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**An American Rabbi in Jerusalem Tackles the**

**Tough Questions of Today**

**By Daniel Keren**

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**Rabbi Yitzchak Breitowitz**

 This is my second Reviews column focusing on one of the world’s most popular lecturers and rabbinic authorities whose podcasts now are viewed by many thousands of English-speaking Jews around the world. Back on May 14th, I devoted my column to “Rabbi Yitzchak Breitowitz on the Difference Between Shabbos and Yom Tov.”

 Until 2010 Rabbi Breitowitz was on the faculty of the University of Maryland Law School in Baltimore where he taught the intricacies of bankruptcy and commercial law. At the same time, he was the Rav of the Woodside Synagogue in the Washington DC suburb of Silver Springs, Maryland where he taught varied Jewish subjects to a wide segment of the Jewish community.

 His major work to date is a fusion of his interest in both secular law and Torah law – a 1983 book titled “Between Religious and Secular Law: The Plight of the Agunah.”

**Rav of Kehilla Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem**

 Today, he and his wife Sally (nee Naiman) live in Jerusalem where he is on the staff of Ohr Somayach, a yeshiva teaching English-speaking young men from secular backgrounds the beauty of Torah. He is also the Rav of the Ohr Somayach yeshiva’s Kehilla Ohr Somayach.

 Rabbi Breitowitz grew up in the Hartford, Connecticut area and earned his rabbinical ordination (semicha) from the Ner Israel Rabbinical College in Baltimore and at the same time earned a bachelors degree from John Hopkins University also in Baltimore before attending Harvard Law School where he graduated magna cum laude.

 His lectures that appear on a number of Torah websites, including Torahanytime.com are geared to Jews with secular college backgrounds. However, I do think that members of the more traditional yeshivas and Bais Yaakov schools could also benefit from listening or viewing his podcasts.

 We are now just days away from Parshas Lech Lecha that begins to tell us the story of our Patriarch Avraham and our Matriarch Sarah. Despite what chazal, our Sages of blessed memory tell us about their sincere and powerful belief and commitment in the Abishter (our Father in Heaven,) Hashem did not give them an easy path in life.

**The First of Abraham’s Challenges**

 Indeed, shortly after being given the command to leave his father’s house and his native land [which Rashi explains G-d told him would be for his own good, he would become richer, have children and become world famous], Abraham is confronted with the first of 10 serious challenges that are designed to see if he would lose any of his Emunah (trust) and Bitachon (faith) in G-d.

 Back in January 2016, Rabbi Breitowitz gave a 54-minute podcast titled “The Book of Job – Rabbi Yitzchak Breitowitz – YouTube” dealing with related issues: Why do bad things happen to good people? And why do the righteous suffer? Indeed, in the more recent aftermath of the Holocaust and perhaps in most people’s personal lives, these questions pop up as we grope to try and understand that which seems impossible to comprehend.

 Among the possible answers that Rabbi Breitowitz offers is that not always is everything that we view as evil is truly bad. If one believes that this is the only world, then of course many unanswered injustices are impossible to come to terms with. But as our rabbis teach us, this world (Olam Hazeh) is just the hallway towards Olam Haba (the World to Come – where one enjoys spiritual rewards for their good deeds in Olam Hazeh) and the post-messianic life when after Techias Hameisim, all the righteous will be resurrected to life eternal in a world almost similar to that of Gan Eden prior to the original sin of Mankind (Adam and Chava).

**The Kabbalistic Concepts of Gilgulim**

 Rabbi Breitowitz also brings up the Kabbalistic concepts of gilgulim (reincarnations) taught by the Arizal in 16th Century Safad, Israel that highlights on the idea that if a Jew in a previous gilgul (lifetime) did not complete his or her spiritual mission, their neshama (soul) is brought down into another body in this world in an effort to make a tikkun (spiritual repair) so-to-speak.

