Points to Ponder

Lech Lecha 5779

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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 and 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.

**וְלֹ֣א תֹאמַ֔ר אֲנִ֖י הֶֽעֱשַׁ֥רְתִּי אֶת־אַבְרָֽםSo 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.

**Haftara: 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.