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Keep Your Enemies Close – Parshas Lech Lecha
By Raphael Grunfeld - 10 Heshvan 5783 – November 3, 2022

These highlights from the Parsha Shiur of **Haga'on Harav Dovid Feinstein, zt"l**, are brought to you by Raphael Grunfeld, a partner in the Wall Street law firm of Carter Ledyard & Milburn LLP, who received semicha in Yoreh Yoreh from Mesivtha

Tifereth Jerusalem of America and in Yadin Yadin from Harav, Haga'on Dovid Feinstein, zt"l. and who attended his weekly parshah shiur for twenty years.

“Va'avarcha m'varachecha... v'nivrechu vecha kol mishpechos ha'adama – I will bless those who bless you... and all the families of the earth will be blessed through you” (12:3). The words v'nivrechu vecha not only mean that the families of the earth will be blessed through you, but also that they will be grafted onto the Jewish people. When other nations see that by simply blessing Avram, they too will be blessed, they will want to convert to Judaism. Jews by birth who may be practicing Judaism out of habit will be strengthened in their commitment to Torah by the fresh enthusiasm and conviction of such converts.

G-d tells Avram to go to the land “that I will show you” without naming the land. So, Avram wanders through the land of Canaan, likely passing many places, but the Torah only mentions two specific locations: Shechem and Alon Moreh. In Shechem he experiences a troubling prophecy, a vision of the sons of Ya'akov fighting there. He does not yet know whether the children of Yaakov fighting in Shechem are his own descendants, or if the land of Canaan is his own land, because G-d has not told this to him yet. Perhaps the children of Yaakov are not his biological children but are merely his students, in the spirit of “whoever teaches Torah to his friend's son is regarded as if he had fathered him” (Sanhedrin 19b).”

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In Alon Moreh, which is close to Shechem, he experiences a joyful prophecy. He has a vision of the descendants of Yaakov pledging collective responsibility to the Torah at Mount Gerizim and Mount Eival. Avram understands that what appears to be negative infighting in Shechem can turn out to be positive unity at Alon Moreh. If there has been sinas chinam, selfish hatred, there might also be ahavas chinam, selfless love. But if you have not experienced the former, you will not fully appreciate the latter. It is only after Avram demonstrates his own ahavas chinam, by praying for the welfare of others and celebrating the joy of others in a land of others, that G-d tells him in pasuk 7 that these are his biological children, and this is indeed his own land.

No sooner has G-d told Avram that the land of Israel belongs to him and his descendants, there is a famine in the land and Avram finds himself on the road to Egypt.

This is one of the tests of faith he undergoes to see whether he will question G-d. Fearing that Pharaoh will kill him and take Sarai as his wife, Avram asks Sarai to tell Pharaoh that she is his sister, “lmaan yitav li va’avureich, v’chaysa nafshi big’lalech – so that it will be good for me because of you, and I will live thanks to you” (12:13). Rashi interprets these words to mean that the Egyptians will give Avram gifts. But that begs the question. Why does Avraham add the words v’chaysa nafshi big’lalech. Obviously, Avram cannot enjoy gifts if he is not alive. And why use the word “nafshi”?

G-d did not directly instruct Avraham to go down to Egypt. The Gemara informs us that there was no mass exodus from Canaan to Egypt. People were able to survive the famine in Canaan, even if only with difficulty. But Avram felt compelled to go down to Egypt of his own accord, even if he did not yet know why. And in so doing, he set the stage for the ultimate survival of the Jews in Egypt.

Like Nachum Ish Gamzu, Avram understood that the famine was for the best. Lmaan yitav li va’avureich means gam zu l’tovah (this too is for the best). In asking Sarai to pretend she was his sister, a ruse which led to Pharaoh being stricken with a skin disease that made intimacy with her impossible, Avram and Sarai guaranteed the future purity of the nefesh of the Jewish people. Even though the Egyptians were later given the power to enslave the Jews, they did not dare touch the Jewish women, out of fear that what happened to Pharaoh years earlier, would happen to them.

As a result, the Torah can vouch that the pedigree of all the twelve tribes was unadulterated. It does so by adding two letters of G-d’s name, the letters yud and hei, to the names of the tribes, as in mishpachas haChanochi (Rashi to Bamidbar 26:5 and Tehillim 122:4.). In addition, by acting in this way, Avram and Sarai guaranteed that the twelve tribes would not assimilate with the Egyptians but would live apart in the land of Goshen. Chazal tell us that the land of Goshen was given to Sarai by Pharaoh, in compensation for the stress he caused her and that it was later bequeathed to Joseph’s brothers when they arrived in Egypt (Bereishit 47:6, Pirkei DeRabi Eliezer 26:7). By creating these two precedents in Egyptian history, which resulted in the Egyptians desisting from having relations with Jewish women and earmarking the land of Goshen for the Jews, Avram and Sarai saved the Jewish soul from

corruption and assimilation. That is the meaning of v’chaysa nafshi big’lalech.

As a result of the gifts Pharaoh lavished on them, both Avram and Lot became extremely wealthy. But they related to their wealth very differently, “V’Avram kaveid me’od bamikneh bakesef u’vazahav – Avram was exceedingly wealthy, in livestock, silver and gold” (13:2). The word kaveid means that Avram considered his wealth a burden and the word me’od means he suffered from this burden, (Midrash Rabbah, Bereishis 9:8). Avram did not need all that wealth to live, and he understood that G-d had deposited it in his bank account in trust for other less fortunate people. He was now burdened with the responsibility of finding those people and making sure he fulfilled his function as paying agent. Shlomo Hemelech’s warning that “osher shamur livalav l’ra’aso – riches hoarded by their owner to his misfortune” (Kohelet 5:12) did not apply to Avram.

With Lot it was different. Although we are told “V’gam l’Lot...haya tzon u’vakar v’ohalim,” (13:5) we do not find the words kaveid me’od. For Lot, whatever he had was nice, but it was not enough. He was the perfect example of Natan Habavli’s adage that whoever has 100 desires 200. And so, in addition to the abundance he already had, he sent his animals to graze in the fields of others. This caused strife between Avram and Lot.

Let us not quarrel says, Avram, for we are “anashim achim” (13:8). Avram and Lot were not brothers; they were uncle and nephew, relatives. But what Avram meant is that even though we have to part ways to end the strife, I will always be there for you in times of crisis when you say “ach” and groan in pain (Rashi, Bereishis 7:23). Avram would always be there for Lot, to step into the breach, “la’achos es hakera,” as he did when he waged war with the five kings and rescued Lot from captivity.

G-d promises Avram (Bereishis 13:15) that He will give him the land forever (“ad olam”). What happened to that promise? True, we are no longer in Eretz Yisrael, because “mipnei chata’einu galinu mei’artzeinu,” as we say in the Yom Tov davening, but it is still and always will be artzeinu, our land. Nobody can take that ownership right away from us, even as they squat in our land. A yerusha can be taken away, but not a nachalah. Unlike the land of Moav, which changed ownership when conquered by Sichon, the ownership of Eretz Yisrael belongs to us, irrespective of who has possession of it.

That the land belongs to us even as we live in the Diaspora is confirmed by the very next pasuk in which G-d says, "I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth." When the Jews live in Israel, they are not compared to the dust of the earth. They are compared to the stars of the heavens. It is only when they are living in the Diaspora that they are compared to the dust of the earth, because everybody treads on them. The juxtaposition of these two verses, one guaranteeing that Eretz Yisrael will be our land forever and the other telling us that we will be like the dust of the earth, proves that the land belongs to us forever, irrespective of where we live.

"Vayehi bimei Amrafel" (14:1). We know that the word "vayehi" always spells trouble. What was the trouble with the war that Avram won against the five kings?

There are three reasons given to explain why the Jews were enslaved in Egypt for 210 years (Nedarim 32a). The first is because Avram mobilized his Torah students to fight in the battle instead of hiring mercenaries (14:14). The second is because Avram asked G-d for a guarantee that his descendants would inherit the land ("ba'ma eidah ki irashena") when he should have trusted G-d without guarantees (15:8). The third is that he allowed the King of Sedom to keep the war prisoners of Sedom instead of taking possession of them and converting them to Judaism (14:21).

It was Avram asking Hashem for a guarantee that that was the root cause of the other two incidents. No concrete action was involved in asking for the guarantee. It was merely words. But it showed a lack of trust in G-d that led to the two concrete actions in the war of the five kings. It was lack of trust in the ability to put together an army in short order that led Avram to mobilize the Torah students on hand, instead of allowing them to continue to study. And it was lack of trust that G-d would help him convert the wayward prisoners of Sedom that led him to give them up and abandon them in the custody of the King of Sedom.

