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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON LECH LICHA - 5767

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SHEMA KOLEINU

The Weekly Torah Publication Of The Marsha Stern Talmudical Academy – Yeshiva University High school for Boys
Lech L'cha 5766

A Torah Personality **Rabbi Baruch Pesach Mendelson**

After Avram had defeated the four kings, he implored HaKadosh Boruch Hu to help him have children, lest all his belongings fall as an inheritance to his servant "Damesek Eliezer." Rashi, quoting the gemara, explains that Damesek is an acronym of "Doleh u'mashkeh mitoras rabo l' aacharem," - he (Eliezer) drew from the torah of his rebbi and watered others with it. At first blush this seems to be a positive attribute of Eliezer. But if this term is meant to be complimentary why would Avram use it, to describe Eliezer, when expressing his sadness over having no biological heir?

In what way can this description of Eliezer point to a character flaw?

The Ba'alei Mussar explain that "doleh u'mashkeh" is to be understood very literally. Whatever Eliezer dished in he dished out, but nothing remained inside of him. Eliezer was the ultimate tape recorder; but the mechanical device is not affected by the shiur it records. In short, Eliezer failed to internalize the teachings of Avram and didn't allow them to affect the essence of his being. Yitzchak, on the other hand was a carbon copy of his father Avram. In addition to looking like him, Yitzchak also in many ways imitated the travels and acts of his great father. Yitzchak internalized his father's teachings. They became part of him, drove him and motivated him. Yitzchak was the appropriate heir to Avram's fortune, for he absorbed all that his father had taught.

The Satmar Rav ZTL, Rav Yoel Teitlebaum, once attended a wedding at which a professional joker asked permission to imitate him. The rebbe granted permission and the joker proceeded to shuckle, sway, cry and gesticulate in a perfect imitation of the rebbe's Shmoneh Esrei. After a few minutes, the rebbe began to cry. The joker quickly stopped and ran over to beg for forgiveness. The Rebbe explained that the joker had done nothing wrong. In fact, the rebbe was crying because the joker was so good. The rebbe realized that if someone else could imitate his davening so well, the rebbe might be imitating himself while davening. It is easy, externally, to act like a big tzadik, what is hard is to really be one internally.

The gemara in Yoma (72b) tells us that any talmid chacham whose "insides don't match his outsides", is not a talmid chacham. One must

strive to internalize the Torah, and not just pursue external "frumkeit". A story is told about two talmidim who came to Rav Issur Zalman Meltzer to tell him their original Torah ideas. The first one presented the idea to Rav Issur Zalman, who responded coolly, "you saw that in such and such a sefer". The talmid was taken aback but what shocked him even more was when Rav Issur Zalman exclaimed how beautiful the other talmid's chidush was. "But that idea was also found in such and such a sefer," blurted out the first talmid angrily. "What's the difference between my dvar Torah and his?" "You just said over the dvar the Torah you read in the sefer," said Rav Issur Zalman, "but your friend saw the dvar Torah and was 'koneh' it – he internalized it before he told it to me."

Chazal's formulation of our requirement to imitate HaKodosh Baruch Hu is "Ma hu rahum, af atah rahum. "Just as he is mercy, so are you mercy". The Alter of Slobodka points out that Chazal do not say, "just as Hashem is merciful, so too should you act with mercy"; rather Chazal tell us to "be mercy". The Alter explains that Chazal are saying that we must change the essence of our being to mercy. This, says the Alter, is the true approach to improving every middah. The problem is that we do not see Hashem, so it is very difficult for us to imitate the middos of Hashem. How do we do it?

The answer to this can be found in the Rambam, who states in Hilchos Deos (6:2) that since it is impossible to directly fulfill the mitzvah of "uvo tidback" (clinging to Hashem), one should instead cleave to talmidei chachamim. This includes eating and drinking with them and attaching oneself to them in all possible ways. The Rambam calls this the mitzvas asseh of "uldavka bo". Then he says, v'chen tzavu chachamim (the rabbis commanded), that one should cling to the dust of their feet and drink thirstily from their words, in other words to attend and take seriously their shiurim. Becoming close to talmidei chachamim and learning from their ways is called a mitzvah deraisa while learning from the shiur is only de rabbanan. We see from here that the essence of a relationship with a rebbe is not the shiur, instead it is the direct relationship from which one learns to internalize the Torah way of life. Let us all work on attaching ourselves and drawing close to our rebbeim in our search to internalize their middos and hashkofos and become true b'nai Torah.

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Peninim on the Torah
by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum
- Parshas Lech Lecha

Go for yourself from your land, from your relatives, and from your father's house to the land that I will show you. (12:1)

In Luban, Russia, after World War I, there was a young rav who was extremely dedicated to the community. An erudite Torah scholar with an encyclopedic knowledge of Shas and Poskim, the Talmud and Codes of Jewish Law, he was also an individual of great integrity and piety. All of this, however, was overshadowed by his incredible humility. When the Russian government removed the town's shochet from his position, the rav studied ritual slaughtering and became the community shochet. When they closed the mikveh, he found a way to validate a brook that was used for swimming for use as a mikveh. He was able to convince the authorities to allow separate times for men and women to swim. Life was very difficult. Compensation for his rabbinic duties was practically non-existent. The authorities were on his case on a regular basis. He already had one foot in a Siberian labor camp. He had no choice left; he would have to emigrate.

Eretz Yisrael was out of the question. The only viable option was the United States.

Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl, came with his young family to these shores in search of a livelihood, in search of a place to teach Torah, in search of the American dream. This dream turned into a nightmare for many Jews. Shabbos was a memory of the past. Kashrus--was not much better. Torah and mitzvos were left behind in Europe. Rav Moshe wanted a place to study and teach Torah. That was his vocation. Instead, he was offered a position as a mashgiach, kosher supervisor. He said he would wait a little longer. Perhaps something would come up. Perhaps he would find work in a Torah-related field.

He was offered the position of Rosh Hayeshivah at Mesifita Tiferes Yerushalayim. The rest is history. Rav Moshe became the posek ha'dor, halachic-decision maker for the generation, a man who contributed to changing the image of Torah in this country. To think that he had almost become a mashgiach. It is incredible to think that the Torah world would have suffered irreparable damage had he not been prepared to wait a little longer.

Rav Moshe once remarked to those closest to him, "Do you know the difference between us and Avraham Avinu?" They were taken aback by the question, but were more surprised with his reply, "Actually, there is no difference between us."

When Rav Moshe noticed the look of incredulity on their faces, he commented, "Avraham Avinu listened to the dvar, word of Hashem. He was told, 'Go for yourself, from your land, from your relatives, from your father's home to the land that I will show you.' He did exactly what Hashem had instructed him to do. I did the same. Not only I, but hundreds of thousands of our brethren picked themselves up, left their homes, their places of birth, and went to a strange land. I am certain that our arrival at these shores was to fulfill a G-d given-mandate. Does the pasuk in Mishlei 20:24, 'A man's steps are from Hashem, but what does a man understand of his way?' not support this idea? In reality, however, there is one difference between us and Avraham. Our Patriarch was fully aware from the first moment that he was carrying out Hashem's will. We think that we are acting in our own behalf, by our own volition, because of our own motivation. It is only afterward, when we look back objectively, that we realize that it has all been part of the Divine Plan."

Rav Moshe applied this thought towards explaining the pasuk in Bamidbar 7:89, "He (Moshe) heard the Voice speaking to him from atop the Cover." Hashem did not speak directly to Moshe. The Almighty "spoke" to Himself, and Moshe listened. This is how life is lived in this world. Hashem speaks to Himself. Some of us listen and are part of the Divine Plan from the ground floor. Others act and, only later on, realize that it was all part of Hashem's plan.

"If people would realize that everything is part of G-d's Divine Plan," Rav Moshe explained, "there would be no such thing as divorce. Chazal teach us that forty days prior to conception, it is decreed from Heaven, 'The daughter of so and so is to wed so and so.' This is Hashem speaking to Himself. Regrettably, we do not 'hear' the Voice. Therefore, the young couple meet, and a relationship blossoms which leads to marriage. Afterwards, it is realized that they are one another's bashert, predetermined mate. This was Hashem's decree from the beginning, but no one listened."

This idea applies to so many areas of human endeavor. Our financial success is determined and announced by the same Voice. Our house, our field, our position, our business - it is all declared by Hashem. If we would only trust in Him initially, then we would not have to undergo much of the anxiety that is part and parcel of every endeavor. Otherwise, we will just have to wait until after the fact to realize that, in any event, He has been in control all of the time.

Go for yourself from your land, from your relatives, and from your father's house to the land that I will show you. (12:1)

It happened at the beginning of World War II that the **Brisker Rav**, zl, found himself in Warsaw. The city had already been overrun by the Nazi hordes, and his only chance for survival was to escape to Vilna. By the time he reached Vilna, the Soviets had already claimed this Lithuanian city as its own. He now looked towards Eretz Yisrael as a haven for himself and his family. The future certainly presented itself as being rosy in contrast to the present.

It was the week of Parashas Lech Lecha, and one of his close talmidim, students, came up to his apartment and found the Rav engrossed in thought. He overheard him saying the following, "In the Rambam's commentary to Mishnayos Avos, he counts Avraham's nisayon, challenge, of 'Lech Lecha,' having to uproot himself and wander to a strange land, as the first of his ten trials. Why is this a challenge? It was Hashem Who instructed him to leave. It was Hashem Who promised him that great things would happen as a result of this move. He would become a great nation and serve as a blessing. For what more could a person ask? It is not as if he heard this promise from a prophet or even an angel. He heard it directly from Hashem. Is this to be considered a challenge?"

The Brisker Rav answered his own question with the obvious, "Apparently, this teaches us that galus, exile, is galus. Regardless of the wonderful future in store for a person, having to wander is a difficult and trying challenge."

While the student did not want to be insolent, he nonetheless had a question which he wanted to pose to his rebbe, who was aware of his presence during his "comments." "Rebbe, this hypothesis is correct when one leaves his home at a time of peace and calm, but, if Brisk is under the siege of the Nazis, and in Lithuania we have no idea what tomorrow will bring, it really is no nisayon. We must leave!"

