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from: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <ryfrand@torah.org> to: ravfrand@torah.org
date: Nov 7, 2019, 7:03 PM subject: Rav Frand - "Pshat" in Rashi -
Developing Potential

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These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: #1092 – The Baal Teshuva Who Wants to Convert His Non-Jewish Girlfriend. Good Shabbos! How Did Rashi Know That? The Almighty informs Avraham Avinu that his wife will have a child: “And G-d said to Avraham, ‘As for Sarai your wife—do not call her name Sarai, for Sarah is her name. I will bless her, and, I will also give you a son through her; I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples will rise from her.’” [Bereshis 17:15] Avraham is flabbergasted to receive this prophecy, but then he says, “O that Yishmael might live before You.” [Bereshis 17:18] Rashi interprets “Would that Yishmael should live! I am not worthy to receive a grant of reward such as this.”

Then the pasuk continues: “Indeed your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you shall call his name Yitzchak; and I will fulfill My covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him. But regarding Yishmael, I have heard you. Behold, I have blessed him, and I will make him fruitful and will increase him most exceedingly; he will beget twelve princes (shneim asar Nesi'im) and I will make him into a great nation.” [Bereshis 17:19-20]

Rashi comments on the fact that Hashem promised to give Yishmael twelve princes (Nesi'im): “They will disappear like clouds.” (The word nesi'im can also mean clouds) “as in the pasuk ‘clouds and wind’ (nesi'im v'ruach)” [Mishlei 25:14]. We use this latter meaning of the word in tefilas

geshem [the prayer for rain recited on Shmini Atzeres] and in the Hoshanos (that are recited on Succos). Rashi is interpreting this pasuk, in which Hashem is promising Yishmael nesi'im (as opposed to Sarim or Roshim, which also mean princes or leaders), as not such good news. Yishmael will have princes alright, but they will be like clouds (nesi'im). Clouds come and clouds go! Clouds disappear! The twelve princes Yishmael will have are no big deal. They will dissipate like clouds.

The Tolner Rebbe asks a question. Rashi says in the beginning of Bereshis [3:8] “I have only come to provide the p'shuto shel mikra [the simple interpretation of Scripture].” In other words, Rashi realizes that if he wanted to explain the pesukim of Chumash according to all the Medrashic interpretations, then a set of Chumash with Rashi would be as big as a set of shas. There are thousands of medrashim. Rashi makes it clear in Sefer Bereshis that he does not consider it his mission to provide a Medrashic interpretation of Scripture. Certainly, Rashi occasionally quotes Medrashic interpretations, and he typically will label an interpretation as such. However, Rashi considers his job to say “p'shat” [the simple interpretation of the pesukim of Chumash].

Given that “job description” of Rashi—to say p'shat—why does he interpret the pasuk regarding Yishmael “he will give birth to twelve nesi'im” in this way? The linkage to the pasuk in Mishlei regarding the clouds certainly does not seem to be the simple interpretation! Where does Rashi see that this interpretation of the word nesi'im becomes peshuto shel mikra in this context?

This question did not originate with the Tolner Rebbe. The super commentaries on Rashi—the Mizrachi, the Maharal, and others—are troubled by this comment of Rashi as well. It is a strange Rashi. Rav Eliyahu Mizrachi answers that if it really meant princes, it should have used a more common Biblical expression for political and military leaders—sarim, alufim, etc. Since the relatively unusual expression for head of a tribe—nesi'im—is used, it means dissipating like clouds.

But this answer leaves something to be desired. Is nesi'im such an uncommon expression? The argument can be made that it is every bit as natural to use nesi'im as it is sarim and alufim! What kind of answer is this?

The Tolner Rebbe gives a brilliant interpretation: The solution lies in a Medrash Tanchuma in Parshas Vayechi. When Yaakov Avinu blesses the twelve tribes on his deathbed, the Medrash says “All these tribes of Israel, twelve in number, these are the Tribes.” The pasuk there uses the expression “Kol eleh shivtei Yisrael, shneim asar” but by Yishmael the pasuk says “twelve nesi'im he will father (yolid)”. The Medrash contrasts the Biblical expression used to describe the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve princes of Yishmael.

What is the contrast? The Tolner Rebbe says the key to the contrast lies in one word: shneim asar nesi'im yolid. What is unusual about this expression? The expression is unusual because a person does not give birth to a prince. No one is born a nasi. No one is born President of the United States. You become President. You need to work your way into the job. What does it mean “he will give birth to twelve princes?”

The Tolner Rebbe explains that this is the fundamental nature of Yishmael. Yishmael is about extraordinary potential that was there at birth but was never developed. When someone has extraordinary potential that was never developed, nothing comes from it. He gives an example.

Sometimes a youngster is a child prodigy (an illuyishe kid), a genius of a child. People may assume the child will grow up to be the next gadol hador! However, genius needs to be cultivated. It must be nurtured. A child prodigy may sit down at the piano and play beautiful music when he is three years old. If someone takes that three year old and sends him to the Julliard School of Music where he can be trained and develop his talent, then he can become something special. However, if someone has a child genius—whether in math, science, music, or art, or in learning—and no one works with him and develops him, nothing will come of him. (If someone has been in Yeshiva long enough, he sees this often.)

Hashem tells Avraham, “Avraham, you prayed for Yishmael. Okay. Your prayers will be answered. He will give birth to twelve princes—child prodigies with awesome potential. But the promise is only that they will be that way at birth. Let’s see what he does with them!” Yishmael, unfortunately has a history of not developing his talent.

That is the point of the Medrash. “All these are the Tribes of Israel...” Yaakov Avinu had twelve sons by his death bed. They were not all perfect. But they worked on themselves. They developed. There on his death bed, Yaakov Avinu was still giving them mussar. “You still have not perfected yourselves.” This is Klal Yisrael. Klal Yisrael were not perfect from birth. They had to develop, they had to work, and they had to sweat. Yishmael fathered “twelve princes” from the moment of their birth. That is the difference.

From this, the Tolner Rebbe goes on to decry the phenomenon we have in our day and time of a “Yeshiva for metzuyanim” [A yeshiva for geniuses]. Sometimes a good boy is not the brightest child, but he is willing to work hard to achieve in learning. Many times, his parents will apply to get him into a high quality Yeshiva and they are told “No. We cannot take him into our school. He is not a genius.” So what if he is not a genius? He is a “plugger”! At the end of the day, that wins the race. You want geniuses? That is Yishmael. Klal Yisrael is “Kol Eleh Shivtei Yisrael – twelve in number.”

He slams the concept of Yeshivas where everybody must be “above average.”

Travelling a Circuitous Route before “Tying the Knot” The other observation I would like to share is a story I heard in the middle of last winter. The details of the story were becoming a bit hazy, but I decided I wanted to tell over the story this week. The fellow who told me the story last winter is Yosef Chaim Golding. I have worked with him in the past, but do not see or talk to him on a regular basis. Amazingly, just this Tuesday, unexpectedly, he called me about something. I asked him to please tell me over again the story he told me last winter. Here is the story:

A couple of years ago, we said a shiur on the week of Parshas Lech Lecha about tying shoes. The Halacha proscribes an appropriate sequence for putting on and tying shoes based on the laws of putting on hand tefillin (which we put on the left hand and tie with the right hand). Usually, we give the right side precedence. Therefore, we first put on our right shoes and then our left shoes. However, by tying, we tie the left shoe first, just as we tie tefillin on our left arms.

The connection between shoes and tefillin is learned from this week’s parsha where Avraham comments that he would not take from the King of Sodom “neither a thread nor a shoelace” (so that the king not later claim that he was responsible for Avraham’s wealth). The gemara in Chullin comments that because of this statement of Avraham, his descendants merited receiving the mitzvot of techeiles [the blue thread on the tzitzis fringes] and tefillin (represented by the “shoelace”). Since the Talmud makes a connection between tefillin and shoelaces, the tying of shoes is supposed to correspond with the tying of tefillin (where the left side has precedence).

Yosef Golding told me the following amazing story, which he heard from a person who was present in a mourner’s house, when the subject told the story: Dr. Joseph Kamenetsky was one of the prime leaders of the Day School movement in America. He was a student of Rav Shraga Feivel Mendelovitz. All the Day Schools that were in the “hinterlands” were the result of Dr. Joseph Kamenetsky’s work. He passed away several years ago. His daughter was sitting Shiva in Eretz Yisrael. A fellow came in to be menachem avel, to offer consolation to the mourners. All of the family members began whispering with each other to try to figure out his identity. No one knew him. The fellow explained why he came:

I am here because I want to show appreciation to your father and grandfather, Dr. Joseph Kamenetsky. I come from a small town in America. My parents were not religious. They sent me to a Day School. My father really was not into religion, but he sent me to a Day School. One day, he

wanted to take me somewhere and called up to my room and said, “Hurry up! We are late. You need to come down already so we can go!” I told him “Sorry, Daddy, I have to retie my shoes.” My father was incredulous. “You want to retie your shoes? What’s the problem?”

I told him that after tying my shoes I remembered that I did it wrong. Instead of tying the left shoe first and then the right shoe, I tied the right shoe and then the left shoe. So now I must untie the shoes and then retie the left followed by the right. My father said “Are you out of your mind? Where did you get this craziness from?” I told him “That is what they taught me in school!” My father said, “That is what they teach you in school? Are they crazy? I am taking you out of that school!”

His father pulled him out of Day School and put him into Public School. The son went “the way of all flesh” and grew up an irreligious Jew to the extent that years later he became engaged to a non-Jewish woman.

Now comes the incredible part.

On the day of his marriage, he bent down to tie his shoe. He bent down to tie his shoe and he tied his left shoe first. Why? Because that’s what he learned in school! He said to himself: “I am going to throw this away? I am going to completely abandon Judaism?” He called up his bride—on what was to be their wedding day—and told her “I cannot go through with it.”

What happened? He went to Eretz Yisrael. He became a baal teshuva [newly observant]. He learned in Yeshiva. He was getting older and he had not yet found a shidduch [matrimonial match]. One day, his Rosh Yeshiva told him, “I have a girl for you. She is a nice religious girl. However, you should know that she is a convert.” The “hero of the story,” who was getting older by now, said, “I don’t care!” He called up the girl to make the date. Lo and behold—it was the bride he abandoned on the day of their scheduled wedding!

After that traumatic experience of her groom cancelling her wedding on the day of the wedding, she said to herself, “If someone is willing to give up his love for his bride for a thing called Judaism, I need to see for myself what it is all about!” She investigated Yiddishkeit. She wound up in Eretz Yisrael. She went to a ba’alas teshuva institution. She converted and became observant.

He married this very girl to whom he was once engaged and almost married!

