



הַמִּזְרָחִי HAMIZRACHI

PARSHA WEEKLY

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PARSHAT LECH LECHA 5784 • 2023










This week's edition is dedicated for the merit of the safe and speedy return of Daniel Shimon ben Sharon, the members of his tank crew, Itai ben Chagit, and Matan ben Anat, together with all injured, missing, and captured, and dedicated to the memory of Tomer ben Shay hy"d.

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World Mizrachi is the global Religious Zionist movement, spreading *Torat Eretz Yisrael* across the world and strengthening the bond between the State of Israel and Jewish communities around the world.

Based in Jerusalem and with branches across the globe, Mizrachi – an acronym for *merkaz ruchani* (spiritual center) – was founded in 1902 by Rabbi Yitzchak Yaakov Reines, and is led today by Rabbi Doron Perez. Mizrachi's role was then and remains with vigor today, to be a proactive partner and to take personal responsibility in contributing to the collective destiny of *Klal Yisrael* through a commitment to Torah, the Land of Israel and the People of Israel.



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Captives & Hostages

The Moral Measure of Society



Rabbi Doron Perez
Executive Chairman, World Mizrachi

The First Jewish Captive

No sooner had the first Jewish family been established, one of the members had been taken captive. Avraham's nephew Lot was taken captive as part of the regional war between the four kings against the five. Lot was residing in Sdom amongst the losing kingdoms and the verse clearly records him being taken into captivity:

וַיִּקְחוּ אֶת-כָּל-רֶשֶׁת שָׂדֵם וְעַמֶּרְהָ... וַיֵּלְכוּ:

[The invaders] seized all the wealth of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their provisions, and went their way.

וַיִּקְחוּ אֶת-לוֹט וְאֶת-רֶשֶׁתוֹ בֶּן-אֲחִי אַבְרָם... וַיֵּלְכוּ...

They also took Lot, the son of Avram's brother, and his possessions, and departed...

Both verses begin and end with the same words ויקחו וילכו – “They captured” and “they went.” The total disregard for the freedom and rights of others is indicated in the ease and the nonchalant way that people are simply taken from their home as hostages and captives. Incredibly the Midrash notes, that the conquerors of Sdom came specifically to look for Lot knowing of his relationship with Avraham. The Midrash even states that they put him in a cage and boasted: “We have captured the nephew of Avraham.” Already then it seemed that the people opposed Avraham's moral and monotheistic beliefs, and were focused specifically on capturing his nephew.

All for One

Avraham's response was nothing less than remarkable. Without any directive from Hashem to act in any way, he springs straight into action upon hearing of his nephew's capture:

וַיִּשְׁמַע אַבְרָם כִּי נִשְׁבָּה אָחִיו וַיֵּרָק אֶת-חֲנִיכָיו וְלִידֵי בֵיתוֹ... וַיֵּרְדֵּף עַד-דָּן:

“When Abram heard that his kinsman's [household] had been taken captive, he mustered his retainers, born into his household, numbering three hundred and eighteen, and went in pursuit as far as Dan.”

Indeed the moment he hears, without thinking for a second, he takes all the members of his house and his followers, all 318 of them and immediately pursues the captors. In a daring night mission he attacks the mighty enemy, chases them all the way to Damascus and returns all the property that had been stolen, as well as his nephew Lot. Avraham's actions are truly remarkable. After all Lot was his errant nephew and chose specifically to separate from him and settle amongst the wicked town of Sdom. Sdom was known for its immorality and its lack of any collective moral company. As evident even today, thousands of years later, the horrific term of sodomy, still exists. Despite Lot going to Sdom, and despite being the errant nephew, Avraham sees him as his brother and without thinking springs into action with total disregard for his life and the lives of all of his followers.

It is absolutely clear to Avraham that he is willing to sacrifice everything to save even an errant member of his family and people.

One for All

To my mind this highlights one of the great differences between our beautiful, moral and spiritual values as opposed to the enemies of Avraham then and the enemies of the Jewish people today. The most basic freedom a person has is the right to pursue life and liberty. The safest place a person has is the precincts of their home which is the intimate sacred space of a family to live in peace and tranquility. From the enemies in the barbaric world of then to the barbaric world of Hamas today, there is a total disregard for the most basic human rights and dignity. People are taken and led away to captivity with total disregard to the value of human life.

The diametric opposite is Avraham's response. Avraham has every moral right to not go and save Lot for the reasons mentioned above, yet he doesn't think twice. As the verse stated above, Lot is a brother and to save the life of a brother, one risks everything. Avraham already then lived by the famous aphorism, "all for one and one for all", engaging in battle to do everything possible to save Lot.

Losing a Moral Right To Exist

Not only is this attitude toward redeeming the captured so central to the Jewish moral code, it is the very cause of the moral decay which caused the entire world to be destroyed by the flood.

Astonishingly, especially in today's context, the word used in the Torah for the robbery and decay of society which caused the flood is indeed the Hebrew word "חמס".

The verse in the beginning of Parashat Noach clearly says:

קָץ כָּל בָּשָׂר בְּאֶפְסוֹס לִפְנֵי כִי מְלֵאָה הָאָרֶץ חָמָס
מִפְנֵיהֶם וְהִנֵּנִי מְשַׁחֲתָם אֶת הָאָרֶץ

"And G-d said to Noach: 'The end of all flesh is come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence through them;



To capture and take hostage another human being is to steal the most basic right to life and liberty and to hold it ransom.

and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth." (Bereishit: 6:13)

According to the verse, חמס is the reason for the destruction. What does חמס mean?

Rashi cites a verse in the book of Yonah which clearly shows that חמס means robbery and stealing. At its core, stealing is a lack of respect for the property of the other, a lack of respect for ownership and for anything that the other possesses. When people have no respect for private space and ownership, society cannot function.

The truth, though, is that it's much deeper than that. The ancient commentary of Targum Unkelos incredibly translates the word חמס as חטופין, which means taking captives. This is the core of their sin. They were not punished merely because society tolerated the stealing of property, but because society tolerated the rampant stealing of human beings. To capture and take hostage another human being is to steal the most basic right to life and liberty and to hold it ransom. When society engaged in such despicable immoral actions, that society has lost its צלם אלוהים, its creation in G-d's image, and needs to be destroyed. The flood and deluge swept away an entire world because those who are prepared not only to tolerate, but to actively engage in such perversion, have no right to exist. The world has seen the despicable actions of Hamas, not only of the murder, the maiming, the unspeakable tortures, but also of huge financial incentives to the man on the street to go hijack and kidnap as many hostages as possible.

The regime of a society prepared to engage in such behavior has no moral right to exist. If ever there was a moral right of a

country today to dismantle the source of its enemy's evil roots and regime, it is Israel's moral and just war to uproot Hamas so that it no longer exists in G-d's world.

We hope and pray for the state of Israel and the Jewish people. We pray that just as Avraham was able to bring back Lot and the captives while every single one of his army of 318 were unscathed, so too should every one of the captured be returned in full health, without one member of the Israeli Defense Forces being harmed.

An unthinkable evil took place which shocked everyone. We hope and pray that an unimaginable miracle of justice and salvation will take place for the sake of G-d, for the sake of His people, and for the sake of all of humanity.

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Acheinu — Global Brothers



Rabbi Reuven Taragin

Educational Director, World Mizrahi

Dean of Overseas Students, Yeshivat Hakotel

Avraham's Brother

This week, we read of an event very similar to what we are experiencing — Avraham goes to war to free Lot, who was taken captive.¹ Though Lot was Avraham's nephew,² the Torah describes him as Avraham's *ach* (brother).³ Why?

Rabbeinu Bachaya explains that Avraham saw Lot as his brother, a *first-degree* relative he was responsible for rescuing. Though a major disagreement with Lot had led to their separation, Avraham chose to focus on his brotherly relationship with Lot. He rushed out (and endangered his life) to save him.

Our Brothers

Like Avraham, recent events have brought us to focus on our relationship with our Jewish relatives. Hamas's savage massacre and captivity of (over 200+ of) our Jewish brothers and sisters and the attacks upon Jewish communities worldwide have reawakened our sense of Jewish brotherhood. A fractured people a mere two weeks ago have come together to defend themselves and care for one another.

Many see the attacks as caused by our lack of *Achdut*. Chazal teach us that we fall in battle when we are not unified.⁴ Indeed, Hamas has stated that our divisiveness convinced them the time was right to attack.

Our response must address this issue. In addition to supporting the soldiers, civilians, and the State of Israel, we need to create *Achdut* and ensure that it continues beyond the coming weeks and months.

Like other life experiences, the Hamas attack is an extension of Hashem's Hand and (thus) has a message for us. If we were punished for our divisiveness, vanquishing Hamas while remaining divided will not solve the true root of the problem, the problem with us. We need to heed Hashem's message and ensure that we emerge

from this crisis unified in a meaningful and sustainable way.

Inclusive Achdut

Baruch Hashem many communities are arranging *Achdut* initiatives. We need to ensure that these initiatives include all Jews of all types. Though, like Avraham and Lot, we are different and disagree with one another, we need to remember that we are all brothers and sisters and treat each other accordingly.

Each of us should seek to resolve disputes we have with family, friends, neighbors, and associates. Are there people we don't speak to? Are there people we should act more friendly towards? Are there Jews who we live near or interact with who we do not yet have a relationship with? We should be strengthening our personal relationships with all Jews.

Communally, we should seek ways to learn, pray, and protest together (in ways appropriate for all Jews) as one unified Jewish community. We disagree on many fundamental issues, but we are all one family. We now have the opportunity and the responsibility to highlight this perspective.

None of us has the ability to unify the entire Jewish people. All of us have the ability and (thus) the responsibility to strengthen our *kesher* with those we know and interact with, unify our communities, and do our best to connect with those beyond.

Now is the time to emphasize that we are all:

One People... One Family... One Fate...

Even if we accomplish this, we will still lack a crucial component...

We Are Not Alone

Later in the *parshah*, Hashem informs Avraham of his descendants' upcoming exile: "*Yado'a teida ki geir yihyeh zarachah b'erez lo lahem* — You should surely know that your children will be a foreigner in a land that is

not theirs..."⁵ There is an apparent discrepancy between "*geir* (a foreigner)," which is singular, and "*zar'achah* (your children)," which is plural.

