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# HAMIZRACHI

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**PARSHA WEEKLY**

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**Picture of the Week**

This week, Mizrachi of Central America was formally founded, with its headquarters based in Guatemala. At the meeting hosted by Rabbi Yosef Garmon, the inaugural board members gained a deeper insight into the work and philosophy of the Mizrachi movement around the world, presented by Rabbi Yeziel Wasserman, Co-President of World Mizrachi.









This week's edition is dedicated for the merit of the safe and speedy return of Matan Shachar ben Anat, a member of Tzevet Perez tank crew, together with all injured, missing, and captured, and dedicated to the memory of Tomer ben Shay hy"d, Itai ben Ruby hy"d, and Daniel Shimon ben Harav Doron Eliezer 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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# The Legacy of Avraham

## Saint, Scholar, and Soldier



Rabbi Doron Perez

Executive Chairman, World Mizrachi

No sooner had the first Jewish family been established and already one of its members had been taken captive.

on harming his family and capturing his nephew.

### What are Avraham's Options?

What was Avraham supposed to do at this point about the unfortunate capture of his nephew?

Firstly, Lot was his errant nephew who not only chose out of his own volition to separate from Avraham, but he also chose, of all places, to settle in the wicked town of Sodom known for its blatant immorality. Even today, thousands of years later, the term sodomy is a pejorative one. Sodom was a perverse place and that's where Lot chose to live – perhaps his fate and that of the city had been justly sealed.

Secondly, even if Avraham wants to try to help and rescue Lot, he seems to be in a powerless position. He is not the leader of a country nor a military man in charge of an army – how can he possibly do anything that has an impact on the course of regional war? Lot and the people of Sodom were held by a powerful regional coalition of four kings.

Thirdly, even if Avraham was somehow able to go out to war in an attempt to save Lot, is this an appropriate path for the man of G-d to take? Avraham was blazing a new trail of holiness and morality. The belief in monotheism – in One purposeful and personal G-d who created every human being in His Image. Indeed the more Avraham sought out G-d, the more he found G-dliness in his fellow man. This

### Lot – The First Jewish 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 Sodom amongst the losing kingdoms and the verse clearly records him being taken into captivity:

וַיִּקְחוּ אֶת-כָּל-רֶכֶשׁ סֹדֹם וְעִמְרֹהָ... וַיֵּלְכוּ

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

וַיִּקְחוּ אֶת-לוֹט וְאֶת-רֶכֶשׁוֹ בֶן-אֶחָיו אַבְרָם וַיֵּלְכוּ...

*They also took Lot, the son of Abram'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 homes as hostages and captives. Incredibly, the Midrash notes that the conquerors of Sodom 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

is evident in a number of incidents regarding Avraham. When G-d informed him that he was going to destroy the wicked city of Sodom, he protested – how can the G-d of justice act unjustly? He pleads with G-d to allow him to save the city on behalf of the righteous individuals. When pagans came to his tent as wayfarers in the desert, not knowing that they were angels, he brought them into his home, treated them like noblemen, and looked after their every need. For Avraham, the love of all human beings meant that even those who were his ideological opponents as idolaters were treated with dignity and respect. Our Sages identify Avraham as an absolute pillar of loving-kindness.

Is it possible that the paragon of kindness, sensitivity, and hospitality could also be a man of war? War entails fighting, violence, and killing. It is bloody, tragic, and takes human life. Can the epitome of the man of G-d, kill others and destroy His image?

Yet, this is exactly what Avraham does.

### Man of War – Warrior of Justice

Without any directive from Hashem to act in any particular way, Avraham springs straight into action upon hearing of his nephew's capture:

וַיִּשְׁמַע אַבְרָם כִּי נִשְׁבָּה אָחִיו וַיֵּרָק אֶת-חֲנִיכָיו יְלִידֵי  
בֵּיתוֹ... וַיֵּרָדוּ עַד-דָּן

*“When Abram heard that his brother had been taken captive, he took out his apprentices, 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 to Damascus, and returns all the property and people that had been stolen including his nephew Lot. The fact that Avraham and his followers numbering only a few hundred people could subdue mighty kings implies not only courage and daring but also a preparedness to fight in war. Indeed, Ralbag – Gersonides – says that

here חניך – apprentice – means not only apprentices in following *mitzvot* (as Rashi says) but also apprentices in courage and battle preparedness. They were trained warriors in order to defend themselves.

What drove Avraham to respond in this way?

It seems to be a clear unmitigated feeling of brotherly love and kinship for a family member. The verse describing the moment Avraham heard of his nephew's capture, describes Lot not as his nephew but rather as his brother. He is clearly being driven by this deep sense of brotherhood and camaraderie. It is unacceptable to leave a brother behind in captivity – who could do such a heartless thing? Rescuing him is the most decent and obvious thing to do.

Furthermore, it is the most just thing to do. How can Avraham as a man of G-d tolerate the despicable and blatant injustice of taking civilian captives, especially when it is his brother? Avraham turns immediately into the champion warrior of justice – to combat immorality, evil, and injustice.

It is Avraham's kindness and sensitivity and love of his family that finds expression in his pursuit of justice. Not only is this not a contradiction to the Jewish view of holiness and G-dliness, but it is its very fulfillment. In the Jewish view, holiness and righteousness are inextricably linked to collective care for society and social justice.

War is not something any moral person craves and desires – it is ugly and every sensitive holy person would love to avoid it. But, in a world where there is so much barbarism and brutality, the good people are called upon to defend themselves. Evil happens in the world not only because of evildoers but because of the silence and impotence of the good. Avraham, as a source of goodness and blessing, could not stand by the side, certainly not when his own nephew, a family member, had been taken captive. He had to fight for justice and return the hostages.

Avraham, the man of decency and kindness, is also the man of righteousness and

justice. He is heroic, selfless, and courageous in his fight against injustice. He springs into action with total disregard for his life and the lives of all of his followers. He is willing to sacrifice everything to save even an errant member of his family and people and restore justice.

### Rav Kook on Holiness

Indeed, says Rav Kook, (Orot HaMilchama 2) this is the way of all our great spiritual giants in Tanach. It was not only Avraham who was both the paragon of kindness and the warrior of justice, but also the greatest spiritual giant, Moshe, the very man who brought the Torah back from Mount Sinai and revealed the word of G-d to the people. It was Moshe who directed the battle against Amalek and he who led the people against the mighty kings Og of the Bashan and Sichon of the Emori. Was it not King David, the sweet singer of Israel and author of Tehillim, who was the same fearless and fearsome warrior who defeated Goliath, becoming head of an army and then king of all Israel, leading the people into battle?

Avraham as the founding father of our people was a man of incomparable kindness as well as a warrior for justice. A man of love and peace and a man of war in fighting against oppression. Avraham, Moshe, and David are towering examples of Jewish holiness – that being a scholar and a soldier; a man of morality and the military; to be holy and heroic, are seamlessly part of the Torah's wholesome view of holiness.

Who is holier than the students and apprentices of Avraham, Moshe, and David today – those who combine a life of studying Torah and righteousness in their personal lives with heroic selflessness for the defense of their brothers and sisters on the battlefield?



PERSONAL GROWTH

# For Our Own Good



**Rabbi Reuven Taragin**  
Educational Director, World Mizrahi  
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## L'Tov Lanu

Moshe Rabbeinu uses his last words, eternalized by *Sefer Devarim*, to encourage the Jewish people to continue following Hashem and observing His *mitzvot* after his death. In *Parshat Eikev*, he minimizes Hashem's ask of the Jewish people: "And now, what does Hashem ask from you? Merely to fear Hashem, your G-d."<sup>1</sup> The Gemara<sup>2</sup> asks the obvious question: How could Moshe present fear of G-d as a small thing? People spend their whole lives trying to achieve it and still find it elusive.

We can add a second question: After mentioning *yirat shamayim*, Moshe lists many other requests: following Hashem's path, loving Him, serving Him with all our heart and soul, and observing His *mitzvot* and *chukim*. Even if fear of G-d was a small thing, how could Moshe present this entire list as a small ask?

To answer these questions, Tosafot<sup>3</sup> and the Ramban<sup>4</sup> focus on Moshe's last two words. After listing Hashem's requests, Moshe adds the words "*l'tov lach*, for your own good."<sup>5</sup> Hashem indeed asks for many things, and a life committed to Torah and *mitzvot* is indeed rigorous and detailed; but all of it, including the seemingly mysterious *chukim*, has intrinsic value for us. We should not see His requests as burdensome because they are all for our sake.

Hashem made this point to Avraham Avinu when He gave him his first *mitzvah* — the *mitzvah* of *brit milah*. Hashem told Avraham that *milah* would make him "*tamim* (complete)."<sup>6</sup> Though the *mitzvah* required him to circumcise part of his body, the removal completed him.<sup>7</sup>

Moshe Rabbeinu made the same point regarding *all the mitzvot*. Though we should observe *mitzvot* because Hashem commands us to, our fulfillment also benefits us. *Mitzvah* observance is not just a duty, but a privilege. This is why

Yirmiyahu HaNavi describes the abandonment of *Avodat Hashem* as "*ra va'mar* (bad and bitter)."<sup>8</sup> It is bad because it constitutes rebellion against Hashem; it is bitter because one forfeits the benefits intrinsic to *mitzvah* fulfillment.

## He Knows What's Best For Us

Though we fulfill *mitzvot* for Hashem's sake, He does not need our fulfillment, and it does not help or contribute to His existence in any way. The *medrash*<sup>9</sup> gives the *mitzvah* of *shechitah* (ritual slaughter) as an example of this idea. "Does Hashem care which side of the neck we slaughter? Does the *shechitah* affect or assist Him? Clearly, the *mitzvot* are for our sake — to refine and purify us, not for Hashem's benefit."

Rebbe Chanaya ben Akashya famously makes this point regarding the multitude of *mitzvot* we are commanded to observe. Anticipating one viewing the long list of *mitzvot* as onerous, Rebbe Chananya explains that they are actually all gifts from Hashem. "*Ratzah Hakadosh Baruch Hu l'zakot et Yisrael. L'fichach hirbah la'hem Torah u'mitzvot.*"<sup>10</sup> Hashem enlarged the amount of Torah and *mitzvot* in order to grant us more beneficial opportunities.<sup>11</sup>

The Ramban understood the benefit of *mitzvah* fulfillment as the message of the famous *pasuk* that links life to *mitzvah* observance: "*U'shmartem et chukotai... va'chai ba'hem.*"<sup>12</sup> Chazal derived the concept of *pikuach nefesh* from this *pasuk*: we do not sacrifice our lives to observe (most) *mitzvot*. The Ramban added a second lesson: Not only do *mitzvot* not supersede life, they also help us live life and build society properly.

The Ramban's *talmid*, who authored the *Sefer HaChinuch*, builds on this idea and applies it to many *mitzvot*, which he explains are "for the good of Hashem's creations." Hashem created us and, therefore, cares about our welfare and knows what contributes to it. This is why He

commanded us to recite *berachot* (which facilitate His blessings to us)<sup>13</sup> and confess sins (which helps us distance ourselves from them),<sup>14</sup> prohibited sacrificing *kodshim* outside of the *Mikdash* (which reinforces murderous tendencies),<sup>15</sup> and repeated important prohibitions (so we would know to be cautious about their fulfillment).<sup>16</sup>

## Wise Advice

The Rambam also emphasizes the benefits *mitzvot* offer. Appreciative of their salubrity, the Rambam<sup>17</sup> describes *mitzvot* as "advice" from the "great advisor" meant to help us improve ourselves. Though *mitzvot* are commandments incumbent upon us to observe, the Rambam portrays them as Hashem's "advice" because the path they chart is also the best way to live.

Interestingly, the Rambam characterizes all *mitzvot*, even *chukim* (*mitzvot* whose reasons are unknown to us), as advice.<sup>18</sup> One might have understood *chukim* differently. Though it is natural to see *mishpatim*, *mitzvot* whose reasons are known, as meant for our benefit, *chukim* could be seen as merely a way of showing our commitment to Hashem's Will.<sup>19</sup> The Ramban felt otherwise. Though we do not know how or why Hashem mandated *chukim*, we believe they also benefit us.