The Brisker Rav replied, "You are mistaken. Do we not find Yirmiyahu Ha'Navi lauding the nascent Klal Yisrael for following Hashem into the wilderness? They were certainly not leaving a resort. They went into the desert after hundreds of years of Egyptian persecution. Yet, they are praised. After all is said and done, it is difficult to leave one's home and one's roots, even if the destination is filled with great promise and hope."

And Avram took his wife, Sarai...and the souls they made in Charan. (12:5)

Targum Onkelos explains v'es ha'nefesh asher asu b'Charan, "and the souls they made in Charan" as, v'yas nafshasa di shabidu l'Oraisa, "and the souls which they committed to Torah." This teaches us, notes **Horav Baruch Mordechai Ezrachi**, Shlita, that the only commitment of substance, the only obligation that has value and endurance, is a commitment to Torah. "Turning someone on," getting them to enjoy mitzvah observance, attending services in shul, are all wonderful beginnings, but the nefesh has not yet been made, success has not been achieved, until there is a shibud, obligation and commitment, to Torah study. Only then is there hope that the individual who has been "turned on" will not turn around and become "turned off." Torah protects and ensures the success of the transformation. Torah catalyzes the transformation and sustains the momentum.

Furthermore, adds Rav Ezrachi, one cannot have a shibuda l'Oraisa unless it is accompanied with a lech lecha, go for yourself, me'artzecha, from your land, etc. One must leave his original environment; break his ties with the past. He is committed to one thing and one thing only: Torah. When the separation is unequivocal, as it was with Avraham and Sarah, when there is a total severance from the commitments of the past, there can be a total commitment to Torah.

In the Talmud Avodah Zarah 9A, Chazal teach us that the world will endure for six thousand years, of which two thousand will be filled with Torah and two thousand will represent the days of Moshiach. Chazal add that the two thousand years of Torah begin with the "souls they made in Charan," at which point Avraham Avinu was fifty-two years old. This was four hundred and forty-eight years before the Torah was given on Har

Sinai. This is a powerful statement, since it implies that the first fifty-two years of Avraham's life, after he had "discovered" Hashem on his own and underwent the miracle at Uhr Kasdim, were all included in the two thousand years of void. Why are the early years of Avraham's life discounted? Are they to be ignored and considered for naught? Furthermore, the "making" of these souls did not just happen overnight. They were not "made" in a vacuum. What was so unique about the nefesh that they made in Charan that initiated the two thousand years of Torah?

This teaches us that it all had to come together, the commitment to Torah in association with leaving his home. At the point of total severance there developed within them a complete commitment to Torah. It was at that specific juncture they became "made"; they were recreated as a nefesh, committed fully to Torah. Moreover, while Avraham and Sarah had achieved incredible personal success, it was only after they had committed others to Torah that they initiated the period of two thousand years of Torah. The void ended when others became committed to Torah. Personal growth is to be measured by how much we do for others. Likewise, growth in Torah is quantified by how much one is able to transmit his Torah to others. Reaching out to others is more than a kiruv, outreach opportunity; it comprises the essence of Torah learning. My Torah grows when I am able to impart it to others. This is the underlying meaning of Toras chesed, a Torah of kindness. There is no greater kindness, no more impressive gift, than sharing the gift of Torah with others.

And he (Avraham) built an altar to Hashem and invoked Hashem by Name. (12:8)

Avraham Avinu preached to the world community about the unity of G-d. He taught the concept of monotheism to a pagan society. Chazal emphasize Avraham's achievements when they say in Pirkei Avos 5:2 that Hashem was very patient with the generations from Adam until Noach. They angered Him increasingly, until Hashem decided to bring the flood to wipe them out. There were also ten generations from Noach until Avraham. They also angered Hashem, until Avraham came and received the reward for them all. During the first set of generations, Hashem's patience finally gave in to the flood which destroyed the sinners. During the second set of generations, Hashem's patience simply waited for Avraham to appear and redeem the world with his good deeds. We wonder what there was about Avraham that outshone every other righteous person that had preceded him. Surely, there were other upstanding human beings who believed in Hashem and stood up for righteousness and justice. Yet, they did not succeed in receiving reward. Why was it Avraham that accomplished what no one before him had been able to achieve? What made him so unusually worthy of distinction?

Horav Yisroel Belsky, Shlita, explains that Avraham took the shortcomings of the previous generations, transforming them into opportunities to spread the knowledge of Hashem throughout the world. He cites the Talmud in Eiruvim 6A, which relates that Rav once visited a city in which the inhabitants were lax in their Shabbos observance, making light of the prohibition against carrying on Shabbos. Rav immediately made gedarim, protective safeguards, for eiruvim which became directives to serve the Jewish People for years to come. He taught us an important principle in life: a failing may serve as an opportunity for growth. A deficiency may provide the stimulus for a creative solution that will not only remove the problem, but might revolutionize the entire picture.

This is the approach employed by Avraham. He used the people's deficiencies as a mirror to reflect the truth of the one true G-d. He was able to take the failings of the preceding generations and use them as a medium for teaching positive ethical behavior. Thus, he earned a great reward for turning their inequity into good.

Avraham introduced a new relationship between man and G-d. His teachings have influenced a world in different ways. Yet, from a religious viewpoint, Judaism remains distinct and unique. Gentile religions distinguish between the cleric and the layman. The theologian immerses

himself in the theory and ritual of their religion, while the layman leads a secular life, other than the few rituals involved in certain times of devotion, such as holidays. His life does not revolve around religion. His religion is, rather, a part of his life.

Judaism is based on a totally different premise. The obligation to believe, to learn and to practice is applicable to everyone. A rabbi spends more of his time devoted to Torah study and dissemination, but his obligation to study and to observe is no different from that of the layman. We are enjoined to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." This exhortation applies across the board for all Jews alike, regardless of vocation or calling.

Avraham taught us that one can serve Hashem at all times. Every single moment of life affords us the opportunity to serve the Creator. Furthermore, it is the essence of life: to serve Hashem and bring the world into perfection. This is why Avraham received the reward for all those who had preceded him. He saw an opportunity in evil, and perfection where others saw failure. Everyone could serve G-d; everyone could climb out of the abyss and elevate himself. His teachings, albeit not accepted by everyone, have at least influenced a world with a belief in monotheism and a sense of morality, regardless of how much this "sense" has changed over the years.

A Jew's greatest goal is to become an eved, servant, of Hashem. This was Moshe Rabbeinu's greatest appellation. To become an eved, one must subjugate himself entirely to his Master. Every moment, every thought, every focus, everything we do should be directed towards this goal. This can only be achieved through learning. Chazal teach us in Pirkei Avos 2:5, "A boor does not fear sin, and an unschooled man cannot be a saint." Learning is the prerequisite to knowledge, which leads to piety and virtue. Unless one is constantly striving to increase his knowledge of Torah, he cannot achieve his potential; he cannot become a true eved Hashem.

Rav Belsky concludes with a meaningful and profound thought from a young man who was preparing to convert to Judaism. When asked by the supervising Rabbi what it was about our religion that had prompted him to become a Jew, he replied, "Every religion promises a glorious future existence after death. Only Judaism offers true fulfillment here on earth." Only a Torah lifestyle takes every minute and makes it holy. We begin our day with Modeh Ani, thanking Hashem for granting us life, and we end it with Shema Yisrael, accepting the yoke of Heaven upon us. Whenever we partake in this world, we do so with a blessing. Our daily interactions are guided by halachah, Jewish law. Our philosophy of life is based upon the ethical and moral guidance of the Torah. This was Avraham's teaching: B'chol derachecha de'eihu, "In all your ways, know Him." Our lives revolve around Him.

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Avraham Received The Keys To All Blessings
At the beginning of the Parsha, Hashem promises Avram: "I will make you into a great nation; I will bless you, and I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing (heyey bracha)" [Bereshis 12:2].

Rashi comments that the words "heyey bracha" mean: "the blessings are put in your hand." In other words, since he was already promised that G-d will bless him, what do the words "heyey bracha" add? Until now, blessings were in the Hand of G-d. He blessed Adam. He blessed Noach. He blessed

Avram. However, the words "hevei bracha" add the ability to bless. From now on, you — Avram — will bless whomever you wish.

Hashem thus invested in Avram an unparalleled power. The blessings all belong to him! The etymology of the word bracha [blessing] is related to the word bereicha [a pool or reservoir]. "Baruch Ata" does NOT mean: "Blessed art Thou." It means: "You are the source (i.e. — reservoir) of blessing."

G-d is telling Avram that he will now become the source of blessing. If someone in this world wants blessing, Avram is the address to which he must direct himself. It is as if G-d handed over the keys to the storehouse of blessing to Avram and put him in charge of the entire inventory.

Rashi continues along the same lines in interpreting the phrase "And through you will be blessed all the families of the earth." [Bereshis 12:3].

"There are many aggadic interpretations of this phrase, and the following is its simple meaning: A man says to his son, 'Be like Avraham.' Similarly, every instance of the phrase 'they will be blessed through you' in Scripture has this meaning. And the following proves that this is so: 'By you will Israel bless, saying, 'May G-d make you like Ephraim and like Manasseh.' [Bereshis 48:20]"

In other words, it will be so self evident that Avraham is the source of blessing in the world that the biggest blessing a person will be able to give his neighbor is "You should be like Avraham." This is the epitome of blessing.

The story is told that in Radin the Gentiles used to ask the Chofetz Chaim to walk over their fields or touch their cows. Although, to put in mildly, Gentiles in Poland generally did not think much of the Jews, they nevertheless recognized that the Chofetz Chaim was a great holy man and that his footsteps would bring prosperity to their fields. They were convinced that his touch would bring increased milk supply to their cows.

We must ask, how can the Almighty have so much confidence in Avram, to literally "turn over the keys of the warehouse of blessing" to him? How can He give such unprecedented power to Avram? Might he not hoard it? Might he not misuse it? Might he not abuse it? There is a well-known expression, "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts, absolutely." There is no greater "power" than being the source of all blessing in the world. It certainly had the potential to corrupt. Why was the Almighty so confident that this power would not corrupt Avraham?

The answer lies in the expression "Give Emes to Yakov; Chessed to Avraham." [Micha 7:20] The Almighty knew that Avraham's Chessed [Kindness] was akin to His Own. Just as He is non-corruptible and does "good" simply because He is a 'Metiv' [doer of good], so too it was with Avraham.

