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ON PARSHAS LECH LECHA - 5757

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Shiur HaRav Soloveichik on Parshas Lech Lecha

[The Rav began the shiur by saying that he heard from his father that without the methodology of studying Talmud that was introduced by his grandfather Reb Chaim, it would be impossible today to study Halacha with students who are trained scientifically. The method of Reb Chaim is a most modern method that involves classification, conceptualization and definition, particularly to look for unity in Halacha. The problems need to be formulated and understood. The question and the answer are of secondary importance. This was also the method that Reb Akiva Eiger's children ascribed to him as well. The Rav noted that he was a forerunner of Reb Chaim. When it comes to the study of Tanach there was no Reb Chaim. We don't tend to look enough between the lines and get hold of the larger picture. The Ramban was unique in his ability to see and understand ideas in Chumash. His spiritual perceptions are exceptionally fine and sensitive to every word of chumash. The Ramban contributed greatly to the philosophy of religion because he was original in his thoughts and approach to religion.]

Vayomer Hashem el Avraham Lech Lecha Mayartzecha etc. According to the Ramban Sefer Breishis is called Sefer Hayetzira. It deals with creation of the world and each being and the life events of the patriarchs, continuing through the death of Joseph. It is not limited to the simple topics of reation of the world and man. What happened to them will be paradigmatic and

symbolic of what will happen to their children through the ages. According to the Ramban we don't look at the events that occurred to the patriarchs from hindsight as being symbolic, rather they foretell the events that will happen to the Bnay Yisrael. There is pre-determination of what will happen to Bnay Yisrael. The Ramban lays down this concept saying that the reason that the description of the travels and well-digging etc. are described at great length because each event forecasts an event that will occur to Bnay Yisrael. The sensational thing in the Ramban is that we may derive from an event a similar event that that will transpire in the lives of the children. Any event that happened to the patriarchs and is recorded and translated will never be invalidated and will have to occur at some later point in the lives of Bnay Yisrael. For example, the destruction of the 2 Batei Mikdash are foretold by the 2 wells that Yitzchak dug and were filled in by Plishtim. The experiences of the patriarchs determined the future course of history.

Rashi and the Chachmei Sefard raised the problem that Artzecha Umimoladetecha Umibais Avicha means Ur Kasdim and not Charan (the Ramban disagrees). Abraham left Ur Kasdim long before he received the commandment of Lech Lecha. Rashi rearranges the order of the verse of Lech Lecha. Even though Avraham already left Ur Kasdim his native land and ancestral home established in Charan, he was told to go even further away from his fathers home that was newly established in Charan. According to Rashi, Terach left Ur Kasdim voluntarily. Avraham's further migration came later.

Ibn Ezra disagrees with Rashi and rearranges the verse (Ain Mukdam Umeuchar Batorah). According to him the command to leave Ur Kasdim was given to Avraham before he left Ur Kasdim. The opening verses of Lech Lecha should be conceptually inserted before the verse of Vayikach Terach Es Avraham at the end of Parshas Noach. The next Parsha would begin with Avraham leaving Charan and going to Canaan. The Ramban rejected this approach. He raised the question on the Ibn Ezra that the Torah describes Terach as the central figure in the migration from Ur Kasdim to Charan, not Avraham. Terach's decision to leave was spontaneous and apparently Avraham left with him out of obedience and not because of a divine commandment.

If we would accept the opinion of the Ibn Ezra we would find the answer to another puzzling question. Chazal stated that Terach repented and embraced the new faith of his son, a Gd that he could not see or touch. This is an interesting statement because the Navi Yehoshua describes Terach and his father Nachor as idolators. Rashi quotes this on the verse Vatah Tavo El Avosecha Bsayva Tova. Why would Hashem promise to unite him with father who is an idolator? From here we learn that Terach did Teshuva. When did Terach make this change in his life to embrace the Elokay Avraham?

We need to look at this conversion in the context of his relationship with his son Avraham. Terach was the one who sought to destroy his son physically after the episode of the destruction of the idols. Terach informed the king of Avraham's outrageous actions knowing full well that it would lead to a death sentence for his son. In general, tension between father and son results in deep enmity usually on the part of the son towards the father. When the hatred is on the part of the father toward the son it is indicative of a mental aberration bordering on the psychopathic. It indicates a sick soul that delights in destructive behavior. Chazal wanted to emphasize that Terach was sick with hatred towards his son. He was willing to sacrifice his family and everything he stood for and sacrifice his son. When did Terach change his behavior?

It happened when Terach decided to abandon Ur Kasdim and move his family to Charan. It was a strange decision, one that is most perplexing to understand when looked at through the background of the Midrash. Terach is described as being one of the leading citizens of Ur Kasdim, some even state that he was related to the royal household. It was a difficult move for Terach to uproot himself from the advanced society that existed in Ur Kasdim and move to a primitive place like Charan. Ur Kasdim society was the most developed society in antiquity, industrially, scientifically. Its society was quite sophisticated and modern for its time. His migration was counter to normal human nature in migrating to a less sophisticated society. He was the

father of the of the idolatrous society in Ur Kasdim. What caused him to abandon all this? The answer is Hirhur Teshuva. The thought that perhaps his son Avraham was correct and that his philosophy was wrong. The Baal Teshuva was responsible for the decision to leave Ur Kasdim and begin life anew in Charan.

Hashem waited for this moment to arrive for Terach to be willing to make this extreme sacrifice and undergo the tribulations that the immigrant must endure. When he made this decision, Hashem told Avraham to leave.