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com
Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD
dhoffman@torah.org This week’s write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand’s Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. 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. Rav Frand © 2019 by Torah.org. Torah.org: The Judaism Site Project Genesis, Inc. 2833 Smith Ave., Suite 225 Baltimore, MD 21209 <http://www.torah.org/> learn@torah.org (410) 602-1350

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A Palace in Flames

Lech Lecha (Genesis 12-17)

Nov 3, 2019

by **Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks**

Abraham was the first person in recorded history to protest the injustice of the world in the name of God, rather than accept it in the name of God.

Why Abraham? That is the question that haunts us when we read the opening of this week’s parsha. Here is the key figure in the story of our faith, the father of our nation, the hero of monotheism, held holy not only by Jews but by Christians and Muslims also. Yet there seems to be nothing in the

Torah's description of his early life to give us a hint as to why he was singled out to be the person to whom God said, "I will make you into a great nation ... and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

This is surpassingly strange. The Torah leaves us in no doubt as to why God chose Noah: "Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generations; Noah walked with God." It also gives us a clear indication as to why God chose Moses. We see him as a young man, both in Egypt and Midian, intervening whenever he saw injustice, whoever perpetrated it and whoever it was perpetrated against. God told the prophet Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I set you apart; I have appointed you as a prophet to the nations." These were obviously extraordinary people. There is no such intimation in the case of Abraham. So the Sages, commentators and philosophers through the ages were forced to speculate, to fill in the glaring gap in the narrative, offering their own suggestions as to what made Abraham different.

There are three primary explanations. The first is Abraham the iconoclast, the breaker of idols. This is based on a speech by Moses' successor, Joshua, towards the end of the book that bears his name. It is a passage given prominence in the Haggadah on Seder night: "Long ago your ancestors, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the Euphrates River and worshipped other gods" (Josh. 24:2). Abraham's father Terah was an idol worshipper. According to the Midrash, he made and sold idols. One day Abraham smashed all the idols and left, leaving the stick with which he did so in the hand of the biggest idol. When his father returned and demanded to know who had broken his gods, Abraham blamed the biggest idol. "Are you making fun of me?" demanded his father. "Idols cannot do anything." "In that case," asked the young Abraham, "why do you worship them?"

On this view, Abraham was the first person to challenge the idols of the age. There is something profound about this insight. Jews, believers or otherwise, have often been iconoclasts. Some of the most revolutionary thinkers - certainly in the modern age - have been Jews. They had the courage to challenge the received wisdom, think new thoughts and see the world in unprecedented ways, from Einstein in physics to Freud in psychoanalysis to Schoenberg in music, to Marx in economics, and Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman in behavioural economics. It is as if, deep in our cultural intellectual DNA, we had internalised what the Sages said about Abraham ha-Ivri, "the Hebrew," that it meant he was on one side and all the rest of the world on the other.[1]

The second view is set out by Maimonides in the Mishnah Torah: Abraham the philosopher. In an age when people had lapsed from humanity's original faith in one God into idolatry, one person stood out against the trend, the young Abraham, still a child: "As soon as this mighty man was weaned he began to busy his mind ... He wondered: How is it possible that this planet should continuously be in motion and have no mover? ... He had no teacher, no one to instruct him ... until he attained the way of truth ... and knew that there is One God ... When Abraham was forty years old he recognised his Creator." [2] According to this, Abraham was the first Aristotelian, the first metaphysician, the first person to think his way through to God as the force that moves the sun and all the stars.

This is strange, given the fact that there is very little philosophy in Tanach, with the exception of wisdom books like Proverbs, Kohelet and Job. Maimonides' Abraham can sometimes look more like Maimonides than Abraham. Yet of all people, Friedrich Nietzsche, who did not like Judaism very much, wrote the following:

Europe owes the Jews no small thanks for making people think more logically and for establishing cleaner intellectual habits... Wherever Jews have won influence they have taught men to make finer distinctions, more rigorous inferences, and to write in a more luminous and cleanly fashion; their task was ever to bring a people "to listen to reason." [3]

The explanation he gave is fascinating. He said that only in the arena of reason did Jews face a level playing-field. Everywhere else, they encountered race and class prejudice. "Nothing," he wrote, "is more democratic than logic." So Jews became logicians, and according to Maimonides, it began with Abraham.

However there is a third view, set out in the Midrash on the opening verse of our parsha:

"The Lord said to Abram: Leave your land, your birthplace and your father's house . . ." To what may this be compared? To a man who was travelling from place to place when he saw a palace in flames. He wondered, "Is it possible that the palace lacks an owner?" The owner of the palace looked out and said, "I am the owner of the palace." So Abraham our father said, "Is it possible that the world lacks a ruler?" The Holy One, blessed be He, looked out and said to him, "I am the ruler, the Sovereign of the universe."

This is an enigmatic Midrash. It is far from obvious what it means. In my book *A Letter in the Scroll* (published in Britain as *Radical Then, Radical Now*) I argued that Abraham was struck by the contradiction between the order of the universe - the palace - and the disorder of humanity - the flames. How, in a world created by a good God, could there be so much evil? If someone takes the trouble to build a palace, do they leave it to the flames? If someone takes the trouble to create a universe, does He leave it to be disfigured by His own creations? On this reading, what moved Abraham was not philosophical harmony but moral discord. For Abraham, faith began in cognitive dissonance. There is only one way of resolving this dissonance: by protesting evil and fighting it.

That is the poignant meaning of the Midrash when it says that the owner of the palace looked out and said, "I am the owner of the palace." It is as if God were saying to Abraham: I need you to help Me to put out the flames.

How could that possibly be so? God is all-powerful. Human beings are all too powerless. How could God be saying to Abraham, I need you to help Me put out the flames?

The answer is that evil exists because God gave humans the gift of freedom. Without freedom, we would not disobey God's laws. But at the same time, we would be no more than robots, programmed to do whatever our Creator designed us to do. Freedom and its misuse are the theme of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, and the generation of the Flood.

Why did God not intervene? Why did He not stop the first humans eating the forbidden fruit, or prevent Cain from killing Abel? Why did the owner of the palace not put out the flames?

Because, by giving us freedom, He bound Himself from intervening in the human situation. If He stopped us every time we were about to do wrong, we would have no freedom. We would never mature, never learn from our errors, never become God's image. We exist as free agents only because of God's *tzimtzum*, His self-limitation. That is why, within the terms with which He created humankind, He cannot put out the flames of human evil.

He needs our help. That is why He chose Abraham. Abraham was the first person in recorded history to protest the injustice of the world in the name of God, rather than accept it in the name of God. Abraham was the man who said: "Shall the Judge of all the earth not do justly?" Where Noah accepted, Abraham did not. Abraham is the man of whom God said, "I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just." Abraham was the father of a nation, a faith, a civilisation, marked throughout the ages by what Albert Einstein called "an almost fanatical love of justice."

I believe that Abraham is the father of faith, not as acceptance but as protest - protest at the flames that threaten the palace, the evil that threatens God's gracious world. We fight those flames by acts of justice and compassion that deny evil its victory and bring the world that is a little closer to the world that ought to be.

Shabbat Shalom.

NOTES

1. Bereishit Rabbah (Vilna), 42:8. 2. Mishneh Torah, Laws of Idolatry, chapter 1. 3. Friedrich Nietzsche, The Gay Science, translated with commentary by Walter Kaufmann, New York, Vintage, 1974, 291.

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com
from: Rabbi Chanan Morrison <chanan@ravkooktorah.org>
to: rav-kook-list@googlegroups.com
subject: [Rav Kook Torah]

Lech Lecha: Mamrei's Advice

Rav Kook Torah

The Sages made an astounding statement about Abraham and the mitzvah of brit milah (circumcision). According to the Midrash (Tanchuma VaYeira 3), Abraham only circumcised himself after consulting with his friend Mamrei. "Why did God reveal Himself to Abraham on Mamrei's property? Because Mamrei gave Abraham advice about circumcision."

Could it be that Abraham, God's faithful servant, entertained doubts whether he should fulfill God's command? What special difficulty did circumcision pose that, unlike the other ten trials that Abraham underwent, this mitzvah required the counsel of a friend?

Abraham's Dilemma

Abraham was afraid that if he circumcised himself, people would no longer be drawn to seek him out. The unique sign of milah would set Abraham apart from other people, and they would naturally distance themselves from him. Additionally, people would avoid seeking his instruction out of fear that Abraham might demand that they too accept this difficult mitzvah upon themselves. As the Midrash in Bereishit Rabbah (sec. 47) says:

"When God commanded Abraham to circumcise, he told God, 'Until now, people used to come to me; now they will no longer come!'"

This side effect of brit milah deeply disturbed Abraham. It negated the very goal of Abraham's life and vision - bringing the entire world to recognize "the name of God, Lord of the universe" (Gen. 21:33). If isolated, Abraham would no longer be able to carry on with his life's mission.

This then was Abraham's dilemma. Perhaps it was preferable not to fulfill God's command to circumcise himself. On the personal level, Abraham would lose the spiritual benefits of the mitzvah, but the benefit to the entire world might very well outweigh his own personal loss.

Mamrei's Advice

Mamrei advised Abraham not to make calculations regarding a direct command from God. God's counsel and wisdom certainly transcend the limited wisdom of the human mind.

For his sage advice, Mamrei was rewarded in like measure, midah kneged midah. Since Mamrei respected the ultimate importance of God's commands, placing them above human reasoning, he was honored with the revelation of divine prophecy on his property.

God's Plan

In fact, Abraham's fears of isolation were realized. From the time of Isaac's birth, people began to avoid him. Abraham himself sent away the children of his concubines "from before his son Isaac" (Gen. 25:6), and God commanded him to send away Ishmael.

All of this was the Divine plan. God wanted Abraham to concentrate his energies in educating Isaac. For in Isaac resided the seed for repairing and completing the entire world. It was necessary, however, to first nurture the initial sanctity of the Jewish people. The enlightenment and elevation of the world that Abraham so desired would be realized through the spiritual influence of his children.

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com
from: Mordechai Tzion toratravaviner@yahoo.com
to: ravaviner@yahogroups.com
<http://www.ravaviner.com/> Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim

From the teachings of the Rosh Yeshiva

Rav Shlomo Aviner Shlit"a

Ha-Rav answers hundreds of text message questions a day. Here's a sample: Resuscitation by Cohain

Q: If a person collapses next to a Cohain, is it permissible for him to perform resuscitation, or is there a fear that if the person dies the Cohain will become impure?

A: It is certainly permissible! Pikuach Nefesh – saving a life! (See Yoma 23a, that when a Cohain was stabbed in the Beit Ha-Mikdash, they asked about the impurity of the knife instead of tending to the victim).

