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subject: **Rav Frand** –
Lech Licha –

Avraham Is Challenged To Wipe His Hard Drive Clean
These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa
portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah
Series on the weekly portion: #1222 – Milah for The Son
of a Jewish Father and a Non-Jewish Mother. Good
Shabbos!

Avraham Is Challenged To Wipe His Hard Drive Clean
In the Medrash Rabbah (Chapter 39), Rav Yitzchak
comments on the first pasuk in our parsha – “Go forth
from your land, your birthplace and the house of your
father to the Land that I will show you” (Bereshis 12:1) –
by citing a pasuk from Tehillim (45:11): “My daughter
listen to me and see; turn your ear and forget your nation
and the house of your father.” This is how Rav Yitzchak
would begin his exposition on Parshas Lech Lecha. He
would reference this pasuk from sefer Tehillim. The
question is – what does this pasuk in Tehillim Chapter 45
have to do with Parshas Lech Lecha?

I saw an idea in a sefer called Nachlas Eliezer from Rav
Eliezer Kahan, who was a Mashgiach in Gateshead:

Rav Yitzchak is coming to answer a question that many
meforshim ask: The pasuk “Lech lecha m'artzecha
u'mi'moladetecha u'm'beis avicha...” contains an
inherent problem.” The Ribono shel Olam is asking
Avraham to go away from his country, his city, his
father's house and to go to Eretz Yisrael. As we all know,
if we go anywhere – especially if we go out of the country
– the first place that we leave is our home. Then we leave
our city. Then when we get to the airport and take off
toward our destination, we ultimately leave our country.
The pasuk should therefore have really been written in the
reverse sequence: Go forth from your father's house, your
birthplace (i.e. – your city), and from your land (i.e. –
your country); not vice versa as the pasuk states.

The famous answer to this question is that the Almighty
is not requesting a change of location, venue, or zip code
from Avraham over here. Rather, the Ribono shel Olam is

asking for Avraham Avinu to become a different person, literally to go ahead and wipe the slate clean to the extent that there is no remnant of his past existence.

To what can the matter be compared? A while back, my laptop started to run very slowly. I went to my computer guy and said, “You need to do something about this laptop.” He told me “The laptop is so old, and it has so much stuff on it that the only way to get this up to speed is to wipe the hard drive clean. We would need to get rid of everything, bring it back to ‘Bereshis’, then reload all the software onto it and then it would perform like new. But guess what? It is cheaper to buy a new laptop than to have me do all that for you.” Which I did.

HaKadosh Baruch Hu is asking Avraham “Wipe your hard drive clean.” There should be no *zecher* (memory) left of your previous existence, of who you were. “I want a fresh start. I am going to build a new nation from you and therefore everything in your past needs to be deleted.”

Now the *pasuk* makes eminent sense. We are all Americans (at least most of us). So as Americans, there is a certain influence that the country we live in has on us. Americans are different from Israelis, Israelis are different from Russians, and Russians are different from Iranians. Everyone is different based on the cultural practices of the country where they grew up. This is the reality of things.

But the influence that a person’s country has on him is not in his bone marrow. That is the easiest influence to get rid of. That can be accomplished in quick order. Therefore, “Go out of your land” (*Lech lecha m’artzecha*) comes first in the *pasuk*. Next comes “and from your birthplace”. We are all influenced by the cities we live in. Different cities have different cultures. We are Baltimoreans, which we consider a badge of honor. People in other towns may turn down their noses at the idea of being “Baltimoreans”. For better or worse, there is a certain culture here. We are influenced by living in Baltimore, Maryland. This influence has a little more profound impact on a person’s identity than “your country”, but again it is not part of the person’s DNA.

But then there is a person’s family – *Beis Avicha*. This is part of our very essence. This influence comes along in our mother’s milk. This is the hardest thing to get rid of – the walls that we were raised in, what we heard as children from our parents and our siblings. That is really

who we are.

Therefore, HaKadosh Baruch Hu is not really telling Avraham to change location but to become a different person and to delete all former influences. The way to do that is *Artzecha*, *Moladetecha*, and finally *Beis Avicha*.

This now helps us understand what Rav Yitzchak was saying by linking the opening *pasuk* of the Parsha with the eleventh *pasuk* in Chapter 45 of *Tehillim*: “My daughter listen to me and see; turn your ear and forget your nation and the house of your father.” This is exactly what was occurring at the beginning of *Lech Lecha*. Avraham was commanded to forget his nation and then forget his father’s house – in that order!

With this understanding, we can also resolve another problem in the first *pasuk* of our parsha. Rashi comments on the words *Lech Lecha* (*Go for yourself*) – for your benefit and for your own good! This is another famous question that everyone asks: This is supposed to be a test for Avraham. There is a difference of opinion whether it is the first or second of the famous Ten Tests that Avraham was given, but it certainly is considered a “Test” and a challenge. So G-d is telling Avraham: Guess what? Here is a test. If you pass this test, are you going to be in good shape!

If “Go where I ask you to go” is supposed to be a *Nisayon*, why isn’t the challenge being given without any promises? Let the promises come after Avraham passes the test and gets to “the Land he will be shown”?

The *Nachalas Eliezer* addresses this problem by citing a fundamental principle of Rav Yisrael Salanter in terms of how to live life. Rav Yisrael Salanter said that to successfully pass a *Nisayon*, a person needs two elements: A person must have *Yiras Shamayim*. That is, if the *Ribono shel Olam* asks you to do something, you must comply because you fear the *Ribono shel Olam*. But the key to passing a *Nisayon* is to minimize the test and make the challenge seem less great than it really is.

A person needs to convince himself – “psych himself out” – that it is not the highest mountain to climb, it is merely a hill. We can give an example. Let’s say that someone needs to exercise every morning. The only way a person can exercise every morning is by getting up at 5:00 am. That is the only time when it might fit into the daily schedule. Now, who wants to get out of bed at 5:00 am? Why do you need to do exercise? Because you need to lose weight and it is good for your cardio-vascular

system. So you tell yourself – why am I getting up so early? It is because it is good for my weight. It is good for my heart. (That is why we are all overweight.)

You make a “deal” with yourself. You say, if I get up at 5:00 am in the morning, I am going to treat myself to a cup of “Keurig-made coffee”, if I don’t get up at 5:00 o’clock then it is Nescafe. So why am I getting up then? I am not getting up because I want my heart to be better or because I want to lose weight. I am getting up because of the geshmak of having some Keurig -made coffee. I love that coffee.

Rav Yisrael says this is the approach a person needs to use in Yahadus. Do not make it hard on yourself! Make it easy in your mind. HaKadosh Baruch Hu is telling Avraham – become a different person. Do you know how hard that is? Avraham Avinu is not 15 years old at the beginning of Lech Lecha. He is 75 years old. It is not easy to “erase a person’s hard disk” at the age of 75! In order for Avraham Avinu to pass this test, it was necessary to minimize the challenge. Therefore, he was promised that this move would be “for your benefit, and for your own good.”

One final point: The pasuk says “And be a blessing” (Bereshis 12:2). Rashi explains: “The blessings are given over into your control. Until now, blessings were in My Hand. I Blessed Adam and Noach. However, from now on, you will bless whomever you desire.” This gift was unprecedented in the history of the world. The keys to blessing were given over to Avraham Avinu.

We can again provide a contemporary example: Imagine a billionaire who is fantastically wealthy. He gives out charity most generously, but he appoints a Gabbai Tzedakah to oversee his charitable contributions. Now if he tells this Gabbai Tzedakah – not only will you oversee my contributions, but I am no longer going to even sign the checks. You will be the one who gives out my millions of dollars based on whatever you think is appropriate. No strings attached. No oversight on my part. This is the nature of the blessing “V’Heyei Beracha” as Rashi describes it.

The reason the Ribono shel Olam gave this gift to Avraham was because Avraham became a different person. He wiped his entire previous life experience clean and became “Kulo l’Hashem” – totally devoted to the Almighty.

Now we can understand something that is truly mind

boggling. The pasuk says in Chayei Sarah: “And it was after the death of Avraham, Elokim blessed Yitzchak his son...” (Bereshis 25:11). Rashi asks – why was it necessary for the Ribono shel Olam to bless Yitzchak – after all, He had given the “keys to blessing” to Avraham to bless anyone he wanted. Why didn’t Avraham bless Yitzchak himself while he was still alive? Rashi answers: Even though the Holy One handed over the keys of blessing to Avraham, Avraham was afraid to bless his son because he saw that Eisav would descend from him. Avraham said, “Let the Master of Blessing come and Bless who ever finds favor in His Eyes.” And the Holy One came and blessed Yitzchak.

Which of us, if we controlled the power of blessing in this world, would withhold it from our own son – even from the “Yitzchak that you love” (Bereshis 22:2)? Yitzchak is a Tzadik Yesod Olam! He was prepared to be offered as an unblemished offering at the Akeidah! Avraham Avinu said, “No. I am not going to take the responsibility of giving a Bracha to Yitzchak because Eisav is going to come out from him.” How selfless can a person be? How does a person get to such a spiritual level?

A person gets to that level by working on himself and allowing himself to depart from his land, from his birthplace, and from the house of his father. He becomes a new person – a person the Almighty trusted with the Power of Bracha.

