

# PARSHAS LECH LECHA

תשפ"ג

Parshas Lech Lecho begins a detailed story of the lives of the Ovos. The Ovos were not simple people. The Ovos were the founders of Klal Yisroel. Everything we have today – all our kochosh hanefesh – were built from the Ovos. They constitute everything we are and everything we are capable of. The Ramban often uses the phrase that the Ovos were the embodiment of the Merkavoh. This means they were the ones who brought into the world a structured and continual knowledge of Hashem. They represented Him in this world, and they founded an entire nation who will continue to represent Hashem throughout human history. We say in our tefillos that Hashem chose us out of all the nations. Why? It was to place His great Name upon us – to be His representatives in His world. That is our purpose.

With this in mind, we see the development of Avrohom Ovinu. There are two separate ideas which many people confuse with one another. Emunoh and Bitachon.

Avrohom Ovinu lived in Ur Kasdim which was the center of avodo zoro in the ancient world. It was Nimrod's capitol city from which he established total control over civilization. He used his power tyrannically to eliminate all knowledge of Hashem from the culture, in order to ensure that he alone would have absolute power. No-one was allowed to have any allegiance to any being other than him. The name Nimrod comes from the word rebel – he caused the entire world to rebel against Hashem.

Avrohom Ovinu publicly stood up to him. He thought things through and completely on his own realized the sheker of avodo zoro. He started preaching this truth that he discovered and made an impact. Shem and Ever had their yeshivah in a different region and did not attract any attention to themselves. But, Avrohom was outspoken in Ur Kasdim itself. Nimrod needed to eliminate him and condemned him to be thrown in the fiery furnace. Here we see Avrohom accepted the consequences of pursuing the truth to the point of mesirus nefesh. He never anticipated that he would be saved by Hashem through an open miracle.

Avrohom Ovinu was capable of resisting the prevailing culture of avodo zoro that he was raised in and was surrounded by. He was able to clear his mind from everything that was taken completely for granted and think through it carefully and arrive at a conclusion that was completely the opposite of what was considered true. He was so deeply connected to the pursuit of truth that he had to share it with others and convince them of the truth – even if it meant giving up his life. This was how deeply identified Avrohom Ovinu was with the middas ho'emes.

Again, Avrohom didn't anticipate that his commitment to truth would merit a miracle to be done for him. Horon his brother, was a very practical person. He only agreed to join with Avrohom and be thrown in the fiery furnace after Avrohom had been saved for his commitment to the truth. Such a weak commitment that is conditional on practical success does not merit being saved by Hashem. Avrohom Ovinu walked out unharmed. It was a big public event and people had different reactions to it. Terach and his family were shaken up by it and decided to leave. Nimrod simply ignored it because it threatened his grip on power.

The pesukim say Terach took his family and headed for Cana'an. Why there? He knew he had great-grandparents there who established a yeshivah which was committed to teaching the truth and he set out to live there. But as we mentioned last week, Terach's determination fizzled out in the middle.

Now Hashem told Avrohom: Lech Lecho. Chazal say Avrohom Ovinu eventually got to the highest point in emunoh where a human being could reach with his own intellect. Now Hashem appeared to him and announced He is the Being who Avrohom deduced must exist and must have created the world. Now I will reveal to you the next level – My whole purpose for this creation and how it is centered around you and your descendants.

Avrohom will now endure 10 tests. Why? He is beginning a new nation. The

first test is to cut himself off from his entire past history and society. Go somewhere where no-one knows you and you have no support mechanism. He is 75 years old. He is not even told where he is going!

At the end, in the last test of the Akeidah, Hashem also doesn't tell Avrohom where to go at the beginning – to Har Habayis. You just go and I'll tell you where to go! You will be totally dependent on Me.

The Netziv explains that the repetition of pesukim at the beginning of Lech Lecho are telling us that when Hashem first told Avrohom to go, Avrohom simply left on the spot. He didn't bother to gather his family or pack his belongings. He just went at seventy-five years old! Then after he arrived, he went back to get his wife and his nephew and all the people and belongings he left behind the first time. Such was Avrohom Ovinu's absolute dedication to following the truth of Hashem – with no thought about the practical consequences. That was his zerizus.

Avrohom came to Eretz Cana'an and could not find a stable place to settle down. He wanders from place to place announcing the truth of Hashem everywhere he goes.

Just as he is settling in, he needs to leave because of a famine. Hashem never promised Avrohom anything. He only guaranteed that eventually he will become a great nation. In the meantime, Hashem is giving Avrohom test after test and he doesn't understand Hashem's ultimate plan. When he comes to Egypt his wife is taken away and Hashem intervenes and makes Avrohom fabulously wealthy.