 One of the most difficult social issues confronting parents in the Western World is that of gender identity – a recent phenomenum where children are encouraged to declare that they believe that they were born in the wrong body (i.e. a boy thinks that he is really a girl and visa versa.) Liberal psychologists actively encourage such individuals to demand the right for irreversible medical procedures that would among other things prevent them from ever having biological children. And often parents are by law not allowed to stop even their minor aged children from pursuing such medical operations.

**The Current Craze Surrounding Gender Identity**

 Addressing this seemingly crazy and difficult situation is a recent June 2021 44 minutes Rabbi Breitowitz podcast titled “Gender Identity – Why is this Happening Now and How it Affects Us.” While offering a clear explanation of this anti-Torah movement, Rabbi Breitowitz clearly explains his sympathy for those children or even adults who have opted or want to have the irreversible medical procedures performed on them. He also explains that the rate of suicide among those who have indeed had the procedures carried out is much higher than in most other segments of the population. Rabbi Breitowitz also emphasizes that such a medical operation is against the Torah and one of the reasons is that it prohibits one from fulfilling the commandment to be fruitful and multiply.

 To view either or both podcasts simply google “Youtube – The Book of Job – Rabbi Yitzchak Breitowitz” and or “Gender Identity – Why is This Happening Now and How it Affects Us – Rabbi Breitowitz.”

*Reprinted from this week’s edition of the Jewish Connection.*

**Parshas Lech Lichah:**

**The Five Star**

**Hotel Called Life**

**By Rabbi Bentzion Shafier**

**Founder of TheSmuz.com**



“*After these matters, HASHEM appeared to Avram in a dream and said, “Do not fear, Avram. I will guard you. Your reward is great*.” Bereishis 16:1

 When Avrohom Avinu was informed that his nephew, Lot, was captured, against all odds and in a most courageous manner, he waged war against the combined armies of the four kings. Miraculously, he was victorious and freed Lot.

 After these events, HASHEM appeared to Avrohom and said, “Do not fear; your reward is great.” Rashi explains that Avrohom was afraid that since this great miracle had been done for him, he had used up all of his merits and had no reward waiting for him in the World to Come. HASHEM allayed those fears by saying, “Everything that I have done for you will not cost you. Do not fear; your reward is great.”

 This Rashi is very difficult to understand. How is it possible that a man as great Avrohom could have thought that he used up all of his reward? After years and years of serving HASHEM, surely the reward waiting for him was phenomenal.

The answer to this is based on viewing life from a different vantage point.

**Pesach in Arizona**

 Imagine that your father-in-law invites you to join him for Pesach in Sedona, Arizona. This is the ultimate Pesach extravaganza. No expense is spared; the guests are showered with every imaginable luxury and amenity. A five-star hotel, French chefs, an 18-hole golf course on premises – the best of the best. You graciously accept and are ready to have the time of your life. But as it turns out, by the time Pesach comes around, things at work aren’t going well, and lately you’ve been fighting with your wife, as a result, you’re in the worst mood you’ve ever been in. For the nine days that you are there, you barely leave your hotel room.

 When the vacation is over, your father-in-law approaches the hotel manager, and says, “My son-in-law hardly ate the entire time he was here. He didn’t come to a single gala Kiddush. He didn’t use the golf course. Not once did he step foot in the spa. Normally, I am not the type to complain. But I just can’t see paying the regular rate, so I’ve decided to pay half the bill, and expect you to waive the other half.”

 How do you think the hotel representative would respond?

**Earth: A Five Star Hotel**

 This planet that we occupy is a five-star hotel. We have every imaginable pleasure and amenity available to us. We enjoy majestic sights and experiences that constantly surround us. From magnificent floral scenes to exotic sea life, from the glory of the night sky to the clear aqua green of the ocean, from a flower in bloom to the plumage of a jungle parrot, all of the pomp and ceremony of a sunrise – a world created in Technicolor.

 And more than that, we were given the tools with which to enjoy it. We have legs with which to walk and hands with which to hold. We have ears, a tongue, a nose, and fingers that bring us an astounding array of pleasures from the world around us. We have foods that explode with a burst of different flavors, aromas, textures, and colors. We are surrounded by untold pleasures and riches.

