

PORTION	DATE	HEB DATE	TORAH	NEVIIM	RENEWED
Lech Lecha	9 Nov. 2019	11 Cheshvan 5780	Gen. 12:1-17:27	Isa. 40:27-41:16	John 8:51-58

This week's Torah portion Lech Lecha contains one positive commandments: to circumcise a boy on the eighth day.

It is written, "Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran." (Gen. 12:4) The Talmud<sup>1</sup> explains that Abram had already reached great spiritual heights long before Hashem spoke to him. At the age of three, he recognized Hashem's existence and began fulfilling all the commandments of the Torah. As he grew older, his perception of Hashem even grew further heights, and engaged in acts of kindness and taught others of Hashem's existence.

The Rebbe explains that Abram perfected all seven of his emotional *middot* (מדות, attributes; characters). The singular form is *middah*. Each *middah* has ten sub-attributes with three intellect (*keter*, *binah*, *chochmah*; crown, understanding, wisdom) and seven *middah* (*da'at*, *gevurah*, *chesed*, *tiferet*, *hod*, *netzach*, *yesod*; knowledge, severity, kindness, beauty, splendor, victory, foundation). The perfection of the emotions by Abram showed that three attributes of intellect did not separate from him, rather permeated and influenced them (seven *middah*). For example: what we know and what we feel does not mean it is same. We might know that Hashem is the only existence, but that knowledge does not necessarily influence how we feel about life. Therefore, the number of Abram is "seventy."

The number "five" alludes to the five state of loving-kindness known as *Gemilut Hasadim* which is the act of caring for others: 1) Visiting the sick – comforting their physical ailment as well as spiritual needs; 2) Comforting mourners – by providing immediate needs such as meals, or companionship, or interact with the mourners to express their grief; 3) Hospitality; 4) Social welfare, such as charity in money, or food, or shelter, or clothing; 5) and Tikkun Olam (Repairing the world).

Therefore, Hashem called upon Avram at the age of 75 to leave Charan, his homeland. Terach, his father was 145 years old when Avram left his father. Even though Terach lived for another 60 years, the Torah mentions his death (Gen. 11:32) before Avram left Charan to prevent us from highlighting his filial obligation as a son.

Some say that Terach was a "closeted believer" of Hashem. He was afraid that even though he sold idols, he accepted as the Creator after he saw his son Charan die in a fire commanded by Nimrod. However, other sages say that Terach received his salvation by the merit of Avram, for Hashem did not want Avram to worry about his father's soul. Some even goes further by saying that even though Terach was a "closeted believer" of Hashem and did not let anyone know about his faith, he has no place in the World To Come. This mystery will be resolved once our Messiah returns.

It is written, "And יהוה said to Abram, "Go yourself out of your land, from your relatives and from your father's house, to a land which I show you." (Gen. 12:1) Hashem commanded Avram, "Go yourself out of your land," without telling him which land to go. The Zohar<sup>2</sup> explains that Hashem granted Avram a spirit of wisdom until, in the Holy Land, he was able to experience [or test] His Presence directly.<sup>3</sup> The Zohar

<sup>1</sup> Nedarim, 32a

<sup>2</sup> Lekh Lekha, 78a

<sup>3</sup> Likutey Moharan I, 44

continues that in Sefer Yetsirah (Book of Formation), the word “to permute” in Hebrew is *metsaref* (מצרף), the letters of *aleph-bet*. By combining and arranging Hebrew letters in all possible ways, Hashem created the world. Abram gazed, looked, saw, permuted, formed, and succeeded in creating them. Then Hashem manifested to him and said, “Abraham, My friend.” (Isa. 41:8)

The sages explain Abraham represents the soul of a person who wishes to serve Hashem. Such a person must leave behind his “land” (his materialism), his “birthplace” (pleasures), and even his “father’s house” who tries to stop him from serving Hashem, to the Holy Land where joy reigns supreme.

In verse 2, it is written, “And I shall make you a great nation, and bless you and make your name great, and you shall be a blessing!” The sages question why Hashem did not have to entice Avram when He clearly knows he will serve Hashem without any care for rewards. Or HaChaim<sup>4</sup> says that this is related to above verse. “I shall make you a great nation” corresponds to the command “Go...from your land.” “[I will] bless you and make your name great” corresponds to “and from your birthplace.” “You shall be a blessing” corresponds to “and from your father’s house.”

