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to: [weeklydt@torahweb2.org](mailto:weeklydt@torahweb2.org)  
date: Wed, Oct 29, 2014 at 10:14 PM  
subject: Rabbi Mordechai Willig - Learning From Avraham Avinu  
**Rabbi Mordechai Willig**  
**Learning From Avraham Avinu**

"Harimosi - I lifted my hand to Hashem...if I will take anything of yours, so you will not say 'I made Avram rich'" (Bereishis 14:22,23). Rashi explains that Avram's lifting of his hand signifies that he was taking an oath. The Meshech Chochma offers an alternative explanation of Avram's actions, namely that Avram lifted his hand, which signified the strength he used in the war, to Hashem to demonstrate that he attributed his victory to Hashem and not to his wisdom or his strength. As such, the spoils of war are not Avram's, and he therefore refused to take anything.

"You may say in your heart, 'My strength and the might of my hand made me all this wealth (chayil)' Then you must remember Hashem and that it is He Who gives you strength to make wealth" (Devarim 8:17,18). The Ramban links "chayil" to military victory. We must realize that victory is Hashem's doing, and therefore even mightier nations and fortified cities can be conquered (9:1-3). Moreover, miraculous sustenance in the desert came from Hashem (8:15,16) and the wealth made with our strength when we entered Eretz Yisrael also came from Hashem, "Who gives you strength."

A similar idea is expressed by the Ramban (Shemos 13:16) who says, "from the great open miracles, a person acknowledges the hidden miracles which are the fundamentals of the entire Torah...that all our matters and happenings are miracles, not nature and the way of the world...but all by Divine decree." Just as redemption is miraculous, so is sustenance - a natural occurrence - miraculous, as it says: "Hashem saved us from our enemies, and gives nourishment to all" (Tehilim 136:24,25) (Bereshis Raba 20:9). The change of tense is instructive - from past miracles we learn that present sustenance is from Hashem Whose kindness endures forever. Similarly, the Medrash cites

an additional juxtaposition: Hashem Who shepherds me, His angel redeems me (Bereishis 48:15,16). Parnassa, sustenance, is greater than redemption, and even greater than the splitting of the sea (Tehilim 136:13).

Avram made the spoils of this war into a song, as the Torah says after the sea split, "the G-d of our father (Avraham) and I will exalt Him" (Shemos 15:2). The Medrash (Bereishis Raba 43:9) links Moshe's "Aromimenu" with Avraham's "harimosi" - just as we sang after the open miracle of kriyas Yam Suf, so Avraham attributed his victory to Hashem Whose Divine Providence vanquished kings, for which he sang and praised Hashem (Meshech Chochma).

In a remarkable interpretation, the Malbim (14:23) translates Avram's words "v'lo tomar", not as "you will not say", but "she [it] will not say." The third person feminine form refers to the aforementioned hand of Avram. If I will accept the spoils, as if my hand won the war and made wealth, my hand will tell me 'I made Avram rich', as it says 'my strength and the might of my hand made me wealth.' How can my hand say that she [it] made me rich if Hashem did all this and not my weak hand?

In an age of unprecedented prosperity in the American Orthodox Jewish community, we dare not forget, as Hashem warned us, that our success comes from Hashem. If we forget this, we can forget Hashem entirely, not only in thought but in deed (Or Hachaim, Devraim 8:18). We must reinforce our faith in Divine Providence to avoid the path that leads from wealth to nonobservance and assimilation.

The deeds of the patriarchs are a sign for their descendants (Tanchuma Lech Lecha, 9). Let us all learn the critical and timeless lesson from our founding father.

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from: Aish.com <[newsletterserver@aish.com](mailto:newsletterserver@aish.com)> date: Wed, Oct 29, 2014 at 5:03 PM subject: Advanced Parsha - Lech Lecha

### **How Perfect Were the Patriarchs and Matriarchs?** **by Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks**

Lech Lecha (Genesis 12-17)

In an extraordinary series of observations on this week's parsha, Nahmanides (Ramban, Rabbi Moses ben Nahman Girondi, 1194 - 1270), delivers harsh criticisms of Abraham and Sarah. The first has to do with Abraham's decision, after arriving at the land of Canaan, to leave and go to Egypt because "there was a famine in the land." On this Nahmanides says:

Know that Abraham our father unintentionally committed a great sin by bringing his righteous wife to a stumbling-block of sin on account of his fear for his life. He should have trusted that God would save him and his wife and all his belongings, for God surely has the power to help and to save. His leaving the Land concerning which he had been commanded from the beginning, on account of the famine, was also a sin he committed, for in famine God would redeem him from death. It was because of this deed that the exile in the land of Egypt at the hand of Pharaoh was decreed for his children.(1)

According to Ramban, Abraham should have stayed in Canaan and had faith in God that he would sustain him despite the famine. Not only was Abraham wrong to leave. He also put Sarah in a position of moral hazard because, as a result of going to Egypt, she was forced to tell a lie, that she was Abraham's sister not his wife, and because she was taken into Pharaoh's harem where she might have been forced to commit an act of adultery. This is a very harsh judgment, made more so by Ramban's further assertion that it was because of this lack of faith that Abraham's children were sentenced to exile in Egypt centuries later.

Later in the parsha, Ramban criticizes Sarah. Despairing of having a child, she asked Abraham to sleep with her handmaid Hagar in the hope that she might bear him a child. Abraham did so, and Hagar became pregnant. The text then says that Hagar "began to despise her mistress." Sarah complained to Abraham, and then "afflicted Hagar" who fled from her into the desert. On this, Ramban writes:

Our mother [Sarah] transgressed by this affliction, as did Abraham by allowing her to do so. So God heard her [Hagar's] affliction and gave her a son who would be a wild ass of a man to afflict the seed of Abraham and Sarah with all kinds of affliction.(2)

Here the moral judgment is easier to understand. Sarah's conduct does seem volatile and harsh. The Torah itself says that Sarah "afflicted" Hagar. Yet Ramban seems to be saying that it was this episode in the ancient past that explains Jewish suffering at the hands of Muslims (descendants of Ishmael) in a much later age.

It is not difficult to defend Abraham and Sarah in these incidents and other commentators did so. Abraham was not to know that God would perform a miracle and save him and Sarah from famine had they stayed in Canaan. Nor was he to know that the Egyptians would endanger his life and place Sarah in a moral dilemma. Neither of them had been to Egypt before. They did not know in advance what to expect.

As for Sarah and Hagar, although an angel sent Hagar back, later when Ishmael and Isaac were born, Sarah once again banished Hagar. This time, though Abraham protested, God told him to do what Sarah said. So Ramban's criticisms are easily answered. Why then did he make them?

Ramban surely did not make these comments lightly. He was, I believe, driven by another consideration altogether, namely the justice of history. Why did the Israelites suffer exile and slavery in Egypt? Why in Ramban's own age were Jews subject to attack by radical Islamists, the Almohades, who brought to an end the Golden Age of Spain they had enjoyed under the more tolerant rule of the Umayyads.

Ramban believed, as we say in our prayers, that "because of our sins we were exiled from our land," but what sins had the Israelites committed in the days of Jacob that merited exile? He also believed that "the acts of the fathers are a sign for the children," and that what happened in the lives of the patriarchs foreshadowed what would happen to their descendants. What had they done to Ishmael to earn the scorn of Muslims? A close reading of the biblical text pointed Ramban in the direction of Sarah's treatment of Hagar.

So Ramban's comments make sense within his reading of Jewish history, but this too is not without its difficulties. The Torah states explicitly that God may punish "the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation" but not beyond. The rabbis further restricted this to cases where "the children continue the sins of the parents." Jeremiah and Ezekiel both said that no one would any more say, "The parents have eaten sour grapes and their children's teeth are set on edge." The transfer of sins across the generations is problematic, Jewishly and ethically.

What is deeply interesting about Ramban's approach to Abraham and Sarah is his willingness to point out flaws in their behaviour. This answers a fundamental question as far as our understanding of the narratives of Genesis is concerned. How are we to judge the patriarchs when their behaviour seems problematic: Jacob taking Esau's blessing in disguise, for example, or Shimon and Levi's brutality in the course of rescuing their sister Dina?

The stories of Genesis are often morally perplexing. Rarely does the Torah pass an explicit, unequivocal verdict on people's conduct. This means that it is sometimes difficult to teach these narratives as a guide to how to behave. This led to their systematic reinterpretation by rabbinic midrash so that black and white take the place of subtle shades of grey.

So, for example, the words "Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian ... mocking," were understood by the sages to mean that the thirteen-year-old Ishmael was guilty of idolatry, illicit sex or murder. This is clearly not the plain sense of the verse. It is, instead, an interpretation that would justify Sarah's insistence that Ishmael be sent away.

Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Chajes explained that the entire tendency of midrash to make the heroes seem perfect and the villains completely evil is for educational reasons. The word Torah means "teaching" or "instruction," and it is difficult to teach ethics through stories whose characters are fraught with complexity and ambiguity.

