

Parshas Lech Lecha

For the week ending 11 Cheshvan 5756
3 & 4 November 1995

Summary

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 reveals 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 tells 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 breaks out between their shepherds, Lot decides to part ways with his uncle Avram. 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 Sara. Hashem promises Avraham a son, Yitzhak, despite Avraham being ninety-nine years old and Sara ninety. On that day, Avraham circumcises himself, Yishmael and all his household.

"When you look at another person, realize that he is a star, a galactic mirror, reflecting the infinite light of The Creator."

Commentaries

"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. He said, "Don't tell me that this mansion has no master!" Suddenly, the owner peeked out and said to him "I am the master of the mansion..." Similarly, because Avraham Avinu looked at the world and said, "Don't tell me that this world has no Master," the Holy One, Blessed be He, 'peeked out' and said to him. "I am the Master of the world..."

(Midrash Rabah)

"And Hashem said to Avram 'Go for yourself...' (12:1).

The great *tzadik*, Reb Zushia of Anipoli 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 Baal Shem Tov?' That's not going to frighten me one bit — how can you compare me to the Baal Shem Tov?! And if they say to me 'Zushia — why weren't you like the Magid of Mezrich? That's not going to frighten me either — Look at me and look at the Magid of Mezrich! What frightens me is when they say to say to me 'Zushia! Why weren't you Zushia!?' Zushia — that you could have been, why weren't you even that...?"

"Go for yourself" can also be translated "Go to yourself..." The mystical sources understand 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 *neshamos* to flower. It is only in this way that we will be, at least, our own "Zushias."

(Adapted from Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin)

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“So Avram said to Lot: ‘Please let there not be strife between me and you...Please separate from me’” (13:5).

A person should always distance himself from partnerships, for they are the source of arguments and lashon hara. Avraham and Lot did not start out fighting — it was their shepherds who fell out, and inevitably this led to Avraham asking Lot to separate from him!

“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, when he exited, the driver would look like a chauffeur — and they were concerned for the dignity of the driver.

The Baal 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 whole universes. When you look at another person, realize that he is a star — not the Hollywood variety! — but a galactic mirror, reflecting the infinite light of the Creator. He may seem very small to you. He may not have achieved much in your eyes. 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, and this in turn can give them the encouragement to fulfill their potential greatness and shine all the more brightly.

(Adapted from Rabbi Zelig Pliskin, Mayana Shel Torah, and a story by Rabbi Nisson Wolpin in The Jewish Observer)

Haftorah: Yeshayahu 40:27-41:16

“...As much dust as Avraham used, turned into swords...” (41:2).

Nachum Ish Gamzu was a man whose very name expressed his essence — whatever 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 way, and 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 Abraham 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 to happen — 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 eventually bring the prophet Eliyahu to announce the dawn of redemption.

(Based on the Midrash)



Insights into the Zemiros sung at the Shabbos table throughout the generations.

Menucha V'Simcha Ohr LaYehudim

ohwkrut vj nauvj dm

“Rest & Joy, Light for the Jews...”

Three elements combine to make Shabbos so special for the Jew. First of all, he rests from his weekday labors both physically and psychologically since he must not only refrain from creative labor, but must feel that all his weekday efforts have been successfully completed. Secondly, he is endowed on Shabbos with a *neshama yeseira*, an extra soul, to enable him to fully savor the joy of food and drink which Hashem has created for this purpose. Finally, he is inspired by the physical light cast by the Shabbos candles in his home and the spiritual light of Torah which he studies in the leisure time afforded by this day of rest, joy and light.

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