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8 years of Points to Ponder on Parashas Lech Lecha

**לך לך  Lech Lecha (12:1)** – What was the big deal about the test of leaving if Hashem promised Avraham a major reward for following it? The **Midrash**comments that the test of Lech Lecha was a test of forgetting everything else that made Avraham who he was until that point and becoming a totally different person – a virtual witness protection. So long as Avraham remained attached to anything in his past, he would not be able to follow Hashem. **Rav Leib Gurvitz ztl.** explained that a person is an outgrowth of the environment that s/he grows up in. When the environment is one of Beracha and idealism, the person grows easily but it is difficult to be brought up in one model and to completely change into a different one.

**לֶךְ־לְךָ֛ Lech Lecha (12:1) - Rashi** asks why Hashem didn’t tell Avraham where he was going. He offers 2 reasons -- to make the land exciting to him and also to give him reward for each step. Rashi seems to be suggesting that uncovering surprises makes a person more interested in that which he is receiving. **The Steipler ztl** noted that this is also apparent in one’s learning too. If we knew everything from the beginning we would not be as excited about the journey of Limmud HaTorah. Loving the process helps one love the treasure that is the result of the hard work put into the Torah.

**לֶךְ־לְך Lech Lecha (12:1)** – The two times we find the phrase Lech Lecha utilized are here and in preparation for the Akaida. The Midrash notes that the one by the Akaida must be more important than the one here. But what is the connection between these tests? And how can leaving a land possibly be more important or beloved than losing a child? **Rav Schlessinger Shlita** suggests that in order to live in the land of Israel there are many sacrafices that one needs to make. Until this very day, the challenges of moving to Eretz Yisrael are special to Hashem, hence the discussion.

**ּמִמּֽוֹלַדְתְּךָ֖ וּמִבֵּ֣ית אָבִ֑יךָ  Go from your land, birthplace and father’s home (12:1)** – The first recorded test of Avraham seems to be out of order. Avraham should leave the home before the birthplace and the birthplace before the land. Why the reverse order? **Rav Noach Weinberg ztl.** noted that there are three spheres of influence that tend to affect a person’s thinking. To develop as a Yirei Shomayim, one must be willing to sacrifice all three spheres of influence – the first, is general society – one needs to think on his own. The next is to give up the values of the local media and community. Your definition of success or respect cannot be dependent on what everyone else’s is. The third is the parental home – the limitations of spiritual growth that perhaps exist within a person based on what his parents told him. One must not compromise on aspirations and clarity of what is right Al Pi HaTorah. That is why the test was Lech LECHA – to convince Avraham to be an independent thinker within Torah context.

**וּמִמּֽוֹלַדְתְּךָ֖ וּמִבֵּ֣ית אָבִ֑יךָ  Go from your land and birthplace  (12:1) - Ramban** wonders what the connection between leaving all of these places and the good things to come is all about. He explains that Hashem was telling Avraham that staying in a place of persecution where you every step is a defensive one is not ideal. Go to the land I am sending you to, and it will be good. The focus would now be a positive Emunah test. **Rav Yonasan Sacks Shlita** added that when it came to Avraham, growth in Avodas Hashem meant leaving the practices of previous generations. This would not be so for his children who would do the exact opposite. For them, Avodas Hashem growth would be in learning from the Avos.

**וְאֶֽעֶשְׂךָ֙ לְג֣וֹי גָּד֔וֹל And I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you and make your name great and you will be a Beracha (12:2)** – The Gemara (Pesachim 117b) notes that this refers to the fact that we bless Hashem by referring to all of the Avos but close with Mogen Avraham alone. **Rav Yitzchak Koppelman ztl.** notes that Avraham was unique among the Avos for he was the only one who had no Mesorah and needed to develop his awareness of Hashem on his own. Thus, Hashem told him, lest you think that similar to your experience, at the time of Moshiach many will need to respond without personal Mesorah and still achieve a calling in the name of Hashem.

**וַֽאֲגַדְּלָ֖ה שְׁמֶ֑ךָ And I will make your name great (12:2**) – **Rashi** notes that the making of his name great merely means the addition of the letter “Heh” – that he would not be Avram but rather Avraham. But why was a changed name so important to Avraham? **Rav Zaidel Epstein ztl (Heiaros)** that the Gemara (Nedarim 32b) explains that when Avraham’s name changed, he was now given the ability to rule over his entire body. Rav Zaidel explains that this means that the opportunity for Avraham’s Yetzer Hara to ruin his life’s mission was limited by the blessing of the name change. He adds that he once heard Rav Moshe Feinstein ztl explain that every Jew receives a calling of Lech Lecha in life. We are all placed into life situations we did not plan on that are indeed Lech Lecha moments. Rav Zaidel adds that these moments can bring about the greatest opportunity for us to make our names—and our marks, within Jewish destiny.

**וְאֶֽעֶשְׂךָ֙ לְג֣וֹי גָּד֔וֹל I will make your name great (12:2) - Rashi** comments that even though we will identify with each of the Avos, we will end the Beracha with Mogen Avraham. Why do we recognize Hashem’s relationship with  Avraham as the end point? Why not end with Yaakov -- having built on Avraham and Yitzchak? **Rav Moshe Weinberger shlita** recalled the comment of the Biala Rebbe ztl who noted that Avraham uniquely was able to relate as a brother -- even when distant (think Mitzrayim or Gerar) and that level of connection allows us to relate even to those with whom we do not have other things in common. It is what serves as a baseline for Am Yisrael -- at the least, we are all connected.