This is why the Torah mentions *chukim* first in the (aforementioned) *pasuk* that characterizes *mitzvot* as facilitating life: "*U'shmartem et chukotai v'et mishpatai asher ya'aseh otam ha'adam va'chai ba'hem.*"<sup>20</sup> We might have assumed that only *mishpatim* facilitate a better life. By putting *chukim* first, the *pasuk* emphasizes that *chukim* do so as well.<sup>21</sup>

In his *Moreh Nevuchim*,<sup>22</sup> the Rambam proves this point from the Torah's assertion that other nations will see our "*chukim* and *mishpatim*" as "wise," "bright," and "just," and, therefore, us Jews as a "wise and bright" people.<sup>23</sup> The *pasuk* mentions *chukim* specifically to teach us that they,

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RASHI TEACHES US HOW TO TEACH

# Lech-Lecha: Theology vs. Ideology



**Rabbanit Shani Taragin**  
Educational Director, World Mizrahi

**M**ultiple messages of *emunah* may be learned from the beginnings of the stories of our forefather Avraham, who in addition to preaching monotheism, is the first personality in the Torah of whom it says “ויאמן”, he believed in Hashem and His promises (Bereishit 15:6)! It is rather strange then, that the Torah does not divulge the origins of Avraham’s belief and foundations of faith. Though there are many midrashic teachings to fill in the lacunae of the seventy-five year prelude to Lech-Lecha ranging from philosophical questioning to iconoclastic idol-smashing and miraculous salvation from a fiery furnace, the Torah does not explicate Avraham’s background.

Clearly, the Torah is cautious not to create a one-track model for developing one’s beliefs. Every individual should be taught, questioned, and challenged differently. Had the Torah revealed Avraham’s upbringing, we may have thought to model his education, ignoring the importance of catering our parenting specifically to each child’s needs and personality. It is nonetheless striking as the Ramban writes (Bereishit 12:2), that the Torah does not even provide basis for the selection of Avraham to journey to a promised land! It must be, he explains, that the people and culture in Ur Kasdim were detrimental and dangerous to his religious beliefs and on his own Avraham ran away to Canaan to escape a culture of polytheism and antisemitism. Hashem called out to him in Charan to encourage his travel to Canaan so Avraham would call out in the name of G-d in the chosen Land!

The Sfat Emet (Lech-Lecha 1871) based on the Zohar, explains that Avraham’s faith is in fact first manifest in the Divine command of *Lech-Lecha*. He may have believed in Hashem before, but there were other monotheists (e.g., Noah, Shem, Malki Tzedek) in his generation with similar philosophical ideas, who also must have been called upon with the command of “*Lech-Lecha*”; Avraham, however, is the first one with the fortitude to obey the Divine imperative. That is the beginning of his greatness and

basis for selection for Divine promises and covenants.

But when did he muster the courage to forfeit his entire past – his homeland, birthplace, and family in anticipation and belief in Divine promises of a great future? Rav Saadia Gaon, Ibn Ezra and Radak all maintain that Avraham was commanded “*Lech-Lecha*” while still in Ur Kasdim – he initiated the move to Canaan and his father agreed to come along as far as Charan. Rashi and Ramban, however, explain the verses in chronological order – Terach initiated a move to Canaan from Ur Kasdim either due to persecution (Ramban) or for personal reasons (Abarbanel – i.e., to change his “*mazal*” – the barrenness of his son Avraham). The commentators agree that Terach, either joining or initiating the journey was motivated by ideological beliefs; he lived based on a system of ideas and ideals, especially those which form the basis of economic or political theories (e.g., Zionism, capitalism, communism). Ideologies, however, are subject to change based on convenience, social zeitgeist, political pressures, military threats, and as such, upon reaching Charan, Terach’s subjective ideology of settling in Canaan was replaced by the more popular “fad” of Charan culture.

The Torah therefore clarifies that when Avraham Avinu journeyed to Canaan, he was motivated by theological belief in Hashem. Whether he was commanded in Ur Kasdim or in Charan, it was clear that he was driven by faith in absolute Divine command and not by relative values of the time. This is a powerful lesson of Jewish faith and education – teaching our children and students to consistently calibrate our motivations and ensure that they are in sync with Hashem’s will and not our self-fashioned ideologies. A theologically-driven lifestyle is oft-filled with sacrifice and scorn from our ideological-liberal contemporaries. Like Avraham Avinu, it demands at times forfeiting our own sense of “self”, comforts, and popularity. Hashem, therefore not only assures Avraham and his offspring of a grand future, but within the command itself – “*Lech-Lecha*” – “walk FOR

you” (Rashi – for your benefit, for your pleasure)! What may appear as a sacrifice and loss will ultimately lead to greater gifts. This theological encouragement repeats itself in the Avraham stories – e.g., when he forfeits a wealthy warlord alliance with the king of Sedom, Hashem promises him immediately thereafter that though it may take four-hundred years, his descendants will ultimately procure tremendous wealth and will be the sole conquerors and inhabitants of the Land. Similarly, just when he thinks that fulfilling “*Lech-Lecha*” x2, imploring him to sacrifice his son and entire future, Hashem assures him an unconditional oath of national perpetuity.

“*Lech-Lecha*” may therefore also be interpreted (e.g., Emek Davar, Noam Elimelech) as “Go-TO YOURSELF” – i.e., a theologically driven life is that provides self-realization and actualization. Ideologies change, political slogans come and go, moral standards are subjective, but G-d’s commands are absolute and demand of us consistent commitment even during challenging times! These absolute imperatives are in fact TRUTHS that enable us to live the most quality-and-godly-oriented lives, the choicest way to live. The Kotzker Rebbe once approached a *chasid* in his court asking him why he had come. “I have come to find G-d,” the *chasid* replied. “But G-d is everywhere. You could have found Him just as well had you stayed at home,” countered the Rebbe. “You should have come to find yourself!”

This week’s *parsha* reminds us of the constant Divine call to each and every one of us – “*Lech-Lecha*” – to find our true selves and help our children/students find their true selves, by following Hashem’s commands. Don’t be swayed by popular ideas and political pressures and ideologies, rather heed theological beliefs and remain steadfast in religious commitment. Like our forefather Avraham, we must “educate” ourselves to hear and answer the resounding call of “*Lech-Lecha*” with “*Hineni*” – “we are ready”; And have no fear – the Divine guarantees of personal and national rewards do not expire!

# Halachic Q&A



**Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon**

Nasi, World Mizrahi | Rabbi of the Gush Etzion Regional Council

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**Question: Given everything that has happened in the last year, how can we know that the Nation of Israel will merit having the land of Israel?**

Answer: In this week's *parsha*, the Holy One, blessed be He, informs Avraham that He will give him the land. Avraham then asks (15: 8): "Whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?"

Avraham's words are very challenging. The Gemara (*Nedarim* 32a) speaks very critically about this:

Rabbi Abahu said in the name of Rabbi Elazar: Why was Avraham our forefather punished, and his children enslaved in Egypt for two hundred and ten years? ... Shmuel said: Because he went too far in testing the attributes [i.e., the promises] of the Holy One blessed be He, as it is written, "Whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?"

According to the Gemara, Avraham was punished in the wake of this doubt in faith, and as a result the people of Israel were enslaved in Egypt.

However, this interpretation is problematic, since two verses earlier, we have seen the immense faith Avraham shows. Avraham is an old man, and the Holy One, blessed be He, makes him a promise:

"And behold the word of the Lord came to him, saying: 'This man shall not be your heir; but he that shall come forth out of your own bowels shall be your heir.'"

And the Torah goes on to tell us how on receiving this promise testifies that Avraham fully believed:

"And he believed in the Lord and He counted it to him as righteousness."

Indeed, the Gemara (*Megillah* 31b) explains the verse, "Whereby shall I know that I will inherit it?" in another way:

And he said, O Lord G-d, Whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it. Said Avraham before the Holy One, blessed be He: Master of the Universe, perhaps G-d forbid, Israel will sin before Thee and Thou wilt do to them as Thou didst to the generation of the Flood and the generation of the Division? He answered, Not so. He then said before Him: Master of the Universe, by what shall I know this? He said: Take me a heifer of three years old, etc.

Avraham did not waver in his faith in G-d. Avraham feared that the nation of Israel would sin and thereby lose the Land of Israel, so he asked, "Whereby shall I know?" How can I know that the Nation of Israel will merit having the land of Israel?

According to this, the difference between the two promises was that when the promise was made regarding his offspring, Avraham was certain that the promise would be fulfilled because it depended on God alone. But when the promise involved the inheritance of the Land of Israel, Avraham knew that the inheritance of the Land of Israel depended on the actions of the people of Israel, and he was apprehensive about this. Avraham knows that that if Israel sins, God forbid, the land may eject them: "That the land vomit not you out also, when ye defile it, as it vomited out the nation that was before you." (Leviticus 18:28)

And what is G-d's response?

We will not now enter into all the details of the vision of the Covenant of the Pieces, but one thing is clear: G-d makes an covenant with Avraham and in this manner tells him that, indeed, the people of Israel will sin and be exiled and punished, but the people of Israel will return to the Land of Israel: "And in the fourth generation they shall come back hither; for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet full." There

is a covenant between the people of Israel and G-d, and this covenant is eternal. Even if the people of Israel sin, in the end, they will return to Israel.

The Gemara in *Megillah* (ibid.) also explains that God offers us the consolation that through the Nation of Israel offering sacrifices, or even by merely reciting the order of sacrifices, G-d will forgive them:

He then said before Him: Master of the Universe, This is very well for the time when the Temple will be standing, but in the time when there will be no Temple what will befall them? He replied to him: I have already fixed for them the order of the sacrifices. Whenever they will read the section dealing with them, I will reckon it as if they were bringing me an offering, and forgive all their iniquities.

We can go even further. There is really no contradiction between "And he believed in the Lord" and "Whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?" Even a person who believes with perfect faith sometimes feels difficulties. Sometimes a person can be helpless and say, "I will lift up my eyes to the hills; from where will my help come?" However, immediately afterwards he will know to say, "My help is from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth."

Simply put, the Nation of Israel will return to its land once the Amorites will be so saturated with sins that they will not be entitled to remain in Israel. However, it is possible to understand the verse "And in the fourth generation they shall come back hither;" as follows: the people of Israel will in the future return to G-d, through repentance, and will, in any event, return to the Land of Israel. (This may perhaps be dependent on a dispute among the Amorites [Talmudic sages] whether the Nation of Israel will be redeemed in any event, or whether their deliverance will occur only after repentance).



# בין אב לבנו: תרח ואברם

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**פ**רשת השבוע נפתחת בציווי של ה' לאברם: "לך לך מארצך ומולדתך ומבית אביך אל הארץ אשר אֶרְאָה" (י"ב, א).

ציווי זה מתחיל את מסעו של אברהם אבינו, ושל עם ישראל לאורך הדורות, אל הארץ המובטחת.

עזיבת בית וארץ מולדת כרוכה בקשיים רבים. ביניהם התמודדות עם תרבות שונה; שפה זרה; קשיי פרנסה; ואף מרחק מהמשפחה.

האתגר של עזיבת המשפחה הוא אחד האתגרים המשמעותיים ביותר. האדם העוזב את משפחתו ועובר למקום אחר נאלץ לבנות את חייו מחדש ללא תמיכה משפחתית, ובמקביל לכך, גם המשפחה שנשארת מאחור מרגישה בחסרוננו.

אולם אצל אברהם אבינו עזיבת המשפחה הייתה חלק מהעניין: מטרת ההליכה לארץ כנען הייתה לא רק הגעה אל ארץ ה', אלא גם התנתקות מתרבות אור כשדים.

למעשה, אברם התחיל לעזוב את אור כשדים לא כאשר ה' ציווה עליו "לך לך", אלא עוד הרבה פנינו, כאשר התחיל להכיר את בוראו, ולעבוד אותו בשונה מדרך חיו של אביו ומכל הסביבה האלילית בה חי, ומתוך עימות גלוי איתם, כפי שמתאר המדרש:

"אמר ר' חייא: תרח עובד צלמים היה, פעם יצא לדרך, הושיב אברהם מוכר תחתיו, בא אדם ורצה לקנות, אמר ליה: בן כמה אתה? אמר ליה: בן חמשים, אמר ליה: ווי לאותו אדם, שאתה בן חמשים שתחווה לפסל בן יומו! והיה מתבייש והולך לו.

פעם אחת באה אשה והביאה קערת סולת. אמרה לו: הקרב לפנייהם. קם, לקח מקל ושרבם, ונתן המקל ביד הגדול שבהם. כיוון שבא אביו אמר לו: מי עשה להם כך? אמר לו: מה אסתיר ממך? באה אשה ונתנה להם קערת סולת, היה כל אחד אומר אני אוכל תחילה, קם הגדול שבהם ולקח המקל ושרבם. אמר לו: מה אתה משטה בי? האם יש בהם דעת? אמר לו: ולא ישמעו אזניך מפיו! נטלו תרח ומסרו לנמרוד. אמר לו: השתחוה לאש. אמר לו: נשתחוה למים שמכבים את האש... אמר: לא נסגוד אלא לאור הריני משליכך בו ויבוא אלהיך שאתה משתחוה לו ויצילך ממנו... ירד אברם לכבשן האש וניצל... (בראשית רבה ל"ח, ח, בתרגום חופשי)

המדרש מתאר כיצד אברם מנפץ את פסילי אביו, ויחד איתם מנפץ את כל אמונתו והשקפת עולמו. אברם מתעמת עם אביו על דרך החיים שלו. העימות

חריף עד כדי כך שאביו מוסר אותו לשלטונות, אשר משליכים אותו לכבשן האש על מנת להרגו.