Yet the Torah does paint its characters in shades of grey. Why so? For three reasons:

The first is that the moral life is not something we understand in depth all at once. As children we hear stories of heroes and villains. We learn basic distinctions: right and wrong, good and bad, permitted and forbidden. As we grow, though, we begin to realise how difficult some decisions are. Do I go to Egypt? Do I stay in Canaan? Do I show compassion to my servant's child at the risk that he may be a bad influence on my child who has been chosen by God for a sacred mission? Anyone who thinks such decisions are easy is not yet morally mature. So the best way of teaching ethics is to do so by way of stories that can be read at different levels at different times in our life.

Second, not only are decisions difficult. People are also complex. No one in the Torah is portrayed as perfect. Noah, the only person in Tanakh to be called righteous, ends drunk and dishevelled. Moses, Aaron and Miriam are all punished for their sins. So is King David. Solomon, wisest of men, ends his life as a deeply compromised leader. Many of the prophets suffered dark nights of despair. "There is none so righteous on earth," says Kohelet, "as to do only good and never sin." No religious literature was ever further from hagiography, idealisation and hero-worship.

In the opposite direction, even the non-heroes have their saving graces. Esau is a loving son, and when he meets his brother Jacob after a long estrangement, they kiss, embrace and go their separate ways. Levi, condemned by Jacob for his violence, counts Moses, Aaron and Miriam among his grandchildren. Even Pharaoh, the man who enslaved the Israelites, had a moral heroine for a daughter. The descendants of Korach sang psalms in the Temple of Solomon. This too is moral maturity, light-years removed from the dualism adopted by many religions, including some Jewish sects (like the Qumran sect of the Dead Sea Scrolls), that divides humanity into children of light and children of darkness.

Lastly and most important, more than any other religious literature, the Torah makes an absolute distinction between earth and heaven, God and human beings. Because God is God, there is space for humans to be human. In Judaism the line dividing them is never blurred. How rare this is was pointed out by Walter Kaufmann:

In India, the Jina and the Buddha, founders of two new religions in the sixth century BCE, came to be worshipped later by their followers. In China, Confucius and Lao-tze came to be deified. To the non-Christian, Jesus seems to represent a parallel case. In Greece, the heroes of the past were held to have been sired by a god or to have been born of goddesses, and the dividing line between gods and men became fluid. In Egypt, the Pharaoh was considered divine.

In Israel, says Kaufmann, "no man was ever worshipped or accorded even semi-divine status. This is one of the most extraordinary facts about the religion of the Old Testament." There never was a cult of Moses or any other biblical figure. That is why "no man knows Moses' burial place to this day," so that it could never become a place of pilgrimage.

No religion has held a higher view of humanity than the book that tells us we are each in the image and likeness of God. Yet none has been more honest about the failings of even the greatest. God does not ask us to be perfect. He asks us, instead, to take risks in pursuit of the right and the good, and to acknowledge the mistakes we will inevitably make.

In Judaism the moral life is about learning and growing, knowing that even the greatest have failings and even the worst have saving graces. It calls for humility about ourselves and generosity toward others. This unique blend of idealism and realism is morality at its most demanding and mature.

NOTES 1. Ramban, Commentary to Genesis 12: 10, based on Zohar, Tazria, 52a. 2. Commentary to Genesis 16:6. Published: October 26, 2014

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from: Chanan Morrison <ravkooklist@gmail.com> to: **Rav Kook List** <Rav-Kook-List@googlegroups.com> date: Wed, Oct 29, 2014 at 6:57 AM subject: [**Rav Kook List**] Lech Lecha: Malkhi-tzedek and Abraham Lech Lecha: Malkhi-tzedek and Abraham

After Abraham defeated Chedarla'omer and his allied kings, he was greeted by Malkhi-tzedek, the priest-king of Jerusalem:

"Malkhi-tzedek, king of Salem, brought forth bread and wine. He was a priest to God, the Most High." (Gen. 14:18) Who was Malkhi-tzedek? What is the significance of this encounter?

#### Shem Loses the Priesthood

The Sages identified the priest-king of Salem as Shem, the son of Noah. With his ill-fated greeting of Abraham, however, Shem forever lost the priesthood.

"The Holy One wanted the priesthood to originate from Shem. But when Shem blessed Abraham before he blessed God, the priesthood was transferred to Abraham. Abraham asked: "Is it proper to bless the servant before blessing his Master?" God immediately gave the priesthood to Abraham. ... "That is what is written, "He was a priest to God." He [Malkhi-tzedek] was a priest, but his descendants were not." (Nedarim 32b) This transfer of the priesthood is deeply significant, as it contrasts the different approaches of these two great individuals, Shem and Abraham.

Shem was called Malkhi-tzedek, literally, "the just king." He stressed the trait of tzedek - justice and worthiness. Abraham, on the hand, excelled in chesed and kindness. He sought to reach out to others, to influence and help them even beyond what they deserved.

Shem emphasized God's quality of transcendence. He was a priest "to God, the Most High." His God was exalted far beyond the realm of humanity. Finite and insignificant, we cannot begin to emulate God, and Godliness cannot directly influence us. For Shem, in order to approach God it is necessary to choose a worthy intermediary. Therefore, the text emphasizes that only he was a priest. Only a holy individual of Shem's stature could serve as a bridge between God and His creatures. Since Shem's descendants did not attain the necessary spiritual level, they were unable to inherit Shem's priesthood.

#### The Inclusive Priesthood of Abraham

The Torah, on the other hand, views every individual as a being created in God's image. We all are capable of connecting with our Creator. What then is the function of the kohen (priest)? The kohen not an intermediary, but rather atones for and purifies the people, enabling them to approach God directly. This form of priesthood could only originate from Abraham, from his attribute of chesed and sincere desire to help others.

Abraham developed his special trait of chesed through the two mitzvot mentioned in the Torah portion: brit milah (circumcision), and settling the Land of Israel. Both commandments strengthened his connection with future generations - "This is My covenant that you must keep, between Me and you and your descendants" (Gen. 17:10). They enabled Abraham to focus on his primary goal: concern for others and preparing the way for future generations.

In general, mitzvot serve to connect and unite. The word mitzvah comes from the root tzevet, meaning "togetherness" or "team." The mitzvot focused Abraham's lifework towards the future community of his descendants, and through them, to the entire world.

#### Abraham's Altar

A careful reading of the text reveals a major shift that occurred in Abraham's service of God. When Abraham first arrived in the Land of Israel, he built an altar and dedicated it "to God Who appeared to him" (Gen. 12:7). This dedication expressed Abraham's gratitude for his own personal spiritual attainments. "To God who appeared to him" - just to Abraham, the holy prophet in his own private spiritual world.

After fulfilling God's command and traveling through the Land, Abraham returned to the altar he had built. This time, however, Abraham "called out in God's Name" (Gen. 13:4). As Maimonides explained,

"The people would gather around him and question him about his words, and he would explain to each one according to his capabilities" (Laws of Idolatry 1:13). Now Abraham "called out in God's Name." He publicized the

belief in one God. This reflects the essence of Abraham's new prophetic mission: reaching out to others in God's Name.

Shem/Malkhi-tzedek, on the other hand, remained on the level of tzedek, without a public calling. "He was a priest to God." He was a priest, but not the priest. Lacking the definitive article, the prefix letter hey, Shem was only a priest for himself, without a connection to others. Instead, the letter hey was added to Abraham's name, indicating the universal nature of his mission. From Avram he became Avraham - "Av hamon goyim," the father of many nations - bringing the entire world closer to God.

"God has sworn and will not retract: you are a priest forever, due to the words of Malkhi-tzedek." (Psalms 110:4) (Adapted from Shemu'ot HaRe'iyah 8: (Lech Lecha) 5690/1929)

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from: **Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald** <ezbuchwald@njop.org> reply-to: ezbuchwald@njop.org date: Mon, Oct 27, 2014 at 5:38 PM subject: Weekly Torah Message from Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

Lech Lecha 5775-2014 "Lot Grows Increasingly Estranged from his Uncle Abram"

by Rabbi Ephraim Buchwald

In this week's parasha, parashat Lech Lecha, Abram (he has not yet been renamed Abraham) concludes the journey he has made from Ur Kasdim and Charan and arrives in Canaan, a journey that will impact on the destiny of the Jewish people and the world.

Scripture, in Genesis 12:4, tells us, וַיֵּלֶךְ אַבְרָם כְּאִשְׁרֵי דְבַר אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם, וַיֵּלֶךְ אִתּוֹ לְלוֹט, The first thing that Scripture notes after stating that Abram went as G-d had spoken to him, was that Lot went with Abram, and that Abram was 75 years old when he left Canaan.

According to Genesis 11:28, Lot's father, Haran, had died. A well-known Midrash, relates that Haran had been "incinerated" in a fiery furnace by King Amraphel because of his lack of respect for the pagan gods. The fact that the Torah emphasizes that Lot went with Abram, implies that there was an extremely close relationship between Abram and his orphaned nephew.