ו**ֶֽהְיֵ֖ה בְּרָכָֽה**: **And you will be a blessing (12:2) – Rav Baruch Mordechai Ezrachi Shlita** explained that one has the obligation to be a blessing. The truth is that when one makes this his mantra in life everything is a blessing for him.

**וְאֶת־הַנֶּ֖פֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר־עָשׂ֣וּ בְחָ֑רָן The souls that they made in Charan (12:5)** – The **Tanna D’Bei Eliyahu**writes that Shem tried to influence the nations of the world for 400 years  to no avail. The commentaries explain that he was unsuccessful at influencing anyone. Avraham was the first success at influence as he created souls. **Rav Baruch Mordechai Ezrachi Shlita** asked why Shem was not successful at being Mikarev like Avraham? He answers that different people have different talents. The Avos had the unique ability to create souls. Shem and Ever lacked that ability. At the same time, Shem and Eiver DID have the ability to create Avos. All of them learned how to be avos in Yeshivas Shem V’Eiver. Sometimes, you need a Yeshiva in order to create the superstars who will lead the next generation.

**וְאֶת־הַנֶּ֖פֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר־עָשׂ֣וּ בְחָ֑רָן** **The souls that they made in Charan (12:5) – Rav Ovadiah Yosef ztl.** cited a midrash which described how far Avraham went in order to be mikarev someone. The Midrash as repeated by Rav Ovadiah ztl. described an elder who came to Avraham’s tent and, after receiving free hospitality took out his idol in order to offer thanks. Avraham demurred and tried to show him the error of his ways. After the conversation—of numerous hours-- the man again took out his idol. For the lack of respect, Avraham asked him to leave. Hashem appeared to Avraham and told him that He was waiting 90 years for the chance to have this man influenced by Avraham in order to have him see the error of his ways. Avraham sent for the man and encouraged the man to return. After extended conversation and a refill on the provisions, the man took out the idol and instead of praying to it, smashed it noting that the extended hospitality clearly demonstrated a higher belief system than the idol. Rav Ovadiah added that we clearly see the importance of not giving up on someone – even at 90 – and that Hashem still waits for him. He also added that the way we approach someone clearly impacts the way they choose to see us and that which we represent – so be mikabel b’sever Panim Yafos. (The **Beis Yosef** adds that this was the fear of the king of Sodom who was willing to give up all of the Rechush – but feared the kiruv power of Avraham – hence he requested – Tein Lee HaNefesh)

ו**ְאֶת־הַנֶּ֖פֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר־עָשׂ֣וּ בְחָ֑רָן And the souls they created in Charan (12:5) – Rashi**quotes that Sarah and Avraham made Geirim. But what type of Geirus did they do before Matan Torah? How good could such a Geirus be if it happened without a Beis Din? **Rav Chaim Kanievsky shlita** noted that the entirety of the Geirus consisted of Kabbolos Ol Malchus Shomayim which did not need a Beth Din. Avraham must have taught the converts the Halachos of Avodah Zara with the Halachos of the other 7 Mitzvos Bnei Noach. This was the conversion process for which a Yachid Mumcheh like Avraham sufficed.

**וְאֶת־הַנֶּ֖פֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר־עָשׂ֣וּ בְחָ֑רָן  The souls that they made in Charan (12:5)** - What happened to these people? **The Pardes Yosef quotes Rav Chanoch Henoch of Alexander ztl.** who notes that the people believed more in Avraham than in his religion. When Avraham died, they didn’t take to Yitzchak and went back to their old lifestyles.

**וַיֵּרָ֤א Hashem appeared to Avraham (12:7)** - Why does Hashem only appear to Avraham AFTER Avraham follows the command of Lech Lecha?  **Rav Haim Sabato Shlita** suggests that one who wants to stick to Hashem belongs in Eretz Yisrael. Only there does Hashem appear to him and only there will He make a Bris with him. Thus, Hashem tells Avraham to go to the land and thereafter He appears to him.

**וַיִּקְרָ֖א בְּשֵׁ֥ם And he called in the name of Hashem (12:8)**– In Pirkei Avos we read that there were 10 generations from Noach to Avraham and Avraham came and took the reward due to them all. **The Sefer Lechem Shomayim** asks why? Why do we not account for Shem and Eiver? **Rav Ovadiah Yosef ztl**. answers that the difference between them and Avraham was that he was Moser Nefesh to proclaim the name of Hashem publically. He made it his life’s mission to make sure that anyone he met would call out in the name of Hashem. Thus, he gets THEIR Sachar too. This is similar to the tenth man at the minyan who affords the other 9 to daven. He gets the Sachar not to their detriment but he afforded them the opportunity to Daven.

**הָל֥וֹךְ וְנָס֖וֹעַ הַנֶּֽגְבָּה Avram traveled southward (12:9)** - But Avraham ALWAYS travelled southward! What is the Chiddush? **Rav Aryeh Leibowitz Shlita** cited **Rav Yerucham Olshin Shlita** who noted that it is not only about what you do, but also that you DESIRE it. Sforno for instance, noted that Terach moved south because he desired spirituality. Although Avraham continued on that southward trip (See Bava Basra הרוצה להחכים ידרים) he did so with a desire to find Hakadosh Baruch Hu in the process. To quote Rav Leibowitz -- sometimes the Chiddush is in the consistency.