זהו עימות קיצוני בין אב לבנו, על השקפת עולם. אם כן, ההליכה של אברם לארץ כנען כרוכה גם בניתוק מבית אביו ומהתרבות בה גדל, ואליה הוא מתנגד.

**אולם, למרבה ההפתעה, העימות בין תרח לאברם איננו מופיע בתורה, ואפילו להפך - לפי המתואר בסוף פרשת נח ההליכה של אברם לארץ כנען מתחילה יחד עם אביו תרח וביזמתו:**

וַיִּקַּח תֶּרַח אֶת אַבְרָם בְּנוֹ וְאֶת לוֹט בֶּן הָרֶן בְּנוֹ וְאֶת שְׂרֵי פְלֹתוֹ אֵשֶׁת אַבְרָם בְּנוֹ וַיֵּצְאוּ אֹתָם מֵאוּר כַּשְׁדִּים לָלֶכֶת אֶרְצָה פְּנֵעוּ וַיָּבֹאוּ עַד חָרָן וַיֵּשְׁבוּ שָׁם: וַיְהִי יְמֵי תֶרַח חֲמִשׁ שָׁנָיִם וּמְאַתַּיִם שָׁנָה וַיָּמָת תֶּרַח בְּחָרָן (י"א, לא-לב).

מה ראה תרח לעזוב את אור כשדים, וללכת דווקא לארץ כנען?

ניתן להבין שתרח היגר מאור כשדים לכיוון כנען מסיבות טכניות (כלכליות וכד'). אולם מכיוון שהתורה טורחת לכתוב זאת, נראה שיש להליכה זו משמעות. יתכן שתרח הבין שצאצאי שם צריכים לחיות בכנען ולכן הלך לשם, כפי שמפרש החזקוני: "ויקח תרח את אברם בנו, ללכת ארצה כנען כי היה מזרעו של שם ולהם נתנה הארץ למורשה כדכתיב ויהי כנען עבד למו... ויצאו אתם מאור כשדים במצות הקדוש ברוך הוא כדכתיב אני ה' אשר הוצאתיך מאור כשדים, ולפי פירוש זה לא נתפרש היכן צוהו. ויבאו עד חרן ולא הספיק תרח לבא בארץ כנען וימת בחרן" (חזקוני לבראשית י"א, לא).

לפי פירוש זה, נראה שתרח היה בכיוון הנכון. הוא הבין שארץ כנען היא המקום הראוי לבני שם, וציית לרצון האלקי הזה.

אפשרות אחרת להבנה היא שתרח הלך לכנען בעקבות הציווי לאברהם:

"ויקח תרח - אחר שאמר האל לאברם לך לך, ואמר אברם לתרח אביו בשם האל, כי האל צוהו לצאת מן הארץ נתרצה לדבר בנו ויצאו עמו ואחר שנתרצה לצאת תלה עיקר המעשה בו כי הוא האב והיוצאים בניו לו..." (רד"ק לבראשית י"א, לא).

לפי פירוש רד"ק, קודם היה ציווי לאברהם ללכת לכנען, ורק בעקבות זאת תרח יצא ללכת לשם. תרח הקשיב לבנו והלך איתו לארץ כנען. לפי זה אמנם תרח לא יזם את ההליכה לכנען, אלא רק הלך בעקבות בנו שקיבל נבואה, אך הנכונות של תרח לעזוב את השקפת עולמו הקודמת וללכת בדרך של בנו היא מרשימה ביותר.

אם נחבר בין דברי המדרש לבין הליכתו של תרח לכיוון ארץ כנען, נקבל תמונה מורכבת יותר על היחסים בין תרח לאברם. למרות שאברם מנפץ את השקפת העולם של תרח אביו, ולמרות שבתחילה תרח מוסר את בנו לשלטונות, בשלב מסוים הוא פותח את עיניו ומקשיב לבנו, לאמת שבדבריו. אולי בעקבות הצלתו של אברם מכבשן האש, תרח הבין שאברם צודק, והיה מוכן להודות בכך, לשנות את דרכו, וללכת עם בנו.

אמנם, תרח איננו הולך עם בנו עד הסוף, הוא נעצר באמצע הדרך, בחרן, ומת שם.

אברם יצטרך להמשיך את דרכו לארץ כנען בכוח עצמו. זו הדרך החדשה שהוא סולל בעולם - דרך האמונה באלקים, המנותקת ומנוגדת לתרבות ממנה הגיע.

**היחסים בין תרח לאברם מוארים כעת באור מרוכך יותר. אין כאן רק ניפוץ ושבירה והתרחקות, אלא גם כבוד, נכונות להקשיב, לקבל ואפילו ללכת יחד במידה מסויימת.**

**הגדלות של האב, תרח,** היא בנכונות שלו לשוחח עם הבן שלו למרות שהוא מנפץ את השקפת העולם של אביו. הנכונות לשמוע ולקבל את דבריו ולהכיר באמיתותם. לאפשר לו לעזוב ולסלול דרך חדשה, ואפילו ללכת איתו במידה מסויימת.

ויחד עם זאת, להבין את ההפרדה ביניהם - ההגעה אל ארץ כנען היא דרכו של אברם ולא דרכו של תרח. תרח יישאר בחרן ויאפשר לבנו לעזוב אותו, להיפרד לגמרי, ולהמשיך לבדו לארץ כנען. בשלב מסוים צריכה להיות היפרדות של הבן מאביו, והוא צריך להמשיך בדרכו בעוד האב נשאר מאחור. האב לא יכול לעשות את כל הדרך של הבן, כי לכל אחד יש מקום אחר ותפקיד אחר בעולם, אבל הוא יכול לאפשר לבן שלו, לתמוך בו, ולא להתנגד לדרכו. לא לזרוק אותו לכבשן האש.

**הגדלות של הבן, אברהם,** היא ביכולת להכיר את בוראו ולסלול דרך חדשה בניגוד לדרכו של אביו, ומצד שני לא למרוד לגמרי אלא לשוחח עם אביו, לנסות לשכנע, ולהסכים ללכת יחד במידה מסויימת. אברם הבחין שההליכה של תרח לכיוון ארץ כנען הייתה חיובית, ואת זה הוא מוכן לאמץ ואפילו להמשיך. כאשר ה' אומר לו "לך לך אל הארץ אשר אראך", הוא מבין שאביו כיוון אל הארץ הנכונה, ומתוך קבלת דברי אביו הוא יודע בדיוק מהו הכיוון אליו יפנה. אברם ידע להבחין מהם הדברים הטובים והנכונים שאביו עשה ואמר, לכבד אותם ולהמשיך את דרכו בהם, ומצד שני להבחין מהם הדברים הבעייתיים שאותם צריך לנפץ, לעזוב ולהשאיר מאחור.

# The Power of Blessings and Good Wishes



**Sivan Rahav Meir**  
World Mizrahi Scholar-in-Residence

**A**luma Ha'itan is the sister of Amichai Vanino, who fell in a heroic battle defending Kibbutz Kfar Aza on Simchat Torah. She wrote to me that I write a lot about blessings and good wishes, and that she wanted to share with me the impact that those things had on her life.

"When my brother Amichai was killed, I was still single. During the *shiva*, a friend of my mother came to console us. Before leaving, she gave the traditional parting blessing and then said: 'Let's meet on happier occasions.' My friend's mother had a son, Meir, who was also single, and so my mother replied: 'Let's meet at the wedding of Meir and of Aluma.' My mother meant the wedding of each of them, but when Meir's mother heard these words, it occurred to her that they could marry each other. One thing led to another and indeed, after several months, we were standing under the *chuppah!*"



This week, 3 Cheshvan, marked the *yahrzeit* of Harav Ovadia Yosef—a man of towering influence and deep humility. I had the privilege of covering Rav Ovadia for years as a news anchor, witnessing firsthand the personal moments behind his public persona. Amid the cheers of vast crowds, as he ascended the stage, few knew of the words he would whisper quietly to himself: "Ovadia, dust and ashes. Ovadia, dust and ashes." It was a grounding reminder to remain humble despite the fervent adulation around him.

With my own eyes, I saw him cry. "Millions of Jewish children in Israel and around the world don't know how to say *Shema Yisrael*," he would exclaim tearfully at those massive gatherings. It pained

him deeply. He could never accept that so many felt distant from their heritage.

I've already forgotten the turbulent political headlines from those years. But what I'll never forget are those whispers and those tears.



As we begin reading the Torah portion of "Lech Lecha" in *Sefer Bereishit*, Avraham Avinu and Sarah Imeinu take their place on the world stage—a position they continue to hold. They introduced the world to justice, kindness, faith, and Torah, setting a profound example. Their journey leads in a clear direction—the Land of Israel—and they are given an eternal promise from G-d. Despite the many challenges ahead, G-d assures them they stand on the right side of history and that they will ultimately be a blessing for the entire world.

In today's terms, "influencers" and "followers" are everywhere. If you think about it, Avraham and Sarah were among the greatest influencers in human history, with billions of followers. It all started in their modest tent and spread outward through their charisma, commitment to education, and their deep faith in G-d. Even today, we refer to Avraham and Sarah as our "father" and "mother."

This year, more than ever, it's important to remember the struggles they endured—famine, war, captivity, hostility, and infertility—as we face our own challenges. While we can't click a "follow" button for Avraham and Sarah, we can still follow their example by reading about their lives. We can continue to draw strength from them and from the promise in this week's *parasha*: "And all the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you."



I witnessed the following inspiring scene this past Simchat Torah, at an event organized by the Keshet Yehudi organization for bereaved families, families of hostages, and about 100 survivors of the Nova festival. While everyone was dancing with the Torah, one young man sat on the side, trembling and looking down as he recalled the atrocities he had witnessed the year before, and his friends who had been killed or kidnapped while he fled for his life.

Eliyahu Libman, a bereaved father, sat down next to the young man. He took his hand and said, "Do you realize that exactly one year ago today, my Elyakim was rescuing people until he himself was murdered? It's the first anniversary of his death. So, listen to me—today is his memorial day and also the day of your rescue. I ask that each year you not only remember those you have lost but also celebrate the miracle you experienced—that on this day you were given a new lease on life."

The young man listened and stopped shaking. Libman continued: "But I also want to request something else. You tell me that for the entire year you've been tormented by the question of why your friends were killed and you survived. I want you to ask yourself a different question: Why am I still here? Because, if you survived, there must be a reason for it—there is more work for you to do in this world. So think: If you have been given another chance, how are you going to fill your days with purpose? Ask yourself: What am I doing with the tremendous gift that I received on that day?"



# For the Shabbat Table



**Rabbi Danny Mirvis**  
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“**A**nd the King of Sedom said to Avram, ‘Give me the people and take the goods for yourself.’ And Avram said to the King of Sedom, ‘I have raised my hand to Hashem, G-d most high, Creator of heaven and earth. That from a thread to a shoelace – I shall not take from anything that you have so that you shall not say, ‘I made Avram rich.’ Except that which the young lads ate and the portion of the men that went with me, Aner, Eshkol and Mamre – they shall take their portion.’” (Bereishit, 14:21-24)

Following Avram’s successful intervention in the War of the Kings, the King of Sedom offers him to take from the spoils. Fearful that the King of Sedom would take credit for his great wealth, which, in fact, came as a result of Hashem’s blessings, Avram

refused to accept even the smallest item, “from a thread to a shoelace.” Nevertheless, Avram allowed the men who were with him to take their share of the spoils.

If Avram felt it was wrong to take from the riches, why did he allow his men to do so? Was he not concerned that people would attribute the wealth of those who followed him to the King of Sedom, as opposed to Hashem?

A great lesson is taught in the name of the Chafetz Chaim: From Avram we can learn that when it comes to being “*Machmir*” (strict), a person can accept a stringency upon himself, but he should not impose stringencies on others. Avram’s decision not to take from the spoils was a “*Chumra*” (stringency). He was fully entitled to take it but decided against it for his own personal reasons. Nevertheless, he allowed

those who came with him to take their rightful portion, for indeed, there was nothing inherently wrong with doing so.

From Avram we learn that if somebody decides to be strict on themselves, that is great, but they should not impose their stringencies on others. A leader who permits something for his community whilst preferring to be stricter for himself is not necessarily a hypocrite, but perhaps someone who understands the need to make Torah and religious observance as accessible as possible within the confines of *halacha*.

By being careful with our own actions whilst being tolerant of others, may we only deserve blessing from Hashem.

Shabbat Shalom!

*Continued from page 4*

too, have deep meaning and contribute to our growth.

In Pirkei Avot, Rebbe Yehudah HaNasi encourages us to consider the cost-benefit ratio of *mitzvah* fulfillment. Moshe Rabbeinu’s words add an essential dimension to this consideration: *mitzvah* observance offers not only heavenly rewards, but also worldly benefits.

May appreciating this inspire us to passionately pursue *mitzvot* fulfillment.