The academic question ba'ma eidah ki irashena would in itself have not led to the punishment of Mitzraim, but it was the practical application of this question in the war of the five Kings, that triggered it. That was the vayehi.

When Sarai understood that she could not bear a child, she consented to Avraham having relations with her maidservant Hagar. Somehow, Sarai understood that her

having a child was dependent on Hagar having a child, "ulai ibaneh mimenah" (16:2). Sarai could only build her family on the back of Hagar's family. We know that Yaakov could not exist without Eisav. He needed Eisav to keep him keep in line. Yaakov would only rule over Eisav if he remained loyal to the Torah. The moment Yaakov strayed from adherence to the Torah, Eisav would rule over him (Bereishis 27:40 and Bereishis Rabbah 67:7).

The same was true for Yitzchak. He needed his archenemy Yishmael nearby to keep him in line. If Avram would never have married Hagar, Yishmael would never have been born and, in turn, Yitzchak could never have been born. The intervention of Hagar in the story of Avram and Sarai was essential for Yitzchak. This existential link between Yitzchak and Hagar can be seen from the gematria of Hagar which is 208, the same as the gematria of Yitzchak.

From: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <ryfrand@torah.org> to: ravfrand@torah.org date: Nov 3, 2022, 5:51 PM subject: Rav Frand - Kiruv Success "On the Road, " But Not at Home

Parshas Lech Lecha

Kiruv Success "On the Road," But Not at Home

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: #1135 – "Schar Pe'sios" – Should You Walk Or Drive To Shul (on weekdays). Good Shabbos!

In enumerating those who accompanied Avram on his journey from Charan, the Torah mentions that he took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, the property that they acquired, and "the souls they made in Charan" (Bereshis 12:5). Chazal say that "the souls made in Charan" were individuals that Avram "brought under the Wings of the Shechinah." In other words, these were people whom he introduced to monotheism, and whom he influenced to reject Avodah Zarah.

In the beginning of the Rambam's Hilchos Avodah Zarah, he describes the development of the theology of Avodah Zarah in the world, and how Avraham Avinu was the first iconoclast. Avram influenced the inhabitants of Charan and had many followers who accompanied him when he left on his journey to Eretz Yisrael.

Rav Shlomo Glasner, a grandson of the Chasam Sofer, notes that Avram was not originally from Charan. Avram originally grew up in Ur Kasdim. The Medrash describes how Avram began his lifelong battle against Avodah Zarah in Ur Kasdim. He was challenged by Nimrod, the ruling power, who worshipped the god of fire. Nimrod threw Avram into a fiery pit to “see if your G-d can save you from the power of my god.” The Medrash says that Avram was miraculously saved from the fiery furnace. Some Rishonim count this challenge as the first of the ten challenges that Avraham Avinu endured (per Avos 5:3).

The question must be asked, why was Avram apparently only successful in bringing people “under the Wings of the Shechina” in Charan? What happened in Ur Kasdim? Why was he not successful in drawing people to the concept of monotheism in his home town of Ur Kasdim? We would imagine that after having witnessed Avram miraculously escape from Nimrod’s attempt to kill him, the people in Ur Kasdim would have certainly been ready to listen to Avram’s message of One G-d and follow him! And yet, it appears that Avram only succeeded in his ‘kiruv’ efforts in Charan. Why was that?

Rav Shlomo Glasner gives an interesting answer. Imagine the scene: All the town people were gathered. Nimrod challenged Avram. The people are sitting in the bleachers watching. Avram jumps into the fiery furnace and emerges unscathed. One fellow says to the person next to him, “Look at that! That is amazing. This person must have a real G-d!” The person next to him says “Wait a minute. Not so quick. If this Avram fellow is for real, then why is his father still in the Avodah Zarah business?” If Avram had a true religion, wouldn’t he first have an effect on his own family members? And yet, his father rejected it. People murmured, “There must be something fishy here.” Avram must have worn a fire-retardant suit or something. Therefore, Avram did not have the same effect “at home” in Ur Kasdim that he later had in Charan, because there were sceptics in Ur Kasdim who tried to debunk the miracle, based on the fact that Avram’s immediate family appeared unimpressed.

A Kri U’Kesiv Teaches Avram’s Sensitivity to His Wife’s Privacy

“From there he relocated to the mountain east of Beth-el and pitched his tent (va’yet ahalo)...” (Bereshis 12:8). The word ‘ahalo’ in the expression “He pitched his tent (ahalo)” is spelled aleph hay lamed hay. Thus, the kesiv

(the way it is written) is actually “her tent” rather than the k’ri (the way it is read) which is “his tent.” Rashi comments on this, saying that Avram first pitched his wife’s tent, and only afterwards pitched his own tent.

Why did he do that? The Levush Ha’Orah, one of Rashi’s super-commentaries, explains that Avram did this to protect the tznius of Sora. She should have a tent to move into immediately, and not need to wait out in the open while he first pitched his tent. One of the outstanding character traits of Sora was her modesty. Chazal say that Avram didn’t even know what she looked like until they arrived in Mitzrayim. Her privacy and comfort drove Avram to prioritize the setting up of her living quarters above setting up his own tent.

How long does it take to pitch a tent? We are not talking about hours or days! And yet, the Levush Ha’Orah explains that this is what Rashi is saying. The sensitivity of Avram for his wife’s privacy was such that by employing this kri u’ksiv, the pasuk is alluding to the fact that he pitched her tent before his tent.

Every year, we mention that Sefer Bereshis is about the maxim Ma’aseh Avos siman l’Banim (the actions of the forefathers foreshadow the actions of the children). This lesson is also Ma’aseh Avos siman l’Banim. A Jewish husband must be sensitive to the feelings and sensitivities of his wife.

This dovetails with a Gemara in Bava Metzia 59a. Rav Chelbo says that a person must always be careful about the honor of his wife because blessing resides in a person’s home only by virtue of his wife. He brings another pasuk as a proof from this week’s parsha: “And Avram benefited because of her” (Bereshis 12:16). This means that a person’s honoring his wife is a segulah for parnassah. That is what the Gemara says!

This is ironic because everybody under the sun wants a “segulah for parnassah“. The Gemara gives an explicit segulah for parnassah—a person should honor his wife! Come and see how particular Avram was for the honor of Sora—he pitched her tent first so she did not need to stand there for an extra ten minutes out in the open.

I saw an interesting observation in the sefer Darash Mordechai from Rav Mordechai Druk: Why is a person’s honoring his wife a segulah for parnassah? How does that work? He explains that when Chava ate from the Eitz HaDaas (Tree of Knowledge) and then gave it to Adam, they were both cursed. Her curse was that “...your desire

shall be to your husband and he shall rule over you” (Bereshis 3:16). Her honor was thus impacted because her husband would now dominate her. So, if a person honors his wife and tries to lighten that curse then, measure for measure, his own curse will be lessened. What is the curse that Adam received? “By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread...” (Bereshis 3:19) In other words, you need to shvitz for parnassah. If a man honors his wife and makes her curse lighter, his own curse will be lightened, and his livelihood will come easier.

Better To Be “Too Wicked” Than To Be “Too Righteous”

The pasuk states, “There was a quarrel between the shepherds of the flocks of Avram and the shepherds of the flocks of Lot, and the Canani and the Perizi then dwelt in the land.” (Bereshis 13:7). A fight broke out between the respective herdsmen of Avram and Lot. Lot’s shepherds let their livestock graze on property that was not theirs, basically stealing from the owners of those properties. Avram instructed his shepherds to muzzle the cattle when they are on land that belonged to other people so they would not graze where they were not allowed to graze.

Avram tells Lot, “Lot, I love you like a nephew, but it is time for us to part ways. You go whichever way you want to go, but we cannot live together anymore.” That is what happens. Lot journeys on to Sodom.

The question must be asked: Avram had influence over thousands of people. Why can’t he sit down with his own flesh and blood and reason with him? Why can’t he influence Lot to instruct his shepherds not to steal other people’s crops?