 But more than anything, we have been granted the extraordinary privilege called life. We were given this golden opportunity to shape ourselves into what we can be for eternity. Is there any way to measure the value of life? Is it worth a million dollars? Ten million? A hundred billion? Is it even possible to put a value on our existence?

 Whether we recognize it for its extraordinary value or not, we are the recipients of an unfathomable amount of good. And as such, we owe. From the moment that we are born, the clock starts ticking and the debt begins. For every breath that we breathe, for every pleasure we enjoy, for every moment of our being, the bill increases. We owe our Creator for that which He has given us.

**No Free Lunch**

 Somehow, we assume that all of the pleasures of this world are free – on the house. I certainly won’t be charged for them. However, the Chovos Ha’Levovos explains that in reality, we do owe for them. They were given to us by HASHEM, and as a result we owe for them.

 For this reason, Avrohom was afraid. He made a calculation based on what he received from HASHEM versus what he had given in return, and he came out only slightly ahead. “Now that HASHEM has brought this great miracle for me,” he thought, “what possible reward do I have left? Surely it has been all used up, and there is nothing left for me in the World to Come.”

 Avrohom Avinu wasn’t out of touch with reality. Quite the opposite, he was highly attuned to a part of the calculation that we rarely think about—we are not entitled to anything. HASHEM didn’t have to create us. HASHEM isn’t obligated to shower us with good. Everything that HASHEM gives to us is because He is wants to share of His good with us. Because of this, we owe a debt to HASHEM that can never be repaid.

 This perspective should be a major driving force in our serving HASHEM – prompting us to attempt as much as we can to pay back the astounding good that HASHEM constantly bestows upon us.

*Reprinted from the current website of TheShmuz.com*

# Rav Avigdor Miller

# On How to Nag

 **QUESTION:** **How does one encourage a husband or a child without becoming just an ordinary nag?**

 **ANSWER:** And the answer is that חכמת נשים בנתה ביתה – It is the wisdom of a woman that builds up her house [Mishlei/Proverbs 14:1]. Now, that’s not an easy answer because you have to learn how to do it. You have to plan what you want to say. Sometimes you feel that you must say something on the spur of the moment. Don’t! Wait until you can say it with cunning. And many times, you’ll accomplish what you wouldn’t have accomplished otherwise.

 Sometimes you might want your husband to go out and learn in the beis medrash at night and he’s sitting with his feet up at the table reading a newspaper. That’s how he’s wasting his evenings. So, you have to wait for an opportunity and then you let pass a remark, “What a nice neighbor, Mr. Cohen next door. I see he’s such a fine man; every night he goes out to learn in the beis medrash.” That’s all; don’t say any more than that. Just let those words sink in a little bit.



 I’ll give you another suggestion as well. Sometimes when your husband does do one good thing, go out of your way to praise him. And that way you’ll give him incentive to do it again.

 Whatever it is, you’ll have to find tactful ways because the frontal attack usually doesn’t succeed and it only causes irritation.

*Reprinted from the October 5, 2021 email of Toras Avigdor (Tape 239.)*

**Rabbi Berel Wein on**

**Parshat Lech Lecha 5782**



 We recognize that in many ways our father Abraham is an innovator, a one-of-a-kind individual, someone who is original, unique, and fearless in his quest for the betterment of the human race and the creation of the Jewish people. Among all his other achievements, if we look carefully at the opening chapters of the Lech Lecha, we find that our father Abraham is also the first human being recorded as having a normal conversation with his Creator.

**An Inability of Original Man to Engage G-d in a Discussion**

 Adam, original man, makes excuses for his failings, but does not engage G-d in a discussion regarding the essence of sin, reward, and punishment. His son, Kayin, whines and complains to justify his murderous behavior, and does not understand the true nature of his sin, and cannot relate properly to the criticism of Heaven.

