



BS"D

To: parsha@parsha.net  
From: cshulman@gmail.com

## INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON LECH LICHA - 5776

In our 21st year! To receive this parsha sheet, go to <http://www.parsha.net> and click Subscribe or send a blank e-mail to [parsha-subscribe@yahoo.com](mailto:parsha-subscribe@yahoo.com) Please also copy me at [cshulman@gmail.com](mailto:cshulman@gmail.com) A complete archive of previous issues is now available at <http://www.parsha.net> It is also fully searchable.

---

Sponsored in memory of  
**Chaim Yissachar z"l ben Yechiel Zaydel Dov**

---

Sponsored by **Judah Frommer**  
in honor of a **triple bar mitzvah anniversary**:  
his father **Ari Frommer (z"l)**, his own,  
and his father-in-law, **Barry Dorf** .

---

To sponsor a parsha sheet (proceeds to tzedaka) contact  
[cshulman@parsha.net](mailto:cshulman@parsha.net)

---

from: Shema Yisrael Torah Network <[shemalist@shemayisrael.com](mailto:shemalist@shemayisrael.com)>  
to: [peninim@shemayisrael.com](mailto:peninim@shemayisrael.com)  
date: Thu, Oct 22, 2015 at 9:17 PM  
subject: **Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum**  
Parshas Lech Lecha

Fear not Avram, I am a shield for you; your reward is very great. (15:1)  
In his He'Emanti Va'Adabeira, Horav Moshe Toledano, Shlita, cites the Peninei Ben Ish Chai, who quotes the Aderest Eliyahu that Hashem is mavtiach, assures/guarantees those who observe Hashem's mitzvos, with great reward, commensurate with their performance. Chazal teach (Kiddushin 39b) s'char b'hai alma leka, "There is no (payment of) reward in this world." In other words, mitzvah performance is rewarded in Olam Habba, the World to Come. The commentators wonder how this reward is reconciled with the pasuk in the Torah, B'yomo titein s'charo, "On that day shall you pay his hire" (Devarim 24:15). A day-laborer must be paid each day. It is preferable to pay as soon as the day's work is over (so that he does not have until the next morning). If so, why does Hashem delay payment of one's s'char for mitzvah observance until the World to Come?

The answer is based upon a Halachic stipulation found in Choshen Mishpat 339:7 that, when a person who hires workers through the medium of an agent, such as a foreman, the law of b'yomo titein s'charo does not apply. Only when the worker negotiates directly with the owner who is paying the bill is there a requirement that payment be made on that very same day that the work was performed. Therefore, since Moshe Rabbeinu was Hashem's medium in giving us the Torah, the demand that payment be made immediately does not apply.

Based upon this we may suggest a novel suggestion, (I assume this is from the Ben Ish Chai). Klal Yisrael heard the first two commandments of the Aseres HaDibros, Ten Commandments, directly from Hashem, without the advantage (or disadvantage) of a medium." Two mitzvos for which Hashem will not withhold reward are: Anochi Hashem Elokecha, during which Hashem "introduces" Himself and enjoins us in the mitzvah of emunah,

faith/belief, in Hashem; and Lo yiyeh lecha elohim acheirim, "Do not worship other gods", the prohibition against idol worship. A Jew who maintains his uncompromising faith in Hashem, who unstintingly does not waiver in his belief by believing in other deities, will receive his just reward in this world.

This is derived from the pasuk in our parsha. Al tira Avram, "Fear not Avram." Do not fear that you will have to wait until you reach the next world before you can receive My reward. Anochi magen lach, "I am a shield for you" The Anochi, I, of Anochi Hashem Elokecha, the first commandment that charges us to be faithful and believe in Hashem, will protect us and be the source for our reward b'olam hazeh, this world.

Alternatively, Hashem was giving Avraham Avinu the key to Jewish survival in galus, our bitter exile, to which so many of our brothers and sisters have succumbed. Anochi magen lach. The belief in Hashem, a Jew's emunah in the face of the most difficult challenges, will carry him through the ordeal, the pain, the trauma, that has accompanied our people for most of this exile. Faith in Hashem is the only support that we have. It is the only panacea that works. Faith carries us over the hump and walks us through the pain and uncertainty. Indeed, one who has faith may be certain of one thing: he is not alone in his travail.

In the introduction to Shema Yisrael from the Kaliver Rebbe, a collection of testimonies of devotion, courage and self-sacrifice, as evidenced during the terrible Holocaust, the saintly author shares with readers his emotions concerning the lofty attribute of emunah and how the Jewish People have demonstrated that their faith in the Almighty is invincible. I take the liberty of sharing a few vignettes from this most poignant thesis.

The Rebbe begins by stating that, after all of the calumnies to befall our people during the Holocaust, after the terrible bloodshed and brutal deaths of six million Jews under the most heinous forms of murder, we would still stand resolute and strong in our faith, declaring, "We have not forgotten Your Name! Despite everything that we experienced, despite the pain and travail, we stand with emunah sheleimah, perfect faith, and shout from the depth of our hearts, "Shema Yisrael!"

How... after a long day of backbreaking labor, during which they had been mercilessly beaten and abused, they finally arrived at their decrepit barracks to "enjoy" their longed-for daily slice of moldy bread and a little rest. Yet, they gave up the food and rest, so that they could put on Tefillin!  
Tefillin?! They only had a shel yad, Tefillin of the hand, but they, nonetheless, ran to carry out the beloved mitzvah, so they could carry out the will of Hashem.

The Rebbe is convinced-and states so emphatically-that the only reason that most, if not all, of those who survived that living purgatory did so because of their indomitable faith in Hashem. This empowered them to put aside all mundane, physical considerations. Otherwise, there is no way they could have physically and emotionally survived such horrible torments. While many of these Jews had never before evinced any semblance of such spiritual greatness, the fires that burned within them were so strong that they kept on burning throughout the many challenges that they confronted.

Those, however, who were of little faith quickly wasted away physically and lost their minds emotionally. Faith has always been the foundation stone of our people - without which we cannot survive.

The Rebbe relates how, when he was in Auschwitz, he saw the son of a great Rav from Grosswardein being taken to his death. Knowing where he was being taken, confronting the brutal truth of his soon to be mortality, he screamed out, "Yidden, dear Jews, please remember to say Kaddish for me!" What greater example of Mi k'amcha Yisrael?; "Who is like Your People - Yisrael?" A member of any other nation would have gone mad, lost complete control of himself. Yet, here stood a young Jew about to meet his Maker, and all he could think about was that someone should recite Kaddish for him! What is Kaddish? It is praise for the Almighty. This is what this young man was thinking about seconds before his death - praise for the Almighty! That is the meaning of emunah. A Jew who has faith lives on an entirely different

plane than the rest of the world. He transcends physicality and the mundane, because he is holding on to G-d.

I could go on with pages of testimony and stories of faith and courage, but I will close with a well-known story that took place concerning Horav Meir, zl, m'Premishlan. This story imparts a powerful lesson, which every one of us should reiterate on a constant basis. Rav Meir'l (as he was referred to endearingly) would immerse himself in a mikveh that was on top of a snow covered mountain. Obviously, the trek up the mountain was not easy - especially for an elderly man to whom physical conditioning was not familiar. Yet, despite his advanced age, Rav Meir'l climbed the mountain easily and without issue. The man who accompanied him would slip and fall numerous times.

After a number of such trips, the shamash, Rebbe's attendant, who was a man half the Rebbe's age, asked, "Rebbe, how is it that Your Honor walks up the mountain so steadily, without straining, and without slipping and stumbling, while I am constantly stumbling?" The holy Premishlaner replied, "He who is bound to the One Above will not fall below."

The legacy of emunah that has been left to us from Avraham Avinu and transmitted throughout the generations is one of critical significance to our survival. It is a legacy from which we may not deviate. It is our lifeline to eternity - and life on this world, as well!

---

from: Kol Torah Webmaster <webmaster@koltorah.org>

date: Thu, Sep 17, 2015 at 8:59 PM

subject: Kol Torah Parashat VaYeilech 2015

### **At What Age Did Avraham Avinu Discover Hashem?**

**by Rabbi Chaim Jachter**

The Debate – age 3 or age 40?

The Midrash (BeReishit Rabbah 64:4) records a debate regarding the age at which Avraham Avinu recognized Hashem's existence. One opinion believes it was at the age of three, while one (according to Rambam's text[1]) believes it was at the age of 40. This dispute continues to rage on amongst the Rishonim as Rambam and Ra'avad debate this issue as well (Hilchot Avodat Kochavim 1:3).

This dispute is most peculiar. Why does it matter if Avraham Avinu discovered Hashem at age three or age forty? Regarding such issues, the Gemara (Yoma 5b) usually comments "Mai DeHavah Havah," what occurred, occurred, and it is simply not worth the time and effort to debate the past if there are no ramifications for the present or future.

One may suggest, though, that these opinions are debating the ideal type of Emunah, belief in Hashem. The opinion that Avraham Avinu's epiphany occurred at age three teaches that Emunah Peshutah, simple and straightforward faith, is the ideal model of faith. The truth of Hashem's existence is so obvious that it is apparent even to a young child. According to this approach, any further investigation is unnecessary and even counterproductive. Is there a need for a child to prove the existence of his loving mother?

The other opinion believes that such Emunah, while representing a good beginning, hardly represents the ideal form of belief in Hashem. Emunah Sheleimah, full and proper Emunah, requires careful, thorough, and mature reasoning. Only when one reaches the age of wisdom [2] is he capable of attaining proper Emunah, at least according to our second opinion.

#### **Rambam's Compromise**

Interestingly, Rambam presents a compromise approach to this issue. He argues that Avraham began to recognize Hashem at the age of three but did not reach a conclusion until he reached the age of forty. Rambam sees great value in the Emunah Peshutah of the very young child. However, Emunah is able to reach its climax only when one reaches the age of forty.

It is most surprising, even downright shocking, that the arch rationalist Rambam attaches great significance to the Emunah of a three year old child. One would have expected Rambam to unreservedly embrace the opinion that Avraham Avinu arrived at his conclusion at age forty[3]. Rambam, however, teaches us the enormously important lesson that highly meaningful Emunah is accessible to all. One need not be able to formulate well-structured and logical arguments in order to be considered a proper Ma'amin, believer[4]. My wife Malca is fond of explaining Hashem to young children in the following manner: When visiting a park one sees people flying kites. They hold the string at the bottom and slowly let their kites out so that the kites go higher and higher until they are so high that the top of the kites can no longer be seen. They have ascended high into the clouds. One sees only people holding strings. How do the kite-flyers know that the kites remain in the sky if they are no longer visible? The answer is that they can feel the tug of the kite as it flies in the clouds. The kites cannot be seen, but they are felt. Similarly, although we cannot see Hashem, we feel His tugs letting us know He is always there. Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik describes this phenomenon as "the metaphysical pull" that Hashem implants in all of us allowing us to connect with Him (Abraham's Journey p. 42).