We don't know if Terach knew of Avraham's contacts with Hashem. The Rav noted that the Torah does not [usually] engage in physical descriptions of people. In Tanach we do find them (e.g. David). Typically these descriptions are not relevant to the unfolding events of the covenantal community and the realization of the great vision foreshadowed by the patriarchs. For example, by the Akeidah the Torah is interested only in the event. It does not mention whether Avraham knew the way to the mountain or if he inquired as to directions from anyone. There is only one subject matter: Avraham's compliance with the divine order to sacrifice Yitzchak. In the story of Jacob sending Joseph to search for his brothers, the Torah describes in detail the encounter and conversation between Joseph and a man, who Chazal say was the angel Gavriel. At first glance this narrative appears to be inconsistent with the usual style of the Torah. Why tell us all this? Because Joseph's mission was not planned by Jacob. Chazal say that at first glance Jacob should not have sent Joseph to look for his brothers. He knew very well the enmity of the brothers towards Joseph. Hashem forced him to send him, because the edict of Ger Yihye Zaracha needed to be fulfilled. We don't know if Terach knew of the secret that Hashem commanded Avraham to migrate to Canaan. We do know that when the message came through for Avraham to leave. Avraham found to his great surprise that his fathers bags had been long ago packed ready to leave on the great march to Canaan.

The Rav said that the objection of the Ramban to the opinion of the Ibn Ezra as to Terach being the central figure in the migration to Canaan is no longer critical. That Avraham complied with the word of Hashem is well known. One only needs to look at the Akeidah to see the depths of commitment of Avraham to Hashem. The greatest story in Parshas Noach is not the departure of Avraham from Ur Kasdim but is the Teshuva of Terach and his abandonment of all he knew and loved to follow the Gd of his son Avraham. The greatest story of the Baal Teshuva is contained in the verse of Vayikach Terach. The Torah tells us all this in a few words. But the verse is not so much concerned with the journey they took, but rather the dramatic change that occurred in Terach.

Avraham was not always successful in his attempts to convert his own family to his faith. He did not succeed with his brothers, nephews, he had limited success with his nephew Lot. The word Lecha means that Avraham and Sarah alone should go to Canaan, no other family members should come along. Lot tagged along. Once Lot decided to remain at Avraham's side, Avraham had to teach him and train him, even though he did not want him to come along. In order to be a great teacher one must be able to reach his own family. Teaching begins at home. In order for Avraham to be considered the Av Hamon Goyim he had to be able to show success within his family. Terach was his success story. Avraham saw Terach was ready to leave so he did not say anything regarding his own desire to leave. He was respectful of his father and kept in the background to give the impression that it was Terach alone who initiated the decision to leave Ur Kasdim. He knew that Terach, the Baal Teshuva, had attained a very high level and did not want to diminish the great achievement and sacrifice that Terach decided to make.

There is a verse in Job, Mi Yiten Mitamay Tahor Halo Echad. Who can make the Tamay to yield Tahor. The Midrash says that this is Avraham from Terach. Avraham was a great prophet but he achieved his covenant with Hashem and prophecy after great searching. Moshe on the other hand was surprised with the gift of prophecy and imposed with it by Hashem. Avraham asked many questions and sought Hashem. As the Ramban describes, Avraham in his youth was immersed with the people of the generation yet he was constantly questioning their practices looking for the truth. He had the

mind of a genius. He had vision and asked questions. There was depth to his intuition, there was breadth to his understanding. Otherwise Hashem would not have chosen him as the Av Hamon Goyim. Such traits are hereditary. Terach Passed these traits on to him. Terach wasted his talents for a long time. Avraham utilized his talents.

The Rav quoted the Rashi on El Haaretz Asher Arekah: Hashem did not reveal to him the identity of the land in order to increase his love for the land and to reward him for each statement. A similar approach is used when describing the commands of going to the Akeidah. Hashem did not give Avraham any directions to travel. How did he know where to go? Avraham traveled from place to place, finally arriving in Canaan. When he arrived he did not know immediately that this will be his land. Only later did Hashem tell him that this will be his homeland. The Ramban, like Rashi, said that Avraham did not receive directions. But how did he know where to go? Should he go north, south, east or west? Similar to the Akeidah how did he know which mountain to travel to?

Avraham used the term Hisu Osi Elokim, when Hashem caused Avraham to be lost and bewildered, confused as to direction to go. The Ramban says that he wandered like a stray sheep not knowing how to return home. Hashem did not guide Avraham. He wanted to bewilder and mystify him, to move on till he found the land intuitively, till he magically felt the attraction of the land, the way birds are mechanically to migrate in fall and spring. We don't understand this pull, it is mechanical. Hashem wanted Avraham to develop the ability to distinguish between Kodesh and Chol, and to be guided on his own intuition into the land of Canaan.

The verse states that Hashem chose Avraham and took him out of Ur Kasdim and changed his name to Avraham. even though he wandered around as a lost sheep for a long time, He felt intuitively that his destination was Canaan. He toured Canaan and spent time there even before being told by Hashem that he had arrived in the right land and it would be given to his children as their homeland.

The Ramban adds that Avraham guessed where to go based on his intuition because he had no premises on which to base his directions. But Terach also left to go to Eretz Canaan, the Ramban mentions that Avraham had Daas Aviv. Terach also headed to Canaan. The Ramban points out that not only was Avraham blessed with uncanny intuition, but so was Terach.

He also felt a mysterious pull on those that were thirsting for the knowledge of Hashem. Why was Canaan intuitively selected by both Terach and Avraham? What attracted them to this land? Here is a central idea of Judaism. The idea of Kedusha pulled them both to Canaan. Major decisions in one life are sudden and intuitive. Secondary decisions are based on careful calculation. Avraham and Terach made a major intuitive decision.

People respond to a stimulus. The Dor Hamabul responded to the challenge of beauty. Their philosophy was that one must succumb to the power of beauty and give in to the aesthetic challenge. They responded to the fair women who were the symbol of beauty. Modern man is still captive to the aesthetic experience, the exploitation of enjoyment in life, making use of all that is available. The serpent in the garden of Eden was the first one to describe this aesthetic pull when describing the Eitz Hadaas as Nechmad L'aynayim. The aesthetic experience is boundless: you want to grab as much as possible. It has no laws that restrict man. The ethical life involves restraints. I can not take what ever I wish whenever I want it. This is directly opposed to the aesthetic experience which says no limits. I resent authority and tradition. There is one moment only, the fleeting present. The Rav compared western society with the Dor Hamabul. Such aphildophy results in the disintegration of society.