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dhoffman@torah.org This week’s write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand’s Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information. Torah.org: The Judaism Site Project Genesis, Inc. 2833 Smith Ave., Suite 225 Baltimore, MD 21209 <http://www.torah.org/learn@torah.org> (410) 602-1350

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(Lech Lecha)

Covenant and Conversation

How Perfect were the Matriarchs and Patriarchs? (Lech Lecha)

Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks zt"l

In an extraordinary series of observations on this week's parsha, Ramban (Nahmanides, 1194 – 1270) delivers harsh criticisms of Abraham and Sarah. The first has to do with Abraham's decision to leave the land of Canaan and go to Egypt because "there was a famine in the land" (Gen. 12:1). On this Ramban says:

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

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

Further in the parsha, Ramban also criticises Sarah's actions. In her despair that she might never have a child of her own, she asks Abraham to sleep with her handmaid Hagar in the hope that she might bear him a child. Abraham does so, and Hagar becomes pregnant. The text then says that Hagar "began to despise her mistress" (Gen. 16:4). Sarah complains to Abraham, and then "afflict[s]" Hagar (Gen. 16:6), who flees from her into the desert. On this, Ramban writes:

Our mother [Sarah] transgressed by this affliction, as did Abraham by allowing her to do so. So God heard her [Hagar's] affliction and gave her a son who would be a wild ass of a man to afflict the seed of Abraham and Sarah with all kinds of affliction. (Ramban, Commentary to Genesis 16:6)

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

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

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

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

Ramban believed, as we say in our prayers, that "because of our sins we were exiled from our land," but what sins had the Israelites committed in the days of Jacob that merited exile? He also believed that "the acts of the fathers are a sign for the children" (Commentary to Gen. 12:6), and that what happened in the lives of the patriarchs foreshadowed what would happen to their descendants. What had they done to Ishmael to earn the scorn of Muslims? A close reading of the biblical text pointed Ramban in the direction of Sarah's treatment of Hagar.

So Ramban's comments make sense within his reading of Jewish history. But this, too, is not without its difficulties. The Torah states explicitly that God may punish "the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation" (Ex. 34:7) but not beyond. The Rabbis further restricted this to cases where "the children continue the sins of the parents." (Rashi to Ex. 34:7, Jeremiah 31:28, and Ezekiel 18:2) Jeremiah and Ezekiel both said that no one would any more say, "the parents have eaten sour grapes and their children's teeth are set on edge." The transfer of sins across the generations is problematic, Jewishly and ethically. What is deeply interesting about Ramban's approach to Abraham and Sarah is his willingness to point out flaws in their behaviour. This answers a fundamental question as far as our understanding of the narratives of Genesis is concerned. How are we to judge our biblical ancestors when their behaviour seems problematic: Jacob taking Esau's blessing in disguise, for example, or Shimon and Levi's brutality in the course of rescuing their sister Dina?

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

For example, the words "Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian ... mocking" (Gen. 21:9), were understood by the Sages to mean that the thirteen-year-old Ishmael was guilty of idolatry, illicit sex or murder. This is clearly not the plain sense of the verse. It is, instead, an interpretation that would justify Sarah's insistence that Ishmael be sent away.

Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Chajes explained that the entire tendency of Midrash to make the heroes seem perfect and the villains completely evil is for educational reasons. The word Torah means "teaching" or "instruction," and it is difficult to teach ethics through stories whose characters are fraught with complexity and ambiguity. Yet the Torah does paint its characters in shades of grey. Why so? He gives three reasons.

The first is that the moral life is not something we understand in depth all at once. As children we hear stories of heroes and villains. We learn basic distinctions:

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

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

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

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

In India, the Jina and the Buddha, founders of two new religions in the sixth century BCE, came to be worshipped later by their followers. In China, Confucius and Lao-tze came to be deified. To the non-Christian, Jesus seems to represent a parallel case. In Greece, the

heroes of the past were held to have been sired by a god or to have been born of goddesses, and the dividing line between gods and men became fluid. In Egypt, the Pharaoh was considered divine.[2]

In Israel, says Kaufmann, “no man was ever worshipped or accorded even semi-divine status. This is one of the most extraordinary facts about the religion of the Old Testament.”[3] There never was a cult of Moses or any other biblical figure. That is why “no man knows Moses’ burial place to this day” (Deut. 34:6), so that it could never become a place of pilgrimage.

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

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

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Rabbi Yakov Haber Creating Jewish History

The founding fathers of Klal Yisrael, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, forged and solidified a new path in Jewish and world history. Partnering with HaKadosh Baruch Hu, they brought the Divine presence back down to the world after the corruption of the generation of the Flood and of the tower of Bavel. Their foundational contribution to all of their descendants, physically and spiritually, reverberates throughout all of history. Chazal succinctly state the deeds of the fathers is a sign for the children - [מעשה אבות סימן לבנים] meaning that events in their individual lives would harbingers similar events in the communal lives of the nation they would found.

Ramban (Bereishis 12:6) significantly expands upon, and even redefines, this theme. At first glance, one would

understand the above teaching to mean that Hashem arranged the events in our illustrious ancestors' lives to parallel the events which He designed for their descendants. According to this model, the actions of the avos indicated what would occur in the future. By contrast, Ramban explains that the avos, through their actions, caused future events to occur to their progeny and were prophetically shown at each event in their lives the future national event that they were sealing into the fabric of history. Ramban coins the term *po'eil dimyon*, a demonstrative, physical act, presenting several examples throughout Tanach whereby Hashem often utilized this technique with other prophets to cause a decree to definitely occur.[2] Consequently, in a very real sense, the avos, the root and foundation of b'nei Yisrael, created all of Jewish history.

Perhaps we can suggest that this enormous power to affect others' lives, even in subsequent generations was granted even to more "ordinary" Jews. The Gemara (Sanhedrin 19b) quotes R. Yochanan who compares the challenges which Yosef, Boaz, and Palti ben Layish respectively overcame. Yosef's difficult triumph over the advances of the wife of Potifar pales in comparison to Boaz's overcoming of the temptation presented to him by Ruth, an unmarried woman who lay at his feet. Similarly, Palti ben Layish's constant, years-long refusal to sin with Michal, the wife of David - after King Saul had given her to Palti in marriage, having questionably invalidated David's marriage to her - eclipsed Boaz's overcoming his temptation. I recall hearing (any error in transmission is mine) from my great Rebbe, Rav Chaim Ya'acov Goldwicht zt"l, founding Rosh Hayeshiva of Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavneh, that it is not the purpose of this teaching to downplay the enormous spiritual accomplishments of Yosef, who is called *hatzadik* for overcoming this temptation and in whose merit the splitting of the sea occurred, and of Boaz, the illustrious ancestor of King David and ultimately of the *melech hamashiach*. Rather, R. Yochanan is teaching us the powerful effect of each spiritual heroic act. It was because Yosef overcame his great, but relatively lesser, temptation and wove into the spiritual fabric of the Jewish people that ability to overcome such temptations that in a later generation, Boaz was able to triumph over an even greater trial. And because Boaz overcame the temptation presented to him, Palti was able to overcome his trial of

even greater magnitude. Thus, each heroic figure affected not only his own spiritual stature but those of future generations.

Based on the above, each Jew also somewhat shares this enormous power granted to the avos to create Jewish history by having the ability, through their heroic acts of Divine service, to pave the way for subsequent spiritual accomplishments. A penetrating awareness of the enormous effects of our actions should inspire and propel us ever higher in overcoming our own challenges and striving to serve our Creator with zeal, enthusiasm and vision. [3]

[1] Interestingly, this exact phrase does not directly appear in the words of Chazal but is a paraphrase of the original statement of אירע לבניו (לאברהם) (Tanchuma 9), quoted by Ramban.

[2] Interestingly, Maharal (Be'er Hagola 2:7) explains the custom of eating simanim on Rosh Hashana based on this principle.

[3] See also The Enormous Effects of Human Action and The Immense Effect of Mitzvot for further elaboration of this theme.

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Weekly Parsha LECH LECHA 5782

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

We recognize that in many ways our father Abraham is an innovator, a one-of-a-kind individual, someone who is original, unique, and fearless in his quest for the betterment of the human race and the creation of the Jewish people. Among all his other achievements, if we look carefully at the opening chapters of the Lech Lecha, we find that our father Abraham is also the first human being recorded as having a normal conversation with his Creator.

Adam, original man, makes excuses for his failings, but does not engage God in a discussion regarding the essence of sin, reward, and punishment. His son, Kayin, whines and complains to justify his murderous behavior,

and does not understand the true nature of his sin, and cannot relate properly to the criticism of Heaven.

Even the righteous man, Noah, the father of the only family that survives the Great Flood, and through whom humankind will be rebuilt and repopulated, does not engage in a conversation with the Creator regarding the impending flood and its aftermath. In fact, we hear almost nothing from Noah, except for his statement about his future and destiny.

All the twenty generations, prior to Abraham's arrival, apparently have nothing to say to God. They may fear His power and even rebel against His rule, but they have no thoughts or communication about the relationship of how human beings can coexist with infinity and God.

Throughout the description of Abraham's life, he seems to be constantly in communication with Heaven. He obeys its orders to leave his homeland and circumcise himself at an advanced stage of life. He proclaims the name God – one and only God – wherever he travels, no matter the risks involved in so doing. He even disputes the decision of Heaven regarding destruction of the cities of Sodom. He even argues that the God of justice in such a fashion that it be visible and understood by ordinary mortals.