**לְמַ֨עַן֙ יִֽיטַב־לִ֣י בַֽעֲבוּרֵ֔ךְ So that they will be good to me because of you (12:13)** – Was Avraham really willing to give his wife to harlotry merely to receive gifts? (**Ramban** even argues that this was a mistake of Avraham who did not show strength of Bitachon here) Was he interested in bribery and not Tzniyus? Did he ignore the factors of family and Chessed?  **Rav Avraham Rivlin Shlita** explained that Avraham knew that Galus is so overpowering that it could infect his children in the future with the desire to disburse and disband. In particular it was the Jewish women who were at most risk and losing their support of the Jewish nation was potentially catastrophic because in general, the women were always more supportive of the Jewish nation than their male counterparts (think Nashim Tzikaniyos, Bnos Tzlofchad etc). They derived their strength from the paradigms of the women who demonstrated the same strength in history. Hence, Avraham and Sarah agreed to the Pharaoh plan in order to set the tone of strength of the future of Am Yisrael.

ו**ּלְאַבְרָ֥ם הֵיטִ֖יב בַּֽעֲבוּרָ֑הּ And they were good to Avraham because of her and he got sheep and cattle etc (12:16) –**Avraham accepted gifts from Pharaoh and not from the king of Sodom. Why? Moreover, why does the king of Egypt give gifts when he took Sarah but the king of Gerar did not offer the same gifts when HE took Sarah? **Rav Eliyashiv ztl.** explains That the rule of a king as hinted to by Shmuel HaNovi is that he has the right to take the royal subjects as per his wish. But he does not have the same right when he is taking advantage of an outsider. Avraham’s trip to Egypt was as a visitor while he moved to Gerar. When he moved to Gerar, he was subjected to the same rules as any other royal subject – as was Sarah. But when Pharaoh took Sarah, he had the responsibility to pay her relatives for the actions as they were not within the local custom.

**וַיְצַ֥ו עָלָ֛יו פַּרְעֹ֖ה אֲנָשִׁ֑ים וַיְשַׁלְּח֥וּ אֹת֛וֹ וְאֶת־אִשְׁתּ֖וֹ וְאֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־לֽוֹ: And they sent him and his wife and everything he had (12:20)** – **The Gemara** (Sotah 46a) notes that because of the 4 steps that Pharaoh accompanied Avraham, Avraham’s children were enslaved to him for 400 years. **Maharasha** adds that even though the actual slavery was commanded because of a different issue (Bris Bein HaBesarim), the gemara tells us why the slavery was to Pharaoh and Mitzrayim specifically and that was due to the accompaniment. **Rav Yaakov Moshe Lessin ztl.** commented about how this provides us into a glimpse into Hashem’s vast ability to provide justice. After all, Pharaoh barely accompanied Avraham, he tortured Avraham AND Sarah and still, Hashem rewarded him for the 4 steps handsomely. Clearly, Hashem takes EVERYTHING into account when looking at his world.

**ל֥וֹט עִמּ֖וֹ And Lot was with him (13:1)** – Originally  Lot was a part of the family but once left Mitzrayim he was considered a “hanger on”. Why? **Rav Schachter Shlita** quoted **Rav Soloveitchik ztl**. who explained that Lot was originally a believer in monotheism until he entered the technologically advanced society of Mitzrayim. Just like Lot went to Mitzrayim and gave up his beliefs and spirituality for the benefits and comforts of society, many in our generation give it up for comfort. Rav Schachter Shlita added that we need to create a sense of spirituality in our children too. It is hard to do but we need to create a sense within our children to discern Kedusha. Avraham did that by the Akaida.

**וַיֵּ֨לֶךְ֙ לְמַסָּעָ֔יו  And he followed his travels from the East to Beit El to the place where his tent had been originally (13:3)** – **Rashi**cites the Gemara (Erachin 16b) that says that he returned to the same places – the same hotels that he stopped in on his way down to Mitzrayim. This teaches us that one should not change his lodging places. **Rav Moshe Tzvi Neriah ztl**. adds that it also teaches us a certain Derech Eretz about how money should not change the humble lifestyle that  a person leads. Avraham went down to Mitzrayim in poverty, having to borrow in order to get there. However, he left Mitzrayim wealthy. He still stayed in the same inns and didn’t opt for more opulent surroundings. Money didn’t change his lifestyle, it just gave him a better way to carry it out.

**וְלֹֽא־נָשָׂ֥א אֹתָ֛ם הָאָ֖רֶץ לָשֶׁ֣בֶת יַחְדָּ֑ו  And the land did not let them live together (13:6)** – Why does the Possuk mention that the land didn’t let them live together and then repeats that due to their wealth they could not live together? **Rav Shmuel Yaakov Borenstein ztl. Rosh Yeshiva of Kiryas Melech**explains that at first the issue was one of finances. However, as the Midrash explains, the differences rose above the finances into spiritual matters and rose above the Shepards and began to split Avraham and Lot. Hence,  the double language.

**וַֽיְהִי־רִ֗יב And there was a fight between the shepards of Avraham and the shepards of Lot (13:7)** – The commentaries note that the arguments stemmed from the fact that Avraham’s shepherds had trained their sheep not to graze on the property of others. Lot’s shepherds did not care. **Rav Yisroel Yaakov Lubchinsky ztl (Givilei Eish)** noted that Avraham’s influence was so great that even his sheep were influenced not to steal. (This is similar to the influence of Rav Pinchas Ben Yair on his animals) That must have required a tremendous amount of educational energy on behalf of Avraham and his shepherds. He then asks why Avraham was not successful at bringing the shepherds into the fold – instead leaving them to remain shepherds. He answers that their being shepherds is not in opposition to being “brought close to the Shechina.” Rather, when someone is good at something and that talent can be utilized in the service of Hashem, it too, is part of the mission of the Jew.