The answer is that Lot felt that he had a legal right to graze his cattle wherever he wanted! The pasuk emphasizes, “The Canani and the Perizi then dwelt in the land.” Lot reasoned that Avram was destined to inherit all the Land of Canaan. Based on G-d’s Promise, it really belonged to Avram. Avram was an elderly man who did not have children. Who would inherit the land from him? It would be his next of kin, namely, Lot himself. By this convoluted logic, Lot felt that he was merely taking what was soon going to be his anyhow. That is why he felt that there was no theft involved, and he could not be convinced otherwise.

It is possible to have influence over people when they know they are wrong. But if people believe they are right,

talking to them from today until tomorrow is not going to help! Rav Ruderman, zt”l, used to say: It says in Koheles “Don’t be too much of a Tzadik... Don’t be too much of a Rasha.” (Koheles 7:16-17). Rav Ruderman used to ask, “Which is worse?” He would answer, it is better to be too much of a Rasha than too much of a Tzadik. When a person is wicked, he knows that he is wicked, and he knows that he needs to change. But a person who views himself as a Tzadik never considers the possibility that he might be wrong and that he, too, might need to change. It is impossible to talk to such people. A classic example was Lot. He felt that “al pi din” (by legal right) he was permitted to graze his cattle on other people’s land. So there was no way he could be talked out of it.

Avram realized this. Therefore, he bid his nephew farewell and said, “Lot you go your way and I will go my way.”

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subject Starting Avraham's Journey
Lech Lecha 5783

Was Avraham an Influencer? Rabbi Moshe Taragin

Avraham was selected by Hashem to transform a dark pagan world by educating them about a “one G-d”. For thousands of years, Hashem’s presence was obscured from a lost world lost which had fallen into moral disarray. Finally, one man discovered Hashem and he was determined to inspire his fellow human beings to a life of religion and meaning.

Avraham's first teaching opportunity arose in the aftermath of a bloody battle. For 25 years, the world was engulfed in a vicious conflict, incited by a large-scale rebellion against four oppressive tyrants. Avraham was slowly dragged onto the battlefield, in part to quell the violence, and in part, to rescue his nephew Lot who had been taken as prisoner of war. Avraham liberated his nephew and rescued the entire kingdom of Sedom from these belligerent and repressive monarchs.

As was common practice in the ancient era, Avraham, a military hero, was offered lavish financial compensations as well as human reward in the form of the citizens of Sedom who would now be reassigned to him and become members of his clan.

Avraham lifts his hands to Heaven and foreswears any reward or any "people transfer", refusing even to accept something as meager as a shoe-string. This disavowal of reward is both noble-spirited and expected. Avraham aspires to establish a new moral standard and the best way to begin is to avoid any trace of greediness or desire for profit. Greed is a dark and powerful human instinct especially when we sense the opportunity for free profits. The thought of profiting upon the misfortunes of others is repugnant and this move would sabotage Avraham's lofty moral agenda. To memorialize Avraham's moral courage, we wear string-laden tzizit as a constant reminder to live within ourselves and within our resources, rather than chasing unbridled consumerist longing.

Though his frugal rejection of war loot is admirable, Avraham's refusal to naturalize the citizens of Sedom is surprising. The residents of the corrupt city of Sedom would soon be incinerated in a hail of sulphuric fire and heavenly flames. This is a perfect opportunity for Avraham to save the souls of condemned sinners and convert them to Judaism. Avraham stumbles upon a giftwrapped opportunity to save people from a looming disaster, yet, he takes a pass. His decision is so odd and is so incongruous with his mission, that the Gemara itself critiques him. What could possibly have convinced Avraham to reject these potential converts?

Education of Manipulation

After his heroic rescue mission, Avraham enjoys extraordinary popularity. He was heralded by kings and lauded by grateful soldiers whom he had protected on the battlefield. Most of all, the average common citizen was indebted to Avraham for saving their lives.

If Avraham parlays his influence to inculcate his new religious ideas, those ideas may not be authentically incorporated. How genuine would people's acceptance of Avraham's ideology be if they were coerced to consent because Avraham was so popular and because he enjoyed a position of such authority? Given his wild popularity they may sheepishly follow his lead, but it is unlikely that they would deeply internalize his new notions about religion and morality.

Moreover, is it even fair of Avraham to take advantage of his stature and his rising popularity to indoctrinate others? Using our moral authority or our popularity to aggressively influence others can be intrusive and manipulative. It is one thing to suggest ideas or even to passionately assert our beliefs. However, when our audience has no choice but to accept our opinions, we must be exceedingly careful about how we offer our opinions and how strong we peddle our influence. It may work in the short term but rarely yields genuine education. Even when this approach is successful it raises several moral red flags. Avraham pauses before he exerts his popularity and influence upon the impressionable people of Sedom and perhaps, as the gemara implies, he made an incorrect decision. However, his moral quandary was vital for preserving his moral integrity.

These are very delicate questions about the manner in which we convince people of our ideas. When we are deeply committed to values, we share our opinions with others hoping to persuade them to our view. However, we must also check ourselves against manipulating or deceiving others. Do we spread our influence in a respectful and dignified manner which doesn't insult the intelligence of our listeners? Do we abuse our positions of authority to unduly influence other people, thereby robbing them of their autonomy and personal discretion?

There are no easy answers to this dilemma, but these are important questions worth pondering-especially for educators and Rabbis.

Information or Influence

Avraham's dilemma also sheds light upon our current cultural moment. The internet, and in particular, social media have empowered us to spread our influence to larger audiences than ever before. At best, the internet makes us better informed people, as it allows information to flow more freely and more efficiently. The internet is a

portal which grants us access to wisdom, knowledge, and expertise which we don't personally possess.

However social media doesn't just better inform us it also powerfully influences us. Social media has manufactured a new public figure called an influencer, who aims to shape our opinions and behavior. Generally, "influencers" do not possess particular talent or unique expertise, but manage to get our attention as they continuously garner followers and "likes". Social media empowers them to impact our purchase decisions, our thought, our opinions, and our social and political behavior.

We thoughtlessly submit ourselves to the influence of people who possess nothing more than celebrity or notoriety. Often influencers pontificate about topics which they are completely ignorant of preaching about politics, culture or religion.

Additionally, by submitting ourselves to the influence of others we abdicate our freedom of decision, often falling prey to group think and to herd mentality. Ironically the internet, which was meant to democratize information, and empower personal autonomy, often shrinks our freedom of thought and of opinion.

Addicted to Influence

Sadly, our culture celebrates the phenomenon of influencing others. We start to define ourselves and our worth based upon our capacity to influence others, rather than upon our principles, character or achievements. As we thirst for more and more influence, we become more dependent upon public approval for our self-esteem. We act provocatively just to draw attention to ourselves and "feed the monster" and satiate our desire for public attention.

In a tragic irony, the "influencer" becomes the "influenced". Influencing others becomes so addictive that our personal behavior is, itself, influenced by our overwhelming desire to influence others. Are "influencers" the ultimate "influencees"?

Religion is about Inherent Value

Religious people look for inherent value and not "social value" or value based upon public opinion. We construct lifestyles of which should be internally self-sufficient and should not require external social validation.

The validity and integrity of a religious life should never be a product of how much that lifestyle influences other people. Believing deeply in the nobility and meaning of a

religious life, we certainly desire others to be similarly inspired, but our own evaluation and appreciation of religion must come from within and not from the impact our religious values have upon others. Too much influence peddling can distract us from the that inner validation which lies at the core of religious meaning. Influence can often degrade meaning. Influence comes and goes, meaning is built to last

<https://www.jpost.com/jewish-world/judaism/parshat-vayera-sacrificing-the-future>

Parshat Vayera: Sacrificing the future **By Rabbi Shlomo Riskin**

"And it happened after these things, and the Lord tested [or proved, or held aloft as a banner or example] Abraham, and said unto him, 'Abraham,' and he said, 'Here I am.'" (Genesis 22:1). Even after the recent conflict in Lebanon again tested the cracks in Israeli society and brought the country to a new period of self-examination, one of the fundamental issues still plaguing the state is how to respond to the Palestinians. Is our position not to give up "even one inch" - that the borders of Israel are clearly delineated in the Bible and we are forbidden to relinquish any portion of it? Or are we duty-bound to seek peace even if that means giving up territory, and even if past events prove the folly of leaving settlements? Fascinatingly, both positions can be found within our biblical commentaries - specifically in the manner in which they interpret the difficult commandment given to Abraham: to sacrifice his son Isaac. This week's reading of Vayera concludes with one of the most agonizing incidents of the entire Bible, in which God orders Abraham to "Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and get yourself to the Land of Moriah, and lift him up there as a whole burnt offering on one of the mountains" (Genesis 22:1, 2). The narrative seems to link this most problematic Divine order to a prior incident by introducing the story with: "And it happened after these things" What things, and how do these things - whatever they are - affect God's command? The Rashbam (Rabbenu Shmuel ben Meir, grandson of the famous Rashi), after confirming that it is indeed the biblical style to employ cause-and-effect, sin-and-punishment connections between incidents that follow each other, suggests that "here too, after the cutting of a covenant between Abraham and Abimelech allowing the