We are witnesses that Abraham has a complete attachment with God, a relationship that cannot and will not be severed or compromised. That is the basis of Abraham's founding the Jewish people, who will also maintain such a relationship of attachment overall of the centuries of human civilization. Whereas previous generations were afraid to deal directly with the Almighty, this became the basis for oral paganism and other religions that always rely upon intermediaries, Abraham and the Jewish people attach themselves inexorably and directly to the Creator for good or for better, no matter what the circumstances are that exist at that very moment. This fundamental difference in approach to the relationship between human beings and their God remains, until today, the identifiable hallmark that differentiates Judaism from other philosophies and beliefs.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

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Insights Parshas Lech Lecha - Cheshvan 5782
Yeshiva Beis Moshe Chaim / Talmudic University
Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav
Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is dedicated in memory of Reuven ben Yosef.

"May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

Mo' Money

Hashem said to Avram, "Go for yourself from your land, from your birthplace and from your father's house, to the land that I will show you. And I will make you into a great nation; I will bless you and I will make your name great" (12:1-2).

The Mishnah in Pirkei Avos (5:3) states that our forefather Avraham was tested with ten different tests. While there is some discussion by the commentators as to which events in Avraham's life constitute an actual test, Hashem asking Avram to leave his home and go to Eretz Canaan is universally agreed upon as one of the tests. A frequently asked question is: Seeing how Hashem had promised Avram all kinds of benefits – Rashi (ad loc) says that Hashem promised him children, wealth, and fame – what kind of test was this exactly? With those guaranteed rewards as incentive, who wouldn't agree to travel to a distant, even unknown, land?

One of the classic answers given is that the test was one of intention; would Avram go because Hashem asked him to go or because Hashem promised him great rewards? We see in the following verse (12:4) that "Avram went as Hashem had spoken." This is used as proof that Avram decided to travel because Hashem asked him to, not because of the rewards promised, and therefore he passed the test.

There are several troubling points to contend with if we are to accept this as a working hypothesis of what took place. First, there seems to be a fundamental misunderstanding of the purpose of a test. Hashem doesn't administer a test to gauge a person's loyalty; for Hashem knows exactly how loyal someone is. A test from Hashem is to give one an opportunity for personal growth. Second, this understanding actually contradicts what Hashem tells Avram. Hashem very clearly tells Avram in the first possuk: Lech lecha – go for your own

sake. If the incentives were only offered as part of the test, Hashem would have simply said "lech – go." So we are left with our original question: What kind of test is this that Hashem is promising money, fame, and nationhood? Every single one of us would be thrilled to have that offer!

The answer lies in our shallow understanding of these gifts and the responsibility that comes with them. Superficially, one might think it would be great to have a billion dollars – "I could buy the most amazing houses and boats and not have to worry about paying bills and having to work." Similarly, "if I were famous I would be the toast of the town. I would constantly get comped clothes and meals and get invited to the most amazing parties. Everyone would want to be my friend. I would have enormous power." Additionally, who hasn't dreamed in living in their own country where they make the rules and live how they want doing whatever they want?

This is exactly the test. Are you going to use these gifts for yourself or will you employ them to better humanity? When you recognize that we live in a theocentric world and not an egocentric world, then you understand that all of your resources are to be used to further Hashem's plan for the world. Having enormous wealth, fame, or power doesn't mean you can do more for yourself; it means you have been "gifted" a ginormous responsibility. In fact, most people, upon realizing that these gifts aren't for personal use, would run in the other direction rather than receive them. This is because properly administering these gifts is a lot of (and usually thankless) hard work. But, if you are able to succeed in doing the right thing with the resources entrusted to you, then you will feel an incredible sense of accomplishment and this is an enormous personal pleasure. Accomplishment is the source of everlasting pleasure and the reason we were created. This is what Hashem meant when he said to Avram – go for your sake.

Family Ties

There was a quarrel between the shepherds of Avram and the shepherds of Lot [...] And Avram said to Lot: "Please let there not be strife between me and you [...] for we are brothers. Please separate from me; if you go to the left I will go to the right, and if you go to the right I will go to the left" (13:7-9).

Rashi (ad loc) explains that there was an ongoing philosophical argument between the shepherds of Lot and those of Avram. Avram's shepherds criticized Lot's shepherds for grazing their herds in fields that didn't belong to them. Lot's shepherds retorted that all the lands were eventually going to be given to Avram and, at this point, Lot was the only heir to Avram. Therefore, they reasoned, Lot was really the rightful owner and his sheep could graze wherever they pleased. But the Torah refutes their argument by saying that Avram had not yet come into possession of the land; therefore Lot had no rightful claim to the land at all.

Avram's comments to Lot (see above), and his resolution to this conflict, seem to be fairly straightforward. Avram appears to be telling Lot, "We need to separate, you go one way and I will go other." This seems like a very reasonable way to avoid further strife and confrontation. But Rashi (13:9) interprets Avram's words in a puzzling way, and in fact, Rashi's interpretation seems to directly contradict what Avram actually says.

Rashi explains that Avram told Lot: "Wherever you dwell I will not distance myself from you. I will stand by as a protector (for you) and to be of service." How can Rashi possibly see this in Avram's words? Avram seems to be telling Lot the exact opposite!

This Rashi is a terrific example of how carefully Chazal read the pesukim; which in turn, allows them penetrating insight to determine what is really being said.

Rashi is bothered by the subjective terms that Avram uses; "If you go left I will go to the right, and if you go to the right I will go to the left." Right and left aren't really opposite directions – in fact it totally depends on which direction you're facing. In other words, if two people are facing each other, the right of one is the left of the other. Had Avram truly intended that they go opposite ways he should have said, "you go north and I will go south" or "you go east and I will go west." By using the subjective right and left, Avram was telling Lot that they were both the right and left of a single entity.

Interestingly, Avram doesn't tell Lot he is wrong and that he has to change. In fact, Lot may have a point: Sarah was physically unable to produce an heir; Lot and Avram's fates are, at this point, inextricably tied. Thus, Avram is allowing for Lot to have his own point of view. In effect, Avram is telling Lot: "You can have your own perspective; but because we are really 'brothers' the most

important thing is that we don't fight. Therefore, we need to separate." But this was only a separation, not an amputation. This is why Rashi asserts that Avram was telling Lot that he would always be there to protect him. Because when you're a single entity an attack on the right is also an attack to the left; after all, brothers need to have each other's back.

Avram's message to Lot is remarkably relevant to today's world situation: Whether one is a Republican or a Democrat, Charedi or Chiloni, it doesn't really make a difference. We need to remember that at the end of the day we all need each other, and that we are all different elements of the same body. After all, the very fact that we all exist is a message from Hashem that, in the grand scheme of things, we are all necessary for His plan.

Did You Know...

This week's parsha proclaims (12:3) that the world population will be blessed through the children of Avraham. We decided to take it literally and create a partial list of Jewish contributions to mankind:

By way of introduction, between 1901 and 2020, 208 Nobel prizes have been awarded to Jews, more Nobel prizes than any other ethnicity. This accounts for over 22% of all Nobels awarded. This is startling considering Jews only account for less than 0.2% of the world population.

Simply put, we have achieved more than a hundred times what our population should statistically account for.

Perhaps more remarkably, some famous Jewish contributors to the fields of science and medicine never even won: 1. Sigmund (Shlomo) Freud – arguably the father of the field of psychoanalysis 2. Jonas Salk – creator of the Polio vaccine that saved millions from death and the devastating effects of Polio 3. Claude Levi-Strauss (not the guy who invented jeans – though he probably wished he had) who is considered the father of modern Anthropology.

Here are some other famous contributions to the world by Jews: Robert Oppenheimer – father of Atomic bomb; Edwin Teller – father of Hydrogen bomb. No matter what you think of the "Bomb" – imagine how horrific it would have been had Russia or China or, God forbid, Germany, developed it first.

Laszlo Biro, a Hungarian Jew, invented the ball point pen; Morris Michtom invented the Teddy Bear; Ruth Handler created the Barbie Doll.

Sergey Brin and Larry Page are the co-founders of Google and are both Jewish. Michael Bloomberg, who was estimated by the NY Times as contributing over 700 million dollars to the city of New York while he was mayor, is also Jewish. We would have added Mark Zuckerberg to this list but, alas, the DYK editorial board does not consider Facebook much of a contribution to society. In fact, it may be a stupefying liability to society. Time will tell...

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***Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair -
www.seasonsofthemoon.com
Parashat Lech Lecha
“Go for yourself...” (12:1)***

Many years ago in a more naive and somewhat safer world, I once hitchhiked from Amsterdam to Pisa in Italy. Only the young and the reckless (and I was both) would climb aboard the rear seat of a BMW 900 motorcycle on a night of driving rain with a 50 pound pack strapped to one's back. (This placed my center of gravity somewhere past the outer extremity of the rear wheel.) Every time the rider accelerated, the backpack dragged me backwards off the bike. The autobahn was a sea of rain. It was King David who taught us that G-d “protects fools.” And that night I certainly qualified for protection.

However, hitchhiking taught me something other than G-d protects the foolish; hitchhiking taught me what is called in Hebrew “menuchah hanefesh”, literally the “repose of the spirit.”

We live in a world where stress can literally eat us up if we let it. How do we combat this killer?

There's an elderly lady who sits in a nursing home in New York City and every day she says the following: “Yesterday is history. Tomorrow is a mystery. Today is a gift from G-d — that's why we call it the present.”