It is inconceivable to think of Him as being stingy, not wanting to give blessing. After all, He is the source of all favors. In a human form, Avraham Avinu is the source of Chessed. The Almighty did not have to worry that he will take it all for himself or misuse it. Avraham was the ultimate master of kindness. He was the human representative of the Master of the World who is the ultimate Doer of Good.

There is a lesson here for all of us. G-d decides how much he is going to shower on each person — in terms of wealth, in terms of health, wisdom, power, talent and all forms of Heavenly Blessings. It stands to reason that if G-d is going to invest extraordinary blessing in a person, He will invest in that person when He has a measure of confidence in that person. G-d wants to know that the person will know how to use these blessings correctly.

Chazal state that before a child is born, an Angel brings the drop before the Almighty and asks what type of attributes to bestow upon this future person: Strong or weak; wise or foolish; rich or poor?

I once heard that it makes sense to determine "Strong or weak" before the child is created, because a "strong" person cannot be given the body of a "ninety pound weakling." Likewise "wise or foolish" makes sense. The Almighty needs to know ahead of time whether the person will be given a brain with a 140 IQ or one with a 75 IQ.

But why is it necessary to know ahead of time whether the person will be "rich or poor"? The various physical attributes that go into making a person do not correlate with the size of his bank account. Why does the Angel have to know "rich or poor" prior to "equipping" this person in the pre-natal creative phase?

The answer is that the Angel needs to know whether to equip him with a Lev Tov [a good heart] or not. A person who G-d will make into a wealthy person needs to be given the right heart, to properly dispense that wealth and make use of that wealth in a fashion that meets Divine Approval.

If we want to merit blessings, the best way is to demonstrate to G-d — up front — that we will know what to do with those blessings. We need to prove we are a "safe bet". We need to demonstrate that we will treat the blessings properly.

The best way to merit becoming a dispenser of blessing is to be the type of Baal Chessed that was characteristic of Avraham Avinu.

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By **Rabbi Doniel Neustadt**

Rav of Young Israel in Cleveland Heights

A discussion of Halachic topics.

For final rulings, consult your Rav

PRIORITY RULES FOR CHYUVIM

Shulchan Aruch(1) records the long-standing and universally held custom for the son of a deceased parent to lead the weekday(2) prayer services as the sheliach tzibbur. This obligation is in addition to the recitation of Kaddish, and is practiced throughout the eleven months when Kaddish is recited.(3) A son in mourning should do his utmost to observe this custom, for Chazal teach that when a son serves as the sheliach tzibbur, he is actually fulfilling the Biblical commandment of kibbud av v'eim(4) by honoring the soul of his departed parent and alleviating its suffering in Gehinom.

One who does not read a siddur fluently or has difficulty pronouncing Hebrew words correctly should not lead the congregation even if he is a mourner.(5) If a son feels that he will have to rush his davening and compromise the level of his kavanah (concentration), he should not serve as sheliach tzibbur either.(6)

It is not uncommon to find several mourners, called chiyuvim, who wish to lead the same services in the same synagogue. In addition to them, a person observing a yahrzeit may also be present and he, too, is obligated to serve as sheliach tzibbur. In order to avoid disputes between the various parties claiming the right to lead the congregation - particularly since filial devotion is a very emotional matter - the poskim set detailed, precise rules as to who takes precedence. Basically, there are two factors which

determine priority, the first of which depends upon the specific chiyuv period being observed(7) by each of the chiyuvim:

CHIYUV PERIODS

SHELOSHIM - the first thirty days(8) after the burial of a parent (as long as the burial took place before sundown, that day is day number one).

YEAR - the eleven months immediately following the burial day of a parent.

YOM HAFSAKAH - the day on which the eleven-month period of being a chiyuv ends.

Yahrzeit - the anniversary of the parent's day of death.

The other factor which determines chiyuv priority is the "residency" - or membership - status of the chiyuv in that particular synagogue:

MEMBER - A member is one who pays membership dues, is employed by the congregation, or is a regular mispallel(9) in this particular synagogue but is assessed by its administration as being unable to pay membership dues.(10) An unmarried son of a member also has the status of a member.

GUEST - any non-resident of the city in question.

NON-MEMBER - any local resident who is not a member of this particular congregation.

General rules:

1. It is a mitzvah for a congregation to allow any chiyuv, even a guest or a non-member, to serve as sheliach tzibbur.(11)

2. Any member chiyuv has priority over any non-member chiyuv.

3. One may become a member even after his chiyuv begins and will from that time have priority over a non-member chiyuv.(12)

4. A chiyuv who has priority according to halachah should not readily relinquish his right to be the sheliach tzibbur, for the right is not really his to surrender; rather, it belongs to the soul of his parent. If, however, the other mourner will be greatly distressed if he is denied the opportunity to be the sheliach tzibbur, he may give up his right.(13) The rav should be consulted.

5. A chiyuv who does not have priority according to halachah but intimidates or forces the other mourners to give up their rights to him, is described as "gaining nothing for the soul of his parent, nor detracting from any merit that was due the other mourner."(14)

6. When there are several mourners of equal status, they should divide the sheliach tzibbur's duties among themselves in a fair and equitable manner. (15) Since Shacharis may be divided into two parts, there can be up to four chiyuvim dividing the three daily prayer services.(16)

7. Some poskim maintain that it is improper to divide a large minyan into two in order to enable a second mourner to have a minyan for which he can serve as sheliach tzibbur.(17) Other poskim, however, do not object to this.(18)

8. A mourner who davens regularly in one shul, but whose opportunities to serve as sheliach tzibbur will be curtailed because of the other chiyuvim in that shul, is neither required nor advised to switch shuls during his eleven months of mourning. On a Yahrzeit of a parent, however, one should see to it that he does serve as sheliach tzibbur, even if it means davening elsewhere.(19)

9. A grandson should serve as sheliach tzibbur if his grandparent died without leaving a son. If there are other mourners at the same shul, a grandson shares his slot with them but not on equal footing as would a son. The particulars regarding the grandson's rights are left to the rav's discretion.(20)

10. It is appropriate that a son serve as sheliach tzibbur after the passing of an adoptive parent. The standard rules of priority, however, do not apply and he does not take precedence over other mourners.(21)

11. During the twelfth month of the mourning period, the mourner is no longer required to serve as sheliach tzibbur, but may do so if he wishes. (22) While some poskim recommend that he do so, he has no priority over any other mourner.(23)

12. One who is in mourning for both his father and his mother does not have more priority than one who is mourning for one parent.(24)

The following rules of priority apply to chiyuvim of comparable membership status (i.e., member vs. member, non-member vs. non member, guest vs. guest):(25)

1. A Sheloshim has priority over a Yahrzeit(26) and all other chiyuvim.(27)

2. A Yahrzeit has priority over a Yom hafsaakah and a Year.

3. A Yom hafsaakah has priority over a Year.

The following rules of priority apply between a member and a guest:

1. A Yahrzeit member has priority over a Yahrzeit guest or a Sheloshim guest.

2. A Sheloshim member has priority over a Yahrzeit guest.(28)

3. A Sheloshim or Yahrzeit guest and a Year member are equal chiyuvim.(29)

4. A Yom hafsaakah guest has priority over a Year member.

FOOTNOTES:

1 O.C. 53:20; Rama, Y.D. 376:4

2 On Shabbos, Yom Tov, Chol Ha-Moed and Purim, a mourner does not serve as sheliach tzibbur. On Tishah b'Av and erev Yom Kippur, a mourner serves as sheliach tzibbur. There are various customs concerning Rosh Chodesh, Chanukah and erev Pesach.

3 The "eleven months" period is always calculated from the day of burial, even if several days elapsed between death and burial; Beir Halachah 132:1, as explained by Igros Moshe, Y.D. 4:61-19.

4 Chayei Adam 67:6. The poskim debate whether a parent may excuse his child from according him this honor and whether the child is obligated to listen to his parent; see Pischei Teshuvah, Y.D. 3 44:1; Chelkas Yaakov 2:93; She'arim Metzuyanim b'Halachah 26:1.

5 Mishnah Berurah 53:60.

6 Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Halichos Shelomo 18, note 28).

7 Actually, the most "important" period is the first seven days of mourning, called shivah. Our discussion, however, does not cover the rules of shivah, since most often the davening takes place in the house of mourning, not in the synagogue. In the atypical case where a mourner during shivah must daven in the synagogue [where he is a member], he has priority over all other chiyuvim.

8 While Yom Tov mitigates some of the restrictions of sheloshim, it does not lessen the sheloshim obligation of serving as sheliach tzibbur; Gesher ha-Chayim 30:10-2.

9 "Regular mispallel" is defined as one who davens in this synagogue on Shabbos and Yom Tov on a regular basis; Teshuvos Binyan David, 12, quoted in Tefillah k'Hilchasah 24, note 194.

10 Beir Halachah 132:1.

11 Mishnah Berurah 53:60.

12 Harav Y.S. Elyashiv (Tefillah k'Hilchasah 24, note 194).

13 Eimek Berachah (Aveilus), pg. 143. See also Halichos Shelomo 18, note 51.

14 Chasam Sofer, Y.D. 345, quoted in Pischei Teshuvah, Y.D. 376:7.

15 One who has a choice of being a sheliach tzibbur for Minchah or for Ma'ariv, should choose Ma'ariv over Minchah; Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 26:1.

16 Igros Moshe, Y.D. 4:61-5. Several brothers, even though they are davening for the same parent, have separate rights as individual mourners; Rama, Y.D. 376:4.

17 Chazon Ish, quoted by Harav C. Kanievsky in Ma'aseh Ish, vol. 5, pg. 24; Igros Moshe, Y.D. 4:61-4. See also Tefillah k'Hilchasah 24:54 quoting Rav Shelomo Ha-Kohen of Vilna.

18 See Piskei Teshuvus 132:28, note 148, quoting a number of contemporary sources.

19 Harav Y. Kamenetsky (Emes l'Ya'akov, Y.D. 376:4, note 224); Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Halichos Shelomo 18:24).

20 Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Halichos Shelomo 18:15).