The sefer *Asifat Chachamim* explains that one consequence of exile is the feeling of loneliness, isolation, and separation from the rest of the Jewish people scattered across the world.⁶ The experience of exile is an experience of *geir* — of feeling like an individual, as opposed to part of Klal Yisrael. The *geulah* process, then, includes overcoming that feeling of aloneness and connecting to Klal Yisrael.

We have grown accustomed to seeing ourselves as part of the Jewish people in a particular community, city, or country. Even if we connect to those who live in our country and those in Israel, we feel disconnected from Jews in other countries. We live in different countries immersed in different cultures and speak different languages. Are we really one people? Do we feel that way?

True Jewish unity unifies *all Jews across the world*. Learning together is one way that can help us feel connected to one another during these challenging times. Jews in New York and London will be reminded of those in Malta and Tanzania and those in Zambia and Finland can feel connected to larger communities in London and Toronto.

May strengthening our *kesher* with our brothers next door and around the world merit our brothers' liberation from captivity.

May learning, davening, and commemorating as one united family give us strength to face and overcome challenges together.

1. Bereishit 14.

2. 14:12.

3. 14:14, 14:16.

4. Bamidbar Rabbah 19:2.

5. 15:13.

6. See also Rashi, Bereishit 47:28.

RAV RIMON CERAMIC VEST & EQUIPMENT TZEVEZ PEREZ EMERGENCY CAMPAIGN

“Tzevet Perez”, is the name of the tank crew led by Daniel Perez (son of Rabbi Doron and Shelley Perez), which has not been heard from since the opening morning of the war.



With 360,000 reservists called up, there is a great lack of vital military gear and protective equipment.

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Rav Yosef Zvi Rimon

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  All donations from Australia and Canada are earmarked for civilian and humanitarian needs

For the merit of the safe and speedy return of Daniel Shimon ben Sharon, the members of his tank crew, “Tzevet Perez”, Itai ben Chagit, Matan ben Anat, together with all injured, missing, and captured, and dedicated to the memory of Tomer ben Shay hy”d.

Halachic Q&A



Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

Head, Mizrahi Rabbinic Council | Rabbi of the Gush Etzion Regional Council
Rosh Yeshivah, Jerusalem College of Technology | Founder and Chairman, Sulamot and La'Ofek

Question: What rules apply to a chayal who is being transported on Shabbat to a guard tower that is outside the eiruv if he will be there for many hours? What can he bring with him? Is there a recommended way for him to carry things with him so that he will minimize the transgression of carrying?

Answer: The ideal option would be for the *chayal* to put anything that would make his time on guard duty easier inside his vest or something else that he must take with him.

Question: When davening for the safety of specific chayalim, should we mention them with their mother's name, as we do for the sick, or in their father's name, as we do when being called to the Torah?

Answer: The reason we daven for a sick person using their mother's name, is because of the words "אני עבדך בן אמתך" – "I am Your servant, the son of Your maidservant" (Tehillim 116), as explained by the Zohar on this week's *parsha* (Lech Lecha). Since in this situation, we are asking for mercy from Hashem, similar to with the sick, it would seem proper to mention the mother's name (as the verse in Tehillim is not referring to a sick person, but rather ending distress). One can also mention the names of both the mother and father if they wish.

Question: Is it proper to declare a fast day given the current situation in Israel?

Answer: One could declare a personal fast. In Israel, every morning we recite *Avinu Malkenu*, and we recite a few *perakim* of *Tehilim* after each *tefila* and three extra "*mi shebarach*"s. It could be difficult to fast with the anxiety being felt, but one certainly could declare a fast.

Question: If a chayal is given leave that starts or ends on Shabbat, can he travel to or from his base on Shabbat or must he remain on base/return before Shabbat (and thus cut his leave short)?

Answer: In general, in a regular time, a *chayal* who needs to be on base for part of Shabbat, must stay on the base for the entire Shabbat.

In the reality of war: If the *chayal* would not have sleeping accommodations or something similar and because of this, he wouldn't be able to refresh and prepare for his next task, he can return home on Shabbat.

If he has good conditions, it is ideal that the *chayal* would stay on base for Shabbat.

But if, for example, he needs to be on base starting Shabbat morning, and he would like to spend Friday night with his family, because his wife and children are

concerned, etc., he can travel on Shabbat back to his base to serve.

If the *chayal* is on his base at the start of Shabbat and wishes to return home when there are only a few hours left to Shabbat, then he should wait until Shabbat ends. If there are still many hours to Shabbat and he has comfortable conditions, it is best to stay, but if his family is feeling stressed, he can rely on the lenient opinions and travel home (if there is an electric car, that would be the best way to travel).

Question: We wait until the seventh of Marcheshvan to say "Veten tal umatar livracha", instead of beginning on Shemini Atzeret in order to give a chance to the travelers who were "oleh laregel" to return home without being delayed by rain. In this vein, should we wait this year because the rain could delay the army from entering Gaza?

Answer: This is something that bothered me as well. I think that we still need to request the rain and recite "*veten tal umatar livracha*", but in "*Shema Koleinu*" we should daven that the rain does not harm the *chayalim* (Perhaps it will specifically harm the enemy. It's hard to know).

פרשת לך לך

הרבנית שרון רימון
Tanach teacher and author



”לך לך מארצך וממולדתך ומבית אביך אל הארץ אשר אראך: ואעשה לך גדול ואברכך ואגדלה שמך ויהי ברכה” (בראשית י”ב, ב-ג)

בסופו של דבר, כאשר נולד בן לאברהם ושרה (כ”א), הוא נקרא “יצחק”, על שם הצחוק הגדול המלווה את לידתו - לידה שהיא נס גלוי, המבהירה את מעורבותו הישירה של ה' בתהליך. ילד שנולד אחרי שנים רבות, בגיל מבוגר מאד, אחרי הבטחות אלקיות חוזרות ונשנות. הצחוק הוא ביטוי לשמחה אך בעיקר לתחושת האבסורד וההיפוך - הכל ביד ה', והוא יכול לשנות את המצבים, ואפילו להפך את המציאות לחלוטין, על מנת שרצונו יתברך יתגשם.

מדוע צריכים אברהם ושרה הצדיקים לעבור דרך ייסורים קשה כל כך? מדוע שלא יזכו בנן ממשיך בקלות ובפשטות?

קשיים גדולים אכן יכולים לשבור את אמונת האדם, ולעורר תהיות על צדקת הדרך שלו. אך עשויים גם לחזק ולגדל את האדם. גדולתו של אברהם אבינו היא בכח האמונה העצום שלו בה' ובצדקת הדרך, ומתוך כך הוא מסוגל להאמין אפילו כשהמציאות נראית הפוכה, ואפילו בשעות הקשות ביותר: והאמן בה' ויחשבה לו צדקה (ט”ו, ו).

אנשים רגילים לא זוכים להבטחה אלקית על הולדת בנם, ואף לא זוכים לנסים גלויים כל כך. לא כל אחד היה מסוגל להמשיך לדבוק בשליחות ולהאמין בהבטחת ה' לנוכח המציאות.

הדרך שאברהם ושרה עוברים עד להולדתו של יצחק מעצימה את האמונה שלהם בה', מדגישה את התאמתם לשליחות האלקית, ואף מחזקת את דרך החיים שבחרו בה כדרך ה'.

הלידה הנסית מבהירה שדרך אברהם היא דרך ה', ומתוך כך יהיה לה קיום והמשכיות לדורות הבאים, אשר ימשיכו את שליחותו של אברהם - להתהלך בעולם, לקרא בשם ה' ולהיטיב.

הבט נא השמימה וספר הכוכבים אם תוכל לספר אתם ויאמר לו מה יהיה זרעך: (ט”ו, ד-ה).

למרות שלפי הטבע כבר אין סיכוי שיהיה להם בן, ה' מבהיר שזה בכל זאת יקרה. ה' יכול “להוציא אותו החוצה”, לשנות סדרי בראשית, ולגרום להולדת ילד אפילו כשזה כבר בלתי אפשרי לפי הטבע.

לאחר שאברהם מקבל הבטחה נוספת על הולדת הבן, נעשה נסיון נוסף להביא לעולם ילד: שרה נותנת לאברהם את שפחתה הגר, בנסיון להביא לעולם ילד באמצעותה. שרה בגדלותה מוכנה לעשות ויתור עצום על מנת שיהיה ילד לאברהם, ממשיך דרכו. כוונתה היא שהגר תלד את הילד לאברהם, אך שרה תהיה המחנכת הרוחנית שלו כך שהוא יוכל להמשיך את דרך אברהם, דרך ה'. אולם, הגר לא מבינה את מקומה הנכון בסיפור ומזלזלת בשרה, ובכך למעשה איננה מאפשרת שהבן יתחנך ע”י שרה, ואיננה מאפשרת לו להפוך לחלק אינטגרלי מבית אברהם ולהיות ממשיך הדרך.

בברית המילה (י”ז), ה' מבהיר לאברהם באופן חד משמעי שהבן היורש לא יהיה בנה של הגר אלא יוולד משרה, מאחר והיא שותפתו של אברהם לדרך:

ויאמר אלקים אל אברהם שרי אשתך לא תקרא את שמה שרי כי שרה שמה: וברכתך אתה וגם נתתי ממנה לך בן וברכתה ויהיה לגוים מלכי עמים ממנה יהיו: ויפל אברהם על פניו ויצחק ויאמר בלבב הלבן מאה שנה יולד ואם שרה הבת תשעים שנה תלד: ויאמר אברהם אל האלקים לו ישמעאל יחיה לפני: ויאמר אלקים אצל שרה אשתך ילדת לך בן וקראת את שמו יצחק והקמתי את בריתי אתו לברית עולם לזרעו אחרי (י”ז, טו-יט)

אברהם ושרה יוצאים למסע בעקבות ציווי ה', ומכאן ואילך, לכל אורך חייהם הם נמצאים בהליכה ממקום למקום, מתוך נסיון לעשות את רצון ה' בעולם - לקרוא בשם ה', להפיץ את האמונה באל אחד, ולהוות מקור ברכה לעולם - להיטיב ולגמול חסד.

