

PARSHAS LECH LECHA

תשפ"ב

Parshas Lech Lecha is the birth of the Jewish people. Avrohom Ovinu was a very unique individual. The Rambam in the beginning of Hilchos Avodo Zoro writes that he had no rebbe. All by himself with his deep penetrating desire to seek the truth, Avrohom Ovinu started to think about where this world came from. But he lived in Ur Kasdim – the place of Nimrod who was the chief spreader of avodo zoro in the ancient world. It is incredible that Avrohom, who was living in the center of avodo zoro, was able to begin thinking and thinking and he came to the conclusion that Hashem created everything. We don't know the details of his thought process. He reached the limits of human intelligence without any outside assistance, and at that point Hashem came to him and instructed him to leave for Eretz Canaan.

But things first need to go in stages. Terach and his family lived in Ur Kasdim – the capital of Nimrod's empire in southern Iraq. There, they heard that in Be'er Sheva, there was a yeshiva of Shem and Ever where they studied the truth about Hashem. Even Terach was overwhelmed by what happened to Avrohom in the fiery furnace that he decided to leave for this yeshiva with his entire family. They couldn't travel directly to Be'er Sheva because of the desert. So, they first went northwest through Turkey where the city of Choron was located. But, they never made it to Be'er Sheva. The initial enthusiasm fizzled and they went most of the way. They couldn't go the whole way. This is very common in people who begin with great enthusiasm and then fall by the wayside. Terach and most of his family remained in Choron. But, Avrohom was still growing. Sometime later, Hashem realized that Avrohom had reached as far as he could reach on his own and Hashem appeared to him.

Avrohom still needed to grow, and Hashem said that he can't achieve this potential in his current situation. Why? A person is influenced by his surroundings on three levels. One, the place where you live. The norms of the country you live become your norms. Their ways of thinking become normal. Two, especially if you were born and raised in that country, you feel totally natural in your old mindset. And the deepest influence comes from one's family.

There are two steps Hashem tells Avrohom to take. The first is leaving where you came from – it is a critical step in Avrohom Ovinu's development.

If a person wants to grow and make a deep change in himself, he has to make a clean break with parts of his past which may be holding him back. It is difficult and it is painful and one is not always successful. The example of someone who went very far but never quite made it was Hogor.

Hogor was originally a princess – the daughter of Pharaoh. How did she become a maidservant in Avrohom's house? Pharaoh was so impressed with Avrohom Ovinu, he decided that he wanted his daughter to become a part of that household. Who was Hogor? At the end of Parshas Chayei Soroh we learn that her actions were as beautiful as ketores. She couldn't live with another man who wasn't on the level of Avrohom. Yitzchok realized that Hogor was the only righteous woman who was fit to be Avrohom's wife after Soroh. So she is a very spiritual person.

Avrohom and Hogor had seven children together, but nothing ultimately became of them. Why not? The entire time the Torah references Hogor, she is called "the Egyptian maidservant". We are told that when she was thrown out of Avrohom and Soroh's house

with Yishmoel, she went back to Egypt. Hogor couldn't cut her ties with her past and this is what held her back.

Contrast this with Rus' interaction with Nomi. Rus declared that she has no other nation other than Nomi's nation. She cut herself off from Moav completely. But Hogor never cut herself off from Egypt. She was confused. Like most people, they have the right priorities and lofty Torah ideals, but still hold on to all kinds of cultures and notions which prevent the Torah from molding and fashioning oneself into someone greater. They are all mixed up and confused about who they are.

So Hashem first told Avrohom to cut off his ties with his country, his birthplace, and his family. He is a brand new individual. When he comes to Eretz Yisroel, he a foreigner – a ger ve'toshav – never really belonging among the Canaanim.

The next step is mystifying. Hashem doesn't tell Avrohom where He is sending him! This forces Avrohom to trust Hashem completely – totally putting his entire future in Hashem's hands – following Him into the unknown. This was the way the Jewish people got started when they left Egypt – they go straight into the wilderness with no security and no way of knowing how they will survive. The only way to start creating the Jewish people is by cutting ties with the past and beginning anew with total faith in Hashem.