The Torah (Genesis 12:5) then proceeds to state, וַיֵּקַח אַבְרָם אֶת שָׂרַי אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאֵת לוֹט בֶּן אֲחִיו וְאֵת כָּל רְכוּשָׁם אֲשֶׁר רָכְשׁוּ וְאֵת הַנַּפְשׁ אֲשֶׁר עִשׂוּ בְּהָרָן, וַיֵּצְאוּ לְלֶכֶת אֶרְצָה וְאֵת לוֹט בֶּן אֲחִיו וְאֵת כָּל רְכוּשָׁם אֲשֶׁר רָכְשׁוּ וְאֵת הַנַּפְשׁ אֲשֶׁר עִשׂוּ בְּהָרָן, וַיֵּצְאוּ לְלֶכֶת אֶרְצָה כְּנָעַן, Abram took his wife, Sarai, and his nephew, Lot, and all the wealth that they had amassed, and the people that they had acquired in Charan, and they embarked for the land of Canaan, and they came to the land of Canaan. Although Lot had been mentioned previously (in verse 4) as the first to accompany Abram, already by verse 5, Lot followed Abram's wife, Sarai. Apparently, the distancing had already begun.

Abram starts to make his mark in Canaan by building altars throughout the land, and calling out the name of G-d, in the hope of persuading the local people to adopt his monotheistic beliefs. Abram continues his travels, journeying steadily toward the south, but Lot is no longer mentioned.

In Genesis 12:10 the Torah states that a famine has struck the land of Canaan and Abram is forced to go to Egypt. Although Sarai, Abram's wife is mentioned as being with Abram, Lot is not mentioned until Abram and Sarai are expelled from Egypt.

In Genesis 13:1, Scripture records, וַיֵּעַל אַבְרָם מִמִּצְרַיִם הוּא וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וְכָל אֲשֶׁר לוֹ, וַיֵּלֶךְ אֶפְרַיִם הַהַרְבֵּה, וְלוֹט עִמּוֹ הַהַרְבֵּה, Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife, and all that was his, and Lot with him, to the south. Scripture also notes that Abram had now become a very wealthy man, laden with cattle, silver and gold. In fact, Abram's possessions are mentioned in the verse even before Lot, indicating a further distancing.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik points to a further textual distinction underscoring the distancing between Abram and Lot. When the Biblical narrative in Genesis 12:5 introduces Lot, we are told that Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his nephew, and all their possessions, and the souls they had made. The verse actually uses the Hebrew conjunctive word, "Eht," four times, implying there was a very close relationship and a powerful bond, not

only between Abram and Sarai, but also between Abram and Lot, all the possessions and all the souls that accompanied them on the journey. However, in Genesis 13:1, when Abram departs from Egypt, the Hebrew term "im" is used, and they no longer appear as one large cohesive family, whose property was shared, in a common household. It seems, in fact, that Lot is hardly a member of Abram's family. He may be biologically related to Abram, he may be friendly with Abram, but something happened along the way to create a distance. Rabbi Soloveitchik suggests that Lot's success in Egypt led to a parting between Lot and Abram's family.

Scripture, in Genesis 13:5, states: וְגַם לְלוֹט הָיָה רֶכֶשׁ עָצוֹן וְיָקָר, Because of Lot's closeness with Abram, Lot merited to have herds of flocks, herds and tents. The abundance of their collective possessions was so great that the land could not support them dwelling together.

What was it that changed the close symbiotic relationship that Abram and Lot once had into a relationship that was growing more and more distanced? So distant in fact, that Lot actually finds new compatriots in, of all places, Sodom.

Rabbi Soloveitchik suggests that Abram, Sarai and Lot's sojourn in Egypt was over an extended period of time, and perhaps lasted several years. During that time, Abram succeeded economically, becoming even wealthier. Lot, as well, benefitted from Abram's economic prowess.

What was the cause of Lot's estrangement? Apparently Lot was dazzled by the environment, seduced by Egyptian riches, its great technology and materialistic culture. While Abram, the farmer and the shepherd, saw Egypt as a primitive land of pagan culture, Lot saw Egypt as a gold mine of new technology, and advanced industry. Lot could not resist the environmental influences.

"This," says Rabbi Soloveitchik, "is basically the acid test of a Jew: whether he can resist pressures, environmental pressures, if he could withstand the impact of great material culture which is morally and ethically very primitive. Abram could resist but Lot could not."

Of course, an even greater estrangement occurs when Lot soon chooses to move toward Sodom, eventually deciding to live among its wicked citizens. In short order, Lot becomes a judge and an enforcer of the Sodomite lifestyle.

The rest is history, a tragic history that has unfortunately been repeated throughout Jewish history by other would-be "Lots."  
May you be blessed.

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## WHEN TO SAY L'CHAIM

**Rabbi Michael Taubes**

When Avraham Avinu returns home victorious from his battle with the four kings after rescuing Lot from their hands, he is greeted by Malki-Tzeddek, the king of Shaleim, who brings out bread and wine and subsequently blesses both Avraham and Hashem (Bereishit 14:18-20). Although at first glance this appears to be a very noble gesture, appropriate for one described by the Torah (Posuk 18) as a Kohein, the Gemara in Nedarim (32b) finds fault with Malki-Tzeddek actions because of the order in which he pronounced his blessings. As the Pesukim indicate, Malki-Tzeddek, identified in the Midrash cited by Rashi as Sheim, the son of Noach, first blessed Avraham and then blessed Hashem, thereby praising the servant before the Master, which is obviously out of order. The Gemara concludes that because of this, Hashem decided that Malki-Tzeddek descendants would not all be Kohanim as he was.

The Sdei Chemed (Asifas Dinim, Ma'areches Berachos 1:45) presents an interesting discussion among the Poskim based on this idea, which frequently has relevance when people get together at a Kiddush or a Simchah and wish each other a "L'Chaim" over a cup of wine or liquor. Is it appropriate for one to first say L'Chaim to a friend, blessing him, and then to make Beracha to Hashem and drink the wine or liquor, as seems to be the

common practice? Or is it preferable for one to first make a Beracha, then drink something immediately (to avoid any interruption between the recitation of the Beracha and the consumption of the drink), and only then wish one's friend a L'Chaim, so as not to repeat the error of Malki-Tzeddek by blessing Hashem only after blessing a fellow human being?

The Sdei Chemed cites opinions on both sides of the issue. Some hold that since the Gemara says that Malki-Tzeddek was ultimately punished for failing to acknowledge Hashem before acknowledging Avraham, then we certainly ought to be careful to recite the proper Beracha to Hashem before wishing L'Chaim to any friend. Others, however, point to the Gemara in Berachos (19b) and other places which states that Kavod HaBeriyos, giving honor to or preserving the dignity of another person, can sometimes take precedence even over the concern for avoiding the violation of an Aveirah from the Torah. Certainly, then, it should not be a problem to honor a friend by wishing him a L'Chaim and then to make a Beracha and have one's drink.

The Kaf HaChaim (Orach Chaim 175:55) quotes one authority who writes that he asked his Rebbe why he was careful to always make the Beracha and drink something before wishing the others at the table well and was told that it is improper to honor a person before honoring Hashem, presumably a reference to the aforementioned Gemara in Nedarim. But he adds that he disagrees with his Rebbe for two reasons. First, he mentions the Gemara in Berachos which places such a high value on the honor to be given to human beings. Then, he quotes a statement from the Maharshal in his Yam Shel Shlomo on Bava Kamma (Perek 8 Siman 64) concerning how one should respond after being wished good health upon sneezing. There is a long-standing practice to wish someone well (using one expression or another) upon hearing him sneeze; Rabbi Akiva Eiger, in his Gilyon HaShas on Berachos (53a s.v. Rashi), says that the source of this custom is found in Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer (Perek 52) where it is explained that originally one died by sneezing, as his breath left his body. Now that this is no longer true, one's life and health should be toasted when he sneezes. The Maharshal writes that there is also a practice to recite a Posuk then to thank Hashem, but that this Posuk is to be recited by the person only after he acknowledges and thanks those who wish him good health. This ruling is accepted by the Magen Avraham (Orach Chaim 230:6); apparently, there is no problem blessing Hashem after blessing a fellow human being. Nevertheless, this authority concludes that he tries to follow his Rebbe's practice of first saying a Beracha and drinking before praising any human being or wishing anyone well.

The Kaf HaChaim continues by citing Poskim who reject the comparison to responding after one says "G-d bless you" or the like following a sneeze, because the Maharshal himself bases his opinion on the statement of the Gemara in Bava Kamma (92b) that when one prays for the well being of a friend when he is himself in need of such a blessing, he himself is answered first. Therefore, specifically in such a case it may be permissible to respond and bless one's friend before blessing Hashem. Moreover, there may be a difference between responding to someone who has wished one well as opposed to initiating a blessing on one's own before saying a Beracha. The Kaf HaChaim thus rules that honoring Hashem should take precedence and that therefore one should not say L'Chaim until after making a Beracha and taking a drink.

Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank, in his Sefer Mikraei Kodesh on Yomim Noraim (Siman 7), discusses when to recite the "Yehi Ratzon" over the apples and other special foods eaten on Rosh Hashanah night, in relationship to the Beracha required for these foods. Citing a Gemara in Berachos (31a) which says that one should first praise Hashem before davening to Him, he rules that the Beracha (and a bite of the food) must precede the Yehi Ratzon. He then quotes an authority who says for the same reason that one must first make a Beracha and take a drink before saying L'Chaim to a friend. This seems to be the preferred view among the Poskim.