1. Devarim 10:12.
2. Berachot 33b.
3. Da’at Zekeinim, Devarim 10:12.
4. Devarim 10:12.
5. Devarim 10:13. See also Devarim 4:40, 5:16,26, 6:3,18,24, 12:25,28, and 22:7. This characterization of mitzvot is similar to Moshe’s explanation of the hardships faced in the desert (Devarim 8:16).
6. Bereishit 17:1.
7. See Rashi (Bereishit 17:1), who explains that milah changed Avraham’s status from a ba’al mum to tamim. See also Sefer HaChinuch 2, who sees the mitzvah of milah as a model for our ability and responsibility to improve ourselves spiritually. In contrast, see the Ramban (Bereishit 17:1) who understands the words “v’heyei tamim” as referring to an independent separate mitzvah.

8. Yirmiyah 2:19.
9. Bereishit Rabba 44:1. See also Midrash Tanchuma, Shemini 8.
10. Mishnah, Makkot 23b.
11. See the Rambam’s commentary to the mishnah, where he explains that people earn their portion in the next world by performing mitzvot with the right intention. Hashem gives us 613 mitzvot so people can find at least one they can fulfill perfectly.
12. Vayikra 18:5.
13. Sefer HaChinuch 430.
14. Ibid., 364. See also 537.
15. Ibid., 186.
16. Ibid., 362.
17. Hilchot Temurah 4:13. See also Zohar (Yitro 82 and many other places).
18. In his Moreh Nevuchim (3:31), the Rambam makes clear that he sees all 613 mitzvot as beneficial to us. Interestingly, in Hilchot Temurah, the Rambam makes the point regarding “rov” (which can be understood to mean “most”) of the mitzvot. Either way, in both places, the Rambam makes clear that chukim are also beneficial to us.
19. In his Moreh Nevuchim (3:31), the Rambam points out that many have an easier time viewing things they don’t understand as G-dly. He rejects this approach with the words “chalilah lo, chalilah” and asserts strongly that everything Hashem commands us is for our own benefit.
20. Vayikra 18:5.
21. See Rambam, Hilchot Me’ilah (8:8), who derives from the placement of chukim before mishpatim

- in this pasuk that we should not respect chukim less than mishpatim. He does not explain that this is because they too are for our benefit and does not make the connection to the end of the pasuk (va’chai ba’hem). Interestingly, in the pasuk before (18:4), the Torah placed mishpatim before chukim. This could be because that pasuk links mitzvah observance to Hashem’s authority. Therefore, it needs to emphasize mishpatim more than chukim. Thus, the two pesukim (18:4-5) taken together emphasize the two reasons to observe all the mitzvot. A precedent for the idea that the Torah mentions what it fears we may disrespect first can be found in Rashi, Vayikra 19:3.
22. Moreh Nevuchim 3:31. The Rambam saw these pesukim as central to our understanding of both Torah and mitzvot and our relationship with other nations. In his Shemonah Perakim, the Rambam uses the pesukim as the basis of his objection to an approach to medrash that he sees as illogical. Since an approach that is illogical will not be respected by other nations, it must be incorrect. In his Igeret Teiman, the Rambam uses the pesukim to explain antisemitism. Other nations hate us because they are jealous of how wise our mitzvot are.
23. Devarim 4:6-8.

# The Power of Example



Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt"l

So familiar are we with the story of Abraham that we do not always stop to think about what a strange turn it is in the biblical narrative. If we fail to understand this, though, we may fail to understand the very nature of Jewish identity itself.

Here is the problem: Until now the Torah has been concerned with humanity as a whole. Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel are human archetypes. The former represent the tensions between husband and wife, the latter the rivalry between siblings. Both are stories about individuals and both end tragically, the first with paradise lost, the second with bloodshed, fratricide and death.

Then comes another pair of stories – the Flood and the building of Babel – this time about society as a whole. Each is about the tension between freedom and order. The Flood is about a world where freedom (violence, lawlessness, “everyone doing what was right in their own eyes”) destroys order. Babel is about a world where order (the imperialist imposition of a single language on conquered peoples) destroys freedom.

All four narratives are about the human condition as such. Their message is universal and eternal, as befits a book about G-d who is universal and eternal. G-d as He appears in the first eleven chapters of Genesis is the G-d who created the universe, made all humanity in His image, blessed the first humans, and who – after the Flood – made a covenant with all humankind. The G-d of the universe is the universal G-d.

Why then does the entire story shift in Genesis 12? From here onward it is no longer about humanity as a whole but about one man (Abraham), one woman (Sarah), and their children, who – by the time of the book of Exodus – have become a large and significant people, but still no

more than one nation among many.

What is happening here? Does G-d lose interest in everyone else? That surely cannot be the case. At the end of Genesis, Joseph says to his brothers:

“You intended to harm me, but G-d intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.”

*Gen 50:20*

It may be that the phrase “many lives” means no more than the lives of his own family (so Targum Yonatan understands it). But the plain sense of the phrase *am rav*, “a great people,” suggests Egypt. Not until Exodus are the Israelites called *am*, a people. Joseph is saying that G-d sent him not merely to save his family from famine, but also the Egyptian people.

That, too, is the point of the book of Jonah. Jonah is sent to Nineveh, the Assyrian city, to persuade the people to repent and thus avoid their own destruction. In its closing words, G-d says to the prophet:

“Should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left?”

*Jonah 4:11 (and see Malbim ad loc.)*

G-d is concerned not only with Israel, but with the Assyrians, despite the fact that they would become Israel’s enemies, eventually conquering the northern kingdom of Israel itself.

Amos famously says that G-d not only brought the Israelites from Egypt, but also the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir (Amos 9:7). Isaiah even prophesies a time when the Egyptians will worship G-d, and He will rescue them from oppression as he once rescued Israel (Isaiah 19:20-21). So it is not that G-d loses interest in humanity

as a whole. He feeds the world. He sustains all life. He is involved in the history of all nations. He is the G-d of all people. Why then the narrowing of focus from the universal human condition to the story of one family?

The philosopher Avishai Margalit, in his book *The Ethics of Memory*, talks about two ways of thinking: “i.e.” and “e.g.” The former speaks of general principles, the latter of compelling examples. It’s one thing to talk about general principles of leadership, for instance – think ahead, motivate, set clear goals and so on. It’s another thing altogether to tell the story of actual leaders, the ones who succeeded, the role-models. It is their lives, their careers, their examples, that illustrate the general principles and how they work in practice.

Principles are important. They set the parameters. They define the subject. But without vivid examples, principles are often too vague to instruct and inspire. Try explaining the general principles of Impressionism to someone who knows nothing about art, without showing them an Impressionist painting. They may understand the words you use, but these will mean nothing until you show them an example.

That, it seems, is what the Torah is doing when it shifts focus from humanity as a whole to Abraham in particular. The story of humanity from Adam to Noah tells us that people do not naturally live as G-d would wish them to live. They eat forbidden fruit and kill one another. So after the Flood, G-d becomes not only a Creator but also a teacher. He instructs humanity, and does so in two ways: i.e. and e.g. He sets out general rules – the covenant with Noah – and then He chooses an example, Abraham and his family. They are to become role-models, compelling examples, of what it means

to live closely and faithfully in the presence of G-d, not for their sake alone but for the sake of humanity as a whole.

That is why five times in Genesis the patriarchs are told:

“Through you all the families, or all the nations, of the earth will be blessed.”

Gen. 12:2, Gen. 18:18, Gen. 22:18, Gen. 26:4, Gen. 28:14

And people recognise this. In Genesis, Malkizedek says about Abraham, “Praise be to G-d Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand” (Gen. 14:20). Avimelech, king of Gerar, says about him, “G-d is with you in everything you do” (Gen. 21:22). The Hittites say to him, “You are a prince of G-d in our midst” (Gen. 23:6). Abraham is recognised as a man of G-d by his contemporaries, even though they are not a part of his specific covenant.

The same is true of Joseph, the only member of Abraham’s family in Genesis whose life among the gentiles is described in detail. He is constantly reminding those with whom he interacts about G-d. When Potiphar’s wife tries to seduce him he says, “How could I do such a great wrong? It would be a sin before G-d!” (Gen. 39:9).

To the butler and baker, whose dreams he is about to explain, Joseph says:

“Interpretations belong to G-d.”

Gen. 40:8

When he is brought before Pharaoh to interpret his dreams, he says:

“G-d will give Pharaoh the answer he desires.”

Gen. 41:16

Pharaoh himself says of Joseph:

“Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of G-d?”

Gen. 41:38

Jews are not called on to be Jews for the sake of Jews alone. They are called on to be a living, vivid, persuasive example of what it is to live by the will of G-d, so that others, too, come to recognise G-d and serve Him, each in their own way, within the parameters of the general principles of the covenant with Noah. The laws of Noah are the “i.e.”. The history of the Jews is the “e.g.”.

Jews are not called on to convert the world to Judaism. There are other ways of serving G-d. Malkizedek, Abraham’s contemporary, is called, “a Priest of G-d Most High.” (Gen. 14:18)

Malachi says a day will come when G-d’s name “will be great among the nations, from where the sun rises to where it sets.” (Gen. 1:11)

The prophets foresee a day when “G-d will be King over all the earth” (Zechariah 14:9) without everyone converting to Judaism.

We are not called on to convert humanity but we are called on to inspire humanity by being compelling role-models of what it is to live, humbly, modestly but unshakably in the presence of G-d, as His servants, His witnesses, His ambassadors – and this, not for our sake, but for the sake of humanity as a whole.

It sometimes seems to me that we are in danger of forgetting this. To many Jews, we are merely one ethnic group among many, Israel is one nation-state among many, and G-d is something we talk about only among ourselves if at all. There was recently a television documentary about one British Jewish community. A non-Jewish journalist, reviewing the programme, remarked on what seemed to her a strange fact that the Jews she encountered never seemed to talk about their relationship with G-d. Instead they talked about their relationship with other Jews. That, too, is a way of forgetting who we are and why.

To be a Jew is to be one of G-d’s ambassadors to the world, for the sake of being a blessing to the world, and that necessarily means engaging with the world, acting in such a way as to inspire others as Abraham and Joseph inspired their contemporaries. That is the challenge to which Abraham was summoned at the beginning of this week’s *parsha*. It remains our challenge today.

#### AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE:

- Why do you think it is important for the Jewish people to be “ambassadors to the world”?
- Why do you think it’s important for other nations to have a relationship with G-d?
- Who else in the Tanach plays a similar educational role that Avraham plays – for both the Jewish people and the other nations?



MIZRACHI



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# The Kinyan of Chuppah



**Rabbi Hershel Schachter**

Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary of Yeshiva University

And He took him [Avraham] outside, and said, "Gaze, now, toward the heavens, and count the stars if you are able to count them!" And He said to him, "So shall your offspring be!" (Bereishis 15:5)

In the natural course of events, *b'derech hateva*, Avraham Avinu and Sarah Imeinu were physically incapable of bearing children. *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* then commanded Avraham to move to *Eretz Yisrael*, and since *Eretz Yisrael* operates on a plane that is למעלה מן הטבע, above nature, he and Sarah would be able to produce a child there. Thus, when Hashem brought Avraham outside, He was saying, "Abandon your astrological calculations, through which you have seen that you are not destined to bear a son (Rashi), for your history will be above nature." Hashem told Avraham to count the stars, assuring him that his descendants would be innumerable as the stars of the sky.

The Ramban explains that if one analyzes the history of any civilization, he will find a period of domination followed by utter demise. The Jewish Nation, however, is למעלה מן הטבע; its history is solely dependent upon *mitzvah* observance. In the language of Rav Soloveitchik, if one were to draw a chart outlining the history of any other nation, it would consist of a predictable rise and fall. Jewish history, on the other hand, would be represented by multiple cycles of peaks and troughs. Indeed, the Ramban considers this principle of מלך לישראל, the idea that Bnei Yisrael are not subservient to the dominion of the stars and constellations, to be one of the *ikarei ha'emunah*. The fate of every other country is governed by the rules and regulations of history, but that of the Jewish Nation is not.

The Rama records the *minhag* to conduct a *chuppah* outside, under the sky, as a *si-man tov*. This invokes the *berachah* given to Avraham, that the couple should be blessed with many children like the stars of the sky.

It is questionable whether remaining indoors and merely opening a skylight above the *chossan* and *kallah* is in fact a fulfillment of the *minhag* to conduct a *chuppah* under the sky. The *minhag* as described by the Rama was to get married outside, just as Avraham went outside to gaze at the stars. Especially in light of the comment of *Chazal* cited by Rashi, that Hashem removed Avraham from *teva*, telling him, "Go out from your astrology," it would seem that the *chossan* and *kallah* fulfill the *minhag* only by walking outside and conducting the *chuppah* under the sky.