In verse 3, it is written, “And I shall bless those who bless you, and curse him who curses you. And in you all the clans of the earth shall be blessed.” (Gen. 12:3) This verse is divided into three parts. First, “I shall bless those who bless you.” Second, “[I will] curse him who curses you.” Third, “In you all the clans of the earth shall be blessed.”

First, “I [Hashem] will bless those who bless you.” Hashem mentions His blessing before those of others. This means that Hashem blesses those who are about to bless Abram even before they actually bless him. Thus, it is teaching us that Hashem will bless those who think of performing the commandments.<sup>1</sup>

Second, “[I will] curse him who curses you.” This means that He will curse Abram’s enemies only after they have actually cursed him. Therefore, those who curse you will be cursed only after they actually curse you, but not merely for thinking about the curse.

Third, “In you [Avram] all the clans of the earth shall be blessed.” This part is conditional upon the first. When a person blesses or curses, he first thinks about it and expresses verbally what he has in mind. Therefore, Hashem is saying to Avram, “I will bless those who bless you as soon as they plan to bless you, even if they have not yet blessed you.

Avram was the prototype of *chesed* (loving-kindness) and dedicated his whole life to acts of kindness as we read later on in the chapters of Beresheet. So, it is a difficult concept that anyone wants to hurt him. “And one who had escaped came and informed Avram” (Gen. 14:13) that his nephew Lot was taken as a hostage. The Talmud<sup>2</sup> explains the “one” is a fugitive, Og who survived the Flood informed Avram of Lot by the five kings. (ibid, v. 1-12) He hoped that Avram would be killed while attempting to rescue Lot so that he could marry Sarai.

Finally, Hashem was telling Avram that his mission was to go out into the world and spread the Way of Life as there would be many who would join him in believing the Creator and bless him for teaching them about Hashem. However, as always there will be people who will oppose against Avram and Hashem. So, Hashem is saying to Avram not to be frightened and abandon his mission “because even those people who

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<sup>4</sup> Lech Lecha, p. 378-379

openly curse and oppose you will envy you in their hearts and pray that their children should be like you when they grow up.”

When we read this verse carefully, the blessing (v. 2) corresponds to the fact that Hashem concealed from Avram his destination nor inform him of it before his departure from Charan. The sages say this is a great test for Avram as he was commanded to depart from his birthplace to an unknown country without knowing where to turn, and opening himself to a great danger. As for Avram, he did not question Hashem’s commands at all and fulfilled it without any hesitation as said, “So Avram left” (v. 4).

In verse 4, it is written, “So Abram left, as יהוה had commanded him, and Lot went with him. And Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran.” After receiving the command of “*lech lecha*”, Abram did not delay following His commandments (v. 1) Lot saw his uncle hurrying to leave Charan followed him. The Torah’s intent is that although Avram rushed about so that his relatives would not join him (v. 1), thus he would fulfill His commandment. Nevertheless, he did not succeed as “Lot went with him”, meaning he clung onto Avram.

In verse 6, it is written, “And Abram passed through the land to the place of Shekhem, as far as the terebinth tree of Moreh. At that time the Kena’anites were in the land.” This verse teaches us that even though Avram passed through the land, going from place to place, and none of the residents living in the land said anything to him, nor protest of his passing since he was entering their land.

In verse 7, it is written, “And יהוה appeared to Abram and said, “To your seed I give this land.” And he built there an altar to יהוה, who had appeared to him.” The sages question why the Torah goes out of its way to say Avram “built there an altar to YHWH, who appeared to him,” since Abram already knew “YHWH appeared to Avram.” Or HaChaim explains that this verse shows Avram’s intense love for Hashem. Even though Hashem already gave good tidings (vs. 2-3), he did not value the tidings compared to joy over the fact that the Shekinah of Hashem revealed to him.