אברהם ושרה מסתובבים בעולם, עם שליחות גדולה ועם הבטחה של הקב”ה שיהיה להם זרע, שירש את הארץ. אך הם לא רואים בהתגשמות ההבטחה. עוברות שנים רבות, הם מגיעים לגיל זקנה, ועדיין אין להם ילד, והם תוהים לעצמם מה יהיה:

ויאמר אברהם ה' אלקים מה תתן לי ואנכי הולך עריצי וכן משק ביתי הוא דמשק אליעזר: ויאמר אברהם הן לי לא נתתה זרע והנה בן ביתי יורש אתי (ט”ו, ב-ג).

אברהם ושרה אינם עסוקים בירושה הפיזית של רכושם אלא בירושה הרוחנית - הם רוצים בן שימשיך את דרכם בעולם - דרך ה' לעשות צדקה ומשפט; דרך ה' להיטיב עם העולם ולברך אותו. הם מרגישים שאם אין המשך לדרך שהם התחילו והנחילו לעולם, לכאורה אין טעם בכל מה שעשו. הכל ייפסק. אמנם, לאברהם ושרה יש הרבה מאד “ילדים רוחניים” - תלמידים ובני בית שהם חינו אתם לעבודת ה', והם תוהים לעצמם האם זאת כוונת ה' - שלא יהיו להם ילדים אלא תלמידים ובני ביתם ירשו אותם וימשיכו את דרכם בעולם?

המצוקה של העקרות עלולה להעלות שאלות מאד מהותיות על משמעות ההבטחה, על השליחות ועל דרך החיים. אך ה' מחזק אותם וחוזר ומבטיח לאברהם שיהיה לו בן שירש את דרכו:

והנה דבר ה' אלי לאמר לא יירשך זה כי אם אשר יצא ממעיך הוא יירשך: ויוצא אותו החוצה ויאמר

Our first leader



Sivan Rahav Meir and Yedidya Meir
World Mizrahi Scholars-in-Residence

I wrote the following, last year, from the election night studio, in the middle of a broadcast. I found, in the course of that long night, a comment from Rabbi Chaim Navon regarding this week's Torah portion. He reminds us that political leadership is important, but there is another kind of leadership, no less important, as described below:

"4,000 years ago, an old man and an old woman departed from Haran, which is thought to have been where modern-day Turkey is, for the land of Canaan. Presumably, the people living at that time did not think much of this. The headlines of the day, as usual, were all about kings and their wars, ministers and their intrigues.

If anyone had known anything about this old and childless man, it would have been a source of mockery. Yet who had even heard of him, or later on about his descendants and their tiny nation, about their strange faith.

But today, no one remembers the kings and the ministers of the Middle East in those days, but everyone remembers that old man. Nearly four billion men and women in the world see themselves as followers of Avraham Avinu."

We are often preoccupied with political leadership, which is always extremely temporary. But this week's Torah portion reminds us, instead, to contemplate the educational and spiritual leadership of Avraham, whose influence is eternal.

Avraham was commanded to go forth, but also into his own soul.



When delivering lectures in English, I find it difficult to translate "Lech lecha." This command, spoken to Avraham in this week's Torah portion, is composed of two words that look the same (לך לך) but are different. And this is not a command like "*Lech le'Yerushalayim*" (Go to Jerusalem) or "*Lech le'Tel Aviv*" (Go to Tel Aviv). Our commentators explain that this command is meant for you to go into yourself (*lecha*), into your soul.

The first two words spoken to the first Jew are a command to move, to go, but above all to look inside. Only then will it be possible to go out into the world and bring others closer to G-d.

Avraham is commanded to find his purpose, to be the best version of himself. In the Torah commentary "Sefat Emet," a revolutionary idea is expressed: "The command of '*Lech lecha*' is spoken constantly by G-d to everyone, but Avraham Avinu actually heard, internalized, and acted upon it."

In other words, this call for self-actualization resonates in the world all the time. We need only tune in to its frequency. To us as well, the descendants of Avraham Avinu, the command of "*Lech lecha*" is given. Even at this very moment.

May we merit to hear it as he did.



So then, what's your "*Lech lecha*" story?

Aliyah Day, by statute, is observed in Israel during the week in which we read about the *aliyah* of Avraham Avinu to *Eretz Yisrael* in *parashat Lech Lecha*. Avraham Avinu

was the first person to arrive here and call it home, followed by millions who did the same over the next several thousand years. Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler describes how Avraham directed his compass to a place that serves as a powerful magnet for us all.

"All of Avraham Avinu's tests were meant to straighten the path before us to *Eretz Yisrael*. Every awakening of a person to suddenly go to the Holy Land originates in the command of '*Lech lecha*' – literally, 'go to yourself.' And, in truth, how wonderful is the love in our hearts for this land from which we were exiled for two thousand years.

Our nationalism is not like that of other nations. If it were, heaven forbid, the Holy Land would have long been forgotten from our hearts, as is the case with other nations that were exiled for a long time from their homelands. Instead, the love for our land depends on its holiness, a holiness that is imbued within us since it is an inheritance for our souls from Avraham Avinu, who practiced self-sacrifice in living up to the command of '*Lech lecha*.'" Think about your individual and family *aliyah* stories. It's a way to honor the "*Lech lecha*" road first taken in this week's Torah portion, a road that has continued to be traveled until today.



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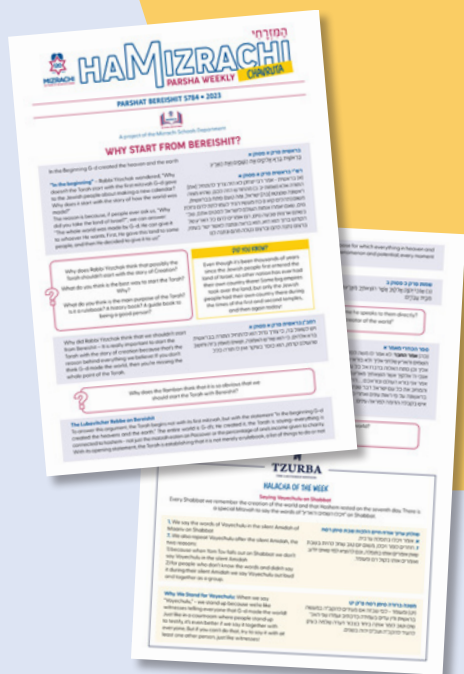
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For the Shabbat Table



Rabbi Danny Mirvis

Deputy CEO, World Mizrachi

Rabbi of Ohel Moshe Synagogue, Herzliya Pituach

“**A**nd Avram said to Sarai, ‘Behold your maidservant is in your hand, do to her as you see fit’, and Sarai dealt harshly with her, so she (Hagar) fled from her. An angel of the Lord found her by the spring of water in the desert, at the spring on the road to Shur. And he said, ‘Hagar, maidservant of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?’ And she said, ‘I am running away from Sarai my mistress.’” (Bereishit 16:6-8)

In this week’s *parsha* we read how Sarai recognized that it was she who was infertile, so suggested that Avram marry her maidservant Hagar, so that together they could have a child and Sarai could bring him up as an adopted son. The consequent birth of Yishmael, however, did not improve the atmosphere in the household but led to conflict between Sarai and Hagar, prompting Hagar to flee.

The opening exchange between Hagar and the angel reveals a lot about the nature of her running away. The angel asked Hagar two questions: “Hagar, the maidservant of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?” Yet she only replied to the first one, “I am running away from Sarai my mistress.”

There are two parts to every journey: Where one is coming from and where one is going. Hagar knew where she was running from, but had no destination in mind. Recognizing that such a journey would never succeed, the angel told her to return to Avram and Sarai.



There are two parts to every journey: Where one is coming from and where one is going.

Hagar’s journey stands in contrast to the first verse of our *parsha*:

“And Hashem said to Avram, ‘Go for yourself (*lech lecha*) from your land, from your kinsmen and from your father’s house, to the land that I shall show you.’” (Bereishit 12:1)

Avram’s *Aliyah* was not only about leaving his land, his kinsmen and his father’s house. It was a journey focused on the destination of, “the land that I shall show you.”

Nevertheless, the *Aliyah* in this verse seems somewhat lacking, for though the verse speaks of a physical and emotional *Aliyah*, what is the difference between moving from the Diaspora to *Eretz Yisrael* and moving from Johannesburg to Perth? Both involve leaving one’s land, family and father’s house and moving to a new destination. To answer this question, it is essential to be aware of the other “*lech lecha*” that Hashem commands Avraham:

“And He (Hashem) said, ‘take now your son, your only son, who you love – Yitzchak, and go for yourself (*lech lecha*) to the land of

Moriah and take him up there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains that I shall tell you.’” (Bereishit 22:2)

In next week’s *parsha*, when Hashem sets Avraham the ultimate test of faith, the instruction “*lech lecha*” takes on a new dimension. This was not a purely physical or emotional journey, but an odyssey of faith – a “*lech lecha*” of spiritual growth.

When coming on *Aliyah* today, it should not only be about physically moving home or emotionally leaving one’s family but must also have a spiritual dimension.

In addition to considering the difficulties or benefits of leaving where we are coming from, we should understand the tremendous historical and religious significance and amazing spiritual potential of where we are moving to.

Shabbat Shalom!



LET'S KEEP IT GOING!

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On Being a Jewish Parent



Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt"l

The most influential man who ever lived does not appear on any list I have seen of the hundred most influential men who ever lived. He ruled no empire, commanded no army, engaged in no spectacular acts of heroism on the battlefield, performed no miracles, proclaimed no prophecy, led no vast throng of followers, and had no disciples other than his own child. Yet today more than half of the billions of people alive on the face of the planet identify themselves as his heirs.