The Gemara (Berachot 48a) in fact speaks of young children who may be counted towards a Zimmun, since they comprehend that their Berachot are directed to Hashem. Rav Ovadia Yosef (Teshuvot Yechaveh Da'at 4:13) rules that Sephardic Jews may count a child from the age of six as the third or tenth person for a Zimmun[5]. In this context, the Gemara recounts a most charming and instructive story that illustrates this point. The Gemara relates that when the great Abayei and Rava were children, they met Rabbah, and Rabbah asked them to whom we recite Berachot. Rava responded that we recite Berachot to "Rachmana," the All Merciful One. Rabbah then asked Rava where Rachmana is, to which Rava pointed to the ceiling. Abayei in turn went outside[6] and pointed upwards[7].

When learning this Gemara in the Morasha Kollel in the summer of 1978, our Rebbe, Rav Yitzchok Cohen, conducted an experiment on his very young son Ya'akov, then aged three, to see if he knew to whom he recites Berachot. Just as Rava did, the young Ya'akov pointed to the ceiling. I have even seen developmentally disabled children who are able already at very young ages to grasp the role of Hashem in their lives. As Hashem promises Bnei Yisrael (Devarim 30:14), He is available to all, as Torah observance is democratic and accessible.

#### **What If One Does Not Feel the Tug?**

What can one reply to somebody who argues that he cannot feel the tug of Hashem or experience the metaphysical pull? One may answer based on the Gemara (Sotah 47a) which states that "Chein Ishah Al Ba'alalah," husbands find their wives attractive and charming. Rav Ben Tzion Shafier relates that a Talmid complained that he did not find his wife attractive. Rav Shafier found this attitude to be puzzling in light of Chazal's teaching that Hashem has implanted in the nature of husbands to find their wives attractive. Upon exploring further, he discovered that the husband had gotten into the destructive habit of looking at pornography. This ugly psychological baggage had polluted his Neshamah and ruined his appreciation for his wife and the great gift Hashem had bestowed upon him.

Similarly, Hashem has implanted within us a natural inclination to connect to him[8]. However, poor habits and exposure to negative influences create a barrier that clogs the natural feelings that should exist. Psychological challenges such as an abusive experience with a parent or religious figure may also disable the natural attraction one should feel for Hashem. The strength of this attraction is described by David HaMelech in Tehillim (42:2 and 3): "KeAyl Ta'arog Al Afikei Mayim Kein Nafshi Ta'arog Eilecha Elokim," "As a ram pines for water so too my soul pines after you Hashem," and "Tzam'ah Nafshi LEilokim," "My soul thirsts for Hashem."

David HaMelech beautifully writes "Mi Ya'aleh BeHar Hashem... Neki Chapayim... Asher Lo Nasa LaShav Nafshi," "Who can scale the mountain

of Hashem, one with clean hands, who has not taken my name in vain” (Tehillim 24:3-4). One who has sullied his Neshamah will find it difficult to scale the mountain of Hashem. Proper spiritual and even psychological guidance is likely to be necessary to remove the grime clogging his spiritual portals to Hashem.

Negative influences from one’s environment and family can also stunt one’s spiritual development. Rambam writes of the spiritual negativity which surrounded Avraham Avinu before he fully recognized Hashem. This likely explains the long delay from the age of three until the age of forty when Avraham Avinu finally recognized the Ribbono Shel Olam, the Master of the Universe.

Unfortunately, some people who have much exposure to secular society (including television programs and advertisements, lyrics of popular songs[9] and the behavior of less than positive people who are regrettably regarded as role models by secular society) have much of their personality and thought patterns influenced and even formed by it. This poison needs to be removed from one’s Neshamah in order for one to form a proper relationship with Hashem. This idea can be learned from Avraham Avinu, who was able to receive Nevu’ah (prophecy) only after he separated from Lot (Rashi to BeReishit 13:14 states “as long as the Rasha was with Avraham, Hashem separated from Avraham”)[10].

A Third Opinion – Avraham Avinu Discovered Hashem at Age 48

Finally, we need to analyze a third opinion presented in the aforementioned Midrash (according to our text) that Avraham Avinu first recognized Hashem at the age of forty eight. One might reasonably ask what would have prompted Avraham Avinu to recognize God specifically at age 48. The choice of this age seems rather random and without a basis in the Chumash.

However, Rav Menachem Leibtag explains (in an essay archived at Tanach.org – Parashat Noach) that “Avraham Avinu reached age 48 on the same year that Peleg died (see Rashi on 10:25), which according to Chazal corresponds to the precise year of Migdal Bavel – 1996 to Creation. Recall that Avraham was born in year 1948!”

In other words, Avraham Avinu’s transformation was as a result of his witnessing (or at the very least upon hearing about) Hashem’s dramatic intervention in the disruption of the construction of Migdal Bavel (the tower of Bavel). Hearing of the occurrence of this astounding miracle radically changed Avraham Avinu and drew him closer to Hashem.

TABC student Tani Greengart cogently asked then why many more people did not react in the same manner as did Avraham Avinu. One could possibly answer that there were indeed many who shared Avraham Avinu’s reaction and that these are the people whom Avraham Avinu and Sarah Imeinu deeply impacted in Charan (as described by Rashi to BeReishit 12:5 s.v. Asher Asu VeCharan).

Alternatively, one may answer that it is hardly a surprise that only Avraham Avinu reacted to this miracle. Chazal teach that the entire world heard about the great miracles of Egypt and the revelation at Sinai, yet Yitro was the only non-Jew who joined Am Yisrael as a result. For everyone else, life went on as usual without these miracles motivating them to draw closer to Hashem.

In our times, how many people became religious as a result of the miracles of the 1948 and 1967 Arab wars against Israel? These were undoubtedly miraculous events, acknowledged as such even by many avowedly non-observant Jews. As recently as the summer of 2014 when hundreds of rockets fell on Israel and caused relatively little damage, how many people made dramatic changes as a result of an incredible manifestation of Hashgachah Peratit, divine intervention?

Don’t Bother me with Inconvenient Facts

Most people are not interested in hearing facts which make them uncomfortable, especially if they call for one to radically change his lifestyle. Avraham Avinu is characterized by intellectual honesty and flexibility and the courage to act on the truth when it is revealed to him. Chazal (BeReishit Rabbah 38:13) present a remarkable dialogue between Nimrod and Avraham

Avinu that epitomizes the phenomenon of people flippantly dismissing an inconvenient truth.

When Nimrod ordered Avraham to worship fire, Avraham Avinu responded that it would be more logical to worship water which extinguishes fire. Nimrod accepted this logic and responded that he would worship water instead. Avraham Avinu then explained that it would be more logical to worship clouds from which water falls. When Nimrod accepted this, Avraham Avinu explained that it would be better to worship the wind, which moves the clouds. After Nimrod accepted this, Avraham asked Nimrod why he does not worship man, who can withstand the wind. Nimrod, realizing that Avraham Avinu had proven that worshipping fire was senseless, responded “You are playing word games with me.” Even after witnessing Avraham Avinu’s miraculous survival in the fire, Nimrod did not change his lifestyle. In fact, he threw Avraham Avinu’s brother Haran into the fire for expressing support for his brother’s stance.

Nimrod simply dismissed the inconvenient truth that Avraham Avinu convincingly and cogently demonstrated. Such is the intellectual dishonesty or intellectual slumber of those like Nimrod who lack the courage to face up to and live up to the truth. Others come up with incredibly far-fetched answers to escape the “inconvenience” of living a Torah lifestyle. For such people, demonstrating the truth is insufficient; they must also be shown and taught how a Torah lifestyle is the best lifestyle possible and a divine recipe for leading the most spiritually and psychologically satisfying lifestyle.

The Bad Example of Haran

The aforementioned Midrash records that Haran was watching and was unsure as to whom to support – his brother or Nimrod. He reasoned that if Avraham was to emerge unscathed, then he would tell Nimrod that he supported Avraham. If Avraham died, then Haran would claim to support Nimrod. Avraham was thrown into the furnace and emerged unscathed. When Nimrod demanded that Haran pledge his allegiance, he said that he supported his brother. Nimrod threw Haran into the furnace, and Haran was burned to death.

It is puzzling why Hashem did not save Haran, as He saved Avraham Avinu moments before from Nimrod’s fire? After all, Haran did express his support for Avraham Avinu. The answer is that Hashem expects proper commitment, just as a potential and actual spouse demands and deserves a full commitment, not a commitment born simply of crass opportunism. Haran hardly deserved a miracle due to his shallow commitment that was preceded by an expression of agnosticism.

People have asked how the Torah evaluates observing Jewish law based a calculation known as Pascal’s Wager. In the “Jewish” variation of this idea, one reasons that is unsure as to whether the Torah is true. He reasons that if the Torah is true then he will receive considerable punishment in the afterlife if he fails to observe it. If on the other hand, the Torah is not true, then there is no considerable downside in keeping it, since the Torah lifestyle is meaningful and enjoyable.

It is possible to argue that one who lives an Orthodox lifestyle due to this calculation is better off than one who does not observe Torah at all. After all, we believe in the potential of Mitoch SheLo LiShmah Ba LiShmah (Pesachim 50b), that one’s observance of the Torah due to flawed reasoning may eventually lead to his child’s observance of the Torah due to noble reasoning.

Nonetheless, Haran’s tragic death sounds an alarm for those who observe Torah out of doubt. Such an attitude did not save Haran from Nimrod’s fire and will quite possibly not motivate children, who will inevitably notice their parents’ shallow commitment, to live an observant life as adults.

A healthy connection with a spouse cannot emerge when one marries due to a Pascal’s Wager type of reckoning. So too a healthy and life-affirming relationship with Hashem is possible only when one is fully committed to the relationship.

It is for this reason that Eliyahu HaNavi at Har HaCarmel (Melachim II Perek 18) expresses that “until when you vacillate between the two poles. If Ba'al is the true god then worship and if Hashem is the true God then fully commit to him.” Eliyahu HaNavi teaches that from a certain perspective, it is preferable to worship Avodah Zarah (idolatry) rather than serve Hashem out of doubt.

There is ample and abundant reasoning and logic to vigorously support a full commitment and a life of Mitzvah observance. There is no need for doubt, since the evidence is so clear for one who is ready and able to make the proper choice. A Torah life lived in doubt will ultimately fail, as did Haran's brand of vacillating spiritual commitment[11].