The *minhag* to conduct the *chuppah* outside plays a role in explaining an enigmatic statement of the Yerushalmi cited by Tosfos. The Yerushalmi states that a man who marries an *almanah* (widow) on a Friday must be careful to consummate the marriage while it is still day, before the onset of Shabbos, so that he does not violate the *issur derabbanan* of effecting an acquisition on Shabbos. Tosfos explains that with regard to *besulos* (virgins), the *kinyan* of *nisu'in* (marriage) is accomplished through the *chuppah* that takes place in the daytime, and the marriage may therefore be consummated at night, on Shabbos. However, the Yerushalmi asserts, when marrying an *almanah*, the *chuppah* does not create the *kinyan* of *nisu'in*. This *kinyan* is effected only through the subsequent *bi'ah*, and for that reason, one who marries an *almanah* should not engage in the first *bi'ah* on Shabbos.

Some *Acharonim* offer an explanation of the Yerushalmi based on the assumption that the *minhag* of conducting the *chuppah* outdoors existed already in the time of the Yerushalmi. It seems obvious that this *minhag* was observed only for

a young *kallah*, who would benefit from the *berachah* to have many children. When an older widow who was not interested in having more children would get married, the *chuppah* would take place indoors.

Notwithstanding this variation, Rav Chaim Volozhiner (Kesser Rosh 95) does not see why the effectiveness of the *chuppah* should depend on its location. Why should a *chuppah* performed indoors not be *koneh*?

The distinction made by the Yerushalmi may be understood, however, in light of a more general discussion regarding the nature of how *chuppah* accomplishes *nisu'in*. Some understand the efficacy of *chuppah* as being based on the practice described in the *passuk*, ופרשת כנפך על אמתך – "Spread your robe over your handmaid" (Rus 3:9). The Gemara in *Kiddushin* (18b) similarly interprets the *passuk*, לעם נכרי לא ימשול למכרה בבגדו בה, to mean, "He shall not have the power to sell her to another man **once he spreads his cloak over her.**" (Shemos 21:8) Rabbi Akiva's opinion is that the *passuk* teaches that a father cannot sell his daughter as an *amah Ivriyah* (Jewish maidservant) after he had once given her over in marriage by accepting *kiddushin* for her. The phrase בבגדו בה is taken as a reference to an *adon* (master) marrying his *amah* through a process known as *yi'ud* by spreading his cloak over her.

Thus, it seems that placing a *tallis* over the heads of the *chossan* and *kallah*, as is still practiced in some *kehillos*, may have been the original form of *nisu'in*. In fact, the Rashash comments that the Gemara in *Kiddushin* is the source of our practice to perform the *badekin*, which, according to some, serves as the *nisu'in*. Perhaps due to the possibility of *chuppas niddah*,

Continued on next page

# How We Come To Meet Avraham Avinu



**Rabbi Yisroel Reisman**  
Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshiva Torah Vodaas

**T**hough we are taught that Avraham Avinu was given ten *nisyonos* (tests) by Hashem, we must remember the first one does not take place at the beginning of our *parsha* when he was told to travel to *Eretz Knaan*. This is the first test mentioned explicitly in the Torah but we are taught by the Midrash that the first one came when he was thrown into the *Kivshan HaAish*, (the furnace) after refusing to bow down to the idols. This act by Avraham was the first expression by Man of his commitment to Hashem and only Hashem. Why would such an event not be written in the Torah? It is a *nisyon* that, had it been included in Chumash, would have given us such a clear picture and idea of who Avraham was – living a life dedicated to Hashem, a life nobody else had ever known. A second question I would like to propose is regarding Avraham's father, Terach who dies at the end of *Parshas Noach*. However Rashi explains that Terach really continued to live for sixty years after Avraham left Charan. He explains further that the reason the Torah mentioned his death at this point is so that we do not think that Avraham abandoned and dishonoured his father by leaving during his lifetime. The Ramban and several others challenge Rashi by asking – is it really true that the Torah would try to fool us? Could it be

that the *pesukim* were written in a certain way so we don't come to think negatively about Avraham Avinu?

Rav Gedalia Schorr ZT"l (*Ohr Gedalyahu* Page #21) offers an answer which resolves both of our questions – the lack of inclusion in the Torah of the first test Avraham faced and Rashi's answer of the Torah trying to protect the honour of Avraham. He writes in multiple places that when we find the number ten in the Torah such as by the ten *makkos* (plagues) in Mitzrayim or the ten commandments by Har Sinai, this always corresponds to what Chazal teach us in *Pirkei Avos* – בעשרה מאמרות נברא העולם, the world was created with ten utterances by Hashem. By Avraham, Rav Schorr explains, we find this connection as well. When Avraham was taken out of Ur Kasdim, he was a *briya chadasha*, a new creation. We say similarly that when *Am Yisrael* came out of slavery they became a nation and this new entity was brought into the world. The first utterance of creation was that there needed to be this *briya chadasha*, there was something made that had not existed before. When Avraham came out of the *Kivshan HaAish* he was not the same being as he was when he was thrown in initially. He was no longer the old Avraham that was a son of Terach. Terach had been the one who grew angry with his son trying to

sanctify the name of Hashem and ultimately led him to the *Kivshan HaAish*. This relationship between them had ended at this point and the new Avraham was no longer considered the son of Terach. Because of this, the Torah tells us that Terach had died because he was no longer relevant and no longer called the father of Avraham. Furthermore, *Chazal* teach us that though the world had been created in ten individual remarks, we only find the Torah says the word *Vayomer* (and Hashem said) nine times. This is because before *Breishis*, there was no world and nothing occupying the space within it and therefore *Vayomer* was irrelevant beforehand. Explains Rav Schorr this is the same by Avraham. Before being put in the furnace there was nothing to be spoken of because this identity and state of Avraham as we know him had not existed yet. It is only after, when he is Avraham Avinu, we are given the opening words of *Lech Lecha*. This whole previous experience is hidden from us the same way anything before the world's creation is as well. The old Avraham had no place in the Torah. It was only the Avraham who came out of the fire committing himself to Hashem and all he will be commanded that must be taught.

● Edited by Zac Winkler.

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when it would be problematic to engage in this practice, the *minhag* developed in later generations to place a cloth **above** the heads of the *chosson* and *kallah* in the form of a present-day *chuppah*.

However, other *Acharonim* offer a different rationale behind the *kinyan* of *chuppah*. In this view, the poles of the *chuppah*, together with their overlying cloth covering, form a *tzuras hapesach* (doorway).

This in turn has the status of a *mechitzah* (partition), thereby separating the area under the *chuppah* as a *reshus* (domain) that is distinct from the surrounding area. When the *chosson* and *kallah* enter into this "room" together, it is as if the *chosson* takes the *kallah* into his *reshus*. The fundamental difference between an *arusah* (betrothed woman), who has had *kiddushin*, and a *nesu'ah* (married woman)

is that an *arusah* is an *ishes ish* (married woman) who is **not** in her husband's house, whereas a *nesu'ah* is an *ishes ish* who **is** in her husband's house. We can understand, then, that *chuppah* is an act of *hachnasah lir'shuso* – bringing the *kallah* into the *chosson's* *reshus*, and creates the *kinyan* of *nisu'in*.

● Adapted from Rav Schachter on the Parsha III.

# How We Can Learn From Our Tests



**Chief Rabbi Warren Goldstein**  
Chief Rabbi of South Africa

This week's *parsha* begins with a test for Abraham, when G-d asks him to leave his home and his birthplace and his family to journey to an unknown destination – which was ultimately to be the Promised Land for the Jewish people. This was the second in a series of 10 extremely difficult trials that would test Abraham's mettle and mould him into the father of the Jewish People. Among them were being commanded to circumcise himself at the age of 99; his wife Sarah's abduction at the hands of Pharaoh; and, most powerfully of all, G-d's command that he sacrifice his only son, Isaac.

These were tests of his courage and conviction, of his commitment and stamina, of his faith in G-d's justice and ultimate goodness.

Many other great leaders of the Torah faced similar ordeals. Joseph famously withstood many tests of his moral principles and integrity. Potiphar's wife attempted – time and again – to seduce Joseph, and though he was an anonymous 17-year-old slave boy, far away from home, he did the right thing and warded off her advances, even though it eventually cost him his liberty. Languishing in the dungeons after Potiphar falsely accused him, and then later, as viceroy of Egypt – both challenging situations for different reasons – he maintained his faith and integrity, to the extent that our sages describe him as Yosef HaTzaddik – Joseph the Righteous.

King David was another leader who passed many tests of his faith in Hashem's justice and compassion. He was pursued by his father-in-law, King Saul; and his own son led a military coup against him, which forced him to flee his palace. Yet, throughout, he remained faithful and devout.

Like Abraham, Joseph and King David, our lives are filled with episodes that

challenge our faith in G-d, and their unwavering belief under extreme duress serves as inspiration to us all.

What is the purpose of a test, and what does it mean in the context of our relationship with G-d? Firstly, it is important to accept that we can never fully understand the rationale behind G-d's workings in this world. The Talmud (*Berachot 7a*) describes how Moshe asked Hashem why some righteous people suffer and some wicked people prosper. G-d answered: "No man shall see Me and live," (Shemot 33:20) which, on a simple level, means that human beings, constrained by the limitations of our minds, can never fully comprehend the depth of the Divine. Yet, despite these limitations, our sages help us understand the idea of tests and challenges in general terms.

Conventionally, the purpose of a test is to assess the abilities of the one being tested. When G-d is the examiner, however, this makes no sense: He knows everything. He knows us better than we know ourselves. He knows what our capabilities are. What, then, is the purpose of being tested by G-d? Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, known as the Ramban, explains in his commentary on Bereishit that the tests we undergo during our lives aren't for G-d's benefit, they are for our benefit. They give us the opportunity to transform our inherent potential into actual spiritual achievements; by putting the emotional, spiritual and physical resources we were blessed with into action, we become self-actualised beings, and ensure we can be rewarded not only for our good intentions, but also for our good deeds. Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz proves from Talmudic sources that G-d only gives us tests and challenges we are capable of overcoming. If we are successful, if we are able to rise to the challenges, we emerge stronger, more elevated and more meritorious.

In his commentary on Bereishit, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch says the Hebrew word for test, *nisayon*, is related to the word *nassa*, meaning to raise or to elevate, as well as the word *nisiya*, which means to travel or move forward. Every test, every challenge, is an opportunity to move forward, to grow, to become stronger and more elevated, through exercising the latent powers within our soul. Not only do challenges uncover hidden reserves, they can also be the impetus for creating new strengths, new reserves. Indeed, the human soul has miraculous capabilities beyond what we can rationally comprehend. We contain multitudes, untold depths. The Torah (Bereishit 1:27) tells us that human beings were created "in the image of G-d;" alone among the creations, we are imbued with a heavenly soul, a spark of the Divine.

The Midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 55:6) also relates the word *nisayon* to the Hebrew word *nes*, which means a banner or a flag. The miraculous, seemingly superhuman strength exhibited by people who withstand severe tests with faith and resolve is a flag, a signal to the world, hoisted high to inspire us all. When facing life's challenges, the superhuman strength and courage of an Abraham or a Joseph or a King David can inspire us. We need to have faith in G-d to give us strength and guidance to withstand our tests and actualise our potential, but also have faith in ourselves – in the power of our G-d-given souls.

This idea – of converting our potential into reality – is actually the fundamental purpose of our lives. The Torah calls the first human being Adam, which comes from the Hebrew word *adama*, meaning "earth" or "ground." What is the connection between the two? The Maharal explains that humans are similar to the ground in one essential respect: they are both pure potential. Whether or not a

*Continued on next page*



# Personalizing Our Practice



**Rabbi Shalom Rosner**

Rosh Beit Midrash, Machon Lev English speaking program

*And I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you, and I will aggrandize your name, and [you shall] be a blessing. (Bereshit 12:2).*

In the *amida* (*shmona esre*) we bow on four occasions. At the end of the *amida* we bow as we recite מודים אנחנו לך (*modim anachenu lach*) as well as during the *bracha* of להודות ולך נאה להודות (*Hatov Shimcha uLecha na'eh l'hodot*). Both relate to *hoda'ah*.

We also bow twice at the beginning of the *amida*: When we recite the opening *bracha* of אלוקי אברהם, אלוקי יצחק ואלוקי יעקב as well as at the end of that *bracha* when we recite מגן אברהם.

Given that we are expressing our appreciation or admission (הודאה) to Hashem when we bow at the end of the *shmona esre*, it makes sense to bow.<sup>1</sup> **However, why do we bow twice at the beginning of the amida?** Rav Shwab (Ma'ayan Beit Hasho-eva) offers an intriguing explanation.

The Gemara in Pesachim 117b citing a *pasuk* from our *parsha* and states as follows:

ואעשך לגוי גדול זהו שאומרים אלהי אברהם, ואברכך זהו שאומרים אלהי יצחק, ואגדלה שמך זהו שאומרים אלהי יעקב. יכול יהו חותמין בכולך? ת"ל והיה ברכה, בכך חותמין ואין חותמין בכולך.