His name, of course, is Abraham, held as the founder of faith by the three great monotheisms, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. He fits no conventional stereotype. He is not described as unique in his generation, as in the case of Noah. The Torah tells us no tales of his childhood, as it does in the case of Moses. We know next to nothing about his early life. When G-d calls on him, as He does at the beginning of this week's *parsha*, to leave his land, his birthplace, and his father's house, we have no idea why he was singled out.

Yet never was a promise more richly fulfilled than the words of G-d to him when He changed his name from Abram to Abraham:

"For I have made you father of many nations" (Gen. 17:5).

There are today 56 Islamic nations, more than 80 Christian ones, and the Jewish state. Truly Abraham became the father of these many nations. But who and what was Abraham? Why was he chosen for this exemplary role?

There are three famous portraits of

Abraham. The first is the Midrash we learned as children. Abraham, left alone with his father's idols, breaks them with a hammer, which he leaves in the hand of the biggest of the idols. His father Terah comes in, sees the devastation, asks who has caused it, and the young Abraham replies, "Can you not see? The hammer is in the hands of the largest idol. It must have been him." Terah replies, "But an idol is mere of wood and stone." Abraham replies, "Then, father, how can you worship them?"¹

This is Abraham the iconoclast, the breaker of images, the man who while still young rebelled against the pagan, polytheistic world of demigods and demons, superstition and magic.

The second is more haunting and is enigmatic. Abraham, says the Midrash, is like a man travelling on a journey when he sees a palace in flames.

He wondered, "Is it possible that the palace lacks an owner?" The owner of the palace looked out and said, "I am the owner of the palace." So Abraham our father said, "Is it possible that the world lacks a ruler?" G-d looked out and said to him, "I am the Ruler, the Sovereign of the universe" (Midrash Bereishit Rabbah 38:13).

This is an extraordinary passage. Abraham sees the order of nature, the elegant design of the universe. It's like a palace. It must have been made by someone, for someone. But the palace is on fire. How can this be? Surely the owner should be putting out the flames. You don't leave a palace empty and unguarded. Yet the owner of the palace calls out to him, as G-d called to Abraham, asking him to help fight the fire.

G-d needs us to fight the destructive instinct in the human heart. This is Abraham, the fighter against injustice, the man who sees the beauty of the natural universe being disfigured by the sufferings inflicted by man on man.

Finally comes a third image, this time by Moses Maimonides:

After he was weaned, while still an infant, Abraham's mind began to reflect. Day and night, he thought and wondered, "How is it possible that this celestial sphere should continuously be guiding the world and have no one to guide it and cause it to turn, for it cannot be that it turns itself?" He had no teacher, no one to instruct him in anything. He was surrounded, in Ur of the Chaldees, by foolish idolaters. His father and mother and the entire population worshipped idols, and he worshipped with them. But his mind was constantly active and reflective, until he had attained the way of truth, found the correct line of thought, and knew that there is one G-d, He that guides the celestial spheres and created everything, and that among all that exists, there is no G-d beside Him. (Maimonides, *Hilchot Avodat Kochavim* 1:3)

This is Abraham the philosopher, anticipating Aristotle, using metaphysical argument to prove the existence of G-d.

Three images of Abraham; three versions, perhaps, of what it is to be a Jew. The first sees Jews as iconoclasts, challenging the idols of the age. Even secular Jews who had cut themselves adrift from Judaism were among the most revolutionary modern thinkers, most famously Spinoza, Marx, and Freud. Thorstein Ve-

blen said in an essay on “the intellectual pre-eminence of Jews,” that the Jew becomes “a disturber of the intellectual peace . . . a wanderer in the intellectuals’ no-man’s-land, seeking another place to rest, farther along the road, somewhere over the horizon.”

The second sees Jewish identity in terms of *tzedek umishpat*, a commitment to the just society. Albert Einstein spoke of the “almost fanatical love of justice” as one of “the features of the Jewish tradition which make me thank my stars that I belong to it.”

The third reminds us that the Greek thinkers Theophrastus and Clearchus, disciples of Aristotle, speak of the Jews as a nation of philosophers.

So these views are all true and profound. They share only one shortcoming. There is no direct evidence for them whatsoever in the Torah. Joshua speaks of Abraham’s father Terah as an idolater (Josh. 24:2), but this is not mentioned in Bereishit.

The story of the palace in flames is perhaps based on Abraham’s challenge to G-d about the proposed destruction of Sodom and the cities of the plain: “Shall the Judge of all the earth not do justice?” As for Abraham-as-Aristotle, that is based on an ancient tradition that the Greek philosophers (especially Pythagoras) derived their wisdom from the Jews, but this too is nowhere hinted in the Torah.

What then does the Torah say about Abraham? The answer is unexpected and very moving. Abraham was chosen simply to be a father. The “Av” in Avram/Avraham means “father”. In the only verse in which the Torah explains the choice of Abraham, it says:

For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household



Judaism takes what is natural and sanctifies it; what is physical and invests it with spirituality; what is elsewhere considered normal and sees it as a miracle.

after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what He has promised him” (Gen. 18:19).

The great scenes in Abraham’s life – waiting for a child, the birth of Ishmael, the tension between Sarah and Hagar, the birth of Isaac, and the binding – are all about his role as a father (next week I will write about the troubling episode of the binding).

Judaism, more than any other faith, sees parenthood as the highest challenge of all. On the first day of Rosh Hashanah – the anniversary of Creation – we read of two mothers, Sarah and Hannah, and the births of their sons, as if to say: Every life is a universe. Therefore if you wish to understand the creation of the universe, think about the birth of a child.

Abraham, the hero of faith, is simply a father. Stephen Hawking famously wrote at the end of *A Brief History of Time* that if we had a Unified Field Theory, a scientific “theory of everything”, we would “know the mind of G-d.” We believe otherwise. To know the mind of G-d we do not need theoretical physics. We simply need to know what it is to be a parent. The miracle of childbirth is as close as we come to understanding the love-that-brings-new-life-into-the-world that is G-d’s creativity.

There is a fascinating passage in Yossi Klein Halevi’s book on Christians and Muslims in the land of Israel, *At the Entrance to the Garden of Eden*. Visiting a convent, he is told by a nun, Maria Teresa:

“I watch the families who visit here on weekends. How the parents behave toward their children, speaking to them with patience and encouraging them to ask intelligent questions. It’s an example to the whole world. The strength of this people is the love of parents for their children. Not just the mothers but also the fathers. A Jewish child has two mothers.”

Judaism takes what is natural and sanctifies it; what is physical and invests it with spirituality; what is elsewhere considered normal and sees it as a miracle. What Darwin saw as the urge to reproduce, what Richard Dawkins calls “the selfish gene”, is for Judaism high religious art, full of drama and beauty. Abraham the father, and Sarah the mother, are our enduring role models of parenthood as G-d’s gift and our highest vocation.

AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE:

- What do you see as the most challenging, and the most rewarding, aspects of parenting?
- Which of Avraham’s three identities do you identify with, and why?
- How do you think the act of naming, like in the transformation of Avram to Avraham and Sarai to Sarah, shapes or redefines an individual’s destiny or purpose in life?

1. Midrash Bereishit Rabbah 38:13

Two Aspects of Milah



Rabbi Hershel Schachter

Rosh Yeshivah, Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary of Yeshiva University

המול ימול יליד ביתך ומקנת כסף.

He that is born in your household or purchased with your money shall surely be circumcised. (Bereishis 17:13)

The Gemara in Shabbos (135b) describes two different categories of *avadim* whom an *adon* (master) has a *mitzvah* to circumcise – *miknas kesef* (an *eved* purchased by the *adon* with money) and *yelid bayis* (an *eved* born in the *adon's* “house” to his *shifchah Cana'ani*s).

When one purchases an *eved Cana'ani*, the *adon* must perform a *bris milah* on the *eved*, after which the *eved* undergoes *tevilah* (immersion in a *mikveh*) and *kabbalas ol mitzvos* (acceptance of *mitzvah* observance). This process is considered a semi-*geirus*; the *eved* now becomes obligated in *mitzvos*, with the exception of *mitzvos aseil shehazman grama* (time-bound positive *mitzvos*). After the *eved* is freed by the *adon*, he requires a second *tevilah* in order to attain a full *kedushas Yisrael*, at which point he becomes obligated in all of the *mitzvos* (Yoreh De'ah 267:1-5).

In contrast, a *yelid bayis* already has a *kedushas eved Cana'ani* prior to *milah*, much as a baby born to a Jewish mother already has a *kedushas Yisrael* before *milah* (Chullin 4b). The Gemara teaches that we perform the *milah* of a *yelid bayis* on the eighth day, whereas we perform that of a *miknas kesef*, such as when a non-Jew sells his child as an *eved Cana'ani* (Rambam, Hilchos Avadim 9:2), immediately, on the day of purchase.

It emerges from the Gemara's distinction that the respective *milos* of these two types of *avadim* Cana'anim represent two different forms of *milah*. The *milah* of a *yelid bayis*, who possesses *kedushas eved Cana'ani* from birth, is a *mitzvas milah*. This is similar to the *bris milah* on a Jewish child, and we perform this form

of *milah* at the age of eight days. On the other hand, a *miknas kesef* does not possess any *kedushas eved Cana'ani* before *milah*. Thus, the *milah* is performed for the sake of *geirus*, and this kind of *milah* may be done earlier than the eighth day. The same applies when a non-Jewish child is adopted and *milah* is performed as part of the *geirus* process that converts the child into a *Yisrael*.

The Rambam (Hilchos Milah 1:10) makes a further distinction between the *milah* of a *yelid bayis* and that of a *miknas kesef* based on the above Gemara. Since the *milah* of a *yelid bayis* should be performed specifically on the eighth day, the *milah* is *docheh Shabbos* (overrides the Shabbos *melachah* restrictions). The *milah* of a *miknas kesef* for the sake of *geirus*, however, has no particular time frame within which it must be performed. Since this *milah* is considered a *milah shelo bizmanah* (a *milah* performed not in its specified time), it may not be done on Shabbos. However, Rabbeinu Yerucham (cited by the Shach, Yoreh De'ah 267:6) disagrees and maintains that the *milah* of *avadim*, even the *milah* of a *yelid bayis*, is never *docheh Shabbos*.