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<http://5tjt.com/pawnshops-ebay-and-halacha/>

## Pawnshops, eBay, and Halacha

By Rabbi Yair Hoffman

There is a law in New York City that all pawnshops have to keep a log of all used items that they have purchased, along with a copy of the identification of the person who had brought in the item. The log must be kept for six years, and police officers check these logs regularly.

The law is designed to minimize theft and reduce crime. Pawnshops have often been used by thieves as a “fence”—a place to unload their stolen merchandise. Fences act as the bridge between the criminal world and the legitimate world. According to Darrell J. Steffensmeier’s book *The Fence: In the Shadow of Two Worlds*, “major fences also play an active role in coaching thieves on techniques of theft and product identification, and in developing long-term relationships with buyers.” The laws regulating pawnshop purchases are thus a necessary tool in minimizing crime.

While these laws may apply to pawnshops, the world of eBay opens up more possible fence opportunities for thieves. Municipal or state laws that govern pawnshops do not cover eBay and other secondhand markets. According to an April 11, 2009 article in the *New York Times*, “Thanks to eBay, the shadowy world of fencing stolen goods is now electronic and accessible to all.” Halachah Is All-Encompassing

The Shulchan Aruch (Choshen Mishpat 356, 358), however, is a bit more encompassing than municipal laws – and address all buyers not just the pawn shops. Rav Karo points out that purchasing stolen items is forbidden and considered a grave sin. (There is an exception, however, in regard to making sure that sifrei Torah and tefillin are not lost or abused; see Y.D. 281). These halachos are based upon the Talmudic discussion in Bava Kamma 119. It does not matter whether the thief is non-Jewish or Jewish; the same prohibition applies. It is considered a grave sin because it strengthens the hand of evildoers and also increases the amount of theft. The Talmud (Kiddushin 56b) gives an interesting folk expression concerning crime: “It is not the mouse that steals, but rather the mouse hole.” Avoiding Possibilities

It is also forbidden, according to Shulchan Aruch, to purchase items that have the status of “possibly having been stolen.” But what are the parameters of this possibility? Does it mean even a remote possibility? Will this not seriously encumber our ability to make secondhand purchases?

The halachah as codified by the Shulchan Aruch is based upon a responsum (#108) of Rav Yitzchak ben Sheisheth (1326–1408), also known as the Rivash. The criterion that the Rivash provides is where there is “raglayim l’davar,” a factual indication of the possibility. (The Rivash, aside from being a Spanish halachic and Talmudic authority in the period of the late Rishonim, was also a businessman for several years prior to having been forced to take an official position in the rabbinate.) Examples Of Raglayim L’davar

What would “raglayim L’davar” include, in terms of a concern for stolen merchandise? A few examples and possibilities: 1. If the price for the item is significantly lower than the market rate. 2. If the item is sold without ahrayus—no return. 3. If the item is sold under suspect circumstances or very quickly. 4. If the seller tells the purchaser, “Don’t tell anyone.” (C.M. 358:3) In a similar vein, the Shulchan Aruch (C.M. 358) rules that if the majority of this type of item are generally stolen, it is prohibited to purchase them. Thus a street-corner watch may not be purchased. If a person works in a facility that produces the type of item being sold, then it would be forbidden to purchase the item from him, unless the owner is aware of the sale. One of the Shulchan Aruch’s specific cases dealt with wool sold by a shepherd, but the principle applies to all industries. Internet Listings

Are there “raglayim l’davar” indications on an eBay or Amazon listing? This is an emerging area of halachah that must be addressed by Klal Yisrael’s poskim, as the Internet is now the forum for most commerce, and we cannot ignore the halachic aspects of it.

If a seller has no history, this may be an indication that the item was stolen—especially if it is accompanied by a “one-day listing.” Multiple sales of items that are easily stolen might also be considered a raglayim l’davar.

Complaints in the comments section might also be a raglayim l’davar. All this brings up another question. Do we have to go to great lengths to research a raglayim l’davar? There are legitimate businesses that also have a sideline in selling stolen items. The idea of “majority” mentioned above may come into play here.

Rav Chaim Kanievsky, shlita, was once asked whether a person whose father is in the habit of stealing may use his father’s esrog on the first day of Sukkos. The father had gifted it to him but there was a concern that it may not fulfill the requirement of “Lachem,” that on the first day the four minim must belong to the person fulfilling the mitzvah. Rav Chaim responded, based upon the Shulchan Aruch mentioned above and an explanatory SM’ A, that it depends whether the majority of the father’s possessions were stolen or not. If the majority were purchased, then the son may use his father’s esrog. If the majority of his items were stolen, then we follow the majority here, as well, and it would be forbidden. (Cited in Chashukei Chemed, Bechoros 18b.)

We see from this ruling of Rav Kanievsky that under certain circumstances the notion of raglayim l’davar on an item does not apply. The exact interplay between raglayim l’davar and “majority” still needs further clarification. ?

The author can be reached at [Yairhoffman2@gmail.com](mailto:Yairhoffman2@gmail.com).

Rabbi Berel Wein <info@jewishdestiny.com> date: Wed, Oct 29, 2014 at 3:11 PM subject: Parshat Lech Lecha 5775 - Rabbi Berel Wein In My Opinion Rabbi Wein’s Weekly Blog KLINGHOFFER

An elderly, crippled, wheel chair bound Jew by the name of Klinghoffer was thrown overboard from a cruise ship by Arab terrorists about a decade ago. Klinghoffer’s only crime was that he was Jewish. These facts are uncontested and well-documented. Nevertheless, in the name of artistic freedom, a play was written that justified the murderous deed and intimated that Klinghoffer’s murder was really the fault of the Jewish state of Israel. Again in the name of artistic freedom, an opera was written reiterating that theme and the opera was produced and presented by the Metropolitan Opera Company of New York last week. It seems that all of the musical critics are in agreement that it was not a great opera, artistically speaking. However, in today’s completely politicized and overwhelmingly anti-Israel and anti-Jewish intellectual world, the Metropolitan Opera Company of New York felt impelled to produce this second-rate work in order to make a statement regarding its own political agenda and skewed worldview. There was a protest mounted against the showing of this opera by some Jewish organizations in New York. But, the Metropolitan Opera Company, using the shield of artistic freedom uber alles – justas the Jew haters on university campuses use the shield of academic freedom to dispense their poison – naturally defended its production and in fact was proud that it engaged in such a groundbreaking venture. The *New York Times*, one of the leaders of the consistently shrill anti-Israel chorus, in its column regarding the production of this opera interviewed a few Jewish opera goers who were at the Klinghoffer presentation. These Jews were not disturbed by the nature or message of the production and seemed to be somewhat bewildered as to what all of the controversy was about. They unfortunately represent a large section of the American Jewish community, that is completely asleep as its society hurtles towards the brink of societal weakness, loss of influence, if not even self extinction. They just don’t understand that they are Klinghoffer..... and that they are applauding their own eventual demise. Of course, the Metropolitan Opera Company of New York is financed very heavily by Jewish donors. Yet, to the best of my knowledge, none of these influential contributors to the Metropolitan has publicly voiced any criticism of the decision to mount and produce this opera, which makes the murderers heroic and the victim pathetic. This opera is perfectly acceptable in today’s American society because poor Mr. Klinghoffer was Jewish. These donors also don’t realize that they are also Klinghoffer. Had Klinghoffer been Moslem or black, his murder would have been judged to be a racist and terrorist crime, worthy of punishment and universal criticism. And certainly

no opera would have been produced to “explain” the “justified motives” of the murderers. Hitler arrived on the scene three generations too soon. In today's climate there would have been many who would have “understood” him and his motives. In spite of the disaster of the “appeasement” policy of the 1930's, it is being followed today in negotiations with murderers that will only lead to a dead end.....and I do mean dead. The only difference is that in today's world, it is called “engagement.” It is a prime example of whistling past the graveyard, which always eventually leads to being in the graveyard. It is no surprise that the Associated Press, in reporting the terrorist incident last week in Jerusalem, ran a headline that read “Israeli Police Shoot Man in Jerusalem.” No mention was made in the headline of the three-month-old infant murdered by this Arab terrorist who drove his automobile into a crowd of innocent people waiting for a train or bus, and who was then subsequently shot dead. This time, after a sufficient outcry of Jewish outrage, the headline was removed a few hours later and replaced with a more accurate description of the terrible event that had occurred. Jews and Israel are fair game for every sort of distortion, criticism and slight, diplomatic, governmental or media generated. The Jewish world somehow still believes that it exists in the more tolerant and subdued immediate post-Holocaust world of the 1950s when “Hava Nagilah” was the most popular song on American radio and stage. Those days are long gone and have been replaced by hatred, discrimination and demonization of all things Jewish. Hillel said that “If I am not for me, then who will be for me?” If individual Jews and communal Jewish organizations are not now prepared to vigorously counteract what is happening in the Western world and the United States vis a vis Jews and the Jewish state then we are truly staring into the abyss. We should remember and assimilate into our inner being that we are all Klinghoffer. Shabbat shalom Berel Wein

from: Rabbi Kaganoff <ymkaganoff@gmail.com> reply-to: kaganoff-a@googlegroups.com to: kaganoff-a@googlegroups.com date: Tue, Oct 28, 2014 at 12:23 PM

### Is Swift the Way to Go?

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question: The Early Birds Avraham and Sorah Adler\* are celebrating the bris of their firstborn son! Avraham knows that one should perform a bris as early in the morning as possible, and, therefore, he would like to schedule it for immediately after the "neitz" minyan, which begins the Shacharis Shemoneh Esrei exactly at sunrise. Sarah feels that she will have no difficulty having herself and the baby ready in time. However, the new grandparents feel that the bris should be scheduled later, so that more guests will arrive. Who is correct halachically?