**הִפָּ֥רֶד נָ֖א  Separate from me please (13:9)** – The concept of separation usually denotes a contentious relationship that leads to divorce between relations. Yet, Avraham presents the concept to Lot with the backdrop of brotherly love. How is separation something that keeps families together? **Rav Dr. Benny Lau Shlita** suggests that the difference is not in recognizing left and right as a turn in direction and the creating of distance. Rather, what was suggested was that each would continue to be in the reflection of the other – at the ready to help. Sometimes we think that we need to divorce ourselves from uncomfortable relationships with those whose physical or spiritual needs differ from ours. **The Netziv (Meishiv Davar 44)** notes that it is this exact differentiation and excommunication that led to Churban. Rav Lau adds that sometimes a little space allows one to live a devoted Jewish life but being  at the ready to defend all of Klal Yisrael in the process.

**הִפָּ֥רֶד נָ֖א מֵֽעָלָ֑י Separate from me (13:9)** – How could it be that the Avraham who did the most Kiruv in the world would chase Lot away? Was he THAT bad? **Rav Reuven Grozovsky ztl.** explained that Avraham was able to impact those from whom he was able to discern that they wanted direction in life. When he saw that Lot was not interested in growing – that he was forging his own path away from Avraham (See Horiyos 10b) then despite his attainments, it was no longer advantageous for Avraham to live near him.

**וַיִּשָּׂא־ל֣וֹט אֶת־עֵינָ֗יו Lot lifted his eyes and saw the fertile area of the Jordan valley (13:10**) - It is incredible that Lot, Avraham’s nephew would choose to live among the people of Sodom. The environment seemed foreign for someone with his background. **Rav Nosson Wachtfogel ztl.** explained that once someone sees something, the Yetzer HaRa can be strong. A person needs to guard his eyes for that reason.

**וְאַנְשֵׁ֣י סְדֹ֔ם רָעִ֖ים And the people of Sodom were bad and sinners to Hashem (13:13)** – What is the meaning of the word “sinners”? What does it add to the concept of their being “bad”? **Rav Yerucham Gorelick ztl** cited the author of the **Nesivos Hamishpat** who would say that often people engage in behavior so often, that the behavior becomes part of the person’s character and personality – the person literally becomes “a Cheftza of sin”. This is the Torah’s intent here when it notes that the people of Sodom were Chataim – not only were their intention bad, they engaged in so much sin, sin permeated every ounce of their being. There is a difference between this type of a person and those who are Chotim as Beruriah noted to Rav Meir (Berachos 10a).

**וַיָּבֹא֙ הַפָּלִ֔יט וַיַּגֵּ֖ד לְאַבְרָ֣ם הָֽעִבְרִ֑י וְהוּא֩ שֹׁכֵ֨ן בְּאֵֽלֹנֵ֜י מַמְרֵ֣א הָֽאֱמֹרִ֗י And he was living in the tents of Mamre (14:13)** – Why was it important here to note where Avraham was. At this point the key issue was that there was a battle – why is it important to know where the refugee was? Also, we ALREADY knew that Avraham was with Mamre (13:18) so why repeat it? **Rav Yaakov Yosef ztl.** Chief Rabbi of New York explained that the Torah came to teach us how far a person will go in order to fool himself. Og had intentions of taking Sarah as a wife after Avraham died in battle. However, why did he assume Avraham would die in battle? What would have been his great sin? Rather, he assumed that since Avraham was hanging out with Aner Eskol and Mamre , he must have been in a “bad crowd.” Thus, he assumed Avraham was going to be held guilty if tested in battle and he, Og, would marry the grieving widow. He was so intent on hatching his plan he never bothered to check the reality.

**וַיָּבֹא֙ הַפָּלִ֔יט And the Refugee came (14:13)** – Tosafos in Meseches Nidda identifies the refugee as none other than Og the future enemy of the Jews. Tosafos notes that Og came to tell Avraham that his nephew was taken captive with a purely ulterior motive in mind. He hoped that the issue would spark Avraham to action which would lead to his death and thereby Og would be able to marry Sarah**. Rav Reuven Grozovsky** ztl notes that we learn the reward due to a person for a good deed that is done, even when it is done for the wrong reasons. Og, it seems, had the worst intentions in his providing information about Lot to Avraham. Still, the fact that he provided information at all, was reason to bring him reward of 450 years of longevity. Rav Reuven goes on to note that if this is true by non-Jews, it is CERTAINLY true with us. Still, since it is not widely publicized, people seem to pass on the chance to do the right thing, even for the wrong reasons.

**וּמַלְכִּי־צֶ֨דֶק֙ Malkitzedek and Avraham (14:18)** – Malkitzedek is identified by the Gemara (Nedarim 32b) as none other than Shem the son of Noach. Why does Avraham ultimately become the chosen one to start the Jewish people and not Shem? What happened to Shem? **Rav Moshe Tzvi Neriah** Z”L points out that Shem continued to live after the Mabul in the same way that he did before it. He lead a spiritually introverted life – consistent with that of his father Noach. He became Kohein Elyon – a spiritual connection to Hashem but only a personally spiritual connection. Hashem chose Avraham because he reached out and brought people closer to Hashem in addition to achieving his own personal growth.