Rav Yerucham Perlow (Sefer HaMitzvos L'Rav Saadyah Gaon, 5733 ed., vol. 1, pp. 361-362) points out that the Gemara in Shabbos (131a-131b) seems to support Rabbeinu Yerucham's view. The opinion of Rabbi Eliezer is that *machshirei milah* (preliminaries to the *mitzvah* of *milah*), as well as the *machshirin* to other *mitzvos*, are *docheh Shabbos*. The Gemara identifies two exceptions – the *mitzvos* of having *tzitzis* on one's garment and of affixing a *mezuzah* to one's doorway. The *machshirin*

of tying the *tzitzis* and of writing the *mezuzah* are prohibited on Shabbos because one can be *mafkir* (renounce ownership of) his garment and his house, in which case these obligations would no longer be incumbent upon him. Since such a potential exists, the Torah does not permit any *chilul Shabbos* for the *machshirin* of these *mitzvos*.

Presumably, the obligation to circumcise a *yelid bayis* is also not absolute, since the *adon* could be *mafkir* the *eved* and then not be obligated in his *milah*. Accordingly, *machshirei milah* of one's *eved* should not be *docheh Shabbos*. If so, why does the Gemara not cite *milas avadim* as an additional exception to Rabbi Eliezer's rule, since only the *mitzvah*, but not its *machshirin*, is *docheh Shabbos*? Evidently, *milas avadim* is not an exception to the rule, since in this case, even the *mitzvah* itself – the *milah* – is not *docheh Shabbos*! Thus, this Gemara supports Rabbeinu Yerucham and seems to contradict the Rambam's view.

The Rambam might respond that even after an *adon* is *mafkir* his *yelid bayis*, he does, in fact, remain obligated in his *milah*. The Rambam (Hilchos Milah 1:1) is *mechadeish*, against the other Rishonim, that if an *adon* neglects to circumcise his *eved*, the obligation is transferred to *beis din* to see to it that the *eved* receives his *milah*. It may be that this obligation actually binds all Jews, including the *adon* who freed him. Since the obligation on the *adon* to circumcise his *yelid bayis* is absolute, the *machshirin*, just like the *milah* itself, are *docheh Shabbos*.

● Adapted from Rav Schachter on the Parsha II.

Lack of Clarity



Chief Rabbi Ovadia Yosef zt"l
Former Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel

It states in the week's *parashah*, "Hashem said to Avraham, 'Go away from your land, from your birthplace, and from your father's house, to the land that I will show you.'" (Bereishit 12:1).

Our *chachamim* said (Avot 5:3), "Avraham Avinu *a"h* was tested with ten tests and withstood them all. To make known how great was Avraham Avinu's *a"h* love."

Rashi explains (quoted in the commentary Tosafot Yom Tov), "and withstood them all" – "that he didn't question Hashem's attributes". Meaning, that the unique quality of Avraham was that not only did he withstand the actual test, but Hashem commanded him to do things that appeared illogical. Avraham didn't think even for a moment, what is going on here? What is the solution? Rather he accepted the Creator's *mitzvah* entirely and with a complete heart.

What are the ten tests that Avraham was tested in? Rabbeinu Rambam enumerates the first test, "Hashem said to Avraham, 'Go away from your land, from your birthplace, and from your father's house, to the land that I will show you.'" This appears surprising for it is known that prior to Avraham being tested with this awesome test, King Nimrod threw him into a fiery furnace because he denied idolatry. If so, why does Rambam not count this test as the first test?!

The answer to this is, that for someone who believes in Hashem, there is no test with matters which are completely clear. We believe in Hashem and when a person is faced with a test, to die or to deny Hashem, the test isn't so great! We have seen this so many times throughout the generations, men, women and children who gave their lives and died for their faith. This isn't such

a great test! It is self-sacrifice! So the test isn't so great. However, where is truly the greatest test? When things aren't clear. Where there is deliberation, wrestling and coping with the decision!

Therefore the test "Go away from your land," was certainly a great test. Not simply the fact that Avraham listened to Hashem, for sure it was clear that he had to listen to Hashem's voice, for who of us would hear a clear instruction from Hashem and not listen to his voice? Rather the greatness was that Avraham didn't have even a moment's doubt. For he had established a huge *teshuvah* organization in Charan. He had taught an enormous number of people and spread everywhere belief in Hashem. He had pupils who were dependent on him and now he would have to forsake everything?! A simple thought could have passed through Avraham's mind, it would make more sense that I remain here! This was a great test and Avraham showed restraint, he had complete belief.

This may be illustrated as follows. If, for example, a man will come with the following offer: take 500 *shekalim* and tell me *lashon hara* about so and so! For sure he will reject him outright, it is forbidden to speak *lashon hara*! However, if without such an obvious suggestion such as this, he approaches him and attempts to coax him about that *lashon hara*, there are many that will stumble in the prohibition of *lashon hara*! We learn from this that the main test is when matters are unclear!

The Gaon, the Tzaddik, Rav Yaakov Galinski zt"l explained that the words of the Gaon Rav Chaim Volozhin z"l (1749-1821) are well known. That's why they said, with ten tests Avraham "Avinu" was tested, they intentionally coined him with the title "Avinu"

for with his stamina in each and every test he engendered in us, his descendants, the ability and strength to withstand, and not to question Hashem's *mitzvah*. To believe that everything that happens in our lives is all from Hashem from Heaven and everything is for the better.

It is related in the Talmud (Berachot 60a) that Rabbi Akiva was traveling and reached a village. He requested to stay the night, but they refused. He said, "Everything that Hashem does is for the best!"

He went and slept in the wilderness. He had a rooster, a donkey and a lamp. A wind came and blew out the lamp. A cat ate the rooster, and a lion ate the donkey. Rabbi Akiva said, "Everything that Hashem does is all for the best."

That night companies of enemy soldiers came and took the villagers hostage. Rabbi Akiva said, "Didn't I say that everything that Hashem does is all for the best? For if the lamp had been lit, the donkey braying and the rooster crowing, they would have taken me captive, too!"

A person must know that he doesn't know. He doesn't know, others don't know, only Hashem knows!

One must know that Hashem turns events, He gives the Torah. Just as we understand our Holy Torah, which is deeper than the sea, likewise we must believe and know that what happens in life is deeper and more tangled. But all is for the best. We are happy that we are children cared for, guided and looked after by our Father in Heaven "He Who set our soul in life and did not allow our foot to falter" [Tehillim 66:9].

Avraham's Challenges



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This week we will take issue with something that does not appear in the *parsha*, which in fact one would have thought should have been recorded in the Torah.

The *mishna* in *Avot* (5:3) states that Avraham passed all ten *nisyonot* (challenges) posed to him by Hashem. Although it is not clear exactly what each of these challenges are, virtually all *mefarshim* agree that the imperative of *Lech Lecha* – to leave his father's home and his birthplace to transfer to a yet unknown destination, is one of the ten.

At the end of last week's *parsha*, when we are told that Avraham left Ur Kasdim, Rashi informs us that the location received its name because that is where Avraham was saved from a fiery furnace (*Ur* – means fire and Kasdim was the name of the city). The *midrash* describes that after Avraham destroyed his father's idols, he was brought before Nimrod who demanded that Avraham denounce monotheism or be sentenced to death. When Avraham refused, he was thrown into a fiery furnace. Miraculously Avraham was saved. Being willing to be killed for his allegiance to G-d is a far greater *nisayon* than leaving his hometown. Why then is this event not recorded in the Torah?

The *Igra Dekala* (Bnei Yissachar) explains that if the Ur Kasdim event was highlighted in the Torah, one may conclude that Avraham dedicated his life to spreading monotheism because he was saved in this miraculous event. It would dilute the fact that Avraham's love was independent of that act – אהבה שאינה תלויה בדבר – Avraham believed in G-d not out of gratitude for being saved, but for the mere fact that he was born!

Rav Simcha Zissel Broide, the Rosh Yeshiva of Chevron Yeshiva (cited by Rabbi Frand)

offers an insightful explanation. There are two types of *nisyonot* that we face. There are “glamorous” *nisyonot* – moments that define who we are – and there are “little,” seemingly less significant *nisyonot* that we experience on a day-to-day basis.

When one faces a large challenge that may involve significant self-sacrifice, one often musters up enough courage and determination to withstand the challenge. So many Jews were willing to be burned at the stake due to their religious commitment. Yet, the challenges one faces on a daily basis are often harder to endure.

Ur Kasdim was a defining moment for Avraham. Is he to sacrifice himself in the name of G-d, or submit to Nimrod's request to defile the name of the Almighty. People often rise above their expected abilities when confronted by such defining moments.

Several years ago, a bus driver identified a terrorist boarding a bus and was able to keep him from entering the bus and killing many innocent passengers. The bus driver was not a strong fellow, but due to the imminent danger, he rose to the occasion. Afterwards, he expressed that if one were to have asked if he would perform such a heroic act, he would have definitely said no. However, in the spur of the moment, something came over him that enabled him to act as he did.

This is the test of the Ur Kasdim variety: When we face a challenge and our adrenalin, or some other inner strength enables us to supersede our fear or selfishness and act like true heroes. Yet, these moments are fleeting. They do not accurately depict a person.

The true test of one's character is the way in which they face daily challenges. Does one go to *minyan* on a stormy day? Does

one study with his child after a busy day at the office? Does one give charity when under financial stress? No one considers making the right decision in these situations to be the essence of heroism, yet they are defining moments.

After Yitzhak descends from the *Akeda*, Chazal tell us he went to study at the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever. What more did he have to learn after experiencing this momentous challenge? The Shemen HaTov explains that since Yitzhak was willing to die *Al Kiddush Hashem*, now he had to learn how to live a life that would exemplify a *kiddush Hashem*. Yitzhak had to strengthen his ability to withstand the ordinary challenges that he would experience on a daily basis. That requires additional training.

The *Lech Lecha nisayon* is dealing with the less glamorous daily challenges. The issues we face with our family members, neighbors, work colleagues and with our finances, day in and day out. The Torah did not explicitly record the Ur Kasdim episode, although it was spectacular, because what truly defines a person is the way in which one deals with the everyday moments. May we gain the strength to shine when confronted with these mundane challenges.