Drunk Person Paying Check

Q: I was eating in a restaurant and a drunk person came over and said that he wanted to pay my check. Is it permissible to accept the money?

A: No. He was not level-headed at that moment.

Drunkenness at Wedding

Q: There are people today who get drunk at weddings. What does the Torah say about this?

A: It is forbidden. In general, it is forbidden to get drunk.

Medicine of Non-Jews

Q: The Chatam Sofer wrote in his Teshuvot (Yoreah Deah #175) that the medicine of non-Jews does not apply to the body of a Jew. What is Ha-Rav's opinion on this?

A: This is an extremely novel ruling. After all, the Rambam bases his medical writings on the medical knowledge of the non-Jews. He does not distinguish between the body of a Jew and the body of a non-Jew. There is certainly a difference between the body of a Jew and a non-Jew regarding eating forbidden foods, but not in the area of medicine.

High-Ranking Officer in Tzahal

Q: Should I aspire to be a high-ranking officer in Tzahal? After all, a person should have a normal life of a Jew – being with his wife, educating his children, learning Torah, celebrating Shabbat and Yom Tov - and a high-ranking officer is in the army all the time.

A: It is a great Mitzvah. It is self-sacrifice.

Sticker to Prevent Snoring

Q: Is it permissible on Shabbat to put a sticker on one's nose, similar to a band-aid, to prevent snoring at night?

A: Yes, it is temporary.

Carrying Torah

Q: I saw someone carry the Sefer Torah from the Aron Ha-Kodesh and he did not turn the Torah around. Should we say something to him?

A: This is the custom of Belzer Chasidim who are particular not to turn the Torah around, since doing so is disrespectful to the Torah (Ma'asei Choshev pp. 300-301 and notes). And there are those who say that the Chazon Ish also acted in this way. Everyone should act in this case according to the custom of the community, but if one acts differently, it should not be pointed out. And in general, if something is to be pointed out, the Rabbi of the community is the one who should do so.

Need for Tzahal

Q: Is it true that if Am Yisrael observes Torah and Mitzvot, there will be no need for Tzahal?

A: Not true. But we will be more victorious. See beginning of Parashat Be-Chukotai.

Taanit Dibur for An Hour

Q: Is there value in having a Taanit Dibur (refraining from speaking) for an hour each day?

A: It is a personal decision. But it is preferable to recite Tehilim, repent and give Tzedakah..

from: **Rabbi Berel Wein** / The Destiny Foundation
<info@jewishdestiny.com> via auth.ccsend.com reply-to:

info@jewishdestiny.com to: @gmail.com date: Nov 8, 2019, 12:03 AM
subject: Food for thought at RabbiWein.com

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

LECH LECHA

It is interesting to note that the Torah in its opening chapters deals with the lives of individuals with a seemingly very narrow focus. It portrays general society for us and tells us of the events that led up to the cataclysmic flood that destroys most of humanity, but even then, the Torah focuses on the lives of an individual, Noah and his family. This pattern continues in this week's reading as well with the story of human civilization condensed and seen through the prism of the life of an individual Abraham, his wife Sarah and their challenges and travails.

Unlike most history books which always take the general perspective and the overview of things, the Torah emphasizes to us that history and great events spring forth from the actions of individuals and even though Heaven preordains events and trends, they only occur when individuals actually by their choice, implement them and make them real. The prophet Isaiah described Abraham as "one" – unique, alone, individualistic... important and influential.

We often think that an individual really doesn't make much of a difference in the world of billions of human beings. However, all of history teaches us that individuals are the ones that shape all events, both good and better in the story of humankind. For every individual contains within him and her seeds of potential and of future generations, of events not yet visible or foretold.

The greatness of Abraham is revealed to us in the Torah through the fact that he was a person of strong and abiding faith. We are taught that his faith in God never wavered and that the Lord reckoned that trait of faith as being the righteousness that transformed him into being the father of all nations. However, faith in God carries with it the corollary of faith in one's self and one's purpose in life. There is a great difference between the poison of arrogance and hubris and the blessing of self-confidence and self worth.

Abraham describes himself as being nothing more than dust and ashes. Yet, as a sole individual standing against kings, armies, societies and the accepted mores of the time, he is confident in the success of his mission, in calling out for the humankind to hear, over the millennia, the name and sovereignty of the Lord.

It is the sense of mission within us that drives our creativity and accomplishments in all spheres of our existence. The journey of the Jewish people through the ages of history and the countries of this planet are the journeys of our father Abraham and our mother Sarah during their lifetimes. Both sets of journeys are driven by this overriding sense of mission, of the importance and worth of every individual who shares that sense of purposeful existence.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berell Wein Subscribe to our blog via email or RSS to get more posts like this one.

from: torahweb@torahweb.org to: weeklydt@torahweb.org date: Nov 6, 2019, 8:50 PM subject: Rabbi Daniel Stein - Living with Emunah

Rabbi Daniel Stein

Living with Emunah

The text of the Torah provides us with a scant amount of information regarding the background of Avraham Avinu, and no indication whatsoever regarding the nature of his previous activities or accomplishments. We are formally introduced to Avraham somewhat abruptly, as he is taking leave of his ancestral birthplace and embarking upon a pilgrimage to Eretz Yisrael. It is only in the Medrash where we discover that Avraham independently deduced the existence of a Creator, and that he courageously promoted his monotheistic convictions to an unreceptive pagan family and society. In fact, the episode which occurred at Ur Kasdim, wherein Avraham was miraculously rescued from the clutches of a fiery furnace, is not mentioned at

all in the pesukim of the Torah. Additionally, the Gemara (Avodah Zara 14b) attests that Avraham elucidated four hundred chapters of original halachic rulings in the area of avodah zara, none of which are recorded anywhere for posterity or future study. The Ramban and many other meforshim wonder, why would the Torah omit these impressive events which are not only critical to the narrative of Avraham but also justify why he alone was chosen to be the cornerstone of the Jewish people?

Rav Moshe Shapiro (Mimamakim) answers that while Avraham Avinu's brave brand of belief in the existence of Hashem was undoubtedly noteworthy, emunah comes in varying degrees and depths. The Maharal (Gevuros Hashem ch. 7) explains that a theoretical belief in the existence of Hashem is merely the preamble to a religious existence. Mature and complete emunah requires a person to also be able to implement their belief in Hashem as a guiding force in their lives, even when confronted with evidence to the contrary. Therefore, the Torah commences the story of Avraham not by describing the profundity of his innovative theological breakthroughs or even with his willingness to sacrifice himself while defending the tenets of his faith, but rather with the transitional moment when his emunah began to dictate his actions even in the face of adversity. The true triumph of traveling to Eretz Yisrael was not in overcoming the inconvenience of the initial upheaval, but in Avraham's unwavering commitment to his divine mission even while being temporarily forced to flee as a result of the ensuing famine. Avraham only became the father of the Jewish people because his emunah in Hashem brought him to continue to invest in the promise of an enduring spiritual legacy despite the fact that he was aging and childless. Therefore, it is with these feats, and not the adventures of his past, that the Biblical narrative of Avraham's life begins.

For this reason, only after enduring the first round of challenges and tests is Avraham regarded as a "believer", when the pasuk states, "and he believed in Hashem and He considered it as charity" (Breishis 15:6). Why does Avraham only merit to be recognized as a believer at this relatively late stage of his life? How can the Torah discount the decades he spent developing and defending the articles of his faith? The Bnei Yissaschar (Sivan 5) explains that Avraham's emunah fully blossomed for the first time when he refrained from doubting the wisdom and legitimacy of Hashem's instructions despite the hardships and setbacks he had to endure. Only when he remained determined in the face of resistance did the reality of his transcendent emunah become tangible. This clarifies the comparison between Avraham's emunah and the institution of charity. Ostensibly, the requirement to give charity results in a fiscal loss for the benefactor; after all, money is being transferred out of his account and deposited into the account of another. However, from the perspective of a maamin, who trusts in Hashem's promise to reimburse and reward all those who distribute their resources to the needy, tzedakah is an investment which pays handsome dividends. Therefore, every sincere and enthusiastic act of tzedakah is likely the manifestation of a deeply held emunah.

According to the Rambam (Sefer Hamitzvos 1), belief in Hashem is a positive commandment and the first mitzvah. Other rishonim do not consider emunah to be a mitzvah at all since the entire notion of a mitzvah presupposes a basic belief in Hashem. Indeed, without some measure of emunah the very concept of mitzvos cannot possibly exist, for how can we speak of a commandment without a commander. Since this argument is so overwhelmingly compelling, many meforshim suggest that the Rambam would have to cede this point as well. The Rambam only asserts that the mitzvah of emunah demands more than just a rudimentary belief in the existence of Hashem, it requires us to act in accordance with that belief and to remain steadfast despite the difficulties we might encounter along the way. In other words, to fulfill the first mitzvah, emunah must be practiced not just preached.

This is supported by the Gemara (Makkos 24a) which recounts that Habakkuk distilled the entire system of mitzvos to one central theme, which is encapsulated by the pasuk "ve'tzaddik be'emunaso yichyeh - the tzaddik

lives with his faith" (Habakkuk 2:4). The Ben Yehoyada notes that the gematriah of the word emunah is 102 while the numerical value of the word tzaddik is 204, because every tzaddik (204) must have two (2) dimensions to their emunah (2*102). There must be a theological belief in the existence of Hashem, but also a determination to put that emunah into practice. It is the relationship between these two facets of emunah which serves as the framework for the rest of religious life.

The Mishnah (Avos 5:19) identifies the disciples of Avraham as those who possess a good eye, a humble spirit, and a controlled personality. At first glance this is surprising, since the defining quality of Avraham was certainly his unshakable emunah. How can the emergence of emunah be completely absent in any reflection on Avraham Avinu's contributions? Rav Eliezer Geldzahler (Sichos Eliezer) suggests that intellectual emunah alone is not enough. Emunah is only meaningful when it is translated into action and ultimately produces a person who has a good eye, a humble spirit, and a controlled personality. Therefore, as we read about Avraham's historic accomplishments, we should be inspired to not only reinforce the theological foundations of our own faith, but to also concentrate on living constantly with that emunah and allowing it to become the guiding force in all that we do. Only if we are successful in this challenge may we proudly renew our claim to be the faithful students and spiritual heirs of Avraham Avinu.

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from: **Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein** <ravadlerstein@torah.org> reply-to: do-not-reply@torah.org to: mei-marom@torah.org date: Nov 7, 2019, 7:18 PM subject: Mei Marom - When Will Galus End?

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Mei Marom

By Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

Parshas Lech Lecha

When Will Galus End?