**וּמַלְכִּי־צֶ֨דֶק֙ Malkitzedek took out bread and wine (14:20)** – Why did he take out bread and wine specifically**? Rav Moshe Wolfson Shlita**explains that bread and wine are unique that through the change that man puts into them, they are improved. In fact, their level of Beracha and Bracha order are improved. This highlights the idea that man has the ability to improve himself as well. Hence, after Yom Kippur, the Bas Kol declares that one should eat his bread in joy and drink his wine in goodness – for Yom Kippur is a day where man lives that change in practice. It is crucial to note that Shem is the one who teaches the lesson as he is Melech Shalem – even though he was born with a Bris, he saw the value of improvement.

**וּמַלְכִּי־צֶ֨דֶק֙ מֶ֣לֶךְ שָׁלֵ֔ם And Malkitzedek the king of Shalem (14:18)** - Why are these Possukim inserted here in the middle of the discussion between the King of Sodom and Avraham. **Rav Yehuda Amital ztl.** suggested that apparently, the insertion of the seemingly out-of-place verses about Malkitzedek here come to tell us that Malkitzedek, the representative of the locus of justice in the world (Yirushalayim) came to congratulate Avraham on his achievement in redeeming the captive Lot. Over the course of this episode Avraham had undertaken various actions which were problematic; therefore, prior to his encounter with the king of Sedom, the Torah emphasizes that he acted properly, as confirmed by the representative of justice. Avraham believed that extraordinary measures were justified – meeting with the most contemptible people, endangering the lives of scholars, and even killing in battle – in order to free captives.

**תֶּן־לִ֣י הַנֶּ֔פֶשׁ וְהָֽרְכֻ֖שׁ קַח־לָֽךְ: Give me the people and take the possessions for yourself (14:21)** - **Rav Pam ztl**. notes that Avraham was held responsible for returning the souls to Sodom for as a result, these souls were never exposed to Hashem. In fact, the Gemara (Nedarim 32a) includes this as a reason for why Avraham’s children were sent into slavery.  A similar experience is found with Timna who wanted to join in with Bnei Yisrael but was rejected and joined Eliphaz instead. Rav Pam noted that we need to be open to Kiruv even if we are not trained -- we have caring hearts for our fellow Jews and should open our hearts for the chance to share the beauty of a life of Mitzvos.

**אִם־מִחוּט֙ וְעַ֣ד שְׂרֽוֹךְ־נַ֔עַל  To a shoe strap (14:23)** – The gemara reminds us that when we get dressed in the morning we put on the right shoe first ad then the left but tie the left and then the right. While this is but a minhag, it is an old one that goes back to the period of the Tanaim, what is it all about? The Gemara explains that it is about having Hashem on our minds all day long and using every experience in life as a means of serving Hashem. Why do we tie the left before the right? **Rav Schachter Shlita** pointed out the comments of **Rabbi Akiva Eiger** citing the **Haflaah**who reminds us that the shoe strap here is similar to Tefilin and accordingly Avraham was rewarded with the mitzvah of Tefillin for not taking from the king of Sodom. Tying the left first, reminds us of the reward of Tefillin commonly worn on the left arm. In this way, Rav Schachter added, we use even the simplest moments of our day to remind us of Hashem and His involvement in the world.

**אִם־מִחוּט֙ וְעַ֣ד שְׂרֽוֹךְ־נַ֔עַל  From a thread to a shoelace (14:23)** – The gemara tells us that as a reward for not taking the spoils, Avraham’s descendants received the Mitzvos of Tzitzis and Tefillin. Why the reward of Mitzvos for an act during a time of permissive but not Mitzva-based activity**? Maran Harav Schachter Shlita** points out that actions in our lives should not be viewed in the context of Kodesh and Chol but rather as Mitzvah and Hechsher Mitzva – a means of achieving the ultimate goal of B’Chol Deracheicha Daeihu. Avraham’s engaging in the war with the 4 kings was part of that lesson – it too, was part of a mitzvah and his reward in the way he conducted himself when performing it, was with Mitzvos.

**אִם־מִחוּט֙ וְעַ֣ד שְׂרֽוֹךְ־נַ֔עַל  From a thread to a shoe lace (14:23) –** In the merit of the denial of the gifts from the king of Sodom Avraham’s children merited the strings of Tzitzis and the straps of Tefillin. **Rav Schachter Shlita** would remind us of the comments of the **Haflaah (Panim Yafos)** who noted that this is the reason that we put on the left shoe first – as a reminder of the connection between the shoe and the tefillin (worn on the left) which was a reminder of the shoe strap that Avraham gave up. Rav Schachter Shlita added that we find a similar historical connection to the concept of saying Lchaim which is a response to the drinking that anesthetized the killer before he received his death sentence – so as to contrast, they would say L’Chaim and not death. Rav Schachter reminded us that one should recite the LChaim after the Beracha an initial sip – as a reminder of Malkitzedek who forgot to put Hashem first.