The Dor Haflaga thought that power was the great challenge to man, that he be able to set himself up as god. Technological achievement, according to the Dor Haflaga, was viewed as the end to be worshiped, it makes him proud to be a man. The ability to control their environment was the greatest goal. The Rav compared Communist society with the Dor Haflaga. Living for the present with no eye on the past and future causes breakdown of society. However, the Dor Haflaga was a highly organized society that prized technological achievement above all else. They would weep for a dropped

brick that they spent years carrying, yet did not shed a tear for a baby that would fall from the tower. The technological achievement is more important than the human being, along the goal to attaining conquest and infinity. Man wants to be triumphant, he wants to be a hero. He hates to be defeated.

Avraham proclaimed a new idea to the world: Kedusha. The main goal is not to gain the maximum pleasure but to find Hashem and cling to him. To do this man does not need to always be successful. Man can afford to be defeated, as Avraham was throughout his years of wandering. As long as he is pulled in the right direction he achieves and is successful. Kedusha is frightening to those who are afraid to fail and those who lack imagination. Those that have imagination and are bold are pulled to Kedusha instinctively, mechanically.

David describes his quest for Hashem as that of the gazelle searching for the brook. Why did he use the metaphor of the gazelle? It would have been obvious to simply describe it in terms of human attraction to Hashem? If one observes the nature of animals in their mechanical drive that pushes them to find water, they persevere until they find it and are able to drink. David wanted to describe man in the same way as needing that mechanical instinctive push to Hashem. If man tries to deny this urge he breaks down. This drive is to be found in every person no matter if he is an atheist or an agnostic. He still has this drive to Kedusha like the gazelle to water. Avraham and Terach were driven mechanically and were not satisfied until they found Hashem.

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"ohr@jer1.co.il" "weekly@jer1.co.il" * TORAH WEEKLY * Highlights of the Weekly Torah Portion with "Sing, My Soul!" thoughts on Shabbos Zemiros Parshas Lech Lecha For the week ending 13 Cheshvan 5757 25 & 25 October 1996 <http://www.ohr.org.il>
Overview Ten generations have passed since the time of Noach. Man has descended to lower spiritual depths. In the year 1948 after the Creation, Avram is born. Through observing the world, Avram comes to the inescapable Truth of Hashem's existence, and thus merits that Hashem reveals Himself 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 who he 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 tells 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. After a quarrel over grazing rights breaks out 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 Sara. Hashem promises Avraham a son, Yitzhak, despite Avraham being ninety-nine years old and Sara ninety. On that day, Avraham circumcises himself, Yishmael and all his household.

Insights Date with Destiny "Go for yourself from your land, from your relatives, and from your father's house." (12:1) Wheeling his lone Lancaster above the target at eighteen hundred feet, Freddy leveled off and tried to bomb the target one more time. Suddenly the cockpit radio spluttered into life: "Freddy! -- What are you playing at?! Get out of there now! There's more flak around those dams than guests at a Buck House tea party!" "Sorry, skipper. I'm going in one more time -- even if it means that you'll have to pick up my medal for me..." Hashem tested Avraham Avinu ten times. The first of these tests was to leave his land, his birthplace and his father's house. However, the 'extra words' here -- "for yourself" -- indicate that Hashem told Avraham that this journey was for his own benefit. If Avraham Avinu knew that leaving his roots was for his own benefit, how could this be a test? The answer is that sometimes it is easier for us to serve G-d when we think we are being self-sacrificing, than when we know there's something in it for ourselves. It appeals to our innate sense of self-dramatization to see ourselves as martyrs to the cause. Many are the epics that play in the cinemas of our minds in which we have the title role of the selfless hero, taking arms against a sea of troubles, and all without benefit or profit to ourselves. The test that Hashem gave Avraham was that he would have to work without the romanticism of self-sacrifice and still do Hashem's will with the same enthusiasm as some dashing hero flying his plane to a date with destiny. Based on Rabbi Yechezkel Weinfeld, as heard from Rabbi Daniel Travis

Counting Stars I "And He took him outside, and said, 'Gaze, now, toward the Heaven, and count the stars, if you are able to count them!' And He said to him, 'So will be your offspring!'" (15:5) The Jewish People are like the stars. Even though there are a myriad of stars, Hashem calls every one of them by name. Even though there are a myriad of Jewish souls, every one has its own name -- its own purpose and uniquely appointed task. The purpose of every soul is unique and irreplaceable, as is the purpose of every star. When we look at the myriad of stars in the sky, they sometimes seem to meld into an amorphous mass, merely a wash of light against the vast blackness of space. Each of them, however, is a separate world of light. Such is the soul, shining its own unique radiance to illuminate its own unique corner of the galaxy of the spirit. Based on the Ksav Sofer, as heard from Rabbi Calev Gestetner

Counting Stars II Avraham Avinu's unique quality was that he obeyed Hashem even in contradiction to human logic. When Hashem took Avraham outside and told him to count the stars, that's exactly what Avraham started to do! "One, two, three..." Hashem said to him "Can you count them?" Is it possible for a man to count the stars? Thus will be your seed: They will do the will of their Father in heaven even when the task seems hopeless. That quality of unbending, unquestioning loyalty is what Avraham Avinu bequeathed to the Jewish People in his spiritual genes. Rabbi Meir Shapiro

The Letter of The Law "If so much as a thread or a shoe-strap; or if I shall take from anything of yours! ... Far from me! Only what the young men have eaten..." (14:23,24) For his part in defeating the four kings, the king of Sodom offered Avraham a share of the victors' spoils, as was his right. But Avraham would take nothing, for he wanted to show his devotion to Hashem, declining personal gain so that the king of Sodom could not claim that he made Avraham rich. However, Avraham applied this stringency to himself alone. When it came to his followers, he permitted them to take everything that was lawful. This teaches us a powerful lesson. Never to be 'frum' on someone else's spiritual expense account! If, after careful consideration, we want to take upon ourselves stringencies, that's up to us. But from others, we should never demand, or even expect, more than the letter of the law. The Chafetz Chaim

Haftorah: Isaiah 40:27-41:16 Avraham Avinu 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. 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, and acknowledge that Hashem is G-d alone." The task of the Jewish People has always been to deliver this message to the world. The prophet Isaiah encourages Israel to persevere both in the face of their own failures and exile, and despite the resistance and apathy of the nations. Hashem has promised them that ultimately they will prevail, for though the Jewish People may seem worm-like in their insignificance and powerlessness, they will vanquish those who now seem invincible.