**“And I will make of you a great nation”; this is why we say: G-d of Abraham. “And I will bless you”; this is fulfilled when we say: G-d of Isaac. “And I will make your name great”; this is fulfilled when we say: G-d of Jacob. One might have thought**

that we ought to **conclude with all** the forefathers; yet **the verse states: “And you will be a blessing”** i.e., **with you**, Avraham, we will **conclude** the blessing, rather than mention **all** of the forefathers.”

The opening paragraph of the *Shmona Esre* contains two parts. First we mention the G-d of each of our *avot* – highlighting the *masoret* (tradition) that is passed on from generation to generation. Without the transmission of Torah through the generations, we would not know how to worship Hashem. Yet, we conclude the blessing with a reference to Avraham alone – מגן אברהם. Each of us is to serve Hashem like Avraham, someone who had no role model to follow. Avraham had to establish a personal relationship with Hashem. Although we have the privilege of receiving our tradition from past generations, each of us needs to develop an intimate relationship with Hashem.

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik expressed a similar idea when explaining the text of זה קלי ואנוהו אלוקי אבי וארוממנוהו – Although our tradition is passed to us from our forefathers, we ought to develop our own unique bond with Hashem.

That is why we bow twice at the beginning of the *Shmona Esre*. First to highlight that we appreciate the tradition that we have received from our ancestors. Then we bow again when we include the *bracha* with reference only to Avraham, to reflect

that we value our personal connection to Hashem, similar in nature to Avraham, who was able to deduce on his own the existence of Hashem.

When we recite the *amida*, may we keep in mind how we value our tradition, as well as our unique personal relationship with Hashem. This intimate connection is established through the study of Torah and *tefilla*. Perhaps that is why the *brachot* in *Shmona Esre* do not include the term א-לוקינו מלך העולם which is prevalent in most other *brachot* that we recite throughout the day. *Shmona Esre* is a more intimate prayer, where we are not relating to G-d as a distant “King” (מלך), but rather as a close family member א-לוקי אברהם – the Father of our forefathers. May we build upon our direct and unique relationship with our Creator!

1. As we mentioned in the past, the word להודות – can be interpreted in two ways. It can refer to an expression of gratitude, or to an admission. Rav Hutner explains that in order to thank someone, one needs to admit that they cannot manage alone. Given that the word has two meanings, how can you know which meaning of “*modeh*” is being referred to in a given context? Rav Hutner explains that the answer depends on the preposition that follows “*modeh*.” If one is “*modeh al*,” then he offers thanks **for** something. If he is “*modeh she-*,” then he admits **to** something. In *Shmona Esre*, the *bracha* of *hoda'a* (“*Modim*”) contains both meanings. First, we say “*Modim anachnu lach sha'ata...*” – we “admit to” G-d's omnipotence. Later, we say: “*nodeh lecha...al chayeinu*,” “thanking” Hashem **for** our lives.

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piece of land will produce fruit depends on what is done with it. Even the most fertile piece of land will not produce fruit if it is left to lie fallow; it needs to be ploughed, fertilised and cultivated. So too, the human being is pure potential, and to live a fruitful, productive life requires

great and continuous efforts. We come into this world as pure potential and, through the process of life, we actualise that potential. And it's up to us; we have been given free choice to turn that potential into personal growth and mitzvot and

spiritual greatness – or we can choose to squander it and simply let it lie dormant. Ultimately, it's through the process of struggle and difficulty, even failure, that a person can transform potential into greatness.

# To Journey Home



**Michal Horowitz**  
Judaic Studies Teacher

In this week's *parsha*, *Parshas Lech Licha*, we begin the journey with Avraham Avinu. From the first call of G-d in his life, at the age of seventy-five, till his death at one hundred and seventy-five, Avraham walked with G-d. Hence the *gematria* of *lech licha*, "go for yourself," is 100 (the numeric value of the Hebrew letters); because for 100 years, patiently, consistently, courageously and faithfully, Avraham walked with G-d (cf. Baal HaTurim, Bereishis 12:1).

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, the Rav, *zt'l*, teaches, "And the L-rd said to Avraham: Go forth..." Avraham, the knight of faith, according to our tradition, searched and discovered G-d in the starlit heavens of Mesopotamia. Yet, he felt an intense loneliness and could not find solace in the silent companionship of G-d whose image was reflected in the boundless stretches of the cosmos. Only when he met G-d on earth as Father, Brother and Friend – not only along the uncharted astral routes – did he feel redeemed. Our sages said that before Avraham appeared, *majestas dei* (Divine Majesty) was reflected only by the distant heavens, and it was a mute nature which 'spoke' of the glory of G-d. It was Avraham who 'crowned' Him the G-d of earth, i.e., the G-d of men." (*Chumash Masores HaRav, Bereishis*, p.72)

According to the Rambam (in his commentary to Pirkei Avos 5:3), the first of Avraham's ten tests was the one with which our *parsha* opens: "Go forth from your land and from your birthplace and from your father's house, to the land that I will show you." (Bereishis 12:1)

To leave one's homeland, one's family, one's history and one's past, in order to journey to the unknown, is a heroic test. And yet, the mishnah (Avos 5:3) teaches us that Avraham passed each of the ten trials. G-d said to leave, and Avraham

picked up and he left his land, family and past behind, all in order to sanctify the name of G-d in the world and to claim *Eretz Yisrael* as the heritage and homeland of *Am Yisrael l'netzach*, for eternity.

Rav Soloveitchik, *zt'l*, teaches, *לך-לך מן-ארץ-ך ומן-בית-ך ומן-הארץ-ך* – The Torah speaks of three departures: physical departure, behavioral departure and kinship departure. Departure from your land connotes physical departure. Departure from your birthplace can be understood as leaving the mother who teaches the child the basics of behavior; the early years of one's life in one's birthplace shape and determine one's behavior patterns. Departure from your father's house refers to clannish estrangement, alienation from one's kin. Avraham was called upon to form a new fellowship, in which the teacher becomes the parent, and the student becomes the child. A new concept of fatherhood emerged, one based upon communication and common devotion, rather than upon biological factors. Parent-teacher and child-disciple relations replace the progenitor-offspring relationship.

"The charismatic personality must dissociate himself from his national connections and completely free himself from the environment he was born and reared in. The spiritual straying is the gist of the command here; the physical journey is of secondary importance. Avraham must forsake his past and transplant himself into a new historical dimension. His synonym is an *Ivri* (14:13), a wanderer or a 'yonderman' who came from beyond the river, a man who does not belong here. G-d preferred the shepherd as His confidant; He selected a member of a stable society and converted him into a nomad. Severance of all ties with an urban, closed environment was an indispensable condition (*conditio sine qua non*) for the

realization of the covenant." (*Chumash Masores HaRav, Bereishis*, p.73)

And so, headed into the unknown, faithfully following the command of G-d, Avraham heeded the call; he left the land of his birth and he courageously journeyed to the new land, the land of his destiny and the land of his future children – *Am Yisrael* – that would be born to him.

On Friday, Oct. 20, 2023, Staff Sgt. (res.) Omer Balva, *H'yd*, 22, was killed by an anti-tank guided missile launched by Hezbollah at Israel. Omer Balva, a 22-year-old Rockville, MD native, was back from his home in Israel. Then, during his U.S. vacation, Hamas stormed southern Israel, kidnapping hundreds and killing more than 1,000. Balva's reserve infantry unit in the Israel Defense Forces quickly recalled him.

But before his return, he wanted to gather supplies he knew that soldiers in his unit might need. So he and his friend Ethan Missner, who had known Balva since they were 7-year-old students at Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School in Rockville, went shopping. They bought knee pads, elbow pads, earmuffs and other supplies for the 9203rd Battalion of the Alexandroni Brigade, Missner recalled. The two spent Balva's last night stateside at Missner's parents' home in Potomac stuffing a duffel bag full of gear.

"He was such a loving person," said Missner, 23. "He brought a lot of light to the world." Balva, who grew up in the Maryland suburbs of Washington with three siblings, was among the 360,000 reservists that the IDF called up to battle. The pair remained in contact after Balva was deployed to the Israeli border. "He said that he could hear bombs dropping at night and it was tough for him to sleep," Missner said. "But on par with who Omer is, if anything he was more concerned

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# Four promises of Zera V'Aretz



**Rabbi Menachem Leibtag**

Tanach Study Center | Yeshivat Har Etzion

*"To your zera [offspring] I shall give this aretz [land]."*

**T**o become that nation, Avraham's family will need to multiply, and hence the blessing of **zera**; and there must be a certain territory (=aretz) wherein his offspring can establish this nation. As we continue, note how this concept of "zera" & "aretz" will be mentioned in almost every other "hitgalut" as well!

Theoretically speaking, these two promises could have been enough. Now that Avraham has arrived in the land, he should now have many children, settle the land, and establish this special nation. But as we know, Chumash is not a 'fairy tale', and becoming G-d's nation unfolds as a long and complicated process. To appreciate that process, we must now consider the reason for each additional "hitgalut" to Avraham Avinu, and how it relates to the stories that transpire in the interim.

The next "hitgalut" to Avraham takes place after his quarrel with Lot. Here we find yet another divine promise of "zera v'aretz": "And G-d spoke to Avram after Lot had left him: Lift up your eyes from this place and see... for this entire **land** (aretz) which you see I am giving to you and your offspring (zera) forever..."

This promise, although a bit more "poetic" than the first, appears to be more or less a repeat of G-d's original promise. Why then was it necessary?

To understand why, we consider the fact that this promise concludes a "parshia" that began way back in 12:10! Even though a "parshia" usually carries only one common topic, this "parshia" contains three different stories: Avraham's descent and return from Egypt, the quarrel between Lot and Avraham, G-d's promise to Avraham of "zera v'aretz."

Nevertheless, the fact that all three stories are in one parshia indicates that they are thematically connected.

At the most basic level, the connection is quite simple. The reason for the quarrel

between Lot and Avraham is due to their wealth. However, it was because of their journey to Egypt that Avraham & Lot became wealthy. Therefore, upon their return, the land is not big enough for all of their new possessions, thus leading to the quarrel. Finally, one could suggest that G-d's promise comes to "cheer up" Avraham after this tragic separation from his nephew Lot.

Nonetheless, one could suggest a deeper connection relating to a more fundamental theme of Sefer Breishit.

Recall that Avraham has no children, and his nephew Lot has no father. Therefore, Avraham treats Lot like his own son. In fact, from the moment we meet Avraham in Parshat Noach, Lot faithfully follows him everywhere.

One could suggest that Avraham understood that through Lot, G-d's promise of "zera" would be fulfilled! And even if G-d would bless him with his own son, Avraham could still include Lot as an integral member of his "chosen" family. Therefore, Lot's decision to leave could be considered a personal tragedy for Avraham.

This background allows us to view the story of Lot and Avraham as the first example of "dechiya," i.e., when a member of Avraham's family is "kicked out." As we will see, many of the stories in Sefer Breishit explain how this process of "dechiya" unfolds, and, as we should expect, these stories will also explain **why**! This incident with Lot is a classic example.

Lot's choice of Kikar ha'Yarden was **not** the compromise that Avraham had suggested. As Targum Unkelos explains, Avraham offered Lot to go either **north** (left) or **south** (right), i.e., to choose between the hills of **Yehuda** or **Shomron**; not a complete separation, only a far enough distance to avoid quarrels.

Instead, Lot opted to leave the mountain range of Eretz Canaan altogether, preferring the Jordan Valley instead. The "technical reason" was because the Jordan Valley had

a river, a constant supply of water – in contrast to the mountain range whose water supply was dependent on the rainfall.

Symbolically, Lot's choice reflects his preference for a different life-style. Avraham accepts the challenge of Eretz Canaan – a life dependent on **matar** (rain) and, hence, dependent on G-d. Lot prefers the "easy-life" in Sdom.

Lot's total divorce from Avraham is indeed tragic, for he has lost not only a "son," but also a disciple. Therefore, G-d must now not only console Avraham, but also reassure him that despite Lot's departure, His promise of "zera v'aretz" remains. Indeed, he will yet have a child – a son who will follow in his footsteps as well.

This explanation of Lot's choice of Sdom provides the thematic connection between all three stories in this "parshia." Recall that Lot had traveled with Avraham to Mitzraim. It may have been Lot's own experience in Egypt, seeing the "good-life," that led him to reject Avraham's offer, and chose the Jordan Valley instead.

In contrast to Lot, Avraham who remains "chosen," ("nivchar") reacted to his experience in Mitzraim in a totally different manner. Avraham, after his incident with Pharaoh and Sarah, saw corruption in Egypt. He returns to Eretz Canaan inspired with the spirit to stop such corrupt behavior, to teach morality. Upon his return, Avraham travels immediately to Bet-el, and once again calls out in G-d's Name.