21 Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Nishmas Avraham, vol. 5, pg. 141).

22 Mateh Efrayim, Kaddish 4:2.

23 Igros Moshe, Y.D. 4:61-17. See also Shevet ha-Levi 2:161. See, however, Chut Shani, Ribbis, pg. 172, where Harav N. Karelitz recommends that a mourner should not serve as sheliach tzibbur during the twelfth month.

24 Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 26:16. See also Emes l'Ya'akov, Y.D. 376:4, note 224.

25 Unless otherwise noted, the rules of priority are based on the decisions of Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 26 and Beir Halachah 132:1. See also Yesodei Semachos 9:7 and 12:11.

26 During Shacharis, the Sheloshim leads until Ashrei-U'va l'Tziyon, and the Yahrzeit takes over from there.

27 Igros Moshe, Y.D. 4:60; 4:61-20. But in many communities the custom is that a Yahrzeit has priority over a Sheloshim.

28 During Shacharis, the Sheloshim leads until Ashrei U'va Letziyon, and the Yahrzeit takes over from there.

29 "Equal chiyuvim" means that neither has priority. During Shacharis, one should daven until Ashrei-U'va l'Tziyon, and the other should continue from there. Minchah and Ma'ariv should be divided between them.

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Covenant & Conversation

Thoughts on the Weekly Parsha from

Sir Jonathan Sacks

Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth

[From 2 years ago - currently 5765]

Lech Lecha

The Long Walk to Freedom

Judaism is supremely a religion of freedom - not freedom in the modern sense, the ability to do what we like, but in the ethical sense of the ability to do what we should, to become co-architects with G-d of a just and gracious social order. The former leads to a culture of rights, the latter to a culture of responsibilities. Judaism is faith as responsibility.

Last week I showed how responsibility, its evasion and abdication, forms the theme of all four dramas of Genesis prior to Abraham. Adam denies personal responsibility. Cain denies moral responsibility. Noah fails the test of collective responsibility. Babel was a rejection of ontological responsibility - the idea that the ethical imperative comes from a source beyond the self.

This is not a small idea. For almost as long as we have documentary evidence, human beings have attributed their misfortunes to factors other than the human will and the "responsible self." They still do today. In the past, men blamed the stars, the fates, the furies, the gods. Today they blame their parents, their environment, their genes, the educational system, the media, the politicians, and when all else fails - the Jews.

There is a Jewish joke that says it better than any philosophical treatise. For a year, Rabbi Cohen has laboured to teach his unruly class the book of Joshua. No one has paid much attention, so he makes the end-of-year exam as easy as possible. He asks Marvin, at the back of the room, "Who destroyed the walls of Jericho?" Marvin replies: "Please sir, it wasn't me." Scandalised, he reports this to Marvin's parents. Instead of apologising, they indignantly reply, "If Marvin says it wasn't him, then it wasn't him." In despair he goes to the president of the congregation and tells him the story. The president listens, opens his drawer, gets out his chequebook, writes in it and says: "Here's a thousand dollars. Get the walls repaired, and stop complaining."

We live in an age of "Please sir, it wasn't me." In one famous American law case, the attorney defending two young men who murdered their parents claimed that they were innocent on the grounds that their parents had been psychologically abusive. In another, the lawyer argued that his client was not to blame for his violence. What he ate made him excitable. This became known as the "junk food defence." What started life as a joke has become a phenomenon. It is called the victim culture.

Nowadays, to win sympathy for your cause, you have to establish your credentials as a victim. This has overwhelming advantages. People

empathise with your situation, give you support, and avoid criticising your actions. It has only three drawbacks: it is false, it is corrupting, and it is a denial of humanity. A victim is an object, not a subject; a done-to, not a doer. He or she systematically denies responsibility, and those who wish to help only prolong the denial. They become what is known in addiction therapy as co-dependents. By locating the cause of someone's plight in factors external to the person, the victim culture perpetuates the condition of victimhood. Instead of helping the prisoner out of prison, it locks him in and throws away the key.

The call of G-d to Abraham - "Leave your land, your birthplace and your father's house" - was a summons to chart new and different path, the most fateful and at the same time the most hopeful in the history of mankind. The best description of it is the title of Nelson Mandela's autobiography: The Long Walk to Freedom.

Three of the most famous denials of freedom were made by individuals from Jewish backgrounds who rejected Judaism. The first was Spinoza who argued that all human behaviour is explicable by causal laws. Nowadays we would call this genetic determinism. The second was Karl Marx who claimed that history was made by material, specifically economic, factors. The third was Sigmund Freud who contended that actions are the result of unconscious and irrational drives, the chief of which relate to the early years of childhood, especially the Oedipus complex, the conflict between fathers and sons.

Unwittingly they provided the best commentary on the opening verse of today's sedra. Marx said that human behaviour is determined by economic factors such as the ownership of land. Therefore G-d said to Abraham: Leave your land. Spinoza said that conduct is driven by instincts given at birth. Therefore G-d said to Abraham: Leave your place of birth. Freud said that we are influenced by our relationship with our father. Therefore G-d said to Abraham: Leave your father's house.

Liberty is not a given of the human situation. Like the other distinctive achievements of the spirit - art, literature, music, poetry - it needs training, discipline, apprenticeship, the most demanding routines and the most painstaking attention to detail. No one composed a great novel or symphony without years of preparation. That is why most theories of human behaviour are simply false. They claim that we are either free or not; either we have choice or our behaviour is causally determined. Freedom is not an either/or. It is a process. It begins with dependence and only slowly, gradually, does it become liberty, the ability to stand back from the pressures and influences on you and act in response to educated conscience, judgment, wisdom, moral literacy. It is, in short, a journey: Abraham's journey.

That is the deep meaning of the words Lech Lekha. Normally they are translated as, "Go, leave, travel." What they really mean is: journey [lekh] to yourself [lekha]. Leave behind all external influences that turn us into victims of circumstances beyond our control, and travel inward to the self. It is there - only there - that freedom is born, practised and sustained.

<http://www.anshe.org/parsha.htm#parsha> Parsha Page by **Fred Toczek**
- A Service of Anshe Emes Synagogue (Los Angeles)

LECH LECHA 5757 & 5762

I. Summary

A. Journey to Canaan. Hashem told Avrom to leave Choran and proceed to another land which Hashem would show him. Avrom (along with his wife Sarai, nephew Lot, their possessions and the followers whom Avrom and Sarai had brought closer to Hashem and Torah) journeyed towards Canaan (Israel).

B. Hashem's Promise. Avrom reached Canaan and continued on until he reached Shechem, where Hashem appeared in a vision and affirmed His promise to Avrom that Canaan would one day be his descendants' domain. Avrom built an altar as thanksgiving.

C. Journey to Egypt. Because of a famine, Avrom and Sarai temporarily journeyed to Egypt. Avrom, fearful the Egyptians would kill him to take Sarai, told her to say that she was his sister. When they arrived in Egypt, Sarai's beauty was greatly admired and she was taken into Pharaoh's royal household. However, when Pharaoh and his household were smitten with mysterious illnesses, Pharaoh sensed that something was wrong. When Pharaoh learned that Sarai was really Avrom's wife and that his taking Sarai had caused this punishment, he asked Avrom and his family to leave Egypt (even offering them riches to entice them to leave), which they did.

D. Return to Canaan. Avrom and Sarai returned to the city of Bethel in Canaan. As both Avrom and Lot had become extremely wealthy and had many flocks and herds, there wasn't enough pasture land for both of their herds and quarrels erupted between their herdsmen. To avoid conflict, Avrom suggested that he and Lot separate, and offered Lot the first choice of which land to settle. Lot chose the fertile, well watered plain of Jordan, and pitched his tent until the infamous city of S'dome. Avrom settled near Chevron, and was again promised by Hashem that his descendants would be granted this land.

E. Battle of the Kings. A battle erupted between five kings (including the king of S'dome) on the one hand, and four kings (including king Kedorlaomer) on the other hand. The latter was victorious and took into possession all possessions and food of S'dome and Amorah and much of its populace, including Lot. Hearing of his nephew's plight, Avrom rallied his (few) men and defeated Kedorlaomer and the others, freeing among others Lot. The King of S'dome went out to greet Avrom, offering him all of the possessions which he had freed in his victory. Avrom, however, refused any rewards for his efforts.

F. Avrom's Heirs. Despite all of his good fortune, Avrom was still saddened by the fact that he was childless. Hashem then took Avrom outside and told him to look up at the sky and count the stars. "Surely you cannot count them," said Hashem, "so many will be your children." Hashem told Avrom that He took him out of the land of Uhr Kasdim to give him this land as a possession to be inherited by Avrom's descendants. Avrom asked Hashem "whereby shall I know that I will possess this land?" Hashem then made a covenant with Avrom (the Covenant Between The Halves), wherein He informed Avrom that his descendants would temporarily be enslaved in a foreign land, but that they would emerge with great wealth.

G. Sarai & Hagar. Because Sarai was childless, she suggested that Avrom take Hagar (Sarai's maid) as a second wife. When Hagar became pregnant, she became disrespectful to Sarai. This bothered Sarai greatly and she complained to Avrom, who returned Hagar to Sarai's authority. Sarai dealt harshly with her, and Hagar fled. An angel of Hashem appeared to Hashem and told her to return, promising that the son Yishmael that she would bear would be the founder of a large nation.

H. Bris Milah. At age 99, Hashem renewed the covenant with Avrom, changing his name to Abraham ("father of a multitude of nations"). Hashem commanded Abraham to circumcise himself and all other male members of his household. Since then every male child is circumcised when he is 8 days old, symbolizing the covenant between Hashem and Abraham and his descendants. Hashem also told Abraham that Sarai would now be known as Sarah ("princess for all"). Abraham promptly performed the mitzvah of Bris Milah, circumcising Yishmael and every male member of his household and them himself.

II. Divrei Torah

A. Lil'Mode Ulilamed (**Rabbi Mordechai Katz**)

Bikkur Cholim (visiting the sick). When Hashem visited Abraham after his Bris in order to comfort him, He set a standard for all of us. Visiting the sick can help save a life, and is therefore accorded a high place in Jewish Law. A woman once appeared before Rav Chaim, her face moist with tears. When Rav Chaim asked what was troubling her, she replied that she needed money for her baby who was very ill. Not only did Rav Chaim run

to secure the necessary money, but he also accompanied the woman to her home where he stayed and watched over the baby for two days, giving her a chance to sleep while foregoing sleep himself.