Philistine's children and grandchildren to continue living in Gerar [Gaza], the Holy one Blessed be He became angry; after all, this 'land of the Philistines' is within the boundaries of Israel. [Abraham is giving up part of the heritage that God had given to his descendants], so God reproved Abraham. It is as though He said, 'You are so proud of the son that I gave you that you agreed to a covenant between you and their [Abimelech's] descendants! Now go and bring him [your son] up as a whole burnt offering, and see what benefit this covenant [with Abimelech] will bring you!' (Rashbam ad loc). In effect, the Rashbam is castigating Abraham for signing away some of the patrimony that God gave his descendants. Abraham has no right to cede property that doesn't belong to him alone but rather to succeeding generations. This is what Yitzhak Tabenkin explained to David Ben-Gurion when he advised the prime minister to refuse an early partition plan that would have granted us a paltry state. "I took counsel with two individuals, and they convinced me that you must reject the offer. I asked my grandfather and I asked my grandson; my grandfather who has been dead for 10 years, and my grandson who has not yet been born." At the same time, however, there is another commentary reported in the name of the Midrash Enelow: "'And it happened after these things' - after Abraham sent away Hagar and Ishmael just one chapter before. Then, as now, 'Abraham rose up early in the morning.' Then after hearing Sarah's wish to banish Hagar the handmaiden and his first-born son Ishmael confirmed by God - whereupon he sends them with bread and a jug of water - but without gold or silver, and without even sufficient provisions for a desert journey. ('And he [Abraham] sent her [Hagar] away, and she went and wandered in the desert.')" And now, just as Ishmael was forced to wander through the desert, Abraham will be forced to go and wander among the mountains with his son Isaac. "And she went and sat opposite, the distance of the fling of an arrow, saying I do not wish to see the death of the child;" Abraham caused Hagar to see her son die, and he will be forced to see - and even bring about - Isaac's death. "And an angel of God called out to Hagar from the heavens, informing her that Ishmael shall live and become a great nation, just as an angel of God will stop Abraham's hand, and promise that a great and numerous nation will emerge from Isaac." Was the Akeda a punishment for Abraham's insensitivity toward

Ishmael? Yes, because although he was obligated to banish the handmaiden and her son, that didn't necessarily include issuing a death warrant by virtue of sending them out to the desert as penniless paupers lacking provisions. Even the Ramban, the most passionate lover of Israel, takes Abraham to task. When Sarah afflicts Hagar for treating her mistress [Sarah] "lightly" and causes her to flee, Ramban comments: "Our matriarch sinned by this affliction, and so did Abraham by allowing her to act in such a manner. And so God heard her [Hagar's] pain and gave her a son who would become a wild ass of a man, and will afflict the seed of Abraham and Sarah with all types of affliction" (Ramban, on Genesis 16:6). It is quite possible that eventually we - the children of Isaac and the children of Ishmael - shall eventually share this land, the apex of the world. Perhaps God only wished that the two boys not grow up together; perhaps the problem lay with Sarah, who would not allow a shared inheritance, who would not stand for "the son of this hand-maiden inheriting together with Isaac" (Gen. 21:10). After all, it is the angel of heaven who prophesies that "he [Ishmael] shall dwell in the face of all of his brothers" (Gen. 16:12), and it is the Bible that informs us that Ishmael eventually repents (Gen. 25:9, Rashi ad loc). If the eternal words of the Bible are great enough and inclusive enough to allow for such diverse and conflicting explanations, can we not understand how contemporary Israel is likewise fractured with such diverse and conflicting viewpoints? And if we clearly uphold one side of the argument, ought we not at least respect - and not delegitimize - those who uphold the other? The writer is the founder and chancellor of Ohr Torah Stone Colleges and Graduate programs, and chief rabbi of Efrat.

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Adapted by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks; From the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

There appears to be a contradiction between the name of this Sidra and its content. For "Lech Lecha," as the Sicha will explain, means "Go to yourself"—Abraham's movement towards the fulfillment of his task. But the Sidra describes a series of events which happened to Abraham, seeming to deflect him from his mission. The

Rebbe resolves the contradiction by going in depth into the meaning of fulfillment, or “ascent,” for the Jew.

1. What’s in a Name?

Names are not accidents in Torah. We find in many places that the name of a person or a thing tells us about its nature. And the same is true of the Sidrot. The names they bear are a cue to their content, even though on the face of it they are simply taken from the first words of the Sidra and are there, as it were, by chance. For there is no such thing as pure chance in events, since everything happens by Divine Providence; certainly in matters of Torah.

We might think that the names of the Sidrot are a relatively late convention, since we are not certain that they are mentioned in the Talmud,¹ while the names of the books of the Torah² and of the divisions of the Mishnah³ are all detailed there. But there is a law relating to legal documents, that a name mentioned in one becomes a name recognized by Torah law if it has stood unchallenged for 30 days.⁴ A fortiori, since the names of the Sidrot have stood unchallenged for more than 1,000 years, and are mentioned by the Sages (Rashi,⁵ for example), they are recognized as such by Torah.

So we can sum up the inner content of the whole of this week’s Sidra by understanding the implications of its name: Lech Lecha.

2. Lech Lecha: Go To Yourself

This is usually translated as “Get thee out (from your country and your birthplace and your father’s house....)” But it literally means, “Go to yourself.” “Going” has the connotation in Torah of moving towards one’s ultimate purpose—of service towards one’s Creator. And this is strongly hinted at by the phrase, “Go to yourself”—meaning, towards your soul’s essence⁶ and your ultimate purpose, that for which you were created.

This was the command given to Abraham, and the first part of the narrative bears this out. For he was told to leave his heathen background and go to Israel. And within Israel he was “going and journeying to the South,” that is, towards Jerusalem. He was moving progressively towards an ever increasing degree of holiness. But then we suddenly find: “And there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt.” Why this sudden reversal of his spiritual journey, especially as the whole Sidra (as testified by its name) is supposed to contain an account of Abraham’s continual progress towards his fulfillment?

3. Ascent or Descent?

That it was a reversal seems clear. To go to Egypt was itself a spiritual descent—as the verse explicitly says, “And Abram went down to Egypt.” And the cause of his journey—“and there was a famine in the land”—also seems like the deliberate concealment of G-d’s blessing. The more so as G-d promised Abraham, “And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great.” Is it not strange that when he reached the land that G-d had shown him, a famine forced him to leave?

A possible answer is that this was one of the trials which Abraham had to face to prove himself worthy of his mission (and the Midrash⁷ tells us when faced with this inexplicable hardship Abraham “was not angry and did not complain”).

But this will not suffice. For Abraham’s mission was not simply a personal one—it was his task to spread G-d’s name and gather adherents to His faith. The Midrash⁸ compares his many journeyings to the way a spice box must be shaken about, to spread its aroma to all corners of a room. So an explanation of his descent in terms of a personal pilgrimage will not do justice to the difficulty. Especially since its immediate effect was to endanger Abraham’s mission. It could not help the work of spreading G-d’s name for the arrival of a man of G-d to be followed by a bad omen of a national famine.

Worse is to follow, for when Abraham entered Egypt, Sarah, his wife, was taken by Pharaoh by force. And even though he did not so much as touch her,⁹ it was an evident descent from the spiritual course that seemed to be outlined for them.

And even before this, when they first approached Egypt, Abraham said to Sarah, “Now I know you are a woman of beautiful appearance.” Thereby he had already begun to see (though only relative to his own exalted standard) with “Egyptian” eyes; for previously he had not noticed this¹⁰ because of the spirituality of their modest relationship.

So how, in the face of so many contrary indications, can it be that the whole story of Lech Lecha is—as its name would seem to imply—one of Abraham’s continual ascent towards his destiny?

