



# Parshas Lech Lecha

For the week ending 11 Cheshvan 5759  
30 - 31 October 1998

## Overview

Ten generations have passed since Noach. Man has descended spiritually. In the year 1948 from Creation, Avram is born. By observing the world, Avram comes to the inescapable Truth of Hashem's existence, and thus merits that Hashem appear 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 whom they 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 asks 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. During a quarrel over grazing rights between their shepherds, Avram decides to part ways with his nephew Lot. 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 Sarah. Hashem promises Avraham a son, Yitzchak, despite Avraham being ninety-nine years old and Sarah ninety. On that day, Avraham circumcises himself, Yishmael and all his household.

## Insights

### BEING A BLESSING

**“And I will make of you a great nation; I will bless you, and make your name great, and you will be a blessing.” (12:2)**

The above sentence is part of the first recorded communication between G-d and Avraham — the beginning of the relationship. As the beginning, these words must contain the *essence* of that relationship. For all beginning contains the essence. A seed is not just the beginning of an oak. It is also its essence.

When G-d spoke to Avraham, He promised him many things: That he would be a great nation; that he would be blessed; that his name would be made great. However, all of this was predicated on a single condition — that Avraham would be a *reason* for people to bless G-d. This was to be the essence of the relationship between G-d and Man: That through his every action, Man would sanctify G-d's name; he would bring a blessing to the lips of the world.

Every Jew is an ambassador. Our actions are scrutinized by the world. If we are held to a higher — and sometimes double — standard, whether as individuals or as a nation, it is because the world recognizes subconsciously that our job in this world is “to be a blessing,” to sanctify G-d's name.

Prepared by Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem, Israel  
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**“So he built an altar there to Hashem Who appeared to him.” (12:7)**

**P**ick up a telescope. Hold it to your eye. What was far away is now very close. Take the telescope and reverse it. Everything now seems very far away.

In the book of Job it says “And from my flesh, I will see G-d.” Before the soul enters the body, it recognizes that G-d created it. It sees the Existence, the Awe and the Radiance of G-d. The body obstructs this Radiance. The Torah is like a powerful telescope allowing the soul to pierce this obstruction and see its Maker as it once did before it became wrapped in the body.

But really the Torah can do more than just restore the vision of the soul. Even though the soul could see its Maker before it entered the body, it did not have the aid of a “telescope.” Its perception of G-d was unmagnified. The natural state of the body is to be like a reversed telescope, distancing the soul from G-d. However, the Torah can turn the body around so that it becomes a telescope which allows the soul to see its Maker more closely than before its earthly incarnation.

EYES TO SEE

**“I will set My covenant between Me and you.” (17:2)**

**W**hen we look at the world, most of us see trees, sky, buildings.

The Avos, the Patriarchs of the Jewish People, looked into the world and they saw that one may not wear a garment in which linen and wool were sewn together. They looked into the world and they saw that you may not cook milk and meat together. They even saw that you should wait several hours after eating meat before eating milk.

Maybe I need to change my eyeglass prescription, but I never see such things. I also can't remember seeing in Nature that you can't eat animals which don't have cloven hooves and chew the cud. All I see is trees, sky, buildings.

The Torah is the blueprint of Reality: If one had eyes to see, *shatnez*, *tefillin* and keeping

kosher would be as visible as trees, the sky and houses.

Avraham had those eyes. He kept the entire Torah — even the Rabbinic decrees — before the Torah was given. The entire Torah...with one exception: The mitzvah of *bris mila*. What was the difference between *bris mila* and all the other *mitzvos*?

The word *bris* means “covenant.” The essence of a covenant is that it requires two parties to enter into it together. Until G-d actually made a covenant with Avraham, no covenant existed. Therefore, no mitzvah to perform *bris mila* existed.

When Hashem made the covenant, the *bris*, with Avraham, He made that covenant on the part of the body which expresses the essence of a person; the place from which flows the life-force and progeny. Avraham took that essential part of himself which expressed his very continuation; he took the symbol of everything he would ever be through his children's children, and he gave it to Hashem.

A *bris* has to have two sides. There is no pact in the world which consists of only one side. What was it, then, that Hashem gave to Avraham? What was the gift of His essence which was to bind Him and the Jewish People to an everlasting pact? Hashem gave Avraham His Will, His desire that it would be only the seed of Avraham that would be the agency through which He would conduct and direct the events of the world. The entire future of the world would be orchestrated through the progeny of Avraham.

Sources:

*Being A Blessing* - Sforno, *Da'as Z'keinim miBalei HaTosefos*, Rabbi Menachem Nissel

*I See No Signal* - Meshech Chochma, Rabbi C. J. Senter

## Haftorah: Isaiah 40:27-41:16

**A**vraham is known as "*Ha-Ivri*," the *Hebrew*, which means "the one who crossed over." He crossed over from being an idol worshipper to serving the living G-d.