## Conclusion

Avraham Avinu set a powerful lesson of boldly following the truth and fully committing to unconditional and wholehearted adherence to Hashem's commands. The hugely important principle of Ma'aseh Avot Siman LaBanim (the forefathers set the standard for the behavior of future generations) teaches that we are expected to follow in the footsteps of our forefathers and live highly satisfying lives as fully committed to Hashem and observance of His Torah.

## Footnotes

[1] See the Kesef Mishneh to Rambam's Hilchot Avodat Kochavim 1:3.

[2] Chazal (Avot 5:22) teach that one achieves Binah, wisdom, at the age of 40.

[3] Rambam expresses a similar idea in Hilchot Geirushin 2:20 where he states that every Jew pines to fulfill Hashem's Mitzvot, but that the Yeitzer HaRa (evil inclination) sometimes restrains this natural desire.

[4] This, in part, is the lesson of Chazal (Berachot 63a, see Ein Ya'akov) who write that even a thief calls out to Hashem right before he engages in theft. The natural connection to Hashem emerges in stressful situations, as commonly noted, “There is no atheist in a foxhole.”

[5] Ashkenazic practice, based on Tosafot (Berachot 48a s.v. VeLeit) and Rama (Orach Chaim 199:10) does not allow for a pre-Bar Mitzvah child to count towards a Zimmun.

[6] Echoing BeReishit 15:5 when Hashem instructs Avraham Avinu to go outside and gaze at the stars.

[7] Rabbah predicted that these two children would grow up to be rabbis. This childhood Machloket (dispute) reflects the many Machlokot that Abayei and Rava would have as adults.

[8] Rav Soloveitchik writes in Abraham's Journey that “There is a natural desire, a natural yearning in every human being, Jew and gentile alike, who were all created in the image of God, to come as close as possible to the Master of the Universe.” Rav Soloveitchik cites the Tanya (Likkutei Amarim chapters 12, 19 and 38) which calls this drive “Ahavah Tiv'it,” the natural love for God.

[9] See Chagigah 15b which states that the fact that Elisha ben Avuyah was steeped in Greek music led to his spiritual downfall.

[10] Rav Soloveitchik (Abraham's Journey p. 59) writes that there are those who “repress the drive for God or are not cognizant of it due to the environment or friends who smother the still, small voice of the human personality.”

[11] Ramban to Devarim 6:16 (the prohibition of Lo Tenasu, testing Hashem) similarly writes “it is improper to serve Hashem ‘Al Derech HaSafek,’” in a manner of doubt.

---

## Thanks to hamelaket@gmail.com for collecting the following items:

---

from: Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein <info@jewishdestiny.com>

reply-to: info@jewishdestiny.com

subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

**Weekly Parsha Blog:: Rabbi Berel Wein**

### ***Lech Lecha***

The pattern of or the life of our father Abraham and our mother Sarah is set in the opening word's of this week's Torah reading. They, the progenitors of the Jewish people and the parents of all nations are destined to be travelers for all of their lives. The truth is that all of us are travelers on the journey of our lives. The difference is whether we have a clear idea of our destination and even more importantly what path to take in order to arrive there.

God assures Abraham and Sarah that Heaven will accompany them on their journey. But the Lord does not forecast the events, the twists and turns, the detours and stumbling blocks that will mark the path of their journey. How to cope with those unforeseen and mostly untoward events is left up to the wisdom, tactics and actions of Abraham and Sarah themselves.

At the same time they are to remember that the focus of their lives is the goal of their relationship with their Creator and the task of creating a family and a

nation that will guide civilization towards that same goal. The Torah itself states that Abraham ‘saw the place from afar.’

‘The place’ refers to that goal of the relationship to God and the acquisition of the holy spirit which allows one to lead a meaningful and productive life. But the goal is always seen ‘from afar.’ Nevertheless, the pursuit of the goal is mandatory upon Abraham, Sarah and their descendants even if in many instances the goal is deemed to be unachievable.

The Jewish people have wandered over the face of this globe for millennia. They always knew that they would return to the Land of Israel one day no matter how distant or unachievable that that day may have appeared. The example of Abraham and Sarah has always stood before the eyes of the Jewish people as the paradigm of their national experience.

It is reported that Rabbi Nachman of Breslov constantly stated: “Every step that I take on the face of this earth is towards Jerusalem.” God did not choose to inform Abraham as to how he would reach his life's destination. Human beings have elaborate plans, Google maps, detailed itineraries and many ideas as how to arrive at their sought after destinations. Sometimes all of these plans do work out on schedule and successfully. But many times Heaven mocks our futile efforts at controlling our destiny.

We state in our daily prayers that “many are the thoughts and plans that lie in the hearts of humans, but only the wisdom and advice of God will prevail.”

The greatness of character of our father and mother, Abraham and Sarah, is reflected in how they dealt with the vagaries of life, the disappointments and certainly the tragedies, while not losing sight of the goal and ultimate purpose of life itself.

The importance of keeping Abraham and Sarah constantly in the forefront of our minds and plans is of inestimable value in negotiating one's journey through life.

Shabat shalom

---

from: Ohr Somayach <ohr@ohr.edu>

to: weekly@ohr.edu

subject: Torah Weekly

**Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Lech Lecha**

***For the week ending 24 October 2015 / 11 Heshvan 5776***

**by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - [www.seasonsofthemoon.com](http://www.seasonsofthemoon.com)**

### **Insights**

#### ***Life in the Fast Lane***

#### ***"Go for yourself" (12:1)***

Very soon, only the speed of light will limit our ability to communicate a thought, a picture, a sound or a sentence from one side of the world to the other, and beyond. The meaning of the word "distance" has changed forever. Just as the electron has shrunk our world, so too there has been a quiet and maybe even more fundamental revolution in the way we look at travelling. We see nothing special in the fact that several hundred people can file into a large metal room and find themselves on the other side of the world in a matter of hours.

A little more than a hundred years ago, to circumnavigate the globe would have required months of arduous, dangerous and expensive effort, almost beyond our imagining. Nowadays, the major drawback in circling the earth in a plane is an aching back from sitting in a reclining chair that doesn't quite live up to its name. We have breached the last frontier. Distance has become no more than a function of time spent in a chair.

The electron and the 747 have had their impact on our culture in other ways. Our cultural mindset mandates that speed is of the essence. “How fast can I get there?” vies in importance with “Where am I going?” Immediacy has become an independent yardstick of worth. How fast is your car? Your computer?

Our age has sought to devour distance and time, rendering everything in a constant and immediate present. Now this. Now this. Now this. (Interestingly, the languages of the age — film and television and computer graphics — are languages which have trouble expressing the past and the

future. They only have a present tense. Everything happens in a continuous present.)

All of this makes our spiritual development more and more challenging. Spirituality is a path. And, like a path, you have to walk on it one step at a time. Your fingers cannot do the walking on the spiritual path. You cannot download it.

Everything in the physical world is a paradigm, an incarnation, of a higher spiritual idea. Travel is the physical equivalent of the spiritual road. The quest for spirituality demands that we travel, but this journey is not a physical journey. Many make the mistake of thinking that hitchhiking around the world and experiencing different cultures will automatically make them more spiritual. The truth is that wherever you go, there you are. When your travel is only physical you just wrap up your troubles in your old kit-bag and take them with you.

Spiritual growth requires the soul to journey. Our soul must notch up the miles, not our feet. The spiritual road requires us to forsake the comfortable, the familiar ever-repeating landmarks of our personalities, and set out with an open mind and a humble soul. We must divest ourselves of the fawning icons of our own egos which we define and confine us, and journey. Life's essential journey is that of the soul discovering its true identity. We learn this from the first two words in this week's Torah portion: "Lech lecha." "Go to yourself." Without vowels, these two words are written identically. When G-d took Avraham out of Ur Kasdim and sent him to the Land of Israel, He used those two identical words: "Lech lecha", "Go to yourself."

Avraham experienced ten tests in his spiritual journey. Each was exquisitely designed to elevate him to his ultimate spiritual potential. When G-d gives us a test, whether it's the death of a loved one or a financial reversal or an illness, it's always to help us grow. By conquering the obstacles in our spiritual path, be it lack of trust in G-d or selfishness or apathy, we grow in stature. We connect with the fundamental purpose of the journey, to journey away from our negative traits and reach and realize our true selves. We "go to ourselves."

© 2015 Ohr Somayach International - all rights reserved

---

[http://www.ou.org/torah/author/Rabbi\\_Dr\\_Tzvi\\_Hersh\\_Weinreb](http://www.ou.org/torah/author/Rabbi_Dr_Tzvi_Hersh_Weinreb)

from: Shabbat Shalom <shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org>

reply-to: shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

**Orthodox Union / www.ou.org**

**Rabbi Weinreb's Parsha Column**

***Lech Lecha - "One Day We Will All Be Together"***

I picked him up at the airport. He was arriving in Baltimore, where I was then a rabbi, to deliver an address and then return home to New York. The plane was late, so that when he came, I told him that we would have to hurry to be at our destination on time. He was already showing signs of age, so that walking quickly was hard for him. We moved rapidly past the gates, at which other flights were disembarking, including one at which the arriving passengers were being welcomed warmly by friends and family. That is where he stopped, transfixed. He could not take his eyes off the scene of the small crowds embracing and kissing each other tearfully and emotionally.

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

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

His response was the greatest lesson of the many I learned from him. "The saddest of all human happenings is separation," he said. "And the most wonderful of all is reunion. Whenever I see people, of whatever religion or background, who are joyfully coming together after a long separation, I feel

'spellbound' (that was the word he used), and I must stand by and witness that pure innocent joy as long as I can."

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

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

This decision to separate was a fateful one for Lot. He settled in Sodom, rose to a prestigious position there, and we will yet learn more about his new life in next week's portion. He tried to mitigate the effects of the separation by remaining loyal to the precepts he learned in Abraham's tent, a difficult challenge in his new circumstances.

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

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

Personally, I have long been intrigued by the stories of siblings separated at an early age who rediscover each other later in life. Often, they learn how different they have become. One example is the reunion of the 90-year old Torah sage, Reb Yaakov Kamenetsky, who, after a 70-year separation, rediscovered his sister in the former Soviet Union. He was steeped in traditional Judaism; she had become totally removed from any semblance of Jewish religion. When one of Reb Yaakov's sons tried to explain to his long-lost aunt what her brother had accomplished in his life, she could only respond that it was a shame that a lad with such youthful promise grew up to become a mere melamed, a school teacher.