Dust and Jewels "...as much dust as Avraham used, turned into swords..." (41:2). Nachum Ish Gamzu was a man whose very name expressed his essence -- whatever happened to him he would always say -- "This is also for the good!" He never doubted that what Hashem does is always for the best.

Nachum was chosen to travel to the Emperor and present him with a box filled with precious stones as tribute from the Jewish People. On the way, and unknown to Nachum, the jewels were switched with worthless dust. With great ceremony the 'jewels' were presented to the Emperor and slowly the box was opened in front of him... The Emperor's rage knew no bounds at this unbelievable insult from the Jews. Suddenly, the prophet Eliyahu appeared in the guise of one of the Emperor's ministers and said: "Your Imperial Majesty, this must be the special dust that the Jews' forefather Avraham used to defeat the four kings as it says '...as much dust as Avraham used, turned into swords...' Let us, at least, try the dust and see if it works for us as well." The Emperor agreed and Hashem caused a miracle -- the dust indeed proved to be lethal against the Emperor's enemies. We must remember that even in the darkest moments of exile, when all our jewels look like dust, Hashem will bring the prophet Eliyahu to announce the dawn of redemption. Based on the Midrash

Sing, My Soul! Insights into the Zemiros sung at the Shabbos table
Ribon Kol HaOlamim - "Master of All the Worlds..." For I have lit my candles and arranged my bed ... in honor of Shabbos. Ki hidlakti nayrosai, vhitzati mitosi...lichvod yom hashabbos In the Torah passage about Jews observing the Shabbos and establishing the Shabbos "ledorosam" (Shmos 31:16) the literal meaning of the word is "for their generations." A careful look at the word in the Torah indicates that it is spelled in such a manner that it could be read as "ledirosam" which means "to their homes." The message communicated by this spelling is that if a Jew lights Shabbos candles, sets his table and arranges his furniture in a manner which transforms his weekday house into a "Shabbosdig" home then the Divine Presence declares that it wishes to enter such a home. But if the spirit of Shabbos is not reflected in the house the Divine Presence avoids a home which lacks a Jewish flavor.

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Parsha Pearls From Meir Tzvi Berman Parshas Lech Lecha
"LECH LECHA MEI'RTZCHA UMI'MOLADTICHA UMBAIS OVICHA"; "Go for yourself from your land, and from your birthplace and from your fathers house." As Rashi infers from the words "for you," this move was made for the benefit of Avraham Avinu, himself. Why, then, is this considered one of Avraham's Ten Tests? To answer, Avraham knew that if Hashem wanted, he could get all the blessings without needing to move. Avraham did not see a need for him to move in order to get the blessings. Doing what one does not understand and suspending one's own judgment even for one's benefit is a hard task. (Darash Moshe)

During the beginning of his exile in Egypt, Avram was forced to create an impression that Sarah was his sister. Lot did not cooperate and did not reveal to the Egyptians that Sarah was Avram's wife. In this merit, Lot was saved from the destruction of Sodom. We later find Lot inviting guests and taking upon himself great personal risk while residing in that city. Yet, this does not appear to be as significant as his not informing on Avram. To answer, Lot's hospitality was a trait that he absorbed through his association with Avram. However, his not informing on Avram, although not as remarkable, was the result of his personal training. Therefore, it was this merit which stood by him in time of need. What counts is where we bring

ourselves, not so much where outside influences bring us. (Darash Moshe)
"VAYOMER AVRAM EL MELECH SODOM HAREEMOSI YADI EL HASHEM KAIL ELYON KONEH SHAMAYIM VA'ARETZ. IM MICHAT VA'AD S;ROCH NA'AL V'IM EKACH MIKOL ASHER LOCH V'LO SOMAR ANEE' HE'ESHARTI ESS AVRAM"; "And Avram said to the king of Sidom "I lift my hand to hashem the exalted G-d who acquired Heaven and Earth, if I will take (anything) from a thread to a shoelace or if I take anything from you letting you say that you made Avram rich."

Avram realized that everything which he did with his hands was really because of Hashem. Therefore as the one who "lifts his hands" to Hashem, he realized that his own hands and their work are G-d given. Avram did not feel that he should keep spoils of war but rather they should be returned to their original owners. He did not feel that this property was sent to him by Hashem, and he had no intentions of claiming it as a prize, just because he had fought the war. (Peh Hakodosh)

"ml@etzion.org.il" PARSHAT LECH L'CHA

Note: This will be my last shiur on the yhe-parsha list. I have finished close to two yearly cycles of Parsha shiur, and I feel that it is important that you receive Parsha shiurim from other ramim in the Yeshiva as well, which should help you become familiar with other approaches to Chumash study.

Thank you so much for being my virtual students, and I hope you have gained a better appreciation of Chumash through our weekly discussions. I also want to thank Benjy Ellis (England), whom I forgot to thank last year, for his unfaltering assistance in editing during most of last year, and all the other "chevra" over these two years, too numerous to mention individually. In regard to my future plans, and availability of previous shiurim, see the second email which you should receive together with this shiur.

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH PROJECT
(VBM)

PARSHAT HASHAVUA
PARSHAT LECH L'CHA
by Menachem Leibtag

THIS WEEK'S SHIUR, DISCUSSING THE REASON FOR GOD'S CHOICE OF AVRAHAM AVINU, IS DEDICATED IN THE MEMORY OF MY FATHER - RAV AVRAHAM BEN RAV SHMUEL HA'KOHEN - WHOSE 'HA'KAMAT MATZEYVA' WILL TAKE PLACE THIS COMING WEEK AND ALSO IN HONOR OF THE BAR MITZVAH OF MY SON BINYAMIN NEXT WEEK ON THE 17th OF CHESHVAN.