Now Avrohom and Lot are given the test of wealth, which is one of the most difficult kinds of tests. Avrohom returns to Cana'an using the exact route and stopping at the same stopovers he used when he left Cana'an. Why? To pay his debts. This means Avrohom Ovinu didn't have a penny to his name when he went to Egypt. He had to pay for everything on credit. The moment he came to some money, he pays back his debts. Absolute honesty. He also resumes spreading the truth of Hashem.

Lot has the same test of wealth as Avrohom. But he doesn't react the same way at all. There are arguments that break out between the shepherds of Avrohom and Lot. Avrohom's shepherds were instructed to make the extra effort not to graze his animals on private property. Lot rationalized to himself that since Avrohom has no direct children, he will be the one who will eventually inherit the land of Cana'an promised to Avrohom. So Lot let his shepherds graze anywhere they wanted.

This is what the test of money can do to people – it motivates them to come up with all kinds of twisted arguments and distorted logic to justify taking other people's money. Maybe Lot actually believed his own excuse?

Avrohom tells Lot that they have to part ways. Lot is obsessed with getting more and more wealth. He looks to the kikar haYarden and sees how fertile it is.

A year ago, there was a major archeological discovery around the Dead Sea. They discovered that 3500 years ago – the time of Avrohom Ovinu – the most fertile and wealthy part of Eretz Yisroel was the area around the Dead Sea – S'dom and Amoroh. Then something happened – a meteor burst – and suddenly the region was showered with sulfur and acid which destroyed everything. This is exactly how the Chumash described what happened! But since Hashem used a meteor, the archeologists claimed it was a completely natural disaster and didn't allow themselves to be affected by the open confirmation of the destruction of S'dom as told by the Chumash. It is inconvenient, so they just ignore it and go on with their lives.

Being the wealthiest part of Eretz Yisroel, the people took their money very seriously. So it is no surprise that the Chumash testifies that people of S'dom were exceedingly wicked. Yet this doesn't deter Lot from going and joining them. He needs to go where the money is – a very practical person with spirituality being much lower on his list of priorities.

The moment Lot leaves Avrohom, Hashem appears to Avrohom promising him the future land of Canaan. He couldn't speak with Avrohom while Lot was around. Lot polluted the environment and the Shechinah couldn't reveal itself.

Then we have the capture of Lot, and Avrohom goes to defeat the five kings and save Lot. Avrohom returns everything back to their former owners. The king of Sodom offers Avrohom all the spoils, and Avrohom refuses. Only Hashem makes me wealthy. He is the exact opposite of Lot.

Then we have the Bris Bein Habesorim which is an incredible test of bitachon for Avrohom Ovinu. On the one hand, Hashem has been promising Avrohom children time and time again. Avrohom sees he can't have children! His wife Sorah is biologically incapable of bearing children! He is afraid his servant Eliezer will inherit him! Hashem responded that you are missing the point. You are saying it is impossible according to the physical reality to have children. But Hashem is not limited by the physical reality! Avrohom needs to change his perspective. Have complete bitachon in Hashem's promise, and rise above nature.

Normally, we are not allowed to ignore the limitations of the physical world. You can't walk out of a window and expect to not be pulled down by gravity by divine intervention. If you get an infection, you need to take care of it medically. If you don't listen to the doctors because you feel you are above nature, and you die from the infection, you are a murderer. We must live within natural limits and not abuse the concept of bitachon to ignore them.

There are certain circumstances where one is obligated to ignore the limitations of the physical world and live above nature. Here, Avrohom was being told by Hashem to change his mindset of living under the rule of nature. He didn't have to do anything. He merely had to trust sincerely that Hashem can and will somehow give him and Sorah children even though there was no natural way for them to have children. He wasn't allowed to question this promise. Apparently, even though Avrohom was a *novi*, it still wasn't so simple to truly believe in this promise.

Rabbeinu Avrohom ben haRambam explains what the sin of the spies was all about. Klal Yisroel were not a primitive people. All of Klal Yisroel in the desert became *nevi'im* already from *kriyas Yam Suf*. The lowest of them – the maidservants – experienced visions that surpassed *Yechezkel*. At Har Sinai, they temporarily rose to a level right under Moshe Rabbeinu! For the rest of the forty years, they were *nevi'im*. Moshe was punished when he hit the rock – according to the Rambam – for calling Klal Yisroel *riff-raff* and rebels. Not for merely hitting the rock. If you don't appreciate their true great level, you can't be their leader anymore.

So Hashem had high expectations for Klal Yisroel to trust that Hashem would lead them successfully in war against the nations of Canaan. Even though these nations had huge armies with trained warriors and strong fortifications, Hashem demanded that Klal Yisroel not feel intimidated by them and be bound by nature. But they couldn't reach this level of trust. They sent spies to figure out how to conquer the land in natural ways and were frightened to hear that it would be impossible naturally. This means they didn't trust deeply enough in Hashem's promise that they will rise above nature and they were not worthy of going into the land.