But there are poignant examples of separated individuals who, despite growing up in radically different environments, end up so similarly. How well I remember an adolescent psychotherapy patient of mine who was adopted in infancy by a professor of physics and his wife, a noted art historian. They were frustrated by this teenager, who was interested neither in intellectual nor cultural pursuits, but whose goal in life it was to become a fireman, and who spent all his spare time as a fire department volunteer. After several years, I received a call from the young man telling me that he had since successfully located his biological father. Wouldn't you know that his father was a veteran fireman!

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

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

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

<http://www.ou.org/>  
from: Shabbat Shalom <[shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org](mailto:shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org)>  
reply-to: [shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org](mailto:shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org)

**Orthodox Union / [www.ou.org](http://www.ou.org)**

**Britain's Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks  
Journey of the Generations**

Mark Twain said it most pithily. “When I was a boy of 14, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be 21, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in seven years.”

Whether Freud was right or wrong about the Oedipus complex, there is surely this much truth to it, that the power and pain of adolescence is that we seek to define ourselves as different, individuated, someone other than our parents. When we were young they were the sustaining presence in our lives, our security, our stability, our source of groundedness in the world.

The first and deepest terror we have as very young children is separation anxiety: the absence, especially, of the mother. Young children will play happily so long as mother or care-giver is within sight. Absent that, and there is panic. We are too young to venture into the world on our own. It is precisely the stable, predictable presence of parents in our early years that gives us a basic sense of trust in life.

But then comes the time as we approach adulthood, when we have to learn to make our own way in the world. Those are the years of searching and in some cases, rebellion. They are what make adolescence so fraught. The Hebrew word for youth – the root n-a-r – has these connotations of ‘awakening’ and ‘shaking.’ We begin to define ourselves by reference to our friends, our peer-group, rather than our family. Often there is tension between the generations.

The literary theorist Harold Bloom wrote two fascinating books, *The Anxiety of Influence* and *Maps of Misreading*, in which, in Freudian style, he argued that strong poets make space for themselves by deliberately misinterpreting or misunderstanding their predecessors. Otherwise – if you were really in awe of the great poets that came before you – you would be stymied by a sense that everything that could be said has been said, and better than you could possibly do. Creating the space we need to be ourselves often involves an adversarial relationship to those who came before us, and that includes our parents.

One of the great discoveries that tends to come with age is that we begin to realise that having spent what seems like a lifetime of running away from our parents, we find that we have become very much like them – and the further away we ran, the closer we became. Hence the truth in Mark Twain’s insight. It needs time and distance to see how much we owe our parents and how much of them lives on in us.

The way the Torah does this in relation to Abraham (or Abram as he was then called) is remarkable in its subtlety. Lekh Lekha, and indeed Jewish history, begins with the words, “God said to Abraham, Go from your land, your birthplace and your father’s house to a land I will show you” (Gen. 12:1). This is the boldest beginning of any account of a life in the Hebrew Bible. It seems to come from nowhere. The Torah gives us no portrait of Abraham’s childhood, his youth, his relationship with the other members of his family, how he came to marry Sarah, or the qualities of character that made God single him out to become the initiator of what ultimately turned out to be the greatest revolution in the religious history of humankind, what is called nowadays Abrahamic monotheism.

It was this biblical silence that led to the midrashic tradition almost all of us learned as children, that Abraham broke the idols in his father’s house. This is Abraham the Revolutionary, the iconoclast, the man of new beginnings who overturned everything his father stood for. This is, if you like, Freud’s Abraham.

Perhaps it is only as we grow older that we are able to go back and read the story again, and realise the significance of the passage at the end of the previous parsha. It says this: “Terach took his son Abram, his grandson Lot,

son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Harran, they settled there” (Gen. 11:31).

It turns out, in other words, that Abraham left his father’s house long after he had left his land and his birthplace. His birthplace was in Ur, in what is today southern Iraq, but he only separated from his father in Harran, in what is now northern Syria. Terach, Abraham’s father, accompanied him for the first half of his journey. He went with his son at least part of the way.

What actually happened? There are two possibilities. The first is that Abraham received his call in Ur. His father Terach then agreed to go with him, intending to accompany him to the land of Canaan, though he did not complete the journey, perhaps because of age. The second is that the call came to Abraham in Harran, in which case his father had already begun the journey on his own initiative by leaving Ur. Either way, the break between Abraham and his father was far less dramatic than we first thought.

I have argued elsewhere (in my new book, *Not in God’s Name*), that biblical narrative is far more subtle than we usually take it to be. It is deliberately written to be understood at different levels at different stages in our moral growth. There is a surface narrative. But there is also, often, a deeper story that we only come to notice and understand when we have reached a certain level of maturity (I call this the concealed counter-narrative). Genesis 11-12 is a classic example.

When we are young we hear the enchanting – indeed empowering – story of Abraham breaking his father’s idols, with its message that a child can sometimes be right and a parent wrong, especially when it comes to spirituality and faith. Only much later in life do we hear the far deeper truth – hidden in the guise of a simple genealogy at the end of the previous parsha – that Abraham was actually completing a journey his father began.

There is a line in the book of Joshua (24:2) – we read it as part of the Haggadah on Seder night – that says that “In the past your ancestors lived beyond the Euphrates River, including Terach the father of Abraham and Nahor. They worshiped other gods.” So there was idolatry in Abraham’s family background. But Genesis 11 says that it was Terach who took Abraham, not Abraham who took Terach, from Ur to go to the land of Canaan. There was no immediate and radical break between father and son. Indeed it is hard to imagine how it could have been otherwise. Abram – Abraham’s original name – means “mighty father”. Abraham himself was chosen “so that he will instruct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord” (Gen. 18:19) – that is, he was chosen to be a model parent. How could a child who rejected the way of his father become a father of children who would not reject his way in turn?[1] It makes more sense to say that Terach already had doubts about idolatry and it was he who inspired Abraham to go further, spiritually and physically. Abraham continued a journey his father had begun, thereby helping Isaac and Jacob, his son and grandson, to chart their own ways of serving God – the same God but encountered in different ways.

Which brings us back to Mark Twain. Often we begin by thinking how different we are from our parents. It takes time for us to appreciate how much they helped us become the people we are. Even when we thought we were running away, we were in fact continuing their journey. Much of what we are is because of what they were.

[1] Rashi (to Gen. 11:31) says it was to conceal the break between son and father that the Torah records the death of Terach before God’s call to Abraham. However, see Ramban ad loc.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks is a global religious leader, philosopher, the author of more than 25 books, and moral voice for our time. Until 1st September 2013 he served as Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, having held the position for 22 years. To read more from Rabbi Sacks or to subscribe to his mailing list, please visit [www.rabbisacks.org](http://www.rabbisacks.org).

---

<http://www.aish.com/tp/i/moha/>

<http://www.ou.org/>

from: Shabbat Shalom <[shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org](mailto:shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org)>

**Orthodox Union / [www.ou.org](http://www.ou.org)**

**Rabbi Ari Kahn on Parsha**

***Covenant***

The relationship between God and man is asymmetrical: God is infinite, omnipotent, and man is limited and flawed. Nonetheless, God reaches out to lowly man, offering His hand, as it were, in friendship. So it was with Avraham: God speaks to him, and promises him a future filled with blessings. However, in what may seem some sort of quid pro quo, the promises come with a price: Avraham must uproot himself, leaving behind everything and everyone he knows, and set out on an uncharted course to an unspecified destination – to leap into the unknown on faith alone.

As the narrative continues, more blessings are forthcoming, but these blessings are often accompanied by new commandments, additional responsibilities. Avraham's relationship with God seems to have "strings" attached: In the Brit bein Habitarim [The Covenant of the Pieces], God promises the Land of Israel to Avraham and his descendants – but the road to this inheritance will be long and arduous: Hundreds of years of persecution and slavery stand between the promise and its fruition. Again, there is a price to be paid.

After years of infertility, after years of wondering how his legacy would be carried into the future, after years of wondering how the message of monotheism would be transmitted, God promises Avraham that Sarah will bear him a son. This, the greatest blessing of all, the blessing that most occupied Avraham's thoughts and prayers, also came with a price: Avraham is given the commandment of circumcision – and then, perhaps the most difficult commandment of all: Avraham is called upon to be willing to sacrifice that very son as an offering to God.

The moment Avraham lifts his hand, at the moment he proves himself ready and willing to follow God's commandment without question, his relationship with God makes a quantum leap. God, for His part, proves to Avraham that He requires human devotion, not human sacrifice, and blesses Avraham by reiterating the promises he had already made in each of His earlier communications with Avraham.

And the Angel of God called to Avraham from heaven a second time, and said, "God declares, 'I have sworn by My own Essence, that because you performed this act, and have not withheld your only son, I will bless you greatly, and increase your offspring like the stars of the sky and the sand on the seashore. Your offspring shall inherit their enemies' gate. All the nations of the world shall be blessed through your descendants – all because you obeyed My voice. (Bereishit 22:15-18)

God has the ability to bless as He sees fit; there is no limit to the bounty or blessing in God's storehouse. Additionally, it is a basic tenet of our faith – first established by Avraham himself – that God has no needs; He lacks nothing, and therefore does not "require" anything man can offer. If this is so, why does God's relationship with his first adherent seem to be based on this strange, lopsided "give and take"? Why does each blessing God confers upon Avraham come with a price tag? Why must Avraham take upon himself ever more demanding obligations in order to merit the blessings God wishes to confer upon him?

Perhaps we might find a resolution to this question by considering the problem from Avraham's perspective, rather than from God's perspective: When God first spoke to him, Avraham was told to leave his home town, his birthplace and his father's household. In fact, his home had become unbearable for him long before God suggested that he pull up stakes: Avraham espoused belief in one God – a God of kindness and mercy, a belief that undermined the concepts of power pagan worship of the society around him. He was a persona non grata in his own homeland – so much so that his townsfolk had thrown him into a furnace to rid themselves of his presence. When God suggested that he move on, Avraham may have perceived this as sound advice, and drawn the logical conclusion that God was motivated by

concern for his safety and wellbeing. As time passes and the relationship develops, God's instructions become more and more demanding. Yet even as the tests of his dedication become harder and harder, Avraham never seems to waver. In fact, the text seems to indicate that Avraham reacts with greater enthusiasm with each passing day. How can this be?

In fact, the Torah tells us what was going through Avraham's mind as his responsibilities grew: "And he believed in God, and considered it an act of charity [on His part]": Avraham understood that with each commandment, God was, in essence, extending His hand, allowing Avraham to reciprocate, to be a partner in the ever-growing relationship, and to somehow compensate for the impossible chasm between the two partners in the covenant between himself and God. Avraham understood that each mitzvah presented him with an opportunity to be an active party to the covenant, and he understood that the fact that God was giving him this opportunity was, in and of itself, a tremendous act of kindness.