Answer: There is a principle of the Torah, zerizin makdimim lemitzvos, that one should perform a mitzvah as soon as the opportunity arrives. To quote the Gemara: One may perform a bris milah any time during the day, but one should try to perform the mitzvah as soon as possible (Pesachim 4a). Thus, since the earliest time to make a bris milah is at sunrise, one should perform it as soon as one can.

As a source for the law of zerizin makdimim lemitzvos, the Gemara mentions that when Avraham Avinu was commanded to bring his son, Yitzchak, to the Akeidah, the Torah emphasizes that Avraham got up early in the morning to fulfill his mitzvah. We also find another Biblical source in which Dovid Hamelech lauds those who perform mitzvos at the first opportunity; I hurried and did not delay fulfilling Your commandments (Tehillim 119:60).

Our enthusiasm to carry out Hashem's commandments should manifest itself in a desire to perform mitzvos as immediately as possible. We should bear this in mind for every opportunity that presents itself, whether it be to perform a chesed or to fulfill one of the laws that we do not necessarily understand. As an example of zerizin makdimim lemitzvos, the Gemara requires one to check for chometz as soon as the evening of Erev Pesach begins, and not wait until later that night.

In a different article, we discussed whether it is more important halachically to perform a mitzvah in a more exemplary fashion, hiddur mitzvah, than to perform it earlier. Briefly put, most authorities contend that it is of greater importance to perform a mitzvah in a more exemplary fashion than to perform it earlier, whereas the Gra contends that performing the mitzvah earlier is preferable.

**Berov Am Hadras Melech** We can now analyze the issues involved in our question: When should one schedule a bris? Should one schedule the bris at the first possible moment, because of the mitzvah of zerizus, or should one delay the bris in order to have a larger crowd attend, which is itself a halachic preference, called berov am hadras melech, a large group of people (attending a mitzvah) honors the King. The question is whether berov am hadras melech is similar to performing a mitzvah in a mehudar way, and therefore is a reason to delay the bris so that more people can attend (according to the majority opinion that hiddur mitzvah is preferable to zerizus), or is it preferred to perform the mitzvah at the first opportunity?

Why should there be a difference?

Hiddur mitzvah means that there is an improvement in the quality of performance of this specific mitzvah, such as using a nicer sefer Torah, purchasing a more beautifully written mezuzah, or davening with greater concentration. Most opinions contend that it is preferable to perform a mitzvah in a more proper fashion than it is to fulfill observing the mitzvah earlier. However, berov am hadras melech does not change the quality of the actual mitzvah performed. The Bris Milah is not performed in a more meticulous fashion because more people attended. Having more people in attendance is a halachic preference, but it does not make the bris into a more mehudar mitzvah.

**Zerizim Versus Berov Am Hadras Melech** Can we prove that one should delay performing a mitzvah in order to accomplish berov am hadras melech? It appears that we can.

The Mishnah teaches that Hallel is always recited immediately following Shacharis, whereas shofar blowing is performed before and during the Musaf davening. The Gemara asks why we make sure to recite Hallel early, yet we delay blowing shofar. The Gemara suggests that the reason that the shofar is blown during Musaf, and not during Shacharis, is because more people attend Musaf than Shacharis (sigh -- I guess times have not changed) – thus, there is greater berov am hadras melech to blow shofar at Musaf than at Shacharis. The Gemara, however, counters that were this logic true and berov am hadras melech supersedes zerizin makdimim lemitzvos, why is it that Hallel is recited after Shacharis? Should not its correct place be after Musaf so that more people participate? Thus, the two rulings appear to contradict one another, the practice of Hallel implying that zerizim is preferred, and the practice of shofar implying that berov am hadras melech is. Obviously, this cannot possibly be! There must be a method whereby we resolve this contradiction.

The Gemara responds that the shofar is not blown until Musaf for a completely different, historical reason. At a certain point in history, the government prohibited the blowing of shofar and posted guards in the shuls during Shacharis; at that time, the point in davening when shofar was blown. The guards dispersed when they noted that the Jews were no longer blowing shofar in Shacharis. The Sages then instituted blowing shofar at Musaf, because by that time the government guards were gone (Rosh Hashanah 32b). Thus, the practice of blowing shofar around Musaf is because of exceptional circumstances unique to shofar that should not be applied elsewhere; otherwise, zerizin makdimim lemitzvos supersedes berov am hadras melech, not the other way around.

**Review of the Rules** Based on all these points, we should prioritize our mitzvah performance in the following way:

1. According to most authorities, hiddur mitzvah is the first choice. When one is certain that one will be able to perform the mitzvah later in a more mehudar fashion, one should delay in order to do so. An example of this is

delaying kiddush levanah until motza'ei Shabbos. (According to the Gra, one should perform kiddush levanah at one's first opportunity.)

2. When delaying may result in missing the mitzvah altogether, one performs the mitzvah as soon as possible. The same is true if delaying the mitzvah for the hiddur may result in a long delay – we perform the mitzvah as soon as possible.

3. Although having many people in attendance enhances the observance of the mitzvah, the idea of berov am hadras melech does not take precedence over performing the mitzvah earlier, and certainly is less important than performing the mitzvah in a more mehudar fashion.

When Should I Schedule the Bris? We can now address the Adlers' question. The authorities indeed conclude that one should not delay a bris in order to enable more people to attend. The preferred practice is to carry out a bris at the end of Shacharis. The original and favored practice is to perform it immediately after uva letziyon and before aleinu, such that all those who attended shul present for the bris, accomplishing both zerizin makdimim lemitzvos and berov am hadras melech (Shach, Yoreh Deah 265:24).

In this context, I want to share the words of the Aruch Hashulchan, who notes that when the Mishnah lists mitzvos that can be performed all day long, it omits mention of bris milah. To quote the Aruch Hashulchan:

It appears to me that this omission is intentional. The reason being that although other mitzvos should be performed as soon as possible, there is not as much concern about delaying the mitzvah slightly as there is in regard to mitzvas milah, which is the seal of the holy covenant. Since through this mitzvah the child enters sanctity, there is major concern not to delay.... We should therefore reprimand those who delay performing the mitzvah for several hours for inane reasons such as not all the invited guests have arrived.... Delaying the bris until the afternoon is very sinful (Aruch Hashulchan, Yoreh Deah 262:8).

The Aruch Hashulchan then proceeds to ask why we wait until after davening to perform the bris milah, to which he answers that davening includes several mitzvos, and since there are several mitzvos involved, davening should precede the bris milah.

Thus, Avraham and Sorah are correct that they should follow the precedent of their namesakes and perform their son's bris as early in the day as they can. Although their parents are correct that, in general, one should try to perform a mitzvah in a way that many people can participate, this does not, however, preempt performing the mitzvah as swiftly as possible.

A Busy Mohel Sometimes the bris needs to be delayed because the mohel one has chosen is not available earlier, due to other brisim he has to perform. I will leave it for a different time to discuss whether this provides sufficient reason to choose a different mohel, who is available as early as one wants to schedule the bris.

I would like to note that some yeshivos have rules when brisim can be scheduled, because the roshei yeshivah are concerned that the frequency with which brisim occur can result in many disruptions to the regular seder hayeshivah. It is certainly within the rosh hayeshivah's prerogative to make such a rule. In my opinion, the bris should be immediately after Shacharis (in actuality, immediately before Aleinu at the end of Shacharis), but the seudah should be scheduled for later in the day, when it is less disruptive to the sidrei hayeshivah.

In Conclusion Our entire discussion revolves around whether and when it is important to perform a mitzvah without delay or if there are other mitzvah calculations that supersede the early performance of the mitzvah. The main point is that our attitude towards the performance of mitzvos should be one of enthusiasm – we are overjoyed with the opportunity to fulfill Hashem's commandments and therefore rush to perform His mitzvos as soon as we possibly can. This zeal must sometimes be tempered with a different type of passion -- the desire to perform the mitzvah in an optimal way. It is wonderful that Jews share these two enthusiastic emotions and try to seek balance between them.

\*The story is real, although the names have been changed to protect privacy.

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*In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag*

Shiurim in Chumash & Navi by **Menachem Leibtag**

### **PARSHAT LECH L'CHA**

Almost 'out of the blue', at the beginning of Parshat Lech L'cha, God appears unto Avraham, commanding him to travel to the 'promised land', while blessing him that he will become a great nation. However, contrary to what we would expect, the Torah never tells us WHY he was chosen; nor does it tell us why HE was chosen!