PARSHAT LECH L'CHA

Why does God choose Avraham Avinu? Did he simply win a 'Divine lottery'?

Although one would expect that the Torah should provide the answer to such a fundamental question, it appears as though Sefer Breishit skirts the issue entirely. In contrast with Parshat Noach which immediately informs us WHY Noach is chosen - "for he was a righteous man..." (6:9), Parshat Lech L'cha never reveals the reason for God's choice of Avraham Avinu. This week's shiur attempts to tackle this Biblical enigma by focussing on the nature of this Divine choice.

BACKGROUND / REVIEW Our thematic study of Chumash is based on the assumption that a logical flow exists from parsha to parsha. The first ten chapters of Sefer Breishit, discussing creation, man's sin, his punishment and the 're-creation' after the Flood, follow a very rational flow. However, as discussed in last week's shiur, at the end of Parshat Noach we find a sudden change in focus - from universalistic to particularistic. In contrast to the discussion of ALL the children of Noach in TOLDOT BNEI NOACH (chapter 10), TOLDOT SHEM (11:10) begins a NEW section of Sefer Breishit, focussing SPECIFICALLY on the family of Avraham. If this assumption concerning the flow of parshiot is correct, then we must assume that the last story of the first section - MIGDAL BAVEL (11:1-9) - should explain the REASON for God's choice of Avraham Avinu! Therefore, we must study the story of MIGDAL BAVEL in search of a thematic connection (and hopefully also a textual parallel) to the Torah's presentation of the story of Avraham Avinu. [We call this methodology.] MIGDAL BAVEL (expanded from last week's shiur) How do we know that the generation of Migdal Bavel sinned? In contrast to the Torah's opening description of the generation of the Flood which states that everyone was wicked and corrupt (6:5,10-13), the opening psukim of the Migdal Bavel narrative leave barely a

clue to any specific sin: "Everyone on earth had the same language and the same words. And as they traveled from the east, they came upon a valley in the land of Shinar and settled there. They said to one another: Come, LET US make bricks and burn them hard. Brick became their stone, and bitumen their mortar. And they said, Come LET US build US a city and a tower with its top in the sky, AND WE WILL MAKE A NAME FOR OURSELVES, lest WE shall be scattered all over the world." (11:1-4)

Not only is it hard to find a specific sin in these psukim, it seems that this generation may even be worthy of praise: * Is not achieving unity a positive goal? (11:1) * Is there anything wrong with living in a valley? (11:2) * Is not the use of human ingenuity to develop man-made building materials, such as bricks to replace stone, a positive advancement of society? (11:3) [An industrial revolution!] * What possibly could be wrong with building a city, or a tower? Is urbanization a crime? (11:4)

Nevertheless, they are punished: God mixes up their languages, causing them to abandon their enterprise (11:5-7). What did they do wrong? Chazal focus their criticism of this generation on their antagonistic attitude towards God (see Rashi 11:1). The final and key phrase in the Torah's explanation of the tower (11:4) points to additional fault: "v'naase LANU SHEM - WE shall make a NAME for OURSELVES" [See also Sanhedrin 109a]

The use of the first person plural - not only in this pasuk, but also in the ALL of the first four psukim (11:1-4) - reflects the ego-centric nature of this generation. [Note also the repeated use of the Hebrew word "hava" (let US).]

Rather than devoting their endeavors to the NAME OF GOD, this generation totally removes God from their goals and aspirations, emphasizing instead man's dominion and strength. Although this generation is undoubtedly more refined and cultured than the generation of the Flood, they have united for the sake of an unholy end. God had higher hopes for mankind. He had hoped that man would use his God-given talents and potential towards a more spiritual goal. As we explained in last week's shiur, they instituted an anthropocentric society instead of a theocentric one - to MAKE A NAME for THEMSELVES. God could not allow this project to continue. However, instead of destruction, mankind now requires RE-DIRECTION - to take those very same virtues of unity and creativity, and channel them towards a higher and more spiritual goal. Against this background, we find God's sudden choice of Avraham Avinu: "And I will make you a GREAT NATION... and through you ALL the families of the earth will be blessed" (12:1-3) Avraham Avinu is CHOSEN FOR A PURPOSE - to direct mankind back in the proper direction. He is given a special land, NOT AS A REWARD, but rather IN ORDER to fulfill that purpose. God desires a special nation which will represent Him - to educate all the nations and to catalyze their spiritual development. Although Avraham himself is only an individual, he is destined to be the forefather of this nation. [Its development is a process which will take some four hundred years (see 15:13-20).] To become this nation, Avraham's offspring must multiply (ZERA), and then establish their nation in a special land (ARETZ). This basic point is not only God's opening statement to Avraham when he first arrives in Eretz Canaan (12:7), it is also repeated each time that God speaks to the AVOT in regard to their future (see 13:14-15, 15:18, 17:8, 26:3, 28:13, 35:12, etc.).

BET-EL & SHEM HASHEM Even though this goal can be totally fulfilled only once this special nation is established, it is significant that Avraham himself attempts to achieve it, at least partially. If we trace the Torah's description of Avraham's first sojourn to Eretz Canaan, we find a certain centrality to Bet-el. Upon arriving, and after building a MIZBAYACH in Shchem, Avraham continues to Bet-El, the climax of his "aliyah": "From there he moved up the mountain range to BET-EL... and he built a MIZBAYACH there and called out b'SHEM HaSHEM - in God's NAME! (12:8).

Similarly, it is not by chance that in the next chapter, when Avraham comes back to Eretz Canaan after his stay in Egypt, he returns specifically to

this very same MIZBAYACH in Bet-El. There, once again he calls out b'SHEM HaSHEM (13:1-4)! The Torah's emphasis on Avraham's calling out in God's NAME in Bet-el is thematically significant, for it constitutes a contrasting parallel to the events at Migdal Bavel. There mankind focused on their own name - "v'naaseh LANU SHEM". Now Avraham must fix that cardinal mistake - he call's out in GOD'S NAME - "va'yikra b'SHEM HASHEM"! It is for this very purpose that Avraham was chosen. This understanding is reflected in the commentary of Ramban, on this pasuk (12:8): "... and Avraham would call out there in front of the Mizbayach and make known God's existence to all mankind..."