[The following is Rabbi Adlerstein's first installment of his new upcoming series called "Meshivas Nefesh." The introduction to this series follows this week's piece.] The fourth generation will return here, for the sin of the Emori will not be complete till then.[2[2]a>

The pasuk makes it clear why Avraham could not take possession of the Land immediately. It was not because he lacked sufficient merit. The potential gift was blocked only because of the rights of the previous occupants. The inhabitants of the Land had not yet filled their quota of iniquity. They had not yet perpetrated enough evil for the Land to vomit them out. As long as they retained rights of ownership, Hashem would not expel them without cause. Not even for His people.

This has important implications for us, who have lived for quite some time under the rule of Esav. He grew up in the household of Yitzchok, and as one of Avraham's descendants, Esav was vouchsafed important qualities and gifts from his family. In many ways, he gained an ethical advantage beyond that of other nations. Countries that stemmed from him often excelled in wonderful practices, like hachnasas orchim. They set up institutions to care for the sick and the incapacitated. They established groups devoted to various chesed activities in many locales. Their legal system upheld the common good: they would execute criminals who jeopardized it by robbery and theft. They addressed evils like bloodshed and false oaths.

Even had we merited redemption earlier, we would have had to wait for them to fill their measure of iniquity by dropping their meritorious practices.

The bottom line is that there are two reasons for the prolongation of our exile. We have not yet done full teshuvah, and our captors have retained positive practices, and thus have not reached their fill of sin.

This ought to spur us on to national teshuvah. Today we observe that the Esav nations have abandoned most of the good deeds of their past. They are mired in licentiousness. They subvert justice by taking bribes. They lend money usuriously. They regard neither judgment nor Judge. Given their sorry state, nothing blocks our full redemption other than a bit more teshuvah! Our geulah is fully up to us now!

Returning to our pasuk, we do have a Divine revelation that the offensive behavior of the inhabitants of the Land would reach its limit by the fourth generation after Avraham. If so, you might ask, why were they not destroyed at that time? While the Bnei Yisrael had sinned through the Sin of the Spies, delaying their entry into the land until the end of forty years in the wilderness, why would this delay the punishment of the inhabitants who fully deserved at that point to be driven out? To answer this question, the Torah writes,[3[3]a> "Hashem your G-d will thrust these nations from before you little by little. You will not be able to annihilate them quickly, lest the animals of the field increase against you." Their punishment was delayed only for the benefit of the Jewish nation.

The guarantee in our pasuk that the fourth generation would inherit the Land explains an oddity about the way the Land was divided at the time of their delayed entry. Ordinarily, the inheritance "arrow" points in only one direction: from older to newer generations. This was not the case in regard to entering the Land, where there was a kind of reverse inheritance as well.[4[4]a> If two brothers left Egypt and died in the wilderness, we would have expected the heirs of each to divide two portions of equal size, one per brother. But this was not so! If one of those brothers had one son, and the other had three, a total of four portions reverted to the deceased grandfather, who also left Egypt. He then is seen as leaving the four portions to be split equally among his two sons. Each brother, then transmits two portions that are divided in one case among three people, and in the other to a single heir. The dead inherited, as it were, from the living! Wouldn't it make more sense to divide the Land simply according to the number of people who crossed over with Yehoshua?

Our pasuk suggests the answer. Hashem promised Avraham that the gift of the Land would take place with the fourth generation. He would not revoke that promise. Even though the conquest of the Land was delayed by the sin of the meraglim, those who left Egypt were entitled to receive this berachah. They became definite stakeholders, as were those who actually entered the Land. The Torah therefore combined the stakes of both into the system described by Chazal.

Based on Meshivas Nafesh by R. Yochanan Luria, 15th century ? Bereishis 15:16 ? Devarim 7:22 ? Rashi Bamidbar 26:55; Tosafos Bava Basra 117a ? Meshivas Nafesh

Rav Yochanan Luria was born in the middle of the 15th century, and died in 1514, placing him in the period of time often referred to as that of the "poskim." In fact his father, R. Aharon, the first to bear the Luria family name, was a friend of some of the most important poskim: Maharam Mintz, the Maharik, and the Terumas HaDeshen.

Born in Alsace, he studied primarily in Germany. Returning to Alsace, he paid off the authorities well enough that he was given official sanction for the yeshiva he founded and led.

R. Yochanan's brother R. Yechezkel was the great-grandfather of R. Shlomo Luria, the Maharshah.

Meshivas Nafesh shows great fidelity to Chazal and to Rashi (to whom R. Luria was related), but also the kind of inventive creativity that gained strength after the period of the rishonim. R. Luria often cites the derashos that he gave on important occasions, particularly at weddings. Many of these offer a window into practices of Ashkenazic Jewry that were not perfectly understood in his day, for which he offers fascinating explanations.

R. Luria also composed a refutation to the Dominicans, who excelled in stirring up hatred against Jews and Judaism.

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from: Daily Halacha <return@email.dailyhalacha.com> via torahlearningresources.org reply-to: mail@dailyhalacha.com to: "C. Shulman" <@gmail.com> date: Nov 6, 2019, 3:02 AM subject: If a Person Prayed or Recited a Beracha Without a Kippa

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The Rabbi Jacob S. Kassin Memorial Halacha Series

Authored by **Rabbi Eli J. Mansour** (11/6/2019)

Dedicated Today In Memory Of Mesudah (Meda) bat Mizlee by Isaac Moses ##DedicationMessage## To dedicate Daily Halacha for a day please click <http://www.dailyhalacha.com/sponsorship.aspx>. Thank you.

Description: If a Person Prayed or Recited a Beracha Without a Kippa

The Shulhan Aruch (Orah Haim 91) rules that a person must have his head covered when reciting a Beracha. Similarly, the Rambam writes that one must have his head covered when praying.

Rav Moshe Feinstein (1895-1986), in Iggerot Moshe (4:40:14), wrote that if one prayed without a head covering, his prayer is considered a "To'eba" (abomination), since he prayed in a manner resembling members of other faiths. Even if one's Kippa fell off without his knowing, and he then prayed with his head uncovered, his prayer is invalid and he must repeat the prayer with a Kippa.

Hacham Ovadia Yosef, however, disagreed. In a letter of approbation for the work Nesah Yosef (cited in Yalkut Yosef), Hacham Ovadia wrote that he felt that Rav Moshe Feinstein went too far, and one who mistakenly prayed without a Kippa certainly does not have to repeat the prayer.

There is also a debate among the Poskim as to whether one may think words of Torah in his mind, without saying them, with his head uncovered. Some ruled that this is forbidden, but Hacham Ovadia Yosef writes in Yabia Omer (vol. 6) that this is, technically, allowed, since Halacha follows the opinion that thinking words in one's mind is not Halachically equivalent to reciting them ("Hirhur Lav Ke'dibur"). Hacham Ovadia also ruled that one may answer "Amen" to a Beracha without wearing a Kippa, though quite obviously, one should try to ensure that he is wearing a Kippa when answering "Amen" and thinking words of Torah.

Rav Moshe Feinstein ruled stringently also with regard to the question of greeting a fellow Jew whose head is uncovered with the greeting of "Shalom." Since "Shalom" is one of the Names of G-d, Rav Moshe explained, it may not be uttered without a Kippa, and by extending such a greeting to one's fellow, he will cause the fellow to respond "Shalom," in violation of this Halacha. According to this ruling, then, it would be forbidden to extend the greeting of "Shabbat Shalom" to a Jew who is not wearing a Kippa. However, Hacham Ovadia disagreed, for several reasons, including the fact that "Shalom" is not among the Names of Hashem that it is forbidden to erase, and therefore, it is not treated with the same level of stringency as other Names.

However, even Rav Moshe permitted saying the English word "G-d" without a Kippa. And thus, for example, one who teaches in a public school and does not wear a Kippa is allowed to recite the Pledge of Allegiance with the class, even though it includes the word "G-d."

Summary: One is required to wear a Kippa when praying or reciting a Beracha, though one who mistakenly prayed or recited a Beracha without a Kippa – such as if it fell off without him realizing it – does not have to repeat the prayer or the Beracha. Strictly speaking, one does not need to wear a Kippa when thinking words of Torah, or when answering "Amen," but this is certainly preferable. One may say the English word "G-d" without a Kippa.

from: **Rabbi Yochanan Zweig** <genesis@torah.org> reply-to: do-not-reply@torah.org to: rabbizweig@torah.org date: Nov 6, 2019, 3:27 PM subject: Rabbi Zweig on the Parsha - Environmental Hazard

Rabbi Zweig on the Parsha

Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya To Dedicate an Article click here

Parshas Lech Lecha

Environmental Hazard

"And it occurred, as he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai..."(12:11)

As they approached Mitzrayim, Avraham asked Sarah to claim that she was his sister. This was to protect him from the Egyptians who might lust after Sarah, and kill him if they were to know that he was her husband.¹

Why is it necessary for us to know that this discussion transpired as Avraham and Sarah drew close to their destination? Why, in fact, was an issue of such gravity not discussed prior to their departure from Eretz Canaan? The Midrash explains that as they neared their destination, Avraham became aware of Sarah's exceptional beauty.² Why is this the juncture where Avraham becomes aware of his wife's beauty?

Mitzrayim was a country notorious for the immoral and lascivious behavior of its inhabitants.³ Generally, an individual living in such a society would be affected, even if he himself would not indulge in any perverse behavior. Perhaps the Torah is teaching us that although a tzaddik of Avraham's caliber would not be dragged down by the immorality of the society where he lives, the influence of the society does have a subtle effect on him. In Avraham's case, this manifested itself in his becoming aware of his wife's beauty.

1.12:11 2.Tanchuma 5 3.20:15

It's Not The Thought That Counts "Then there came the fugitive and told Avram..." (14:13)

Chazal identify the "fugitive" as Og, the king of Bashan, who had escaped the onslaught of the four kings and fled to Avraham to inform him that his nephew Lot had been captured.¹ The Midrash relates that for this deed, Og was blessed with longevity. At the same time, the Midrash reveals that Og's true intentions were malevolent; he hoped that Avraham would pursue Lot's captors and be killed, allowing him to marry Sarah.²

In Parshas Chukas, we find that Hashem reassures Moshe, telling him not to fear, for Bnei Yisroel will successfully defeat Og and his nation.³ The Midrash explains that Moshe feared that the merit of Og's service to Avraham would protect him against Bnei Yisroel.⁴ It is difficult to understand Moshe's fear, in light of the evil intent which was the impetus for Og's actions.

Human nature is such, that we find it difficult to express gratitude for benefits we have received from others. One technique we employ to avoid expressing gratitude, is to focus on the intent of the benefactor. We rationalize that if the intent of the benefactor was a selfish one, then the act was done for his benefit and not ours. Therefore, we are exempt from showing gratitude. Chazal are teaching us that "hakaras hatov" – acknowledging the benefit we have received, is not dependent upon the intent of the benefactor, rather the benefit which has been provided. The lesson can be especially helpful in the relationship between a child and his parents. The child should focus on the benefit he has received from his parents, the gift of life being the ultimate benefit, and not on their motivations.