In contrast to Parshat Noach, where the Torah informs us at the outset both why NOACH was chosen [i.e. "for he was a righteous man..."(see 6:9)]; as well as WHY he was chosen [i.e. for the purpose of re-creation (see 6:5-8)]; in Parshat Lech L'cha, the Torah never informs us concerning WHY God chose Avraham Avinu.

Did Avraham Avinu simply win a 'Divine lottery'?

In this week's shiur, we discuss the Torah's presentation of God's choice of Avraham Avinu, in an attempt to understand the literary method that the Torah employs to explain why Avraham was chosen, and its thematic significance.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Our series of shiurim on Chumash is based on the assumption that each book of the Bible carries a unique theme; and to identify that theme, one must study the progression of its primary topics.

In our shiur on Parshat Noach, we discussed the progression of topics in the first eleven chapters of Sefer Breishit, showing how each successive story discussed a story relating to 'sin & punishment' (i.e. God's disappointment with the behavior of each successive generation, and how He punished them).

This included the story of man's sin in Gan Eden, Cain's murder of Hevel, the corruption of the generation of the Flood, and finally the building of the Tower of Bavel.

That pattern of stories relating to 'sin & punishment' abruptly changes at the beginning of Parshat Lech L'cha, as the focus of Sefer Breishit now changes to God's choice of Avraham Avinu to become the forefather of His special nation. This change of focus in Sefer Breishit from 'universalistic' to 'particularistic' must relate in some manner to the reason for God's need for choosing a special nation.

As the MIGDAL BAVEL incident (see 11:1-9) was the last story recorded in Sefer Breishit prior to God's choice of Avraham Avinu, and hence forms the segue between these two sections - our shiur begins with a careful study of that narrative in search of a thematic connection (and/or a textual parallel) between this story and God's choice of Avraham Avinu.

#### **THE SIN OF "DOR HA'PLAGAH"**

In our introduction, we assumed that the building of the Tower constituted a sin. However, at first glance, that assumption is not so clear, for it is difficult to find a specific sin the Torah's description of their actions. In contrast to the Torah's introduction of the generation of the Flood, which explicitly brands the population as wicked and corrupt (6:5,10-13), the opening psukim of the Migdal Bavel narrative leave hardly a clue to any specific sin:

"Everyone on earth had the same language and the same words. And as they traveled from the east, they came upon a valley in the land of Shinar and settled there. They said to one another: Come, LET US make bricks and burn them hard. Brick became their stone, and bitumen their mortar. And they said, Come LET US build US a city and a tower with its top in the sky, AND WE WILL MAKE A NAME FOR OURSELVES, lest WE shall be scattered all over the world." (11:1-4)

Not only don't we find a transgression, one may even be tempted to applaud their accomplishments. After all:

- \* Is not achieving unity a positive goal? (11:1)
- \* Does not the use of human ingenuity to develop man-made building materials, such as bricks to replace stone, indicate the positive advancement of society? (11:3)  
[The very first 'industrial revolution']
- \* What could possibly be wrong with building a city or tower? Is urbanization a crime? (11:2)
- \* Is there anything wrong about traveling towards the east or setting up a city within a valley? (see 11:2)

Nevertheless, God punishes them by mixing their languages, causing them to abandon their joint project (11:5-7).

So what did they do that angered God?

Chazal focus their criticism of this generation on their antagonistic attitude towards God (see Rashi 11:1). However, the final and critical phrase in the Torah's description of their deeds points to an additional reason:

"v'naase LANU SHEM - WE shall make a NAME for OURSELVES"  
(see 11:4 / See also Sanhedrin 109a)

The use of the first person plural - not only in this pasuk, but also in the ALL of the first four psukim (11:1-4) - reflects the egocentric nature and attitude of this generation. [Note also the repeated use of the Hebrew word "hava" (let US).]

Rather than devoting their endeavors to the glorification of the NAME OF GOD, this generation excludes God from their goals and aspirations, emphasizing instead man's dominion and prowess.

Although this generation is undoubtedly more refined and cultured than the corrupt, depraved generation of the Flood, they unite for the unholy purpose of venerating the 'name of man', rather than that of the Almighty.

Apparently, God had higher expectations for mankind, hoping they would harness their God-given talents and potential towards loftier pursuits. Instead, they established an anthropocentric society, devoting their energies towards MAKING A NAME for THEMSELVES.

God could not allow this project to continue. But in contrast to the corrupt generation of the Flood, the builders of the Tower did not deserve destruction, rather they required 're-direction'. Towards this goal, God will now choose Avraham Avinu to establish a nation whose purpose will be to REDIRECT mankind - to channel those very same qualities of unity and creativity towards a more altruistic end.

The aftermath of the Tower of Babel incident provides the thematic setting for God's startling challenge to Avraham Avinu:

"And I will make you a GREAT NATION.... and through you ALL the families of the earth will be blessed." (12:1-3)

Avraham Avinu is CHOSEN FOR A PURPOSE: to direct mankind back in the proper direction. Towards this goal, He is also promised a special land, not as a REWARD, but rather as a VEHICLE to fulfill that purpose. God sets aside a special location, and then designates a special nation to represent Him, and to become a model nation that will inspire nations and spark their spiritual development.

Even though Avraham at this point is only an individual, God promises him that he is destined to become the forefather of this nation - whose development will involve a complex process, which will take some four hundred years (see 15:13-20).]

To become this nation, Avraham's offspring must multiply (ZERA) and then establish their nation in a special land (ARETZ). These two prerequisites not only appear in God's opening statement to Avraham upon his arrival in Eretz Canaan (see 12:7), but they are also repeated each time God speaks to the AVOT in regard to their future (see 13:14-15, 15:18, 17:8, 26:3, 28:13, 35:12, etc.).

The seeds of this nation are 'planted' in Sefer Breishit, as detailed by the story of the Avot.

## **BET-EL & SHEM HASHEM**

Although this goal can only be fully attained once this nation is established, it is significant that Avraham's own life will now foreshadow that ultimate goal.

For example, if we trace Avraham's first journey through Eretz Canaan as described in the Torah, we find that the site of Bet-El earns a unique place within Avraham's itinerary.

After he arrives in Canaan and builds a MIZBAYACH in Shchem, Avraham continues to Bet-El, the climax of his "aliyah":

"From there he moved up the mountain range to BET-EL... and he built a MIZBAYACH there and called out b'SHEM HaSHEM - in God's NAME! (12:8).

Then, in the next chapter, Avraham returns to Eretz Canaan after his stay in Egypt and comes specifically to this very same MIZBAYACH in Bet-El.

There, he once again calls out b'SHEM HaSHEM (13:1-4)!

Wherein lies the significance of Avraham's MIZBAYACH in Bet-El and his calling out in God's Name?

Avraham's calling out in God's NAME in Bet-El signifies a contrasting parallel to the Migdal Bavel fiasco. There, mankind's focus on their own prominence is reflected in their statement of: "v'naaseh LANU SHEM." Now Avraham must correct that cardinal mistake; he calls out in GOD'S NAME - "va'yikra b'SHEM HASHEM"! It is for this very purpose that Avraham was chosen.

Ramban expresses this understanding in his commentary to this pasuk (12:8):

"... and Avraham would call out there in front of the Mizbayach and make known God's existence to all mankind..." (see Rabman on Breishit 12:8)

## **A 'STRATEGIC' LOCATION**

This thematic background may help us understand why God chose specifically the land of Israel to become the 'homeland' of this nation. Recall (from your study of world history) how Egypt and Mesopotamia emerged as the two great cradles of ancient civilization. One could suggest that the land of Israel, located in between these two centers of civilization (and along the main highway that connects them), provides a 'strategic' location for the accomplishment of their national goal.

This idea may be reflected in events that transpire in chapter 12. Note how Avraham is first commanded to leave his own homeland in **Mesopotamia** and travel to Eretz Canaan (see 12:1). At the highlight of that "aliyah", he builds his "mizbayach" in Bet-el and 'calls out in God's Name' (12:7-8). Then, the next story in Chumash informs us how he traveled to **Egypt** and encounters an incident of corruption (see 12:10-20). Upon his return from that center of civilization, once again Avraham goes to Bet-el and builds a mizbayach and calls out in His Name (see 13:1-4). Finally, note as well how Avraham calls out, once again, in God's Name - after he establishes a covenant of mutual trust with Avimelech (see 21:33). [See also Ramban on 12:8 in its entirety (and the TSC shiur on Parshat Va'yetze).]

## **A BIBLICAL THEME**

This concept, that Am Yisrael is chosen to bring God's Name to mankind, emerges as a central theme not only in Sefer Breishit, but throughout Tanach, as well.

In Sefer Devarim, Bnei Yisrael are commanded to establish a national religious center "ba'makom asher yivchar Hashem I'shakeyn SHMO sham" - in the place which God will choose for His NAME to dwell therein (Devarim 12:5,11). As we explained in our shiurim on Sefer Devarim, this phrase, repeated numerous times in the sefer, describes the BET HA'MIKDASH - which is to become the institution through which God's prominence will be recognized by all mankind.