4. History Foreshadowed

We can work towards a resolution of these difficulties by understanding the inner meaning of the famous

dictum, “The works of the Fathers are a sign for the children.” This does not mean simply that the fate of the Fathers is mirrored in the fate of their children. But more strongly, that what they do brings about what happens to their children.¹¹ Their merit gives their children the strength to follow their example. And in Abraham’s wanderings, the subsequent history of the children of Israel was rehearsed and made possible.

Abraham’s journey down to Egypt foreshadows the future Egyptian Exile. “And Abram went up out of Egypt” presages the Israelites’ redemption. And just as Abraham left, “weighed down with cattle, silver and gold,” so too did the Israelites leave Egypt “with great wealth.”

Even that merit for which the Israelites were saved they owed to Sarah; for just as their women kept themselves from sinning with the Egyptians,¹² so had Sarah protected herself from Pharaoh’s advances.

5. The End is Implicit in the Beginning

Understood in this light, we can see the end of Abraham’s journey to Egypt foreshadowed in its beginning. For its purpose was his eventual departure “weighed down with cattle, silver and gold,” expressing the way in which he was to transform the most secular and heathen things and press them into the service of G-d. This was indeed the purpose of the Israelites’ exile into Egypt, that G-d’s presence should be felt in this most intransigent of places. The final ascent was implicit in the descent.

There is, in Jewish learning, an image which captures this oblique directedness. The Babylonian Talmud, unlike the Jerusalem Talmud, never reaches its decisions directly but arrives at them through digressions and dialectics which shed, in their apparent meandering, more light than a direct path could. Indeed, when the two books are in disagreement, the Babylonian verdict is always followed.¹³

So too do the seeming digressions of Jewish history represent not a wandering from the path of destiny but a way of shedding the light of G-d on untouched corners of the world, as preparation for, and part of, their subsequent redemption.

Abraham’s removal to Egypt was not an interruption but an integral part of the command of “Lech Lecha”—to journey towards that self-fulfillment which is the service of G-d.

And as Abraham’s destiny was the later destiny of the children of Israel, so it is ours. Our exile, like his, is a preparation for (and therefore part of) redemption. And the redemption which follows brings us to a higher state than that which we could have reached without exile. “Greater will be the glory of this latter house (i.e., the Temple of the Messianic Age) than that of the former (the first Temple).”¹⁴

Exile, then, is an integral part of spiritual progress; it allows us to sanctify the whole world by our actions, and not simply a small corner of it.

Perhaps one will say: Where is this progress apparent? The world does not appear to be growing more holy: Precisely the opposite seems to be the case.

But this is a superficial judgment. The world does not move of its own accord. It is fashioned by Divine Providence.

What appears on the surface to be a decline is, however hidden, part of the continuous process of transformation which we work on the world whenever we dedicate our actions to Torah and G-d’s will. In other words, the world constantly becomes more elevated and refined. Nothing could illustrate this more clearly than the story of Abraham’s journeyings, seen first on the surface, and then in their true perspective.

Whatever a Jew’s situation, when he turns towards his true self-fulfillment in the injunction of Lech Lecha, he places his life and his actions in the perspective of Torah, and takes his proper place in the bringing of the future redemption.

(Source: Likkutei Sichot, Vol. V pp. 57-67)

FOOTNOTES 1. Cf. Megillah, 29b; 31a, Sotah, 40b. 2. Baba Batra, 14b. 3. In many places. 4. Baba Batra, 167b; Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat, 49:3; Remo in Shulchan Aruch, Even Hoezer, 120:3. 5. Bereishit 47:2; Shemot 19:11; 25:7, etc. 6. Alshich, beginning of our Sidra. 7. Bereishit Rabbah, 40:2. 8. Ibid., 39:2. 9. Cf. Tanchuma, 5 (on our Sidra). 10. But he had seen her previously (cf. Kiddushin, 41a). 11. Cf. Ramban, 12:6. Bereishit Rabbah, 40. 12. Shir Hashirim Rabbah, 4:12. 13. Cf. Yad Malachi, beginning of Part 2. 14. Haggai 2:9, as interpreted in Zohar, Part I, 28a..

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Kehunas Avraham

Rabbi Elchanan Adler

In the middle of Parshas Lech Lecha after Avraham's battle with the four kings, the Torah describes two interactions immediately following his victory. The Torah tells us about the well-known offer that the king of Sedom makes to Avraham. He tells Avraham to take all of the spoils of war, and in return all he wants is his people who had been taken captive. Before delving into Avraham's response, it is worth noting the following quirk in the pesukim setting this scene. It is in pasuk yud zayin that the Torah tells us that the king of Sedom went out to greet Avraham after his victory. However, it is only three pesukim later that the Torah continues to describe the interaction between Avraham and the king of Sedom. Meanwhile, smack in the middle of this story are three pesukim describing how Malkitzedek, the king of Yerushalayim, also comes out to meet Avraham and brings with him refreshments and blessings. After feeding Avraham, Malkitzedek – who was a kohein – gives both Avraham a blessing and Ha-Kadosh Baruch Hu himself a blessing. After this interlude the Torah resumes telling us about the king of Sedom's offer to Avraham and how Avraham refuses to take from the king even a shoelace, lest he take credit for making Avraham wealthy when in fact it was a guarantee from Ha-Kadosh Baruch Hu that he would be wealthy. The curious placement of this interaction with Malkitzedek begs the question, why would the Torah interrupt describing Avraham's meeting the King of Sedom to tell us about Avraham's meeting Malkitzedek?

Ohr Hachaim (Bereishis 14:18 DH U'Malkitzedek) suggests that the Torah was trying to draw a stark contrast between the behavior of Malkitzedek, who was righteous, and the king of Sedom, who was evil. Avraham had been returning from war. He was likely exhausted and hungry, so like the mensch that he was, Malkitzedek brought Avraham "lechem v'yayin", food and wine. The king of Sedom on the other hand, despite being the king that he was and despite the degree of appreciation he should have been expressing to Avraham for defeating the four mighty kings, he shows up empty handed.

There is in fact another distinction to be drawn between the behavior of Malkitzedek and the King of Sedom. Malkitzedek is identified by the Torah as being a kohein. Seemingly it was for that reason that Avraham gave ma'aser to Malkitzedek. Kohanim had the responsibility

of bringing korbanos on behalf of klal yisrael, but they had an additional job as well. The pesukim say in parshas Eikev (Devarim 10:8) that in addition to bringing korbanos they also had the responsibility of giving a beracha to klal yisrael. But, they cannot just give any type of beracha. The beracha preceding birkas kohanim ends by saying "le'varech es amo Yisrael be'ahava". Based on this word, the Magen Avraham (OC 128:18) quotes the Zohar that a kohein can only give the beracha if he is in good spirits. In other words, there is a certain sense of generosity and camaraderie necessary for the kohein to be fit to give this beracha. If he isn't in the right state of mind then he shouldn't give the beracha. As displayed by the presents that Malkitzedek gave to Avraham Avinu, he gave him a beracha filled with love and connection. He gave Avraham a beracha that was focused solely on Avraham's betterment. This comes in stark contrast to the king of Sedom who only offered Avraham the spoils of war for his own self interest and never thought to wish Avraham well for Avraham's sake alone.

In truth, this interaction between Malkitzedek and Avraham bears greater fruit in the pages of Chazal. Chazal (Nedarim 32b) wonder why Malkitzedek was stripped of the zechus to have his offspring become the future kohanim of klal yisroel for it to be given to Avraham. They answer that it was because when Malkitzedek gave a beracha to Avraham and HaKadosh Baruch Hu, he first gave one to Avraham and only then blessed Hakadosh Baruch Hu, when he should have first given a beracha to HaShem and only then blessed Avraham. In Chazal's words, it was because Malkitzedek was makdim birkas eved le'birkas kono [preceded the blessing of a servant to the blessing of a creator] that he was held responsible. This transgression and punishment beg an explanation. What's the connection between the injustice and the retribution? What did Avraham have that Malkitzedek was missing?

The Gemara in Rosh Hashana (28b) discusses the topic of ba'al tosif in the context of the birkas kohanim. The gemara entertains the following scenario where a kohein goes to bless the kehillah and says to himself that since Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave him the reshus to bless the people, he might as well add his own additional beracha.

In such a case the gemara says that if he does make any additions, he has transgressed ba'al tosif. Often the word "reshus" refers to authority or power. If so, there is an

interesting tension that emerges from this gemara. On one hand, the kohanim are given a degree of autonomy and are in fact imbued with authority in this process of blessing klal yisroel; it finds expression in their needing to raise their hands or in their need to face the congregation when blessing. They are in fact playing an essential role and contributing towards the blessing. They aren't merely praying to G-d and letting Him do the rest. However, on the other hand, they're limited in their contribution to the beracha in that they cannot add anything to the beracha itself.