 Even the righteous man, Noah, the father of the only family that survives the Great Flood, and through whom humankind will be rebuilt and repopulated, does not engage in a conversation with the Creator regarding the impending flood and its aftermath. In fact, we hear almost nothing from Noah, except for his statement about his future and destiny.

 All the twenty generations, prior to Abraham's arrival, apparently have nothing to say to G-d. They may fear His power and even rebel against His rule, but they have no thoughts or communication about the relationship of how human beings can coexist with infinity and G-d.

**A Constant Communication with Heaven**

 Throughout the description of Abraham's life, he seems to be constantly in communication with Heaven. He obeys its orders to leave his homeland and circumcise himself at an advanced stage of life. He proclaims the name G-d – one and only G-d – wherever he travels, no matter the risks involved in so doing. He even disputes the decision of Heaven regarding destruction of the cities of Sodom. He even argues that the G-d of justice in such a fashion that it be visible and understood by ordinary mortals.

 We are witnesses that Abraham has a complete attachment with G-d, a relationship that cannot and will not be severed or compromised. That is the basis of Abraham's founding the Jewish people, who will also maintain such a relationship of attachment overall of the centuries of human civilization. Whereas previous generations were afraid to deal directly with the A-mighty, this became the basis for oral paganism and other religions that always rely upon intermediaries,

**Abraham and the Jewish People’s Direct Attachment to the Creator**

 Abraham and the Jewish people attach themselves inexorably and directly to the Creator for good or for better, no matter what the circumstances are that exist at that very moment. This fundamental difference in approach to the relationship between human beings and their G-d remains, until today, the identifiable hallmark that differentiates Judaism from other philosophies and beliefs.

*Reprinted from the current website of rabbiwein.com*

**How a Jew Can Utilize His Mundane Activities Towards Forging a Connection to G-d**

**From the Talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

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



 The seventh of the Jewish month of Marcheshvan always falls in the week in which the Torah portion of Lech Lecha is read.

 On the seventh of Marcheshvan [in Eretz Yisroel] we begin to pray for rain, for it is the day on which the last pilgrims who had come to the Holy Temple for Sukkot returned home. We wait until this date to ask G-d for rain so as not to cause undue hardship for the pilgrims who are still traveling.

 The seventh of Marcheshvan is thus symbolic of descent, for it signifies the Jews' departure from the Temple--the epitome of holiness--and their return to their own places.

 Lech Lecha, by contrast, is symbolic of ascent. In this Torah portion, Avraham leaves the land of his birth and goes to the land of Israel. It thus signifies the ascent from Charan to the higher level of holiness of the land of Israel.

 What exactly did the Jews do during their thrice-yearly pilgrimage to Jerusalem? They basked in the Temple's holiness, witnessed the Ten Miracles that occurred there regularly, and in general perceived G-dliness in a revealed manner. The enjoyment that was derived, albeit of a sublime and spiritual nature, was nonetheless a personal enjoyment.

 The Jews' return home marked an end to this exclusive preoccupation with G-dliness, Torah and mitzvot, and Divine service. Each person had to resume the more mundane labors of his livelihood, plowing and sowing his individual plot of land. Yet G-d wants the Jew, through his actions, to establish a "dwelling place" for Him in the "lower realms"--the material plane of this physical world.

 Thus, in essence, the seventh of Marcheshvan--the "descent" of the Jew from the holiness of Jerusalem to the more ordinary affairs of his daily life--is actually a very great "ascent," for it is only upon his return home that he can begin his task of establishing a "dwelling place" for G-d in earnest.

 It wasn't until Avraham arrived in the land of Israel that his work to reveal G-dliness within the world commenced on an unprecedented scale. True, Avraham had strived to foster an awareness of G-d even prior to this time, but his efforts had been more limited in scope.