The Promise of a Child, The Birth of a Nation



Michal Horowitz
Judaic Studies Teacher

Much is known to us about the lives of Avraham and Sarah from the Torah text. In this week's *sedra*, they arrive in Canaan, find a famine in the land, descend to Egypt because of the famine, and Sarah is taken by Pharaoh (Ch.12); upon leaving Egypt, Avraham and Lot (his nephew) part ways (Ch.13); Lot is captured in the first World War and Avraham goes to battle to save his nephew (Ch.14); Avraham has the *nevuah* of the Covenant Between the Pieces (Ch.15); Avraham takes Hagar as a wife, but Sarah banishes her from their home, and in the desert, Hagar sees angels and is promised a child (Ch.16); and finally, Hashem promises Avraham that Sarah will have a child and commands Avraham regarding *bris milah* (Ch.17)!

In the very last *perek* of the *sedra*, Hashem promises Avram that their names are no longer Avram and Sarai, but Avraham and Sarah, and that together, they will have a child.

The covenantal community, which began with Avraham and the covenant of *milah* in this week's *sedra*, will continue, by Divine promise, through the child promised to Avraham and Sarah, namely, Yitzchak. And through this child, the covenantal community would become a *teaching community*. With Sarah as mother and Avraham as father, new roles in the covenantal community would be formed, as father/mother pass the *mesorah* onto child/student, ensuring that our national destiny and mission would continue and endure.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik zt'l, the Rav, movingly teaches, "Judaism apparently considers the act of education to be synonymous with the act of faith.

Indeed, educational endeavors require the teacher... to turn one's face to the future and sacrifice continually for a great vision that may never be realized during the teacher's lifespan.

"It is not implausible to link the verb '*a-m-n*' to '*em*', 'mother', since she is the foremost teacher of and believer in the child. A mother will never despair of her child, nor will she spare any effort to further her child's welfare (see Bereishis 21 when Yitzchak is born and Sarah orders Avraham to send Yishmael away), even though she does not expect to live long enough to enjoy the fruits of her toil and sacrifice. She is the most unselfish being. Her faith in her child can never be shaken. She will patiently try to do some particular thing for her child over and over again, since failure, however disappointing, does not weaken her determination to bring out the best and the finest in the child. The *em*, the mother, is unconditionally committed to her child, in whose capabilities she has unrestricted trust.

"To believe and to bring up are identical accomplishments... The element of faith is indispensable for any pedagogical endeavor. A teacher who lacks confidence that his pupil is able to grasp the ideas he passes on to him will never be successful. The teacher must also have faith that learning will have a moral impact upon the disciple. We believe that knowledge is redemptive and a therapeutic performance. A pessimist must never do any teaching or be entrusted with the care of a child, since his efforts are doomed to failure from the very outset. All educational activities are identical with mothering, for what is mothering if not displaying unlimited faith in a

child? ... In a word, the religious teacher is an instructor, a teacher, an educator charged with the mission of completing G-d's works... He must have faith in G-d and, at the same time, faith in man; he is both a *ma'amin* and an *omen*, patient and courageous. Avraham was such a person" (Abraham's Journey, p.97-99).

The director of a certain *cheder* in Beit Shemesh came to consult with Rav Aharon Leib Shteinman zt'l regarding the acceptance of children from a certain family into the *cheder*. Other parents in the school were pressuring the administration not to accept the children. R' Aharon Leib was incredulous. "It is *gayvah* to insist that you are better than another person and to reject a child based on such haughtiness!" he exclaimed. "But the father is acting crazy!" the principal countered. "He's using any and all means possible to push in the children!" "Other parents in the school also want the best *chinuch* for their children," R' Aharon Leib countered. "Why isn't the principal calling *them* crazy? The parents pushing the school to not accept these children are full of *gayvah*!" He then repeated several times, "*Gayvah, gayvah, gayvah*!"

R' Aharon Leib continued, "With the criteria some schools are setting up today, even Avraham *Avinu* would not be accepted to a 'good' school! After all, he was the son of Terach, an idol merchant! Rikva *Imeinu* would definitely have trouble getting accepted as well, with Besuel for a father and Lavan for a brother! And our *Imahos* Rachel and Leah, daughters of Lavan, the swindler, would not get accepted either. In fact, a good portion of our Patriarchs and Matriarchs would not be able to get into our schools today! In

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The Tower of Babel, Avraham Avinu, and the Bet Hamikdash



Rabbi Menachem Leibtag
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The Torah tells us absolutely nothing about Avraham's past. Why not? The Midrashim are replete with beautiful stories reflecting the special qualities of this unique personality. The verses themselves, however, offer us no clue as to why G-d suddenly designates him as the father of His special nation.

The explanation of this enigma may lie in a transition that occurs in the Biblical narrative towards the end of Parshat Noach. Heretofore, the Chumash tells us about the development of mankind as a whole. For example, in chapter ten the Torah tells us how the seventy nations evolved from the descendants of Noach's three sons. Suddenly, at the end of Parshat Noach (in chapter 11), the Torah becomes far more discriminatory, focusing specifically on the descendants of Shem and then on Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov and his family. What triggered this shift, and wherein lies its significance?

Presumably, the answer should be provided right at the point where this transition occurs: in Breishit chapter 11 – the Tower of Babel narrative. The people of the world gathered to build a city and a tower for the expressed purpose of “making for themselves a name” (11:4). Rather than promoting the awareness of G-d and devoting themselves to the

glorification of His Name, the people did just the opposite: they sought to extol their own greatness.

G-d therefore interfered and disrupted the construction, and the ensuing dispersion ultimately led to the formation of multiple nations. However, it is precisely at this point in Chumash that its focus shifts to the story of G-d's choice of Avraham Avinu. In light of the events of Tower of Babel, G-d designates a single nation – whose destiny will be to redirect mankind towards a theocentric, rather than anthropocentric, mentality. Towards this end, G-d summoned a qualified, righteous personality, Avraham Avinu, and promised him a special nation that would inherit a special land for the purpose of representing Him to the rest of mankind.

Avraham wastes no time getting to work. Although clearly this destiny requires first the formation of a nation living on its land, Avraham sowed the seeds of this destiny by “calling out in the Name of Hashem” – the antithesis of the Tower of Babel – in Bet-El (see 12:8, 13:4). As Ramban explains, Avraham would assemble audiences and teach monotheism.

The ultimate contrast to the Tower, however, will not emerge until Bnei Yisrael will inherit their land and build the Bet Hamikdash, as alluded to in Sefer Devarim. In his farewell speech,

Moshe refers to the Temple in numerous instances as “the place G-d will choose to have His NAME dwell therein” (see in particular Devarim 12). In direct contrast with the builders of the Tower, who gathered the entire world to a VALLEY (facing downward) to construct a city with a tower in its midst to exalt mankind – Bnei Yisrael will assemble all the nations to the Temple MOUNT (facing upward) to the city of Jerusalem with the Temple in its midst to exalt G-d.

Yeshayahu (2:1-4) beautifully captures this ultimate purpose of the Bet Hamikdash: “In the days to come, the mountain of Bet Hashem will stand high above the mountains... and all the nations shall gaze on it with joy. Many peoples shall go and say: Come let us go up to the House of G-d, that He may instruct us in His ways and that we may walk in His paths – for TORAH shall come forth from out of Tzion, and the word of G-d from Yerushalayim...”

This universal goal underlies G-d's designation of Avraham Avinu. The Torah tells us nothing of his superior qualities in order to focus instead upon Avraham's response to his mission. This may teach us, his progeny, how we must relate to the chosen destiny of Knesset Yisrael: not as a reward, but rather as a challenge and mission.

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Brisk, when I was growing up, there was one central *cheder* for those who wanted a Jewish education – we all learned Torah together” (Reb Aharon Leib, Artsroll, p.151-152).

With the birth of the covenantal community, the teaching community

was born. Father/mother teaches child; teacher/rebbe teaches *talmid* (student). It is with unlimited faith, unbounded patience, and unrestrained love that the *mesorah* is transmitted from one generation to the next. And with these ideals in mind, Avraham and Sarah were

promised that they would have a child. It is from them that we learn for our day and age. For though times have certainly changed, the commitment of mother/teacher to the child, and father/rebbe to the eternal covenant, remain a constant *m'dor la'dor*, from generation to generation.

The Uniqueness of the Avot



Rabbi Eli Mansour

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Parashat Lech Lecha begins as G-d commands Avram to leave his home and go to *Eretz Yisrael*. The Commentators ask why the Torah uses the dual-phrase '*Lech Lecha*,' and not just '*lech*'?

The Ba'al HaTurim, in his commentary on the Torah, offers two answers. First, he notes that the numerical equivalent (*gematria*) of *lech lecha* is one hundred. G-d hinted to Avram that he would not see the blessings he was promised until he reached the age of one hundred. Second, G-d hinted to Avram that he would die in one hundred years, at the age of one hundred and seventy-five.

The rabbis teach us that leaving his birthplace and traveling to an unknown destination was one of the ten tests (*asara niseyonot*) which G-d tested Avraham. However, we might ask why this is considered to be a test, as G-d promised him that he would receive children, money,

and fame. If so, this doesn't seem to be a very difficult test!?

Among the other tests, the Midrash relates that Avraham threw himself into a fiery furnace rather than worship Nimrod. [On] the one hand, this appears to be the greatest test, as Avraham was willing to sacrifice his life for G-d. However, it appears leaving his home was greater than the other tests. The Jewish people, throughout history, succeeded in momentary tests, similar to Avraham's test of faith. However, an open-ended test, day after day, is much harder.

G-d commands Avraham to move to Eretz Yisrael, where there is a famine, and he must leave to Egypt, where his wife is taken captive. Avraham experiences one problem after the other. This test spanned years; it is harder to 'live' a sacrifice than to 'die' in sacrifice.

The Mesilat Yesharim explains that every day we are tested. These are the day-to-day tests that we confront, and they are

difficult. Great people don't only pass their momentary tests, but they excel day after day.