1.Bereishis Rabbah 42:8 2. Ibid 3.Bamidbar 32:33 4.Tanchuma ibid.

Badge Of Honor "if so much as a thread to a shoe strap; nor shall I take anything of yours! So you shall not say 'It is I who made Avram rich.'"(14:23)

After Avraham defeated the largest army ever amassed and recaptured all the spoils and captives from the four kings,¹ the Torah records a dialogue between Avraham and the king of Sodom in which the king offered to divide the spoils with Avraham; Avraham would take the possessions, while the

king of Sodom would receive the freed captives. Avraham rejected this proposal with the statement, "If so much as a thread to a shoe strap; nor shall I take anything of yours! So you shall not say 'It is I who made Avram rich.'"2 The Talmud teaches that for having refused to accept even a thread or a shoe strap, Avraham's children merited to receive two precepts, Tzitzis for the thread and Tefillin for the strap.3 Aside from the obvious play on words, how is Avraham's reward commensurate with his actions?

Rashi explains that Avraham's actions were particularly meritorious, for he did not want to benefit from stolen property.4 The Maharsha questions the claim that this was stolen property, for halachically the spoils of war are the legal possession of the victor.5

Although Avraham was legally entitled to the spoils, it is clear that this was not the king of Sodom's perception. The mere fact that he offered to divide the bounty with Avraham implies that he felt he had rights over these possessions, and that he was making a magnanimous gesture. What the Sages find meritorious in Avraham's actions is the fact that he dealt with the king of Sodom within the context of the king's perception. According to the king's perception, if Avraham were to take everything by force, he would be a gazlan, a thief. As Hashem's representative, Avraham could not allow for the perception that he had either stolen his fortune or that the money had been given to him as a mortal's magnanimous act, for this would detract from Hashem's honor. Avraham showed that in order to protect Hashem's honor, he was willing to deal with people based upon the reality which they had created for themselves, even though the basis for their position was unfounded.

This characteristic is rewarded with Tzitzis and Tefillin for the following reason: The same section in the Talmud that teaches that Avraham was rewarded with the mitzva of Tefillin, explains that when a Jew wears Tefillin, he instills awe in all who see him.6 This is not because they fear the person himself, rather they sense the presence of a Higher Authority who is being represented by this individual. We could compare this to a policeman who wears a badge; one does not fear the man himself, rather the institution which he represents. Tefillin are the badge that represents Hashem's presence. It is interesting to note that the Tefillin are worn on areas generally designated for displaying a badge, the sleeve and the cap. Concerning Tzitzis, the Talmud teaches a similar concept. A Jew wearing Tzitzis is akin to a slave who wears the insignia of his master on his garment.7 These two mitzvos reflect the Jew's designation as Hashem's representative and facilitate the perception of Hashem's presence in this world.

Avraham showed the ability to accept someone else's perception of reality. Therefore, he was a fitting candidate for the precepts which allow Hashem's presence to be perceived. The reason is as follows: Egocentricity prevents a person from seeing a differing point of view. Avraham displayed a complete lack of egocentricity, which is the cornerstone for the acceptance of Hashem. All too often we require that others live within our reality, especially if we consider their position to be incorrect. Although it meant giving up that which was rightly his, Avraham dealt with the king of Sodom within the king's own reality, in order to preserve Hashem's honor in this world.

from: **Rabbi Kaganoff** <ymkaganoff@gmail.com> reply-to: kaganoff-a@googlegroups.com to: kaganoff-a@googlegroups.com date: Nov 7, 2019, 6:11 AM subject: **Shalom Zachor**

As I mentioned in last week's article, my much beloved and missed brother-in-law, Rabbi Yosef Azar, a very exceptional and popular teacher at various seminaries, lost his protracted battle with cancer recently. Rav Yosef leaves behind a widow and ten children, eight of whom are still living at home; the youngest is only five years old. As you are all aware, I rarely make appeals for funds. However, I am making an exception this week, asking people to donate via www.charidy.com/rabbiazar/RavSternbuch.

I have been told that donations can be made tax deductible in USA, UK or Israel.

Since bris milah figures so significantly in this week's parsha, I am providing a guest shiur from my good friend on the topic of shalom zachor. Understanding the Shalom Zachor

Is attached

Understanding the Shalom Zachor **By Rabbi Avraham Rosenthal**

Klal Yisrael has many minhagim, some more common than others. Although not everyone follows this particular minhag, as most Sefardi communities do not hold a Shalom Zachor – everyone has heard about the custom of Shalom Zachor. All too often, when a certain practice has been in force for hundreds of years and is almost universal, the fine details of the custom tend to get sidelined and ignored. As the mitzvah of bris milah is mentioned in this week's parsha, we will take this opportunity to examine the famous custom of Shalom Zachor.

Sources in the Rishonim The current format of the Shalom Zachor is mentioned by two Rishonim: 1) The Orchos Chayim, a thirteenth century halachic work, states: "The custom in all of our localities is one who is either circumcising his son, or who is bringing his son or daughter to the chuppah, makes peace with his enemies and invites them to eat and rejoice with him, in order that they should bless him and not curse him. Also the entire congregation, elders, women and children gather on Leil Shabbos and the eve of the eighth day" (Orchos Chayim, Hilchos Milah #9, s.v., venahagu). 2) The Terumas Hadeshen, who lived in the fifteenth century, writes: "That which we are accustomed now following the birth of a boy, that they enter there and eat on the Leil Shabbos after the birth is considered a seudas mitzvah" (a meal considered to be a mitzvah) [Shu"t Terumas Hadeshen #269].

Possible Source in Chazal The Gemara (Bava Kama 80a) relates that three great Amora'im, Rav, Shmuel and Rav Assi, met outside the home where a simcha was being held. The Gemara itself has two versions as to which simcha was taking place. According to one opinion, it was a "shavu'a haben," while according to the other it was a "yeshu'a haben." According to the text that it was a "shavu'a haben" – "the week of the son," they were about to attend a bris milah. It is referred to as "shavu'a haben," because the bris takes place a week after the baby is born (Rashi, ad loc.). According to the other version, they were attending a "yeshu'a haben," "a salvation of the son." Here we have a disagreement among the Rishonim as to what type of simcha

this was. Some maintain that it was a pidyon haben, a redemption of the first born. It was referred to as a "yeshu'a," as the Aramaic translation of pidyon, redemption, is purkon, which is synonymous with salvation (Rashi ad loc; Tosafos ad loc, s.v. lebei yeshu'a haben, first explanation; see also Gilyon Hashas on Rashi, with Hagahos Vetziyunim [Oz Vehadar edition]). Others contend that "yeshu'a haben" refers to a festive meal held in honor of the fact that the baby survived the birth (Tosafos, ad loc., second explanation). Although some authorities point to this explanation of the Gemara as a source for the custom of serving a festive meal the night preceding the bris (Dagul Mirvavah, end of Yoreh Dei'ah #178), others maintain that this is the basis for the Shalom Zachor (Shu"t Terumas Hadeshen #269; Rema, Yoreh Dei'ah 265:12).

Reasons for the Event Several reasons have been suggested for serving the Shalom Zachor meal. These include: 1) As we saw, some authorities maintain that the Shalom Zachor is the meal served as a commemoration of the fact that the baby survived childbirth. The reason why Friday night was chosen as the time for this is because, generally, people are home at that time (Shu"t Terumas Hadeshen #269). 2) Concerning the earliest age from when an animal is fit to be offered as a korban, the pasuk states: "An ox, a sheep or a goat, when it is born, it will be seven days with its mother, and from the eighth day and onwards it will be accepted as a fire-offering to Hashem" (Vayikra 22:27). The Midrash explains: This can be understood through the following parable. A king comes to a particular country and makes the following decree: All of the residents here can not see me before

first seeing the queen. So Hashem commanded that we should not bring before Him an offering before it experiences Shabbos, as one cannot have seven days without Shabbos. Similarly, there is no circumcision without Shabbos, as it states, “And from the eighth day and onwards, it will be accepted” (Midrash Rabbah, Vayikra 27:10). Since the bris milah cannot take place before the baby experiences Shabbos, a festive meal is served on Shabbos (see Taz, Yoreh Dei’ah 265:13). 3) The Gemara (Niddah 30b) relates that when the fetus is in its mother’s womb, a malach teaches it the entire Torah, and before it is born, the angel strikes it on the mouth, thereby causing it to forget. Based on this, some authorities maintain that the Shalom Zachor is a form of nichum aveilim, where we comfort the baby who is “mourning” over the loss of his Torah (Drisha, Yoreh Dei’ah 264:2; Taz, Yoreh Dei’ah 265:13).

Reasons for the Name In trying to find an explanation as to why this event is referred to as a “Shalom Zachor,” this writer discovered something interesting. Most of the sources attempt to explain the word “zachor” without mentioning anything about “shalom.” In fact, it was either referred to by its description, i.e., gathering in the baby’s home on Friday night after the birth, or it was called “seudas zachor,” the meal of the “zachor.” To this day, it is called this way in many German Jewish circles. A search through a

Torah Literature database revealed that the term “Shalom Zachor” does not appear before the late 1800’s. So, we will first examine why it was called a “seudas zachor.” 1) As we mentioned, the Gemara tells us that the baby is made to forget the Torah that he learned while in the womb. Therefore, the meal is called “zachor,” as it is a remembrance of that loss. In addition, we are telling the child to “remember” the Torah that he has forgotten. We specifically do this on Shabbos, as the mitzvah of “remembering” is central to that holy day, as it says, “Remember the Shabbos day” (Migdal Oz [Yaavetz], Birchos Shamayim #15). 2) In the Gemara we cited concerning the fetus’s forgetting his Torah learning, the Gemara adds that the malach makes the baby take an oath that he will be a tzaddik and not a rasha. On the Friday night after he is born, we come to remind the child that he should remember (zachor) the oath that he took. Shabbos is viewed as an opportune time to remind the child about his oath, as it is the first mitzvah that he is performing. Therefore, a seudah is served in honor of the child’s beginning to keep the Torah and its mitzvos. This explanation dovetails with the Gemara that referred to the bris milah as “shavu’a haben.” Although the word “shavu’a” is usually translated as “week,” if it is pronounced “shevu’a” (with a sheva under the shin, as opposed to a kamatz), it means “oath” (Migdal Oz, Birchos Shamayim #15). It is interesting to note that the Aruch Laneir (Niddah 30b) explains why it is necessary to teach the baby Torah, only to make him forget it. Since the malach makes the baby swear that he will be a tzaddik, the baby must first learn all of the Torah in order to understand the ramifications of that oath. 3) The previous two explanations focused solely on the word “zachor,” as the term “Shalom Zachor” is quite recent. The one explanation of the term “Shalom Zachor” that I found is based on the Gemara (Niddah 31b), where it states, “Once a male comes to the world, peace comes to the world.” Therefore, we call it a “Shalom Zachor” to signify this (Otzar Kol Minhagei Yeshurun #27).