In truth the tension is not as contradictory as it seems. It's not that Kohanim are merely davening to HaShem to bless the people and it is not that the kohanim are blessing the people themselves. There is a middle ground. The Kohanim act as a medium and as a channel through which the blessing of Hakadosh Baruch Hu can flow. Ultimately it is Hashem himself giving the blessing but the kohanim are the vehicles.

Not only is this potentially the reality of how birkas kohanim works, but since the kohanim are in fact the vehicles for the beracha of Hakadosh Baruch Hu they themselves must recognize and be cognizant of the fact that they are not the source of the beracha but rather that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is the source of the beracha and that they are merely the conduits for its passage.

With this understanding we can explain a little bit better the episode with Malkitzedek and Avraham. Malkitzedek was giving a birkas kohein to Avraham. However, because he gave a beracha to Avraham before giving a beracha to HaShem Himself, it suggests that he believed that he was in fact the source of the blessing being given. He failed to recognize that really it was coming from HaShem. Had Malkitzedek recognized that, of course he would have honored HaShem by giving Him the blessing first. Malkitzedek had the giving nature and good spirit necessary to give a birkas kohein but his conduct conveyed a lack of recognition that the source for the beracha was Hashem himself. Avraham on the other hand had both prerequisites. Avraham had the good spirits, the giving nature, but never lost sight of Hakadosh Baruch Hu's role in the world. Chazal tell us how Avraham would encourage his guests before eating food to recognize who the food was coming from. In our story itself, Avraham's behavior highlights the synthesis of these character traits. When the king of Sedom offered

Avraham the spoils of war, the very first thing Avraham does is acknowledge Hashem as the creator and sustainer of all things. Then he goes onto say that although those with him should take spoils for themselves, he will not take even a shoelace. It's from this that Chazal know that Avraham has an "ayin tova". This episode clearly depicts his unequivocal acknowledgement of Hakadosh Baruch Hu in addition to his keen sensitivity, care, and love for those surrounding him.

To conclude, the berachah in shmoneh esrei immediately following Birkas Kohanim is Sim Shalom. There is a unique connection in halacha between these two berachos in that we only ever recite Sim Shalom when we are also reciting Birkas Kohanim. The connection between these two berachos goes beyond just the halacha. We beseech HaKadosh Baruch Hu in Sim Shalom, "barcheinu aveinu kulanu ke'echod". We ask Hashem to bless us like "echod". Who is "echod"? The meforshim tell us that "echod" is really Avraham Avinu. We're asking HaKadosh Baruch Hu to bless us like he did Avraham. We know that Avraham was blessed with a critical role in future berachos. The pasuk (Bereishis 12:3) says "ve'nivrechu vecha kol mishpechos ha'adamah". Future generations will be blessed through him. People will bless their children by asking Hashem to help their children be like Avraham. In light of what we said until now maybe we can explain this a little better. Avraham Avinu was the original mekareiv. He was the one and only person who dedicated himself at his time to spreading the name of G-d throughout the world. It's because of his commitment to spreading the oneness of HaKadosh Baruch Hu that Avraham is referred to as "echod". Avraham embodied the meeting point between the two middos we mentioned earlier. Firstly, he was a *nadiv lev*, a giving person; he was a person filled with love and connection towards others. Secondly, Avraham was the model servant of G-d in his recognition that all comes from Hashem. Avraham never failed to recognize HaKadosh Baruch Hu as the source behind the happenings of the world. With these two unique and critical attributes that Avraham lived with, he was a most worthy beginning for the line of kohanim, those gifted with the merit to bestow blessing on klal yisroel.

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אל תירא אברם אנכי מגן לך Fear not, Avram, I am a shield for you. (15:1)

We are referred to as Bnei Avraham Avinu, children of the Patriarch Avraham, because we inherited from the father of our people a national character trait. The Chiddushei HaRim writes that the term Magen Avraham, shield of Avraham, is a guarantee from Hashem that the nekudah, characteristic, which defined Avraham would be bequeathed to each and every one of his descendants. The Patriarch was referred to as Avraham HaIvri, because he stood his ground on one eiver, side, while the rest of the world was on the other side. This applies to Avraham's ability to withstand societal coercion, family pressure and the challenges and trials of life, both at home and in exile. The strength of character which Avraham evinced is intrinsically imbued within the psyche of each and every Jew. We are Ivrim, off to one side, who neither seek, nor require, public acclaim. We do our "thing" regardless of its acceptance by the greater society and culture in which we live. No other nation has endured our trials and tribulations, and not only survived, but thrived, holding our heads high with pride and devotion to Hashem. Yes, we are different, but so was Avraham, and we are his descendants.

Avraham Avinu used every ounce of strength to spread the word of Hashem to a world steeped in paganism. He taught them about monotheism, to worship the one G-d Who created, rules and guides the world. He was relentless in his commitment. Even when it became difficult due to the Heavenly-induced trials that he endured – and from which he emerged triumphant – he continued his work, because he was focused on spreading the d'var Hashem. Can we say the same? Is our devotion real, or is it limited by our comfort zone?

An elderly Holocaust survivor devoted himself selflessly to seeing to it that Yeshivas Ponovezh was kept clean. He did everything within his ability to maintain the pristine, positive atmosphere of the physical structure. Indeed, his "work" was his life, having lost his wife and children to the Nazi murderers. Understandably, every once in a while the memories of what had been overwhelmed him, when he realized what could have been. During such moments of sadness, he would fall into a melancholic state that overtook him. Only after he visited the saintly Bais Yisrael, zl, of Ger, who consoled him, was he able to calm down.

Simchas Torah 1958, the students of Ponovezh were dancing with great passion and fervor in honor of the festival commemorating the annual completion of the Torah. In the center of the dancing, inspiring everyone to elevate their dancing and singing to a greater level, was the venerable Ponovezher Rav, zl. The elderly Jew mused to himself, "If only my sons would be alive, they, too, would be among those who were dancing. Instead, they are buried somewhere in Europe." The more he reiterated this thought and how they had lived, that they would have been counted among the scholars of the yeshivah, the more emotional he became, and tears began to roll down his face. He could no longer contain himself, and he cried to the Ponovezher Rav, "Rebbe, where are my sons? Why were they taken from me? They could have grown into great talmidei chachamim!"

His cry – and the bitter weeping that accompanied it – brought a halt to the dancing. The Ponovezher Rav had not been spared from tragedy. He, too, had lost everyone except for one son. The Rav began to weep, and he cried out to the elderly shamash, "For them (the martyrs), it is not necessary to cry. They are ensconced in a far better world, basking in the glow of the Shechinah, Divine Presence. For whom should we cry? For us! We have to ask ourselves where we are holding in our mission as Jews. How much more could we achieve? Every moment of life is a Divine gift for a reason – to act and accomplish for Yiddishkeit! For us, we must cry!"

The Ponovezher Rav's response applies to all of us. Avraham Avinu taught us that nothing stands in the way of a Jew's mission. We answer to a Higher Power. If this means being on one side against everyone else – so be it. It is part of our national DNA.

והאמין בו' ויהשביה לו לצדקה And he trusted in Hashem, and He reckoned it to him as righteousness. (15:6) 5783

Avraham Avinu was rishon v'rosh l'maaminim, first and foremost of the believers in Hashem. Discovering on his own that this world did not just happen and that every moment of its existence – and the existence of every creation – is providentially guided by Hashem, he devoted his life to spreading this concept to a world to whom this idea was foreign. His descendants, the Jewish People, have maintained his teachings with emunah in Hashem, the pre-emanate foundation of our dogma. Throughout (what presented themselves as) the worst

moments in our tumultuous history, we have continued and maintained our faith in Hashem – against all odds and under all conditions. Even when the Jew was alone in an inhospitable world, surrounded by hostile people who viewed him with an eye of disdain, the Jew proudly held his head high, buttressed by his commitment to Yiddishkeit and his faith in Hashem.

Not all stories need be about a tragedy if they are to inspire the heart and impact the mind. The following story is well-known to some and probably comes as a surprise to others. It demonstrates the passion and commitment a Jew had in trying times, when he was alone, surrounded by thousands of non-Jews, who, at best, did not understand him, his laws and lifestyle! Nonetheless, he openly displayed zeal and devotion to Hashem – a commitment that was acknowledged by the most powerful man in America.