Finally, Hashem promised Avrohom the greatest blessings. Avrohom followed Hashem to the very last detail. He had total subordination to the will of Hashem.

Avrohom took his wife Sorai, his nephew Lot, and his entire household – all the disciples he made in Choron.

Avrohom kept preaching about Hashem everywhere he went. The Rambam says – quoting the Sifri, when you love something, you constantly talk to other people about it and try to get them to love it as well. Avrohom had a wide influence on people. It doesn't mean each person perpetuated his message faithfully. But it means he had a general impact on his society and the message started to seep in.

He finally came to Eretz Canaan – all the way from Ur Kasdim and Choron – but he can't stay there! There is no food. He has to go down to Egypt. Why did Hashem tell him to come here if he can't stay? Where is he supposed to be? The answer is that he is supposed to be wherever Hashem wants him to be. This is the message of Succos. A Jew never has a stable place to live in this world. You are living with Hashem. If you put yourself in Hashem's hands, then you are secure wherever you live. It doesn't matter where you are.

Then we have the whole story of Avrohom in Egypt. He came to Egypt a poor man. We know this because Avrohom traveled back to Canaan on the same roads he left – in order to pay his debts that he incurred on the way to Egypt. He didn't have enough money to afford his basic needs and had to borrow. On his way back, Avrohom is wealthy. We see he is very careful about theft. He muzzles all his animals to prevent them from grazing on other people's grass. Lot makes all kinds of rationalizations and excuses in order to steal, but Avrohom doesn't make excuses. He seeks the truth in every area of life including financial matters.

People who are honest and scrupulous can't live with those who aren't. They think differently. They act differently. These opposites just couldn't coexist. A life of truth cannot tolerate someone who lives with lies. So Avrohom separated from Lot. But when something happened

to Lot, Avrohom came running to save him. Why? Because Avrohom took responsibility for Lot when they left Ur Kasdim. He even went to war and put himself in danger to save Lot.

Step-by-step, the parsha is explaining to us why Avrohom was chosen to found the Jewish people. Loving Hashem, mesirus nefesh, absolute trust in Hashem, and a penetrating pursuit of the truth.

Lot is not atypical. People today have a very big problem with living with the truth. Everyone has some convoluted rationalization to cheat the telephone company, the airlines, the government, and cut corners everyway they can. Truth is a basic character trait that goes through everything you do. There is no such thing as a little lie. Either it is true or it's false. Don't allow yourself to live with small lies – it violates that basic character trait and once you start with small lies, it won't stop there.

Then follows the bris bein habesarim.

Hashem promised Eretz Yisroel to Avrohom at the very beginning of the parsha. But then Hashem made a bris, which means it is unconditional – unbreakable. It means that no matter what happens, Jews have a right to be in Eretz Yisroel.

But the most important point of the bris is that Hashem took Avrohom out of the system of natural law. Avrohom learned that he could live

above nature when he is connected to Hashem. Avrohom thought it was scientifically impossible for him to have a child with Soroh. Hashem said, "Get out of this mindset!" Not only in the 21st century do people think they are subject to the laws of science. Hashem says this is false. I am in charge of what happens. Nothing is impossible.

Stupid people ask – do you believe in science? There is only one reality in the world – Hashem.

This is the introduction to the bris about Eretz Yisroel. You are in Hashem's hands completely. Avrohom says if Hashem guarantees it, I believe. He is now living in a new reality. But it doesn't come easily.

Hashem pushes us with challenges and tests – to encourage us to develop. If life were easy we would never push ourselves to the maximum to develop. By Avrohom putting his life in Hashem's hands and Hashem putting Avrohom in all kinds of difficult situations, Avrohom transforms into a different person. Hashem isn't just testing Avrohom's resolve to see if he can remain faithful. Each test brings Avrohom to a new level of greatness.

When you go through these parshiyos, we see Hashem adding more and more difficulty with each test. The tests don't stop. And Avrohom is growing and growing with each test to ultimately become the father of the Jewish people.