What About the Girls? Now that we have seen some of the reasons why a festive meal is served in honor of the birth of a boy, we can address the question why a similar event is not held when a girl is born. Rav Yaakov Emden (Migdal Oz, Birchos Shamayim #15) suggests two possible reasons for this: 1) As we saw, one of reasons for the Shalom Zachor is connected with the Torah the baby learned and subsequently forced to forget. While it can be assumed that a baby girl will learn Torah in the womb, it must be realized that the loss of that Torah is qualitatively different than the forgetting of the Torah experienced by a boy. The reason for this is quite simple: women are not commanded to learn Torah. They are required only to know the mitzvos and halachos relevant to them. Men, on the other hand, are required to learn as much of Torah as possible. 2) While the above approach deals with the Torah learning aspect of the Shalom Zachor, it does

not explain the other reason, namely, to remind the child about his oath that he took to be a tzaddik. It would seem that a baby girl also took such an oath.

However, Rav Yaakov Emden explains that, in reality, the neshamos of every husband and wife are two halves of a whole. Before birth, the neshamah is divided

into two, one of which is placed inside a male, while the other into a female. When they eventually marry, the two halves are reunited. The male half is considered the dominant neshamah, and the oath administered to it is binding on both halves. Hence, the female half does not make its own oath and there is, therefore, no need to remind the baby girl about it.

Specifically on Shabbos We have already mentioned one of the reasons for holding the Shalom Zachor specifically on Shabbos, and that is because it is a time when people are generally at home. Several other reasons have been suggested, including: 1) There is a custom that when a tzaddik comes to a city, the populace comes to greet him on Shabbos. The newborn baby is completely free of sin and is therefore considered to be a tzaddik. Therefore, the custom is to come greet him on Shabbos (Bris Avos, Kuntres Maftai’ach shel Chayah #43). 2) The Rambam (Hilchos Shabbos 2:3) writes that when it comes to desecrating the Shabbos in order to save a life, this should be not be done by non-Jews or children, but rather by adult Jews and Torah sages. It was therefore the custom for the rov of a community to come to the home of new mother on Shabbos in order to ascertain whether it was necessary to transgress the halachos of Shabbos on her behalf, as it was possible that her life was still in danger. As it was not deemed appropriate for the rov to go on his own, the heads of the community, along with a contingency of townspeople, would accompany him. From this developed the custom of visiting the home of the newborn on Shabbos (Nefesh Harav, page 242). 3) The Zohar writes that the coming week receives its bracha from the previous Shabbos. Therefore, all of the spiritual energy that will filter down to the physical world due to the coming events is already present on Shabbos. Thus, for example, the spiritual energy of the impending bris is present on Shabbos. Therefore, the Shabbos before the bris is an opportune time for the father to give thanks to Hashem for the upcoming mitzvah, as well as for the community to bless him that he merit to fulfill the mitzvah (Shu”t Teshuvos Vehanhagos, vol. II, #202).

Mitzvah or Not? Is it considered a mitzvah to partake of a Shalom Zachor? This question is debated by the halachic authorities. Some contend that it is, indeed, a seudas mitzvah. They base this on the fact that Rav was planning on attending the yeshu’a haben, and we know from a different passage of Gemara (Chullin 95b) that Rav would not partake of a seudas reshut, a nonobligatory meal (Terumas Hadeshen #269; Yam shel Shlomo, Bava Kama #37; Rema, Yoreh Dei’ah 265:12). Others disagree, contending that Rav’s presence at the Shalom Zachor does not prove that it is a seudas mitzvah, because we do not know whether he ate there. Perhaps he merely attended, but did not eat (Shu”t Chavos Ya’ir #70).

Refreshments Only

Several Acharonim mention that the custom is not to serve a proper meal at the Shalom Zachor, but rather light refreshments (Shu”t Chavos Ya’ir #70; Nohaig Ketzon Yosef, Milah #1; Migdal Oz, Birchos Shamayim #15; Aruch Hashulchan, Yoreh Dei’ah 265:37). The Acharonim note that there had been a custom to serve lentils at the Shalom Zachor. The idea behind this is because we find that Yaakov Avinu was cooking a pot of lentils to serve his father, Yitzchok, who was mourning the death of Avraham. Chazal point out that lentils are appropriate to serve to a mourner, since they “have no mouth,” just as a mourner “has no mouth” (see Rashi, Bereishis 25:30). Since one of the reasons given for the Shalom Zachor is to comfort the child who is mourning over the loss of his Torah, it is therefore appropriate to serve lentils (Hegyonai Haparasha, Vayikra, page 210; Otzar Habris, vol. I, page 128). Nowadays, it is customary to serve chickpeas, which, like lentils, do not have an opening. It is interesting to note that the word for chickpeas in Yiddish is “arbes.” The Klausenberger Rebbe points out that the reason for serving arbes at a Shalom Zachor is because it is linguistically similar to

the words “Veharbah arbey es zar’acha” (Bereishis 22:17), “I will greatly increase your descendants” (Hegyonei Haparasha, Vayikra, page 210). There is also a custom to serve nuts at a Shalom Zachor. This is based on a Midrash (Shir Hashirim Rabbah, Parsha #6 1.11) which explains that the pasuk, “I descended to the garden of the egoz (nut)” (Shir Hashirim 6:11), refers to bris milah. The Midrash states that just as an egoz, a nut, has two shells, so Klal Yisrael has two mitzvos: milah and pri’ah (two stages in the circumcision process) [Otzar Habris, vol. I, page 128, footnote #13].

No Baby Present It sometimes occurs that the baby is not at home on his first Friday night. Should this be a reason not to hold a Shalom Zachor? Some authorities maintain that based on many reasons for holding a Shalom Zachor, i.e., to comfort the child over the loss of his Torah, to greet the baby who is a tzaddik, to remind him about the oath he took, indeed, there is no purpose in the Shalom Zachor when the baby is not present (Even Yisrael, cited in Otzar Habris, vol. I, page 129, footnote #15). However, the generally accepted custom is to hold the Shalom Zachor, even when the baby is not there. Assumedly, this is based on the idea that the purpose of the Shalom Zachor is to give thanks to Hashem that the baby was born (Otzar Habris, page 129).

Kri’as Shema The generally accepted custom is that on the night before the bris, children come to the home of the baby and read Kri’as Shema. One of the reasons given for this practice is that the pesukim of Shema are a shemirah, a protection, for the baby. Perhaps we can discuss this in greater detail in a future article. In addition to that custom, some have the minhag of reciting Kri’as Shema at the Shalom Zachor, even if it is not the night prior to the bris. Also, the Steipler Gaon maintained that it is not necessary to read the pesukim in the presence of the child (Orchos Rabbeinu, vol. I, page 248).

The Friday Night Baby If a baby is born on Friday evening, should the Shalom Zachor be held on the first Friday night or on the second? (Of course, this question assumes that it is logistically feasible to hold the Shalom Zachor so soon after the baby’s birth.) Some maintain that the Shalom Zachor is held on the first Friday evening. This is based on the reason given for the event that it is an opportunity for the father to give thanks over the baby’s birth. It is most logical that such thanks be expressed as soon as possible after the birth. Additionally, the Terumas Hadeshen cited earlier writes that the Shalom Zachor is held on the Friday night following the birth (Pri Megadim, Orach Chayim #444, Mishbetzos Zahav #9). Others contend that it is more appropriate to hold the Shalom Zachor on the second Friday night. This is based on the Gemara cited above concerning the “shavu’a haben.” Some commentators hold that the meal of the “shavu’a haben” is the meal served on the night prior to the bris. Since the baby’s bris will take place on Shabbos morning, it is appropriate to have the Shalom Zachor also serve as the shavu’a haben (Koreis Habris 265:68). Many authorities write that the minhag follows the view that the Shalom Zachor is held on the second Friday night (Otzair Habris, vol. I, page 129).

No Invites Some communities have a custom that announcements and notices advertising a Shalom Zachor do not contain a direct invitation to the public. Rather, the announcement merely informs the community that so-and-so is making a Shalom Zachor. This is similar to the custom of not inviting people to attend a bris (Nohaig Ketzon Yosef, Milah #1; Koreis Habris 265:68).

The Torah was Given on Shabbos As we noted earlier, one of the reasons behind the Shalom Zachor is that we come to console the child over the Torah that he lost. Rav Aharon Rokeach of Belz would say, in the name of his father Rav Yissachar Dov, that it is highly significant that we perform this consolation specifically on Shabbos. The Gemara (Shabbos 86b) states that, although there is a disagreement as to the exact date in Sivan the Torah was given, “according to all opinions, the Torah was given on Shabbos.” This indicates that the receiving of the Torah is inherent to Shabbos. We therefore come to the child specifically on Shabbos to console him, in order

to hint to this fact that through the power of Shabbos, one can receive the entire Torah (cited in Piskei Teshuvos, Yoreh Dei’ah #265, footnote #360).

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com
http://www.ou.org/torah/author/Rabbi_Dr_Tzvi_Hersh_Weinreb
from: Shabbat Shalom shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org

Parshas Lech Lecha

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

Walking With and Walking Before

When I was still a pulpit rabbi back in Baltimore, I would meet with a group of teenagers from time to time. The agenda was open-ended, and my goal was to encourage the group to share their feelings and attitudes freely. One of the favorite topics chosen by the kids was their school curriculum and what they found wrong with it.

I learned many things from this group of adolescents, whose critique of the curricula of the schools they attended was sharp and accurate. I particularly remember the outburst of one exceptionally creative young man. Let us call him Josh.

He was a student in a very academically oriented high school which put its major emphasis upon textual study. “What am I supposed to do with my creativity”, he asked. “Where is there room in the school for me to express my artistic talents?”

I was hard-pressed to come up with an answer for Josh’s pained query. All I could say was that he was personally experiencing a tension which pervades the history of our religious faith. It is the tension between conformity to the rules and regulations of our sacred texts versus the natural and powerful human need for creative expression and innovation.

Our religion reveres tradition and continuity. Attempts to question tradition and to stake out new spiritual turf have been typically viewed in our history as heresy and rebellion. Is there no room for creative novelty in our faith? I think that there is room for such creativity, and I think that it is none other than Abraham himself who is the first example in the Torah of innovative ingenuity, within the context of religious service.