 The seventh of Marcheshvan always coincides with Lech Lecha to teach us that the descent it symbolizes is really a step up, providing us with a lesson we can apply in our lives:

 Although the Jewish people are in exile, this should not cause us to be saddened or despair. On the contrary, it is precisely through the "descent" of exile that we may effect the greatest "ascent": fulfilling the will of G-d by serving Him within the context of the physical world, thereby making a suitable "dwelling place for G-d" in the lower realms.

*Reprinted from Reprinted from the 5757/1996 Lech Lecha edition of L’Chaim Weekly.*

*Reprinted from the 5756/1996 Parshat Lech Lecha edition of L’Chaim Weekly. Adapted from an address of the Lubavitcher Rebbe to Tzviso Hashem (a youth group) in 5743/1983).*

**Thoughts that Count**

"*And I will bless those who bless you and those who curse you, I will curse*." (Gen. 12:3)

 Why doesn't the Torah write both in the same order, i.e., "I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you?" The Talmud (Kiddushin 40a) says that G-d gives credit to one who plans to perform a mitzva, even if circumstances prevent the realization of the plan. However, for a transgression, one is punished for plans only when they are carried out.

 When a person blesses or curses, he first thinks about it and then expresses verbally what he has in mind. Therefore, G-d is saying to Avraham, "I will bless those who bless you as soon as they plan to bless you, even if they have not yet blessed you. However, those who curse you will be cursed only after they actually curse you, but not merely for thinking."

"*And I will make your children as the dust of the earth*." (Gen. 13:16)

 A Rabbi who intensely fought the missionaries in his town was visited by the bishop and asked, "Rabbi, why do you oppose us so strongly?" The Rabbi replied, "When you convert someone to your religion, you sprinkle him with your 'ritual water.' Jews are compared to the dust of the earth. When one mixes water with earth, mud results. I cannot sit idly and see someone trying to make mud of my people."

"*If so much as a thread or a shoestrap; or if I shall take anything of yours*." (Gen. 14:23)

 The Talmud (Sota 17a) says, that because Avraham refused to take from the king of Sodom even a thread or a shoestrap, his children (the Jewish people) merited to receive from G-d two mitzvot: the mitzva of putting a thread of techelet [a special blue dye] in the tzitzit and the mitzva of putting retzuot (straps) in the tefilin.

 According to the Talmud, Avraham originated the concept of praying to G-d each morning (Shacharit). Therefore, during his prayer we wear the talit and tefilin. When Avraham spoke to the king of Sodom, he first mentioned the thread and afterwards the shoestrap, thus, we first don the talit, which has in it the thread of techelet, and afterwards the tefilin, which have the leather straps.

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**Henry Fuerte, a 9/11 World**

**Trade Center Survivor**

**Tells His Amazing Story**



 Henry Fuerte was born in the US to a Jewish family. He had completed his Bachelor’s degree in biology but ended up becoming a computer and technology expert employed on the 90th floor of North Tower of the World Trade Center in an international insurance company Marsh & McLellan.

 “That Tuesday was Election Day for mayor and I came to work late. Normally I’d be at the office at 8:00 am but I came approximately 8:45. I saw my boss coming out of the elevator to get a coffee in a coffee shop right by the World Trade Center. We smiled at each other and continued on our way”.

 What Henry didn’t know was that was the last time he’d see his boss. He was killed and buried under the wreckage of the tower that came down on the shop only to be found 2 months later.

 Fuerte took an elevator up to the Sky Lobby on the 78th floor. He was on his way to the next elevator up to the 90th floor. The elevator came and the door opened. As he entered he was immediately thrown backwards out of the elevator from a huge blast. The blast was from a plane crashing into the building 12 flights up from him. It was the American Airlines Flight 11, coming from Boston Logan Airport which slammed the building and whose explosion sent Henry sprawling.

 The elevator he was supposed to take disintegrated and careened down the shaft, the people inside burned alive before hitting the bottom of the shaft. “I understood something was amiss. I’m 187 lbs. but I was tossed like a rag doll. There suddenly was a lot of dust and darkness. I remember it like yesterday. It was a miracle that I flew backwards out of the elevator. I had this feeling that I must get out of there immediately. An inner voice told me to fly out of there.”