When you stand by the side of the road waiting for a ride, you have no idea whether someone will pick you up in a minute, an hour, or next week.

You are not in control. It's wonderfully relaxing.

No one in his right mind hitchhikes to an important business meeting or to catch an airplane. The very act of hitchhiking says, “I'm prepared to be where I am. I don't need to be anywhere else.”

A hitchhiker feels the presence of hashgacha (Divine supervision). My life is not in my control. All I have is the present. And therefore I must live in this moment and be here now.

That is why hitchhiking is a great calmer. (No, I don't mean karma.)

A Jew's job is to live in the present, but not for the present. Much of our lives are spent thinking about what might happen, or what might not happen, or where I could be/should be now, or what went wrong or what went right. What a waste! This moment is unique. It will never be here again. Sometimes, I just close my eyes and think, “I'm alive!”

The little agenda pilot that lives in our head can steal our lives away without our even noticing, unless we heed our little hitchhiker's guide to eternity saying, “G-d gave you this moment; live it to the full!”

At the beginning of this week's Torah portion, G-d said to Avraham, “Go for yourself...” Actually, the Hebrew translation is “Go to yourself...”

Avraham is the personification of kindness in the world. The essence of kindness is giving, and only a person who is totally at one with where he is can give fully of himself. Avraham had the ability to “go to himself”, to connect every G-d-given second in his life to eternity.

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Dvar Torah Lech Lecha: Jewish History in a Nutshell

Jewish history in a nutshell. This is what is presented to us at the commencement of Parshat Lech Lecha (Bereishit

12:3), when Hashem gives seven blessings to Avraham, the founder of our faith. Two of those blessings are: “Umekallelecha a’or,” – Hashem says, “I will curse those who curse you,”

“Venivrech becha kol mishpachot ha’adamah.” – “and all families on earth will be blessed by you and your descendents.

Why do these two blessings appear alongside one another? The sefer Mayana Shel Torah suggests that sometimes we might be exceptionally kind to a person – sometimes that person might even depend upon our kindness for his or her existence – yet not only is there no appreciation for that kindness, but they actually give us a lot of trouble. This, Hashem says, is what will happen to the Jewish people through the ages.

“Umekallelecha a’or,” – “I will curse those who curse you.”

Sadly there will sometimes be nations who will curse the Jewish people; who will hate us and resent us for our very existence.

“Venivrech becha kol mishpachot ha’adamah,”

This will happen even though we, the Jewish people, give a contribution of inestimable value wherever we are in the world. Here we have Jewish history in a nutshell. So very often there will be deep appreciation and true friendship that we will benefit from, but sometimes there will be darkness for the Jewish people as a result of the trouble that we will endure. But don’t worry, says Hashem! You can’t have light without shade, and no shade can destroy that light.

Despite the darkness that the Jewish nation will endure, I will guarantee, says Hashem, that you, the Jewish people, will continue to shed shine a light for the world indefinitely. Am Yisrael Chai, the Jewish nation will live on forever.

So therefore let us not allow the ingratitude of some to stop us from giving kindness to others and let us, as a nation, not allow the darkness that sometimes exists for us to stop us from fulfilling the blessing given to Abraham: Venivrech becha kol mishpachot ha’adamah; for us to be a continuous blessing for everyone on earth through the contribution that we must give always to our environment.

Shabbat shalom.

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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.

Dedicated by Mark & Deedee Honigsfeld in memory of Joseph Gross — Yoseph Zvi ben Dovid Yaakov 7 Marcheshvan and Bluma Honigsfeld, Bluma bas Shlomo Chaim 10 Marcheshvan

and by

Linda and Sheldon Pfeffer in memory of Benjamin Levine –Binyamin Ben Zvi Hirsh — 11 Marcheshvan

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Lech Lecha: Blinded by Reality

Ben-Tzion Spitz

You too must not count too much on your reality as you feel it today, since like yesterday, it may prove an illusion for you tomorrow. - Luigi Pirandello

Abraham's first documented encounter with God is when God addresses him and commands him to leave his land (literally, "go for you from your land"), his birthplace and his father's home to the ambiguous "land which I will show you." Abraham, full of faith, obediently complies, and does leave his life in the advanced and cosmopolitan Mesopotamian Empire. He leaves his homeland, leaves his father and treks to the relative wilderness of the land of Canaan; the rural, rough and uncultivated land bridge that connected the two ancient major political, economic and cultural powers of the Ancient Near East – the Mesopotamian and the Egyptian Empires.

That command starts Abraham's journey. We see the development of his relationship with God. We see Abraham's kindness and generosity. We see his bravery and faith. We see his devotion and sacrifice. It all started with Abraham leaving his land.

The Chidushei HaRim on Genesis 12:1 reads more deeply into the command of “go for you from your land.” The word “from your land,” in Hebrew, “Me’artzechah,” can also be read as from your landedness, from your materiality, from your obsession with the material world and material things.

The Chidushei HaRim explains that in order to serve God, the first step is to leave the trappings of the physical world which blind us to the evil, to the materiality that we’re submerged in. We have to leave that mindset of preoccupation exclusively with the corporeal, even if we don’t know where we’re going.

Once we’ve become free of our fixation on material things and approach God without pretense and in truthfulness, then God will lead us to “the land which I will show you,” – to a more elevated existence, to a deeper relationship with God and the truth of our existence, to the development of our soul and our own personal, divine missions on Earth.

May we loosen our shackles from the “realities” that both bind us and blind us, and may we follow in the footsteps of our patriarch, Abraham.

Dedication - To William Shatner’s real star trek!

Shabbat Shalom

Ben-Tzion Spitz is a former Chief Rabbi of Uruguay. He is the author of three books of Biblical Fiction and over 600 articles and stories dealing with biblical themes.

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Rav Kook Torah

Rav Kook on Tehillim 140: The Tzaddik and the Yashar
Rabbi Chanan Morrison

“ אֵף צַדִּיקִים יוֹדוּ לַשֵּׁמָיִם, יִשְׁבּוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־פְּנֵיהֶּ ”

“Surely the righteous (tzaddik) will give thanks to Your Name.

The upright (yashar) will dwell in Your Presence.”

(Psalms 140:14)

What is the difference between a tzaddik and a yashar?

Which is on a higher spiritual level?

The tzaddik loves goodness and virtue. He “gives thanks to Your Name.” He appreciates and values God’s true justice.

But the yashar has a higher aspiration: he yearns for God’s goodness to reach all realms of life, even spheres that are distant from spiritual matters.

The Sages referred to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as yesharim (Avodah Zarah 25a). They rejoiced in all the good that God bestows to the universe. As yesharim, they did not dissociate themselves from worldly matters. On the contrary, they were deeply involved in material occupations. They sought to elevate the world to its ultimate goal of true perfection. That is how the Torah depicts the lives of the Patriarchs: full of positive, creative activity.

The inner harmony of the yashar guides him, enabling him to attain perfection in all matters. He is able to contribute to the world’s progress while remaining focused on inner spiritual growth. How does the yashar achieve this?

Dwelling after Prayer

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levy taught that one should wait an hour after praying, as it says, “The yashar will dwell in Your Presence.” What is the purpose of this post-prayer meditation?

Prayer helps us raise our sights beyond day-to-day worries and concerns. But the positive impact of prayer should not be limited to the time of prayer. Ideally, the spiritual influence of prayer should extend to all aspects of our lives. All of life should be holy, directed towards goals of truth and righteousness. As it says, “Know Him in all of your ways” (Proverbs 3:6).

If we wish to expand the lofty emotions and insight experienced in prayer to the rest of our lives, we need to take time after praying to contemplate the import of that encounter. That is the essence of Rabbi Yehoshua’s teaching that one should wait an hour after praying. We need this time to internalize the prayer-experience and apply it to all aspects of life.

This is the service of the yashar. “The yashar will dwell in Your Presence.” He extends the holy light of God’s Presence to all spheres of life. He recognizes that the most profound praise of God comes from the beauty of a developed world, a world that gives pleasure to the spirit and uplifts the soul.

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

Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parashas Lech Lecha

פרשת לך לך תשפ"ב

ואברם כבד מאד במקנה בכסף ובהב

Now Avram was very laden with livestock, silver and gold. (13:2)

The mere mention of the word *Ruzhin* conjures up images of wealth and royalty. Indeed, the saintly *Ruzhiner Rebbe*, זל, was a legend in his own time. Everything about him, from his clothes to his living quarters to his total demeanor was resplendent with wealth and monarchy. Nonetheless, he was regarded as one of the greatest *tzaddikim*, righteous leaders, of his time. The greatest *gedolim*, Torah giants, of his generation would travel for weeks just to spend a brief visit with him. They viewed him as a Heavenly agent, dispatched to this world on a Divine mission to reach out and inspire *Klal Yisrael*, to infuse them with love for the Almighty, His Torah and to glorify His Name.

The *Rebbe's* fame spread far and wide, and people from all over came to him just to bask in his greatness. Once, when the *Ruzhiner* visited Germany, the distinguished *Rav* of Frankfurt, the saintly *Horav S. R. Hirsch*, זל, came to visit him. Following the visit, *Rav Hirsch* was asked his impression of the *Rebbe*. *Rav Hirsch* replied, "It is quite unbelievable to see how all the money and honor is brought to him, and he himself is totally disinterested in it. His one and only concern is how to increase *kavod Shomayim* and the *kavod* of *Klal Yisrael*."

