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**Rabbi Berel Wein on**

**Parshat Lech Lecha 5781**



 We are aware that one of the ten tests and challenges that confront our father Abraham is the Almighty's commandment to Abraham that forms the name of this week's Torah reading. Abraham is directed to, ‘go, for your sake,’ leave the comforts and familiar surroundings of your home and society, and to take a journey into a strange and unknown land.

 According to Chassidic tradition, this instruction from heaven was not localized, to be heard only by the ears of Abraham. Many people also heard this directive, but they did not feel that it had any relevance to them, and they never acted upon it.

 It was the holy nature of our father Abraham that compelled him to realize that the message was truly meant for him,  and he then undertook the journey with his wife, Sarah, that would make them the parents of the Jewish people for all eternity.

 There is also another and perhaps deeper meaning into those two words of

"lech lecha." This is not only an immediate instruction regarding a specific journey and trip, but it is also a general outline and pattern for the remainder of the life of Abraham and Sarah, that guides them long after this initial sojourn has been taken and its purpose accomplished.

**Abraham’s Purpose in Life**

 Heaven, so to speak, is telling Abraham that the purpose in life is always to keep on going, never to rest on one's past accomplishments, but to always see that there is more to be done. The work of human beings in this life is never fully achieved.  We are never allowed to quit, so to speak, in midstream. As long as the breath of life exists within us, we should continue to be devoted to furthering Torah accomplishments.

 That is undoubtedly what the Mishnah in Avot wishes to communicate to us by saying that Abraham was tested ten times, and he able to with-stand all these trials. The Hebrew expression "to stand" not only refers to a physical description on two legs, but also implies that Abraham was elevated and made greater by each of the challenges and tests that he was able to overcome.

**No Concept of Retirement in**

**Talmud or Jewish Tradition**

 I have pointed out in previous articles that the rabbis saw that this was the main difference between Abraham and Noah. There are many people in the world who accomplish noble and even holy tasks. But there are very few who do so on a consistent basis throughout their entire lives, no matter what circumstances they face. It is one of the reasons why we never find in the Talmud or Jewish tradition the concept of retirement as being a time of leisure, a time of not having to face new tasks or challenges.

 There is no end to the accomplishments and challenges of life when there is life itself within our bodies. The challenges of age are far different from those of youth, in that there is no excuse for attempting to shirk them and avoid their rigors. Thus, we are always meant to keep on going to the extent that we are able to do so. That has always been the message of Abraham to us, for all our generations.

*Reprinted from this week’s website of rabbiwein.com*

**G-d’s Reaching Out**

**To the Jewish People**

**From the Talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

**Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, Zt”l**



 The Torah portion of Lech Lecha opens with G-d telling to Abraham: "Go from your land and birthplace... I will make you into a great nation."

 Why does the Torah not preface the command by mentioning at least briefly Abraham's piety, righteousness and self-sacrificing devotion to G-d, similar to the way Noah is introduced with, "Noah was a righteous man"?

 The Jewish nation begins with Abraham. His selection by G-d from among all the people only came about when G-d said, "Go from your land..."

**Torah Narrative Begins with a Command**

 The Torah begins its narrative with this command, rather than his sterling qualities, in order to indicate the essential qualities of Abraham in particular, as well as of the Jewish people as a whole.

 The relationship of all the other nations with the Creator results from their knowledge and understanding of Him. This causes them to bring themselves to Him and obey His laws.

 By contrast, the Jewish people's relationship with G-d and their own existence as a nation is primarily based on the fact that it was G-d who chose them, not that they uplifted themselves to know Him and to bind themselves to Him.

**A Relationship Emanates**

**From G-d and Not from Man**

 Since this relationship emanates from G-d and not from man, it is readily understandable that Jews are a qualitatively different category of created beings.

 All created beings are and remain created entities; Jews, however, are essentially a G-dly entity that is found within the context of creation.

 The same is true with regard to the contrast between the mitzvot given to the Jewish people and those commanded to other nations. There is not merely a quantitative difference, but a qualitative difference as well.

 The main function of the commandments given to non-Jews is to ensure an orderly world and to refine man, so that both the world as a whole and man in particular conduct themselves properly.