**A Time to Save Themselves**

 Fuerte and others around him tried freeing people trapped in a different elevator attempting to force the door open but it wouldn’t budge. The group gave up and decided it was now time to save themselves and get out of the area. They went down to the floor where the Hyundai Company was situated and asked where the stairs were. “But they were really unaware of the danger of the situation and asked us to leave as we were disturbing them. They continued on working.”

 Fuerte and others found the emergency stairs and went down. “When we got to the 35th floor we met firefighters passing us on the way up. We made place for them to pass we went down single file and they went up.

 Fuerte was on autopilot singularly focused on getting out of the area. He descended the tower in pain from the blast that hurt him and saved his life hurling him from the elevator. The second tower got hit. Fuerte got out of the building and ran towards the Brooklyn Bridge.

 “Outside I saw police, FBI and firefighters and when I saw the flames on the Southern Tower I understood this was a terror attack. Three minutes passed and a woman started screaming. I turned around to see the Southern Tower collapse in front of my eyes as I’m running from it. A thick cloud of smoke and dust enveloped the whole area. I tried calling my parents but didn’t succeed. I met another Jew who succeeded in reaching his wife on his phone and had him get the message to my family that I was still alive.”

**Went by Foot to a Hospital**

 Fuerte went to a hospital by foot and waited 4 hours. Upon examination he was found that other than some minor smoke inhalation which caused some low oxygen levels in his blood and a few scratches he was fine. “I started to say the Psalms from a book my aunt gave me as a gift a few months before. I thought about Israel and told myself that’s it; I must move to Israel.”

 Two days later Fuerte was back at work as if nothing happened but after 6 months of routine he began having post trauma symptoms: depression accompanied by trembling, hallucinations and nightmares.

 “I did decide to get back to work so as not to wallow in my thoughts but I did wonder: Why was I saved?  I’m single and had no children why me? 50,000 people worked in the World Trade Center every day. It was 108 stories high and over 400 meters tall. 256 of my co-workers died 70 of them I knew personally. 400 Jews perished there. With time I understood the great Divine Providence that G-d wanted me to live. That’s exactly what He wanted.”

**The Impetus to Leave Everything and Move to Israel**

 This idea was the impetus for Fuerte to leave everything and move to Israel. “It was difficult to explain to my family how and why I could leave a successful career, my home and family. But eventually I moved to Israel. My family thought I lost my mind!”

 Shortly before he decided to move, Henry met the young woman who would later become his wife, Michal Michelle. “I went out with a lot of young women but all of them ran away as soon as I said the word ‘Israel’”, Henry says with a smile. He went out with Michal four times and then decided it was time to move to Israel. Michal ended up coming immediately afterwards for a friend’s wedding and stayed for 4 more months. When she was about to get on a plane back to the States Henry ran and got her a diamond ring and proposed to her. She said ‘yes’ and they got married in August 2006.

 “This was my second miracle. I got married at 35 after going through a lot in life. This was a miracle in its own right. It was very difficult for me to find a Jewish bride in the States. People take it for granted but not me. To me it was a miracle. Moving to Israel was also a miracle. I came seveb times as a tourist but moving here is not simple.”

**Thanking G-d for His Great Kindness and Compassion**

 Grateful for the miracles he experienced, Henry came back to Judaism and keeps Torah and Mitzvoth. Henry, his wife Michal and two children Maayan and Gabriel live in Modiin and they thank G-d for His great kindness and compassion.

 “I earned a good income in America. I was all set, but I had no satisfaction. I always looked for some change. When I decided to strengthen myself, things suddenly fell into place. I moved to Israel, I got married, I found good employment in computers, a job that people dream of. I have a house, a wife and children and a good livelihood. I’m to my loved on and my loved one is to me. I did what I could and G-d met me half way. You need faith in G-d and then you see how G-d’s salvation happens with the blink of an eye.”

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