The *Maskillim*, members of the Enlightenment – self-loathing Jews who looked for every opportunity to demean and denigrate Judaism, its religious adherents and especially its expositors and disseminators – found in the *Ruzhiner* an example of one whom they viewed as pretentious and insincere. How could the *Rebbe* reconcile piety with ostentatious wealth? Clearly his saintliness (they felt) was a sham, conjured up to curry favor and amass even greater wealth from his unsuspecting *chassidim*.

The holy *Ruzhiner* responded to their hate-filled critique by citing Avraham *Avinu's* method of outreach as an example of employing wealth as a means for garnering

the esteem of people. When Avraham commenced his journey of outreach, he took with him a large cache of wherewithal with which he hoped to impress people. "Why did he do this?" the *Rebbe* asked. "Our Patriarch was well aware that simple people gravitate to those who are blessed with material abundance." Our society is obsessed with materialism, to the point that the more someone earns, the more they are likely to be admired by strangers and perceived to be interesting, exciting and even erudite. Respect appears all too often to be directly correlated to one's earnings. Concomitantly, one who does not have high earning power struggles to convince his peers to take his views or character seriously.

The *Rebbe* quoted *Chazal* (*Gittin* 59a), "From the days of Moshe *Rabbeinu* until the days of Rabbi Yehudah *HaNasi*, we do not find unparalleled greatness in Torah knowledge and unparalleled greatness in secular matters, including wealth and high political office, combined in one place, i.e., a single individual (*Torah u'gedulah b'makom echad*). Likewise, from the days of Rabbi Yehudah *HaNasi* until the days of *Rav Ashi*, we do not find *Torah u'gedulah b'makom echad*." "Why specifically these three?" the *Rebbe* asked. "Were these Torah giants the only ones who had achieved *Torah u'gedolah b'makom echad*? The *Rebbe* explained that each one of these giants was a *nosein ha'Torah*, disseminator of Torah without peer. Moshe gave us the Torah. Rabbi Yehudah *HaNasi* redacted the *Mishnah*. *Rav Ashi* compiled the *Talmud*. It is one thing to put forth the effort and prepare the redaction and compilation, but how does one ensure its acceptance? People are fickle and have large egos. They could contend that if they would have prepared it, they would have done a better job. When one is wealthy, however, people listen to him. Wealth begets esteem and power which, in turn, generate acclaim and acceptance by the masses. Sadly, this external caveat was necessary in order to achieve immediate acceptance by the people.

In an alternative exposition, the *Maharam Shif* writes that anyone who completes a component of the Torah in such a manner that (upon his completion) no one will dispute it, it is critical that he possess the qualities of *Torah u'gedulah b'makom echad*. He must be the greatest and wealthiest, because if someone supersedes him either in erudition or in material bounty, he may feel that he can impugn the integrity of his predecessor's teaching. The

Torah was concluded by Moshe, leaving no room for opposition. Rabbi Yehudah *HaNasi* redacted the *Mishnah*, so that no one may dispute or append it. Likewise, *Rav Ashi* sealed the *Talmud*, circumventing the opportunity for challenge. The *Chasam Sofer* adds that this is why the despotic Korach raved about his enormous wealth. He felt that if he could demonstrate to the people that his wealth superseded that of Moshe, then Moshe would no longer represent *Torah u'gedulah b'makom echad*, thus allowing the opportunity for Korach to oppugn his teachings. This was another area in which Korach confirmed his shortsightedness.

Perhaps we might suggest another approach which focuses more on the Torah than on the *gedulah*. Moshe *Rabbeinu*, Rabbi Yehudah *HaNasi* and *Rav Ashi* represent the ultimate achievement of Torah study in that they took the enjoinder of *lilmod u'le'lameid*, to learn and to teach, to its apex. Hashem wants us not only to study Torah, but to see to it that every single person in *Klal Yisrael* studies it. *Le'lameid*, teaching Torah, defines the *mitzvah* of *limud ha'Torah*, study of Torah. Each of these giants reached the apogee of Torah learning, because he personally saw to that the Torah was available to the masses. Each of them ascertained that Torah would never be forgotten, as it was accessible to everyone, anywhere, all the time.

Avraham *Avinu* studied Torah, but until he reached out to the masses, the period of *tohu*, void, in the world continued to exist. It was only after *v'es ha'nefesh asher asu b'Charan*, that he reached out to the multitudes and brought them under the protective wings of the *Shechinah*, in order to usher in two thousand years of Torah.

ותקח שרי אשת אברם את הגר המצרית שפחתה... ותתן אתה לאברם... ותהר ותקל גברתה בעיניה. ותענייה שרי ותברח מפניה... ויאמר לה מלאך ד' שובי אל גברתך והתעני תחת ידיה
So Sarai, Avram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her maidservant... and gave her to Avram... she conceived... her mistress was lowered in her esteem... and Sarai dealt harshly with her, so she fled from her... and an angel of Hashem said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit yourself to her domination." (16:3,4,6,9)

The narrative concerning Sarah *Imeinu* and Avraham *Avinu* regarding Hagar, followed by Sarah's anger, Hagar's running away, and the angel's instruction that she

return, even if it meant submitting to Sarah's domination, is confounding. Clearly, the profundity escapes the superficial reading of the story. Sarah has been recognized in our sacred tradition as a woman who represents the epitome of all good and noble virtues. To think that all this goodness dissipated when Hagar conceived and gave birth to Yishmael, especially when it was Sarah's idea that Avraham take her on as an additional wife, is unacceptable. Furthermore, if Sarah was indeed beside herself, why would the Heavenly angel instruct Hagar to return and face the music?

Horav Aryeh Levin, zl, explains this with an analogy to a classic *Rebbe* who dispatches his *chassid* to carry out an errand for him. Ostensibly, the *chassid* feels honored that the *Rebbe* chose him to perform this task – regardless of its meniality. Nothing is too difficult, if it is at the behest of, or for, his revered *Rebbe*. If, however, this same task would come at the request of an ordinary person, with whom he does not enjoy such a relationship, the response would probably be quite negative. He would take offense and bristle, "Am I your servant?" Furthermore, if he would be compelled to carry out this ordinary person's request he would kvetch and complain constantly, whereas if he were to do it for his *Rebbe*, he would be excited and exalt in every aspect of his performance. One's attitude depends on the mission, and upon whom it is that is asking him to perform the task.

This, explains the Tzaddik of Yerushalayim, gives meaning and lends rationale to the Torah's narrative. All along, until she conceived as Avraham's additional wife, Hagar regarded Sarah for what she was: a virtuous woman whose impeccable character traits were without peer. Thus, serving her in any capacity was an untold honor for which there was no substitute. Now, in her perceived state of equality, or even superiority, to Sarah (since she was now a mother, a status that still eluded Sarah), however, her attitude changed. Now she reverted to the pagan DNA that prevailed within her. She no longer regarded Sarah as reverential and virtuous, but rather as an ordinary person, a "boss lady" who did not deserve her respect. All of a sudden the honorable Sarah *Imeinu's* work load became cruel and harsh treatment, which she would not accept. It was drudgery for her to serve Sarah, because "who" was Sarah to lord over her? Unable to bear the cruelty, she fled to the wilderness –

when, in fact, Sarah's demeanor toward Hagar had not altered one iota.

This is why the angel instructed her to return home. Nothing had changed other than Hagar's attitude: "Regardless of what has transpired, you must view Sarah as your mistress. She is the same noble, righteous, exalted Matriarch as she has been in the past." Except, Hagar's susceptible mind had rewritten the "past" in accord with a new narrative.

A Jew's positive attitude should be rooted in his *emunah*, faith, in Hashem. *Horav Mordechai, zl, m'Lechowitz*, teaches: "Without Hashem, one cannot cross the threshold of his house. With Hashem, however, one can split the sea." Faith in Hashem means much more than mere lip service. It should also not be our "between a rock and a hard place, last minute ditch attempt," when we see that the gates are closing and all our "other" endeavors have proven fruitless. Believing in Hashem should be a Jew's first address, the anchor upon which he relies, the "go to" to Whom he knows he can always turn.

Reb Lipa was the wealthiest man in a small town in Belarus. In addition to his enormous wealth, *Reb Lipa* possessed exceptional *middos tovos*, refined character traits. *Reb Lipa* shared his wealth with those less fortunate than himself. One day, as he was taking a walk through town, he tore one of his shoes. He immediately stopped at Chaim's shoe repair to have his shoe fixed. Chaim dropped whatever he was doing in order to pay specific attention to the needs of *Reb Lipa*. When he was done, he handed the shoe to *Reb Lipa*, who promptly paid him for his work. Upon leaving the shop, *Reb Lipa* noticed that the shoe was sewn in a crooked manner. Upon further perusal, he saw that the repair was a botched up job, very unprofessional for a man with Chaim's expertise. When *Reb Lipa* complained about the repair, Chaim broke down in bitter weeping, "You do not understand. My work is a reflection of my bitterness. I have eight daughters at home, whom I must marry off. I am stretched financially to the point that days pass and there is no food in the house to sustain my family. Do you understand that when one goes to work with such hardship on his mind, his hard work will be far from appealing?"