**אִם־מִחוּט֙ וְעַ֣ד שְׂרֽוֹךְ־נַ֔עַל  Not from a thread or a shoelace (14:23) – Chazal**connect the idea of the shoelace to the shoe of Aliyah L’Regel. What is the connection all about? **Rav Zechariah Tubi Shlita** suggested that Aliyah L’Regel is the Jew’s opportunity to recognize that everything he has is from Hashem. He leaves his domicile and goes up to Hashem at personal financial risk. Still Hashem promises Lo Yachamod Ish Es Artzeicha BaAloseicha – no one will desire your land when you go up and Hashem will protect you since it all comes from him anyway. The same is true here – Avraham tells the king of Sodom that everything comes from Hashem and he does not want anyone to tell him otherwise.

**וְלֹ֣א תֹאמַ֔ר אֲנִ֖י הֶֽעֱשַׁ֥רְתִּי אֶת־אַבְרָֽם So that you will not say that “I made Avraham wealthy” (14:23) – Rashi** explains that Avraham added that it was only Hashem who promised to make me wealthy not you. Why was Avraham afraid that the king of Sodom would misrepresent his success? After all, it was unnatural that 4 kings who handily beat 5 would then fall to an army of 2 men – Avraham and Eliezer? Who would NOT see the hand of Hashem in THAT? Moreover, the king already signed over the wealth. What was Avraham afraid of? **Rav Leib Chasman ztl.** explains that this is the challenge of wealth is so great that it leads people to provide natural explanations for having it when the most obvious – that it is Siyata D’Shmaya – defies them. This was Avraham’s fear. He was interested in Kiddush Hashem and was afraid that the king of Sodom in an effort to undercut that complete Kiddush Hashem was going to use money to take away the purity of the action. It was not worth it to Avraham and therefore he told him to keep his wealth.

**וַיּוֹצֵ֨א אֹת֜וֹ הַח֗וּצָה וַיֹּ֨אמֶר֙ הַבֶּט־נָ֣א הַשָּׁמַ֔יְמָה וּסְפֹר֙ הַכּ֣וֹכָבִ֔ים אִם־תּוּכַ֖ל לִסְפֹּ֣ר אֹתָ֑ם וַיֹּ֣אמֶר ל֔וֹ כֹּ֥ה יִֽהְיֶ֖ה זַרְעֶֽךָHe took him outside (15:5) – Rashi** explains that Hashem told Avraham not to utilize his star gazing. For while it might be written in the stars that Avram and Sarai were destined not to have children, Avraham and Sarah CAN have children. Why did Hashem need to change the names of Sarah and Avraham in order for them to have Yitzchak? Why couldn’t Hashem simply change the stars or make their message obsolete? **Rav Yehuda Leib Bloch ztl.** explains that this is not the way of Hashem. Hashem created the world with a sense of justice and truth and he does not make changes to the basic rules of nature unless he considered them beforehand (hence the things created Erev Shabbos Bein HaShmashos). It is more indicative of Hashem’s abilities to keep to the rules of nature that he created AND still bring about the miracles through changes in the governance of that nature – hence the name change.

**וּסְפֹר֙ הַכּ֣וֹכָבִ֔ים אִם־תּוּכַ֖ל לִסְפֹּ֣ר אֹתָ֑ם Count the stars if you can (15:5) –** It sounds as if the challenge is one based on size – that the nation will be so great in the future that the people will not be able to be counted. However**,  Rav Shimon Schwab** ztl. noted that the difficulty in counting the stars is based both on size and proximity. The stars are shining from so many distance points that getting an accurate count of them is impossible. Rav Schwab pointed out that the same can be said of the Jewish people who are so great in so many ways and whose impact on the world from future to past and from past onto present is so great the numbers won’t make any sense.

**With what shall I know that I will inherit the land (15:8) – Rashi** comments that the interest here was to know with which merit would Avraham’s children merit the land. **Rav Schachter Shlita** often cited the comments of the **Netziv** who explained that the intent of Irasheinah refers not to Yirusha but rather to a process of seizing. They were asked with what will they acquire the land (like V’Horashem Es HaAretz).

**בַּמָּ֥ה אֵדַ֖ע כִּ֥י אִֽירָשֶֽׁנָּה With what shall I know that I will inherit the land? (15:8)** - The Gemara Nedarim notes that Avraham’s descendants were punished for this seeming lack of trust in Hashem. How are we to understand this? Where was Avraham to receive **Kli Yakar** explains that knowing that your children will be exiled and punished and that you have a part in it, is punishment and painful. Even if the ultimate reason for their exile is not based on him alone, it is the awareness that he was not able to protect -- and was a contributor -- that was a punishment of major proportion.

**עֶגְלָ֣ה מְשֻׁלֶּ֔שֶׁת** **He told him to take 3 calves and three  goats and three rams and a turtle dove and dove (15:9)** – Why were so many animals necessary for this Bris? The **Aruch HaShulchan (Haggadas Leil Shimurim**) explains that after Hashem promised Eretz Yisrael to his children in the future, Avraham wondered how Hashem would be able to keep that promise if the children do Avairos? That’s why Hashem told him to take the different animals – which correspond to different nations (Eigel to Egypt, Ayil to Persia & Madai and Eiz to Greek) while the birds refer to Doves. The nations tend to crack and absorb other nations as a result of assimilation. The Jewish nation does not work that way. That’s the answer to Avraham’s question about how he will get Hashem to be able to keep the promise of Eretz Yisrael. As long as we stay unadulterated, we will deserve Eretz Yisrael.