**Quite Different Mitzvot**

 The mitzvot given by G-d to the Jewish people are quite different. Not only are they given for the sake of purifying man and the world, but most importantly in order to effect "unification and attachment" with G-d.

 Since Creator and created are separated by an infinite gulf, it is self-evident that just as created begins are as nothing in G-d's eyes, the same is true of their service.

 The only way that "unification and attachment" can be achieved between Creator and created is for G-d to choose this unification as a result of the fulfillment of His commands.

 This concept is stressed in the Torah at the beginning of the first Jewish relationship with G-d.

 It was not Abraham's own unique qualities and his divine service that singled him out; rather, G-d chose him. His "unification and attachment" to G-d resulted from his being chosen and commanded by G-d, and from his fulfillment of His commands.

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**The Two Oxen**

**By Rabbi David Sutton**



 A fable is told of two oxen who stood together watching enviously at the majestic sight of eagles gracefully flying overhead. They both admired the beauty and grandeur of the eagles’ flight, and very much wanted to emulate them.

 The foolish ox stood at the edge of a mountain, and when it felt a gust of wind, it jumped into the air and attempted to fly. Of course, it quickly came crashing down to the ground.

 The wise ox, however, said to itself, “I obviously cannot fly like an eagle. I was not built with this ability. I am not equipped to fly. But I have other talents. I can do things that eagles can’t. I will try to plow the earth as gracefully as the eagle flies.”

 When we see somebody excel in a way we never can, we should not feel disheartened or envious. Instead, we should resolve to work harder and improve in the things we are good at, to do our job as well as that person does his or hers.

 This is an especially vital message in the area of childrearing and education. Rav Ades noted the importance of parents empowering their children with self-esteem, and he said the way we do this is by emphasizing this point – that each and every person in this world has his or her own unique role to fulfill. When a child knows that he was created with special capabilities that nobody else has so that he can fulfill the role assigned only to him and to nobody else on earth, he feels confident even if his peers score higher grades than him or are better ball players than him.

*Excerpted from the Parshat Noach website of iTorah.com.*

**Parshas Lech Lecha**

**The Greatness of the Avos**

**By Rabbi Bentzion Shafier**

**Founder of TheSmuz.com**



“*And it was as they came close to coming to Egypt, and Avram said to his Sari his wife, “Behold, now I know that you are a beautiful woman*.” — Bereishis 12:11

 HASHEM told Avram to leave Charan and go to the land of Cannan. When Avram arrived, there was a famine in the land, and he was forced to go down to Egypt. While traveling there, he said to his wife, “Behold, now I know that you are a beautiful woman.”

 Rashi, in the name of the Medrash, explains that up until this point Avrohom Avinu didn’t notice his wife’s physical appearance. Because they were traveling, the situation caused him to become aware of it, and he now recognized that she was a beautiful woman.

 This Rashi becomes difficult to understand when we focus on why HASHEM created beauty in a woman.

**Men are from Mars; Women are from Venus**

 Men and women are different in almost every way imaginable. They speak differently, act differently, and have different value systems. It would seem near impossible to take two individuals from different backgrounds, with diverse natures and upbringings, put them together for a short time, and then ask them to live together for the rest of their lives in peace and harmony.

 In all relationships, differences of opinions tend to escalate, so feeling are hurt, and eventually the liaison ends. Most business partnerships end with a fight. Most friendships weaken when people go their separate ways. It seems impractical to expect the institution of marriage to succeed.

 To allow marriages to flourish, HASHEM placed within the heart of man the capacity to form a bond of love. Love allows a couple to overlook each other’s shortcomings, to ignore their partner’s flaws. It is the glue that holds a marriage together.

 To help form this bond, HASHEM created a number of catalysts. One of these is a woman’s beauty. When a husband notices his wife’s appearance, there is an awakening in his heart. He feels attracted to her, and this increases the love and attachment he feels towards to her. This element is so significant in creating that bond that a man is not allowed marry a woman without first seeing her in case “she may be ugly in his eyes.”