In verse 8, it is written, “And from there he moved to the mountain east of Bēyth Ėl, and he pitched his tent, with Bēyth Ėl on the west and Ai on the east. And he built there an altar to יהוה, and called on the Name of יהוה.” The sages question why the verse says, “And from there he moved to the mountain east of Bethel” first. Rashi explains Avram moved his tent. However, since the Torah has not yet mentioned anything about a tent, this subject is missing. The Talmud<sup>5</sup> explains it is the Rock that was moved away from the place He appeared to Avram. It explains that when we pray, the Shekinah is with us, and when we stop praying, the Shekinah departs. Another explanation: Avram disassembled the altar and took with him until he pitched his tent again. If this is the case, “there” is explained since the altar is already mentioned in verse 7.

In verse 11, it is written, “And it came to be, when he was close to entering Mitsrayim, that he said to Sarai his wife, “See, I know that you are a fair woman to look at.” The sages question why Abram would now say, “you are a fair woman to look at,” to Sarai. Had he not noticed her beauty before? Or HaChaim explains: Avram wanted to instruct Sarai that he was her brother. However, he was concerned that Sarai would ask why he put her in a dangerous situation upon entering Mitsrayim.

Here are several possibilities that went through their minds: If she said that Avram was her husband, then the Mitsrim would kill him and take her by force; if she said that Avram was her brother, she would be

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<sup>5</sup> Berachos, 5b

obliged to with the Mitsrim. Thus she would complain that Avram should not have brought her to such place.

Now, although the righteous have faith in Hashem that He will save them from all danger, we nevertheless should not rely on miracles, especially in situations where the danger stems from a person's free will that can harm or kill someone even if Heaven has not decreed that that person should die. Of course, the victim may have the merit to be saved from his enemy.

But since it is a fundamental principle of Creation that man has free will, overturning the perpetrator's free will and saving the victim runs against a principle of free will, so it requires a miracle. When a person is in a dangerous situation and requires a miraculous salvation, the need for a miracle is even greater if the danger stems from a human being than if it stems from natural factors. Thus, we do not rely on miracles. Meaning that one may not put himself in a situation where he will need a miracle to be saved.<sup>6</sup> We can find such example in Shmuel Aleph (First Samuel) 16:2 who says, "How would I go? When Sha'ul hears it, he shall kill me." Shmuel said this to Hashem when He told him to stop mourning for Sha'ul who was rejected by Hashem to reign over Yisrael. Thus, Hashem gives him a reason for Shmuel so that he can be saved. Shmuel did not want to anoint David because he would be killed by Sha'ul. But Hashem overrode his free will, therefore he needed a miracle to save him which YHWH did.

For this reason, Avram said to Sarai, "See, now I know..." He is giving her an explanation for why he had brought her to Mitsrayim, he just realized how beautiful Sarai was, for if he realized it earlier, then he would never have brought her here and he would have gone elsewhere.

Now, you will say, "How about when Avram said, "She is my sister" without any explanation given to Sarai in Philistine? Why was he not concerned about endangering her at that time?" (Gen. 20:2) The reason is that the people in the land of Philistine were not as dark skinned like Mitsrim, meaning Avram and Sarai had similar skin tone as the Philistines, therefore he thought Sarai would be safe. Thus, Avram simply said, "She is my sister."

It is written, "And it shall be, when the Mitsrites see you, that they shall say, 'This is his wife.'" (v. 12) Notice how Avram said, "It shall be." It shows that Avram knew for certain that the Mitsrites were going to take Sarai away to be a wife of Pharaoh. With these words, Avram was giving Sarai the reason, in advance, for that which he would soon instruct her (in verse 13), "Please say you are my sister." Meaning, from this moment, without anyone prompting you, "Say, 'I am his sister,'" because as soon as the Mitsrites see her, they are going to say, "She is his wife," and kill him to take away his wife by force.

It is written, "Please say you are my sister, so that it shall be well with me for your sake, and my life be spared because of you." (v. 13) If Sarai said, "This man is not related to me at all," then the Mitsrites would let him live, but he would not gain any financial support. However, if Sarai says, "I am his sister," he hoped to gain gifts as they will come to him with gifts to win over his permission to marry Sarai. The sages explain that when Avram took his family from Charan, he did not have all the riches. They go even further that he was poor. So, when his family arrived in Mitsrayim, he had no way to support his family. Avram had no interest in money, but he needed money to survive the famine. By having Sarai say that she was his sister, Avram ensured that the Mitsrites would give him gifts so he would have the means to sustain himself, which was the reason he came to Mitsrayim in the first place, as it is said, "The righteous eats to the satisfying of

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<sup>6</sup> Pesachim 64b

his being.” (Mishle 13:25) A tzaddik does not indulge in food and drink for the sake of physical pleasure, but rather, to sustain his soul. Avram therefore said, “וְחַיְתָּה נַפְשִׁי בְּגִלְלֶךָ” (*ve·cha·ye·tah naf·shi big·la·lech*; my soul may live.)