The Ramban explains that our forefathers were unique in that their actions created templates for the rest of Jewish history. This is known as '*maaseh avot siman lebanim*.' For example, he explains that just as Avraham went into the land of Israel and settled at Hai, years later Yehoshua's first stop when he brought the people into Israel in Hai. Similarly, the Ramban explains that just as Avraham went to Egypt because of a famine, and G-d punishes Pharaoh for taking Sarah, and then Avraham is released and sent away with gifts, years later the sons of Yaakov go to Egypt due to a famine, and after being enslaved by Pharaoh they are set free with great wealth. Avraham created the templates for Jewish history. For this reason, it is important to carefully study the lives of the Avot, who created these templates for their descendants.



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Same Place, Worlds Apart



Rabbi Moshe Weinberger
Congregation Aish Kodesh, Woodmere

Rav Pinchas Koritzer frequently said that until *parshas Lech Lecha*, before Avraham Avinu, the world was in a state of confusion. When Avraham came into the world, however, kindness and Hashem's *שְׁמוּת*, salvation, entered the world. Let us see how Avraham's life brings clarity to our world.

Without any introduction, Hashem began speaking to Avraham with the words *לך*, "Go!" With these words, our history began abruptly and without any preface. Hashem did not even tell him exactly where he was going. We know now, however, that Avraham was being sent to *Eretz Yisroel*, the land of Israel. The beginning of our *parsha* seems to imply that Hashem suddenly gave Avraham a new commandment, to leave his birthplace of Ur Kasdim and travel to *Eretz Yisroel*. The remarkable thing is that just a few *psukim* earlier, at the end of *parshas Noach*, we learn that Avraham had already left his birthplace and was already on his way to *Eretz Yisroel*. He had merely been waylaid in Charan. The *pasuk* says "And Terach took Avram his son, Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, the wife of Avram his son, and they went out of Ur Kasdim with them to go to the land of Kena'an [*Eretz Yisroel*]..."

We therefore see that it was Terach's idea to leave Ur Kasdim and move to Kena'an before Hashem ever spoke to Avraham. Why does the Torah present "Go!" as if it were a commandment to do something that Avraham was not already on his way to do? In addition, we must understand why Hashem tells Avraham to leave his birthplace. As we saw earlier, Avraham was no longer in his birthplace of Ur Kasdim. He was already in Charan, on the way to Kena'an! Finally, we must understand why Terach calls *Eretz Yisroel* Kena'an, but Hashem does not call it by

name, but instead calls it "the land that I will show you."

It is clear that there are two ways to go to the same destination, *Eretz Yisroel*. There is "*Aliyas Avraham*" and "*Aliyas Terach*." Why did Terach decide to "make *aliya*?" The Torah makes a point of omitting the reason, perhaps because there are numerous reasons someone may move from one country to another. He may have moved for economic, political, or cultural reasons. Alternatively, he may have moved to escape something in Ur Kasdim. There are numerous reasons why Terach may have wanted to move to Kena'an. But Avraham moved to *Eretz Yisroel* for one reason: it was Hashem's will. There was no natural, rational reason for Aliyas Avraham. *Eretz Yisroel*, to Avraham, was only defined as "the land that I will show you," the land where Hashem wants him to live. Even later on, Avraham names Yerushalym "Hashem appeared" in order to show "Hashem appeared on this mountain."

Terach, however, called *Eretz Yisroel* "Kena'an" because it had absolutely no spiritual significance to him. For him, Kena'an was simply a destination to which he could flee and nothing more. For Avraham, every inch of *Eretz Yisroel* was a revelation of G-dliness, another opportunity for "and you shall walk before me." Everywhere he went, he built altars. Kena'an and *Eretz Yisroel* were the same place, but for Avraham and Terach, they were worlds apart.

Throughout history, our people have made *aliya* in two different ways. Even when the Jews left Egypt to go to *Eretz Yisroel*, there were two types of *aliya*, as we see in the *pasuk* "their going out for their travels... their travels for their going out." For some Jews, their *aliya* was just "their travels for their going out," meaning that they only wanted to go to *Eretz Yisroel* because they just wanted to escape

the slavery of Egypt. For many, however, it was "their going out for their travels," their departure from Egypt was not for its own sake. They were leaving primarily because they wanted to go to *Eretz Yisroel*, and not simply because they wanted to leave Egypt behind.

Hashem told Avraham to "Go!" as if it were a sudden command to do something new because He wanted to emphasize to Avraham that his *aliya* to *Eretz Yisroel* was not a continuation of Terach's journey to Kena'an. It was to be a completely new type of *aliya* with exactly the opposite purpose of Terach's. For Avraham's *aliya*, he was told to go "from your birthplace, from your father's house." Avraham had to leave behind his father's attitudes and travel to *Eretz Yisroel* with a new purpose.

For Avraham, the connection between the people of Israel and the land of Israel is not about some particular quality or advantage of the land. It is based on the will of Hashem. Hashem chose this place as the land where His unbreakable connection with the people of Israel would be manifest. That is where the three parts of one whole are united as one: Hashem, *Eretz Yisroel*, and the Jewish people.

That is why, in his covenant with Avraham, Hashem told him to take "three calves, three goats, and three rams" and cut them in half. There are three types of animals and three of each animal because of the inseparable relationship between the three partners, Hashem, the Jewish people, and *Eretz Yisroel*. They were cut in half to show that none of them can exist separately from the others. They would be incomplete. The connection between them cannot be broken because they are united by Hashem's will. The Jewish people and the land of Israel are chosen by Hashem and are therefore eternal.

Why Abraham Fell In Love with the Land



Rabbi YY Jacobson
TheYeshiva.net

An old Jewish lady sold pretzels on a street corner for 25 cents each. Every day a young well-dressed man would leave his office building at lunchtime, and as he passed the pretzel stand, he would leave her a quarter, but he never took a pretzel.

This went on for more than seven years. The two of them never spoke. One day, as the young man passed the old lady's stand and left his quarter as usual, the pretzel lady spoke to him.

"Sir, I appreciate your business. You are a very good customer, but I have to tell you that the pretzel price has gone up to 50 cents."

The Farmers

The Midrash on this week's Torah portion Lech Lecha relates a fascinating episode:

When Abraham traveled through various cities of Mesopotamia, he observed the people engaging in excessive eating, drinking and frivolousness. He said, "I do not want to have a part in this land."

When Abraham arrived at the mountains surrounding the north of the Land of Israel he saw the inhabitants engaged in "pruning during the season of pruning" and "plowing during the season of plowing." Abraham declared: "I wish I could have a lot in this land."

So G-d told Abraham: "To your offspring I will give this land."

Upon reflecting on this Midrashic tale, four questions come to mind.

First, what was it about the agricultural labor in the Land of Canaan that inspired

Abraham to "fall in love" (so to speak) with the country?

Second, the fact that G-d promised this land to Abraham for all his children, as the eternal homeland for the Jewish nation, indicates that the agricultural nature of the country's inhabitants somehow captured the legacy of Judaism. But what is the unique connection between Judaism and farming?

Third, why, given the multitude of labors associated with agronomy and farming, Was Abraham impressed by the two labors of pruning and plowing?

Finally, the order in the Midrash seems amiss. The work of plowing—cutting and turning up the soil to make it fertile for production—must precede the work of pruning, which consists of removing weeds and harmful vegetation from the midst of the beneficial produce, and it takes place only after the plowing season. Why does the Midrash tell us that Abraham observed first the season of pruning, and only after that, the season of plowing?

Thou Shall Prune

The essence of the Jewish experience consists of two phases: pruning and plowing.

Every human being is a garden, containing within his or her psyche weeds and roses. Man is a duality of heavenly grandeur and earthly beastliness, a vision of G-d and a mountain of dust, a ray of infinity and pompous aridity. Each of us operates on two levels of consciousness: a self-centered consciousness that makes us prone to narcissistic and immoral behavior, and a transcendental, Divine consciousness

that is the source of our ethical and spiritual yearnings and convictions.

Our mission in life consists of pruning, of removing the weeds from the roses. We must ensure that the mountain of dust does not eclipse the vision of G-d. Each day of our lives we are called to challenge the forces of aridity and darkness in our psyche and to cultivate the plants of light and G-dliness within our hearts.

Life is a daily battle for transcendence. On our own, we are a complex mixture of good and negative forces competing within us. Our choice and calling is to prune, to consistently cultivate the noble and pure dimensions in our psychological "garden," to reign in the beast and reveal the Divine.

Thou Shall Plow

This work impressed Abraham deeply. But this was not all. He was even more moved by a philosophy and a lifestyle in which the season of "plowing" followed the season of "pruning."

Many of us have engaged at some point in our lives in a battle against the noxious and poisonous "plants" in our psyche. Many of us have fought battles for our souls, integrity and happiness. With sweat and toil, we pruned the weeds and – at least to some extent – our roses emerged.

Yet at some stage during the struggle, we put down the tools to relax. At some point, most of us make peace with the status quo; we become complacent with our garden, satisfied with our moral and spiritual condition. Occasionally we may look in the mirror and know that we can

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Lech Lecha: Ivri



Rabbi Judah Mischel

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In 1978, Anatoly (Natan) Sharansky was sentenced on trumped-up charges for treason and espionage by the Russian court. Facing the threat of execution or long-term imprisonment, Sharansky refused to bend. His defiant, final statement in the Soviet court was a message of resistance and faith, addressed to his wife Avital and the world: “I am happy that I lived honorably, at peace with my conscience. I never compromised my soul, even under the threat of death... To the court I have nothing to say. To my wife and the Jewish people I say, *Next year in Jerusalem.*”

After nine years isolated and alone in prison, on an icy winter day in 1986, Sharansky was released in a prisoner exchange at Berlin’s Glienicke Bridge. Sharansky slowly climbed out of the car, closed the door behind him and began to walk.

Suddenly, he began to stagger; he zigged a step or two to the left before starting forward again. A few more steps and he zagged back toward the right. Left, right, zig, zag....

The American officials waiting to receive him on the other side watched with concern and disbelief. Was Sharansky drugged, injured or too traumatized to walk normally?