Reb Lipa listened to Chaim's tale of woe and said that he wanted to help. "Come with me," he said, "I will help you." He brought him to his mansion where he took him

to the vault where he kept his money. He took a gold brick, handed it to the shoemaker, and said, "This is for your immediate and all future expenses. Whenever you are in need, simply 'slice off' some gold from the brick and use it to pay your way."

Understandably, Chaim was overjoyed. His newly found mirthful attitude showed in the manner that he worked and in the products that he produced. Soon, his exceptional skills became the talk of the town and the whole area. He began producing shoes of such excellent quality that people came from far and wide to purchase his wares. Chaim was no longer a *nebach*, unfortunate man. He had worked his way up the economical ladder, married off his daughters, and was now living quite comfortably.

One day, Chaim took a stroll in the market, when he chanced upon a dejected, clearly impoverished beggar. The man was crying bitterly. "How can I help you, my friend?" Chaim asked. The poor man related his tale of broken promises from would be benefactors, failed business opportunities, which had left him destitute and bitter. He had nothing with which to support his family. Chaim said to him, "Come with me. Let me help you." Chaim figured that he could share his good fortune with someone in need, and this man was definitely in need: "Here is a gold brick which I received years ago from someone. It helped me; now it will help you." The man was profoundly grateful, took the brick and went home. As soon as he arrived home, he took a hammer and struck the brick with it. His intention was to immediately split up the gold. How shocked he was to discover that it was actually a brick of steel with a thin gold covering. Angry, he returned to Chaim's house to complain. After all, he had been cheated!

Chaim looked at the brick, listened intently to the poor man's harangue, thought for a moment, and then spoke up: "Interestingly, years ago, I received this same brick from a kind-hearted benefactor. I believed in it; I neither asked questions, nor did I attempt to investigate whether it was truly gold or simply gold overlay. I returned to my profession with added hope and excitement, worked hard, and earned an honest and successful living. During this entire time, I never once doubted the value of the brick. To one who has faith, the brick is gold; to one who does not believe, nothing will make him happy." The lesson for us is obvious and requires no added commentary.

ובן שמונת ימים ימול לכם כל זכר לדורתכם

At the age of eight days, every male among you shall be circumcised throughout your generations. (17:12)

The following incident, which occurred about two hundred years ago with the saintly *Chasam Sofer*, gives us a glimpse into the extraordinary greatness of the man who is responsible for saving Hungarian Jewry from the tentacles of the *Haskalah*, Enlightenment. The *Chasam Sofer* was not only the leading *posek*, *halachic* arbiter, of his day, but also a holy and righteous Torah giant, who obviously was as comfortable in the Heavenly sphere as he was in the mundane world. The story is cited by *Horav Yissachar Shlomo Teichtal, zl*, who heard it from the son-in-law of the *Rav* of Kashua, a disciple of the *Chasam Sofer*. It happened that in one of the small communities close to Pressburg, where the *Chasam Sofer* reigned as *Rav*, a gentile came to the *Rav* of the community and asked to be converted. He was tested, his background thoroughly investigated, and his character and integrity substantiated. He was sincere and deserving of a *halachic* conversion, which was performed. The problem arose as a result of the necessary *Bris Milah*. On the third day, which is usually the most painful and critical, he became gravely ill, to the point that the doctors despaired for his recovery. The members of his family, who were no friends of the Jews, immediately revealed their anti-Semitic animus and began to instigate the gentile populace to exact vengeance against the Jewish perpetrators – a term targeting the entire Jewish community.

The *Rav* was beside himself with fear for the repercussions which might result and affect the Jews in his community and the surrounding Jewish communities. He traveled to Pressburg to seek the counsel of the *Chasam Sofer*. The sage was visibly upset with the *Rav* for using a *mohel*, ritual circumciser, whose experience was solely with eight-day-old infants, for an adult, for whom this was a surgical procedure. In any event, it was too late; what had been done could not be reversed. In order to remove the danger that hung over the Jewish community, the *Rav* and *mohel* would have to be *moser nefesh*, literally sacrifice themselves, as penance for their actions.

The *Chasam Sofer* instructed them to obtain a wagon in which they would transport the critically ill *ger* and themselves on the pretense of traveling to see a specialist.

Instead, the three of them would ride into the Danube River and succumb to its waters. This way, the gentiles would consider the *ger's* death to be an unfortunate accident and the deaths of the Jews a penance for their error, which would circumvent the decree hanging over the Jewish community.

These righteous men humbly accepted the *Chasam Sofer's* ruling and prepared themselves with the appropriate *vidui*, confession, preceded by immersing themselves in the *mikvah*, recitation of *Tehillim*, and a tearful plea for atonement for their souls. They placed the deathly ill man on the wagon, and all three left their homes with the intention to give up their lives for the future of the Jewish community. They reached the shore of the Danube and were about to plunge forward, when suddenly they heard a voice calling out to them in *Yiddish*, “Where are you going?” They turned to see a Jewish man chasing after them, “*Yidden*, where are you going?” They ignored him and trudged on. The man caught up with them, however, and put his hand on the horses that were pulling the wagon, and they came to a halt. He asked the *Rav* where he was going. The *Rav* explained their predicament and the *Chasam Sofer's* ruling, to which the man said, “There is another way.” He removed a small jar from his pocket and instructed them to sprinkle the liquid in the jar on top of the wound that had become infected. Within a few moments, the *ger* regained consciousness and began to speak as if nothing had ever happened. Clearly, they had been privy to a Heavenly miracle. They returned home to the joy of all involved. Needless to say, the danger hanging over the Jewish community was diffused. The *Rav* traveled to the home of the *Chasam Sofer* to relate the miracle to him. He replied, “*Eliyahu HaNavi* is the *Malach HaBris*, the Heavenly Angel appointed over the *Bris Milah*. Due to your willingness to accept to be *moser nefesh*, relinquish your lives, to save the Jewish community, he appeared to save you. Although, veritably, as *Shlomo HaMelech* writes in *Koheles*, *Shomer mitzvah lo yeida ra*, ‘He who obeys the commandments will know no evil’ (*Koheles* 8:5), you would have been otherwise protected.”

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Izsak Keller

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The Talis Exchange and Other Lost Stories
Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

teach us that in the merit of Avraham saying to the king of Sodom that he would not accept even a thread from him, his descendants received the mitzvah of tzitzis.

Question #1: THE TALIS EXCHANGE

Dovid asked me the following shaylah: “I put down my talis in shul and, upon returning, discovered that it had been replaced with a similar-looking talis. I left the talis undisturbed, and hung up a sign noting the exchange. Unfortunately, no one responded, and, indeed, the owner may not even realize that he has my talis. Should I take his talis home? May I use it, or must I purchase a new one and leave his until he claims it, which may never happen?”

Question #2: THE LAUNDRY EXCHANGE

A laundry returned the correct quantity of items that had been brought originally; however, the customer, Reuvein, later realized that one sheet was not his. A different customer, Shimon, picked up his laundry and was missing some items; however the laundry insisted that it had returned whatever was brought. Shimon subsequently discovered that Reuvein had one of Shimon’s missing sheets and he clearly identified his missing sheet. Reuvein claimed that the sheet was a replacement for his sheet that was lost and that he is therefore not required to return it. Must he return the sheet?

Question #3: THE WEDDING EXCHANGE

Someone went to a wedding wearing one coat and mistakenly returned home with a different one. May he use this coat and assume that the other party is agreeable to the exchange? Does this depend on which coat is more valuable?

Question #4: AN UMBRELLA ON THE SUBWAY

On the subway you see a frum, unfamiliar person rush off the car, forgetting her umbrella. May you keep or use the umbrella, knowing that the owner will soon realize her loss?

SHO’EL SHELO MIDAAS

The concern in all these situations is that one is using someone else’s property without permission. This is

called sho’el shelo midaas, borrowing without the owner’s knowledge, which is usually halachically equivalent to stealing (Bava Metzia 41a; 43b)! In general, one may not use an item until one receives permission from the owner.

CAN’T I JUST ACCEPT THE TRADE OF THE TWO ITEMS?

Since the loser is wearing my talis, why can’t I simply assume that we have traded taleisim; I’ll keep his talis and allow him to keep mine? (Although the correct Hebrew plural is taliyos or talisos, I will use the colloquial taleisim.)

Although Dovid may grant permission to the other person to use his talis, can he assume that he has permission to use the other person’s talis? Let us examine a relevant discussion:

EXCHANGED ITEMS AT THE TAILOR

Someone whose clothes were replaced with someone else’s at a tailor may use what he received until his garment is returned. However, if the exchange transpired at a shiva house or a simcha, he may not use the garment he received but must hold it until the owner claims his property. What is the difference between the two cases? Rav answered: “I was sitting with my uncle, and he explained to me, ‘Sometimes people tell the tailor to sell the item for them’” (Bava Basra 46a).

We see from this case that if I exchanged a coat with someone else at a simcha or at a shiva, I may not wear the coat, since I am “borrowing” it without permission. The fact that the other person is using my garment, knowingly or unknowingly, does not permit me to use his. I may have to purchase a replacement, even though a perfectly nice garment is sitting unused in my closet, since the garment is not mine.

However, if the exchange happened in a tailor shop, I may use the replacement.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A TAILOR AND A WEDDING?

Why is the tailor shop different? The Gemara presents a rather cryptic answer to this question: “Sometimes people tell the tailor to sell the item for them.” What does this mean?