As descendants of Avraham, we are given this very same gift: Through mitzvot, we are able to compensate for the asymmetry of our relationship with God, and to reach up and accept the hand He offers us. Each task, each challenge, each commandment that we fulfill allows us to feel that we are somehow deserving of the kindness with which God treats us. Although God is omniscient and omnipotent, and man may see himself as small and inconsequential, in His benevolence, God allows man to make these gestures of commitment that allow us to become invested in the relationship, and to be deserving of the blessings He showers upon us. While we must always remain mindful of the chasm that separates us from God, we should not lose sight of the immeasurable kindness God continues to perform by reaching out to us, by giving us tasks to perform, by challenging us. This is what Avraham understood as God continued to give him opportunities to build a covenant with Him: In His ultimate act of tzedakah, God allows us the illusion that we are deserving of a relationship with Him, and deserving of the blessings He first bestowed upon Avraham.

For a more in-depth analysis see:

<http://arikahn.blogspot.co.il/2015/10/lectures-and-essays-lech-lcha.html>

---

[www.matzav.com](http://www.matzav.com) or [www.torah.org/learning/drasha](http://www.torah.org/learning/drasha)

Parsha Parables By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

**Drasha Parshas Lech Lecha**

**Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky**

***Long Distance Call***

Good deeds deserve good dividends, but there is one deed mentioned in this week's portion that is veiled in anonymity. However, its dividends lasted so forcefully that the impact was realized almost 500 years later.

The Torah tells us about a war that took place. Avram's nephew Lot was captured. The Torah tells us "Then there came the fugitive and told Abram, the Ivri, who dwelt in the plains of Mamre..." (Genesis 14:13) It obscures the name of the refugee and does not even directly state his message. The next verse, in a seemingly disjointed manner, tells us, "and Abram heard that his kinsman was taken captive, he armed his disciples who had been born in his house -- three hundred and eighteen -- and he pursued them as far as Dan" (ibid v.14). The Medrash tells us that the refugee was Og, a giant of a man who escaped an attack on his fellow giants. He informed Avram that his nephew was alive, albeit taken prisoner with malevolent intent. He figured that Avram would try to liberate Lot and be killed in battle. Og would then marry Sora. (Perhaps that is the reason that the Torah seems to separate what Avram heard from what the refugee told.) For this piece of disguised information, Og receives a seemingly disproportionate reward. He is granted not only longevity, as he lived until the final days of the Jews' sojourn through the desert, but also the impact of his deed was so potent that Moshe was afraid to attack him before entering the Land of Canaan! Imagine. Og lived for 470 years after the deed, and then Moshe had to be reassured that he need not fear his merits!

Rabbi Berel Zisman, one of the few remaining from his illustrious family of prominent Lubavitch Chasidim spent a portion of World War II in a concentration camp in Munich. After the war, he was allowed entry to the United States, but had to wait in the town of Bremerhaven for six weeks. During that time he decided to travel to Bergen-Belsen the notorious concentration camp which was transformed to a displaced person camp to visit a cousin who was there. Dozens of inmates came over to him with names of loved ones scattered across the free plains of the USA. They wanted to get them messages. Berel took their messages. To Sam Finkel from Abraham Gorecki: "I am

alive and recuperating. Please try to guarantee employment to allow me to enter the US." And so on. One card was for Jacob Kamenecki from a niece from Minsk. "Please be aware that I survived the war and will be going back to Minsk."

Armed with lists of names and some addresses, Berel arrived in the US where he became a student in the Lubavitch Yeshiva in Crown Heights. Knowing no English, upon his arrival he asked a cousin to address postcards. Each had a message written in Yiddish "My name is Berel Zisman. I have just arrived from Europe - and have regards from..." He filled in the blanks and ended the brief note on each card with, "for further information, I can be contacted at the Lubavitch Yeshiva, corner Bedford and Dean in Crown Heights."

Rabbi Zisman does not really now how many people received his cards, but one person who lived in a basement apartment on Hewes Street definitely did. When Rabbi Jacob Kamenecki, one of the United States' leading sages, came to the Lubavitch yeshiva looking for Berel Zisman, a war refugee who had arrived at the yeshiva only a week ago, no one knew why.

Berel was called out of the study hall and met the elderly man, filled him in on all the particulars about the status of his relative, and returned to his place. When the young man returned to his seat, he was shocked at the celebrity treatment he once again received. "You mean you don't know who that Rabbi was? He is the Rosh Yeshiva of Torah Voda'ath!" Berel shuddered, feeling terrible that he made the revered scholar visit him. A while later, he met the Rosh Yeshiva and approached him. "Rebbe, please forgive me, I had no intention to make you come to me to get regards. Had I known who you were I would surely have gone to your home and given the information to you in person!"

Reb Yaakov was astounded. He refused to accept the apology. "Heaven forbid! Do you realize what kind of solace I have hearing about the survival of my relative. I came to you, not only to hear the news, but to thank you, in person, for delivering it!"

Imagine. Avram was nearly 80 years old, he had no descendants, and the only link to the house of his father's family -- at least documented as a disciple of Avram's philosophies -- was Lot. Now even the whereabouts and future of that man were unknown. And when Og delivered the news of his whereabouts, perhaps Avram's hope for the future was rekindled. Perhaps his gratitude toward Og abounded. And though Og spoke one thing, and Avram heard another, the reward for the impact on Avram's peace of mind was amazingly powerful.

We often make light of actions and ramifications. The Torah tells us this week, in a saga that ends five books and some four hundred years later, that small tidings travel a very long distance.

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky is the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva Toras Chaim at South Shore and the author of the Parsha Parables series. Torah.org

---

from: Rabbi Yissocher Frand <ryfrand@torah.org>

reply-to: ryfrand@torah.org,

to: ravfrand@torah.org

subject: Rabbi Frand on Parsha

**Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas *Lech Lecha***

***To What Do You Owe Your Success?***

The Torah tells us that Lot, the nephew of Avram, became caught up in the World War that occurred between the Four Kings and the Five Kings.

"Avram heard that his kinsman was taken captive, he armed his disciples who had been born in his house -- three hundred and eighteen -- and he pursued them as far as Dan." [Bereshis 14:14] Avram was successful in rescuing Lot and the grateful King of Sodom told Avram, "Give me the people and take the possessions for yourself." [Bereshis 14:21]. Avram however refused to take anything -- "Not even a string, not even a shoelace -- so that you not say 'It is I who made Avram rich.'" [Bereshis 14:23].

The Shulchan Aruch [Orach Chaim 2:4] rules that even the mundane act of putting on and tying one's shoes is bound by halachic protocol: One should first put on the right shoe, then put on the left shoe, then tie the left shoe, and finally tie the right shoe. There is a reason for this sequence.

Rabbi Akiva Eiger in his annotations to the Shulchan Aruch cites a work entitled Emek haMelech which provides an appealing reason for this specific protocol. Emek haMelech cites the Talmudic teaching that the Jewish people merited two Mitzvos based on Avram's proclamation "I will not take a string or a shoelace" -- the string of Techeles (that is added Biblically to the Tzitzis of the Tallis) and the leather strap of Tephillin. Since we gained the mitzvah of Tephillin by virtue of the fact that Avram refused to take a

shoelace, we give halachic significance even to our shoelaces. Since Tephillin are placed on the left arm (for most people who are right handed), we give precedence to the left foot and tie that first, just like we tie Tephillin onto our left arm.

The most common reason given for the fact that the majority of people put Tephillin on their left arm is because the pasuk teaches "and it shall be a sign on your hand (al YADCHA)" [Shmos 13:16]. The word YADCHA is strangely spelled with a HAY at the end, from which Rabbinic exegesis derives "Yad Key-he" (your weaker arm). If one is right-handed, his weaker arm is his left arm and that is where he places his Tephillin. Conversely, a lefty places Tephillin on his weaker arm -- his right arm.

What is behind the idea of placing Tephillin on the "weaker arm"?

One of the great challenges of life is to remind ourselves who to thank for our good fortune. If we are successful in any endeavor whatsoever, we always need to bear in mind that whatever we have is only because of the Grace of the Master of the Universe and the Help of Heaven. Whether a person is successful financially and he earns a lot of money or he is successful professionally and has risen to the top of his profession, whether one has -- Baruch Hashem -- beautiful children and has done a great job raising them; whatever area of life it is -- the only way people have any type of success is because of Siyata D'Shmaya.

Unfortunately, many times we fall into the trap of thinking "My strength and the power of my hand created for me this great wealth." [Devorim 8:17] We begin to think that it is our smarts, our business acumen, our brains, our persistence, whatever it may be. We attribute it to ourselves. Tephillin, which are put on the weaker arm, are supposed to act as an antidote to this type of belief. A person needs to be reminded that "my hand is weak and that all I accomplish is not because of my strength". The message is that our arms are feeble and that alone they cannot accomplish.

I saw a very interesting observation in a Sefer called Mishkan Bezalel. The Talmud says that someone who sinned receives a draft deferment and returns home from the battle field -- lest he fear that he will die in battle as a result of his sins and cause other soldiers to lose heart as a result of his negative attitude. The Talmud cites as an example of a sin for which a person would be excluded from the Jewish army as one who "speaks between (putting on) the (Arm) Tephillin and the (Head) Tephillin".

Why is this particular sin chosen as the prototypical definition of exclusion from war for one's spiritual shortcomings? The answer is that Head Tephillin represent accepting upon oneself the Yoke of Heaven (Kabbalas Ol Malchus Shamayim). A person needs to acknowledge that the Almighty is in charge. Arm Tephillin represent what we can accomplish by ourselves in the world. A person who interrupts between the Head Tephillin and the Arm Tephillin is ineligible to go to war as part of the Jewish army because he does not realize that the whole power and success of a person (Arm Tephillin) comes about only by virtue of his acceptance upon himself of the yoke of Heaven (Kabbalas Ol Malchus Shamayim), represented by the Tephillin on his head.

One of the greatest temptations in life of falling into the trap of feeling that "my strength and the power of my hand have made me this valor" is when people are successful in battle. Armies that are victorious, military forces that achieve smashing victories, always attribute their successes to themselves -- to their might, their brains, their superior equipment, whatever it might be. Therefore, the person going into war who "speaks between putting on the Arm Tephillin and the Head Tephillin" separates the actions of his hand from his acceptance of the yoke of Heaven upon himself, so he is ineligible to go to war. Therefore, it is this specific spiritual shortcoming that is cited as the prototype of a sin which invalidates a soldier from the Jewish army.

