition. Avraham felt that he personally should be the rebbe, mentor, to transmit the Torah to them. He had a distinct imprint which he sought to impart. Perhaps it was his understanding of the middah, attribute, of chesed, lovingkindness. Being the one who was considered the amud ha'chesed, pillar of lovingkindness, his insight into this remarkable character trait was unique. Thus, he wanted to teach the Torah with a special focus on chesed.

In addition, at best, a rebbe can model himself after the father, in an effort to teach the Torah in the most optimum manner, but he does not take the father's place. What about a father's teaching distinguishes itself over that of anyone else? We may suggest the following: The Torah in Bereishis 46:28 writes, "He sent Yehudah before him to Yosef, to instruct ahead of him in Goshen." Rashi explains that Yehudah was chosen from among all the brothers to become the first Rosh Yeshivah, as Yaakov sent him to Goshen to establish a bais talmud she'misham teitzei horaah, "a house of study from which instruction will go forth." The commentators are bothered by Yaakov Avinu's choice. Would it not have been more practical to send Yissachar, who was the consummate Torah student, or Levi, who epitomized spirituality? The Tiferes Shlomo explains that while all of this is true, Yehudah had one unique quality which distinguished him from the others, a quality which must be inherent in a Torah teacher, a quality which is intrinsic to Torah leadership: achrayos, responsibility. It was Yehudah who came forward and offered to be the guarantor for Binyamin's safe return. He took the responsibility. He was mekabel achrayos. Yehudah came forward and declared, Anochi e'erven, miyadi tevakshenu, "I will guarantee him of my own hand. You can demand him" (ibid.43:11). Torah and spirituality are very important, but - without a sense of responsibility - the educator will not succeed.

This is the quality that a parent has - or, at least, should have. Responsibility is synonymous with parenthood. One who is irresponsible simply cannot be a good parent. Parenting means taking responsibility - regardless of one's position or other responsibilities. Children come first.

Rashi cites Chazal at the end of Sefer Bamidbar to explain this idea. In the beginning of Parashas Masei, the Torah recounts Klal Yisrael's various encampments. Forty-two "stops" are enumerated, places which serve as allusions to the occurrences, both positive and negative, which took place there. Rashi quotes a Midrash which compares this detail to a king whose son had been taken ill. The king took the prince to a distant city to seek medical attention. The prince was cured, and his father, on the return trip, recounts all of the stops they took as well as what they did at each place: "Here, we slept; here, it was cold; here, it was very hot; etc." Likewise, as Klal Yisrael nears the end of their forty-year journey, Hashem reminisces with them concerning the various places in which they encamped and what occurred in each place. The commentators question why the story presented a king who travelled with his son. Would the analogy be different if it had been a simple father who had taken a long trip with his son? Does the fact that the father was the king have any bearing on the story?

The commentators explain that Chazal emphasize melech, king, as a way of underscoring the idea that, regardless of who the father is, he must set aside time for his children, not only for study, but even for simple conversation, such as reminiscing about a recent trip. Everything matters, and every incident plays an important role in a child's development. That is a father's and mother's responsibility.

Nothing stands in the way of educating one's own children. The greatest Torah leaders would set aside the most important meetings and lectures if it would infringe upon the time designated for their children. The Skverer Rebbe, Horav Yaakov Twersky, zl, was a world leader, whose every waking moment was devoted to Klal Yisrael and to his own avodas ha'kodesh, service of Hashem. He was an individual more spiritual than

physical, his entire life a symphony of holiness and purity. Yet, when he was living in Bucharest, Romania, following World War II, he felt that the "street" culture was not conducive to a Jewish girl's religious development. His daughters had to play, and he felt there were no other girls with whom they could play constructively. So, what did this great tzadik, righteous person, do? He set aside time to play with them! He even knitted with them! Indeed, he was involved in every aspect of their development. He understood the responsibility that rests upon every Jewish parent.

Rotzeh Hashem es yireiav es ha'meyachalim l'chashdo

Horav Avigdor Miller, zl, notes that the word "and" is not used to connect what seems to be two categories of people: G-d-fearing Jews, and those who trust in Him, awaiting His kindness. The connection is not used because they are one and the same. Just as there is no true sense of bitachon, trust, in Hashem without yiras Shomayim, fear of Heaven, so, too, is there no fear of Hashem unless one sincerely believes that He desires to do good, to act benevolently with us. The individual who fears Hashem - but does not recognize and acknowledge that Hashem desires kindness - is no different than one who ascribes corporeality to Hashem, limiting His abilities. Both of these beliefs are categorically false. One who truly is boteach b'Hashem, trusts in the Almighty, is a G-d-fearing Jew, who has a keen awareness of Hashem and lives by His every precept. Indeed, when we think about it and just take a moment to look around us, we will understand that the greatest kindness that Hashem can bestow upon us is that we succeed in attaining a true fear of Heaven, because that defines the perfection of man.

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