The next time G-d speaks to Avraham is in chapter 15 – better known as Brit Bein Ha'b'tarim. There, again, G-d promises "zera v'aretz;" however in this promise, for the first time, we find the framework of a "brit" – a covenant.

Once again, to better appreciate this promise, we must take note of the event that precedes it, i.e., the war of the five kings against the four kings in chapter 14. In this battle, for the first time, we see Avraham Avinu as a man of war, a conqueror. Yet, it

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# Receiving the Power to Bless



**Rabbi Eli Mansour**  
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**W**hen G-d first spoke to Abraham and commanded him to leave his homeland and move to what would become known as the Land of Israel, He made several promises, including, "Va'ab-rechecha Mebarechecha, U'mekelelcha A'or" - "I shall bless those who bless you, and those who curse you, I shall curse." G-d assured Abraham that those who bless him and his descendants would be blessed, and those who curse him and his descendants would be cursed.

The Or Ha'hayim Ha'kadosh (Rav Haim Ben-Attar, 1696-1743) notes the different sequences in the two parts of this phrase. When it comes to those who bless Abraham, G-d promised, "I will bless those who bless you," mentioning first His blessing, and then the blessing that people give to Abraham. But in the next part of the verse, G-d says, "those who curse you, I shall curse" - mentioning first the curse that people would try to place on Abraham,

and then that G-d would curse them. What is the reason for these different sequences?

The Or Ha'hayim explains that the first phrase - "I shall bless those who bless you" - means that G-d would bless people who bless Abraham even before they actually utter the blessing, as soon as they intend to bless him. Those who curse Abraham, however, would be cursed by G-d only after they actually utter the curse. And thus G-d stated, "I shall bless those who bless you" - indicating that they will be blessed even before they pronounce their blessing to Abraham" - and "those who curse you, I shall curse" - indicating that they will be cursed only after cursing Abraham.

Why would those who bless Abraham or the Jewish People be rewarded even before they actually pronounce the blessing, whereas those who curse Abraham or his descendants are punished only after pronouncing the curse?

The Or Ha'hayim offers a number of explanations, one of which is that people need to be blessed in order to grant blessings to others. The blessings that people would confer upon Abraham or upon the Jewish Nation will not be effective unless those people have themselves been blessed. Therefore, G-d assured Abraham that He would grant blessings to all those who intend or wish to bless him or his descendants. These blessings will then grant them the power to bless Am Yisrael. This is the meaning of "Va'ab-rechecha Mebarechecha" - that G-d will bless those who wish to bless the Jewish People, empowering them to give us their blessing.

The more we desire to bring blessing to other people, and to the world, the more G-d blesses us with this ability. If we truly strive to bless and give to the world, then we will receive G-d's blessings to enable us to do so.

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is this military victory that leads Avraham to the realization of how important it is that he have a successor.

Now there are numerous opinions among the commentators explaining why Avraham was fearful (which are not all mutually exclusive). However, there is one point that Avraham raises over and over again in his ensuing conversation that definitely relates to his military conquest, as well as his lack of a son.

Avraham realizes that, without a son, everything that he has acquired will be taken over by his servant, Eliezer.

There can be no doubt that "yerusha" is the key word in this conversation, but what does it mean?

Throughout Chumash, "yerusha" almost always implies military conquest, usually by (or to become) a sovereign nation. Here too, after his military victory, Avraham

wants to know **how** his offspring will one day gain sovereignty over this land!

In Brit Bein Ha'tarim, we find the answer to Avraham's question: G-d informs Avraham Avinu that indeed his offspring will one day **conquer** ("yerusha") the land. However, this conquest will take place only **after** several generations of bondage in a foreign land, after which they will gain their independence and their oppressor shall be punished.

Therefore, in the aftermath of the war of the kings, an additional promise of "zera v'aretz" must be made, one which explains **how** the process of Avraham's offspring becoming a nation will unfold.

This order of events that unfolds in Brit Bein Ha'tarim is quite significant for it highlights the nature of our relationship to the land of Israel. Most nations first begin by a group of people living in a common

land. First, we find a common land, and hence common needs, and then a common nation. In contrast to this, Am Yisrael will become a nation in a very different manner. We don't begin with a common land, rather we begin with a common goal (or destiny), i.e., to become G-d's model nation. As the Torah emphasizes, we will become a nation in a "land that is not ours." Technically speaking, our initial bonding is caused by a common plight and suffering in a **foreign** land. Only **after** we become a nation, and only after we receive the Torah at Har Sinai (the laws that teach us how we are to achieve our goal), only then do we conquer the Land that G-d has designated for us.

In other words, we are not a nation because we have a common land, rather we are a nation because we share a common goal, and to enable us to fulfill that goal, G-d promises a special land.

# I Only Have Eyes for You



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**T**he Midrash (Bereishis Raba 46:9) teaches, “If your children uphold circumcision, they will enter the land, and if not, they will not enter the land... Thus Hashem said to Avraham Avinu, ‘And I have given to you and your seed after you...’ (Bereishis 17:8) on condition that ‘And you shall guard My covenant’ (Id. at 9).” The Tur at the beginning of his discussion of the halachos of *bris mila* (Yoreh De’ah 260) teaches this concept as well, stating that in the merit of the covenant of *mila*, Hashem entered into a covenant with us to give us *Eretz Yisroel*. But this is very difficult to understand. There are very few mitzvos that even the most nonobservant Jews try to keep, but *bris mila* is one of them. Yet *Eretz Yisroel* is not truly in our hands in the way that it should be. If almost all Jews try to observe this mitzva, why don’t we have a true hold on *Eretz Yisroel*?

It must therefore be that there are two aspects of the mitzva of *mila*. Chazal did not say “If your children uphold the mitzva of circumcision...” They say “If your children uphold circumcision.” We see that one aspect of *mila* is the mitzva to physically perform the act of circumcision. That is over in a moment. The second aspect of *mila* is our obligation to uphold our covenant with G-d to which we commit ourselves with the mitzva of *mila*. This is the lifelong mitzva of “And you shall guard My covenant.”

The act of circumcising the flesh is merely a signature, a sign of our consent to the obligation to uphold a lifelong covenant. Yet we do not merit entering *Eretz Yisroel* just by performing this act. We can understand this with an analogy. Reuven signs a contract obligating him to repay a certain

sum of money to Shimon over a period of time. But as time goes on, Reuven never makes any of the payments under the contract. When Shimon approaches him about this, he answers, “That’s my signature on the document. I have fulfilled all of my obligations by signing. I stand by my signature, but that does not obligate me to do anything further!” We can all see that Reuven’s claim is patently ridiculous. The whole point of a contract, a covenant, between two parties, is that the parties fulfill the obligations outlined in the agreement over time. A signature is not the end of one’s obligations. It is only the beginning. A signature without the intent to fulfill the obligations embodied by that signature is a completely empty gesture. Similarly, circumcision is the “sign of the covenant between Me and you (Bereishis 17:11).” It is our signature, obligating us to fulfill our obligations to Hashem over time. It is only a sign of the covenant, but it is not the be-all-end-all of our fulfillment of the covenant itself.

These two aspects of the mitzva of *mila* are reflected in the two blessings we say at a *bris*. The first *bracha* thanks Hashem for sanctifying us with his mitzvos and commanding us “regarding circumcision.” This *bracha* relates to the one-time physical act of circumcision. The second *bracha* thanks Hashem for our obligation “to bring [the child] into the covenant of Avraham Avinu.” The first element relates to a mitzva that is over in a moment. But guarding the “covenant of Avraham Avinu” involves changing how one views his entire life. It is a life in which one is always conscious of not desecrating the sanctity of his covenant with G-d.

In the words of the Seforno (on Bereishis 17:11), the *bris* is an “eternal reminder to go in His ways like the sign of a master on his servant.” Through the covenant on our flesh, Hashem whispers to us at work, on the train, in the street, and while we are sitting at the computer, “And you shall guard My covenant.” Guarding the covenant means always looking for ways to sanctify everything associated with the part of the body on which Hashem has sealed His covenant with us. If we live a life in which we guard the sanctity of the covenant, it is a completely different life. It is a life with which we merit to enter into *Eretz Yisroel*, into the palace of the King, the land of true life.

Every morning a Jew wraps his *Tefillin* strap around his finger like a wedding ring and says “And you are betrothed to Me forever. And you are betrothed to Me with righteousness, with judgment, with kindness and with mercy and you are betrothed to Me with faithfulness.” Hashem is reminding us “We are committed to each other. Remember to guard My covenant!” That covenant is forever. We use a ring to remember it because a ring is round and has no end, just like our commitment to G-d and our covenant with our husband or wife is forever.

Our efforts to guard the covenant with G-d truly sum up our goals in life. We want Hashem to be able to say about us at the end of our lives, “And You found his [Avraham’s] heart faithful before You (Nechemia 9:8).” As the Malbim explains on that *pasuk*, “After all of the tests with which Avraham was tested and which he passed, his heart was found to be faithful.” He guarded his covenant with G-d despite all of his tests and all of the difficulties.

# From Spouse to Sibling



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**L**ech Lecha relates how a famine breaks out in the Land of Canaan, and Abraham and his wife Sarah head down south to Egypt. As they approach Egypt, Abraham voices his fears to his wife that the Egyptians, notorious for their immorality, might kill him so that they may lay their hands on the most beautiful Sarah.

“Please say that you are my sister,” Abraham pleads with his wife, “so that they will give me gifts for your sake and my life will be spared.”

This is a difficult story to digest. Abraham, the founder of Judaism, considered one of the most spiritual humans of all times, the person who gave the world the gift of Monotheism and taught humanity the value of kindness, seems to be all-consumed by the fear for his life, and totally unconcerned with the fate of his wife.

What is even more disturbing is Abraham’s interest that “they give me gifts for your sake,” while his wife would be enduring abuse and humiliation.

No less absurd is the fact that the Torah finds it necessary to begin the biography of the father of the Jewish people with this episode, as though signifying that it contained the fundamentals of Jewish faith and practice...

Two approaches can be found among the commentators. The Ramban writes that Abraham performed indeed “a great sin, inadvertently.” The Zohar explains that Abraham, who knew Sarah’s superior spiritual quality, was certain that no harm would befall her. He was only fearful about his own fate.

Yet, as in every story of the Torah, this narrative contains a psychological and spiritual message.

What is the difference between the sibling relationship and the spouse relationship? A spouse you choose; siblings you don’t choose. Your connection with your brothers and sisters is natural and innate.

The bond between siblings is constant and immutable. Whether you love your brother or not, he will always remain your brother; you are eternally connected by genes, culture, and soul connection.

Conversely, the bond with a spouse is subject to change and fluctuation; today you are married, but a year from now you may, sadly, be divorced.

Yet paradoxically, the love of a sibling – even at its best – is calm and placid; the love of a spouse, on the other hand, is capable of becoming fiery and passionate. Because the love of a sibling is inborn and natural, it can never die, but we also don’t get too excited about it. It is part of who we are.

The love of a spouse is something created anew as a result of two separate individuals coming together at a later stage in life. The distinctiveness, rather than the sameness, of the two individuals linked in marriage, is what gives the relationship its intensity and drama, feelings that cannot be found even between close siblings. Yet this same quality is also the reason some marriages are short-lived. Passion can flourish, but passion can fade away.

And when the marriage does fail, you fall back on the innate bond that exists among family members, who are, hopefully, always there for you.

The story of Abraham and Sarah is also allegorical.

When one is situated in the holy-land, a term symbolizing a psychological state of serenity and spirituality, he is her husband and she is his wife. They care for

each other and look out for each other in a way that only a husband and wife can. Those are the days when you wake up in the morning and say, “Thank you G-d for giving me such a special person in my life.”

But then a famine may erupt, starving your heart and dulling your senses, you end up in “Egypt,” which in Hebrew means “constraints” and “limitations.” You lose your passion for your spouse, barriers between you are constructed, and your love becomes a challenge.

At these moments one must remember that his wife is, in essence, also a sister and that her husband is also a brother. Even if you don’t feel the connection, you remain connected innately; even if you don’t experience the romance consciously, you remain linked essentially, because the shared bond between a wife and her husband is not only the result of a created union at a later point in their lives; rather the spouse relationship is innate and intrinsic, in the words of the Zohar, “two halves of the same soul.” A marriage, in the Jewish perspective, is not only a union of two distinct people; it is a reunion of two souls that were one and then, prior to birth, separated. In marriage, they are reunited.

The relationship between spouses goes beyond feelings. We crave to always be husbands and wives, but sometimes -- for our marriages to survive and thrive -- we must become brothers and sisters. Whether you feel it or not, your wife is one with you, always. Do not allow the loyalty and trust to wane, on both sides. Even if there are arguments, difficulties, and hardships, maintain the loyalty to each other, like healthy and functional siblings.