**וְאֶת־הַצִּפֹּ֖ר לֹ֥א בָתָֽר** **The bird he did not split (15:10)**– The animals Avraham was encouraged to split represent the nations of the world but the bird – a reference to the Jewish people, Avraham was told to leave whole. The **Maharal** explains that the Jewish people are compared to a flying bird. The secret to the Jewish people is the fact that as many try to trap her (spiritually)she always manages to fly away – and soar – because of the spirit.

**וַיְהִ֤י הַשֶּׁ֨מֶשׁ֙ לָב֔וֹא And the sun was setting and a deep sleep befell Avraham (15:12)**– The Yalkut Shimoni quotes Rav Yehoshua of Sakinin who explains that sleep is the beginning of all sorts of trouble.  **Rav Altusky ztl.** explains that we are dealing with sleep for no reason. Any deviation from one’s set schedule in Avodas Hashem serves as the basis of the beginning of Nefilah – of failure.

**ידֹ֨עַ תֵּדַ֜ע כִּי־גֵ֣ר | יִֽהְיֶ֣ה זַרְעֲךָ֗ Your offspring will be strangers (15:13**) - We refer to Avraham’s children as Zera. Why? **Rav Schachter Shlita** quoted **Tosafos (Yevamos 22b**) who notes that there is a difference between Zera and Ben. Ben refers to a biological child irrespective of whether he follows in the path of the parent. At the same time, Zera only refers to Zera Kasher and not Zera Pasul. However, it includes future generations similar to a seed that grows the trees that will grow into the tree of the same species well into the future. Rav Schachter added that the promise of Eretz Yisrael to the Zera means that the land is promised to the children of Avraham who observe the Torah. This is why in Birkas HaMazon we mention the Torah taught by Hashem as a condition for getting the land. Further, our receiving the land is predicated on the intention to build a Beis HaMikdash to serve as a base for Kappara via Korbanos.

**דַּמֶּ֥שֶׂק אֱלִיעֶֽזֶר: Eliezer from Damascus (15:2)** - Why is Eliezer referred to with these terms? Rashi cites the gemara (Yoma 28b) that the word Damesek refers to the fact the Eliezer would take from his teacher and share it with others. **Rav Boruch Mordechai Ezrachi Shlita** explained that this is the most apt description of Eliezer. Most people content themselves with studying and perfecting the teachings of their teachers. Eliezer was not content with being a receiver in life. He dug deep to really understand the teacher (Doleh like a well) and then carried out the depth of the teaching into the world at large (Mashkeh).

**וַתִּקַּ֞ח שָׂרַ֣י אֵֽשֶׁת־אַבְרָ֗ם אֶת־הָגָ֤ר הַמִּצְרִית֙** **Sarai took Hagar her Egyptian maidservant at the end of 10 years (16:3)** – The Gemara (Yevamos 64) learns that one needs to marry a different wife if a couple cannot procreate after 10 years of trying. **Tosafos (Chagigah 2b)**  explains that a Jewish child whose mother is a Canaanite maidservant does not fulfill his father’s procreation obligation. That being the case, what did Sarai’s actions help here? **Rav Noson Gestetner ztl.** explains that only after the command of Bris Milah was Avraham commanded not to intermarry. Prior to that, he was not. During those times, biblical lineage followed the patriarchical line. Ergo, a child born to Avraham and Hagar would be Jewish and aligned with Avraham’s destiny.

**הִתְהַלֵּ֥ךְ לְפָנַ֖י וֶֽהְיֵ֥ה תָמִֽים** **Walk before me and be Tamim (17:1) – Sforno** notes that the word Tamim here refers to completeness. In other words one needs to be complete in his Yiras Shomayim. How does one achieve that Sheleimus? **Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel ztl.** explained that torah is referred to as Temima. It is both Sheleima and bring Sheleimus to the person studying it. An established Torah schedule leads to Sheleimus as we learn from Yaakov. If one achieves it one is primed to Sheleimus.

**הִתְהַלֵּ֥ךְ לְפָנַ֖י וֶֽהְיֵ֥ה תָמִֽים Walk before me and be Tamim (complete) <17:1>** - The **Midrash Tanchuma** notes that this introduction to the commandment to Avraham to have a Bris. According to the Midrash, Avraham was confused. How could it be that prior to Bris, he was considered incomplete and now, through the process of subtraction, he would be complete? **The Sfas Emes** explains that the mathematical calculation is off here. One assumes that through the process of Bris Milah he is losing or removing part of himself – this would imply that he is not complete. However, in point of fact the person is making an opening to give room for Hashem in his life through the keeping of Bris Milah. It is that spiritual opening or opportunity that makes the person complete. Shabbos works the same way, by unplugging for Shabbos, we create the opening in our lives for time to think about and enjoy Hashem. That is why we say V’gam B’Minuchaso lo Yishkenu Areilim. Only a nation blessed with the opportunity for Bris can appreciate Shabbos.

**וַֽהֲקִֽמֹתִ֨י אֶת־בְּרִיתִ֜י בֵּינִ֣י וּבֵינֶ֗ךָ וּבֵ֨ין זַרְעֲךָ֧ אַֽחֲרֶ֛יךָ לְדֹֽרֹתָ֖ם לִבְרִ֣ית עוֹלָ֑ם To your children after you forever more (17:7)** - Why the extra wording? **Rav Zvi Sobolofsky Shlita** explained that this is the intent of the concept of Bris -- when something is accepted as a group, it lasts even when the initial people are no longer present. **Rav Schachter Shlita** would highlight that this is the intent of the Possuk -- it is not only when something is accepted publicly -- it is when the Mitzva is accepted by future generations that are like the first one. Just as Avraham accepted the responsibility for Bris, his children would approach Milah the same way.