One could even suggest additional significance to the two occasions when Avraham calls out in God's Name in Bet-el. The first time is upon Avraham's arrival to Eretz Canaan from MESOPOTAMIA (Ur Kasdim), and the second time, upon his arrival from EGYPT. Considering that it is Avraham's destiny to bring God's Name to ALL nations, it is significant that he is promised a land at the CROSSROADS between these two CENTERS of ancient civilization, calling out in God's Name upon each arrival.

A BIBLICAL THEME This concept, that Am Yisrael is chosen in order to bring God's Name to mankind develops not only as a theme in Sefer Breishit, but also in the entire Tanach. In Sefer Dvarim, Bnei Yisrael are commanded to establish a national religious center "ba'makom asher yivchar Hashem l'shakeyn SHMO sham" - in the place which God will choose for His NAME to dwell there (Dvarim 12:5,11). As we explained in our shiurim on Sefer Dvarim, this phrase, repeated numerous time in the sefer, describes the BET HA'MIKDASH - which is to become a focal point through which God's reputation will become known to all mankind. Some four hundred years later, when the MIKDASH if finally built, this same theme is reflected in Shlomo's prayer at its dedication ceremony: "If a foreigner comes from a distant land for the SAKE OF YOUR NAME, for they shall hear about YOUR GREAT NAME... when he comes to pray at this House... grant him what he asks, thus ALL THE PEOPLES OF THE EARTH will KNOW YOUR NAME and revere You, as do Bnei Yisrael, and they will recognize that YOUR NAME is attached to this House which I have built." (Melachim I 8:43 /see also Shmuel II 7:22-27) MIGDAL BAVEL AND THE BET HA'MIKDASH The famous messianic prophecy of Yeshayahu creates an intriguing parallel to Migdal Bavel: "In the days to come, the MOUNTAIN of BET HA'SHEM (the Temple Mount) will stand high above the mountains... and ALL THE NATION shall gaze on it with joy. Then MANY PEOPLES shall go and say: Come let us go up to the House of God, that He may instruct us in His ways and that we may walk in His paths - for TORAH shall come forth out of Tzion, and the word of God from Yerushalayim..." (2:1-4)

Just as in the story of Migdal Bavel, here we find the UNITY of all nations, however in striking contrast. Now they gather to a MOUNTAIN top (man looking up), instead of a VALLEY (man looking down), to the CITY of Yerushalayim, and to its TOWER - the Bet HaMikdash. Now, mankind is united for a common goal, to listen to word of God, as taught by His people.

In contrast to Migdal Bavel, the Mikdash becomes the symbol of a theocentric society, the ultimate goal of all mankind.

The following table reviews this contrasting parallel:

MIGDAL BAVEL	BET HA'MIKDASH	-----	-----
Unity for man	Unity for God	Valley	Mountain a city
the city of Jerusalem	a tower		the Temple
			Man's reputation
God's reputation ("shem Hashem")			

In the prophecy of Z'fania we find an additional parallel to the Migdal Bavel narrative in his description of the messianic times: "For then I will make the peoples pure of speech - SAFA BRURA - so that they will all call out b'SHEM HASHEM, and worship Him with one accord." (3:9)

Again we find unity for the purpose of calling out in God's Name. In Z'fania we find an additional textual parallel in use of the word "safa" (=language).

REWARD OR PURPOSE In light of our discussion, we can re-examine our original question. We have shown that Avraham Avinu was chosen to fulfill a SPECIFIC MISSION - to become the forefather of a nation which

will lead all nations to a theocentric existence, refocussing mankind's energies in the proper direction. Thus, God's choice of Avraham Avinu was not in REWARD for any specific deed which Avraham performed, but rather for a SPECIFIC PURPOSE. Undoubtedly, as reflected in numerous Midrashim, Avraham must have been a man of extraordinary stature who possessed the necessary potential to fulfill this goal. However, the Torah opts not to mention these merits, focussing instead on his mission - thereby emphasizing the primacy of Avraham's designated task. This same principle applies in all generations. God's choice of Am Yisrael is not in REWARD for their merits, but rather IN ORDER that they fulfill the mission with which He has entrusted them. As this mission is eternal, so too is God's choice of the Jewish Nation. This Biblical theme stresses our need to focus not on the exclusive PRIVILEGES of being God's special Nation, but rather on its constant RESPONSIBILITIES.

shalom, u'le'hitraot

menachem

FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. One could suggest that events that took place at Migdal Bavel represent the natural course of the history of nations. People with a common goal join together for a common purpose, and build a society. Sooner or later, splinter groups with other ideals and goals form, often challenging the authority of first group, or possibly breaking off and starting their own nation. When people disagree on a common goal, they often are not able to communicate with each other, even if they do speak the same language. [The knesset is classic example.] One could suggest that when God decides to stop this building project, he does so by breaking the people's unity, i.e. causing them to fight over their goals. Their inability to communicate with each other, to understand each other's language, stemmed from a lack of a common goal in their project.

1. Use this suggestion to explain a possible meaning of language in the Migdal Bavel narrative. 2. See Ibn Ezra (11:1 - "dvarim achadim") and if you have time - the Abarbanel on this sugya. Relate to the above...

B. Note that in the entire Migdal Bavel narrative, Hashem's name is exclusively Shem Havaya. 1. Relate this to the Shiur on Parshat Breishit.

C. This connection between Migdal Bavel and the "bechira" of Avraham Avinu is supported by the Midrash that states that Avraham was 48 years old when he recognized God for the first time. Avraham Avinu reached age 48 on the same year that Peleg died, which according to Chazal corresponds to the precise year of Migdal Bavel!