It is written, “But יְהוָה plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Avram’s wife.” (v. 17) The Torah repeats that Sarai is Avram’s wife to show that at that time Hashem was afflicting Pharaoh, He was doing so because Sarai was Avram’s wife. The Zohar<sup>7</sup> says that each time the angel struck Pharaoh, he told him that it was “because of the matter of Sarai, the wife of Avram.”

It is written, “And Pharaoh called Abram and said, ‘What is this you have done to me? Why did you not inform me that she was your wife?’ ‘Why did you say, ‘She is my sister’? And so I was going to take her for my wife. Look, here is your wife, take her and go.’” The sages say the difficulty here is why did Pharaoh repeat his question and expressed in two different ways.

To understand above verse, let us examine Avimelech’s words to Avram, “What did you see that you did such a thing?” (20:10) Avimelech questioned Avram to explain to him why he found it necessary to hid Sarai’s status. But Pharaoh did not ask for an explanation as his questions were merely complaints about Avram’s deception. Pharaoh understood his people. So, he knew Avram’s reason for saying that Sarai was his sister, that Avram was afraid that if it became known that Sarai was his wife, he might die on her account. Avimelech, however was puzzled by Avraham’s deception because his people were not so corrupt.

Or HaChaim explains: Pharaoh asked, “Why did you not inform me that she was your wife,” but in his question he omitted the word ‘me’ and just said, “Why did you say, ‘She is my sister’?” As explained above, Pharaoh knew the reason why Avram felt compelled to hide Sarai’s identity as it would have not been reasonable for him to only to say, “Why did you say, ‘She is my sister’?”

However, the first question, “Why did you not tell me” that she is your wife? Meaning, you (Avram) “could have told me in private that Sarai was your wife. This way, even if you say, ‘She is my sister’ to the people, they would not harm you. You would have been protected from the people without causing me, the king, the evil of sinning with her!”

Pharaoh made this complaint to Avram because he was so certain about himself that he would not commit such heinous act as killing Avram if he had known Sarai was his wife. And he also assumed that Avram would not suspect him of such evil. Thus, Pharaoh argued that Avram had no reason to hide Sarai’s identity from him. On the contrary, if Avram told him that Sarai was his wife, he (Pharaoh) would have helped him from the danger and offer protection since he was a moral king (in his own mind). This is the meaning of “Why did you not tell me that she is your wife?”

Then, Pharaoh added, “Why did you say, ‘She is my sister’?” He reasoned that if Avram said, “Is there an obligation on every man to bring wife to Mitsrayim and to tell the Pharaoh that she is my wife?” To deflect such argument, Pharaoh said, “Why did you say, ‘She is my sister’?” He is saying, “I know she is a very beautiful woman. But if you have told me in private of Sarai’s status, I could have protected her in some way. Also, since you said, ‘She is my sister,’ you should have thought or concerned that I might take her as a wife. Of course, if you have not said, ‘She is my sister,’ I would assume that she is your wife and not take her forcibly.” Thus, Pharaoh’s second question is an expansion of his first one: ‘You’, in particular, should have told ‘me’, in particular, that she is your wife and not your sister.

<sup>7</sup> The Zohar, Vol. I, 82b

Avram did not answer any questions posed by Pharaoh, whereas he responded to Avimelech when he was asked why Avram misled him and his people as to Sarai's status. For Avram reasoned that hiding the status of Sarai was because he suspected Pharaoh himself was prepared to kill Avram on account of his wife, and to say so to Pharaoh would have not been appropriate. Thus, he remained silent. For this reason, Pharaoh quickly "commanded his men" to escort Avram, Sarai, and his family out of Mitsrayim. (v. 20)