**וְנָֽתַתִּ֣י לְ֠ךָ֠ וּלְזַרְעֲךָ֨ אַֽחֲרֶ֜יךָ** **And I will give to you and your children after you the land of your youth (17:8)** **– Rav Yosef Leib Bloch ztl. of Telz**explained that the concept of Zechus Avos is not merely one of a gift because of protectzia. Rather, when a child follows in the footsteps of the parent, it is as if the parent is still alive in the soul of the child. Each action done by the child is an action as if done by the parent and the parent’s Zechus guides the goodness due the child too. Thus, when the children inherit Eretz Yisrael, it is only those who inherit in the footsteps and style of Avraham who are entitled to inherit it. The **Lutzker Rav** ztl. adds that the same is true for Torah as well. A Bris is a preparatory step for Kabbolos Ol Malchus Shomayim and Limmud Torah. But only those with a Bris are entitled to the same ability – Lo Asa Chein L’Chol Goy.

**Milah** – In the context of Birkas HaMazon we mention Eretz Yisrael and Bris Milah. Why ? **Rav Schachter Shlita**explained that the Gemara in Berachos notes that the Zechus of Eretz Yisrael came as a gift to Avraham because of the Mitzvah of Milah. (Hashem gave a gift of Eretz Yisrael to Avraham on the occasion of the Bris.) That is why we mention the Bris, in context of  Eretz Yisrael and the history of the Jewish nation.

**Haftara:**

**Yeshayahu 40 – Rav Berel Wein Shlita**explains that in all of Tanach, the strongest indictment against paganism is in Parshas Lech Lecha, and its Haftorah is similarly unsparing. Just as Avraham’s opposition to paganism set him against the rest of the world, so too does the faith of the Jewish people set them apart. There is a high price for standing up for morality in an immoral world, yet as the prophet Isaiah assures us in this Haftorah, God will never abandon us.

**Rav Yonasan Sacks Shlita**explains that while the Jewish people cry out that Hashem is unfair in his punishment and that He has forsaken us, this is a major challenge to the concepts of Emunah of Yichud Hashem and Sachar V’Oinesh. Rav Sacks explains that this is the message the Novi wants us to take and keep in mind. Hashem’s Cheshbon is not merely that which WE think it is. The response to Golus and challenge needs to be introspection not suspicion. Even when it looks like Hashem is favoring other nations – it is to us to know that they will fall. There is a just reward based on merit.

**נִסְתְּרָ֚ה דַרְכִּיֽ֙ My path became obscured from Hashem (40:27) - Reuben Ebrahimoff, the Haftaraman** explained that from time to time many of us may experience feeling “spiritually” disappointed. Usually this occurs when our expectations from Hashem have not been met. It may be normal for a person to distance himself or herself from Hashem. But wait, if Hashem is the source of all blessing, then why is it that when we feel abandoned, we abandon Hashem? We should reach towards Hashem for what we want, and that is to feel connected to Hashem.

**מִ֚י הֵעִיר֙ מִמִּזְרָ֔ח צֶ֖דֶק   Who aroused from the East, [the one] whom righteousness accompanied? (Yeshayahu 41:2)** – The **Yalkut Shimoni** notes that the nations of the world were asleep at the wheel and ignored the quest to recognize Hashem until Avraham came along. Avraham did not only show them the folly of worshipping idols, he had to show them the value of giving Tzedaka too. How did he do this? The Midrash explains that he opened his tent to guests. **Rav Yitzchok Sorotzkin Shlita** notes that while not serving Avodah Zara is a command applicable to Non-Jews, doing Chessed and giving Tzedaka is not. Thus, how can the Midrash imply that the world was “asleep at the wheel” if the drive implied was not one that they had to take? He answers, based on a Maharsha in Sanhedrin (104b) that even when not commanded, there is a concept of common sense or Seichel that demands that one understand the value of Tzedaka performance. That Seichel was missing until Avraham awoke it within the world through his actions.

**מִ֚י הֵעִיר֙ מִמִּזְרָ֔ח צֶ֖דֶק   Who awakened from the East (Yeshaya 41:2)** - Chazal note that this is a reference to Avraham. **Rav Gideon Weitzman Shlita** explains that Hashem wanted Avraham to recognize that his movement was “Lecha” for himself, if it were to be Meiyir. Owning it guarantees commitment necessary for success.

**מִ֚י הֵעִיר֙ מִמִּזְרָ֔ח צֶ֖דֶק   Who aroused the righteous one from the east? (Yeshayahu 41:2 )** – Why is Noach introduced with such fanfare while Avraham is merely introduced with Lech Lecha? **Rav Shalom Rosner Shlita** pointed out that the ultimate praise for a person is that he simply heard the call of Hashem and responded. He did not need coaxing and gloating – he heard a call and responded. Avraham heard the call and he followed Hashem – that is all the praise that needs to be said.

**בִּקְד֥וֹשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵ֖ל תִּתְהַלָּֽל: And you shall rejoice in Hashem, in the holy one of Israel you shall praise (Yeshayahu 41:16) - Rav Shlomo Kluger ztl.** explained that there are Tzaddikim who normally would deserve to receive the Shechinah but do not because their generation is not worthy of the experience. That is the intent of the Possuk here -- if you scatter the Reshaim, the stock of the Tzaddikim will rise. As a result, the holy ones will sing His praises.