In this week’s Torah portion, Lech Lecha, we find God Himself describing Abraham as one who “walks before Me”, “hit’ halech lefanai...” (Genesis 17:1). Our sages contrast this description of Abraham with an earlier description of Noah, to be found in last week’s Torah portion. There we read, “Noah walked with God”, “et haElokim” (Genesis 6:9). Noah walked with God, whereas Abraham walked before Him.

Noah walked with God and required Divine support to live his religious life. He was not able to walk before God. He could not take the initiative and strike out on his own. He needed to be certain of God’s will before he could act.

Abraham, on the other hand, walked before God. He stepped out on his own and risked acting independently and creatively. He was confident in his own religious judgment and did not require God’s prior approval for all of his actions. Indeed, he dared to challenge God’s own judgment.

Thus, we never find Noah speaking out in defense of his generation, nor does he pray for their salvation. Abraham, on the contrary, forcefully defends sinful Sodom and Gomorrah and prays even for his adversaries.

Of Moses too, it can be said that he walked before God. He broke the tablets on his own initiative, and, according to our sages, added a day to God’s own timetable for giving the Torah. In both cases, we are told that the Lord congratulated him for his bold creative actions.

I remember reading an anecdote about Rav Kook, the first chief Rabbi of the Holy Land, which illustrates his preference for the creative genius over the person who just conforms. Rav Kook once had to decide a halachic issue by resolving a disagreement between two great Talmudic authorities. The dispute was between the author of Darchei Teshuvah, a monumental anthology of halachic dicta, and the Maharsham, who authored many

volumes in response to questions arising from the circumstances of new technological inventions.

Rav Kook decided in favor of the Maharsham over the Darchei Teshuva. He argued that whereas the latter was a *gaon me'asef*, a genius at recording the opinions of others, the former was a *gaon yotzer*, an inventive genius. The creative authority trumped the expert anthologist.

One of the areas of psychology which has always fascinated me has been the research on the phenomenon of human creativity. One line of that research suggests that there are two modes of thought of which we are all capable, although some of us are better at one and some are better at the other.

There are those of us who are convergent thinkers. Our ideas connect and ultimately merge with the ideas of our predecessors and peers. Others think divergently, and their ideas veer from earlier norms and carve out new paths and different solutions.

The contrast between Abraham and Noah suggests that although Abraham was the model of ultimate obedience to God's will, he nevertheless was capable of divergent thinking. He was able to walk before God. Noah, however, could only think convergently and, figuratively speaking, needed to hold God's hand.

It is important that we realize that creativity is not at odds with spirituality and with faithful adherence to meticulous religious observance. We must not be afraid of our own powers of creative thinking.

The realization that there is a place for creativity in the worship of the Almighty is especially essential for those who are responsible for the curricula of our educational institutions. They must be on guard never to stifle the wonderful creative impulses which typify youth. They must cultivate those impulses and allow for their expression within our tradition. And we must allow for the development of contemporary Abrahams, and not be satisfied to raise a generation of mere Noahs.

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com

from: Torah in Action /Shema Yisrael <parsha@torahinaction.com>

subject: Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Lech Lecha

פרשת לך לך תשפ

ואת הנפש אשר עשו בחרן

And the souls they made in Charan. (12:5)

Our Patriarch spent his entire adult life devoted to outreach. Wherever they traveled, and when they finally settled, Avraham and Sarah were fountains of *chesed* and lovingkindness in a world beset with paganism and hedonism.

Avraham *Avinu* is referred to as the *amud hachessed*, pillar of kindness, and rightfully so, having spent his entire life reaching out to a pagan world, both materially and spiritually. *Chesed* is a wonderful and vital character trait. Our world functions on *chesed*, both in the religious and secular communities. It is the one character trait upon which everyone seems to agree. We have all developed diverse individual approaches toward carrying out many acts of *chesed*, but they are all focused (or should be) on helping those in need. Why, then, is Avraham, our Patriarch, so lauded for his acts of lovingkindness? If an entire secular world understands the need for social services, it is obvious that we must all incorporate *chesed* into our lifestyles.

At first glance, we may suggest that our Patriarch earned this appellation because he was the first person to recognize that people had spiritual needs. Saving them from moral and spiritual extinction is one of the greatest acts of *chesed*. Furthermore, Avraham's entire life was devoted to *chesed* of all sorts. Unlike his predecessor Noah, who spent an entire year on the *Teivah*, Ark, doling out *chesed* 24/7, Avraham acted on his own, without Divine imperative instructing him to do so. Avraham recognized a need and acted on it. I think that while all of the above are true, Avraham's

chesed was unique; and taught us, his descendants, the true meaning of *chesed*.

Some people get involved in acts of *chesed* due to a personal need. They are looking for *z'chusim*, merits. They have a personal challenge in their lives which they feel their own acts of kindness to others might alleviate. Avraham *Avinu* acted because he was *korei b'shem Hashem*, called out in the Name of Hashem. It bothered him that people were wasting their lives as pagans, ignoring the only Source of spirituality: Hashem. He felt their need, their aimless lives, their pain. This is *chesed*. Praying for another Jew in need is *chesed*. Praying for another Jew in need when one is personally experiencing this very same challenge has outstanding efficacy. This is because, when one truly feels another Jew's pain (which he now does, as he himself is experiencing a similar situation), it is true *chesed*. Identifying with another Jew's plight catalyzes ultimate *chesed*.

A well-known story inspires this idea. A woman who had been married for a number of years without being blessed with a child asked a *Rav* in *Eretz Yisrael* to keep her in mind and pray on her behalf. The *Rav* replied that surely other *rabbanim* whose "tzaddik status" was greater than his would be more effective. The woman insisted that she wanted his prayer. She had an instinctive feeling that her salvation would be catalyzed through his prayer.

The *Rav* commented, "Veritably, I understand your pain. My own daughter has been married for some time, and she, too, has yet to be blessed with a child. You know, *Chazal* (*Bava Kamma* 92a) teach that if someone has a need and he prays for someone else who is suffering for that very same problem, then his prayers are answered first. I suggest that you pray for my daughter while I pray for you."

The woman agreed. Years passed, and the *Rav* adhered to his end of the deal, praying regularly for the woman from whom he never heard again. His daughter eventually adopted a child. A short while later, he was informed of the exciting news that his daughter was expecting her first biological child. A few months later, on the very same day that he was celebrating the birth of his grandchild, he received a call from the original woman who had asked him to pray for her, inviting him to the *bris* of her son! Yes, the two infants were born within the same hour!

This concept – different people, different circumstances – has repeated itself numerous times, because when one person feels someone else's pain, when he identifies with his challenge, his *chesed* attains a different status.

Horav Nissim Yagen, zl, relates a story that provides a powerful insight into the *chesed* process. I think this story and its accompanying lesson can be used as a springboard to illuminate another aspect of Avraham *Avinu's* outlook on *chesed*. An elderly Jew in Yerushalayim was an extremely righteous and G-d-fearing man. His kindness to others knew no bounds. His generosity sadly did, as he was extremely poor. He gave whatever he could, and he was saddened that he could not give more. Jobs were not so plentiful, thus his family was relegated to sustain itself from the *chalukah*, charity, funds that were received from overseas. These funds barely covered his daily needs.

One day, the *Old Yishuv's tzedakah* collectors came by and asked for his assistance in marrying off an orphan couple. (This was, sadly, not uncommon. Poverty was a way of life in those days, and charity was the only means for navigating through its challenges.) He told the collectors that, at that moment, he had nothing to give. If they could return the next day, he would do his best to provide them with a sizable sum of money.

Indeed, when the men returned the next morning, the *tzaddik* handed them a considerable wad of cash. These collectors were well aware of the *tzaddik's* financial situation. He certainly did not have this much money. "Where did you get all of this money?" they asked.

The pious man explained, "I decided that it is not necessary for me to recite *Kiddush* on *Shabbos* over wine anymore. According to the Torah, *challah* is sufficient for fulfilling the obligation. I calculated that, over a

period of two years (if I use *challah* in place of wine), I will save approximately 288 *lira/shekel*. I then borrowed that amount, and this is what I gave you. The young couple's wedding is far more important than my wine on *Shabbos*. They will get married, and I will pay back my debt over the next two years with the money that I have saved."

The lesson to be derived from this story, explains *Rav Yagen*, is that *chesed*/charity takes precedence even over the many *hiddurim*, stringencies, that we have accepted upon ourselves. Does Hashem want us to extend singing *Shalom Aleichem* prior to *Kiddush* on Friday night, while our guests' stomachs are growling to eat? We all know the many things that we rightfully do, but we should not do them at the expense of *chesed*. We must ask ourselves: What does Hashem want from us? If we apply our *seichel*, common sense, to the issue at hand, we might discover that what He wants is that we reach out and lend a hand to those in need.

We return to Avraham *Avinu* and his brand of *chesed*. He could have said, "I will reach out only to those who are interested in learning about Hashem. I will not concern myself with heathens whose sole intention is to fill their stomachs with my food and who have no real interest in spiritual growth." He had many justifications and excuses, but he did not use them, because *chesed* is blind; *chesed* is for all; *chesed* is broad-spectrum kindness.

הפרד נא מעלי

Let us separate. (13:9)

The question is well-known. Avraham *Avinu* reached out to an entire pagan world in order to teach the people the verities of monotheism. He converted many. His nephew and close disciple, Lot, was one of these many souls whom Avraham brought closer to Hashem. Yet, when Lot manifested an attitude that was inappropriate; when his ethical standards came into opposition with those of Avraham, the Patriarch bid him, "Good day," and separated himself from him. Why did Avraham have patience for everyone (certainly his pagan candidates left much to be desired), but not Lot? Why was Avraham so firm in demanding that he and his nephew part ways? Furthermore, it is not as if Avraham were unaware of Lot's moral and ethical shortcomings. Yet, he reached out to him, because he had hoped that perhaps he would succeed in convincing him to alter his deviant lifestyle. Lot's actions came as no surprise to Avraham. Why did he make such an about-face and divorce himself from his nephew? Does a disagreement among their herdsmen warrant such a harsh reaction?

Horav Moshe Neriyah, *zl.* addresses the source of the controversy between Lot's and Avraham's shepherds. *Va'yehi riv bein roei mikneh Avram u'bein roei mikneh Lot*, "There was quarrelling between the herdsmen of Avram's cattle and those of Lot's cattle" (ibid 13:18). *Chazal* describe the nature of this controversy: The animals of (belonging to) Avraham *Avinu* would go out muzzled (for fear that they might eat from the fields of others without permission), while the animals belonging to Lot were not muzzled." Lot's herdsmen excused their actions, claiming, "Hashem told Avraham, 'To your seed, I will give this Land' (ibid 12:7). Avraham is barren, unable to have children. He will pass from this world and Lot, his nephew, will be his heir. The animals are eating from their own (or what will eventually one day be theirs)." Alternatively, when Avraham's shepherds accused Lot's shepherds of stealing, they would respond, "Stealing? You are the ones that are acting inappropriately by depriving animals of a proper, nutritious meal. You keep them muzzled, thereby not permitting them to eat more, when it actually belongs to them."

