



המזרחי HAMIZRACHI

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PARSHA WEEKLY

PARSHAT LECH LECHA 5787 • 2026



WORLD MIZRACHI Picture of the Week

This week, as part of the Shalhevet shlichut training program, a panel was held on the topic of Campus Life Dilemmas. Many of the alumni go on to serve on campuses, with the topics covered critical for anyone serving in communal positions. Moderated by Prof. Elliott Malamet, panelists included Rabbanit Nechama Goldman-Barash, Rabbi Ben Menora (Shalhevet alumnus, former JLIC rabbi at Binghamton University), and Rabbi Yehuda and Rabbanit Hannah Auerbach (Shalhevet alumni, former JLIC rabbinic couple at University of Chicago). The Shalhevet shlichut training program is run by the Religious Zionist Shlichut Center, founded by World Mizrahi.

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www.mizrachi.org
office@mizrachi.org
+972 (0)2 620 9000



NASI
Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

CO-PRESIDENT
Rabbi Yechiel Wasserman

CHAIRMAN
Mr. Harvey Blitz

EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN
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World Mizrahi 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, Mizrahi – an acronym for *merkaz ruchani* (spiritual center) – was founded in 1902 by Rabbi Yitzchak Yaakov Reines, and is led today by Rabbi Doron Perez. Mizrahi'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.



EDITOR
Rabbi Reuven Taragin

ASSISTANT EDITOR
Esther Shafier

GRAPHIC DESIGNER
Leah Rubin

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
Elan Finkelstein

PROOFREADER
Renee Rosenberg

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The Real Avraham Saint, Scholar, and Soldier



Rabbi Doron Perez
Executive Chairman, World Mizrahi

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

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 וְעַמֹּרָה... וַיֵּלְכוּ

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

וַיִּקְחוּ אֶת-לוֹט וְאֶת-רֶכֶשׁוֹ בְּוַחֲדֵי אֶבְרָם 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 וַיִּקְחוּ וַיֵּלְכוּ – "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 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, although Lot not only chose to separate from his righteous uncle Avraham, he decided to settle in the wicked and immoral city of Sodom, he was a family member of Avraham. How could the righteous Avraham leave his own nephew for the dead?

Secondly, even if Avraham wanted to 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 G-d, a 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 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?

After all, war entails fighting, violence, and killing. It is bloody, tragic, and takes human life – there is no way to avoid this against the warring kings. Can the epitome of the pure and righteous man of G-d, kill others and destroy others created in His image?

Man of War – Warrior of Justice

Yet, this is exactly what Avraham does.

He springs straight into action upon hearing of his nephew's capture:

וַיִּשְׁמַע אַבְרָם כִּי נִשְׁבָּה אָחִיו וַיֵּרָק אֶת־חֲנִיכָיו יְלִידֵי
בֵּיתוֹ... וַיֵּרֶדְף עַד־דָּן

“When Avram 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 – standing up to the hostage taking violent marauders.

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?



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How We Vote



Rabbi Reuven Taragin

Educational Director, World Mizrahi

Dean of Overseas Students, Yeshivat Hakotel

Our Test Today

“At 5:35 AM, we woke up: my wife, my brother Reb Shimon Leib, and my brother-in-law Reb Natanel Solduchil. And after we drank coffee, we put on Shabbat clothing in honor of this great and holy day, because “This is the day the Lord has made, we will rejoice and be happy on it.”

After 2000 or more years of exile, you could say that from the six days of Creation until this day, we have not merited to see a day like this, that we are holding elections in a Jewish state. *Shehechyanu!* Blessed is the One who kept us alive and sustained us and brought us to this day!

So we went to the voting station near Chabashim Street with our identity cards in hand. With great and mighty joy, we walked the short way there, and the entire way I walked as if it were Simchat Torah, circling with a Torah scroll, because I was holding the identity card of our new Jewish state in my hand.

My happiness and joy knew no bounds! The assistant at the voting station brought the ballot box, and the chairman called out to me and said, “*V’haddarta p’nei zaken* – And you shall honor the old man,” and he told me that since I was the oldest person present, I would be the first to vote. With a thrill of awe and holiness, I handed my identity card to the chairman, who read my name aloud from the card and the voters’ register.

The deputy chairman wrote down my name and handed me the number 1, then handed me an envelope. I went into the other room, where there were ballots from all the parties. With a shaking hand, moved with holiness, I took one ballot marked “B” for the

Religious Union party and placed it inside the envelope I had received from the deputy chairman.

I reentered the polling room and showed them I held only one envelope. Then the holiest moment of my life arrived. The moment that neither my father nor my grandfather had the privilege to experience in their lifetimes. Only I, in my time, in my lifetime, did I merit to experience such a holy and pure moment as this... What joy for me and my portion!

At 6:28 AM, we returned home and went to pray. What a great holiday!”¹

This is how Rabbi Moshe Alpert, an ultra-Orthodox rabbi who served as the leader of several Jewish communities in Jerusalem during the Mandate, describes his experience of voting in the first Israeli Knesset elections in 1949.

Nearly eighty years and countless election cycles later, many of us have come to take for granted the privilege of voting for a Jewish government in a Jewish state.

We should not.

For nearly two millennia, our people lacked the opportunity to vote for Jewish representatives in our own country. Regardless of the candidates or the election outcome, we should recognize and appreciate the profound *zechut* of possessing this right.

How To Choose

Indeed, Jews know how to celebrate elections. Indeed, we take full advantage of the democratic process by consistently fielding one of the world’s largest numbers of political parties per capita.

This situation complicates voters’ decision-making. Many party platforms are similar, and numerous significant issues are under debate. How, then, should we choose?

While each of us must ultimately make a personal decision, the Torah provides guidance. The *pasuk* describing the appointment of a king states: “*Som tasim alecha melech* – Place a king upon yourself,” implying that the people are responsible for the appointment.² Yet, the conclusion of the *pasuk* appears to suggest otherwise: “*asher yivchar Hashem elokecha* – that Hashem, your G-d, chooses.” Who then is ultimately responsible for choosing the king: the people or Hashem?

The Sifri,³ emphasizing the end of the *pasuk*, views Hashem as the ultimate chooser, with the *Navi* designating the individual to be appointed. This was indeed the process by which Shaul, Dovid, and many subsequent kings were selected.

The Ramban, however, identifies a difficulty with this interpretation: the continuation of the *pasuk* instructs the people to select a Jew, rather than a gentile, as king. If Hashem determines the king through the prophet, the need for Torah guidelines regarding eligibility becomes unclear.

The Ramban therefore cites a second interpretation, which emphasizes the words “*som tasim*” and asserts that the decision rests with us. The phrase “that Hashem your G-d chooses,” on this reading, means that we should use Hashem’s will as our guiding criterion. The appointment of a king, like all significant decisions, should be based on our understanding of Hashem’s desires for us and for the world.⁴

*Pirkei Avot*⁵ instructs us to align our will with Hashem’s, encouraging us to desire what He desires. This alignment should inform both our daily choices and our selection of leaders.

May It Be His Will

Ultimately, the Ramban favors a third interpretation that connects Hashem’s Will to our decision-making. According to this view, the *pasuk* teaches that Hashem “chooses” whomever we appoint, provided

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DRAWING WISDOM FROM THE MESHECH CHOCHMAH

Lift Up Your Eyes



Rabbanit Shani Taragin

Educational Director, World Mizrahi

Educational Director, Mizrahi Lapidot and Matan Eshkolot Programs for Educators

Rosh Beit Midrash of Mizrahi-Tzemach David Women's Learning Hub, Mizrahi Lapidot,
and Yeshiva University in Israel Women's Torah Studies Program

There is a profound difference between hearing about something and seeing it for ourselves. The Torah repeatedly tells us that Hashem spoke to our *Avot*, but in *Parshat Lech Lecha*, when Avraham Avinu arrives in *Eretz Yisrael*, we encounter a different expression: “לה' הנראה אלי” – he built an altar to Hashem, Who had appeared to him. Why does the Torah emphasize that Hashem was seen?

Rav Meir Simcha HaKohen of Dvinsk, in his *Meshech Chochmah*, finds in this expression a key to understanding both Avraham's spiritual journey and the unique sanctity of *Eretz Yisrael*. His insight invites us to look beyond what is immediately visible and discover the deeper reality that lies beneath the surface.

Learning to See

Rav Meir Simcha explains that the human soul is naturally attuned to the spiritual, yet the physical world can obscure our awareness of Hashem. Our bodies, with their material needs and limitations, may become a barrier between us and our Creator. Torah, however, has the power to transform that relationship. It does not ask us to escape the physical world, but to refine ourselves so that we can perceive the spiritual within it. Rav Meir Simcha offers a striking metaphor: Torah functions like a microscope, enabling us to discern what would otherwise remain hidden from view. The physical world need not conceal Hashem. When our perspective is shaped by Torah, even our embodied existence can become a means of recognizing Him. This is the deeper meaning of *Iyov's* declaration: “ומבשרי ואחזה אלוך” – “From my flesh, I behold Hashem” (*Iyov* 19:26). We do not encounter the Divine by denying our physical

existence, but by learning to see beyond its apparent limitations.

This insight illuminates Hashem's promise to Avraham later in the *parsha*. After Lot separates from him, Hashem tells Avraham: “שָׂא נָא עֵינֶיךָ וּרְאֵה ... כִּי אֶת כָּל הָאָרֶץ ... אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה רוֹאֶה לְךָ אֲתֹנֶנָּה” – “Lift up your eyes and look ... for all the land that you see, I will give to you” (*Bereishit* 13:14-15). At first glance, the promise seems to depend on what Avraham can see. Yet the land before him does not appear to belong to him. Other people inhabit it; its future is uncertain; the fulfillment of Hashem's promise lies far beyond his immediate experience. Rav Meir Simcha suggests that Hashem is teaching Avraham to look beyond the visible landscape. *Eretz Yisrael* possesses a sanctity that cannot be measured by its political circumstances or determined by its current inhabitants. Its deepest identity derives from its relationship with Hashem. Even when its outward reality seems to contradict the promise, its inner truth remains unchanged.

The words “שָׂא נָא עֵינֶיךָ” therefore convey more than an invitation to survey the land. They call upon Avraham to develop a different way of seeing: to recognize the enduring spiritual reality beneath the changing circumstances of history.

The *Meshech Chochmah* further connects this promise to the halachic distinction between a person's right to benefit from land and ownership of the land itself. The Canaanite, he explains, held only what *halacha* calls a *kinyan peirot*, a right to the land's use and produce. The *guf*, the essence of the holy land, belonged to no human being. That is why Avraham could acquire it through sight alone, and why it would remain with his descendants forever. Human beings may cultivate its fields and enjoy its produce, but *Eretz*

Yisrael's ultimate significance cannot be reduced to human possession. Its sanctity and its destiny are rooted in Hashem's covenant with Avraham and his descendants. Here lies a remarkable paradox. *Eretz Yisrael* is the land in which we are called to perceive Hashem's presence, yet it is also a land whose visible circumstances can make that presence difficult to discern. Avraham is asked to hold both realities together: to inhabit the world as it is, while seeing it in light of what Hashem has promised it will become.

This Week in Eretz Yisrael – Seeing Beyond the Headlines

On Tuesday, October 27, the citizens of Israel will go to the polls to elect the 26th Knesset. This is the first national election since October 7, held after years of war and of grief, in a society that often seems divided against itself. The campaign season is, almost by definition, a season of hearing: speeches, slogans, polls, accusations, predictions. Much is said; little is clearly seen. In *Eretz Yisrael*, the distance between the world we see and the world we pray for can feel painfully wide. Public discourse amplifies our differences; headlines capture our attention; political debates can leave us wondering whether we are still capable of seeing one another clearly. The *Meshech Chochmah* does not ask us to close our eyes to these realities. Faith is not denial, and spiritual vision is not indifference to the challenges of our time. Rather, his teaching challenges us to look at those realities through a deeper lens.