The early poskim explain that when the exchange transpired in a repair shop, one may assume that the following situation occurred:

Someone brought a garment to the tailor, asking him to sell it for him. The tailor erred and sold your garment instead and then paid the money received (minus his sales commission) to the original owner of that garment. When you came to claim your garment, the tailor realized his error, and also realized that he must compensate you for your item, since he probably has no way to retrieve it. However, he had no cash available, so he gave you a replacement instead – the garment that he was supposed to sell (Tur and Sma, Choshen Mishpat 136:1). Since the tailor already paid the original owner for his garment, he now owns it and he is fully authorized to give it to you as a replacement for your lost garment. This case is referred to as *nischalfu keilim beveis ha'uman* (items that were exchanged in a craftsman's shop).

The next passage in the Gemara's discussion is now almost self-explanatory:

Rav Chiya the son of Rav Nachman explained that the ruling of *nischalfu keilim beveis ha'uman* applies only if the repairman himself gave you the different garment, but not if his wife or children gave them to you.

Obviously, if the tailor's wife or child gave you the wrong garment, you cannot assume that this was because of the tailor's earlier error. It is more likely that they simply mistakenly gave you the wrong garment, which needs to be returned.

Similarly, the following concluding passage of this discussion is clear.

Rav Chiya the son of Rav Nachman continued: The halacha of *nischalfu keilim beveis ha'uman* applies only if the repairman told you, "Here is a garment." However if he said "Here is your garment," we assume that he erred, since he is not giving you your garment.

If the tailor had sold your garment in error and is now sheepishly providing you with a replacement, he would not tell you, here is your garment. Therefore, if he says here is your garment, we assume he must have mistakenly given you the wrong garment, and you must return it.

We see clearly that the ruling of *nischalfu keilim beveis ha'uman* applies only when I can assume that a tailor or other repairman inadvertently sold or disposed of my item and can legitimately offer me the replacement. Otherwise the situation is comparable to the case of garments exchanged at a *simcha*, where one may not use the received garment without permission.

At this point we can analyze Question #2.

A laundry returned to Reuvein the same number of items he had brought originally; however, one sheet is not his. Shimon claims to be missing some items, which the laundry denies. Shimon proves that the sheet is his, yet Reuvein claims that the laundry gave it to him as a replacement for what they lost and that he is therefore not required to return it. Must he return the sheet?

Answer: Shimon did not give the sheet to the laundry to sell. Therefore, the laundry gave Shimon's sheet to Reuvein without authorization and he must return it to its rightful owner, even if Reuvein has no other way of being compensated for his loss (Terumas Hadeshen #319; one of the interesting and surprising aspects of this shaylah is that this actual case was asked over 600 years ago!!). The reason for this is obvious: Laundries do not usually act as agents to sell people's clothing, and in any case, Shimon clearly denies ever making any such arrangement.

SO, WHAT IS THE STATUS OF THE TALIS?

Let us return to our original question. Someone took Dovid's talis and left behind a similar-looking one. The owner has not responded to any of his notices, and Dovid suspects that he does not even realize that an exchange transpired.

Based on the above discussion, it would seem that Dovid has no choice but to consider purchasing a new talis. However, there is another Gemara discussion that affects our case, so don't run to the store just yet. Let us examine the following passage:

Shmuel said, "Someone who finds tefillin in the street should estimate their worth and may wear them himself" (Bava Metzia 29b). If the finder has no need for a pair of tefillin, he may sell them and put the money aside for the owner. The Rosh (Bava Metzia 2:16) rules that the finder may even use the money in the interim.

Shmuel's statement presents some obvious questions: His ruling seems to contradict the principle that borrowing an item without permission is tantamount to theft. Why can the finder wear (or sell) these tefillin? As we are all aware, one of the Torah's mitzvos is to return a lost object to its owner (Devorim 22:1-3; Shemos 23:4). How does the Gemara permit the tefillin finder to wear them and not return them to the owner? And even if we correctly assume that "estimating their worth" means that he is responsible to return the value of the tefillin to its owner if and when he locates him, why is this case

different from the normal obligation of returning the actual lost item itself to its owner? Obviously, there must be something about tefillin that permits the finder to keep them and simply repay their estimated value.

Some poskim contend that this ruling applies only to a mitzvah object, where the owner wants someone else to use his tefillin rather than have them sit unused (Shach 267:16, in explanation of the Rambam, Hilchos Gezeilah 13:14). However, most authorities imply that this ruling also applies to non-mitzvah items, in cases where the owner is satisfied with simply receiving back their value (see Tur and Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 267:21). The basis for this second opinion is the continuation of the Gemara's discussion:

TEFILLIN VERSUS SEFORIM

The Gemara asks why someone finding tefillin may wear them, since this ruling appears to contradict a statement that someone who found books may not use them, but must hold them for the owner. Why are tefillin different from seforim? The Gemara answers that a person wants to receive back his own books, whereas he can always purchase new tefillin. This implies that people have no strong attachment to any specific pair of tefillin, whereas they have tremendous interest in seforim that are difficult to replace. From this one could infer that there is a difference between finding an item that the owner does not mind replacing and finding an item that he does not want to replace, and this would seem to have ramifications for someone who finds a talis, an umbrella, or some other easy to replace item.

Although this seems to be the obvious point of this Gemara, elsewhere the Gemara seems to rule otherwise. If someone found coins placed in a deliberate fashion, the finder may not spend this money and replace it with other coins, but must hold these very coins and return them to their owner (Bava Metzia 29b). Obviously, the owner is not concerned about receiving back these specific coins, and would be very satisfied with receiving replacement money. Why is it not sufficient to simply return coins of the same value? We see that returning replacement value is not satisfactory, even when the owner does not care. The answer is that in the case of lost tefillin, two factors must be met before one may use them. In addition to the point mentioned above, another consideration is that someone who finds tefillin must occasionally air them out and ensure that they are kept dry (Rosh, Bava Metzia

2:18). (When a person wears tefillin daily, he automatically airs them out at the same time, which benefits them.) Thus, the owner of the tefillin actually benefits more if the finder sets aside money, since the tefillin will become ruined if no one takes proper care of them. This is qualitatively different from finding lost coins, which require no care other than storing them in a secure place.

We can therefore derive the following principles: If taking care of a lost item requires some effort, and the owner does not care whether he receives back the original item, the finder may estimate the value of the lost item and plan to repay the owner this amount. Otherwise, the finder should hold the lost item and await the owner's return.

Having established the rule, let us see which cases fit the rule and which do not. Clothing does not usually fit this rule, since people are interested in receiving back the same garment. A person is comfortable with his own clothes, and often purchasing something to one's taste is not a simple matter. Therefore, someone finding a lost garment may not sell it and hold the money for the owner. ARE UMBRELLAS AND TALEISIM LIKE TEFILLIN? On the other hand, the average person does not develop a personal attachment to his umbrella and is perfectly satisfied to have a usable replacement umbrella.

Similarly, a man is usually not that concerned about his specific talis and is satisfied with a replacement. In addition, both of these items are comparable to tefillin and not to coins, since if they are never used they become musty. (Normal use of an umbrella airs it out.) Therefore, someone who locates a lost umbrella may use it after estimating its value.

We are now prepared to answer Question #1 and also Question #4. I will answer Question #4 first: On the subway you see a frum but unfamiliar person rush off the car, forgetting her umbrella. May you keep or use the umbrella, knowing that the owner will soon realize her loss?

Clearly, she will despair of recovering her umbrella as soon as she realizes her loss (yi'ush), and if pick it up after she realizes that she left it on the subway, you are not responsible to return it or its value. Nevertheless, in this subway scenario, you will be picking up the umbrella before she realizes her loss. In that case, the umbrella is

still the property of the person who lost it and someone picking it up is responsible to return it. However, a person is usually not concerned about owning a specific umbrella, but is satisfied with money to purchase a replacement. (Indeed, if the umbrella that was lost appears to be a designer umbrella, the halacha will be different.) Therefore, even though the owner still owned the umbrella when you found it, you may claim the umbrella as your own, and simply make a mental note how much it is worth. Should you ever meet its owner and she proves that the umbrella was hers, you must compensate her.

And now our analysis of our opening question, The Talis Exchange

Dovid had put down his talis in shul, and it was replaced by a similar-looking talis. His attempts to alert the owner were unsuccessful, and, indeed, the owner may not even notice the exchange. May Dovid use the other talis or must he purchase a new one?

I believe that most men do not feel attached to their particular taleisim, and this case is therefore comparable to the tefillin case of the Gemara. Assuming this to be true, someone who finds a lost talis may estimate its value and then either wear it or sell it. Either way, he should record the value of the talis and intend to return it to the owner, should the owner ever return for it. When I first published this article, I received several responses disagreeing with me, contending that most people are more possessive of their taleisim than I felt.

PECULIARITIES

The careful reader may have noted that our discussion is heading to an unusual conclusion. Although the Gemara's rules that the owner is less concerned about retrieving his tefillin than retrieving his seforim, today the opposite is generally true – an owner is usually not concerned about receiving back the same sefer since one can usually purchase it again in a bookstore. (However, the Gemara's halacha would remain true if he had written notes in the sefer, or it is a special edition that the owner would not be able to readily replace.)

On the other hand, many people own hand-picked tefillin and want their specific pair back (Minchas Elazar 4:9; see Pischei Choshen, Aveidah 6:ftn23). They may have purchased tefillin whose parshi'os were written by a specific sofer who no longer writes, or made by a specific batim macher who has a long waiting list. After analyzing

the principles of the above-mentioned Gemara, the Minchas Elazar decides that the original owner gets his tefillin back. Thus, although the principles of the Gemara are infinite, the specific cases that match them change with society.