B. Growth Through Torah (**Rabbi Zelig Pliskin**)

1. When you suffer, focus on how you can use this experience to help others. "And Hashem said to Abraham, go from your land, and from your birthplace, and from the land of your father, to the land which I will show you." Rabbi Nachum of Tzernoble devoted much time and effort to redeeming Jews imprisoned by anti-Semitic regimes. He traveled from place to place gathering funds to make the payments necessary to free those in prison. Once while he was in Zhitomer, some people fabricated lies about him and he was himself imprisoned. A righteous person who came to visit him said "Abraham was outstanding in his kindness to wayfarers. He took in travelers and expended great efforts to make them comfortable. He always wanted to know what more he could do to help his guests. Hashem told him to travel away from his home, birthplace and land; only now when he personally experiences being a stranger in a strange place will he know firsthand what it is like. This gave him a greater appreciation of what he could do to help his guests." The visitor continued, "similarly with you, you are completely devoted to freeing prisoners. Hashem is giving you an opportunity to experience what it is like to be held captive. This will give you a deeper appreciation of the necessity of doing all you can to free others." Whenever you personally suffer any kind of pain or sorrow, remember carefully your experience. When others are in similar situations, you will know with greater depth what they are experiencing and you will be able to help them with greater sensitivity and compassion. Moreover, it will make your own suffering easier to cope with, as you'll can view it as a valuable opportunity to learn.

2. Be aware of everyone's greatness. As noted above, Hashem promised Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars. The Bal Shem Tov explained that the descendants of Abraham are like stars, which when seen from a great distance and they appear to be mere tiny specks, but in heaven they are actually quite gigantic. So too with people. They may look "small", but in reality they have much greatness. When we look at another person, we should remember that he/she is like a star with enormous potential for greatness, and treat him/her accordingly. After a meeting, Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky and Rav Moshe Feinstein stood outside a waiting car and discussed who would sit next to the driver and who would sit alone in the back. Rav Feinstein took the back seat. After Rav Feinstein left the car, Rav Kamenetzky told the driver "we were clarifying who would get out first. That person, we decided, would sit in the back. Otherwise, the longer-traveling passenger would end up riding in the back with you alone at the wheel, making you look merely like you are our chauffeur. But, that is not the case; we appreciate your importance and didn't want to compromise it.

C. Kol Dodi on the Torah (**Rabbi David Feinstein**)

Sarah and Abraham's Test. Immediately upon entering Egypt, Sarah's great beauty was noticed and she was taken into the royal household. Even though no harm was done to her, Chazal teach that it was a trial of the faith of Abraham and Sarah. Why did Hashem, whose ways are totally just and righteous, see fit to subject Sarah to such a terrifying experience? We may assume that Sarah's abduction must have been part of Hashem's master plan to accomplish a good purpose and that the benefit realized was very great and commensurate with its very distressing nature. What was the purpose? In the short term, the plagues protected Sarah's honor and allowed for her freedom and resulted in Abraham and Sarah being given sizable gifts. More importantly, in the long run, the incident set a great example for all of Egypt. Everyone heard about the harsh punishment Pharaoh received for his unsuccessful attempt to impose himself on an unwilling Hebrew woman. This was a lesson the Egyptians would not soon forget; many years later, when the Jews were enslaved in Egypt, the Egyptians restrained

themselves from taking advantage of their power over the Jewish women. We may assume that this was the fruit of Hashem's master plan. This serves as a powerful lesson for all of us; whenever we undergo a difficult experience, we must strengthen our faith in Hashem's goodness and believe that His master plan required that we endure the difficulty in order to accomplish something worthwhile and that even though the benefits of a trial may not be realized until some time later, they may be of incalculable importance.

D. Love Thy Neighbor (**Rabbi Zelig Pliskin**)

Your wife comes first. The Torah states regarding Abraham, "from there he relocated to the mountain East of Bethel, and pitched his tent there." The Hebrew for "his tent" is "oholo"; yet, the Torah writes "oholah", ending with the feminine suffix which means "her tent". Why does the Torah change the gender and what does this teach? The Midrash notes that this teaches us that Abraham first pitched Sarah's tent and then his own. From here we see that when a husband needs to do something for himself and his wife, he should take care of his wife's needs first.

From: **Rabbi Shlomo Riskin's Shabbat Shalom Parsha Column**

[Shabbat_Shalom@ohrtorahstone.org.il] on behalf of Rabbi Shlomo Riskin's Shabbat Shalom Parsha Column

[parshat_hashavua@ohrtorahstone.org.il] Sent: Wednesday, November 01, 2006 3:57 AM To: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin's Shabbat Shalom Parsha Column Subject: Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Lech Lecha by Shlomo Riskin
Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Lech Lecha (Genesis 12:1-17:27) By Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel – Our Biblical portion opens with G-d's election of Abraham: "Go away, for your own good, from your land, from your birthplace and from your father's house to the land that I shall show you. I will make you into a great nation... You shall become a blessing... All the families of the earth shall be blessed through you" (Genesis 12:1-3). And here indeed is the first Divine Commandment to the first Jew – and it is the command to make aliyah. It will be important for us to try to understand why living in Israel should be so central an aspect of our status as the people of the covenant, but even prior to this is an even more obvious query: Why did G-d choose Abraham? The Bible has not yet told us of any significant act which he performed or any path-breaking ideology that he discovered which would warrant his election. Almost apropos of nothing, G-d seems to have chosen this son of Terah to be a source of blessing for the world. On what basis?

The great philosopher – sage of the twelfth century, Maimonides, basing himself on the earlier midrashim, maintains that it was actually Abraham who discovered the concept of ethical monotheism – a unique and single Creator of the universe who demands justice, compassion and peace. Abraham shattered the idols in Ur Kasdim, was chased to Haran where he continued to preach his new-found religion, and was at that time addressed by G-d and sent to the land of Israel (Mishneh Torah, Laws of Idolatry 1,3). In effect, then, if the question is raised:

"How odd of G-d to choose Abraham for the Jews" the logical answer must be: "It was not at all odd because Abraham chose G-d".

At this point in our inquiry, our earlier question becomes a major issue: Why is travel away from country, birthplace and father's house necessary to propagate this new faith? The first issue to be understood is that in fact it is the propagation of this new credo which is the source of the Abrahamic blessing for the world and is the essence of his election. Not only does G-d stipulate that "through (Abraham) all the families of the earth shall be blessed," but Maimonides also pictures the first Jew as an intellectually gifted forerunner of "Yonatan Applesseed," planting seeds of ethical monotheism and plucking the human fruits of his labor wherever he went.

And, as strange as it may sound, this "missionary activity" on behalf of G-d which was established by Abraham is a model for all of his descendants and even (according to many authorities) an actual commandment! In the words of the Midrash Sifrei (Deut 6,5), in interpreting the commandment "to love the Lord your G-d," our Sages teach: "(we are commanded) to make Him (G-d) beloved to all creatures, as did Abraham your father, as our Biblical text teaches, 'the souls which they (Abram and Sarai) made in Haran' (Gen 12:5). After all, if all the people of the world were to gather in order to create one mosquito and endow it with a soul, they would be incapable of accomplishing it, so then what is the text saying in the words, 'the souls which they make in Haran?' But apparently this teaches that Abraham and Sarah converted them and brought them under the wings of the Divine Presence."

The midrash further confirms that the propagation of ethical monotheism was the major vocation of Abraham when it explains the reason for G-d's command that he leave Haran in favor of Israel: "Said R. Berakhia: to what could Abraham be prepared? To a vial of sweet smelling spices sealed tightly and locked away in a corner- so that the pleasant aroma could not spread. Once the vial began to be transported, its aroma radiated all around. So did the Holy One Blessed be He say to Abraham, 'Move from your place, and your name (and message) will become great universally'" (Bereishit Rabbath 39).

But this midrash flies in the face of the Biblical text. It was in Ur Kasdim, and then in Haran, that Abraham and Sarah won converts (souls) to their religion! And this is confirmed by a daring Talmudic statement, "Said R. Elazar, the Holy One Blessed be He sent Israel into exile amongst the nations of the world only in order to win converts..." (T. B. Pesahim 77b). So if propagating the faith is so essential to the Jewish election and mission, why did G-d command and send Abraham (as well as his descendants) to live in one place, Israel? It would seem that a large diaspora would be far more efficacious in bringing multitudes of souls into our faith!

The true answer lies in the fact that we are a nation as well as a religion, a people imbued with a mission not only to serve G-d but also – and even principally – to perfect society. From our very inception the Bible understood that the world is a global village, that nations are inter-dependent, and that an ethical and moral code of conduct was central to the survival of a free world.

Only from the back-drop of our formation of a nation – desperately involved with daily problems of peace and war, wealth and poverty, racial and ethnic differences, education for every spectrum of society – do we have the opportunity of influencing other nations, because they have become impressed with the society which we develop. Our goal therefore must be to influence others because they strive to emulate us, not for us to be a nation like all nations but rather for us to be a light unto the nations.

Even more to the point, no one can influence another unless he/she knows very well his/her own self definition. A minority group dominated by a host-culture majority will expend so much energy merely attempting to survive that there is little ability or will left over to develop a unique culture as a model for others; besides, unless one is in control of the society, there is no living laboratory to test our ethical and moral ideas, to see if they can be expressed in real life situations.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, the Chief Rabbi of Great Britain, expressed it very well. There were three brilliant and disenfranchised Jews who developed unique world outlooks. Karl Marx argued that human beings are controlled by social forces, mainly economic, tied to land or real estate. Spinoza maintained that humanity is controlled by nature and natural instincts, biological drives and genetic determination. Freud believed that every human personality is formed by the laboratory of his/her parents home, fraught with traumas of Oedipus and Electra complexes and all too often arrested from proper emotional development by parental insensitivity.