Firstly, the ballot belongs to the world of *kinyan peirot*. Governments come and go. Coalitions are built and fall apart. Each one administers the land for a time, and how they do so matters significantly. That

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Halachic Q&A



Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

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

Rosh Yeshivah, Jerusalem College of Technology | Founder and Chairman, Sulamot and La'Ofek

**“עושה מעשה בראשית”
שכחו וגבורתו מלא עולם”
upon feeling the blowing wind on
Mount Hermon?**

The *Mishnah* in *Mesechet Brachot*¹ states that upon experiencing winds, one recites the blessing of “עושה מעשה בראשית”². However, the *Gemara Yerushalmi*³ explains that this blessing applies to winds that blow violently, whereas for winds that blow gently, one recites “עושה מעשה בראשית”⁴. This distinction is also cited by the *Tosfot*.⁵

The *Shulchan Aruch*⁶ mentions only the blessing for winds that blow violently, stating that one may recite either “עושה מעשה בראשית” or “עושה מעשה בראשית”⁷. The *Magen Avraham*⁸ cites the *Tosfot*, in the name of the *Gemara Yerushalmi* we mentioned earlier, stating that for gentle winds, one should recite only “עושה מעשה בראשית”. The *Mishnah Berurah*⁹ therefore writes that it is preferable to always recite “עושה מעשה בראשית” over the wind because we are not sufficiently knowledgeable about what qualifies as a wind blowing “violently.” The *Magen Avraham* also writes that even for the blessing “עושה מעשה בראשית,” the wind must be a “strong wind.” Furthermore, in the name of Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, it is stated in *Halichot Shlomo*¹⁰ that one may recite the blessing over “exceptionally strong winds, if they inspire awe and amazement.”

Although people do not generally have the custom of reciting blessings over winds, it appears that, from a *halachic* perspective, there is no distinction between winds and lightning or thunder. It may be that the difficulty lies in determining what qualifies as a strong wind, unlike lightning and thunder, whose definitions are clear and unambiguous. In any case, when the winds are truly

unusual, and presumably, such winds can be experienced on Mount Hermon, it seems that one may recite the blessing.

Therefore, the practical conclusion is that if unusually strong winds are blowing on Mount Hermon and they inspire awe and amazement, one may recite the blessing of “עושה מעשה בראשית”. Finally, it should be added that simply seeing Mount Hermon can also warrant the blessing of “עושה מעשה בראשית”, provided that the sight awakens in the viewer a sense of awe and amazement.

I regularly use disposable contact lenses and eye drops for dry eyes.

Regarding Shabbat:

A. Is it permissible to open the plastic case covered with aluminum foil, which contains the solution and the contact lens?

B. Is there any issue with touching the solution?

C. Is it permissible to put eye drops into my eyes?

A. It is permissible to remove the aluminum foil cover. This is similar to removing the seal of a barrel. Since it is needed for Shabbat, it is permitted, just as we permit opening the lids of yogurt containers and similar items. Of course, if there are letters printed on the foil, one should try to avoid tearing through them. If there is no alternative, however, one may open it even in that situation, preferably using a *shinui* (doing it in an unusual manner). If it is a reusable container and a particular part must be broken off, it is preferable to break it off using a *shinui*, such as using the backs of one's fingers.

(Even this is not truly “reusable,” since it is intended to empty the solution inside it and will not be refilled. Nevertheless,

it is preferable to do this using a *shinui*, because in this case one is creating a cap, unlike simply removing a lid, which presents no problem at all.)

B. There is no problem with touching the solution.

C. It is permissible to use these eye drops for dryness, since this is not considered taking medication. Nowadays, many people routinely use such products to treat dry eyes.

Is it permissible for men to wear cologne?

Since nowadays men wear cologne, it is permitted.

What is the halacha regarding lighting Shabbat candles for a couple who are in the delivery room when Shabbat begins?

Since they will presumably be staying in the hospital that night, they may light Shabbat candles with the blessing. If they think they will be discharged and return home, they should light the candles without reciting the blessing.

Be'ezrat Hashem, may the birth go smoothly, and may the baby be born healthy.

● *Compiled and Translated by Elan Finkelstein.*

1. ברכות נד.
2. ירושלמי ברכות טז.
3. ברכות נט. ד"ה “על הרוחות”
4. או"ח רכז:א.
5. שם.
6. או"ח רכז:ד.
7. הליכות שלמה תפילה פרק כג דבר הלכה מא

פרשת לך לך

בין לוט לאברהם - מהליכה יחדיו לפרידה

הרבנית שרון רימון

Tanach teacher and author



יווי ה' אל אברם מביא אותו לעזוב את ארץ מולדתו, וללכת אל ארץ לא נודעת, אל עבר שליחות חייו. למרות שהוא עוזב את בית אביו ואת כל משפחתו, לוט בן אחיו הולך איתו: "וַיֵּלֶךְ אֲבָרָם כְּאִשְׁרֵי דְבַר אֱלֹהֵי ה' וַיֵּלֶךְ אִתּוֹ לוֹט... וַיִּקַּח אֲבָרָם אֶת שְׂרֵי אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאֶת לוֹט בֶּן אֲחִיו... וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶרְצָה כְּנָעַן" (י"ב, ד-ה).

מדוע הלך לוט עם אברם?

יתכן שלוט הולך עם אברם מסיבה טכנית - אביו הרן מת, והוא חי בביתו של אברם ולכן אברם לוקח אותו איתו, כחלק מבני ביתו (כמשתמע מפס' ה. ומדגיש אור החיים: "לא לצד קיום מאמר ה' אלא ראהו הולך והלך עמו"). אולם יתכן שהליכתו של לוט עם אברם נבעה משותפות מהותית לדרך, כפי שמפרש רד"ק (בעקבות אונקלוס):

"...כי לוט היה מאמונתו לפיכך נתחבר עמו, והוא גם כן היה קורא לאנשים ומראה להם טעמים שיאמינו בה' ויעבדו אותו לבדו ולא הגלולים לפיכך אמר הנפש אשר עשו" ולא "אשר עשה"..."

בין אם לוט הלך עם אברם כנספח, כאחיו יתום, ובין אם הלך עם אברם כשותף לדרך - **בתחילת הדרך הם הלכו יחד, ואף הגיעו יחד אל ארץ כנען. אולם, מהר מאוד מתחיל הקרע בין לוט לאברהם, אשר הולך ומתרחב עד לפרידתם המוחלטת.**

עם הגיעם אל הארץ, מתוארים מסעותיו של אברהם, קריאתו בשם ה', והתגלות ה' אליו. בכל אלה לא מזכיר לוט כלל. סביר להניח שלוט היה שם, אך המסע, השליחות, וההתגלות האלקית הם של אברם, ועל פניו נראה שללוט אין חלק פעיל בכך. הוא נספח ולא ממש שותף, ומדגיש המשך חכמה: "קודם ביאתו לארץ ישראל היה לו לוט חבר ורע, ולכך כתוב "אתו". וכשהיו בארץ ישראל וראה ה' פעמים, נתקדש בקדושה יתירה עד כי היה לוט רחוק הרבה ממנו..."

עם חזרתם ממצרים הפער הולך וגדל: "וַיַּעַל אֲבָרָם מִמִּצְרַיִם הוּא וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וְכָל אֲשֶׁר לוֹ וְלוֹט עִמּוֹ הַגִּבְעָה" (י"ג, א), אך בשלב זה הרכוש כבר איננו "רכושם (המשותף) אֲשֶׁר רָכְשׁוּ", אלא לכל אחד יש את רכושו הפרטי הנפרד: "וְאֲבָרָם כָּבֵד מְאֹד בְּמִקְנֵה בָּקָר וּבְצֹהֶב... וגם ללוט ההלך אֶת אֲבָרָם הָיָה צֶאֱן וּבָקָר וְאֶהֱלִים" (ב-ה), ובמקביל - גם הדרך כבר איננה ממש משותפת: "וַיֵּלֶךְ (אברם) לְמִסְעָיו מִנֶּגֶב וְעַד בֵּית אֵל... אֶל מְקוֹם הַמִּצְבֵּחַ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה שָׁם בְּרֵאשִׁיטָה וַיִּקְרָא שָׁם אֲבָרָם בְּשֵׁם ה'" (ג-ד), ואילו לוט הולך בנפרד עם רכושו.

מידה מוסריות גבוהות, ותלות בקב"ה. לוט בוחר בחיים של נוחות בסדום העשירה והפורחת.

אין פסול בחיי שפע בפני עצמם, כל עוד הם מכוונים לרצון ה'. אך הכתוב מעיד בפנינו: "וְאֶנְשֵׁי סְדֹם רָעִים וְחָטָאִים לֵה' מְאֹד" (יג), ואף מתאר את עונשם העתידי - השחתת העיר. אך רשעותם של אנשי סדום איננה מרתיעה את לוט מהתיישבות בחבל ארץ זה. בכך נפרד לוט מאברהם לא רק גיאוגרפית אלא בעיקר רוחנית. אברם בוחר ללכת בדרך ה' ולשבת בארץ ה', עם כל האתגרים הכרוכים בכך, בעוד לוט בוחר בחיי השפע והנוחות בסדום עיר הרשע.

מבחינתו של לוט, הוא התנתק מאברם ומדרכו, והוא לעולם לא יחזור לשם.

לעומת זאת, אברם עדיין מרגיש אחריות רבה על אחיינו. כאשר לוט נשבה במלחמה (פרק י"ד), יוצא אברם למלחמה לא-לו ומשיב את לוט ואת כל השבויים והשלל שנלקחו מסדום. אך לוט אינו טורח להודות על כך, ובוודאי אינו חוזר לחיות עם אברם.

כאשר ה' מודיע לאברם שהוא עומד להחריב את סדום (פרק י"ח), אברם עומד בתפילה בנסיון להציל את העיר הצדיקים שבה (ואולי הוא חשב שלוט ובני ביתו צדיקים וראוי להציל את העיר בעבורם?).

לוט אמנם צדיק יחסית לאנשי סדום, וניצל מהשחתת העיר (הצלתו של לוט היתה בזכות הכנסת האורחים, אותה למד מאברהם אביו, ובזכות אברהם: "וַיְהִי בְשָׁחַת אֶל-לְהִים אֶת עָרֵי הַכֶּנֶז וַיִּזְכֹּר אֶל-לְקִים אֵת אֲבָרָהָם וַיִּשְׁלַח אֶת לוֹט מִתּוֹךְ הַהֶפְכָּה...") (י"ט, ט), אך למרות שלוט ראה במו עיניו בהשחתת העיר הוא לא חזר בו, המשיך להתנכר לאברם ולדרכו, ולא חזר לקשר איתו.

מכאן ואילך לא נשמע עוד על לוט, והיחסים בינו לבין אברהם ינותקו לחלוטין.

אם כן, מדוע נפרדו דרכיהם של לוט ואברם?

דרכו של אברהם (ועם ישראל בעקבותיו) איננה סוגה בשושנים. היא רצופה באתגרים ובנסיונות, תובענית ביותר ואיננה מתאימה לכל אדם. מי שמחפש חיים פשוטים; חיי נוחות ורווחה; מי שעולם הערכים איננו מספיק ברור ומהותי עבורו; ומי שאמונתו בה' איננה מספיק חזקה - עלול להיבהל מהאתגרים, להתרחק, ולהיפרד.

אך אברהם אביו יזכה להמשכיות - ליצחק, אשר ימשיך את דרכו, דרך ה' לעשות צדקה ומשפט.