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Parsha Questions

1. What are three things diminished by travel?
2. "And all the families of the earth will be blessed through you." What does this mean?
3. Who were the souls that Avraham and Sarah 'made'?
4. Which one of Noach's three sons received the Land of Canaan as part of his inheritance?
5. What two results did Avraham hope to achieve by saying that Sarah was his sister?
6. Why did Avraham's shepherds rebuke Lot's shepherds?
7. Who was Amrafel and why was he called that?
8. What does 'hera' mean (verse 14:10)?
9. Why did the 'palit' tell Avraham that Lot had been captured?
10. Who accompanied Avraham into battle against the four kings?
11. Why did Avraham give 'maaser' to Malki-Tzedek?
12. Why didn't Avraham accept any money from the king of Sedom?
13. Why was Avraham anxious after he defeated the four kings?
14. When did the decree of four hundred years of exile begin?
15. What did Hashem indicate with his promise to Avraham that he would "come to his ancestors in peace?"
16. How did Hashem fulfill his promise to Avraham that he would be buried

in "a good old age?"

17. Why did Avraham die five years before his allotted time?
18. Why did the Jewish people need to wait until the fourth generation until they returned to Eretz Canaan?
19. Who was Hagar's father?
20. How old was Avraham when Yishmael was born?

Bonus QUESTION: Avraham didn't accept any money from The King of Sedom, not wanting the king of Sedom to say "I made Avraham rich." Why then was he willing to take presents from Pharaoh, King of Mitzrayim?

I Did Not Know That! The letter 'yud' taken away from Sarai's name has a numerical value of ten. It was divided into the two letters 'hey' -- each of which has a numerical value of five. One was added to Sarah's name, the other to Avraham's. This teaches that an ideal marriage is based on sharing. Based on Yerushalmi Sanhedrin 2:6

Recommended Reading List Ramban 12:6 A Sign for the Children 12:8 Proclaiming the Name of Hashem 12:10 The Sin of Avram 13:7 The Quarrel of the Shepherds 14:1 The Four Kings 15:12 The Dreadful Vision 16:12 Yishmael Sforno 12:17 Pharaoh's Plague 16:12 Yishmael 17:1 Attaining Perfection

Answers to this Week's Questions

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated

1. 12:2 - Offspring, wealth and fame.
2. 12:3 - A person will say to his son, "You should be like Avraham."
3. 12:5 - People they converted to the worship of Hashem.
4. 12:6 - Shem.
5. 12:13 - That the Egyptians would let him live and give him presents.
6. 13:7 - Lot's shepherds grazed their flocks in privately owned fields.
7. 14:1 - Amrafel was Nimrod. He said (Amar) to Avraham to fall (fel) into the fiery furnace.
8. 14:10 - To a mountain.
9. 14:13 - He hoped Avraham would die trying to save Lot, so that he might be able to marry Sarah.
10. 14:14 - His servant, Eliezer.
11. 14:20 - Because Malki-Tzedek was a kohen.
12. 14:23 - Hashem had promised Avraham wealth, and Avraham didn't want the King of Sedom to be the one to take credit for it.
13. 15:1 - He was afraid that his victory was Hashem's reward for all his good deeds.
14. 15:13 - With the birth of Yitzchak.
15. 15:15 - That his father, Terach, repented and became righteous.
16. 15:15 - Avraham lived to see his son, Yishmael, repent and become righteous, and he died before his grandson, Esau, became wicked.
17. 15:15 - So as not to see Esau begin his pursuit of evil.
18. 15:16 - They needed to wait until the Amorites had sinned sufficiently to deserve expulsion.
19. 16:1 - Pharaoh.
20. 16:16 - Eighty-six.

Bonus ANSWER: Avraham suspected that the King of Sedom would publicize the fact that he enriched Avraham. Pharaoh, on the other hand, wouldn't brag about his gifts to Avraham. Since they were given under embarrassing circumstances, Pharaoh would avoid mentioning them in order to avoid drawing attention to the incident. Heard from Rabbi Michael Bachar

Or: If Avraham had refused the gifts offered for Sarah, he may have aroused Pharaoh's suspicion that he was indeed her husband, and spoiled the charade. Abarbanel

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"ravfrand@torah.org" Rabbi Frand on Parshas Lech-Lecha

Actions of the Mothers Foreshadow the Fate of the Children

At the end of the parsha, the Ramban [Nachmanides] comments that Sarah insists on sending away Hagar and Yishmael. The pasuk [verse] uses the expression, "And Sarai afflicted her and she fled from her presence"

[Bereshit 16:6]. The Ramban points out, "Our Matriarch sinned with this cruelty and also Avraham in allowing her to do it."

[Of course whenever we use the expression "Our Matriarch or our Patriarch sinned", it has to always be emphasized that it is not a 'sin' in our terms. We are referring to a minuscule type of 'sins.' _We_ do not have the right to say such things. When the Rishonim [early authorities, such as the Ramban] say such things, that is when we can accept it.]

The Ramban continues and says that as punishment, "G-d gave Hagar a son

who was a 'Pere Adam,' who went on to afflict the descendants of Sarah and Avraham with all types of cruelty, for all generations." We all know who this son is, and we all know who his descendants are.

If we ever wonder why Jews have so much 'tzores' from the Arabs, like everything else in world history, it can be traced back to "The actions of the Patriarchs foreshadow (the actions that happen) to the children." This lack of compassion that was manifested by Sarah, was the cause -- as the Ramban points out -- of the persecution by the descendants of Yishmael against the Jewish people.

Easier to Die With Mesiras Nefesh than to Live With Mesiras Nefesh [Mesiras Nefesh - Giving over one's life] The parsha begins with one of the Ten Tests with which Abraham was tested [Avot 5:3]: G-d commands Avram to leave the place where he grew up, the place he was well known, the place where he was accepted, the place where he already had success... to go to an unknown place and an unknown land. This was a Test for Avraham Avinu and it was the first Test that the Torah deals with in detail. We know, based on tradition, that there was a Test that preceded this test. That was the Test of 'Ur Casdim,' where Avram was thrown into the fiery furnace in persecution for his belief in One G-d. That Test of Sanctifying G-d's Name and of Mesiras Nefesh, is only hinted at by the Torah. The Test of 'Lech Lecha' is written explicitly and in much greater detail.