 The Torah’s approach to a successful marriage is not to ignore the physical, but rather to understand that it is a tool to be used for greater devotion and attachment of husband to wife. So how is it that Avrohom wasn’t even aware of whether his wife was attractive or not?

**The Greatness of the Avos**

The answer to this question seems to be that because of the great level of spirituality they were both on, matters of physical beauty were irrelevant. Apparently Avrohom was on the level of loving his wife totally and completely for her inner beauty — for who she was as a person. The external would neither have helped nor hurt. If her physical beauty would have added a dimension to the love and devotion that he felt towards her, we have to assume that he would have used it as such. Rather, it was something that wouldn’t have added to the already powerful bond and attraction he felt towards her.

 What we see from this is an amazing illustration of the great spiritual planes the Avos and Imahos were on. To Avrohom and Sarah, it wasn’t that the physical took a back seat; it was irrelevant; it didn’t weigh in at all. They lived on such a pure level that they bonded as a couple with complete and utter devotion, without any need of the physical drives that HASHEM put into mankind.

**The Difference Between a Mile Marker and the North Star**

This concept has great relevance in our lives. We are told that a person must say, “When will my actions reach the level of the Avos?” Chazal teach us that to reach greatness, we must use the Avos as role models. We are supposed to study their lives, see how they conducted themselves, and emulate their ways.

 However, there are two dimensions to the lessons that we learn from the Avos. Some lessons are direct. We can see how they acted in a given situation, and we attempt in our own lives to imitate those deeds. In this mode, we use the Avos almost as mile markers to plan and measure our growth.

**Understand the Greatness**

**And Potential of the Human**

 The second type of lessons that we learn from the Avos are much less direct. These lessons are not as much about how to **act** as they are how to **understand** the greatness and the potential of the human. We see the enormity of the Avos and Imahos, recognize how much they towered over us, and we use them as a guide, a North Star against which we set our compass.

 When we see that people who walked this earth, ate, drank, and slept as we do, yet reached levels that are almost beyond our comprehension, we aren’t asked to imitate those actions, but to expand our horizons. I am not expected to be like them, nor will I ever be asked to do what they did, but if that is what a human is capable of, then it breaks through the barriers of what I thought was possible. Their actions expand my understanding of what is possible for me.

**The Physical in Our Own Lives**

 It is important to remember that in our own lives and marriages, physical elements are important. A wife should do her best to make herself attractive to her husband, and a husband should do his best to make himself attractive to his wife. We aren’t Avrohom Avinu and Sarah Imenu.

 Therefore, we were given tools to help create a powerful attachment that withstands time and the travails of life. Physical attraction isn’t the end goal, but it is a key element and driving force in a successful marriage and a Torah home. At the same time, it is important to have in front of us an image of what a human can aspire to so we can set our goals for our own greatness.

*Reprinted from this week’s website on TheShmuz.com This is an excerpt from the [Shmuz on the Parsha book](https://theshmuz.com/product/shmuz-on-the-parsha-book/).*

**The Songs of Nevuchadnetzar**

**Rabbi Joey Haber**

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 The Gemara tells that the Babylonian emperor Nevuchadnetzar, who destroyed the first Bet Ha’mikdash, could have been an exceptional poet and singer. If he would have sung songs, his songs would have been greater than David Ha’melech’s songs in Tehillim.

 Nobody would have thought anything of David Ha’melech’s songs to G-d, because they would have paled in comparison to Nevuchadnetzar’s. But an angel slapped Nevuchadnetzar on the mouth, so he would not be able to sing.

 What does this mean?

 One commentary explains that Nevuchadnetzar was able to sing beautiful praises to Hashem because he had everything. He was the most powerful man in the world in his time. He was famous, wealthy and successful. A person so successful could sing wonderful praises to G-d.

 But then an angel gave him a “slap” – gave him some challenges and hardships, and then said to the emperor, “Now let’s see if you can praise G-d!”

What makes David’s praises so special is that he sang them even in the darkest of times. David Ha’melech faced unimaginable challenges, including a revolt against him mounted by his own son.

 But throughout it all, David was able to sing, to see what is beautiful in the world and feel grateful to Hashem.

