



Parshas Lech Lecha

For the week ending 8 Cheshvan 5758
7 & 8 November 1997

Overview

Ten generations have passed since the time of Noach. 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 reveal 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 asks 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 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 Sarah. Hashem promises Avraham a son, Yitzhak, despite Avraham being ninety-nine years old and Sarah ninety. On that day, Avraham circumcises himself, Yishmael and all his household.

Insights

THE GREATEST BLESSING

“And Hashem said to Avram, ‘Go for yourself from your land and from your birthplace and from the house of your father to the land which I will show you, and I will bless you and I will magnify your name, and you shall be a blessing’.” (12:1)

When Hashem commanded Avram to leave home, He gave him many blessings. As Rashi explains: “*And I will make of you a great nation*” is a promise of children; “*I will bless you*” denotes material success; and “*I will magnify your name*” is the promise that Hashem would perfect Avram, making him free from blemish and defect.

These blessings are so extensive that it's difficult to imagine how they could be added to. However, the greatest blessing is yet to come. As the verse above concludes: “*And you shall be a blessing.*”

The greatest blessing is to be a blessing to others. To help them. To care for them. To be there for others in their times of joy and sadness.

The only way to achieve real happiness in life is to help others to be happy.

ON BEING ONESELF

“And Hashem said to Avram ‘Go for yourself...’” (12:1)

The great *tzaddik*, Reb Zushia of Annipoli once said: “When I get to the next world, the World of Truth, if they say to me: ‘Zushia, why weren't you like the Ba'al Shem Tov?’ that's not going to frighten me one bit. How can you compare me to the Ba'al Shem Tov?”

And if they say to me: ‘Zushia, why weren't you like the Maggid of Mezrich?’ that's not going to frighten me either. Look at me and look at the Maggid of Mezrich! What frightens me is when they say to me: ‘Zushia! Why weren't you Zushia! The Zushia that you could have been, why weren't you even that?’”

“*Go for yourself*” can also be translated as “*Go to yourself...*” The mystical sources explain this to mean: “*Go to the root of your neshama (soul).*” In the next world, there will be no claims against a person that he failed to live up to the potential of others. However, it is our duty to maximize our talents, to push out to the very limits of our abilities so that we bring the root of our souls to flower. It is only in this way that we will be, at least, our own “*Zushias.*”

THE TOWERING INFERNO

“Go for yourself” (12:1)

There was a traveler who was journeying from place to place. He came upon a large mansion ablaze with light, sumptuously furnished. He said “Don't tell me that this mansion has no master!” No sooner had he spoken than the owner of the mansion peeked out and said to him: “I am the master of the mansion.”

(Continued)

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(Continued from Front)

Similarly, Avraham Avinu looked at the world and said "Don't tell me that this world — so perfectly furnished — has no master!" Then, the Holy One, Blessed be He, peeked out and said to him: "I am the Master of the world."

Prophecy is given to those who exert themselves. If a person raises himself to the limits of his righteousness, if he uses his intellectual and critical faculties to their utmost, then Hashem will grant him understanding above the normal human level.

Avraham saw the reality of Creation — the mansion ablaze with light — and used his own human resources to come to the inescapable truth of the existence of the Creator. At that point, Hashem reached out to Avraham and gave him prophecy.

Another idea.

Avraham saw a mansion which was "ablaze (with light)." The expression for "ablaze" — *dolekes* — can also mean "burning." Why should seeing a burning mansion be compelling evidence of the Creator?

When something is totally and utterly burned it returns to ash, to the level where everything is the same; it has been reduced to its elemental self. It has no form that sets it apart from any other thing in the Creation.

Avraham Avinu saw the world, the mansion, *as if it was all one element, one unity*. He saw the disparate nature of this world, this "mansion," as "burned," reduced to an ineffable oneness, reflecting of its Creator. Avraham perceived the unity of nature and, through this, the Unity of Hashem.

That's the greatest of blessings.

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 alone is G-d."

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 the resistance and apathy of the nations.

Hashem has promised that ultimately they must 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. No matter what 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

ACTING LIKE STARS

"And (Hashem) took him outside and said to him 'Look up, please, at the heavens and count the stars, if you can count them;' and He said to him 'So, too, will be your descendants.'" (14:24)

Two great rabbis of the previous generation, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein and Rabbi Yaakov Kaminetzky, were once seen standing beside the chauffeur-driven car which was to take them home, discussing which of them was going to get out of the car first.

As Reb Moshe lived nearer, and would thus get out first, he got in the back and Reb Yaakov got in the front. The reason for their discussion was that if Reb Moshe had sat in the front, then when he exited the driver would look like a chauffeur, and they were concerned for the dignity of the driver.

The Ba'al Shem Tov explains that the descendants of Avraham are like stars. From our point of view the stars seem like insignificant specks of light, whereas in the heavens they are in reality entire universes.

When you look at another person, realize that he is a star! (Not the Hollywood variety) A galactic mirror, reflecting the infinite light of the Creator. He may seem very small to you. He may not have achieved much. But his potential is vaster than the trackless emptiness of space.

When you see people in this light, you will behave towards them with great respect, and when you show others respect, they gain respect for themselves. This in turn can give them the encouragement to fulfill their potential greatness and shine all the more brightly.

way, 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."

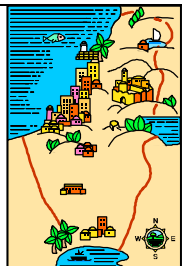
The Emperor agreed and Hashem caused a miracle — the dust indeed proved to be lethal against the Emperor's enemies.

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.

Sources:
The Greatest Blessing - Rabbi Meir Chadash
On Being Oneself - Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin
The Towering Inferno - Midrash Rabba; Chazon Ish; Rabbi Moshe Shapiro as heard from Rabbi Nota Schiller
Acting Like Stars - Rabbi Zelig Pliskin; Mayana Shel Torah; Rabbi Nissan Wolpin
Dust and Jewels - Midrash

LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael



WORTH MOVING FOR

Rabbi Ami and Rabbi Asi, who studied Torah in *Eretz Yisrael*, would leave their place of study when it became too hot and move to the shade. On cool days they would move from a cold spot to where they could get some warmth from the sun.

(Kesuvos 112b)

They bothered to make these moves, explains Rashi, in order to avoid having any complaints about the climate of *Eretz Yisrael*.

These two Talmudic giants could apparently have endured the discomfort of heat or cold and would have preferred to do so rather than lose the precious time required for relocation. But this might have stirred a fleeting thought of discontent with the climate of the land they so loved. They therefore decided it was worth making this sacrifice.

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