כעת מגיע ה"פיצוץ": "וְלֹא נָשָׂא אִתָּם הָאָרֶץ לְשָׁבֶת יַחְדָּו כִּי הָיָה רְכוּשָׁם רָב וְלֹא יָכְלוּ לְשָׁבֶת יַחְדָּו: וַיְהִי רִיב בֵּין רַעֲיֵי מִקְנֵה אֲבָרָם וּבֵין רַעֲיֵי מִקְנֵה לוֹט" (ו-ז). לכאורה, המריבה היא על שטחי המרעה, אשר אינם מספיקים לכמות המקנה הרב שיש לשניהם. אולם, ברור שהשורש של הפירוד יותר עמוק. אפשר להסתדר טוב מאד יחד בתנאי מחיה דלים ובצפיפות כל עוד יש קרבת לב ותחושת שותפות. כאשר לוט ואברם כבר אינם שותפים ברכוש ואינם שותפים לדרך, מתגלעות מחלוקות, המתבטאות במריבות בין הרועים.

חז"ל (בבראשית רבה מ"א, ה) מצביעים על סיבת המריבה:

"...רבי ברכיה בשם רבי יהודה ב"ר סימון אמר בהמתו של אברהם אבינו היתה יוצאה זמומה ובהמתו של לוט לא היתה יוצאה זמומה. היו אומרים להם רועי אברהם: הותר הגזל? היו אומרים להם רועי לוט: כך אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא לאברהם "לירעך אתן את הארץ הזאת", ואברהם פרדה עקרה ואינו מוליד, למחר הוא מת ולוט בן אחיו יורשו"

לפי דברי חז"ל, הפער בין אברם ללוט (המתבטא בדברי הרועים שלהם) הוא ברמת המוסריות - בעוד רועי אברם מקפידים על הגינות מול יושבי הארץ, רועי לוט מרשים לעצמם לרעות בשדות זרים, מתוך תחושה שהארץ כבר שייכת להם.

במדרש זה מבטאים חז"ל את ההבדל התפיסתי בין לוט לאברם: אברם עסוק בשליחותו, בקריאה בשם ה', ואילו לוט עסוק בתוצאות וברווחים שהוא יוכל להרוויח מכך - בירושת הארץ ובצבירת רכוש.

בעקבות המריבה אברם מציע ללוט להיפרד, וכוונתו לפרידה טכנית - לחלק ביניהם את אזורי המרעה בארץ. אולם לוט בוחר בפרידה הרבה יותר מהותית: "וַיֵּשֶׁא לוֹט אֶת עֵינָיו וַיֵּרָא אֶת כָּל כְּפַר הַיִּרְדֹּן כִּי כָלָה מִשְׁקָה לִפְנֵי שַׁחַת ה' אֶת סְדֹם וְאֶת עֲמֹרָה כִּגְן ה' כְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּאֶמְכָּה צֹעַר: וַיִּבְחַר לוֹ לוֹט אֶת כָּל כְּפַר הַיִּרְדֹּן וַיֵּסַע לוֹט מִמִּצְרַיִם וַיִּפְרְדוּ אִישׁ מֵעַל אֲחִיו" (י-יא).

לוט בוחר לשבת בסדום, מפני שהוא רואה את העושר והפוריות של חבל ארץ זה, המזכיר לו את העושר והפוריות של ארץ מצרים, ממנה שב זה עתה. בהיותם במצרים, התוודע לוט לאפשרות לחיים מלאי כל טוב ושפע, בהשוואה לחיים בארץ כנען, שתלויה בגשמים ולעתים יש בה בצורת רועב (כפי שהם חוו על בשרם, ונאלצו לרדת למצרים). **לוט מואס בחיים אלה, של נדודים, שמירה על אמות**

What Does It Mean to Dedicate a Torah Class to Someone?



Sivan Rahav Meir

World Mizrahi Scholar-in-Residence

One question in the chat caught me by surprise recently. Some 4,000 women had registered for an open class on *Parashat Bereishit*, organized by the “Mitchadshot” community. At the beginning of the Zoom session, I mentioned that the class was dedicated to the recovery of the students who had been injured in an explosion just hours earlier, during a trip in northern Israel.

Then someone wrote in the chat: “This is my first-ever Torah class. What does it mean to dedicate a class to someone? I’ve never heard of such an idea.”

I explained that every good deed we do in this world generates *zechuyot* spiritual merits. Torah study and prayer have a special spiritual power. And when we do something good, we can dedicate the merit of that act to a particular purpose. For example, to the recovery of someone who was injured just hours earlier.

The Jewish people are bound together by a sense of mutual responsibility. We all affect one another through our good deeds and *mitzvot* – or, G-d forbid, through our wrongdoing. We are all part of one human fabric, and every action has an impact.

Then, just as the Zoom class was ending, almost as though it were a direct continuation of our discussion, I received a message written by Chani Leiter, the mother of Neria, who was seriously wounded in a terrorist attack a few weeks ago:

“From the the intensive care unit at Shaare Zedek Medical Center, we are receiving messages and videos of so many prayers, Torah study, acts of kindness, and good deeds being performed all around the world on behalf of our Neria. If only I could describe how much

strength this gives us.

“We are seeing how the mutual responsibility and concern of the Jewish people extend far beyond our own personal ordeal. This is the hidden Jewish soul, now revealing itself.

“We named our son Neria – the light of G-d – because we wanted him to spread G-d’s light in the world. G-d’s ways are mysterious, but we can see with our own eyes how Neria is doing exactly that right now. All of this surrounds us with love and gives us strength.”

Wow.

A question from one woman and an answer from one mother remind us of something fundamental: No one is ever alone, and no good deed benefits only the person who performs it.

May Neria Dov ben Chana, and all those who were injured, have a complete and speedy recovery.

■ ■ ■

When Sandy and Rosalie Goldstein were in their forties, they were both considering making *Aliyah* from the United States. Somehow, after a conversation with an official they mistakenly received the impression that they were already too old. They understood that Sandy would not be able to find work in Israel as an accountant at his age, and so they put the dream aside and continued building their lives in New Jersey.

Decades passed. But it is always possible to grow, to renew ourselves, to do better. And today, you can find the Goldsteins in Netanya, surrounded by grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Some members of the family had already made *Aliyah* before them, and they themselves are just one small part of the worldwide

wave of *Aliyah*.

You look at their ID cards, and you cannot help but be inspired. Sandy has just celebrated his 105th birthday, and Rosalie will turn 101 in January. This month, they will celebrate their 79th (!) wedding anniversary.

They could have stayed in their comfort zone. They had already built careers in the United States, raised a family, worked on behalf of Soviet Jews behind the Iron Curtain, and over the years had also grown stronger in their observance of Torah and *mitzvot*.

They both love to quote the ancient words of Hillel the Elder: “If not now, when?”

They remind us: whatever change or improvement we have been dreaming about, whatever new beginning we have been postponing – now is the time.

■ ■ ■

1. This week’s Torah portion, *Lech Lecha*, is the third portion in the Torah. In a sense, we are starting from the beginning for the third time. The universal, global experiments of the Garden of Eden, Noah’s Ark, and the Tower of Babel have all failed. The world needs nations, countries, and distinct identities. The world needs Avraham.

2. Avraham Avinu and Sarah Imeinu make their first appearance on the stage of history – and, in fact, have never left it. If there were a ranking of the most influential people in human history, they would take first place. Billions of people around the world consider themselves their spiritual heirs.

3. Avraham and Sarah are the first *olim*, the first immigrants to the Land of Israel. “Go forth from your land, from your birthplace, and from your father’s

Continued on page 12

For the Shabbat Table



Rabbi Danny Mirvis

CEO, World Mizrachi

Rabbi of Ohel Moshe Synagogue, Herzliya Pituach

“**A**nd He (Hashem) took him (Avram) outside and said, ‘Gaze now heavenwards and count the stars, if you can count them,’ and He (Hashem) said to him (Avram), ‘So will be your offspring.’” (Bereshit 15:5)

On numerous occasions in the book of Bereshit we are blessed to be innumerable, whether like the sand of the sea, the dust of the earth, or the stars of the sky. On a simple level, the comparison to stars expresses both greatness – shining brightly like stars – and the fact that we cannot be counted, just as it is impossible for someone to count all the stars in the sky.

During a recent gathering of Mizrachi representatives from across Europe, I heard Poland’s Chief Rabbi Michael Schudrich (who also serves as the head of Mizrachi Poland) share two original insights into this comparison.

First, if you would ask a normal person to go outside and task them with counting the stars in the sky, they would think you were crazy. Who on earth would actually attempt to perform such an impossible task? Yet when Hashem told Avram to go outside and count the stars, he was not daunted by the size of the task or overwhelmed by the seemingly impossible prospect. Avram started counting the stars one by one. In response, Hashem declared, “So will be your offspring.” This will be an enduring characteristic of the Jews. We will never be scared of attempting the impossible or aiming for the stars, even when they seem far beyond our reach.

Second, Chief Rabbi Schudrich commented that it is possible that this episode transpired at daytime. As opposed to night time, very few stars are close enough, large enough or bright enough to be viewable during the day. Most stars are physically there but out of normal sight.

So too in the future, there will be times when the Jews will be like those stars. Some will be easily noticeable, others less so, and many will be entirely invisible, leaving us with the task of discovering those Jews, and providing them with the path and tools to reclaim their identity.

When considering the realities of post-Shoah European Jewry, both these messages resonate strongly. There are an innumerable number of Jews out there who may not know they’re Jewish or might not wish to acknowledge, share or embrace their identity.

Reconnecting with such Jews might seem an impossible task, but as Avram imprinted in our DNA, we, his descendants, don’t know the meaning of “impossible.”

Shabbat Shalom!

Parsha Riddle



Reb Leor Broh

Mizrachi Melbourne

What appears four times in Parshat Lech Lecha, each time directly involving Avraham?

See page 24 for the answer to the Parsha Riddle

The Heroism of Ordinary Life



Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt”l

The Lord said to Abram: “Go – from your land, your birthplace, and your father’s house – to the land that I will show you.” (Gen. 12:1)

These words are among the most consequential in the history of humankind. In that very moment a new faith was born, one that has lasted for two-thirds of the course of civilisation and remains young and vigorous today. Not only did Abraham give rise to what today we call Judaism. He was also the inspiration of two other religions - Christianity and Islam - both of which trace their descent, biological or spiritual, to him, and which now number among their adherents more than half the six billion people on the face of the earth.¹

There was no one like Abraham, yet the Torah is exceptionally understated in its account of him. As children we learned that he was the first iconoclast, the person who, while still young, broke the idols in his father’s house. But this is a Midrash, a tradition, inferred from hints in the biblical text rather than from explicit statements. In the pure text of the Torah, we are told nothing of his childhood, youth, his early days with Sarah, or any other time before the moment when G-d spoke these fateful words to him.

From what we do know, Abraham does not fit any conventional image of the religious hero. He is not, like Noah, the sole survivor of a world hastening to its destruction. He is not, like Moses, a law-giver and liberator. He is not like the later prophets, people who spent their life confronting kings, wrestling with their contemporaries and “speaking truth to power.”

To be sure, he is a man of exemplary virtue. He welcomes strangers and gives them food. He fights a battle on behalf of the cities of the plain in order to res-

cue his nephew Lot. He prays for them in one of the greatest dialogues in religious literature. He patiently waits for a child and then, when the command comes, is willing to offer him as a sacrifice, only to discover that the G-d of truth does not want us to sacrifice our children but to cherish them. But if we were asked to characterise him with adjectives, the words that spring to mind – gentle, kind, gracious – are not those usually associated with the founder of a new faith. They are the kind of attributes to which any of us could aspire. None of us can be an Abraham, but all of us can take him as a role-model. Perhaps that is the deepest lesson of all.

In *Sincerity and Authenticity*, Lionel Trilling made the following comment:

Not all cultures develop the idea of the heroic. I once had occasion to observe in connection with Wordsworth that in the rabbinical literature there is no touch of the heroic idea. The rabbis, in speaking of virtue, never mention the virtue of courage, which Aristotle regarded as basic to the heroic character. The indifference of the rabbis to the idea of courage is the more remarkable in that they knew that many of their number would die for their faith. What is especially to our point is that, as ethical beings, the rabbis never see themselves – it is as if the commandment which forbade the making of images extended to their way of conceiving the personal moral existence as well.

Trilling is not quite accurate. The rabbis did speak of courage, *gevurah*. But he is right to say that Judaism did not have heroes in the way the Greeks and other cultures did. A hero is one convinced of his own importance. He or she is conscious of playing a part on the world stage un-

der the admiring gaze of their contemporaries. The rabbis, said Trilling, “would have been quite ready to understand the definition of the hero as an actor and to say that, as such, he was undeserving of the attention of serious men.” Abraham is the paradigm of an unheroic hero, one who (in Maimonides’ lovely phrase) “does what is right because it is right”² and not for the sake of popularity or fame. If we were to define Judaism in Abrahamic terms it would be the heroism of ordinary life, being willing to live by one’s convictions though all the world thinks otherwise, being true to the call of eternity, not the noise of now. Which brings us to the key phrase, the first words of G-d to the bearer of a new covenant: *Lech Lecha*. Is there, already in these two words, a hint of what was to come?

Rashi, following an ancient exegetical tradition, translates the phrase as “journey for yourself” (Rashi, Gen. 12:1). He suggests that these words really meant, “Travel for your own benefit and good. There I will make you into a great nation; here you will not have the merit of having children.” Sometimes we have to give up our past in order to acquire a future. G-d was already teaching Abraham that what seems like a sacrifice is, in the long run, not so. Abraham was about to say goodbye to the things that mean most to us – our land, our birthplace and our parents’ homes, the places where we belong. It was a journey from the familiar to the unfamiliar, a leap into the unknown. To be able to make that leap involves trust – in Abraham’s case, trust not in visible power but in the voice of the invisible G-d. At the end of it, however, Abraham would discover that he had achieved something he could not have done otherwise. He would give birth to a new nation whose greatness consist-

ed precisely in the ability to live by that voice and create something new in the history of humankind. *Lech Lecha* therefore means more than “Go.” It means, “Go for yourself.”

Another midrashic interpretation takes the phrase to mean “Go with yourself” – meaning, by travelling from place to place you will extend your influence not over one land but many:

When the Holy One said to Abraham, “Leave your land, your birthplace and your father’s house . . .” what did Abraham resemble? A jar of scent with a tight-fitting lid put away in a corner so that its fragrance could not go forth. As soon as it was moved from that place and opened, its fragrance began to spread. So the Holy One said to Abraham, “Abraham, many good deeds are in you. Travel about from place to place, so that the greatness of your name will go forth in My world.”

Bereishit Rabbah 39:2.

Abraham was commanded to leave his place in order to testify to the existence of a G-d not bounded by place – Creator and Sovereign of the entire universe. Abraham and Sarah were to be like perfume, leaving a trace of their presence wherever they went. Implicit in this *Midrash* is the idea that the fate of the first Jews already prefigured that of their descendants. They were scattered throughout the world in order to spread knowledge of G-d throughout the world. Unusually, exile is seen here not as punishment but as a necessary corollary of a faith that sees G-d everywhere. “*Lech lecha*” means “Go with yourself” – your beliefs, your way of life, your faith.

A third interpretation, this time more mystical, takes the phrase to mean, “Go to yourself.” The Jewish journey, said R. David of Lelov, is a journey to the root of the soul. Only in the holy land, said R. Ephraim Landschutz, can a Jew find the source of his or her being. R. Zushya of Hanipol said, “When I get to heaven, they will not ask me, Zushya, why were you not Moses? They will ask me, Zushya, why were you not Zushya?” Abraham was being asked to leave behind all the

things that make us someone else – for it is only by taking a long and lonely journey that we discover who we truly are. “Go to yourself.”

There is, however, a fourth interpretation: “Go by yourself.” Only a person willing to stand alone, singular and unique, can worship the G-d who is alone, singular and unique. Only one able to leave behind the natural sources of identity can encounter G-d, who stands above and beyond nature. A journey into the unknown is one of the greatest possible expressions of freedom. G-d wanted Abraham and his children to be a living example of what it is to serve the G-d of freedom, in freedom, for the sake of freedom. What does this mean?

Alasdair Macintyre once pointed out that there are two kinds of atheist: one who does not believe in G-d, and one for whom atheism itself is a kind of religion. Of the latter, some of the greatest examples were (lapsed, converted, or non-believing) Jews – most famously, Spinoza, Marx, and Freud. Instead of merely denying the truths of Judaism, they set out to provide systematic alternatives.

Fundamental to the Torah are two freedoms: the freedom of G-d and the freedom of human beings. G-d is not, in Judaism, an impersonal force. He acts (in creation, revelation, and redemption) on the basis not of necessity but of choice. In choosing to make humanity in His own image He endowed us, too, with choice. There is no such thing as fate or predestination. “I call heaven and earth to witness,” said Moses, “that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life.”

It was this that Spinoza, Marx, and Freud set out to challenge. Each sought to show that we are not free. Man is a predictable animal. Our nature and character are subject to quasi-scientific laws. There is a science of human behaviour as there is a science of atoms. History, personal or collective, is a form of inevitability. We are what we are because we could not be otherwise. Against this, Judaism is a living protest. Abraham and his children were summoned to a life of radical freedom – and it is this that is at the heart of

G-d’s threefold call.

Marx said that man is a product of social forces, themselves shaped by the interests of the ruling class, the owners of property of which the most significant is land. Therefore, G-d said to Abraham: Leave your land.

Spinoza said that humans are made by innate instincts and biological drives (nowadays this is called genetic determinism) given by birth. Therefore, G-d said to Abraham: Leave the circumstances of your birth.

Freud said that we are the way we are because of the traumas of childhood, the influence of our early years, our relationships and rivalries with our parents, especially our father. Therefore, G-d said to Abraham: Leave your father’s house.

Lech Lecha means: Leave behind you all that makes human beings predictable, unfree, able to blame others and evade responsibility. Abraham’s children were summoned to be the people that defied the laws of nature because they refused to define themselves as the products of nature (Nietzsche understood this aspect of Judaism particularly well). That is not to say that economic or biological or psychological forces have no part to play in human behaviour. They do. But with sufficient imagination, determination, discipline and courage we can rise above them. Abraham did. So, at most times, did his children.

Those who live within the laws of history are subject to the laws of history. Whatever is natural, said Maimonides, is subject to disintegration and decay. That is what has happened to virtually every civilisation that has appeared on the world’s stage. Abraham, however, was to become the father of an *am olam*, an eternal people that would neither disintegrate nor decay. Therefore, it had to be a people willing to stand outside the laws of nature. What for other nations are natural – land, home, family – in Judaism are subjects of religious command. They must be striven for. They involve a journey. They are not given at the outset, nor can they be taken for granted. Abraham was to leave behind the things that make

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Outsiders



Rabbi Hershel Schachter

Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary of Yeshiva University

A very old *minhag* is recorded in *Shulchan Aruch*¹ that when a young woman gets married the *chupah* should take place outside under the stars. *Hakodosh Boruch Hu* told Avraham Avinu, look at the stars, try to count them. It is impossible. So too, will your descendants be so numerous like the stars in the sky. We want to invoke the blessing that Hashem gave to Avraham Avinu and the Jewish people, that the young woman who is getting married now should be blessed with a lot of children.

Some commentaries on the *Shulchan Aruch* assume that this *minhag* existed already in the days of the *Talmud Yerushalmi*. *Tosfos*² quotes the *Talmud Yerushalmi* as distinguishing between the *chupah* of a woman getting married for the first time as opposed to an *almonah*: standing under the canopy only constitutes *nissuin* when the woman is getting married for the first time but not if she is an *almonah*.

Rav Chaim Volozhiner³ argued that this makes no sense whatsoever; why should we distinguish between a first marriage and a second marriage? Some of the contemporaries of Rav Chaim Volozhiner explained that the idea behind the distinction in the *Yerushalmi* is not so much first marriage vs. second marriage; but rather that a young woman gets married outside, and the *chupah* which has four poles constructed in the shape of a *tzuras ha'pesach* (i.e., what we use to make an *eruv* for Shabbos purposes), only constitutes a separate room when it is out in the open. But in the case of the older *almonah*, who is beyond the childbearing age, who gets married inside, because we

are not interested in invoking the blessing of “*ko yihiye zaracho*,” the four poles of the *chupah* do not accomplish that that area should be considered a separate room because the room is surrounded all around with walls which enclose the entire area, including the *chupah* area, and everything is considered one big room. (The whole idea that standing under the *chupah* accomplishes *nissuin* is based on the premise that the *chosson* and *kallah* who are married already enter together in a separate room for the sake of accomplishing *nissuin*).

When Hashem told Avraham Avinu to gaze up at the stars and attempt to count them, the Torah tells us that he was inside his tent and Hashem took him outside to look at the stars. Rashi in his commentary on *chumash* quotes from the *midrash* that the idea behind taking him outside was to demonstrate that the Jewish people are not part of the natural order of the world. The Torah tells us that Sara Imeinu was an *akorah*, and the *gemorah* tells us that Avraham Avinu as an *akor*.⁴ According to the rules of nature they should not have been able to have children. According to the rules of nature, the entire Jewish people should not have existed. The entire history of the Jewish people is *l'maaleh min ha'tevah*. This is what the *gemorah*⁵ means by the statement “*ein mazel l'Yisroel*.” It does not mean that Jewish people have no luck, rather it means that our history is not subject to *sh'litas ha'kochavim u'mazolos* and does not follow the normal rules and regulations of history. One might refer to this concept as “*austriit*.” Hashem told Avraham Avinu to go out of his house, representing

the idea that the Jewish people don't really blend in with the rest of nature.

The old *minhag* of having the *chupah* under the stars for a young woman getting married is not really being fulfilled if they stand inside the building and open up the ceiling. Even though they are standing under the stars, they have not walked outside. If the *chupah* takes place inside the building with just the ceiling removed, according to the interpretation that we quoted in the *Talmud Yerushalmi*, such a *chupah* would not be valid. To properly observe the *minhag*, the *chosson* and *kallah* should go out of the building and there, outdoors, stand under the stars.

This idea could perhaps explain the mysterious phenomenon of antisemitism throughout all the ages. The Jewish people really don't blend in with the rest of nature. We know that there is a natural tendency for the human body to reject foreign matter. Because the Jewish people have been designated by Hashem as something “*chutz min ha'tevah*,” and perhaps that is why Avraham Avinu refers to himself as *ger v'toshav a'nochi l'mochem*,⁶ the Jews are always considered like *geirim*, strangers, and correctly so. This, perhaps, is the cause of the natural tendency for them to be isolated.⁷

1. אבן העזר סי' ס"א סעיף א'

2. תוס' יומא (י"ג:) ד"ה לחדא

3. ספר כתר ראש (סי' צ"ה). ועי' בספר עקבי הצאן (עמוד 265-266).

4. עי' יבמות (ס"ד).

5. שבת (קנ"ו).

6. בפ' חיי שרה (בראשית כ"ג-ד').

7. See *The Meaning of Am Hanivchar; the Source of Anti-Semitism*

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house,” G-d tells Avraham – and he sets out for the Land of Israel. Millions have followed in his footsteps over the generations.

4. The first *mitzvah* Avraham fulfills is also the only *mitzvah* in this Torah

portion: *brit milah*, circumcision. Close to 100% of his Jewish descendants continue to observe it to this day.

5. It's worth remembering: In his own time, nobody called him Avraham Avinu. They probably called him Avraham the

eccentric, the lunatic. The entire world worshipped idols, while he introduced us to the revolutionary ideas of monotheism, charity and kindness, faith and optimism. Today, everyone knows he was right.

Two Questions for the Week



Rabbi Yisroel Reisman
Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshiva Torah Vodaas

Question of the Week #1

In *Bereishis* 13:14, Avraham Avinu is shown *Eretz Yisrael*: צפנה ונגבה וקדמה וימה – north, south, east, and west. This is the order in which Avraham Avinu was shown *Eretz Yisrael*. By Yaakov Avinu, in *Bereishis* 28:14, in the famous *pasuk* of Ufaratzta, the order is different: וקדמה וימה וצפנה ונגבה – east, west, north, and south.

A little strange! By Avraham Avinu, north and south come first, while by Yaakov Avinu, east and west come first.

Rav Tzadok, in *Divrei Sofrim*, at the end of *Os Lamed-Zayin*, points this out and says, rather mysteriously, that Avraham Avinu is more appropriate to north and south, while Yaakov Avinu is more *shayach* to east and west.

Why Avraham is associated with north and south, and Yaakov with east and west, I don't know. But okay, *kach heim hadevarim*. That is not what I want to ask. What bothered me is *Tehillim* 107:3, where it speaks about gathering the Jewish people back to *Eretz Yisrael*: מִמִּזְרָח וּמִמַּעֲרָב מִצְפּוֹן וּמִיָּם. מִצְפּוֹן וּמִיָּם.

We say this in *davening*. But it doesn't make sense! *מִמִּזְרָח* means from the east, *מִמַּעֲרָב* means from the west, and *מִצְפּוֹן* means from the north. But what does *מִיָּם* mean? The *yam* is also west! It should say from the east and south, from the west and north. What does the *pasuk* mean when it says *מִצְפּוֹן וּמִמַּעֲרָב מִמִּזְרָח וּמִיָּם*?

A davar peleh!

Perhaps we can answer as follows. When we learned *Sefer Yirmiyahu*, we learned in 1:14: מִצְפּוֹן תִּפְתָּח הָרָעָה – from the north, the evil will come. Nevuchadnetzar will attack from the north. The *kasha* is that Bavel is not in the north! Babylonia is due east of *Eretz Yisrael*, not north.

Rav Yaakov Emden answers that it is true that Bavel is east of *Eretz Yisrael*. However, when you wanted to travel from Bavel to *Eretz Yisrael*, especially in ancient times, you could not simply travel straight west. You would have to cross the Arabian Desert, which was not a practical route.

To get from Bavel to *Eretz Yisrael*, you had to travel north first, and then west, eventually coming down into *Eretz Yisrael*. So when the *pasuk* says תִּפְתָּח הָרָעָה מִצְפּוֹן, it is describing the route of travel. The attack would come from the north.

Perhaps this is also the *pshat* in מִמִּזְרָח וּמִמַּעֲרָב מִצְפּוֹן וּמִיָּם.

The Jews who are in the south, in Africa, and want to come to *Eretz Yisrael* – are they going to travel through the Sinai Desert? No! They will take a boat and come by way of the Mediterranean Sea.

Perhaps that is why the *pasuk* mentions מִיָּם.

Question of the Week #2

In *Bereishis* 16:11, we have Hagar running away. Why is she running away? She is running away from Sarah because Sarah is causing her pain. Hashem tells her: שׁוּבִי אֶל גְּבִרְתְּךָ וְהִתְעַנִּי תַחַת יְדֶיהָ – return to

your mistress and submit yourself to her, even though she is causing you pain. Then Hashem tells her that she will have a son: וְקָרָאת שְׁמוֹ יִשְׁמָעֵאל, כִּי שָׁמַע ה' אֶל עֲנִיךָ – you shall call his name Yishmael, because Hashem has heard your affliction.

I don't understand! Where in these *pesukim* did Hashem answer her *tefillah*? She didn't *daven* for children! She ran away because she was in pain. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* told her to return to Sarah, even though Sarah would continue to cause her pain. So what does it mean, כִּי שָׁמַע ה' אֶל עֲנִיךָ – that Hashem heard her affliction? Where did *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* respond to the *tzaar* she was experiencing with a message of redemption? There was no message of redemption. There was no promise that the pain would stop.

It seems to be a difficulty in the *poshut pshat* of the *pesukim*. I imagine someone has asked this question, but since I have not yet been *zocheh* to see who asked it, I will leave it to you as homework for the coming Shabbos Kodesh!

With that, I want to remind everyone to vote. *Klal Yisrael* has to stand up for what we believe in. Voting is a *mitzvah*. How much of a *mitzvah*? An Adam Gadol once said, "Is voting a *mitzvah* like eating *matzah*? No! It is a *mitzvah* like eating *maror*!" Sometimes it is a bitter *matzav*, and you have to do what you have to do.

Do this very special *mitzvah*, and have an absolutely wonderful Shabbos Kodesh!

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the selection aligns with His guidelines. The decision rests with us, and Hashem affirms our choice.

May we, together with the Jewish people, select leaders in a manner that merits Hashem's support and blessing for their endeavors.

● In memory of my mother, Shulamit Bat HaRav Shmuel Tzvi Halevi Z"l.

1. Quote from Sivan Rahav-Meir at <https://sivanrahavmeir.com/the-daily-thought/a-personal-account-of-the-1st-israeli-elections-in-1949/>

2. *Devarim* 17:15. See *Ha'emek Davar* 17:14, who explains that the Torah merely describes, but does not mandate, appointing a king because the appropriate form of government changes per place and people.
3. *Sifri Shoftim* 14. See also *Ibn Ezra, Devarim* 17:15.
4. In a similar vein, see *Shluchan Aruch, C.M.* 163:1 based on *Teshuvot Maimoniyot, Kinyan* 27.
5. *Avot* 2:4.

Jewish History in a Nutshell



Chief Rabbi Sir Ephraim Mirvis KBE

Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth

Jewish history in a nutshell. This is what is presented to us at the commencement of *Parshat Lech Lecha* (*Bereishit* 12:3), when Hashem gives seven blessings to Avraham, the founder of our faith. Two of those blessings are:

“*Umekallelecha a’or*,” – Hashem says, “I will curse those who curse you,”

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

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

will happen to the Jewish people through the ages.

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

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

“*Venivrech u becha kol mishpachot ha’adamah*.”

This will happen even though we, the Jewish people, give a contribution of inestimable value wherever we are in the world. Here we have Jewish history in a nutshell. So very often there will be deep appreciation and true friendship that we will benefit from, but sometimes there will be darkness for the Jewish people as a result of the trouble that we will endure.

But don’t worry, says Hashem! You can’t have light without shade, and no shade can destroy that light.

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

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

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most people and peoples what they are, and lay the foundations for a land, a Jewish home, and a family structure responsive not to economic forces, biological drives, and psychological conflicts but to the word and will of G-d. *Lech Lecha* in this sense means being prepared to take an often-lonely journey: “Go by yourself.” To be Jewish, to be a child of Abraham, is to have the courage to be different, to challenge the idols of the age, whatever the idols and whichever the age. In an era of polytheism, that meant seeing the universe as the product of a single creative will – and therefore not meaningless but coherent, meaningful.

In an era of slavery, it meant refusing to accept the status quo in the name of G-d, instead challenging it in the name of G-d. When power was worshipped, it meant constructing a society that cared for the powerless: the widow, orphan, and stranger. During centuries in which the mass of humankind was sunk in igno-

norance, it meant honouring education as the key to human dignity and creating schools to provide universal literacy. When war was the test of humanity, it meant striving for peace. In ages of radical individualism like today, it means knowing that we are not what we own but what we share; not what we buy but what we give; that there is something higher than appetite and desire – namely the call that comes to us, as it came to Abraham, from outside ourselves, summoning us to make a contribution to the world.

The (non-Jewish) journalist Andrew Marr once wrote that Jews “really have been different; they have enriched the world and challenged it.”³ It is that courage to travel alone if necessary, to be different, to swim against the tide, to speak in an age of relativism of the absolutes of human dignity under the sovereignty of G-d, that was born in the words *Lech Lecha*. To be a Jew is to be willing to hear

the still, small voice of eternity urging us to travel, move, go on ahead, continuing Abraham’s journey toward that unknown destination at the far horizon of hope. First we hear of how he began his journey. Then we step forward to find our own destiny.

AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE:

- What does it mean to be a Jewish hero – without seeking recognition – and how do we find the courage to stand apart?
- While we are all influenced (and enriched) by our upbringing, circumstances, and the guidance of others and expectations of others, how can we balance this with the call to shape our own destinies?

1. These figures were accurate at the time of writing in August 2008, although today they would need adjusting when quoted, to account for the expanded world population.
2. *Hilchot Teshuvah*, Chapter 10, Law 2.
3. Andrew Marr, *The Observer*, 14 May 2000.

“Lech Lecha” – Becoming Your True Self



Rabbi Shalom Rosner

Rosh Beit Midrash, Machon Lev International program

The *parsha* begins with Hashem commanding Avraham – *Lech Lecha* – to go. Some have interpreted the phrase to refer to the fact that the journey was for Avraham’s own good and benefit (Rashi). He was to go for himself.

Rav Shlomo Yosef Zevin (*LaTorah V’La-Moadim*) suggests that the imperative has a far deeper meaning. Hashem is commanding Avraham – *Lech Lecha* – go to the depths of your soul. That statement is not a command to go for yourself but rather a directive to go to yourself. Hashem’s call to Avraham was not simply geographical. It was existential: discover your own essence, your own *neshama*.

Hashem never demands of a person to achieve beyond his or her capacity:

“כָּל אֲשֶׁר תִּמְצָא יָדְךָ לַעֲשׂוֹת בְּכַחַד עֲשֵׂה”

“Whatever your hand finds to do – do with all your might.” (*Kohelet* 9:10).

The *pasuk* does not mean that one should feel free to do as they please. That would invite a world of *hefkerut*. Rather the intention is that one should utilize the strengths and talents with which one was gifted to maximize their potential.

This echoes the famous teaching of R’ Zusha of Anipoli. “In the next world, they will not ask me, ‘Why weren’t you like the Baal Shem Tov?’ or ‘Why weren’t you like the Maggid of Mezritch?’ But they will ask me: ‘Zusha, why were you not

Zusha’?” Did you do everything possible to be the best person you could be based on the capabilities and limitations granted to you.

The message is clear: our task in life is not to imitate others, but to actualize our own deepest potential. As *Chazal* tell us: “*Maase Avot Siman L’banim*” – we are to emulate the characteristics exemplified by our *Avot*, and their encounters are an example for future generations. That is the first command to the first Jew – *Lech Lecha*. May we be able to dig deep inside ourselves, recognize our talents and utilize them to maximize our potential in the manner in which we serve Hashem and the way in which we impact those around us.

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is why voting thoughtfully, with seriousness and with real concern for Torah and for *Klal Yisrael*, is a genuine obligation of *hishtadlut*. But the *guf* of *Eretz Yisrael*, its *kedushah* and its bond to our people, is not on any ballot. It was acquired by Avraham’s gaze and sealed by Hashem’s promise.

Secondly, “ומבשרי אחזה” teaches that the path to seeing Hashem runs through the physical world, not away from it. Political life is about as physical and earthbound as human activity gets. The religious response is not to withdraw from it, but to refine it. That means guarding our speech during a heated campaign, refusing to turn fellow Jews into enemies, and remembering that the person on the other side of the debate is also a child of Avraham and Sarah. When we bring Torah into the most mundane arena, the arena itself can become a lens.

This is especially important when disagreement threatens to become estrangement. A society shaped by Torah must strive to preserve the dignity of those with whom we disagree. We can debate policies passionately, criticize decisions honestly, and recognize genuine dangers without reducing fellow Jews to caricatures or enemies. The person across the political divide is not merely a voice in an argument, but another member of *Klal Yisrael*, bound to us by a shared history and a shared destiny. Perhaps this, too, is a form of learning to see: looking beyond a person’s position to recognize the human being who holds it. When Torah refines our vision, it does not make us less attentive to the world. It makes us more discerning about what truly matters within it.

Finally, the Meshech Chochmah reminds us that there are moments when we

must deliberately lift our eyes. When the ground beneath us feels uncertain and the future difficult to discern, we need not surrender to the limits of our immediate perspective. We can acknowledge the pain of the present without allowing it to define the entirety of our story. Avraham Avinu stood in a land that did not yet appear to be his. He could not see the full unfolding of Hashem’s promise, but he was taught to see beyond the limitations of the moment.

“שא נא עיניך וראה.” Lift up your eyes and look. May we merit to cultivate Avraham’s vision: to face the realities before us with courage and responsibility, to recognize the *kedushah* that endures beneath the changing surface of history, and to see our fellow Jews through the eyes of Torah. May that vision help us build a society worthy of the extraordinary gift and responsibility of living in *Eretz Yisrael*.

Like Perfume



Michal Horowitz

Teacher, Lecturer & Author of “Able: Living With A Disability, A Torah View”

There is so much to learn from the ways of Avraham, who birthed our nation on the powerful foundations of *emunah* (faith) and *chesed* (loving-kindness). He never wavered in either realm, always maintaining his belief in the goodness of Hashem, come what may, and his kindness to – and hope for – mankind. And it is these two pillars – faith in G-d and in doing for fellow man – which have become the bedrocks of our nation, *Am Yisrael*, throughout our long history, and continue today.

The first Divine command to Avraham are words that echo throughout the generations, and that shaped our nation: “*Lech Lecha*,” journey to yourself, or journey for yourself (12:1).

In his opening words on the *parsha*, Rashi explains that *Lech Lecha* means: לְהִנָּחֵל, that the journey from your land (Haran – *Bereishis* 11:31), from your place of birth (Ur Kasdim), and from your father’s (Terach’s) home (of idol worship), will be “for your benefit and for your good.” In the new land, Hashem promised to make him into a great nation, to bless him and to make his name great (12:2).

Additionally, there are many *midrashic* interpretations into the two words that launched a nation. And each interpretation sheds further light into the personality of Avraham, the *tafkid* of his and Sarah’s, and the nation that they founded.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z’l, teaches that, “לֶךְ-לְךָ – Go – In Hebrew the suggestive phrase is *Lekh lekha* – literally, ‘Go for

yourself,’ or possibly ‘Go to yourself.’ A more *midrashic* interpretation takes the phrase to mean ‘Go with yourself’ – meaning, by traveling from place to place you will extend your influence not over one land but many.”

Rabbi Sacks quotes the following *Medrash*: “When the Holy One said to Avraham, ‘Go – from your land, your birthplace, and your father’s house’ what did Avraham resemble? A jar of scent with a tight-fitting lid put away in a corner so that its fragrance could not go forth. As soon as it was moved from that place and opened, its fragrance began to spread. So the Holy One said to Avraham, ‘Avraham, many good deeds are in you. Travel about from place to place, so that the greatness of your name will go forth in My word’ (*Bereshit Rabba* 39:2).

“Avraham is commanded to leave his place in order to testify to the existence of a G-d not bounded by place – Creator and sovereign of the entire universe. Avraham and Sara are to be like perfume, leaving a trace of their presence wherever they go. Implicit in this *midrash* is the idea that the fate of the first Jews already prefigured that of their descendants, who would be scattered throughout the world in order to spread knowledge of G-d throughout the world. Unusually, exile is seen here not as a punishment but as a necessary corollary of a faith that sees G-d everywhere. *Lekh lekha* means ‘Go with yourself’ – your beliefs, your way of life, your faith” (*The Koren Shalem Humash with Rashi and Onkelos, and Commentary of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt’l*, 2025, p.78).

This beautiful *Medrash*, along with the insight of Rabbi Sacks, is not only a narrative of the life, and works, of Avraham, but should be the beacon of light that guides us all. Every Jew has a responsibility to himself, to *Am Yisrael*, *Toras Yisrael* and *Eretz Yisrael*, to go “with himself,” and to carry his beliefs and way of life along with him always, wherever he may be. Just like perfume leaves a sweet scent in its wake and touches its surroundings, so too, we must ensure that the perfume of Torah, and its beautiful way of life, leaves its mark upon those around us.

Wherever life may take us, and wherever we may find ourselves, we are the seed that Hashem promised Avraham would become a “*goy gadol*,” a great nation.

In a world utterly devoid of the beautiful scents of “perfume”, we must strive – each of us on our own level – to bring the *ne’imus* of Torah to our fellow Jews, to our beloved Land, and to our world.

May our ears be attentive, may our eyes be perceptive, may our hearts be open and may our souls long to continue the great mission began by Avraham and bequeathed to us, his children – the great nation of *Am Yisrael*.

הִנֵּה יָמִים בָּאִים, נֹאֲמַם ה' אֶלְקִים, וְהִשְׁלַחְתִּי רָעָב, בָּאָרֶץ: לֹא רָעַב לָלֶחֶם, וְלֹא צָמָא לַמַּיִם כִּי אִם לִשְׂמֹעַ אֶת דְּבַרִּי ה' –

Behold, days are coming, says Hashem Elokim, and I will send famine into the land, not a famine for bread nor a thirst for water, but to hear the word of Hashem (Amos 8:11).

The Biblical Borders of the Land of Israel



Rabbi Menachem Leibtag

Tanach Study Center | Yeshivat Har Etzion

In His first three promises to Avraham, G-d describes the land in very general terms. Later in *Parshat Lech Lecha*, Avraham enters into two covenants with G-d concerning his future. Both covenants precisely define the Promised Land, but each covenant consists of an entirely different piece of land!

1) At **Brit Bein HaB'tarim**: "**Ha'Aretz**": "On that day G-d made a covenant with Avraham, saying: to your offspring I assign **this land**, from the **river of Egypt to the river**, the river **Euphrates**, the Kenites, Knizites... (the ten nations)".

After Avraham's defeat of the Four Kings, G-d promises him that his offspring will one day **conquer** ("yerusha") the land, just as Avraham himself had just done. 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 will be punished. The land in which they will establish their sovereignty is described as expanding from the Nile to the Euphrates.

This covenant with Avraham Avinu reflects the **historical/national** aspect of *Am Yisrael's* relationship with G-d, as it focuses on the long-term, historical process required for Avraham's offspring to achieve their sovereignty. Notice that in this covenant, the Promised Land is consistently referred to as "**ha'Aretz**," and its conquest as "**yerusha**."

2) At **Brit Milah**: "**Eretz Canaan**": "I assign the land in which you sojourn to you and your offspring to come, all the **land of Canaan**..."

In preparation for this covenant, G-d first changes Avram's name to Avraham, in anticipation of the birth of a child from

Sarah. G-d then promises Avraham that He will establish and maintain a special relationship between Himself and Avraham's descendants – "*lihyot lachem l'Elokim*" – He will be a close, intimate G-d for them.

This covenant reflects the **religious/personal** aspect of *Am Yisrael's* relationship with G-d, as it emphasizes a unique, intimate relationship with the Divine. In this covenant, the Promised Land is referred to as "**Eretz Canaan**."

Hence, there are two aspects latent in the "*kedusha*" (sanctity) of *Eretz Yisrael*:

A) The National Aspect – the "*kedushat ha'Aretz*" of *Brit Bein HaB'tarim* relates to the **conquest** of the land and the establishment of a national entity – a sovereign state. This "*kedusha*" is achieved once *Bnei Yisrael* gain sovereignty, upon Yehoshua's conquest of the land.

B) The Personal Aspect – the "*kedushat Eretz Canaan*" of *Brit Milah* already existed in the time of the *Avot* and remains eternal. This *kedusha* reflects G-d's special Providence over this land, even while inhabited by other nations. This intrinsic "*kedusha*" is forever present regardless of who seizes control over the Land, be it Persians, Romans, Crusaders, Turks etc.

Based on our understanding of these two covenants, their conflicting presentations of the land's borders can now be reconciled.

Avraham Avinu was chosen to father a nation that will "become a blessing" for **all other** nations. The special land set aside for that nation by that promise is called "*ha'Aretz*." In *Brit Bein HaB'tarim*, "*ha'Aretz*" is defined as the land between the Nile and Euphrates. These rivers are not borders; never in the history of mankind have

these rivers marked the borders of a single country. Rather, these rivers mark the two **centers** of ancient civilization – Mesopotamia ("*N'har Prat*") and Egypt ("*N'har Mitzrayim*").

Therefore, whereas *Brit Bein HaB'tarim* reflects the **national** aspect of our relationship with G-d, its borders of "*ha'Aretz*" reflect our destiny to become a blessing to **all** mankind. We are to become a nation "declaring G-d's Name" at the crossroads of the two great centers of civilization.

The more precise geographic borders of this special land are defined in *Brit Milah*, as *Eretz Canaan* – the land in which our forefathers sojourned. Given its destiny to become the homeland for G-d's special nation, this land possesses intrinsic *kedusha*. This inherent sanctity sensitizes the land to the moral behavior of its inhabitants.

The basic borders of *Eretz Yisrael* are those of "*Eretz Canaan*," i.e., "from Dan to Be'er Sheva," as promised in *Brit Milah*. Once this "kernel" area is conquered, its borders can potentially be extended. The potential limits of this expansion are established by *Brit Bein HaB'tarim* – from "*N'har Mitzrayim*" to "*N'har Prat*."

We have shown that our relationship to the Land of Israel, like our relationship with G-d, exists at both the national and individual levels. G-d chose this special land **in order** that we fulfill our destiny.

While "*kedushat Eretz Yisrael*" at the individual level may be considered a Divine **gift**, its *kedusha* at the national level is most definitely a Divine **challenge**. To achieve its fullest borders, we must rise to that challenge.

Growth spurts



Rabbi Eli Mansour
Edmond J. Safra Synagogue, Brooklyn

Parashat Lech-Lecha is named for G-d's command to Abraham with which this parasha begins: "*Lech Lecha Me'arsecha...*" – to "go forth" from his homeland and settle in the Land of Israel.

The Rabbis list this command as one of the ten difficult tests which Abraham was given, and withstood, as he was required to leave his home and go and journey to and settle in a foreign land. The final, and most difficult, test was that of *Akedat Yishak* – when he was told to sacrifice his beloved son. (Of course, in the end, G-d told him to withdraw his sword.) That test, like the test of moving to the Land of Israel, was also formulated with the expression "*Lech Lecha*," as G-d told Abraham, "*Lech Lecha El Eretz Ha'Moriya*" – to "go forth" to Moriya, the future site of the *Bet Ha'mikdash*, to sacrifice his son (*Bereshit* 22:2).

What exactly does the expression "*Lech Lecha*" mean? The literal translation of this phrase is "Go for you." But what precisely does this mean?

The Arizal (Rav Yishak Luria, 1534-1572) explained that every person is given a unique, distinctive soul, such that every person is given a unique, distinctive spiritual goal in life. Our ultimate goal is to

perfect our souls – but since each soul is different, each person's goals are going to be different. We each face a unique set of challenges and struggles over the course of our lives, in accordance with the particular needs of our soul, with the particular mission we are to fulfill.

We might draw an analogy to eyeglasses. Each person's eyeglasses are unique, tailor-made for the particular deficiencies of his or her eyesight. If we lose our glasses, we cannot just borrow somebody else's, because each prescription is different and unique. By the same token, each person has a unique set of spiritual challenges, which correspond to the unique deficiencies in his or her soul. We all face different struggles, and so what's right for one person is not necessarily suitable for another person.

This, the Arizal explained, is the meaning of the expression "*Lech Lecha*" – "go for you." When we are given a test in life, this is an opportunity for us to fulfill our unique mission in this world. Every time we encounter some challenge, it is a chance to realize our destiny, to take the next step in perfecting our souls and thereby achieving the purpose for which we were created. And so life's tests are

referred to with the phrase "*Lech Lecha*" – "Go for you," because they are for us, for our benefit, enabling us to fulfill our unique mission on earth. (Indeed, Rashi explains "*Lech Lecha*" to mean "for your benefit.")

Significantly, the word "*Nisayon*" ("test") stems from the word "*Nes*," which means "flag" (as in the prayer, "*Ve'sa Nes Le'kabetz Galuyotenu*" – "and raise a flag to assemble our exiles"). The reason is because the purpose of a "*Nisayon*" is to elevate us, to lift us high up like a flag. We should not resent challenges; we should embrace them. When we are confronted with a challenge and we overcome it, we undergo a "growth spurt." We are catapulted to greater heights. This is precisely the purpose of life's challenges – to raise us higher.

Every challenge we are given in life is an opportunity – an opportunity to develop our unique, precious soul, and to realize the unique, vitally important purpose for which we were brought into this world. Rather than bemoan the difficulties and hardships that we encounter over the course of life, let us instead welcome them as opportunities to grow, and seize each such opportunity to the very best of our ability.



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One Against the World



Rabbi Moshe Weinberger

Congregation Aish Kodesh, Woodmere

This is the most exciting time of year. Once again, as we begin *parshas Lech Lecha*. We read about the Avos, starting with Avraham Avinu. Everything begins with Avraham and everything ends with Avraham. As Rashi says (commenting on *Bereishis* 12:2), in the first paragraph of *Shmoneh Esrei*, we mention Avraham first among the Avos, and we conclude the blessing with a reference to Avraham as well. “We conclude with you.”

Beyond the text of a paragraph in *Shmoneh Esrei*, what does it mean that we open and close with Avraham Avinu? Rav Nossan Nota Spira, *zt”l*, writes in *Megaleh Amukos* that the deeper meaning of Chazal’s teaching is that the Jewish people begin and end exile with the powers we inherited from Avraham. What was Avraham’s most identifiable characteristic? Yechezkel describes Avraham with a unique statement not used regarding anyone else in *Tanach*, including Moshe Rebbeinu and Dovid Hamelech. He says (33:24), “Avraham was one.” He was unique and stood alone against the entire world.

As a nation, we certainly feel what it means to be alone, standing against everyone else. We look around us and feel that not only is the entire Muslim world against us, but the Western world again turned its back to us, isolating and rejecting us. We know that we are, in a very real sense, alone.

The *Megaleh Amukos*’s teaching that we begin and end our exile with the power to stand against the entire world like Avraham Avinu is not, however, directed only at the Jewish nation as a whole. It applies to every individual Jew as well.

We live at a time of unprecedented spiritual blessings. There are more people studying in *yeshivah* than ever before. It is astounding how many *shiurim* are available to people. Deeper levels of Torah are now extremely accessible. But with all of our spiritual blessings, one thing

has changed drastically. In earlier times, most people lived a “single life.” In other words, they davened, learned, worked, and raised their families. They lived one, consistent, cohesive life. There was, of course, tremendous variation in the spiritual and physical quality of that life, but people lived “single lives.” Even those who left the path of Yiddishkeit did so completely and lived a consistent, albeit nonobservant, life.

Today, however, there is a different reality. Many, many people live fine, upstanding lives during the day. They get up to daven and learn Torah. Perhaps they even go to the *mikvah*. They go to work, teach in *yeshivah*, and may even be *roshei yeshiva* or prominent *rebbeim*. They are known far and wide as *ehrllicher Yiddin*, honest religious Jews or *talmidei chachaim*, great Torah scholars. Yet at night, when all the doors are closed, they descend down into the depths of the forty-nine levels of impurity with the click of a mouse or the tap of a screen. So many people are now living double lives.

And no one knows about people’s alter ego besides themselves and Hashem. Sometimes wives or parents catch them and bear the pain of knowing about their secret life of impurity. But no one in their communities has any idea who they really are or the nature of their struggles and failures.

Many people remain immersed in the depths of *Geheim* by night, but look like the same holy Jews they always were during the day. Today’s technology enables people to live a double life to a degree that was not possible just twenty-five years ago.

What is the significance of this new reality in these last few minutes before *Moshiach*? It means that now, every single Jew has the opportunity to stand alone against the entire world like Avraham Avinu did in his own time. “Avraham was alone” meant that he was called (*Bereishis*

14:13) “Avraham the *Ivri* [העברי],” because, according to the *Yalkut Shimoni* on that *passuk*, “the whole world was on one side [עבר] and he was on the other side.”

Most Jews today carry a device in their pockets that can access the entire world in just a few seconds. So, just like Avraham Avinu, when a Jew sits in his home at 11 p.m. with no one watching, he finds himself alone, facing down the world. And just like his great-grandfather Avraham, he has the power to say, “No!” But that challenge feels daunting.

Because the whole world is now so easily accessible to a person, we have never before seen a situation in which every boy and girl, every man and woman, has been called upon to fight against the entire world.

Avraham had the whole world open to him – he had a choice. Yet he chose to embrace Hashem and spurn all the insanity of the world, even though people were persecuted for his choice. Similarly, each person today has the whole world in front of him right in his pocket. Just like Avraham had no one to help him in his fight because he was alone, a Jew today must also stand against the whole world alone.

For some reason, it is Hashem’s will that every Jew today has the opportunity to conquer the whole world in a way of “Avraham was alone.” It is as if He is telling each of us, “I know you have the ability to make the right choice.” Avraham was known for his attribute of kindness, *chesed*. The *Zohar* (114b) says that Avraham did kindness with his Creator. Every time one of us stands up to the whole world like Avraham Avinu and makes the right choice, Hashem considers it an act of kindness to Him! May each of us merit to see how precious our personal battles against the world are to G-d – how Hashem will say about each one of us “He was one” or “She was one” against the whole world!

How Do I Hear the Call?



Rabbi YY Jacobson
TheYeshiva.net

“G-d said to Abram, ‘Go to yourself, from your land, from your birthplace, and from your father’s house to land that I will show you. And I will make you a great nation, I will bless you, I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing...all the families of the earth will be blessed through you.’”

Why was he chosen? What did he do to earn this special call from G-d? The Torah says nothing about Abraham prior to this encounter. All we are told at the end of Noach is that a man named Terach had three sons, Nachor, Abraham, and Haran; Haran died while his father was alive. Nachor married a woman named Milka; and Abraham married a woman named Sarei, who was barren. That’s it. As far as we are concerned, Abraham is a regular guy living in Charan, in present-day Iraq. And then, suddenly, out of the blue, the Torah tells us how G-d spoke to Abraham, told him to leave his land, and relocate to a new land, Canaan, and promises him that he will change the world! G-d says to him that he will father a great nation and that all nations will become blessed by him; G-d promises him the Land of Canaan as an eternal inheritance and turns him into the father of a new civilization, charged with the mission to change the landscape of the planet. The entire rest of the Torah hinges on this opening commandment to Abraham.

Why him?

To be sure, the Talmud and the *Midrashim* offer numerous stories about Abraham’s youth, his search for truth, his endless inquisitiveness and yearning to discover the origin of existence; his battle with his countrymen and the king; his sacrifices for the truth and for the convictions he espoused. Yet, from the biblical text, it seems like a random selection! Not even a single narrative is told about Abraham’s unique virtues to underscore his greatness. There is not even a single verse relating his greatness.

Many answers have been suggested. Today, I will share an insight by the Sefas Emes, Rabbi Yehuda Leib Alter, the third Gerer Rebbe, based on a teaching of the Zohar. It is short, simple, and profound.

The words “*Lech Lecha*” are always said by G-d to everyone. It was just Abraham who heard the call.

The Torah does not discuss Abraham’s background to explain why G-d spoke to him because G-d did not speak (only) to him; G-d spoke it, and speaks it, to every human person. “Go to yourself, from your land, your birthplace, and your father’s home, to the land that I will show you” is the Divine call to every soul.

Communication is about two people bonding. If I speak, but you do not listen, or you do not hear, I’m not talking to you. “G-d spoke to Abraham,” not because G-d spoke to Abraham, but because Abram listened. He had the emotional, psychological, and spiritual “antenna” that allowed him to internalize the Divine call.

My wife can speak to me, but it does not mean I am capable of hearing what she says. There are truths I heard 20 years ago, but I lacked the openness to hear them at the time.

“This person really speaks to me” is an expression we use. They may be speaking to others as well, but somehow, with his teacher, I know how to listen; I get it. “The bird spoke to me” is an uncommon expression – not because birds do not speak to me; the birds nesting in the trees behind my home talk to me all the time, as do the gazelles, the groundhogs, the turtles, the trees, and even the rocks. They speak, they exude energy, life, messages, songs, chemicals, and odors, but I do not hear what they have to say. I lack the tools to appreciate their music, so they are not speaking to me.

G-d speaks to each of us. And His message is “*Lech Lecha*.” Move on. Get out of your rut. Step out of your biases, blind spots, fears, insecurities, traumas, and all

the voices that limit you, and turn you into a limited and fearful human being. Open yourself up to Divine expansiveness; expand your horizons and become larger than your smaller self. Allow yourself to go on a journey – toward the destination G-d creates for you, even if it means letting go of everything familiar to you.

Go away from your superficial self and open yourself up to the Divine infinite light at the core of your being. Create a paradigm shift from self-centeredness to infinite-centeredness. G-d calls to each of us and says: Step away from your narrow perspective and begin to see things from My perspective, from the vantage point of ultimate truth and infinite oneness. Go out of your narrow, selfish orbit and change the world! And in that, you will arrive at your truest self, at your deepest core.

It is a call to every human heart, but can I even hear it? If I spent my life creating and then managing my coping mechanisms, and I managed to “polish” them to perfection, so they seem sophisticated and logical, how do I even notice the inner still voice resonating in my inner untainted core?

It was Abraham who heard the call – and acted on it. Abraham became the person to whom G-d spoke these fateful words because he heard them!

That’s how and why he became the first Jew – and changed history.

When we can each open ourselves to that vulnerable call, we become partners with Abraham and Sarah: We begin to change the inner and outer landscape of our lives and radiate it to all those around us.

It begins with awareness, with “hearing” the call. Can you notice the triggers? Hold space for the anxiety? Can you be curious about the dissonance, and observe the mental chaos with compassion? Can you then tune in to the inner voice behind them all, whispering to the beautiful, wholesome, glorious, and Divine core-self: “*Lech Lecha*.”

Lech Lecha: L'chaim!



Rabbi Judah Mischel

Executive Director, Camp HASC; Founder, Tzama Nafshi

Author of the *Baderech* series

Rav Yitzchak Zilber, *zt'l*, legendary champion of Russian Jewry, was a humble talmid chacham and teacher whose incredible self sacrifice and dedication inspired and strengthened generations of Jews. Having been imprisoned in gulags of the former Soviet Union, he escaped to Tashkent and later arrived in *Eretz Yisrael*, where he continued his efforts in teaching Torah around the clock. Thousands of Russian *olim* to the Holy Land sought his counsel and Torah instruction.

In the early 1970s, most Jews from the USSR arrived without a *bris milah*. While the country scrambled to accommodate the waves of *Aliyah*, neither the Ministry of Absorption nor the Chief Rabbinate were prepared for the challenge of providing to the masses an opportunity to do this *mitzvah*. The bureaucratic mechanics created a waiting period of weeks. As it is extremely important not to delay the essential *mitzvah* of *milah*, Rav Zilber worked feverishly to help the *olim* accomplish it as soon as possible. In Yerushalayim, he reconnected with Dr. Yaakov Tzatzkis, a urologist who had performed clandestine circumcisions in Moscow. Together, they made countless *brisim* in their own homes, and across *Eretz Yisrael*, for Russian Jews of all ages.

Dr. Tzatzkis recalled:

After a *bris*, it's customary to drink *l'chaim*. We would bring a bottle of wine, maybe a little vodka to help ease the pain and some cookies or cake. Sometimes the *baalei simcha* themselves would bring something.

One cold and rainy day we had the unexpected opportunity to perform a *bris* at Bikur Cholim hospital in Yerushalayim. Rav Yitzchak suddenly came running to meet me at the hospital, and arrived with a bottle of wine and some cookies. I saw that he wasn't wearing a coat.

The next day, again, I met him outside without a coat. "Rav Yitzchak, this is not like winter in Moscow, but it is raining and cold! Why aren't you wearing a coat?" He mumbled something unintelligible. When I pressed him further, Rav Yitzchak relented: "OK, so I pawned it...."

I looked at him inquisitively.

"When you called me to join you for the *bris* yesterday," he explained, "I ran out of the house right away. My wife didn't have any warning to prepare something for the *simcha*. I didn't have any money in my pockets. What was I supposed to do? We needed some *mezonos* and wine to celebrate the *bris*. So I walked into the store on Rechov Strauss down the block from the hospital, gave them my coat, and they gave me what I needed. How could a *Yid* enter the covenant of Avraham Avinu without a *l'chaim* to celebrate?"

■ ■ ■

When Avram was ninety-nine years old, Hashem appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am E-l Sha-dai. Walk in My ways and be *tamim*, wholehearted.

I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and I will make you exceedingly numerous (you will multiply very greatly). This is My covenant, which you shall observe between Me and between you and between your offspring after you, that every male among you be circumcised."

(17:1-2, 10)

This was the first time in history that the *Ribbono Shel Olam* invited us all into an exclusive, sacred covenant and partnership. *Milah* thus connects us to everyone who came before us, as well as everyone who will come after us. It opens for us a

blessing for national growth, development and expansion בְּמֵאֵד וּבְמָאֵד.

The practice of *milah* is rooted in the recognition that Hashem created the world in an "imperfect" state, and that Hashem's *mitzvos* are obligations and opportunities to work toward improving Creation and perfecting the world. The *mitzvah* of *milah* has and will always remain a defining symbol and sign of our commitment to *Yidishkeit* and to Hashem.

During the Second Temple period, Greco-Roman culture centered around adulation of the "perfect" human body, and specifically the male physique. Meanwhile, generations of Jews faced *gezeiros*, severe decrees banning *milah*, and doing the *mitzvah* required great self-sacrifice. *Midrash Tanchumah*, (*Tazria* 5) relates a debate between the great sage and martyr, the *heilgeh* Rabbi Akiva, and the evil Roman governor of Judea, Turnus Rufus:

The wicked Turnus Rufus challenged Rabbi Akiva: "Which is better and more beautiful, the works of the Almighty, or those of flesh and blood? Rabbi Akiva replied, "The works of flesh and blood are more beautiful."

Turnus Rufus then asked, "Why are Jews circumcised?" Rabbi Akiva replied, "I knew you would ask this and that is why I pre-empted you and answered that the works of man are superior."

Rabbi Akiva then brought sheaves of grain and loaves of bread. "These sheaves are the works of the *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, while these loaves are the works of flesh and blood.

"Are not the loaves superior?"

The *Midrash* concludes with a lesson that the commandments that *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* gives us are לְצַרְרָא אוֹתָם בְּהֵם, to purify and further refine us.

■ ■ ■

Continued on page 22

Special Stars

Mrs. Shira Smiles

International lecturer and curriculum developer

Parashat Lech Lecha is filled with many of Hashem's promises to Avraham Avinu and his future descendants. "Vayoztai oto hachutzah vayomer habet na hashamayimah u'sfor hakochavim im tuchal le'spor otam vayomer lo ko yihiyeh zar'acha – And He took him outside, and [Hashem] said, "Gaze, now, toward the Heavens and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And [Hashem] said to him, "So shall your offspring be!" (Bereisheet 15:5-6) With the most beautiful imagery, Hashem promises Avraham Avinu that his children will be numerous as the stars in heaven. Just as one can't count the stars, the Jewish people will be too many to count. What is the significance of comparing the Jewish people to the stars?

Rabbeinu B'chaye explains that there are many different kinds of stars, each one is a different size and possesses a unique power. Likewise, within the Jewish people there is great diversity, and various levels of service of Hashem. Judaism does not have a "one size fits all" approach.

Rav Simcha Wasserman, zt"l, explains that although the Jewish people can be viewed as one unit serving Hashem, and there is an aspect of community in our avodat Hashem, each person is beloved to Hashem for his individual service and is not eclipsed by the whole. Just as each star has a name, each Jew is special to Hashem and is treated as "an only child." When we contemplate this message, we can each feel our personal importance and realize how unique and intimate our relationship with Hashem is.

We find a fascinating insight into this extraordinary illustration offered by Rav Leib Bakst, zt"l. The Midrash teaches us that the stars were created as a consolation, to appease the moon who's light was diminished. Thus, the stars are particularly beloved by Hashem, as they were created to uplift and relieve the distress of another entity. Hashem's comparison of Avraham Avinu's descendants to the stars not only equates their quantity, but it also expresses the reason for Hashem's intense love of His people. That is, Hashem created

the Jewish people to bring goodness, kindness and light to the world.

Rav Chaim Volozhin, zt"l, would frequently remind his son that a Jew's purpose in this world is to help another. Rav Avraham Schorr teaches that this is one of the reasons that a person's heart is situated on the left side of his body, although classically it is the right side that symbolizes strength. When facing one another each person's left side mirrors his friend's right side. One's heart was created to feel another's pain and joy and to fill another's need. The mandate of each Jew is to look around and see whom we can help, whose day we can brighten with a smile or a compliment. We can wish each other "good morning" or "have a good day" with the intention of sharing a heartfelt brachah. These are all ways we can become the "stars" that Hashem envisioned in His promise to Avraham Avinu.

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An interpretation of G-d's name *Sha-dai* is *She'amar l'olamo dai*, "The One who said to His world, 'Enough!'" This refers to Hashem halting the expansion and development of the world before it would become complete or "perfect." In doing so, Hashem left space for us to apply our creative efforts to improve His world. By holding back from completing Creation, Hashem enables us to participate in a continuous expansion that is qualitative as well as quantitative.

All of Creation had been "yearning" to be more, to be greater, to be fulfilled and self-actualized. Had *Sha-dai* not told Creation to stop, there would have been no sheaves of wheat for Rabbi Akiva to bring

before Turnus Rufus – for they would have already evolved on their own into baked loaves of bread.

It is the name *Sha-dai* – this attribute which leaves the male body "incomplete" – which obliges us to bring a Jewish child into the covenant. This is what allows us to participate in "completing the creation" of the child's body.

■ ■ ■

"I will surely open the floodgates of the sky for you and pour down blessings on you until there will not be sufficient room for them!" (Malachi, 3:10)

Gemara (Taanis, 22b) explains this verse: "Hashem will bless us *ad bli dai*, with an

excess of blessings, beyond that which we require, with an abundance so great that עד שיכלו שפתותיכם מלומר די "our lips will be worn out (yivlu) from saying *Dai*, 'It is enough!'"

From bread to *Bris Milah*, may we live with the awareness and appreciation that everything is בֵּינֵינוּ וּבֵינֵיכֶם, "between us and Hashem," may we celebrate our role and privilege as co-creators, with overflowing blessings. *L'chaim!*

■ ■ ■

*Excerpt from newly released
Baderech: Along the Path of the
Torah, (Mosaica Press, Elul 5786)*

If the Left? Then I Will Go to the Right!



Rabbanit Yemima Mizrachi
Popular Torah teacher and author

Rabbi Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin teaches that the first appearance of a word in the Torah carries historical significance. Thus, in *Parashat Lech Lecha*, the words “my sister,” “beautiful,” “his disciples,” “quarrel,” and “separation” are all introduced.

“Please separate from me!” Avraham, the man of *chesed*, says to his brother, Lot.

In psychology, much emphasis is placed on the importance of separateness – the ability of a child, spouse, or close partner to develop as an independent individual.

“Please, let there be no quarrel between me and you!” Avraham asked Lot. He is asking that they not “mix fields” – another concept in psychology, but in the biblical account, this is literally a matter of mixing fields. Avraham does not want his shepherds to graze their flocks alongside Lot’s shepherds, who are grazing in fields that do not belong to them. And precisely because Avraham resembles Lot in appearance, he wants them to separate, so that people will not assume that his own shepherds are also guilty of theft.

And yet, at that very moment, Avraham sets out on a terrifying military campaign to rescue Lot and his family from captivity. “And he armed his disciples” (*vayarek et chanichav*).

Avraham is teaching the members of his household the most important, historically significant lesson of all: Our separateness, he tells them, is not a parting of ways. It is a commitment!

Yes, we are the Right, and they are the Left, but we will remain two hands belonging to one and the same body!

“If the Left? Then I will go to the Right!”

What appears to be a message of separation and estrangement is actually a message about *separateness* – the kind that allows me to help you from a different direction, to keep you from falling.

And this is how Rashi explains it in a truly extraordinary comment: “Wherever you settle, I will not distance myself from you; I will stand by you as a shield and a source of help.”

Wow.

This week’s elections could, Heaven forbid, serve as evidence that we are a people scattered and divided. But we can choose to be among the disciples of Avraham Avinu and understand that separateness is what allows for independent opinions, while ensuring that we will always be there for one another, from the Right or from the Left, ready to fight for each other – “for we are brothers.”

And the word that first appears in *Parashat Lech Lecha* explains everything: “And Lot chose” (*vayivchar*). “And Lot chose for himself the entire plain of the Jordan... and they separated, each from his brother.”

A different choice does not have to contradict brotherhood!

And so the holy *Or HaChaim* writes words that bring tears to my eyes:

“This can also be understood in light of the verse: ‘You sit and speak against your brother; you slander your own mother’s son’ [*Tehillim* 50:20]. Our early commentators explained it this way: ‘You sit and speak against him? You find fault with your mother’s son, who is yourself?! For we are brothers!’

When a quarrel takes place in the presence of the Canaanite and the Perizzite, they will condemn us all. For a flaw in one brother brings harm upon his brother as well. Both the one who bites and the one who is bitten are held accountable, because they are brothers!” (*Bereishit* 13:8)

Your enemies, Rabbi Chaim ben Attar is telling us, see one brother speaking ill of another and understand that both are sons of the same mother. If one has a flaw, that flaw exists genetically in his brother as well...

Choose. Preserve your separateness. You have different opinions and different worldviews. But please! Do not separate through quarrelling!

There is no more terrible message to send our enemies than the sight of us fighting among ourselves. Do not choose a protest vote. Choose a vote that brings us together. We are brothers.

And in his characteristically concise and extraordinary style, the Baal HaTurim explains the verse: “And they separated, each man from his brother; Avram settled in the land of Canaan...” (*Vayipardu ish me’al achiv; Avram yashav be’eretz Canaan*). The final letters of the words spell *shalom* – peace. He is teaching us that they separated in order to make peace. And there is also a hint here that peace will prevail among their descendants.

Amen. May it be so.





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