*Reprinted from the Parshas Noach 5781 edition of iTorah.com website.*

**The Incredible Power of**

**Your Prayers for Others**

**By Daniel Keren**

 I was recently listening to some lectures by Rabbi Dovid Orlofsky, one of the most popular speakers in the English-speaking Torah world today. His podcasts can be accessed on the Torahanytime.com website. A graduate of the Yeshiva Chofetz Chaim in New York and the Pressburg Yeshiva in Yerushalayim; before making Aliya to Eretz Yirsoel he was the Long Island regional director for the National Council of Synagogue Youth.



**Rabbi Dovid Orlofsky**

 In one of those lectures, I can’t remember the title, Rabbi Orlofsky told a very interesting story. A frum woman who worked in a Jewish girl’s school recalled that once a woman came into the school’s office. She didn’t look like she really belonged as the school catered to the more rightwing Orthodox community and this woman was not exactly dressed in the tzniut (modest) style of that segment of the Jewish community. The frum woman asked her what she wanted and the not so tzniut dressed answered that she wanted to enroll her young daughter in the school.

 When asked why she was interested in this particular school, the woman answered that she had checked it out and this school was the cheapest with regards to tuition. The school’s employee couldn’t control herself, and blurted out, “But do you realize that this school teaches traditionl Jewish values that are probably more stricter than what you practice in your home? That might cause some conflict.”

**The Woman Quickly Left the Office**

 The woman listened to that argument and nodded in agreement and immediately arose from the chair she was sitting in and quickly left the office.

 After the woman left and closed the door, the school’s employee began shaking with trepidation. What had she done? Maybe, just maybe, had she not spoken out and just enrolled that woman’s daughter in the school and let destiny take its place, the girl might have been influenced by the curriculum and the faculty and become a fine specimen of a bas Yisroel (Jewish daughter). What right had she to chase the mother away?

 From that moment on, the school employee began to pray to the Ribbon shel Olam (the Master of the World) to have rachmanus (mercy) on that innocent Jewish girl. Years passed, many years passed and that woman continued to pray sincerely on behalf of the girl who she inadvertently denied a chance for a proper and kosher Jewish education.

**Fifteen Years Later**

 And then almost 15 years later it happened. The woman saw a woman and she recognized her as the mother of that girl. She quickly approached the mother and reminded her of that time she had come to her school to enroll her daughter and had “persuaded” her to not do so. She nervously asked that woman what had become of her daughter.

 The mother remembered that incident and said, “You know, even though we enrolled her in a more “Modern” school, for some crazy reason which my husband and I can’t understand to this day, that daughter always had a strange and illogical inclination for more rightwing ultra-Orthodox practices. In fact, there she is right now,” pointing to a tzniut dressed woman wearing a modest sheitel and pushing a baby carriage.

 Perhaps the constant concern and davening of that school employee for the next 15 years made a rashum (turmoil) in heaven and saved that Jewish daughter from the natural course of events.

 A couple of years ago, I bumped into a friend of a friend. You know the type of guy you meet every once in a blue moon when attending a bar mitzvah or chasanah (wedding) of your common friend. I asked him “what’s happening in his life” and he sadly told me that he had a 28 year-old-daughter who was still not married and on top of that sadness, his other child had just got divorced and was now a single mother of two young children.

**What Can You Say in Such a Situation**

 Obviously he was not a happy camper. What can you say in such a situation? I asked him if he could let me write the names of his two daughters so I could pray for them during the Shma Koleinu section of the Shemonah Esrai. He gave me the names and I promised to pray for them and he mumbled a very weak thank you.

 Basically he had begun to give up hope on his never-married-daughter and was emotionally devastated by the breakup of his other daughter’s marriage. So I davened and the months passed. A year-and-a-half passed and I was afraid to call him and inquire, fearful that I might just be pouring salt into his painful emotional wounds. And then it happened! Another blue moon moment occurred and I unexpectedly bumped into that friend of a common friend. With trepidation, I asked him about his two daughters and to my joy, he cracked a big smile and told me that he had married both of them recently.