The winter of 1777 was very harsh. Bitter cold, treacherous biting wind and heavy snow was what the soldiers fighting for America's freedom from England began to expect as daily fare. Coupled with the freezing cold, which took a toll on their bodies, was the emotional turmoil, the loneliness and separation from family and friends, that made their battle even more difficult. If this was true for the thousands of soldiers who, as far as anyone knew, were gentile by birth, one can only begin to imagine the terrible depression that should have (but did not) overwhelm the lone, observant Jew.

While many of the soldiers would secretly curse their lot and the man (George Washington) who was their commander-in-chief, the lone Jew respected him and offered daily prayers for General Washington's triumphant emergence from the battlefield. The Jew had memories of his home, his family in Poland and the suffering to which they were subjected by the cruel anti-Semites who ruled the country. The miserable landowners took every advantage of the hapless Jews. It took place everywhere that the Jew called home. The wicked gentiles, cruel barbarians who enjoyed nothing more than exerting their power over the weak and downtrodden, victimized him. What kept these broken souls alive, committed to a higher ideal? Their emunah in Hashem that this was all part of a Divine Plan. Whether it was in Poland or Valley Forge, the Jew's devotion to Hashem withstood all external pressures to sever his relationship

with the Almighty. After all, he shared Avraham Avinu's DNA of faith.

The soldiers in Valley Forge had no sense of the reason for their battle against the English. They had no inkling why they were in Valley Forge in middle of a fierce winter, fighting against whom they were told was the enemy. In their midst was a lone Jewish soldier fighting for his life, the lives of his compatriots in arms, and the future of (what was to become the) United States. He rarely called attention to himself, but tonight was different. It was the first night of Chanukah, and he was prepared to light the Menorah.

When all the soldiers had drifted off to sleep, the young man took out his Menorah and lit one candle. He sat there mesmerized, watching the small flame dance merrily as it cast its shadow on the wall. Watching the flame brought back memories of better times, his parents, siblings, the small shul they attended, and the scholarly Rav, who was more father to the community than mentor. He was everyone's friend, in whom they confided. These memories opened up the reservoir of tears that he had controlled. After all, soldiers did not cry. As he wept, a tall distinguished man came over, looked at him, and gently asked, "Why are you weeping? Are you cold, my friend?" The Jewish soldier immediately jumped to his feet and saluted.

Then the Jewish soldier said, "I am weeping to my Father in Heaven, in whose hands lie the fate of all mankind. I was praying for your success, General Washington. I believe in your mission. I came to America to flee the tyranny and persecution that oppressed my family, my town's people, and my nation. The despots will fall! You, sir, will emerge victorious!"

"Thank you soldier," General Washington responded. "What do you have here? What are you lighting?" "This is a Menorah, a candelabra. Jews throughout the world are lighting their candelabra in honor of the festival of Chanukah, when my people recall the miracles that were wrought on behalf of our ancestors. They were only a handful of dedicated men committed to the ideal of belief in G-d. Thanks to this faith, they miraculously triumphed over the massive armies that sought to obliterate them. We maintained our faith in G-d and, as a result, we were the beneficiaries of Heavenly miracles."

The bright flame of the Chanukah candle ignited a flame of hope in the fatigued general's eyes. He declared

joyfully, “You are a Jew? Then you are a descendant of the people of the Prophets. If you say that we will win this war – then I am certain we will win.” General Washington shook his hand and left to rejoin the troops, armed with renewed vigor and hope. He asked the soldier for his name and address and went out into the night.

One year later, on the first night of Chanukah, the Jewish veteran, having returned home, sat in his home on Broome Street (Lower East Side of New York). He had already lit the first Chanukah light. Suddenly, he heard a knock on the door. His wife rose to open the door. How shocked she was to come face-to-face with the new first commander-in-chief of the United States, President George Washington.

“I see that incredible light – the light of hope. That flame kindles a light in my heart. It, together with your words of encouragement and hope, inspired me that cold, bitter night. It spurred me on to renewed hope and faith that we will overcome our enemies. “As a result, you will soon be awarded the Medal of Honor for your bravery in Valley Forge. Tonight, however, you will receive a personal gift from me in gratitude for your support and inspiration.” With these words, he placed on the table a gold medal upon which was engraved a Chanukah Menorah with one light burning. Upon this medal was inscribed: “As a sign of thanks for the light of your candle. George Washington.”

When one’s faith is sincere, it garners the respect of others.

<https://www.jewishpress.com/judaism/parsha/perfect-faith/2022/11/03/>

Pearls of Wisdom

By Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser

With Perfect Faith

- 9 Heshvan 5783

Parshas Lech Lecha opens with Hashem’s command to Avraham Avinu, “Go for yourself from your land, from your relatives ...” and His promise “I will make of you a great nation, I will bless you and make your name great” Our sages tell us that this command is one of the ten nisyonos (challenges) with which Avraham Avinu was tested by Hashem.

The Ramban questions this, noting that Avraham was guaranteed by Hashem that he would be rewarded with

honor, acclaim, and greatness. If so, what was the difficulty of fulfilling this command?

The Ohr HaChaim poses the same query and adds that, in fact, even a simple person would do whatever was necessary to achieve such renown and blessing.

Furthermore, the Medrash Bereishis Rabbah equates the two nisyonos – Avraham leaving his birthplace and Akeidas Yitzchak – as they are both presented with the words “lech lecha – go for yourself.” How could you compare the two?

The baalei mussar (teachers of Jewish ethics) point out that the Torah characterizes Avraham’s response as (Bereishis 12:4), “Avraham went as Hashem had spoken to him.” He did exactly as he was commanded, without any deviation.

At this point in time, the Sheva Mitzvos Bnei Noach had already been given to mankind. These laws – such as prohibitions against murder and theft, the establishment of courts – set up a moral code in the world. However, the essence of mitzvos is different in that we fulfill them in order to carry out the will of Hashem, whether or not we understand their rationale or reason.

HarRav Dovid Braverman observes that there was no good reason for Avraham Avinu to leave his birthplace and his homeland. He was successfully bringing people closer to Hashem right where he was. Yet when Hashem told him to leave, he accepted the Divine decree. That was the significance of the nisayon. From birth, man inherently desires to be independent, and he is loath to willingly follow orders without an explanation or reason. Thus, being subservient to the command of Hashem, without asking any questions or understanding the rationale is most difficult. Indeed, our sages tell us (Kiddushin 31a), “Greater is one who is commanded to do a mitzvah and performs it, than one who is not commanded to do a mitzvah and performs it.”

The Zohar tells us that the 248 positive Torah commandments correspond to the 248 limbs of a person. The numerical equivalent of Avraham’s name is 248, to tell us that Avraham Avinu achieved that level of subservience where all his limbs were dedicated to fulfilling the will of Hashem. Although Hashem did not disclose to Avraham his destination, Avraham readied his household and departed from his home. Avraham’s emunah was steadfast and constant, whether he was leaving his homeland or sacrificing his son. One nisayon

was not more difficult than the other because his faith in Hashem was complete (emunah shleimah), as we say in the modim prayer, “to do Your will and to serve You wholeheartedly.”

Shimon, a poverty-stricken kollel fellow in Bnei Brak lived a life fraught with nisyonos. Yet he remained steadfast in his emunah, fulfilling every mitzvah with the greatest passion and intensity. He never questioned the difficulty of his circumstances, or the challenges he encountered, nor did he waver in his faith in Hashem.

When Shimon put up his succah this year, he realized that he had enough space for two people to sleep on cots. Since his children were still toddlers, he felt it only proper to invite a guest who might need a place to sleep in a succah.

Shimon invited his older uncle from Yerushalayim, who was overjoyed. The first night of Succos, as the kollel fellow prepared for bed, he happened to look up and noticed, through the schach, that the people who had built their succah on the porch above him had placed a covering over their succah for the night that extended to over half the width of his own succah, in effect technically disqualifying half of his own succah. Without giving any thought to this unfortunate turn of events, he contemplated his options, as he didn't want to disappoint the uncle who was looking forward to being able to sleep in the succah.

Shimon excused himself from the succah and explained to the uncle that since most people were exhausted from their yom tov preparations, they went to sleep after the seudah. His family had, therefore, established a custom to stay up and learn on the first night of Succos to ensure that Torah was being learned throughout the first night. The uncle was duly impressed and accepted Shimon's departure from the succah with no reserves.