The credo of the Jew is "There is nothing apart from Him." The credo of the world is "There is nothing apart from *me*."

Even if the rest of the world is on the other side, the *Hebrew* — the one who crosses over — stands up and says "Stop worshipping your idols of stone, of money, of worldly power. Stop worshipping yourself, and acknowledge that Hashem is G-d. There is nothing apart from Him."

The task of the Jewish people has always been to deliver this message to the world. The prophet Isaiah encourages Israel to persevere in the face of both their own failures and exile, and the resistance and apathy of the nations.

Hashem has promised that ultimately they must prevail, for though the Jewish People may seem worm-like in their insignificance and powerlessness, they will vanquish those who now seem invincible.

### THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

***"Why do you say O Jacob, and declare O Israel: 'My way is hidden from Hashem, and my cause has been passed over by my G-d.' Could you have not known even if you had not heard, that the eternal G-d is Hashem, Creator of the ends of the Earth...Whose discernment is beyond inquiry?" (40:27-8)***

**A** classic philosophical problem: If G-d is Omniscient, if He knows the present, past and future, how is it possible for us to have freedom of will? If, from the beginning, G-d knows what we will be, whether good or bad, how can we choose which direction to follow? Doesn't the prior knowledge of the Creator make it impossible for us to be other than that which G-d already knows we will be?

The Rambam, Maimonides, addresses this problem as follows: Our knowledge is entirely different from G-d's "knowledge." We cannot have the slightest clue as to the nature of G-d's knowledge. It is as totally removed from our understanding, from our knowledge, as the essence of G-d Himself.

All we can understand of G-d's knowledge is that it allows for both concepts to coexist. Man *has* freedom to choose *and* G-d knows exactly what he will

do. We may not understand how these two things coexist, but that is because we are bounded by earthly minds. For just as the Heavens tower above the Earth, so the "thoughts" of G-d tower over the thoughts of Man.

The opening lines of this week's Haftorah contain this philosophical debate:

*"Why do you say O Jacob, and declare O Israel: 'My way is hidden from Hashem, and my cause has been passed over by my G-d.'" A person might think that there can only be one of two realities: Either the ways of Man are hidden from G-d and G-d has no foreknowledge, or that "my cause has been passed over by my G-d," i.e., if G-d knows what I'm going to do, I can't be held responsible for my actions, they were predestined. To this conundrum the next verse replies: "Could you have not known even if you had not heard, that the eternal G-d is Hashem, Creator of the ends of the Earth ... Whose discernment is beyond inquiry?" Man has not the remotest grasp of the nature of G-d's knowledge. His discernment is beyond inquiry. All we can know is that His knowledge still leaves room for Man to choose, and thus we are accountable for our actions.*

*The Vilna Gaon in Mayana shel Torah*

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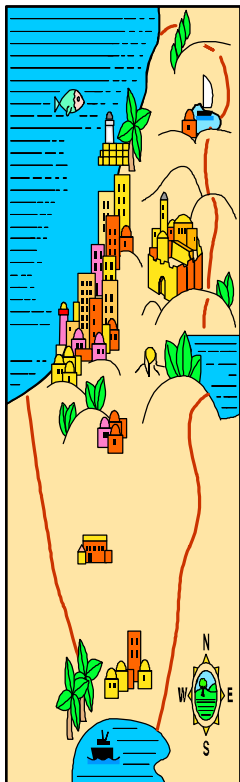
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# LOVE OF THE LAND

*Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael*

## THE PROMISED LAND



This week's Torah portion, Lech Lecha, will introduce a new dimension of this column — a focus on individual cities in the Promised Land. As an appropriate introduction we offer this perspective of the promise itself.

Four Divine promises to Avraham are mentioned in Parshas Lech Lecha regarding the "Promised Land," and they form a fascinating pattern. As Avraham reaches a higher level in his relationship with Hashem, there is a corresponding increase in the level of the promised prize.

"I shall give the land to your posterity" (Bereishis 12:7) is a limited promise which could mean only a small part of the land which Avraham had traveled until that point — the site of Shechem.

As Avraham's merits increase, he is told to lift his eyes and look in all directions. All those lands would be his, the gift would be an eternal one and his posterity would be as numerous as the dust of the earth.

(Bereishis 13:14-16)

In the historic covenant which previewed the special relationship of Avraham and his posterity with Hashem through the sacrificial service in the Sanctuary, the promise is expanded to include the "Greater Land of Israel," and a guarantee that the sins of posterity will not forfeit this promise. (Bereishis 15:18-21)

In the covenant of circumcision, Avraham's bonding with his Creator is rewarded with a promise that his posterity will return to their promised land even after they are exiled from it, and they will have a special, intimate relationship with Hashem. (Bereishis 17:8)

*Based on the Commentary of Nachmanides*

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