G-d commands Abraham: "Free yourself of the Marxian determinism of land, the Spinozistic determinism of genetic birthplace, and the Freudian determinism of parental home. All of these will have an influence, but

human freedom emanating from our being children of a G-d of love will empower us to transcend these limitations and create a more perfect society. Hence G-d tells Abraham that he must leave Marxist nationalism, Spinozistic materialism and Freudian determinism to forge a unique nation dedicated to the ultimate values of human life and freedom, societal justice and compassion, international pluralism and peace – so that through his special nation the world will be blessed and humanity will be redeemed.

Shabbat Shalom

From: Eretz Hemdah E-Mail staff [mailto:dana@eretzhemdah.org] Sent: Sunday, October 15, 2006 6:01 AM To: dana@eretzhemdah.org

MORESHEET SHAUL from the works of

Rav Shaul Yisraeli zt"l

A Siyum on Massechet Kiddushin

(based on Chavot Binyamin, siman 119)

The last mishna in Kiddushin mentions that the forefathers kept the laws of the Torah before they were given. Rav also repeated this concept in Yoma 28. On this, the Makneh asks how Avraham could marry Hagar, as she was a first generation Egyptian (see Devarim 23:9). He suggests an answer that the prohibition is only to marry an Egyptian through formal kiddushin, whereas Hagar was only a pilegish (concubine). This works out according to the Rambam that a pilegish does not have kiddushin.

The gemara (Sanhedrin 21a), discussing the number of wives a king can have, cites Rav who says that a pilegish refers to a woman who received kiddushin from the king but lacked a ketuba. This fits Rav's approach that those things that the prophet Shmuel warned that a king might do (including taking one's daughter) are forbidden to him, as a king has no dispensations from the prohibitions incumbent on all of Bnei Yisrael. Therefore, there must be kiddushin, for it is forbidden to live with a woman without it. Another indication that a pilegish has kiddushin is from the machloket between R. Yehuda and R. Meir whether a pilegish has no ketuba or a partial ketuba. This seems to assume that there must be kiddushin, for otherwise, there would be no reason to consider a ketuba. If so, wasn't Avraham's taking of a pilegish, whether it was with or without kiddushin, forbidden?

The Magid Mishne (on the Rambam, Ishut 1:4) says that the Rambam's text in Sanhedrin is that a pilegish has kiddushin but no ketuba. This is difficult because the Rambam (Melachim 4:4), in reference to a king, says that a pilegish does not have kiddushin. Also, how can there be kiddushin without a ketuba, as the halacha is that a condition to withhold a ketuba from one's wife through kiddushin does not take effect? The Makneh says that the relationship with a pilegish lacks the mutual obligations between the two (including ketuba), and it just allows occasional cohabitation. However, this is difficult, for if there is kiddushin, how can the mutual obligations that kiddushin entails not set in?

Let us take a further look at the Rambam's (ibid.) position on pilegish: "So too, he [the king] takes women from throughout the borders of Israel: wives, with a ketuba and kiddushin, and pilagshim, without a ketuba or kiddushin. Just by singling her out, he acquires her, and she is permitted to him. However, a simple person is forbidden to have a pilegish except a female servant after yi'ud (setting her aside as a wife- see Shemot 21:8-9)." How is it that a king may take a pilegish without kiddushin if a regular Jew is prohibited to do so? After all, although Shmuel mentioned certain of a king's powers, which according to some, he is permitted to exercise, this only allows him to assert his authority over a fellow Jew, not to ignore a religious prohibition. It is also unclear why the Rambam views yi'ud as a case of pilegish, as the process appears to create full ishut (status of marriage), just as kiddushin does.

To begin answering these questions, we will note another halacha in the Rambam, which opens the laws of Ishut and is the basis of a broad thesis: "Before the Torah was given, a man would meet a woman in the market. If he and she wanted him to marry her, he would bring her into his house and cohabit in seclusion, and she would be his wife. Once the Torah was given, Israel was commanded that he should first acquire her in front of witnesses, and then she would be for him a wife."

The Rambam seems to be saying that the major innovation of the Torah law of kiddushin is the need for witnesses. We would have thought the act of acquisition was the heart of the matter and the witnesses are a simple detail.

The Rambam apparently understands that the important thing that comes from kiddushin is that the woman is set aside for one man alone. The main contributor to that situation is the fact that there are witnesses, which turns the union into a fact known to the public. [Ed. note- It is not clear to me why an act of acquisition, which turns an object into the property of an individual, is less effective at setting it aside for him if there were not witnesses present.] Therefore, a pilegish is not bound to her "husband" in that manner, and there is little preventing her from leaving him. Despite

their understanding in the meantime that she is set aside for him, their relationship is still a haphazard one which is a form of z'nut (promiscuity) which was forbidden when the Torah was given.

However, if it were possible to create a relationship where the woman was bound to the man, even if it was without formal kiddushin, cohabitation would be permitted. Since the Rambam says that women could be taken for the king from throughout the land, it follows that they could not just get up and leave him. (Note that other people are not allowed to even use the servants of the king.) Since the king can make a woman off limits to others without kiddushin, the Torah prohibition on pilegish does not apply to him. Similarly, although the owner of a Jewish maid-servant can use yi'ud to create kiddushin, even if he wants to use it to create only pilegish status, he may do so. She will be permitted to him because, as his maid-servant, he can make her off limits to others. In other cases, a man can only set her aside effectively with kiddushin and, in the absence thereof, relations would be deemed z'nut. (The gemara (Kiddushin 2b) comments that the term kiddushin is related to making the woman forbidden to everyone else like hekdesh.)

When the Rambam says that pilegish is without kiddushin he is referring to the formal kiddushin which is accomplished by the three effective acts of acquisition (see Kiddushin 2a). However, it is true that if the effect of being off limits to others can be accomplished without kiddushin, one can arrive at a legitimate status of pilegish who is permitted because she is quasi-mekudeshet. It is in the case of quasi-kiddushin that R. Yehuda and R. Meir discussed whether a pilegish receives a ketuba or not. In a case where there was actual kiddushin, it is not possible to treat the woman like a pilegish and consider depriving her of a ketuba.

Finally, we can similarly explain the status of Hagar. She did not receive kiddushin from Avraham and, therefore, there was no prohibition due to her being an Egyptian. However, since she was his maid-servant, she was off limits to others and permitted, even according to the rules in place after the giving of the Torah, as she was set aside for Avraham alone.

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PARASHAT LEKH LEKHA

"Berit Bein Ha-betarim" – the Covenant Between the Parts By Rav Yaakov Medan

"YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE STRANGERS..."

The "Covenant between the Parts" begins with bad tidings: Avraham is presented with the prospect of a four-hundred year exile, including slavery and suffering. Chazal debate the reason for this affliction, and – as is their way – couch their explanation in terms of Divine retribution, reward and punishment: "Rabbi Abahu said in the name of Rabbi Elazar: For what reason was Avraham punished, that his descendants would be enslaved in Egypt for two hundred and ten years? Because he pressed Torah Sages into service, as it is written, 'He led his trained servants, born to his house....' Shmuel said: Because he exaggerated in [his demands on] God's Divine attributes, as it is written, 'By what shall I know that I shall inherit it?' Rabbi Yochanan said: Because he kept people from joining the monotheistic faith, as it is written: '[The king of Sodom said to Avraham:] Give me the people, and take the property for yourself.'" (Nedarim 32a) The three answers offered by the Gemara fall into two clear categories. One category includes those who follow the teachings of R. Yochanan of Teveria – R. Yochanan himself, R. Elazar, his colleague and disciple, and R. Abahu, his disciple. In the second group, the Rosh Yeshiva of Neharde'a in Bavel – Shmuel – sits alone. The Amoraim of Teveria connect the "Covenant between the Parts" with the preceding parasha – Avraham's battle against Kedarla'omer and his company - and seek Avraham's sin within this context. Shmuel, in contrast, regards the episode of the Covenant as an independent unit, and seeks the sin within this unit itself, namely, in Avraham's words to God. "BY WHAT SHALL I KNOW THAT I SHALL INHERIT IT?"

Shmuel's understanding of Avraham's sin sits well with the literal reading of the text. Avraham asks of G-d some guarantee for the fulfillment of His promise concerning the inheritance of the land. This demand would seem to express a deficiency in his supposedly perfect faith, justifying a harsh punishment. Indeed, in

Shemuel's view, Avraham's punishment was "measure for measure": because Avraham asked, "How shall I know" (ba- meh eda), he was informed of the future exile of his descendants with the words, "Know with certainty..." (yado'a teda).

This interpretation raises two difficult questions. A. Avraham is the father of monotheistic faith and the greatest believer. How can we attribute to him the sin of deficient faith? B. The verses preceding the notification of future affliction represent a clear contradiction to the idea that Avraham's faith was anything less than perfect: "He brought him outside and said: 'Look, now,

to the heavens and count the stars – if you are able to count them.' And He said to him: 'So shall be your descendants.' And he believed in God, and He considered it righteous on his part. And He said to him: 'I am G-d Who brought you out of Ur-Kasdim to give you this land for a possession.' And he said: 'Lord God, how shall I know that I shall inherit it?'" (15:5-7) The Torah speaks explicitly in praise of Avraham's faith. Why, then, would he not believe that the land would be given to him? [1] It is possible that Shemuel's understanding is connected to that of the author of Seder Olam, as Rashi quotes in his name:

"Four hundred and thirty years' – all inclusive. From the time of Yitzchak's birth until this point [the exodus], four hundred years had passed. From the time that Avraham [first] had offspring, the promise 'Your descendants will be strangers...' was fulfilled, and thirty years passed from the time of [God's] decree at the Covenant until the birth of Yitzchak." (Rashi, Shemot 12:41) This is most surprising: How could the Covenant have taken place when Avraham was seventy years old, when we are told explicitly, at the beginning of our parasha: "Avraham was seventy-five years old when he left Charan" (12:7)?

Ramban (Shemot 12:40) addresses this question, and mentions the opinion of the Seder Olam that Avraham actually ascended twice from Charan to Eretz Yisrael: once at the age of seventy, and again at the age of seventy-five. This explanation is somewhat forced. In any event, his explanation implies that the narrative does not follow chronological order, and that the Covenant took place before the beginning of the parasha. Perhaps we need not posit two journeys by Avraham to Eretz Yisrael; perhaps it is enough for us to move the Covenant to the end of parashat Noach, to the time when Avraham was living with his family in Charan. Charan is situated near the river Perat, which represents the border of the land promised to Avraham in the Covenant. In the Covenant between the Parts, Avraham was promised not only the land of Canaan, as in the covenant of his circumcision, but all of "this land" – including the Keini, the Kenizi, the Kadmoni and the Refaim. Let us clarify the picture that arises from this hypothesis.