This understanding gives us insight into the events of Parshas Lech Lecha. Avram Avinu defeated the mightiest army in the world. Lesser personages would have been extremely vulnerable at that moment to boast and proclaim "my strength and the power of my hand have made for me this valor." The

King of Sodom offered him the booty and the spoil. "You deserve it Avram, it was all your doing that brought us this triumph!" This was the rule of war: "To the victor go the spoils".

Avram turned him down. "Not a thread and not a shoelace! I realize this has nothing to do with me. I realize this is only S'yata D'Shmaya [the Help of Heaven]. I am not going to take an iota from you." This was the great spiritual significance of the statement "not even a shoelace". It was so important that it caused us to receive the corresponding mitzvah of Tephillin, which commands us to place the Arm Tephillin on the weaker arm and commands us to keep in mind the idea of not pausing for a moment after taking action with our arm from attributing all our success to the One we acknowledge by placing Tephillin upon our head.

This is what the Emek HaMelech means in explaining that we tie our left shoe first in the morning because of its connection to Tephillin and because it reinforces the idea of the "Yad Keheh" [the weaker arm]. It is only the Ribono shel Olam that lets people be victorious whether in war or in any other area of life.

#### ***A Sailor Who Recognized The Hand Of G-D In A Time Of War***

I recently received a letter from a Rav in Eretz Yisrael who relates an amazing story he heard from a sailor in the Israeli Navy, who he happened to meet while riding on a train. The sailor recognized him as a Rabbi and felt obliged to tell him the story of miracles he witnessed during the 2006 war with Hezbollah.

He was assigned to a ship called Chanit (Hebrew for 'spear') stationed off the Lebanese Coast during the last war with Hezbollah. During the early stages of the war, as reported in the press at the time, the Israeli naval boat was hit by an enemy missile. The details that the sailor shared with the Rabbi on the train ride were not reported in the general media at the time:

It was Friday night. Usually, the crew would eat Friday night dinner in two shifts. But since we were in a war zone, our three religious crewmen went to the commanding officer and begged him that we all need Hashem's help and we should ask for it as a group! The first miracle was that the skipper agreed to leave only four sailors on the bridge. The entire crew went down to a room, where they had a minyan for Mincha and Kabbalas Shabbos. I was bored and wanted to eat quickly and then catch a few hours of sleep because I was on the midnight watch, but I stayed with the rest of the crew.

Then all of us had a Shabbos meal together. Fifteen different sailors said Kiddush, each in the custom of their fathers. I am talking about guys who weren't even religious. The meal was drawn out. I had a headache and was dying to go to sleep. The religious guys started to say the Grace After Meals and then BOOM – the missile hit, but on the opposite end of the craft. It should have sunk the boat, but it hit a crane right above the chopper landing pad. What a miracle! If that is not enough, the helicopter refueling tank filled with explosive chopper fuel didn't explode despite the fact that the whole end of the boat was burned.

Had everyone been at their appointed posts that night, at least twenty people would have been killed. Since they were all eating together a Shabbos meal and they were in a different part of the boat, only the four sailors who were on the bridge were killed.

I went down to my bunk under the place where the missile hit. I saw that my bunk had melted from the heat of the blast. My bed was charcoal. The metal bed was completely melted down and all my possessions were ashes. If I had not been detained in the chapel and in the dining hall for the Shabbat meal, I would have been charcoal myself. I have not stopped thinking about Hashem since. It has changed my life.

This sailor became observant because of this miracle that he witnessed with his own two eyes. I would not believe the following climax of the story if I did not trust the person who wrote me this narrative as he heard it directly from the sailor involved:

They went down to the boiler room of the ship after the incident and they found a Sefer Tehillim that was opened to Chapter 124:

A song of ascents by David, Had not Hashem been with us – let Israel declare it now! Had not Hashem been with us when men rose up against us, then they would have swallowed us alive, when their anger was kindled against us. Then the waters would have inundated us; the current would have surged across our soul. Then they would have surged across our soul – the treacherous waters. Blessed is Hashem, Who did not present us as prey for their teeth. Our soul escaped like a bird from the hunters' snare; the snare broke and we escaped. Our help is through the Name of Hashem, Maker of heaven and earth.

This sailor now wears a kippah and is growing a beard. He saw the Hand of G-d is his own life and as a result of that he is an observant Jew. We do not always merit seeing this in our own lives, but this is the reality.

This is the lesson of Avram and the lesson of Arm Tephillin which we place on our weaker hand. Without the Help of G-d above (the Head Tephillin), our arms are incapable of anything. It is only with S'yata D'Shmaya that we are what we are. Avram recognized that without the Help of the Master of the Universe, he would not have been successful in recapturing Lot.

Nothing was due him from the spoils.

All of us in life have a very weak hand (Yad Keheh). The only reason we are successful is because of the Help of Hashem.

Transcribed by David Twersky Seattle, WA; Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman, Baltimore, MD

RavFrاند, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Yissocher Frand and Torah.org.

---

<http://www.jpost.com/Author/Rabbi-Shmuel-Rabinowitz>

#### **The Jerusalem Post**

**By Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz**

***Parshat Lech Lecha – What was Abraham searching for?***

***October 22, 2015 Thursday 9 Heshvan 5776***

This week's Torah portion, Genesis 12:1-17:27, begins with a Divine directive to the forefather Abraham (Abram), "Go forth from your land and from your birthplace and from your father's house."

In order to begin a new chapter in the history of humanity and prepare the foundation for Am Yisrael – the nation that in the future will receive the Torah and the moral mission of being the Chosen People – there first must be a disconnection and departure from the idolatrous past. But where was Abraham commanded to go? The reader does not know, and truth be told, apparently neither does Abraham. The destination is phrased as, "Go forth... to the land that I will show you."

In what direction does a person turn who is supposed to walk somewhere but does not know to where? He goes to where his legs carry him. An important message is conveyed by this: Sometimes a person just has to get up and take a first step. Even if the destination is not completely clear, that first step bears great significance.

Whoever continues reading the story will be surprised.

A few verses later, we read that Abraham knows very well where he has to go.

"And Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother's son... and they went to go to the land of Canaan..."

(Genesis 12:5) Abraham goes to Canaan; that same land promised later to Abraham and his descendants – Eretz Yisrael.

But how did he know that is where he was supposed to go? This question preoccupied many of Torah commentators and was answered by many. There are those who said that God showed him the destination, and others who said that Abraham understood this on his own. We will examine the words of the midrash which offers a surprising answer: "Rabbi Levi said: At the time that Abraham was walking about Aram Naharayim and Aram Nahor, he saw [people] eating and drinking and lazing about. He said: May I have no portion in this land. Once he arrived at the promontory of Tyre, he saw [people] engaged in hoeing at hoeing time and weeding at weeding time. He said: If only I had a portion in this land.

The Blessed Holy One said to him: ‘To your offspring I will give this land.’” (Breishit Rabba 39:8) What is the midrash telling us? Abraham did not know where to go. He traveled through many countries and examined the behavior of their inhabitants. In certain places, he saw great economic abundance which led the inhabitants to pass their days in pleasurable and hedonistic pastimes. Instead of joining the celebration and choosing to settle in these lands, he chose to distance himself from them. Only when he came to the Land of Israel and saw the inhabitants preoccupied with their work without time for unruly behavior, did Abraham chose to settle in this land. God agreed with him and promised the land to Abraham and his descendants. Abraham searched for a place in which to settle. He understood that there is a specific land in which he is meant to settle, but he himself chose the criteria. They were moral criteria. Abraham searched for a place that did not have too much abundance, the kind that leads to decadence and an unruly life. He preferred a place where one must work to live, to weed out thorns in the field and hoe the land to work it.

We do not have to look that far back to understand this.

We are all familiar with the stories of the early settlers in Israel in the previous and the 19th centuries. These were idealists who did not shy away from hard physical labor; people who saw work as a challenge, but excelled just as much if not more in having high standards of morals, values, integrity and humility.

These were the kinds of people that Abraham could relate to. This was the kind of place he searched for, and found. And of course, he was right. This was the land God intended for him and to which he was sent.

We live today in a society of abundance, which historically speaking is a rare phenomenon. We live in a society that does not have time because it is so busy with enjoyable leisure activities. When we read about Abraham and the values he held dear, we as his descendants must take these values and build our lives based on them. Then, we will not only be Abraham’s descendants, but we will be those who follow in his footsteps.

The writer is rabbi of the Western Wall and holy sites.

---

[ohr.edu/this\\_week/insights\\_into\\_halacha](http://ohr.edu/this_week/insights_into_halacha)

**Ohr Somayach :: Insights into Halacha**

**Rabbi Yehuda Spitz**

*Mayim Acharonim, Chova?*

*For the week ending 1 November 2014 / 8 Heshvan 5775*

In Parshas Lech Lecha, we are introduced to an interesting personality named Bera, Melech S’dom, the King of S’dom. While he was certainly not known for his morality and impeccable character, nonetheless, his title, as well as the destruction of his home town using salt, described in Parshas Vayera[1], seemingly references a catalyst to a Mitzvah that many are wholly unfamiliar with: its homonym, ‘Melach S’domis’ or S’dom Salt. The Mitzva I am referring to is Mayim Acharonim, the handwashing before Birchas HaMazon[2].

Mitzva?!

I am sure that many readers are shaking their heads in disbelief, wondering how I can call this known chumra a Mitzva. This common, but slightly mistaken, belief was made evident to this author when a neighborhood housewife recently asked an interesting sheilah. Apparently, after hosting several friends and relatives for a Shabbos Seudah, she washed Mayim Acharonim along with the men, earning her much scorn and ridicule. The incredulous men commented that their washing Mayim Acharonim was only a chumra, and there obviously was no basis for a woman to do it as well. Our distraught domestic denizen wanted to know who acted correctly, and was astounded when I replied that technically speaking they both were.

A Bit of Background

Mayim Acharonim has an interesting background, as it actually has two entirely different sources and rationales mandating it. The first, in Gemara Brachos[3], discussing the source for ritual handwashing, explains that one can not make a bracha with dirty hands, and cites the pasuk in Parshas Kedoshim[4] “V’hiskadeeshtem, V’heyisem Kedoshim”, “And you shall sanctify yourselves, and be holy”. The Gemara clarifies that “And you shall sanctify yourselves” refers to washing the hands before the meal, Mayim Rishonim, and “and be holy” refers to washing the hands after the meal, Mayim Acharonim. In other words, by washing our hands before making a bracha (in this case before Bentsching), we are properly sanctifying ourselves.