Some four hundred years later, when the MIKDASH is finally built, this same theme is reflected in Shlomo's prayer at its dedication ceremony:

"If a foreigner comes from a distant land for the SAKE OF YOUR NAME, for they shall hear about YOUR GREAT NAME... when he comes to pray at this House... grant him what he asks. Thus ALL THE

PEOPLES OF THE EARTH will KNOW YOUR NAME and revere You, as do Bnei Yisrael, and they will recognize that YOUR NAME is attached to this House which I have built." (Melachim I 8:43 /see also Shmuel II 7:22-27)

In fact, Malkat Sheva [the Queen of Sheeba], reaches this very conclusion upon her visit to the Bet Ha'Mikdash, as described in Melachim 10:1-9!

### IN MESSIANIC TIMES

The famous messianic prophecy of Yeshayahu (chapter 2) not only reflects this same theme, but also creates an intriguing parallel to the Migdal Bavel narrative:

"In the days to come, the MOUNTAIN of BET HA'SHEM (the Temple Mount) will stand high above the mountains... and ALL THE NATIONS shall gaze on it with joy. Then MANY PEOPLES shall go and say: Come let us go up to the House of God, that He may instruct us in His ways and we may walk in His paths - for TORAH shall come forth from Tzion, and the word of God from Yerushalayim..." (2:1-4)

Note the contrasting parallel between this 'hope' and the events at Migdal Bavel. In both events all mankind unites for a joint purpose. However, in Yeshayahu they gather to a MOUNTAIN top (man looking up) rather than in a VALLEY (man looking down); and to the CITY of Yerushalayim and its TOWER - the Bet Ha'Mikdash, rather than their own city and tower. Mankind has now united to hear the word of God, as transmitted and taught by His people.

In diametric opposition to Migdal Bavel, the Mikdash becomes the symbol of the goals of a theocentric society - the ultimate goal of mankind.

The following table reviews this contrasting parallel:

#### MIGDAL BAVEL BET HA'MIKDASH

Unity for man	Unity for God
Valley	Mountain
a city	the city of Jerusalem
a tower	the Temple

Man's prominence God's prominence ("shem Hashem")

Another parallel to the Migdal Bavel narrative appears in the prophecies of Zefania, in his depiction of the messianic era:

"For then I will make the peoples pure of speech - SAFA BRURA - so that they will all call out b'SHEM HASHEM, and worship Him with one accord." (3:9)

Once again, the prophet depicts the unification of mankind for the purpose of calling out in God's Name. An additional parallel to the Migdal Bavel incident is suggested by the use of the word "safa" (=language).

#### REWARD OR PURPOSE

In light of our discussion, we can now reexamine our original question. We have shown that Avraham Avinu was chosen to fulfill a SPECIFIC MISSION - to become the forefather of a nation that will lead all others to a theocentric existence and refocus mankind's energies in the proper direction.

Thus, Avraham Avinu's distinction came not as a REWARD for any specific deed, but rather for a SPECIFIC PURPOSE. Undoubtedly, as reflected in numerous Midrashim, Avraham must have been a man of extraordinary character and stature who possessed the necessary potential to fulfill this goal. However, the Torah prefers to omit any explicit reference to these qualities, focusing not on his past accomplishments but rather on the mission that lies ahead, thus stressing the primacy of Avraham's designated task.

This same principle applies in all generations. God's choice of Am Yisrael is not a REWARD, but the means by which they can and must fulfill the mission with which He has entrusted them. As this mission is eternal, so too is God's choice of the Jewish Nation.

This Biblical theme stresses our need to focus not on the exclusive PRIVILEGES of being God's special Nation, but rather on its unique RESPONSIBILITIES.

shabbat shalom, menachem

from: Shema Yisrael Torah Network <shemalist@shemayisrael.com>

to: Peninim <peninim@shemayisrael.com>

date: Thu, Oct 30, 2014 at 3:52 AM

Peninim on the Torah

by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

Parshas Lech Lecha

And I will make of you a great nation; and I will bless you, and I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. (12:2)

In an alternative explanation, Rashi says, "'And I will make you a great nation" is a reference to the words Elokei Avraham, G-d of Avraham, which is recited in the beginning of Shemoneh Esrai. Vaavarchecha, 'and I will bless you,' refers to Elokei Yitzchak; and Vaagadlah shemecha refers to Elokei Yaakov. While I might think that they conclude the blessing of the Avos, Patriarchs, with all three of them, the pasuk states Ve'heyeh b'rachah, 'And you will be a blessing,' Becha chosmin, v'lo bahem, 'With you, Avraham, they conclude the blessing, and not with them.'"

A well-known exposition is attributed to Horav Elimelech, zl, m'Lishensk, author of the Noam Elimelech, who explains the concept of Becha chosmin, "With you they will conclude." This applies to the chasimas hagalus, conclusion of the exile, prior to the Geulah Haasidah, Future Redemption, with the advent of Moshiach Tzidkeinu. The end of our long galus will be realized through the merit of Avraham's middah, attribute, of chesed. Each Patriarch had a unique quality which personified his specific avodas Hashem, service to the Almighty. Clearly, each Patriarch exemplified all middos tovos, good character traits, but each one had a specific attribute upon which he focused more so than on others.

Avraham Avinu was the amud ha'chesed, pillar of kindness. His life was devoted to reaching out to people of all stripes and persuasions, with acts of kindness. This endeared him to them; hence giving him the opportunity to draw them into conversation about Hashem. He used the attribute of kindness as his vehicle for reaching out. Yitzchak Avinu represents the middah of avodah, service to Hashem through intense prayer and profound devotion. Yaakov devoted himself to Torah study. Thus, the attribute of Torah is connected with him.

Becha chosmin, "With you they will conclude," means that, at the End of Days, our People will be in great need of zchusim, merits, by which we may be worthy of redemption. Our davening, prayer, will sadly not be up to par. Our shul attendance, minyan three times daily, something to which every European Jew adhered, will be but a memory. Torah study will be relegated to the yeshivah student, while we will rely on tapes, cds and mp3s for our shiurim and Torah study. The days of spending a few hours in the bais hamedrash on a nightly basis will be something of the past. The only area in which we will still remain strongly committed will be chesed, kindness. It will be our multifold acts of kindness, following in the footsteps of our Patriarch Avraham, which will, hopefully very soon, allow us to see the conclusion of our galus.

Another point which the Chidushei HaRim expressed concerning Becha chosmin focuses on the inextricable bond which every Jew - regardless of how far-removed he may be from religious observance - maintains with Judaism. We have seen this throughout the generations as Jews who reneged everything-- who turned their backs on G-d and His People, who assimilated themselves, so that they were completely indiscernible from the non-Jews -- have returned, have come back and embraced their heritage. What keeps them connected? What impels them to return? The Pintele Yid? The Jewish Spark? But what is the Pintele Yid? From where is it derived? What gives it the strength to survive generations of assimilation and self-loathing?

The strength is derived from the blessing, Becha chosmin, "with you they will conclude." We conclude the Bircas ha'Avos with Magen Avraham, the Shield of Avraham; the protective shield of our Patriarch has protected us throughout time. Yitzchak and Yaakov descended from worthy and holy lineage, imbued with a passion and love to serve the Almighty. Avraham did

not. He discovered it all by himself, nurturing it and bringing it to the point of unshakeable faith in the Almighty. Hashem has infused every Jewish soul with the Avraham Avinu factor, a unique strain of belief that: transcends time; withstands the vicissitudes of various physical and emotional adversities; triumphs over assimilation and self-inflicted loathing of everything connected with religion-- so that when the Pintele Yid breaks through, he can come back. Becha chosmin: the Shield of Avraham is our "seal" of protection.

Horav Zev Weinberg, Shlita, takes this idea one step further. In the blessings following the Haftarah, we recite the blessing, Magen David, the Shield of David. He suggests that this blessing implies that Hashem protects the future, such that no stranger will sit on his throne (Davidic dynasty). In other words, our people will continually yearn for Moshiach Tzidkeinu. It will remain a tennet of our belief and another unbreakable bond with the Almighty. Indeed, throughout our persecution, and despite all of our trials and sufferings, we have maintained a strong belief in Moshiach. Thus, we have two magens/shields: Magen Avraham, which heralds back to the past; and Magen David, which represents our hope for the future. Together, they work to keep our people focused, regardless of how far they may stray.

Avram took his wife Sarai... and all their wealth that they had amassed, and the souls they had made in Charan. (12:5)

Rashi explains that the nefesh, souls, which they made in Charan, is a reference to the many people who Avraham Avinu and Sarah Imeinu were able to pluck from the grasp of the pagans and inspire with the monotheistic belief. These converts to Hashem followed the ones who had "made" them. Avraham's raison d'etre in life was to promulgate the belief in Hashem. To teach the truth was not enough if he did not convert the people. A successful teacher is one who impacts the lives of his students. This was our Patriarch's goal, his life's work. Indeed, every endeavor that he undertook was for the specific purpose of enhancing the glory of Heaven and disseminating the concept of a life of service to the Almighty.