Returning lost items is a beautiful and important mitzvah. As we now see, the details of observing this mitzvah are often very complicated – and can vary from item to item.

<https://www.theyeshiva.net/jewish/8268/essay-noach-a-tale-of-three-noachs>

A Tale of Three Noachs

What I Heard from Benny Fishoff About Holocaust Survivors

Rabbi YY Jacobson

1 Cheshvan 5782

Three Lives, Three Worlds

There is a fascinating and insightful Midrash on the opening of this week's portion. The Torah begins: Genesis 6, 9: These are the generations of Noach, Noach was a righteous man; he was perfect in his generations; Noach walked with God.

The Midrash, always sensitive to nuance, wonders why the single verse mentions Noach not once, nor even twice, but three times? The repetition of a name three times in a single sentence is obviously superfluous. The Torah could have stated: "These are the generations of Noah, who was a righteous man, perfect in his generations. He walked with G-d."

The Midrash offers the following extraordinary insight. The Torah is intimating that there was not one Noach; there were three Noach's. We are being introduced to three distinct Noach's. There is Noach before the flood, during the flood, and after the flood.

Noach, explains the Midrash, was one of the few individuals in history who lived three lives, in three completely different worlds. First, Noach saw a settled, safe, and predictable world. That was Noach #1. Then Noach saw his entire world destroyed by the flood—that was Noach #2. And then he saw the world rebuilt and civilized after the flood. That was Noach #3.

To survive and thrive in each of the three eras, you need a completely different set of skills and resources. The first Noach grew up and came of age in a world that he, his father, grandfather, and great grandfather were accustomed to. There is routine, order, and comfort.

But then Noah encounters a new reality—one that reduced the entire planet to an ocean, without a single survivor, not among humans, or animals, birds, insects, or even trees or bushes. Just imagine what that does to a person. Everything you knew is suddenly gone. The “skills” required to cope and survive in such a world are of a different nature; it is about resilience and alertness. But then Noah was forced to reinvent himself yet a third time, as he was summoned to leave the Ark and rebuild the world; to get back into normal life. How do you do that after living on the edge in a world gone mad? How do you integrate back into normal living after you faced the abyss and watched your boat submerged in a titanic flood, and your planet consumed in the waters? How do you return to civilization as a normal person?

Now you need a new set of skills—the ability to recover after such devastation; the power to smile again, not the innocent idyllic smile of youthful innocence; rather the joy that comes from conviction and resolve to still believe in the possibility of love, joy, and kindness.

It was far from simple. The only story we know of Noah after the flood is that he planted a vineyard and became inebriated. Did Noah suffer from PTSD? Did Noah need to numb his tremendous pain from the devastation?

An Entire Generation

An entire generation of Jews understood this Midrashic insight all too well.

Many of our parents, grandparents, or great grandparents have grown up in pre-War Europe. Despite the many challenges facing them in the beginning of the 20th century, many of them enjoyed a relatively calm childhood. The world was not a perfect place, but it was a fine place, with many pleasant moments and experiences. And then, as Adolf Hitler took Europe by storm, their entire universe was shaken up and brutally destroyed, as Germany unleashed its torrents of genocide, abuse, and brutality against our people. Some of our relatives watched parents, children, siblings, uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces, relatives, and friends, be sent to breathe their last breath ingesting Zyklon B and their bodies burnt in the crematoriums. Six million vibrant lives were cut down through bullets, fire, gas, beatings, hanging, torture, disease, or live burial.

Nobody prepared anybody for this harrowing experience. As I once heard from former Chief Rabbi of Israel Rabbi Yisroel Meir Lau, when he tried describing his experience

in Buchenwald, at the age of six: “I was six-year-old, surrounded by the stench of death. I would compare myself to a cockroach or a little bug. They may not have large brains, but they have an instinct to do anything they can for survival. They will try everything. And that is what I also understood and did.”

And then the survivors had to yet reinvent themselves, a third time. The survivors of the War now faced the challenge of “normalcy.” Can you ever be normal again? Can you ever laugh again as though the world was a fun place? How do you transform yourself from a creeping insect, trying to find a droplet of water, or a crumb of bread, without an SS guard shooting you, into a dignified human being who has the freedom to live, breathe, and love?

This was not easy—and will one day be recorded as one of the great miracles in the annals of human history. For the most part, the survivors recreated a new world for themselves and all of us, a world of generosity, love, and moral dignity.

From the Furnace

Last week the Jewish world lost a unique and extraordinary individual, a personal family friend, a philanthropist, an activist, and a Holocaust survivor, Mr. Benny Fishoff, at the age of 97. Born in Lodz, Poland he lost his entire family during the Second World War. He once shared with me the following moving reflection: The third chapter of the book of Daniel describes the Jewish exile to Babylonia. The king of Babylonia (present-day Iraq), Nebuchadnezzar, who destroyed the First Temple in 586 BCE had three Jewish attendants, Chananyah, Mishael, and Azaryah. When they refused to bow down to a Pagan idol which he erected for people to worship, the king had them thrown into a burning furnace to be burnt alive. Yet miraculously they emerged unscathed. From that moment on, their names are not mentioned any longer in the Tanach as part of Jewish life in Babylonia.

The Talmud asks this question:

What happened to the three sages? The Talmud offers three explanations. The third was offered by Rabbi Yochanan: “They went up to the Land of Israel; they married, and they gave birth to sons and daughters.” The Talmud states this as a novelty because it was no small feat. When people have a near-death experience, and they are saved by a hairs-breath, the trauma often

leaves them paralyzed. They can't function normally in the world. Here, three Jews were plunged into the burning furnace because of their loyalty to Judaism and the G-d of Israel. What did they do afterward? They did not withdraw; they did not give up on life and on Jewish destiny. They returned to the Holy Land from where they were exiled, they got married, and they brought a new generation of Jews to the world.

Benny said to me words I will never forget: You want to know the greatest miracle of the generations of survivors? That we tried to rebuild normal lives! Yes, we were not always successful; yes, we have our share of challenges that we transmitted to our children. But we try our best to be normal. We try to smile, to be happy, to love, to help people, to give our children a dignified future.

Think about it: Unlike Chananyah, Mishael, and Azaryah who emerged unscathed, the Jews who survived the holocaust watched the burning furnaces of Auschwitz and Treblinka consume their loved ones. Their families were not saved from the crematoriums of Belzec, Chelmno, and Majdanek. Here then is a far more dramatic question: What did the survivors of this unspeakable calamity do when they came out of Hitler's furnace?

The words employed in the Talmud provide the best answer: "They went up to the Land of Israel; they married, and they gave birth to sons and daughters!" The generation which exited the gates of the Nazi hell rebuilt the Land of Israel, literally and figuratively—rebuilding Jewish life the world over. Second, most of them got married, and third, they chose to give birth to a new generation of Jews.

And this, Benny, told me, is the greatest miracle in human history.

We often lament about our parents and grandparents, who surviving the Holocaust, often did not lead the most emotionally functional lives. Children of survivors have suffered from the silence, from the repressed pain, from the mid-night screaming, from the PTSD. The pain is deep and real. What we sometimes fail to realize is that after the hell they have been through, that was expected. The miracle is that most of them fought courageously to lead normal lives—to find love once again, to raise families, to trust, to be happy, to celebrate life. And because they did it, we are here today.

From the ashes, they recreated life.

Our Own Three Worlds

In a far different way, this remains a challenge for many of us, even if in a far more benign way.

Many of us, in our own little or big way, experience three worlds, demanding of us to reinvent ourselves again, and again, and yet again. We live not one life, but at least three lives.

We begin our youth often in a "civilized, settled world." We enjoy the innocence, calmness, stability, and security of youthfulness. We expect things to be a certain way, we rely on routine, and we are sheltered by the feeling that life is good, beautiful, and fragrant.

If you can stay in this world forever—by all means! Do not leave!

But not all of us get this privilege. Sooner or later, spaghetti hits the fan. Some of us encounter a new reality, where our old world is devastated. Our sheltered cocoons blow up and we become vulnerable to sadness, madness, suffering, and loss. The loss of a loved one; the divorce of our parents and the breakdown of our family; mental or emotional challenges; financial crisis; broken relationships; trauma and anxiety—all leaving our hearts shattered into one thousand pieces. Some of us have known the pain of abuse and molestation, physical, verbal, or emotional. Some of us have known the pain of addiction and self-destruction, following or preceding the experience of our world inundated by a massive "flood." All we search for is an Ark, where we can run and hide. But then we must have the courage to reinvent ourselves yet a third time—to become yet a new "Noach," one who can create a new world—a world of laughter, love, light, hope, and promise; a life of healthy attachments, faith, and joy; a life filled with the conviction that goodness is more powerful than evil, and light can dispel darkness. Yes, this new world lacks that idyllic innocence and ignorance of childhood, but it contains a depth, maturity, and profundity that allows it to become a real foundation that can't crumble.[1]

G-d says to Noach, "go out of the ark," and build a new world. Even when it raining outside, look up and you might see a rainbow, knowing that above the clouds, the sun is always shining. At every moment, you are a manifestation of the infinite light and love of the Divine. The clouds will pass, and your sunlight and sunshine will emerge.