Shimon walked through the streets of Bnei Brak looking for an open succah and found the succah that belonged to a Chassidic rebbe. He sat down and was soon deeply immersed in his learning. At approximately 2:30 in the morning, a well-dressed individual, who appeared to be a foreigner, entered the succah. Curiously, the man asked Shimon why he was learning so late at night in this succah. Not especially eager to engage in conversation, Shimon was slightly evasive. However, the stranger persisted until Shimon explained what had happened. The man was very moved by his story, and asked, “Where do

you live?” Once again, Shimon was vague, just telling him the neighborhood he lived in. But the man pressed him for his exact address and Shimon realized that he would be better off just answering the questions the first time.

After the first days of Succos, there was a knock on the door and when Shimon answered, the stranger entered.

“I want you to know how moved I was by our encounter the other night,” the man told Shimon. “I'm an extremely wealthy person with real estate holdings in Canada. During the year I am privileged to support the rebbe in whose succah I found you. Whenever I am in Eretz Yisrael I join the rebbe as a personal guest in his private succah, and after the seudah that night I stopped in to see the communal succah that I had donated this year. I was shocked to find you learning there at such a late hour, and I saw your pain when I interrupted your learning, pressing you for information. I realized how sincere and dedicated you are to your Torah studies. Truthfully, I have been searching for a while to establish a Yissochor-Zevulun agreement with a very special young man who has great yiras Shamayim and emunah. Baruch Hashem, I have found him. I would like to draw up an official contract, in which you will be supported with 5,000 Euros a month and a free five-room apartment in a very nice area.”

Shimon's life was completely transformed, all because he wanted to follow Hashem's command and fulfill His will to the highest degree.

from: **Rabbi Chanan Morrison**

<chanan@ravkooktorah.org> date: Nov 3, 2022, 3:56 AM

subject:

Rav Kook on Lech Lecha: Malki-Tzedek and Abraham

Lech Lecha: Malki-Tzedek and Abraham After Abraham defeated Chedarla'omer and his allied kings, he was greeted by Malki-Tzedek, the priest-king of Jerusalem:

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

Shem Loses the Priesthood

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

“The Holy One wanted the priesthood to originate from Shem. But when Shem blessed Abraham before he blessed God, the priesthood was transferred to Abraham. Abraham asked: “Is it proper to bless the servant before blessing his Master?” God immediately gave the priesthood to Abraham.... That is what is

written, “He was a priest to God.” He [Malki-Tzedek] was a priest, but his descendants were not.” (Nedarim 32b) This transfer of the priesthood has deep significance, as it contrasts the different approaches of these two great individuals, Shem and Abraham.

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

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

The Inclusive Priesthood of Abraham

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

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

In general, mitzvot serve to connect and unite. The word mitzvah (מצווה) comes from the root צוּוּת meaning ‘together’ or ‘team.’ The mitzvot focused Abraham’s spiritual labors toward the future community of his descendants, and through them, the entire world.

Abraham’s Altar

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

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

“The people would gather around him and question him about his words, and he would explain to each one according to his capabilities” (Laws of Idolatry 1:13). Now, Abraham “called out in God’s Name.” He publicized the belief in one God. This reflects the essence of Abraham’s new mission: reaching out to others in God’s Name.

Shem/Malki-Tzedek, on the other hand, remained on the level of tzedek, without a public calling. “He was a priest to God.” He was a priest, but not the priest. Lacking the definitive article, the letter ה, Shem was only a priest for himself, without a connection to others. Instead, the letter ה was added to Abraham’s name, indicating the universal nature of his mission. From Avram he became Avraham - אַבְרָהָם הַמְּוֹנֵן גֵּוֹיִם, the father of many nations - bringing the entire world closer to God.

“God has sworn and will not retract: you are a priest forever, due to the words of Malki-Tzedek.” (Psalms 110:4) (Adapted from Shemu'ot HaRe'iyah 8: Lech Lecha 5690/1929. Image: Workshop of the Sarachi family - Plaque with Abraham and Melchizedek (Wikimedia Commons))

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The Value of Future Potential

Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh (Transcribed and adapted by a talmid from the YUTorah shiur originally given at Gruss Kollel on Oct 29, 2020)

There is an interesting contrast between the beginnings of last week’s Parsha and this week’s Parsha. In the case of Noach, Torah says: Eileh toldos Noach. Noach ish tzadik, tamim haya be-dorosav—he was righteous; he was perfect; he was a tzadik ha-dor. And therefore, Va-yomer Hashem la-Noach: Make a teiva and I will save you because you are special. But by Avraham Avinu we find that the Torah says: Va-yomer Hashem el Avraham. Lech lecha me-artzecha u-me-moladtecha, u-mibeis avicha el ha-aretz asher areka. Ve-e’escha le-goy gadol, etc. What do we know about Avraham? We know who his father was and who his brothers were, etc. We know his family migrated. But we don’t know anything special about him. The Torah doesn’t say that Avraham was a

tzadik tamim or anything else about him that was unique. Why is it that Hashem chose Noach because he was so righteous, while He chose Avraham seemingly out of the blue?! We know the Midrashim about all the wonderful things Avraham did until that day. But why are they not written in the Chumash?

I want to suggest a possible angle via another comparison between Avraham and Noach. What does the Torah say about Noach? Noach Ish tzadik, tamim haya be-dorosav. Es ha-Elokim his'halech Noach. Noach was Tamim,

and he walked with Hashem. At the very end of this week's Parsha, after many of Avraham's trials and tribulations, Hashem makes a bris with Avraham—Bris Milah—and says: his'haleich lefanai ve-veyhei tamim. Noach was described as Tamim from the beginning. Yet Hashem commands Avraham: hishaleich lefanai veyhei tamim. That seems very strange. After a full-parsha worth of growth, Avraham seems to be in a place where Hashem tells him to start working on what Noach had already accomplished! That can't be. Rather, the Torah is trying to make a very sharp point here. Hashem chose Noach because of the madreiga that he had reached—Noach was special because of what he did. Why did Hashem choose Avraham? It was not because of what he did. Maybe he did a lot of things, and maybe he didn't. Midrashim tell us about the incident of the Kivshon ha-Aish and all kinds of stories from Avram's early life. But the Torah doesn't mention them. Hashem chose Avraham because of what he was going to do, not because he already was tamim. The pasuk emphasizes the future tense: his'haleich lefanai, veyhei tamim. The bechira of Avraham was not a reward for what he already did. Rather, it was a mission for what he was going to do in the future. Ki yedativ—as it says in next week's Parsha—le-ma'an asher yitzaveh es banav ve-es beiso acharav, i.e., what he is going to accomplish. On the other hand, why did Hashem pick Noach? What was Noach's mission? He just had to do one thing—to survive. And what did Noach do right after the Mabul? Whatever he did was not terribly impressive. Let's not repeat it now. But what did Hashem tell Noach to do in the future? Not die... Yasher Koach! Noach may have done a lot. But Hashem didn't think that the future of the world came from him. Hashem did not give him a mission. He just didn't die. By Avraham, though, the Torah doesn't even tell us what

Avraham did or did not do before he was chosen. That is not important. What is important is what he will do, what his tafkid is, and what mission Hashem gives him. He will be tamim. He will walk before Hashem. He is going to metzaveh others acharav. Ultimately, we are called Bnei Avraham. We are not Bnei Noach.

How do you judge someone? It's so natural for us, at first glance, to judge someone for what they have done already. Who am I? I am what I already accomplished. How great am I? Well, let's see, what have I accomplished until now? And that could lead to two equally problematic psychological results. I am great because I have done a lot. And then I am like Noach—I am amazing; I am great! But then perhaps I will end up like Noach. Or. . . You could say: I haven't done everything I should have done. I haven't done everything I wanted to do. I haven't done as much as the next guy has done, etc. And that's why I don't believe in myself. The Torah is telling us here: No. What is important is not what you have done until now. It's a good start. But what's really important is what you are going to do from now on. This is what they say in the outside world: Today is the first day of the rest of your life. You are not what you have failed or succeeded in until now. If you have succeeded until now, don't rest on your laurels. And if you failed until now, don't beat yourself up. You are what you will do tomorrow, the day after, and the day after that. If you put yourself on the path of growth, of heyei tamim, his'haleich lefanai, then you are following Avraham Avinu and therefore you are part of this amazing mesorah. Don't look at the rearview mirror of your past. Rather look to the future like Avraham Avinu. Shabbat Shalom.