We see from the arrogant manner in which Lot's herdsmen presented their claim to whatever produce their animals ate, that it was not simply "them" talking. They had a "*rebbe*," mentor, who *paskened*, ruled, and guided them. They followed their mentor's definition of right and wrong, proper and inappropriate. Apparently, if they were to permit themselves to allow their animals to eat from anywhere they chose, it would be with Lot's direction and blessing. *Rav Neriyah* sees this not as a case of petty theft, but rather, as the espousal of a perverted and malignant ideology

which permitted them to do and take what they wanted because, after all, one day it would all be theirs.

In other words, Lot's herdsmen implied: "We follow the direction of our mentor, Lot, not Avraham." Once Lot had become a "*rav*" and a "*posek*," it was too dangerous for Avraham to be in his proximity. Controversy based upon perverted ideology is no longer a "difference of opinion." It is a scourge that destroys. We have no room for negotiation with corrupt ideology. The time had arrived for *Hipared nah meilal*, "Let us separate." Lot's further actions indicated that it was much more than a momentary difference of opinion. Lot was opposing Avraham across the board, because he now believed in himself and in his ability to define and determine what was right and what was wrong. He was not privy to Avraham's standards. He was doing it his way. He had his own standards. He was his own *rav* and *posek*. It is sad how today we see that the more things change, the more they really stay the same.

ויבא הפליט ויגד לאברהם העברי

Then there came the fugitive and told Avram, the Ivri. (14:13)

Avraham *Avinu* was not the first righteous person to believe in and follow Hashem. He was the first one whom Hashem chose to be the progenitor of His great nation, *Klal Yisrael*. Shem ben Noah is referred to as a *Kohen l'Keil Elyon*, Priest to the G-d on High. That seems to be a distinguished reference. Yet, Hashem passed him over for Avraham. Why? Shem was always righteous. He assisted his father in building the *Teivah*, Ark, and devoted his life to solitude, removing himself from society. The problem is that after witnessing the destruction of humanity and spending an entire year immersed in acts of *chesed*, kindness, Shem continued business as usual. He did not change. He left the Ark in much the same way, on the same level, as when he had entered. He learned this way of life from his father, Noah, "who walked with G-d." He was a priest to G-d Above, and this is where Shem remained: above, out of touch, secluded, leaving no influence or impact on the world around him.

Hashem wanted someone who would be *korei b'Shem Hashem*, call out in the Name of G-d, who would declare his faith and reach out to the world and bring them closer to the monotheistic faith. Avraham lived within the world. He was a part of society. He understood people. Nonetheless, he remained Avraham the *Ivri*, which means on one side, opposite the rest of the world. He reached out to the world from his chosen side. He did not compromise his faith, his "side." He never wavered, because he was not on the same side as they were. Avraham cared about the world, about the people, praying for them, teaching them about Hashem. He was the pillar of kindness in a world where corruption and *middas Sodom*, characteristic of the evil of Sodom, was a way of life, but he did it all from his side – not theirs.

We derive a powerful lesson from this. We, his heirs, are *Ivrim*, a term which connotes opposite. It is important that we never waver in our commitment. Flexibility and outreach are critical, but never cross sides.

The combination of Avraham/Avram *HaIvri* is written in the Torah but once – when our Patriarch gathered his students and went out to battle armies much greater than himself. He was the *Ivri* – on one side; one man opposite the world; a world opposing him at every step. He battled with Amrafel, the evil king whose goal was to spread his pagan beliefs to an unsuspecting world, and the king of Sodom, whose Draconian laws were undermining the development of a moral, ethical, decent society. Amrafel and Sodom were antagonists in a war that was destroying the world. They fought against one another, but they had one common enemy: Avraham. He was against idol worship, and he promoted lovingkindness. Neither one of those evil misfits had a place for him in their lives. Their agenda certainly did not include the likes of Avraham or his beliefs. Our Patriarch battled against this united evil which Amrafel and Sodom represented. How did he expect to win?

Horav Moshe Neriyah, zl, explains that Avraham was always alone against the world. He was acutely aware that his survival was dependent upon one factor: Hashem. He knew that, by the laws of nature, he did not have a chance of success. He understood that he was *Ivri* – on one side, alone, against a world being devoured by paganism and immorality in which ethics and moral decency were taboo. Without Hashem, he had no chance. With Hashem, he had no competition.

This has been our legacy, bequeathed to us from the first *Ivri*. Yosef *HaTzaddik* followed suit; so did the *meyaldos*, Egyptian midwives, Yocheved and Miriam. They stood up for what was right and true. Thus, they are characterized as *Ivri, Ivriyos*. When we surrender to pressure – be it external, or even from our own liberal, progressive left who are prepared to undermine Jewish law in order to achieve acceptance and inclusion – we lose the characterization of *Ivri*. It is not enough to be a *Yehudi*: One must also be an *Ivri*, willing to stand alone and battle for Torah values.

**אם מחוט ועד שרוך נעל ואם אקה מכל אשר לך ולא תאמר אני העשרתי את אברם.
I will not take so much as a thread or a sandal strap of what is yours;
you shall not say, "It is I who made Avram rich." (14:23)**

Avraham *Avinu* refused to accept any material gifts from the king of Sodom. He was not interested in the pagan patting himself on the back knowing that he had increased Avraham's wealth. Yet, we do not find this same attitude when Pharaoh offered gifts. Avraham readily accepted them. Furthermore, when Avraham had an incident with Avimelech, in which the king sought to assuage his guilt, he, too, gave Avraham gifts, which the Patriarch also accepted. Why did he refuse the gifts from the Sodomite king, yet accept the gifts proffered by Pharaoh and Avimelech? *Horav Baruch Dov Povarsky, Shlita*, explains that actually Avraham refused to accept gifts from all three kings. Pharaoh and Avimelech's gifts, however, were different in the sense that they constituted compensation for their mistreatment of Sarah *Imeinu*. Thus, they never viewed their gifts as altruistic renderings, but rather, as a form of appeasement to assuage their guilt feelings. Indeed, in Avimelech's case, it was a sort of remuneration for Avraham's prayer in his behalf that he be healed from the plagues that were his well-deserved punishment.

Having said this, Avraham's acceptance of gifts from Avimelech and Pharaoh was actually a form of giving, since, by taking their gifts, he was basically granting them absolution for their revolting behavior. Indeed, using their own unique powers of deep insight, *gedolei Yisrael* are able to discern from whom to accept gifts and from whom not to.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* questions why, earlier in the *parsha*, Avraham comments that perhaps the Egyptians might give him presents when they leave. Even if he had had good reason to accept their "reparations," it should not have been something which he actively sought or to which he looked forward to receiving. This sounds inconsistent with the image of the Avraham *Avinu* that we have contrived up in our minds.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* cites the *pasuk* in *Chayei Sarah*, "And to the children of the concubines that were to Avraham, he gave gifts and sent them away (ibid 25:6)." *Rashi* explains that these were no ordinary gifts, but rather, everything that he received as a result of Sarah's stay in Egypt and Plishtim and other gifts, he gave them to them because he refused to derive any benefit from the pagans. Why did Avraham do this? The *Rosh Yeshivah* asks further: How could Avraham give his material possessions away to the children of the concubines? His material possessions, having first belonged to him, incurred a degree of *kedushah*, holiness, because they had served an *adam kadosh*, holy man. The material possessions of a holy person develop spiritual status as a result of their consecration for a higher purpose. This is all the more reason that Avraham certainly would not have wanted to share his possessions with the heathens.

This, explains the *Rosh Yeshivah*, is the reason that Avraham sought Pharaoh's and Avimelech's gifts. He did not accept them for personal use. He knew that he would have to leave something for the *bnei*

ha'plagshim, and he refused to defile his consecrated possessions by giving them away to them. Thus, when he had the opportunity to benefit from Pharaoh and Sodom, he did so.

**אל תירא אברם אנכי מגן לך. שכרך הרבה מאד.
Fear not, Avram, I am a shield for you. Your reward shall be very great.
(15:1)**

The words, "Your reward shall be very great," imply that not only is a reward waiting for Avraham *Avinu*, but the reward that had normally been stored away on his behalf was not diminished as a result of the miracles which were wrought for him. Why is this? Yaakov *Avinu* feared that his *z'chusim*, merits, would be diminished as a result of Hashem's saving him from Eisav's reach. Why should Avraham be different? Indeed, is this not what reward is all about?

Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl, quoted by *Horav Boruch Dov Povarsky, Shlita*, compares this world to an upscale restaurant in which the food prices are commensurate with the surrounding ambience. A cup of coffee in a greasy drive-in will certainly be more economical than a cup of coffee served on china at a table, in a luxurious, carpeted dining room with beautiful paintings on the wall, accompanied by soft music piped in through a superior sound system. Everything costs money. It might be the very same cup of coffee, but once it is served amid luxury, the price rises.

Our world is a fancy restaurant which offers us every ambience to accompany our enjoyment. We must remember that the luxury does not come cheap. It costs, and we must pay. The more we enjoy, the more we pay. Therefore, *tzaddikim*, righteous people, who seem relegated to a life of frugality and are sustained on the bare minimum, are actually benefitting greatly. By sufficing with less, they gain more, because their reward/merit account has not diminished.

One exception exists to the "coffee in the upscale restaurant pricing" rule: the waiters. Someone who works at the establishment eats whatever he wants for free. Workers do not pay. Furthermore, nothing is deducted from their pay. It is usually one of the perks of employment. This is what Hashem intimated to Avraham (explains the *Ponovezher Rosh Yeshivah*): You have nothing to worry about. You are a company man. As a result of your extraordinary humility, you might consider yourself to be a guest who pays dearly for the food and other pleasures he receives. You are wrong. As a man on a mission to elevate the glory of Heaven and teach a pagan world about monotheism, you are assisting in maintaining My world. You will not lose as a result of your material enjoyment.

Rav Yisrael teaches that in order for one to pass through this world and not have the benefits that he experiences have a depreciating effect on his merit account, he should become a company man and do whatever is in his power to raise the glory of Heaven, to reach out to Jews and bring them under the *kanfei ha'Shechinah*, the ways of the Divine Presence.

לזכר נשמת
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The Feigenbaum Family
Hebrew Academy of Cleveland, ©All rights reserved
prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum