



Parshas Lech Lecha

For the week ending 13 Cheshvan 5757
25 & 25 October 1996

Overview

Ten generations have passed since the time of Noah. Man has descended to lower spiritual depths. In the year 1948 after the Creation, Avram is born. Through observing the world, Avram comes to the inescapable Truth of Hashem's existence, and thus merits that Hashem reveals Himself to him. At the beginning of this week's Parsha, Hashem tells Avram to leave his land, his relatives and his father's house and travel to an unknown land where Hashem will make him into a great nation. Avram leaves, taking with him his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, their servants, and those who he converted to faith in Hashem. When they reach the land of Canaan, Hashem appears to Avram and tells him that this is the land that He will give to his descendants. A famine ensues and Avram is forced to relocate to Egypt to find food. Realizing that his wife's beauty would cause his death at the hand of the Egyptians, Avram tells her to say that she is his sister. Sarai is taken to the Pharaoh, but Hashem afflicts the Pharaoh and his court with severe plagues and she is released unmolested. Avram returns to Eretz Yisrael (Canaan) with much wealth given to him by the Egyptians. After a quarrel over grazing rights breaks out between their shepherds, Avram decides to part ways with his nephew Lot. Lot chooses to live in the rich but corrupt city of Sodom in the fertile plain of the Jordan. A war breaks out between the kings of the region, and Sodom is defeated. Lot is taken captive. Together with a handful of his converts, Avram rescues Lot, miraculously overpowering vastly superior forces, but demurs from accepting any of the spoils of the battle. In a prophetic covenant, Hashem reveals to Avram that his offspring will be exiled to a strange land where they will be oppressed for 400 years, after which they will emerge with great wealth and return to Eretz Yisrael, their irrevocable inheritance. Sarai is barren and gives Hagar, her Egyptian hand-maiden, to Avram in the hope that she will provide them with a child. Hagar becomes arrogant when she discovers that she is pregnant. Sarai deals harshly with her and Hagar flees. On the instruction of an angel Hagar returns to Avram and gives birth to Yishmael. The Parsha concludes with Hashem commanding Avram to circumcise himself and his offspring throughout the generations as a covenant between Hashem and his seed. Hashem changes Avram's name to Avraham, and Sarai's name to Sara. Hashem promises Avraham a son, Yitzhak, despite Avraham being ninety-nine years old and Sara ninety. On that day, Avraham circumcises himself, Yishmael and all his household.

Never be 'frum' on someone else's spiritual expense account!

Insights

DATE WITH DESTINY

“Go for yourself from your land, from your relatives, and from your father's house.” (12:1)

Wheeling his lone Lancaster above the target at eighteen hundred feet, Freddy leveled off and tried to bomb the target one more time. Suddenly the cockpit radio spluttered into life:

“Freddy! — What are you playing at?! Get out of there now! There's more flak around those dams than guests at a Buck House tea party!”

“Sorry, skipper. I'm going in one more time — even if it means that you'll have to pick up my medal for me...”

Hashem tested Avraham Avinu ten times. The first of these tests was to leave his land, his birthplace and his father's house.

However, the 'extra words' here — “for yourself” — indicate that Hashem told Avraham that this journey was for his own benefit.

If Avraham Avinu knew that leaving his roots was for his own benefit, how could this be a test?

The answer is that sometimes it is easier for us to serve G-d when we think we are being self-sacrificing, than when we know there's something in it for ourselves.

It appeals to our innate sense of self-dramatization to see ourselves as martyrs to the cause. Many are the epics that play in the cinemas of our minds in which we have the title role of the selfless hero, taking arms against a sea of troubles, and all without benefit or profit to ourselves.

The test that Hashem gave Avraham was that he would have to work without the romanticism of self-sacrifice **and still do Hashem's will** with the same enthusiasm as some dashing hero flying his plane to a date with destiny.

Based on Rabbi Yechezkel Weinfeld, as heard from Rabbi Daniel Travis

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COUNTING STARS I

“And He took him outside, and said, ‘Gaze, now, toward the Heaven, and count the stars, if you are able to count them!’ And He said to him, ‘So will be your offspring!’” (15:5)

The Jewish People are like the stars. Even though there are a myriad stars, Hashem calls every one of them by name.

Even though there are a myriad of Jewish souls, every one has its own name — its own purpose and uniquely appointed task.

The purpose of every soul is unique and irreplaceable, as is the purpose of every star.

When we look at the myriad of stars in the sky, they sometimes seem to meld into an amorphous mass, merely a wash of light against the vast blackness of space. Each of them, however, is a separate world of light.

Such is the soul, shining its own unique radiance to illuminate its own unique corner of the galaxy of the spirit.

Based on the Ksav Sofer, as heard from Rabbi Calev Gestetner

THE LETTER OF THE LAW

“If so much as a thread or a shoe-strap; or if I shall take from anything of yours! ... Far from me! Only what the young men have eaten...” (14:23,24)

For his part in defeating the four kings, the king of Sodom offered Avraham a share of the victors’ spoils, as was his right. But Avraham would take nothing, for he wanted to show his devotion to Hashem, declining personal gain so that the king of Sodom could not claim that he made Avraham rich.

However, Avraham applied this stringency to himself alone. When it came to his followers, he permitted them to take everything that was lawful.

This teaches us a powerful lesson. Never to be ‘frum’ (pious) on someone else’s spiritual expense account! If, after careful consideration, we want to take upon ourselves stringencies, that’s up to us. But from others, we should never demand, or even expect, more than the letter of the law.

The Chafetz Chaim

Haftorah: Isaiah 40:27-41:16

Avraham Avinu is known as Ha-Ivri — the Hebrew, which means ‘the one who crossed over.’ He crossed over from being an idol worshipper to serving the living G-d.

Even if the rest of the world is on the other side, the Hebrew — the one who crosses over — stands up and says “Stop worshipping your idols of stone, of money, of worldly power, and acknowledge that Hashem is G-d alone.”

The task of the Jewish People has always been to deliver this message to the world.

The prophet Isaiah encourages Israel to persevere both in the face of their own failures and exile, and despite the resistance and apathy of the nations.

Hashem has promised them that ultimately they will prevail, for though the Jewish People may seem worm-like in their insignificance and powerlessness, they will vanquish those who now seem invincible.

DUST AND JEWELS

“...as much dust as Avraham used, turned into swords...” (41:2).

Nachum Ish Gamzu was a man whose very name expressed his essence — whatever happened to him he would always say — “This is also for the good!” He never doubted that what Hashem does is always for the best.

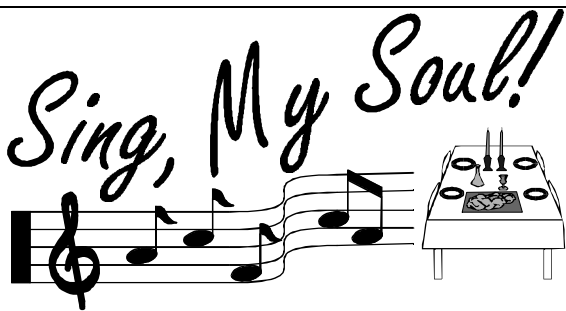
Nachum was chosen to travel to the Emperor and present him with a box filled with precious stones as tribute from the Jewish People. On the way, and unknown to Nachum, the jewels were switched with worthless dust. With great ceremony the ‘jewels’ were presented to the Emperor and slowly the box was opened in front of him... The Emperor’s rage knew no bounds at this unbelievable insult from the Jews. Suddenly, the prophet Eliyahu appeared in the guise of one of the Emperor’s ministers and said: “Your Imperial Majesty, this must be the special dust that the Jews’ forefather Avraham used to defeat the four kings as it says ‘...as much dust as Avraham used, turned into swords...’ Let us, at least, try the dust and see if it works for us as well.”

The Emperor agreed and Hashem caused a miracle — the dust indeed proved to be lethal against the Emperor’s enemies.

We must remember that even in the darkest moments of exile, when all our jewels look like dust, Hashem will bring the prophet Eliyahu to announce the dawn of redemption.

Based on the Midrash

INSIGHTS INTO THE ZEMIROS
SUNG AT THE SHABBOS TABLE
THROUGHOUT THE GENERATIONS.



RIBON KOL HAOLAMIM-nkugv kf iucr
“MASTER OF ALL THE WORLDS...”

For I have lit my candles
and arranged my bed ...
in honor of Shabbos.

כי הדלקתי נרותי
... והצעתי מטתי...
לכבוד יום השבת

Ki hidlakti nayrosai,
vhitzati mitosi...
lichvod yom hashabas

In the Torah passage about Jews observing the Shabbos and establishing the Shabbos “Iedorosam” (Shmos 31:16) the literal meaning of the word is “for their generations.” A careful look at the word in the Torah indicates that it is spelled in such a manner that it could be read as “Iedirosam” which means “to their homes.”

The message communicated by this spelling is that if a Jew lights Shabbos candles, sets his table and arranges his furniture in a manner which transforms his weekday house into a “Shabbosdig” home then the Divine Presence declares that it wishes to enter such a home. But if the spirit of Shabbos is not reflected in the house the Divine Presence avoids a home which lacks a Jewish flavor.

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