Avraham was living with his father's household and his family in Charan. There he receives a Divine revelation at the age of seventy, in which G-d shows him from a distance "this land," which lies on the south-western side of the river Perat, and promises him: "I am G-d Who brought you out of Ur-Kasdim to give you this land as a possession." In the wake of this message, G-d commands him – five years later, when he is seventy-five years old – to leave his land, his birthplace and his father's home, and to go to that land which He will show him. At this stage, Avraham has not yet become the father and greatest of believers. He is the son of Terach the idolater, and although he has discovered (through contemplation of the sun and moon) that it is G-d Who created the world, and although he has already withstood the test of the furnace in Ur-Kasdim, he still has questions and uncertainties as to his path and God's promises. Indeed, he is punished for these uncertainties in the affliction promised in the Covenant between the Parts: "Your descendants will be strangers..."

When Avraham reaches the land five years later, by God's command, and G-d is revealed to him at his tent and guides him in all his endeavors – only then, in the land of God's inheritance, the land that G-d desires, does he ascend from one spiritual level to the next, until he becomes the greatest of all believers in God. Only then are we told, "He believed in God, and it was considered righteousness on his part."

According to our hypothesis, the parasha should be divided into two separate parts [2]: A. "After these things, God's word came to Avram in a vision, saying: 'Do not fear, Avram, I am your Shield; your reward is very great.' And Avram said: 'Lord God; what can You give me, for I am childless and the steward of my house is Eliezer of Damesek?'" And Avram said, 'Behold, to me You have given no children, and here, the one born in my house will be my heir.' And behold, God's word came to him, saying: 'It is not he who will be your heir, but one who will descend from your bowels will be your heir.' And He took him outside and said, 'Look, now, at the heavens and count the stars – if you are able to count them.' And He said to him, 'So will your descendants be.' And he believed in God, and it was considered righteousness on his part." (15:1-6)

B. "He said to him: 'I am G-d Who brought you out of Ur-Kasdim to give you this land for a possession.' And he said, 'Lord God: by what shall I know that I shall inherit it?' He said to him, 'Take me a three-year old heifer and a three-year old goat and a three-year old ram and a turtledove and a young pigeon.' So he took all of these for Him and divided them in the middle and

placed each half facing the other, but he did not divide the birds. And the eagle descended upon the carcasses, but Avram drove them away. And the sun began to set, and a deep sleep fell upon Avram, and behold – a great dark fear fell upon him." (15:7-12) The first part takes place in the land of Canaan, following the war against the kings, when Avraham is already at least seventy-five years old. The second part precedes the other chronologically; it takes place in Charan when Avraham is seventy years old.

"BECAUSE HE PRESSED TORAH SAGES INTO SERVICE"

As mentioned above, the Sages of Eretz Yisrael interpret the narrative in accordance with the order of the text. According to their understanding, the Covenant between the Parts takes place immediately after the war against the kings, and the narrative as a whole is introduced with the words at the beginning of chapter 15: "After these things..." Let us first discuss the approach of Rabbi Abahu in the name of Rabbi Elazar. In his view, Avraham was punished with servitude for his descendants "measure for measure" because "he pressed Torah Sages into service." When I was a child, these words of R. Abahu used to be used as proof for the argument that Torah students should not be enlisted in the I.D.F. This claim proceeds from the exegetical assumption that Avraham is guilty of causing his "trained servants, born to his house" to neglect Torah, since the time spent in pursuit of the forces of Kedarla'omer and his company and in saving Lot was time wasted, in terms of Torah study. Avraham, then, should have conducted the pursuit alone or sent Eliezer – as indeed the Midrash teaches, in its assertion that the "three hundred and eighteen" fighters that the text describes Avraham as enlisting in fact refer to Eliezer himself (the numerical value of his name is 318). In other words, it is clear that Torah study needed to be put aside for the purposes of the pursuit and to save Lot – for, after all, Avraham is not punished for wasting his own Torah-study time. He is punished only for pressing into service a greater number of fighters than was necessary for the battle against the four kings and their armies.

This interpretation is problematic in every respect. Can three hundred and eighteen fighters possibly be considered an excessively large army for the military challenge that Avraham faces? Is he supposed to rely on a miracle? Are all those "born to his house" really engaged day and night only in Torah, never leaving Torah for a moment in order to help take care of the needs of Avraham's household? Who, then, were his shepherds; who dug his wells, who was responsible for setting up his tent during his wanderings? Did Avraham never press those "born to his house" into service; did they never do anything for him?

Let us attempt to understand Rabbi Abahu's words differently. It is possible that Chazal had reservations as to the merit of the aim of the war that Avraham is about to embark upon: saving the kingdom of Sedom from the hands of Kedarla'omer. Perhaps they do not consider this sufficient justification for endangering the members of his household. If we question why Chazal are concerned for the safety of these gentiles and servants who took care of Avraham's herds, the answer is given: Chazal point out that these servants were Torah sages and fulfilled the commandments, with Eliezer instructing them in the teachings of Avraham, his master. Avraham should not have endangered these people without good reason.

Why, then, do Chazal not present a similar claim concerning Avraham himself, for having endangered his own life in this battle? The answer is clear: A risk that a person takes upon himself is not the same as a risk that he places upon others – even if they are his servants. Avraham assumes the risk in order to save his relative, Lot, thereby fulfilling the commandment, "You shall not turn your back on your own flesh." He had a special obligation towards Lot, the son of his brother who was burned in God's name when he decided to accept the G-d of Avraham. But Lot was neither the relative nor even a friend of Avraham's shepherds and servants. On the contrary: he was their sworn adversary. Avraham therefore had no right to endanger them in order to save Lot. I wish to add two further comments concerning the view of Rabbi Abahu.

A. The issue of "pressing into service" was familiar to Rabbi Abahu and his generation on the personal level. Roman soldiers would kidnap people indiscriminately in the streets and send them into the king's service and on all kinds of dangerous missions. Even Torah Sages were not spared this danger. R. Zeira recounts how he himself was pressed into service to bring myrtle branches to the king's palace:

"Anyone who makes mention of redemption immediately prior to his prayer – Satan does not prosecute on that day. Rabbi Zeira said: I mentioned redemption adjacent to my prayer, and yet I was pressed into service to carry myrtles to the palace." (Yerushalmi Berakhot 1:1) B. As stated, the Midrash teaches that Eliezer alone pursued the kings in order to save Lot:

"Reish Lakish said in the name of bar Kapra: The steward of my house' – Eliezer is a son of my household, for by means of him I pursued the kings up to Damesek. And Eliezer was his name, as it is written: 'He led his trained servants born to his house, three hundred and eighteen.' The numerical value of 'Eliezer' is three hundred and eighteen." (Bereishit Rabba 44:9)

Why does the author of this midrash contradict the literal meaning of the text, as well as simple logic, to introduce this strange legend?

As I explained at length last week, the Midrash appears in many instances to draw a parallel between Avraham and Gidon, the Judge. The well-known legend describing Avraham as smashing his father's idols, as a result of which he is sentenced to death by Nimrod, while his father Terach, with his wisdom, saves him from Nimrod's punishment – seems to be borrowed from the story of Gidon, who smashes the ashera and the altar to Ba'al belonging to the household of Yoash, his father. The people of Ofra want to kill him, and Yoash saves his son from them with his wisdom. The basis for the parallel is that Avraham takes just over three hundred members of his household to wage war against the mighty armies of four kings, employing the tactic of "dividing up at night, he and his servants, and striking them." He attacks suddenly in the middle of the night as the enemy camp is fast asleep, with different forces appearing from different directions, causing the armies to flee in confusion and panic, leaving all the spoils. Gidon employs exactly the same tactic with his own three hundred men in the battle against the camp of Midian. He, too, pursues the Midianite army in order to save his brethren from them, as he admits to Zevach and Tzalmuna, kings of Midian, at the end of the battle. This parallels Avraham's pursuit of the kings in order to save Lot, his nephew. G-d offers Gidon an even more miraculous victory, similar to that of Yonatan and his attendant in their battle against the camp of the Pelishtim, in the war of Mikhmas (Shemuel I 13): "It was on that night that G-d said to him: Arise, go down to the camp, for I have given it into your hand. And if you are afraid to go down, go then – you and Pura, your attendant to the camp." (Shoftim 7:9-10)

Reish Lakish is teaching us, in the midrash, that Avraham acted in a similar way. He went down to the camp with Eliezer, his attendant, alone – just as Yonatan went with his attendant alone, for "there is nothing stopping G-d from saving by means of many or few." Gidon, in contrast, withdraws and takes all three hundred of his men with him to fight. Perhaps, in R. Abahu's view, Avraham's sin lay in acting like Gidon and not, as Reish Lakish explains, like Yonatan. Below, we shall discuss further the parallel between Gidon and Avraham. "GIVE ME THE PEOPLE, AND TAKE THE PROPERTY FOR YOURSELF"

The final interpretation that we must address is that of Rabbi Yochanan, who also claims that Avraham's sin concerned the war against the kings. In his view, the problem was that Avraham prevented people from joining the monotheistic faith when the king of Sedom proposed, "Give me the people, and take the property for yourself."

Why should we expect Avraham to convert all the men of Sedom and bring them within the monotheistic fold? What good would come of a forced conversion of all these people? And since when are we commanded to make converts – especially when it comes to people like the evil sinners of Sedom?