So we have two extremes in the test of bitachon. When Hashem tells Avrohom to ignore nature and truly believe he will have a son with Sorah, Avrohom passes the test, changes his limited mindset and he is rewarded. When Hashem tells Klal Yisroel to ignore nature and truly believe Hashem will fight their battles for them and they will conquer the land with no problems, they fail the test and send spies and die in the desert as a result.

These are the kinds of tests of bitachon given specifically to a *novi* who can hear a direct command by Hashem to defy nature and he has to trust in a miracle happening for him. If Hashem tells a *novi* to walk out of the window of a high building, he must walk out without any hesitation and without any concern that gravity will make him fall! Complete confidence!

But what about us who aren't *nevi'im* and have to live under the limitations of nature? Where is our bitachon tested?

The Rambam describes the first mitzvah of the Torah – belief in Hashem. It is not a simple mitzvah. Despite all the natural explanations we might have for things that happen, we are obligated to believe that Hashem is really the source of everything and that all events that happen are because of Him. We say in the *Shir Hakovod* that Hashem is holding us up and supporting

us all the time. He is keeping us alive and is helping us along throughout our lives – every minute and every second of the day.

This becomes difficult because Hashem mostly controls what happens through the laws of nature. We have to be completely confident that Hashem is behind every natural occurrence and is allowing it to happen for various reasons. People may get sick from an infection. They are obligated to go to a doctor and follow his instructions for getting healed. But at the very same time, we have to sincerely believe that getting the infection and getting cured from the infection is completely in Hashem's hands. Sometimes the infection won't get cured by medication in the way we expect.

We can't just mouth slogans that we believe in Hashem. We need to work on ourselves and develop a deep mindset which views the world with Hashem running it in the background.

At the beginning of Parshas Vayeshev, Yaakov Ovinu sends Yosef to meet his brothers. Yosef knows that his brothers hate him. They may treat him decently when they are with Yaakov, but meeting them far away from Yaakov's protection means he is endangering himself by listening to his father. But his father commanded and Yosef obeyed. The Torah says Yosef got lost again and again, and Hashem keeps sending people to get Yosef back on track. Yosef doesn't give up on his *kibud av* – even though it is clearly against his own safety to find his brothers who might harm him. The Ramban explains that although Yosef and the brothers have total free will, Hashem is still able to manipulate their choices and their *middos* to bring about His plan to bring Yaakov and his family down to Egypt.

So nature doesn't get in the way of Hashem's *hashgocho*, and people's free will doesn't get in the way of Hashem orchestrating events behind the scenes. He arranges people to bump into Yosef and put him on the right path to meet his brothers.

After Yaakov died, the brothers feared that Yosef would now take revenge against them. They made up a story that Yaakov left them instructions for Yosef not to harm them for selling him into slavery. Yosef said this whole ruse is unnecessary because I know Hashem is in charge of everything that happens. You have nothing to fear from me because I know it was Hashem's will that I be sold into slavery and brought down to Egypt. The fact that Hashem used your *middos* of jealousy in order to get me here is between you and Hashem and not my business to take revenge for. If it wouldn't be you it would be someone else. I believe Hashem runs the world! This is the core of bitachon. Hashem uses people's *middos* and choices to end up with the result He wanted.

When Yosef was sold to the house of Potifar he became successful and was put in charge of everything. Yosef could have easily given himself all the credit for all his talents and abilities. But Yosef was careful to always attribute all success to Hashem and made it clear to everyone that he isn't able to take any credit.

Yosef is falsely accused and is put into jail and he became successful in running the jail! The two ministers have their dreams and Yosef interpreted them with the help of Hashem. But here he slips and asks the wine minister to remember him and get him out of jail. Yosef spent an extra two years in jail until Pharaoh called for him. When he is brought before Pharaoh, Yosef immediately declares it is not me who is going to give any interpretation. It all comes from Hashem whether I succeed or fail. All my talents are irrelevant. This realization that he is nothing but a tool of Hashem is the true expression of bitachon.

So we have two levels of bitachon. One which is demanded from a *novi* when Hashem expects him to believe a miracle will happen for him in very unique circumstances. The other one is for everyone to go through their everyday lives knowing that Hashem is running everything down to the finest detail through nature. All your successes and failures come from Hashem arranging things and not because of what people do.

This is not so simple. The *posuk* says you can know it but not really believe it deep down in your heart. It takes work to ignore all the world leaders who claim to be running the world and really think they are just puppets in Hashem's hands. This is bitachon and it has to be part of you. Avrohom had to work on himself to change his perspective and rise above the stars. When you are dealing with Hashem directly, nature is not a limitation.