The second source, Gemara Chullin[5], on the other hand, refers to Mayim Acharonim as a “chova”, an outright obligation. The Gemara elucidates that there is a certain type of salt in the world, called ‘Melach S’domis’, (actually one of the additions needed to make the Ketores properly[6]) that is so caustic, that if it gets into a person’s eyes, it can cause blindness r”l. Since one is supposed to have salt at his table at every meal[7], Chazal were worried that this specific type of salt may have found its way onto our tables and consequently could cause someone to become blind if he rubs his eyes after eating. Therefore, as a way to mitigate this salt’s potentially devastating effects, they mandated handwashing after eating, known colloquially as Mayim Acharonim.

In fact, the Gemara’s words are codified as halacha by the Tur and Shulchan Aruch[8], stating simply “Mayim Acharonim Chova”. The Rambam as well, writes that it is an obligation due to the potential Sakana involved[9]. As an aside, the Ben Ish Chai[10] posits that when eating, one should say this three word formula, and that way fulfill the halacha of speaking Divrei Torah at a meal[11].

Chova?

Well, if the Gemara, and even the Shulchan Aruch, consider washing Mayim Acharonim an actual obligation, then why do many treat it as a mere stringency? Furthermore, there are those (many of Germanic origin) who claim that their custom is to specifically not wash Mayim Acharonim! Additionally, if it is a binding halacha, why don’t women generally observe this washing?

The answer lies in the commentary of the Ba’alei Tosafos to both aforementioned Gemaras[12]. Tosafos comments that ‘nowadays, that ‘Melach S’domis’ is no longer found amongst us, we no longer are accustomed to washing Mayim Acharonim, and one may Bentsch without first washing his hands’. In other words, Tosafos maintains that although washing Mayim Acharonim used to be an obligation, since the problematic S’dom Salt was no longer prevalent already in their days, one is no longer required to wash Mayim Acharonim. In fact, not washing for Mayim Acharonim is cited as the common minhag by several Ashkenazic Rishonim, as well as the Levush and the Rema[13].

An additional rationale for leniency is put forward by the famed Rav Yaakov Emden[14]. He points out that ever since the advent of cutlery, most civilized people (hopefully) do not do the bulk of their eating with their hands, rather with a fork and spoon. Therefore, he explains, one who eats with silverware (or even plasticware) and did not actually touch his food, has no need to wash Mayim Acharonim.

Interestingly, the Shulchan Aruch[15] cites Tosafos’ lenient view as well, at the end of the very same siman where he rules that “Mayim Acharonim Chova”! Several authorities explain his seemingly contradictory intent that indeed nowadays one is no longer mandated to wash Mayim Acharonim. Yet, the Shulchan Aruch is telling us that nevertheless, we still should strive to do this important Mitzvah[16].

This view is cited by many halachic decisors including the Chayei Adam, Shulchan Aruch HaRav, Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, Aruch Hashulchan, and Mishna Berura, who relate that although Mayim Acharonim may no longer be obligated by the strict letter of the law, nonetheless, one still should be very stringent with its adherence[17]. Other authorities cite Kabbalistic reasons to be strict with its observance[18]. The Vilna Gaon was known to be extremely makpid on this halacha, referring to it as both, a “Chova” and a “Mitzva”, even nowadays[19].

Wash This Way!

Interestingly, authorities debate the proper way to perform washing Mayim Acharonim. One machlokes involves how much water to use. The basic halacha is that this handwashing has no set limit or minimum, rather even a small amount of water is sufficient[20]. However, the Kabbalistic approach mandates only using a small amount of water[21]. Conversely, the Vilna Gaon was makpid to use a full Reviis of water, as he considered Mayim Acharonim a full washing, akin to the Netillas Yadayim required before eating bread (Mayim Rishonim)[22].

Another machlokes revolves around how much of the hand must be washed by Mayim Acharonim. Although the basic halacha only requires from the finger tips to the second knuckle[23], nevertheless, Kabbalistically speaking, one should wash the entire fingers[24]. A third opinion, that of the Vilna Gaon, is that the whole hand should be washed, as he considered Mayim Acharonim a full Netillas Yadayim[25]. The unifying thread of these disparate shittos is their mandating adherence to the strict performance of Mayim Acharonim.

Women’s Role

Yet, so far, none of this explains why women commonly do not wash Mayim Acharonim. This “custom” seems to be an anomaly, as technically, women and men share the same obligation in this Mitzvah, and we do not find a halachic codifier making such a distinction.

Several contemporary authorities, including Rav Shmuel HaLevi Vosner and Rav Moshe Sternbuch[26] offer a possible justification. They explain that although women and men were both equally obligated in this Mitzvah, nevertheless, since it is no longer mandated as a strict requirement due to the dearth of ‘Melach S’domis’, but rather as a

proper “minhag”, it is entirely possible that women collectively never accepted this stringency upon themselves. Therefore, nowadays they are not required to wash Mayim Acharonim[27]. Indeed, Rav Yonah Mertzbach (Rosh Yeshivas Kol Torah) was quoted as stating that the common minhag for women in Ashkenaz, even among ‘Chareidim L’Dvar Hashem’, was not to wash Mayim Acharonim[28].

However, many other contemporary halachic decisors, including Rav Yosef Chaim Zonnenfeld, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, Rav Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg, Rav Ovadia Yosef, Rav Mordechai Elyahu, Rav Moshe Sternbuch, the Rivevos Efraim, and the Shevet HaKehasi[29], all rule that regardless of the rationale, women still should be vigilant with washing Mayim Acharonim.

To Wash or Not to Wash?

Back to our dilemma. This background is why I informed that harried housewife that technically speaking both she and her relatives were correct. She undeniably had what to rely upon not to wash Mayim Acharonim. Yet, she was definitely correct in making sure to do so anyway. As the Pele Yoetz explains, even if there no longer is a danger posed from salt that blinds our eyes, nevertheless, we still have an obligation to listen to the words of our Chachamim, and not blind ourselves to their wisdom[30].

Footnotes

[1]See Parshas Vayera (Bereishis Ch. 19, verses 24 & 25) and Parshas Nitzavim (Devarim Ch. 29, verse 22), which, as part of the tochacha Moshe Rabbeinu gives Bnei Yisrael warning them of the dire consequences of not listening to the word of Hashem, states “gafrits v’melach sereifah kol artzah...k’mahpeichas S’dom”, “Sulfur and salt will burn your whole land... just as (it did) in the turning over (destruction) of S’dom”. According to the author of the Zera Gad on the Haggada, Rav Tzvi Hirsch of Horodna, in his glosses to Targum Rav Yosef on Divrei HaYamim (II, Ch. 13, 5; as cited by the Mareh Yeoshua on the Maaseh Rav - 84), who explains Dovid HaMelech’s eternal ‘Bris Melach’ with Hashem as parallel to the salty seas never becoming sweet. Rav Tzvi Hirsch explains that the current Yam HaMelach (Dead Sea) sits upon the former site of S’dom and its sister cities. Since all of the seas and oceans are connected, the salty destruction of S’dom is what turned them all salty. Accordingly, ‘Melach S’domis’ is still extant, if highly diluted. He therefore maintains that washing Mayim Acharonim is still actually obligatory nowadays, akin to the opinion of the Vilna Gaon (see footnote 19). The wording of the Aruch Hashulchan (O.C. 181, 5) implies that he concurs with this understanding as well.

[2]While Bera’s connection to the Mitzva of Mayim Acharonim is tenuous at best, relying on homonyms and clever wordplay, interestingly, due to Avraham Avina’s famous “thread and shoelace” rebuttal to him, he unwittingly became the catalyst for the Mitzvos of Tzitzis and Tefillin. See Gemara Sota 17a and Gemara Chullin 89a.

[3]Gemara Brachos (53b).

[4]Vayikra (Chapter 20, verse 7).

[5]Gemara Chullin (105a-b) and Gemara Eruvin (17b).

[6]See Gemara Krisus (6a) and Rambam (Hilchos Klei HaMikdash Ch.2, 3).

[7]See previous article titled “Salting With Sugar?!”

[8]Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 181, 1), based on the opinions of many Rishonim, including the Rif (Chullin 37b), Sefer HaChinuch (Parshas Eikev, Mitzva 430 s.v. mayim), and Tur (O.C. 181).

[9]Rambam (Hilchos Brachos Ch.6, 3).

[10]Ben Ish Chai (Year 1, Parshas Shlach 7), quoting his esteemed father and grandfather.

[11]See Pirkei Avos (Ch.3, Mishna 3).

[12]Tosafos (Brachos 53b s.v. v’heyisem; Chullin 105a s.v. mayim; Eruvin 17b s.v. Mayim Acharonim).

[13]Including the Rosh (Brachos Ch. 8, 6), the Ohr Zarua (vol. 1, 72), the Agur (235), the SMA”G (Positive Mitzva 27), the Levush (O.C. 181, 9) and the Rema in his Darchei Moshe glosses on the Tur (181, 2). See also Shu”t Hisorerus Teshuva (vol. 1, 63), who defends the “common custom” of not washing Mayim Acharonim.

[14]Mor U’Ketzi’a (end 181 s.v. da). This is l’shitaso, as the Ya’aveztz rules similarly by the handwashing requirements of a davar hatebulu b’mashkeh - see previous article titled ‘The Coffee Dipping Conundrum’. However, the Kaf Hachaim (ad loc. 27) cites several authorities who do not agree with the Ya’aveztz’s leniency and concludes that even if one ate exclusively with utensils, he must still wash Mayim Acharonim. Similarly, regarding a different halacha related to handwashing, we find that although according to the letter of the law it need not be required, nevertheless, many authorities rule that one should still wash his hands, as hand washing does not usually entail too much effort - see previous article titled ‘The Halachic Power of a Diyuk’.

[15]Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 181, 10).

[16]Shu”t Nechpeh B’Kessef (vol. 1, pg. 154, 4th column), Yalkut Yosef (vol. 8, 181, footnotes 1 and 2), Halichos Olam (Parshas Shlach, 1), Halacha Berura (vol. 8, O.C. 181, Birur Halacha 1 s.v. h’nieh).

[17]Chayei Adam (46, 1), Shulchan Aruch HaRav (O.C. 181, 9), Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (44, 1), Aruch Hashulchan (O.C. 181, 5), Mishna Berura (181, 22). Other poskim who rule this way include the Rashal (Yam Shel Shlomo, Chullin Ch. 8, 10), Magen Avraham (O.C. 181, 10), Elyah Rabbah (O.C. 181, 9), Pri Megadim (O.C. 181, M.Z. 1, citing several reasons for stringency), Maharsham (Daas Torah O.C. 181, 10; quoting the Toras Chaim), Ben Ish Chai (Year 1, Parshas Shlach 6), Shoneh Halachos (vol. 1, 181, 1), Shu”t Ohr L’Tzion (vol. 2, pg. 303), Yalkut Yosef (ibid.) and Halacha Berura (ibid.). Many of these authorities suspect that even though actual ‘Melach S’domis’ might no longer be prevalent, still other types of common salt that would be harmful if rubbed into eyes, nonetheless are. Additionally, even if salt was no longer an issue, still, one fulfills the Mitzvah of “V’heyisem Kedoshim” by washing Mayim Acharonim.