It is, therefore, surprising that Chazal (Talmud Nedarim 32a) say that Avraham was punished-by his descendants being enslaved in Egypt for two hundred and ten years, because, when the King of Sodom asked him to return his citizens (whom Avraham had saved from invading kings), he agreed. The King of Sodom said, Ten li ha'nefesh v'ha'rechush kach lach, "Give me the people and the wealth take for yourself" (Bereishis 14:21). In his commentary to the Talmud, the Ran writes: "Had Avraham kept the people (that he had rescued), he would have brought them under the wings of Hashem." Rashi writes that he should have converted them. In any event, our Patriarch, who gave his life for Jewish outreach, is chastised for returning the citizens of Sodom. Because he did not insist on keeping them and eventually converting them, his descendants suffered the brutal shibud Mitzrayim, Egyptian enslavement.

How are we to understand the reason for the punishment of our Patriarchs - and us? A man who devotes his entire life to seeking out the truth and teaching it to a world of pagans - was held to task for missing a few? Our Patriarch went to great measures to achieve success, traveling from place to place, at great personal affliction, all because he wanted to glorify Hashem's Name. He feared no man, risking his life and possessions for his faith. Yet, just because he missed a few, he was punished with the knowledge that his children would suffer the pain of enslavement in an environment steeped in moral depravity - for two hundred and ten years! Is this fair?

In my very first dvar Torah, in the inaugural edition of Peninim some twenty-four years ago, I quoted my Rosh Yeshivah, Horav Chaim Mordechai Katz, zl, who derived from here that the responsibility to reach out to all Jews is compelling and ceaseless. No Jew should be left behind, and no person should be relegated to walking blindly in the spiritual darkness that envelops so much of contemporary society. Regardless of how much a person has achieved, it is never enough. We have no room for complacency or respite in this endeavor. This explanation personifies the Rosh Yeshivah,

whose fiftieth yahrtzeit is this year. Despite ill health and having suffered the tragic, brutal murders of his family and the destruction of the Telshe Yeshivah in the European Holocaust, the Rosh Yeshivah was relentless in the execution of his responsibility to sow the seeds of Torah in America. He was a beacon of light in a sea of confusion, the captain of the ship who never left his post, who never wavered from his course, who never rested, because he never felt that the job had been completed.

At that time, I assumed that the responsibility for outreach is based on the importance and inestimable value of each and every Jew. As a result, I was still bothered by the explanation. After all, if one reaches nine out of ten Jews, it is still considered a success. Concerning everything else we go according to the numbers, the percentages. That Avraham did not achieve one hundred percent should not have marked him for censure and punishment.

Reading the shmues, ethical discourse, once again, I realize that the Rosh Yeshivah meant something else. As Torah Jews, we have a responsibility to reveal and enhance the glory of Hashem in the world. It is not about how many people we reach. It is about how much we have increased kavod Shomayim, honor of Heaven, in the world. Each individual who has been exposed to the greatness of Hashem, and the way of life His Torah instructs him to live, adds to kavod Shomayim. Thus, this is not about one more person or one less person. It is about raising the banner of Heaven higher and increasing the knowledge of Hashem.

Avraham Avinu truly did so much, but we are helpless in measuring kavod Shomayim. It is measured by a scale whose barometer is spiritual in nature. We have no idea concerning the value of "more" kavod Shomayim.

And there was a quarrel between the herdsmen of Avram's livestock, and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. (13:7)

Avraham Avinu's cattle went out with their mouths muzzled, specifically so that they would not eat what did not belong to him. Lot did not seem to maintain this stringency. His animals ate whenever and wherever they pleased. This caused friction between the two. As a result, Avraham asked Lot to separate from him, to choose any area that he pleased, and he would go elsewhere. This way they could remain "friends," and Lot could do as he pleased without suffering the pain and rebuke. Rav Yosef B'chor Shor explains further that Avraham was concerned, "What would the neighbors say when they saw two close relatives quarrelling with one another?" This would create a chillul Hashem, desecration of Hashem's Name, that such a devotee of Hashem as Avraham could quarrel. It just did not look good.

What was Avraham's concern? Anyone who knew Avraham and Lot was well aware of the intrinsic differences between the two. Furthermore, everyone was aware that Avraham's animals were muzzled, and Lot's were not. Why would anyone remotely think negatively of Avraham? Furthermore, Avraham Avinu had an inn that functioned 24/7 to welcome and assist travelers and anyone who was in need. Who would think that a person of such elevated moral standing would steal? Clearly, Lot would be considered the "bad guy" in this dispute.

Horav Yaakov Galinsky, zl, posits that human nature always veers to the negative. Thus, while they all knew that Avraham was righteous, an individual of impeccable character, if there was a vestige of negativity about him - however remote - they would believe it. Rav Galinsky quotes the Yerushalmi Yoma 2:2, which teaches that Rav Yanai was compelled to do some work in his vineyard during Chol Hamoed, the Festival Intermediate Days, because it was a davar ha'avud, something which would otherwise be lost. Everyday labor is prohibited during the Intermediate Days unless it is for a davar ha'avud, which incurs a loss. Any thinking person would realize that, if Rav Yanai was working on Chol Hamoed, it was a davar ha'avud. Nonetheless, everyone who observed this act of labor immediately went to work in their own vineyards. After all, the Rav was doing it - why not I? The following year, he made his field hefker, relinquished ownership, so that there would not be any misunderstandings. Then, no one questioned his

actions. Why? Yalfi mikalkalta v'lo yalfi mitakanta, "People (choose to) learn from the misconduct and not from the repair." In other words, people tend to look for the negative; it is what they want (or, at least, have no problem) to believe.

A young father attending the private minyan of the Chazon Ish, became very cross with his young son who was making noise during davening. The Chazon Ish later told the father, "Your son learned two lessons from you today: one should not make noise during davening; it is permissible to lose one's temper and become angry. Which one do you think he will remember?" Indeed, the Chazon Ish writes (Emunah u'Bitachon) that, if a rebbe has inappropriate middos, character traits, the students will be influenced by them - despite all of the other wonderful lessons he teaches them.

This is a powerful lesson for all of us. No one remembers the hard work, dedication, long hours, generosity and all of the positive contributions that a person has made - if it comes in contrast with one (albeit minor) error. Human nature is not perfect, and neither are people. Nonetheless, human nature tends to focus on the imperfection. It always makes a person feel good that he is better than someone else. This is especially true of those who only seek out the negative attributes in others, precisely because they realize that they have nothing positive to manifest about themselves.

And he trusted in Hashem, and He reckoned it to him as righteousness. (15:6)

Rashi notes that, concerning Hashem's promise to Avraham that he would be blessed with offspring, the Patriarch did not ask for a sign. Concerning the promise that he would take possession of Eretz Yisrael, Avraham Avinu asked, Bama eida, "Whereby shall I know?" requesting a sign from Above that he would inherit it. Why did the Patriarch ask for affirmation regarding the Land and not regarding the offspring?

Horav Yitzchak Volozhiner, zl, explains this with an analogy that goes to the very crux of the issue which continues to haunt us until this very day. A king was once traveling on the road when he chanced upon a poor person begging for alms. Something about this poor man impressed the king. He invited him into his carriage and gave him a large quantity of money, enough to solve his financial problems. The king continued along with his travels. Sometime later, he came upon a drunkard lying in a pile of garbage, yet covered with a fur coat. The king saw this and instructed his driver to remove the fur from the drunk and give it to the poor man.

The poor man accepted the coat gladly - as he did the money which he had received earlier. He did have one request of the king, 'My lord, I humbly request of his honor a letter stating that I received the fur from his honor as a gift.' The king acquiesced, but was stymied that the poor man wanted a letter to cover the coat, but not regarding the money that he had given him. Certainly, the money had greater significance than the coat. The poor man replied, "No one will question me concerning the money, since it came from the king. Everyone will believe that I was the recipient of good fortune from a benevolent king. The fur, however, belonged to another man, albeit taking it was well within the king's purview. Nonetheless, I am afraid that, if and when the drunk sobers up, he might come with a claim that I stole his fur. He will not believe that his highness gave it to me. Thus, I request a letter confirming my right to the fur."

The nimshal, resemblance, to the blessings Avraham received from Hashem is clear. Concerning the blessing of children, he did not require affirmation, because no one would complain if the elderly Avraham were to be blessed with offspring. Regarding the promise of the land, there was an issue. It was presently inhabited by nations who felt that it belonged to them. The fact that Hashem created the world and gave Eretz Yisrael to His People would not seem to sway them. Avraham would need some assurance, Bama eida, that it would revert to him.

Until this very day, there are those who feel that they have a right to contest our gift from Hashem. Reading about it in the Torah does not seem to impress them. One who peruses history will note that, during the periods that

Klal Yisrael did not inhabit the Holy Land and it was instead inhabited by Christians and Muslims, it was not agriculturally productive. The land will only "work" for the nation to whom it was gifted. Eretz Yisrael has maintained its fidelity to Am Yisrael. We should reciprocate.

In loving memory of our dear husband, Abba and Zeidy, on his first yartzheit Mr. Zev Aryeh Solomon R' Zev Aryeh ben Yaakov Shmuel z"l nifter 8 Cheshvan 5774 t.n.tz.v.h.

Peninim mailing list Peninim@shemayisrael.com  
mail.shemayisrael.com/mailman/listinfo/peninim\_shemayisrael.com

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