 Now I can’t verify that it was the result of my prayers. But hey, they were sincerely recited and just maybe like that school employee, it made a rashum in shomayim. So when you know of others who have problems that only davening (praying) can help, you have nothing to lose and besides it still doesn’t cost you any money in situations when money doesn’t seem to be the solution.

*Reprinted from last week’s edition of The Jewish Connection.*

**Should a Mourner be Called For an Aliya if He is the Only Kohen in Attendance?**

**By Rabbi Eli J. Mansour**

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A mourner who is observing Shib’a should not be called for an Aliya to the Torah, since it is forbidden for mourners to study Torah. An interesting question arises in a case where a mourner who is a Kohen does not have a Minyan in his home, and prays in the synagogue, instead, where no other Kohanim are in attendance. Normally, if there is a Kohen present, he must be given the first Aliya to the Torah, as otherwise people might question whether he is in fact a legitimate Kohen.

 In light of this Halacha, should we perhaps allow a mourner to receive the first Aliya if he is the only Kohen, in the interest of protecting his reputation?

 The answer is that even in such a case, the mourner should not receive an Aliya, and he does not need to be asked to leave, either. It can be assumed that the people in the congregation realize that this Kohen is in mourning and is therefore unable to receive an Aliya, and therefore, nobody will question his status as a valid Kohen.

 This case resembles a case where the only Kohen in the synagogue is in the middle of Shema or the Amida prayer when the Torah reading begins. Since he cannot be called for the first Aliya – as waiting for him to finish his prayer would inconvenience the congregation – and it is clear to everyone present that he cannot receive the Aliya because he is praying, and not because he is not a valid Kohen, he does not receive the Aliya.

 Likewise, if the only Kohen in the synagogue is a mourner, he does not receive an Aliya, because everybody knows the reason why he cannot be called to the Torah.

 The exception to this rule is Shabbat, when a Kohen who is a mourner should be called for the first Aliya if no other Kohanim are present. Public displays of mourning are forbidden on Shabbat, and if the only Kohen in the synagogue does not receive an Aliya because he is in mourning, or if he is asked to leave so a Yisrael can be called, this would publicly display his status as a mourner.

 Therefore, if it happened on Shabbat that the only Kohen in the synagogue is a mourner, he should receive the first Aliya. This is the ruling of Hacham David Yosef, in his Halacha Berura.

 **Summary:** If the only Kohen in the synagogue is a mourner observing Shib’a, the first Aliya is given to a Yisrael, unless this occurred on Shabbat, in which case the mourner should receive the first Aliya. :

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**Thoughts that Count**

**For Parshat Lech Lecha**

*Fear not Abram, for I am your shield* (Gen. 15:1)

 Our forefather Abraham was the epitome of unlimited loving-kindness; in his eyes everyone was good and had merit. Unfortunately, however, looking at the world in such an undiscriminating fashion precludes the entire purpose of creation, i.e., the eradication and nullification of evil. For this reason G-d promised Abraham that He would put a "shield" on his loving-kindness, to make sure it would be applied with the proper discretion. *(Torah Ohr)*

*And Abram took Sarai his wife... and all the souls they had made in Charan* (Gen. 12:5)

 As Rashi explains, this refers to the people whom Abraham and Sarah "brought under the wings of the Divine Presence. Abraham converted the men [to the belief in one G-d] and Sarah converted the women."

 Because this took place before the Torah was given at Sinai, the concept of conversion did not exist as it does today; according to halacha, Abraham and Sarah were considered "Children of Noah." Thus Rashi uses the unusual phrase "brought under the wings of the Divine Presence" to establish this fact before using the word "conversion" in a non-literal sense. *(The Lubavitcher Rebbe, zt”l)*

*For their wealth was great, so that they could not dwell together* (Gen. 13:6)

 Not poverty but wealth, and the jealousy it engenders, is the cause of most of the dissension and conflict in the world. *(Likrat Shabbat)*

*Your reward will be exceedingly great* (Gen. 15:1)

 The reward a Jew receives for doing mitzvot is vastly out of proportion to the deed itself: a finite and limited action is rewarded with an eternal and everlasting dividend. *(The Lubavitcher Rebbe, zt”l)*

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