From my teacher, Rav Yoel Bin-Nun, I learned that the approach of the teacher - Rabbi Yochanan - is the corollary of that of the disciple – Rabbi Abahu. The assumption that there was some justification for saving the people of Sedom from their captivity and servitude is closely connected with the assumption that it would be possible to convert them and bring them to monotheistic faith. For this purpose it was proper even for Torah sages such as the members of Avraham's household to endanger themselves in order to save Lot and the men of Sedom together with him. But if Avraham decided to leave the men of Sedom and Lot alone, to allow them to return to their former evildoing, then there was no real reason for the war, and he was guilty of pressing Torah Sages into service with no justification. Let us explain Rabbi Yochanan's teaching in greater detail. After Avraham separates from Lot, who heads for Sedom, G-d appears to him and promises: "Lift up your eyes and see, from the place where you are – northwards and southwards and eastwards and westwards. For all the land that you see – to you I shall give it, and to your descendants, forever. And I shall make your descendants like the dust of the earth, that if a person can count the dust of the earth – so shall he number your descendants. Arise and walk about in the land, its length and breadth, for I shall give it to you." (13:14-17)

This promise, as formulated here, applies not only to the land of Canaan, but to all of the great expanse from the river of Egypt up to the river Perat. We are accustomed to understanding this as a vision for the distant future, but it is not so. God's intention in these words is for the present. Indeed, immediately after God's promise, the war of the kings erupts, with the kings from the other side of the river Perat invading the eastern side of the Jordan River, attacking all the kingdoms there, and perhaps even gaining indirect control of the western side of the Jordan.

Along comes Avraham and, in an instant, defeats these conquerors. In banishing them and the remains of their forces to the other side of the river Perat, all the land up to the river Perat falls into his hands. As he returns, crowned with victory, from his battle, it is no wonder that Chazal teach that all the kings vied to appoint Avraham king over them, for he had liberated them from the yoke of Kedarla'omer. Similarly, hundreds of years later, all the tribes of Israel came to Gidon, following his victory over Midian, and pleaded: "Rule over us, both you and your son and your grandson, for you have saved us from the hand of Midian" (Shoftim 8:23). Thus G-d fulfills His promise to Avraham to give the entire land

into his hands. But Avraham withdraws. He returns to his tent and chooses to relinquish his rulership over this vast area and over all that G-d has given into his hand. He obviously has his reasons: reigning over the land also involves assuming responsibility for its inhabitants – to educate them in the way of God, which is the way of righteousness and justice. Avraham sees before him the men of Sedom in all their wickedness, and concludes that he is not up to the task [3]. He wants to establish God's nation from his own seed, to educate them from childhood, and thereby to prepare the people that will bear the banner of God's Name in the world [4].

In this act, Avraham admits failure and foregoes the challenge that G-d has placed before him. His pangs of conscience over this decision are easily detected in his prayer to save the people of Sedom, some twenty-four years later. In our parasha, too, G-d needs to comfort him:

"After these things God's word came to Avram in a vision, saying: Do not fear, Avram; I am your Shield; your reward is very great" (15:1). Avraham had reason to fear that he had lost all his reward as well as God's promise, since he himself had decided to forego it. G-d once again promises him the land, and Avraham requests a covenant rather than just a promise, for the promise had been allowed to fall away:

"And he said: Lord God, by what shall I know that I will inherit it?" "THE EAGLE DESCENDED UPON THE CARCASSES"

According to the view of R. Yochanan, Avraham should have accepted rulership over the land; he should have forced upon its inhabitants the "way of G-d to perform righteousness and justice." His actions were deficient. Although it is difficult to regard his behavior as a sin, bringing in its wake Divine retribution and punishment, clearly he did something wrong. Indeed, as we shall discuss below, the same conclusion arises from the unfolding of the Covenant between the Parts.

For this covenant, Avraham is required to bring a three-year old heifer, a three-year old goat, a three-year old ram, a turtledove and a young pigeon, and to wait for God's appearance. Clearly, fire is supposed to descend from heaven onto Avraham's offerings, thereby sealing the covenant between him and God. Let us depict the events here as described by my friend, R. Yisrael Sadiel of Kfar Etzion. Instead of the Shekhina, it was the "eagle" that descended upon the carcasses. The eagle (ayit) here is not a solitary bird. "Ayit" is a participle, like "tzayid" (hunting) or "dayig" (fishing). It appears, then, that a great flock of birds of prey – perhaps even of different types – descended upon the offerings that Avraham had prepared for the covenant. Avraham did not give up on fulfilling his part of the covenant: he lifts a thick stick and attacks this throng of menacing birds with all his strength. It is a battle that continues for many hours, a long, dangerous and exhausting fight described by the Torah in just a few words: "The eagles descended upon the carcasses, and Avraham drove them away." Throughout his desperate battle, Avraham must surely have his eyes raised heavenwards. He must be asking himself why G-d is holding back the descent of His fire upon the sacrifices that Avraham has painstakingly prepared in order to fulfill the covenant. But throughout the day, G-d is absent. "The eagles descended upon the carcasses, and Avraham drove them away. And when the sun began to set, a deep sleep fell upon Avraham, and a great dark terror fell upon him. And He said to Avram: 'Know with certainty that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not their own, and they will enslave them and afflict them for four hundred years. But I shall judge also the nation that they will serve, and afterwards they will emerge with great wealth. And you will come to your fathers in peace; you will be buried at a good old age. And the fourth generation will return here, for the sin of the Emori is not yet complete to this day.' And it was, when the sun went down and it was dark, behold – a smoking furnace and a fiery torch that passed between these pieces." (15:11-17) The sun is setting – it has reached the tops of the trees; Avraham has prevailed over the birds of prey, but has collapsed with exhaustion, or has fainted [5].

It is specifically then that G-d comes, finds Avraham sleeping, and schedules the next meeting between them for four hundred years' time!

What is the symbolism of Avraham's Sisyphean battle against the eagles? This battle would seem to symbolize his spiritual and physical battle against the nations surrounding him, and against their wickedness – a battle that reaches its climax in the war of the kings. With his victory and the spiritual challenge that it brings – to introduce the way of God, the way of righteousness and justice, over the nations of the land, from the river of Egypt to the river Perat – it is specifically at this point, at the climax of the battle, that Avraham shows signs of fatigue and doubt, and he withdraws. As stated, in contrast to the two previous interpretations of his sin (as proposed by R. Abahu and by Shemuel), R. Yochanan proposes not a sin but a failure: the lack of courage to elevate himself to the level of repairing the entire world. Is this missed opportunity worthy of punishment?

Indeed, my view is that R. Yochanan believes that the decree, "Your descendants will be strangers," is not a punishment, but rather a historical necessity in light of Avraham's withdrawal to his tent. R. Abahu emphasizes the

slavery in Egypt – measure for measure for Avraham having pressed his servants into service. It is possible that Shemuel, who accuses Avraham of challenging God's promise, is emphasizing the "affliction" that is promised, namely, the literal suffering. In R. Yochanan's view, the emphasis should be placed upon the issue of being strangers. Had Avraham taken on rulership of the land and responsibility for the nations dwelling in it, to correct them and return them to God, they certainly would have joined themselves to the nation of the G-d of Avraham, and inherited the land forever. But since Avraham decided to withhold that potential sanctity from them and to bequeath the land only to his own descendants, a problem arose: to where would the nations, living in the inheritance that they had received from their forefathers in Eretz Yisrael, go? Could the native inhabitants of the land be banished for no justified reason, simply because G-d wanted to give the land to the descendants of Avraham? [6] G-d informs Avraham that so long as the sin of the Emori is not complete, G-d will not banish them from the land. The children of the Emori were no saints in Avraham's generation; all were idolaters. But then – at the Covenant between the Parts – the accounting of their sins began, and God's accounting for idolatry lasts up to four generations, as we read in the Ten Commandments, in the prohibition, "You shall have no other gods before Me." Until the sin of the Emori is complete, and until G-d visits their sin upon them after four generations, there is no land for the descendants of Avraham. Therefore, the nation of Israel that is descended from Avraham is destined to be a stranger in a land that is not theirs. Even if Avraham's children will dwell, for part of this time, in Eretz Yisrael, they will still be considered strangers, for the Emori inhabitants of the land will rule over them.

We may ask, then, why slavery and affliction are decreed upon Avraham's descendants. Why does G-d not suffice with, "Your descendants will be strangers," without adding that "they will enslave them and afflict them"? But in truth we must understand that the verse means only that the status of "strangers" will last four hundred years, while within those four hundred years there will be slavery and affliction for some undefined period. Indeed, this is what happened: the slavery and affliction did not extend throughout the four hundred years of "strangeness." Even the two hundred and ten years of exile in Egypt were not all years of slavery and affliction, for throughout Yosef's lifetime – and, according to Chazal, throughout the lifetime of his brothers – the slavery was postponed.

The slavery and affliction are a necessary historical result of being strangers for an extended period in the land of another nation. Naturally, there are hosting kings who are better and others who are worse, some more tolerant and others less so. Therefore, G-d set down a period for Avraham's descendants to be strangers, and declared that consequently there sometimes would also be periods of slavery and affliction. The status of being strangers arose, as stated, from the fact that there was not yet an available land for Am Yisrael, so long as the sin of the Emori was not complete.

Was Avraham justified in retiring to his tent and in relinquishing the opportunity to impose the way of G-d – the way of righteousness and justice – over all the nations of the land? Was he justified in his insistence that God's nation, destined to inherit the land, would be established from his seed alone? These questions will occupy us in next week's shiur. NOTES:

[1] The Maharal draws a distinction between Avraham's faith that he would have children and his lack of faith that the land would be given to them, but this is still a forced explanation. [2] Admittedly, there is no traditionally accepted distinction between these parts. [3] I also learned from Rav Bin-Nun that this prevented a real conflict between the two great legislators of the time: on one hand, Hammurabi, king of Babylon, author of the famous Hammurabi Code – identified by a number of important scholars as Amrafel, king of Shin'ar, against whom Avraham fought; and on the other hand – Avraham, legislator of God's way to perform righteousness and justice, who was destined to inherit Hammurabi's rule on the south-western side of the river Perat. [4] Indeed, the history of nations distinguishes between nations that may be traced back to a single family, and those associated with a certain area where the common culture arose. [5] Cf. Daniel chapter 10. There, too, the "deep sleep" refers to a faint resulting from exhaustion. [6] Although there are those who learn from the first Rashi in the Torah that G-d – to Whom all the world belongs – does "whatever He wishes," this is a moral distortion as well as a distortion of Rashi's interpretation; the scope of this shiur does not allow for a more extensive discussion. In any event, our parasha proves that this is not so. Translated by Kaeren Fish

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