[18]The Kaf Hachaim (O.C. 181, 1) states that the words of Chazal are really “Sod” wrapped in “Pshat”. Therefore even if the “Pshat” is no longer relevant, the hidden meanings still are. He then cites that the Zohar (Parshas Terumah pg. 154b and Parshas Pinchas pg. 246a) and the Arizal (Shaar Hamitzvos, Parshas Eikev) write that one should be extremely vigilant with Mayim Acharonim due to Kabbalistic reasons. This zehirus with Mayim Acharonim based on Kabbalistic reasons is also cited by the Shlah (Shaar HaOsiyos, Os Kuf s.v. u’ksheim), the Magen Avraham (ibid.), the Chida (Birkei Yosef O.C. 181, 7), the Pele Yo’etz (Os Nun, Netilas Yadayim s.v. v’yesh), Shulchan HaTahor (181, 1 and footnote, who calls it a ‘chova gamur’), Rav Chaim Fala’ji (Kaf Hachaim 25, 2, 8 & 9, quoting the Yalkut Ruveim on Vayikra), the Matteh Moshe (vol. 2, 306), Ben Ish Chai (ibid.), and in Shu”t Min Hashamaim (57). See Shemiras HaGuf VeHanefesh (vol. 1, Ch. 56) at length.

[19]See Biur HaGr”a (O.C. 181, 12) who was extremely stringent with this halacha, as he rejects the common leniencies offered by Tosafos and the Rosh. In Maaseh Rav (84) he refers to Mayim Acharonim as both a “Chova” and a “Mitzva”, even nowadays. See also Mishna Berura (O.C. 181, 22) who explains that according to the Gr”a the sakana of ‘Melach S’domis’ still applies nowadays. This also seems to be the Rambam’s understanding (Hilchos Brachos Ch. 6, 3), and is cited by the Aruch Hashulchan (O.C. 181, 5) as well, that those who use sea salt should still be wary of ‘Melach S’domis’, which would fit in with the explanation of the Zera Gad (see footnote 1).

[20]The Kol Bo (23), quoting the Raavad, as well as the Beis Yosef (O.C. 181 s.v. mashma) citing the opinion of Rabbeinu Bachya (Shulchan Shel Arba, Shaar 1 s.v. v’yesh hefresh), ruled that there is no shiur for the amount of water needed for Mayim Acharonim, and even a small amount will do. The Elya Rabba (ad loc. 3) and Aruch Hashulchan (ad loc. 8) wrote that this is indeed the halacha. Similarly, Rav Yosef Elyahu Henkin (Shu”t Gevuros Elyahu vol. 1, 53, 4), wrote that one only needs to use a small amount of water. This seems to be the common custom (see Mishna Berura ad loc. 19).

[21]See Ben Ish Chai (Year 1, Parshas Shelach 8), Kaf Hachaim (Falaj’i; 25, 2), and Kaf Hachaim (O.C. 181, 6). See next footnote.

[22]Maaseh Rav (84), cited by the Mishna Berura (O.C. 181, 19). The Aruch Hashulchan (ad loc. 8) notes that many Gedolim washed with a full Revis, and he personally does not see any need to makpid on only using a small amount of water. However, the Chazon Ish is quoted (Orchos Rabbeinu vol. 1, 70; quoting the Steipler Gaon; and in the new print of Maaseh Rav, Milum pg. 320, s.v. u’l’inyan; quoting Rav Chaim Kanievsky) as not believing that the Gr”a was actually makpid on a shiur Revis for Mayim Acharonim. However, see Shu”t Teshuvos V’Hanhagos (vol. 1, 173 s.v. v’achshav) who writes that this shemua is tzarich iyun gadol, as why should this rule in Maaseh Rav be any less reliable as to the Gr”a’s personal hanhaga than any other one in the sefer, especially as his talmidim were known to be stringent for washing this way. He attempts to answer that perhaps the Chazon Ish was referring to washing only to the second knuckle (as opposed to the whole hand) with a Revis, that he did not believe was the Gra’s true shitta. However, he reiterates, washing the whole hand with a Revis (meaning a full Netillas Yadayim) was indeed the Gr”a’s opinion.

[23]Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 181, 4), quoting the Tur (ad loc.) and Rashba (Toras HaBayis, Bayis 6, Shaar 1, Ch. 9), Levush (ad loc.), Magen Avraham (ad loc. 4), Pri Megadim (ad loc. E.A. 4), Chayei Adam (vol. 1, 46, 1), Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (44, 1), Aruch Hashulchan (ad loc. 7), and Rav Yosef Elyahu Henkin (Shu”t Gevuros Elyahu vol. 1, 53, 4). Indeed, in his Beis Yosef commentary (ad loc. 4), the Shulchan Aruch explicitly rules against Rabbeinu Bachya’s opinion (Shulchan Shel Arba pg. 466) of mandating whole finger washing.

[24]The Arizal (Shaar HaKavannos pg. 72b) and the Siddur HaRashash maintain that Kabbalistically, the entire fingers must be washed during Mayim Acharonim. The Kaf Hachaim (O.C. 181, 17) rules this way as well. [In O.C. 157, 22 the Kaf Hachaim explains the Arizal’s reasoning for this.] He adds a rule, that anytime a halacha is not specifically mentioned in the Gemara, but its practical application is debated by Poskim, we should follow the practice of the Kabbalists. He adds that certainly, if the Shulchan Aruch would have seen the ruling of the Arizal he would have mandated whole finger washing as well. As mentioned in a previous footnote, requiring the whole fingers to be washed was also the opinion of Rabbeinu Bachya (Shulchan Shel Arba pg. 466). The Mishna Berura (O.C. 181, 4, Biur Halacha s.v. ad) concludes that lechatchilla one should try to be machmir for this opinion. [Interestingly, he refers to it as the Gr”a’s shitta. On this, see Shu”t Teshuvos V’Hanhagos (vol. 1, 173) who explains that the Gr”a’s true shitta was washing the full hand. See next footnote.]

[25]See Biur HaGr”a (O.C. 181, 12, s.v. yesh), Chidushei HaGr”a Imrei Noam (on Brachos 15a and 53b), Maaseh Rav (84), and in many glosses on the Maaseh Rav, including Damesek Eliezer, Ohr Chodosh, and Biurei Rav Naftali Hertz HaLevi. This was also attested to by the Gr”a’s talmid, Rav Zundel Salant (Ha’ZaddikRi”Z M’Salant pg. 115), and was the personal hanhaga of the Brisker Rav [see Shu”t Teshuvos V’Hanhagos (vol. 1, 173) at length on the Gra’s shitta of Mayim Acharonim].

[26]Shu”t Shevet HaLevi (vol. 3, 23, 3 s.v. l’inyan) and Shu”t Teshuvos V’Hanhagos (vol. 1, 174). However, Rav Sternbuch concludes that nevertheless women still should wash Mayim Acharonim. He notes that certainly according to the Gr”a and others who maintain that even nowadays that Mayim Acharonim is obligatory, there would be no difference between men and women in this aspect. He adds that he has seen many ‘Chassidim and Anshei Maaseh’ whose wives were particular to wash Mayim Acharonim. He concludes that while women should do so, it is preferable that they should wash unobtrusively to not fall into the category of ‘giving an impression of showing off’ (mechezi k’yuhara).

[27]There are several other possible justifications for women’s general lackadaisicalness with Mayim Acharonim: The Ya’aveztz (Mor U’Ketzi’ah ibid.) posits that since women are generally more rigorous regarding hygiene and cleanliness they certainly would make sure not to eat with their hands, and l’shitaso not be required in Mayim Acharonim [however, he concludes that barring that, women and men have equal obligation in this Mitzvah]. Others [see Shu”t VaYevarech Dovid (vol. 1, O.C. 30) and Yalkut Yosef (ibid.)] opine that since men are only makpid due to Kabbalistic reasons and not because of actual halachic concerns, women are not beholden to keep it.

[28]Cited in Halichos Bas Yisrael (pg. 58, end of footnote 11).

[29]Rav Yosef Chaim Zonnenfeld (Shu”t Salmas Chaim new print, O.C. 174), Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (cited in Halichos Bas Yisrael Ch. 3, footnote 11), Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv (Ha’aros B’Maseches Chullin 105b), Rav Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg (cited by Rabbi Dovid Weinberger in the Artsroll Ohel Sarah Siddur, endnote 105), Rav Ovadia Yosef (Halichos Olam vol. 2, Parshas Shlach 1), Rav Mordechai Elyahu (Darchei Halacha glosses to Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 44, 1), Rav Moshe Sternbuch (Shu”t Teshuvos V’Hanhagos vol. 1, 174), the Rivevos Efraim (Shu”t vol. 1, 140, 3), and the Shevet HaKehasi (Shu”t vol. 1, 94). Others contemporary sefarim who rule that women should wash Mayim Acharonim include Halichos Baysa (Ch. 12, 2), Yalkut Yosef (ibid.) and Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 181, 2), and Halacha Berura (ibid.). In fact, the Aruch Hashulchan (O.C. 181, end 5) already mentioned that one should make sure that ‘kol bnei baiso’ wash Mayim Acharonim.

[30]Pele Yo’etz (Os Nun, Netilas Yadayim s.v. v’yesh). There are several additional reasons to be vigilant with Mayim Acharonim. In Shu”t Min HaShamayim (ibid.; cited by the Aruch Hashulchan ibid.) he explains that ‘kol hameikil b’Mayim Acharonim mekilim lo mezonosav min HaShmayim’. Additionally, the Chida (Birkei Yosef ibid.) cites that his saintly grandfather was told in a She’elas Chalom that ‘hameikil b’Mayim Acharonim mekilim lo yamav u’shinosav’! Definitely excellent reasons to observe this washing. For more on the topic of She’elos Chalomos in general, see Rabbi Eliezer Brodt’s Lekutei Eliezer (ppg. 59 - 63).

Disclaimer: This is not a comprehensive guide, rather a brief summary to raise awareness of the issues. In any real case one should ask a competent Halachic authority.

L’iluy Nishmas the Rosh HaYeshiva - Rav Chonoh Menachem Mendel ben R’ Yechezkel Shraga, Rav Yaakov Yeshaya ben R’ Boruch Yehuda, and l’zchur for Shira Yaffa bas Rochel Miriam and her children for a yeshua teikev u’miyad!

© 1995-2015 Ohr Somayach International - All rights reserved.