When he reached the western bank of the river, Sharansky smiled and assured the American officers that he was fine, and explained: his KGB tormentors had instructed him to get out of the car and “walk straight across”, directly to the other side of the bridge. After so many long and painful years, in his first steps toward freedom, zig-zagging across the bridge was his last act of holy defiance. There was no way he was going to start following their orders now!

■ ■ ■

Our sedra chronicles the revolutionary journey undertaken by our great-grandparents, Avraham and Sarah. Every step of the way provides insight and moral instruction for us:

וַיֵּלֶךְ לְמַסְעָיו מִנֶּגֶב וְעַד-בֵּית-אֵל
הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר-הָיָה שָׁם אֶהְיֶה בְּתַחֲלָה...

“And he went on his journeys, from the south and until Beit El, until the place where his tent had been previously...” (13:3)

Rashi tells us that when Avraham returned to Eretz Canaan from Egypt, he lodged in the same *achsanya*, inn, that he had stayed at when traveling down to Egypt. This, Rashi explains — based on the Gemara (Arachin, 16b) — is to לְמַדָּךְ, דִּרְךְ אֶרֶץ, “teach us the appropriate way to act.” For שְׁלֹא יִשָּׁנָה אָדָם מֵאֲכָסְנֵיָא שְׁלוֹ, “Despite the fact that Avraham Avinu came on his return trip a wealthier and more influential man than he was on the first part of the journey, he showed respect for those who provided for him before he achieved fame and success along the way.

וַיֵּלֶךְ לְמַסְעָיו, “Avraham went on *his* journeys”...via the same routes he had taken before. This seemingly mundane detail is *limedcha*, “to teach us” how to conduct ourselves, how to treat others, how to behave in a Jewish way. Reb Nosson Breslover explains that this is an example of מעשה אבות סימן לבנים, “the actions of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs are models for their children,” for every one of us must go through all the ten trials of Avraham Avinu and walk the paths of our *Avos* and *Imahos* before us (*Likutei Halachos*, Onah 3:1). Indeed, all of the journeys, travails, tests and experiences detailed in Torah are for the purpose of *limedcha*, “to teach us.”

Yechezkel haNavi recalls the extensive and extraordinary accomplishments of Avraham Avinu, accentuated by the fact that אחד היה אברהם, “Avraham was *echad*, one man” (33:24). Rebbe Nachman of Breslov (*Likutei Mohara*”n, *hashmata*) explains why Avraham is called *echad*: he served G-d without being concerned for other people’s opinions. Unfazed by cultural norms and those who opposed his way of life, Avraham was *echad*, a *yachid*, ‘individual,’ a nonconformist who did not compare himself to others. He served G-d without ‘looking over his shoulder.’ Furthermore, raised in an idolatrous home, Avraham Avinu did not follow their orders. Rather, he confidently blazed an original path in service of Hashem. He was not held back by doubts, demons or negative memories from his past.

According to the *Midrash*, our Zeidy is called אברהם העברי, Avraham *halvri*, meaning ‘the one who is on the other side,’ or ‘who stands opposite’: “The whole world stood on one side and he stood on the other.” This is the essence not only of Avraham Avinu, but also of us, heirs to his spiritual legacy. On one side, the world goes in its *derech*, and we, on the other side, if need be, walk in ours.

The image of Natan Sharansky, the released prisoner of conscience, criss-crossing the bridge dividing East from West is one of the enduring, iconic moments marking the eventual fall of the Soviet Union and end of the Cold War. It is also a quintessentially Jewish moment, a reminder, לימדך, to teach us to zig-zag across the bridge toward a life of freedom, to blaze our own path, to forging an authentic identity as modern day *Ivri*. May we move forward with faith, joy, confidence and defiance... And no matter what the world may think, may we affirm, “Next year in Yerushalayim.”

Afflictions Affect

Mrs. Shira Smiles

International lecturer and curriculum developer

There are many aspects of the relationship between Sarah Imeinu and Hagar that demand exploration and explanation. Yet, two particular words are notably curious, “*vate’aneha Sarai* – and Sarai afflicted her (Hagar).” (Bereishit 16:6) After Sarah gives her maidservant Hagar to Avram, Hagar immediately conceives and begins to treat Sarah with disdain. Can we accept this “afflicting” as Sarah Imeinu’s reaction to Hagar’s disrespect? How are we to understand Sarah Imeinu here, this great woman, mother of our nation, as causing distress to another person?

Ramban indeed notes that this was a failing on Sarah Imeinu’s part, and the Jewish people are suffering from her behavior to this day. Throughout the generations, Hagar’s descendants, the Arab nation, have been afflicting us. According to the Ramban, this is a measure for measure response to what Sarah Imeinu did. Because the Avot and Imahot were so great, their actions have ramifications for all time, for good, and otherwise.

Rav Eliyahu Ki Tov, in *Sefer Haparshiyot* has a more positive perspective. He explains that great people are tested in areas that run counter to their defining *middot*. If a person whose *middah* is *chessed*, can never act in a harsh way when the circumstances demand that he does, then he cannot really be considered a person of *chessed*. He is rather led by soft or weak emotions. It is only when one can use his *middot* appropriately, that we know he is consciously in control of this *middah*. Thus, we see Avraham Avinu continually being tested to act with harshness, sometimes even cruelty, to truly ascertain the strength of his *middat hachessed*. Likewise, the unusual situation between Sarah and Hagar was a test for Sarah Imeinu. Was she able to act against her nature to prove her ability to act appropriately under any circumstance? In this regard, Sarah Imeinu passed her test and it is considered a great merit to her. It may even have been greater than giving Hagar to Avram to begin with. We see from here that there are times when it is appropriate to act with strength and it takes wisdom

and consultation to know what is called for when.

Rav Sher, in *Leket Sichot Mussar* takes a completely different, and rather creative approach. Sarah Imeinu oversaw teaching Torah to the women of her community. Hagar’s role was similar to that of Eliezer in the Beit Midrash of Avraham Avinu. They were responsible for facilitating and explaining the teachings. When Hagar married Avraham Avinu, she felt that she could be promoted to the role of teacher, not simply a coordinator and assistant. Sarah Imeinu understood that Hagar was not capable of the more advanced position and demoted Hagar to her previous role. For Hagar, this was the greatest affliction possible, she had a deep desire to educate and develop. Indeed, we see that Hagar merited to see many angels when she fled. She had a deep spiritual side to her, but unfortunately, she allowed her haughtiness to be her undoing. The lesson is clear: genuine service of Hashem comes with humility and self-effacement.

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do better, but we learn to survive and even be happy with our destination.

Moral and spiritual complacency, though tempting and easy, is an invitation to the abyss because of two reasons: First, life is a cliff. If you are not ascending upward, you are falling downward. The forces of selfishness and darkness never leave you

completely, and if you drop your guard, failing to fight them every day of your life, they may overtake you.

What is more, truth is infinite. The moment we become spiritually fixed in a mode and smug with our condition, we have lost touch with truth and with G-d. A relationship with G-d must include a

steady yearning; an ongoing search. What was wholesome yesterday is broken today.

Abraham was transfixed by the vision of a human being who, following a successful season of pruning, returns to the plow to commence his spiritual process all over again, as though he or she never began.

His Brother was Taken Captive



Rabbanit Yemima Mizrachi
Popular Torah teacher and author

A very complex relationship existed between Avraham and Lot, centered on the question, “Am I his brother?” At the very moment when Avraham decides to separate from Lot, when one would go to the right and the other to the left, at that very moment he said the sentence that we did not stop saying before the slaughter: “We are brotherly people!”

This sentence is a reminder to two people who suddenly can no longer stand in the same place, pray in the same place, graze in the same place: “Avram said to Lot, “Let there be no strife between you and me ... for we are kin... please let us separate: if you go to the left, I will go to the right and if you to the right, then I to the left... Thus they parted from each other, Avram remained in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled in the cities of the Plain”.

Pay attention to the last letters of each of the words: “ויפרדו איש מעל אחיו, אברם”.

שלום – Peace. The Baal HaTurim explains that sometimes, in order to achieve peace, there must be a separation between brothers.

But then: “And Avram heard that his brother had been taken captive.” Lot was taken into captivity with his wives and children, and Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch, who did not miss a small nuance

in the language, wrote: “Before taking his leave, Avraham said, We are a brotherly people, as if to say, People! It is incumbent upon us (it is our duty) to be brothers! Not so now, when he hears of the misfortune that befell Lot, the unfortunate Lot was immediately his ‘brother’!”

Neither the right nor the left are relevant at a time like this, said Avraham, our brother is in captivity. And what did he do next? “He mustered his retainers.”

It can be seen that the central foundation here is in the education of this nation: You cannot entrench yourself in your school when disaster comes, all the good you have accumulated in your education, you must now “muster” others, be partners. “And he mustered his followers: he took his apprentices out of the circle they had been in, out of the loneliness they had been in. Until now, Avraham has distanced himself from any contact with others, educating people to their pure destiny, amidst the corruption of the world. It did not occur to him to educate Lot, and until now Avraham had kept away from all contact with the outside world for fear of corrupting his disciples. But now, at the time of *pikuach nefesh*, Avraham was not afraid of danger. He “emptied his disciples”, so to speak, emptied them from his house, and Avraham’s family, which until now was Lot, and the people of Sodom

mocked at their loneliness, but now they hastened to rescue them.”

There is no greater human beauty than this interpretation of Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch, who knew the storms of generation, the dangers of exposure, but understood as a great educator that the highest educational value is this brotherhood that reaches out to another brother in need.

Only this wonderful realization frees the captives in the end: “He brought back all the possessions; he also brought back his brother Lot and his possessions, and the women and the rest of the people.”

It seems to me, *Ribono shel Olam*, that we have arrived there, in that “valley of equals” spoken of in the *parashah*. We will never be the same, but in this terrible war we will give our lives to identify the DNA of a brother or sister. In this war, we never had to hear the reproach: “People! We are brothers!” We are simply brothers without anyone ordering us to do anything. We sent our followers to their brothers, that’s how we were raised. That is also how future generations will be educated. This is how we will return our brothers and sisters home.



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