Abraham and Sarah taught us that when the relationship becomes challenging, you

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# Lech Lecha: #Blessed



**Rabbi Judah Mischel**

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**R**enowned for their selfless hospitality and legendary *hachnasas orchim*, the Machlis family is a paragon of self-sacrifice in generous giving. The *kidush Hashem* and positivity radiating from the Machlis home has filled Yerushalayim with light for decades. Each Shabbos, hundreds of guests are welcomed, countless Jews and non-Jews alike have passed through their home, enjoying a Shabbos or Yom Tov *seudah*. Entering their holy abode, one is greeted with open arms, showered with kindness, nourishment and a deluge of *blessings*.

A brilliant *talmid chacham* and beloved teacher of Torah, Rav Mordechai Machlis readily overflows with sage words of encouragement and *chizuk* to those who approach him. On one occasion, a group gathered in the Machlis home sought his blessings, and the Rav readily complied with all their personal requests, blessing them one by one for good health, happiness, *shalom bayis*, *parnassah* and the fulfillment of every need.

One of the petitioners, a middle-aged gentleman, asked for blessing for success. Rav Machlis asked him what he did for a living. It turned out he was a pediatric oncologist trained to address the rarest, most intensive cases of childhood cancer. Rav Machlis was at a loss for words. How could he bless the visitor for “success?” If he prayed that the doctor should have an abundance of *parnassah* from his work, it would be like asking for more children to be in dire need of his medical specialty, *chas v’shalom*....

Suddenly, there was a sparkle in Rav Machlis’s eyes. “I bless us that there should be no more illness, no more sickness in the world,” he exclaimed. “Everyone should be healthy — and except for birthing centers, may there be no need for hospitals! Your field of expertise should become obsolete, just a faint memory. Then, people all over the world should pay you generously to come and speak, sharing your remarkable

story of being part of that strange historical phenomenon that once was called ‘pediatric oncology.’”



“I will make you a great nation and I will bless you. I will make your name great and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and curse him that curses you; And all the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you.” (12:1-3)

*Chazal* relate that the wise and righteous Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa had a special *koach* and skill in praying for the sick. When Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai’s son fell seriously ill, he turned to his student and cried, “Chanina, pray for my child so that he may live!”

Chanina ben Dosa promptly placed his head between his knees, davened for Hashem’s mercy, and the boy recovered. (*Berachos*, 34b)

“Every day a voice goes out from Chorev and declares, ‘All the world is nourished bishvil Chanina!’” (*Berachos*, 17b). While the *p’shat*, the simple meaning of ‘*bishvil*’ is ‘for the sake of’, the Baal Shem Tov, *zy’a*, says *shvil* can also be translated as ‘path’ or ‘pipeline’. Reb Chanina’s prayers and blessings opened a channel or path for Hashem’s outpouring of *shefa*, bounty, goodness and blessing. All the world was nourished and blessed through the spiritual ‘pipeline’ of Rabbi Chanina.

Rashi comments on our *pasuk* (12:2): “*And you shall be a blessing*: ‘The blessings are entrusted into your hand. Until now, they were in My hand; I blessed Adam and Noach. From now on, you may bless whom-ever you wish!’” How did Avraham Avinu, and Rabbi Chanina, merit to bless others? “One with a good eye will be blessed” (*Mishlei*, 22:9). Alternatively translated, this *pasuk* reveals, ‘One with a good eye *should be the one to bless*.’ To bestow a blessing upon another, we need to see, acknowledge and affirm their worthiness. We honor them by seeing what they need

and sharing our hopes and prayers for their wellbeing. Implicit in blessing is being *tov ayin*, ‘with an eye to the good,’ with respect for the other person and an appreciation of their goodness.

Indeed, the Mirrer Mashgiach, Reb Yerucham Levovitz, *zt’l*, teaches that the effectiveness of one’s blessing depends on one’s selflessness, magnanimity and *ayin tovah*. Their ‘pipeline’ is open to the extent that they see the good in, and truly desire the wellbeing of another. Thus, the source of Avraham Avinu and Rabbi Chanina’s ‘powers’ was none other than their total selflessness, and this is how they merited to become conduits of blessing for the whole world.

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai says that Avraham Avinu wore a medallion with a precious jewel with healing powers, and anyone suffering illness who gazed at it was immediately cured (*Bava Basra*, 16b). The *tzadik* Rebbe Moshe of Kubrin, *zy’a*, asserts that this jewel was not ‘magic,’ rather its *koach* was rooted in the trait that Avraham himself exemplified — great chesed, kindness to others. Furthermore, Avraham bequeathed to each of us this ability to bless, uplift and heal others. Whenever a Jew engages in selfless kindness, practices hospitality and blesses others heartfully, he or she awakens the healing power of Avraham. And this is how anyone, even “all the families of the earth,” can merit to bless themselves through Avraham.

May we open our hearts in selfless kindness, and our eyes to see the good. May we open the gates of blessing, healing and salvation for all of *Am Yisrael* and all the good people of the world. And let all our troubles and *tzaros*, illness and pain, become but faded memories, relegated to history books and tellers of ancient tales.



In honor of the Yahrzeit this week  
of our great teacher,  
Rebbetzin Henny Machlis, *a’h*

# Seeing Spiritual

Mrs. Shira Smiles

International lecturer and curriculum developer

We have in our *parashah* the sweeping promise that has resonated throughout our generations ever since with eternal messages for each of us: “Raise your eyes and from the place where you are now [standing] look to the north to the south to the east and to the west. For all the land that you see, I will give to you and your offspring forever... Rise, walk the land, through its length and breadth, for I will give it [all] to you.” (Bereisheet 13:14-17) Hashem directs Avraham Avinu to do two things, to see the land and to traverse its expanse. Why are both charges necessary and how do they apply to us today?

The Kli Yakar offers a stunning interpretation of these verses. He notes that there are two aspects of the land, the spiritual and the physical. As the place of the earthly Temple mirrors the heavenly Temple, the Kli Yakar explains that it is the repository of spirituality, connecting us with Hashem forever. Further, when one looks at this holy place, he is immediately infused with a spirit of holiness and purity. Not only does he perceive the

Divine, but he is seen by Hashem, enveloped in a halo of grace and transcendence. This experience is not limited to the time that our holy Temple stood; rather, it exists in every generation until the end of time. The spiritual legacy given to Avraham and his descendants is unconditional, acquired by way of his seeing the land. How fortunate we are that we can take advantage of this spiritual well-spring and gain *chizuk* in difficult times, feel strengthened and bolstered by the closeness to Hashem.

The promise of the physical land, continues the Kli Yakar, was actualized by way of Avraham Avinu journeying through the land. Whereas the spiritual inheritance was given, “*lecha...u'leazar-acha ad olam,*” to Avraham and his offspring forever, their possession of the physical land depended upon adhering to Torah and *mitzvot*.

In his *sefer, Menachem Tzion*, Rav Zaks emphasizes the importance of looking at *Eretz Yisrael* with positivity and optimism. One must focus on the beauty of the land, on its good aspects and qualities. The Yalkut Shimoni on Eichah recounts

how Yaakov Avinu asked Hashem “where are my children?” to which Hashem responded, “an *ayin ra'ah* took control of them and they were exiled from the land.” Their inability to focus on all the good in our land led to the exile, and most tragically, extends the exile until today.

Rav Zaks tells a story about one of the Gerrer Rebbes who visited Israel shortly before WWII. In one of his letters, he makes reference to the “holy city of Tel Aviv.” At the time, Tel Aviv had no *yeshivot* or any other definitive marks of holiness. The Rebbe, however, explained that it was a city filled with Jews, no churches or mosques, and Sunday was a regular weekday. Focusing on the positive elements, he found the holiness within.

At this time, when so many lives are at the forefront as they proudly protect our land, it is imperative that we show Hashem how much we cherish it, how we choose to focus on the positive and draw from its spiritual resources. Thus, may all Jews throughout the world merit to make *Eretz Yisrael* their permanent home, sooner than we can ever imagine.

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cease to be husband and wife; now you become brother and sister. You fall back on the innate, intrinsic oneness which binds you in an eternal link.

This, in fact, brings an awesome benefit to a husband. When you are there for your wife, even when you're not in the mood for it, an extraordinary energy of love is later returned to you. That's why Abraham told Sarah that by saying that she was his sister, he would not only survive, but would also receive special gifts.

There are times when the Jew is situated in the holy-land, inspired and motivated

to live a spiritual and G-dly life. Like in a good marriage, the Jew is excited about G-d, yearning to be close to Him and fulfilled by having a relationship with Him.

But then come the days when you enter into a psychological “Egypt,” where your inner spirituality is numbed, as you are overtaken by self-centered lusts, beastly cravings, negative impulses, and enslaving addictions. Your marriage with G-d seems all but dead.

The key to survival at those moments is to remember that G-d is not only a spouse, but also a sibling. We are sacred and G-dly

not just because we feel it and we love it, but because a person is inherently a sacred creature, and G-dliness is intrinsic to the human being's very composition. Whether I'm in the mood for it or not, when I behave in a moral and spiritual way, I am being loyal to my true self.

You are holy not because you feel holy, but because you are essentially holy – this is one of the most fundamental ideas of Judaism, expressed in the first narrative about the first Jew.

# A Decent Marriage



**Rabbanit Yemima Mizrachi**  
Popular Torah teacher and author

**T**he road home is long, that is the great lesson of *Parshat Lech Lecha*. Avraham and Sarah have to leave a land that is a familiar environment, a home - the things they have invested in and born out of themselves and their father's house - heritage and childhood experiences. They have no idea where they are going or when they will leave.

The road home is long, that is the great lesson of Rachel Imeinu, whose *yahrzeit* we will mark this week. Her son was thrown into a pit for so many years and his father waited for him to return, she waited for seven years to get married and suffered from depression, she waited to give birth to children and she did not even merit to return home because she died when there was still a long way to go.

The only question our fathers and mothers ask themselves is: will we remain decent along the way, even when it seems that life has not treated us fairly? This is the most heroic experience a person has to go through in his life. At any given moment, in the face of unfair conduct, we may mirror the unjust conduct of others and behave exactly like them. But the Torah tells us: "*Lech Lecha - Go.*" Go away from this place that makes you a tool in the game of evil, and return to yourself. "Return to your treasures and use them."

Avraham sees a world in chaos, a "burning castle." The Sefat Emet explains: "From the language: persecuting me." A world full of persecution, competition, and violence. Avraham is not swayed by the chaos and is: "searching and thinking," an expression in Rambam that describes a philosopher, a man who internalizes things and finds out from his treasures. At this point, Avraham asks, "Is it possible that there is no governor?" Is it all managed by someone?

"The owner of the castle looked at him." This is how he discovers G-d. What a revelation that is! After all, he now knows that there is both a G-d and a world that behaves unjustly! What does the castle owner's "look" do for him? In other words, I find it hard to find comfort when I hear people say to a grieving woman: "Everything is from G-d!" Is G-d now also, G-d forbid, against her?

G-d's "glance" is not at the world. He knows His world well. He glances at him, at Avraham. Will Avraham remain who he is while the whole world is in one transition and he is in another? Will he stay fair when the whole world is unfair? Will he become a person who heals a broken world?

There is no more difficult experience.

When Rachel jumps up and asks G-d to return the captives to their border, she does not talk about her concession to

her sister Leah. That was not her doing. She was forced into this concession by her father, the deceitful, dishonest man. The argument she used to bring back the captives was the way she fought for her decency in an unjust world. When things were not going well, she bravely went her way, "and I did not dishonor my sister." Like His *middot*!

Her marriage was greatly delayed under such exasperating circumstances, but she asked for a decent marriage. She knew that marriage itself is a very long road and that one can be drawn into provocations at any stage, using the other's means or, as it is popularly called, "whataboutism" - wait, what about you! "Remove the beam between your eyes!"

Our mothers remove the beams and build their houses with them. Even when faced with injustice, they remain fair in the face of life. They let their cry be heard in Ramah when their sons are in captivity, and when their daughter is carried off to Pharaoh's house, they will wait to the last for redemption, they will do all they can to bring her closer to it. But on the way - they will be Israelites, they will go their way until the owner of the castle looks at them and says to them, as He did to Avraham: "It cost you a lot!" And He says to them as He said to Rachel: "For there is a reward for your labor: They shall return from the enemy's land."

*Continued from page 16*

with how his family was feeling, his girlfriend, me. He didn't want people to feel sad for him."

The Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School community — including alumni, students, faculty and staff — is "completely devastated and heartbroken" to learn of Balva's death, said Rabbi Mitchel Malkus, head

of the school, in an emailed statement. "Omer was a beloved student," Malkus said. "He was an unabashed advocate for the state of Israel. He is a hero to the state of Israel, the Jewish people and the school. We mourn his loss."

When Balva enlisted at 18, he wrote Missner a letter to remind him of all they

had shared as children and all they had to look forward to as men — marriage, kids, a lifetime of memories. "He wrote that when he's having a tough time, he imagines us at 24, 25 with our families on vacation, just being together. ... That's the one thought that always put a smile on his face, because he wanted to start a family young," Missner said.







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