Lech Lecha 5774

**A thought about Rav Ovadiah Yosef**’s Petira **– Rav Ovadiah Yosef ztl(Anaf Eitz Avos)** notes that the Rambam maintained that Avraham recognized the Borai Olam when he was 40. The Raavad argues based on the Talmud’s (Nedarim 32a) understanding that Avraham was actually 3 when he came to understand Hashem. Moreover, he argues that Avraham was not the only one to recognize a sovereign Hashem for there was a Shem V’Ever. How could they have neglected their responsibility to rid the world of Avodah Zara? Rav Ovadiah ztl answers that Avraham didn’t only teach his Talmidim, he went out and taught about Hashem throughout the world. A similar comment can be made about Rav Ovadiah. He was not only a supreme Rosh Yeshiva, he was a Posek worldwide. Yehi Zichro Baruch.

**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.

**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.

**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).

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**Haftorah – 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.