At first glance, it would seem to us that the Test of being prepared to give one's life for Kiddush Hashem is a far greater accomplishment. Yet, by virtue of the fact that the Torah only reveals it through hints, the Torah is telling us ~~that in comparison to 'Lech Lecha,' it is a less significant accomplishment.~~

'Lech Lecha,' was a greater Test than the Test of 'Ur Casdim.'

In past years we have given different explanations as to why this is true. I recently the following suggestion in the name of Rabbi Dovid Kviah, in his work 'Succas Dovid': It is easier to die in Sanctification of G-d's Name, than it is to live in Sanctification of G-d's Name.

An act of Mesiras Nefesh is a tremendous achievement. However, the person only deal with the situation for a minute, thirty seconds, or however long it takes to die. Then the person is 'home free.' But, if a person lives his daily life with Kiddush Hashem and faces constant tests, that can be an even greater achievement than giving up one's own life.

If Lech Lecha entailed from Avram, going away from a country in which he had already made 'in-roads,' a country about which the Torah tells us "the souls that he had made in Haran," [12:5] and to go away to a new country where he was not known and start all over again, and to live a daily Test (of being a newcomer and a stranger) that is perhaps a greater Test than the one-time Test of dying to Sanctify G-d's name.

In davening we say "Remember for us the Akeidah, in which Avraham bound up Yitzchok his son upon the altar". The question can be asked -- why are we invoking only the merit of Avraham, what about Yitzchok? Was Yitzchok not willing to be killed to Sanctify G-d's name?

The answer is that it is more difficult for a father to live the rest of his life with the knowledge that he has sacrificed his favorite son, than it is for that son to give up his life in that one moment and not to have to live with enduring pain and anguish. It is easier to die with Mesiras Nefesh than to live with Mesiras Nefesh.

Personal Strengths and Gifts from G-d: Use Them or Lose Them

The Medrash says on the pasuk "Say you are my sister..." [12:13] that there were two personalities in Tanach that were the main characters of the story, but they made themselves secondary and as a result, they in fact became secondary. Who were they? Avraham and Barak ben Avinoam.

The story is well-known that Devorah came to Barak and charged him to go out and do battle with Sisera, but he responded that he would only go if she accompanied him [Shoftim 4:6-8]. The Medrash says that he became secondary in the events as it says "And Devorah and (then) Barak sang" [5:1]. Barak was supposed to be the main character, leading Klal Yisroel into battle. But he hesitated, looking for Devorah's support, and consequently he became secondary to her.

Likewise, Avram was the main character, but he made himself secondary to Sarai as it says "...in order that it will be good with me for your sake, and I will live as a result of you" [Bereshis 12:13]. So, he in fact became secondary, as it is written "And Avram was given goods because of her..." [12:16].

This Medrash is telling us a powerful lesson. The Yefe Toar comments on this Medrash, "This is an open rebuke against false modesty. At a time when one is supposed to take charge, when the hour calls for him to be the main character, he should not claim that he is not worthy and shun the limelight. Modesty does not mean denying one's talents and one's role. Modesty means to know one's talents and one's role, but to know that it is not "My strength and the power of my hand that made me this great wealth" [Devorim 8:17]. The Medrash is saying is that if you have these strengths and you are cast in that main role, but you fail to rise to the occasion, then you become different -- you lose it. You lose the strengths that you had. We are granted gifts and strengths by G-d. There are occasions that call for us to take charge, to be the main character. To 'cop out' by saying "It's not for me; I'm not worthy" is false modesty, the result of which is that we may lose these strengths. They were given to us for a purpose. If we fail to use them, G-d will take them away from us. If the moment calls for greatness, we must rise to that challenge!

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Dvar Torah: Lech Lecha, 5757, Rabbi Moshe Shulman
OUR CHILDREN ARE OUR FUTURE!

When we speak of Abraham, we picture in our minds a man of incredible faith, and commitment, who would follow the word of G'd, no matter how difficult. It is, therefore, surprising, almost unimaginable, to find Abraham doubting a promise made to him by the Almighty Himself! Yet, that is precisely what the Torah describes.

Four times Abraham is promised that he will have children, even at the age of 99 (see Gen. 12:2, 7, 13:16, and 15:5). And after each time, Abraham demonstrated his total faith in G'd's word: "VE'HEAMIN BA'HASHEM", "And he believed the Lord, and it was counted for him for righteousness." (15:6) Yet immediately following, G-d tells Abraham his children will inherit the Land of Canaan. All of a sudden, Abraham demonstrates doubt, as he questions: "BAMOH EIDAH KI IRASHENA" - "By what shall I know that I shall inherit it?" How could a man who had followed G-d halfway around the world, maintained his faith despite 25 years of frustration and hardship, accepted the miracle of having a child at the age of 100 years, had faith enough in G-d and in His Prophecy to submit himself to circumcision at that same age - how could a man of such faith possibly doubt a relatively innocuous statement such as: "Your seed will inherit this land"? And this, when he had already accepted the basic notion that he was yet to have children?!

Evidently, Abraham's doubt was not in the Power of G-d to fulfil His promise, and provide him with children. His doubt, however, lay in the guarantee in the future that his children would DESERVE the land they were promised! For G-d never guaranteed the commitment of those children!! That is, perhaps, the most difficult question a Jew can ask. What guarantee do we have to our children's commitment to Judaism?

You all know the beautiful Midrash, that describes how G-d came to the Jewish People and asked them for a guarantor before giving them the Torah. The first choice - Our forefathers, was rejected, for they are no longer here, and cannot be our guarantor today. Our prophets - their teachings can be forgotten. The only acceptable guarantor was our children - Yes our children are our guarantors. Their commitment, is our guarantee to continuity.

But what is the guarantee to the continuity of their commitment? "How do I know that we will inherit the Land?", asks Abraham. How do we know that our children will stay committed? WE DON'T! There is no sure-fire guarantees from heaven. Because there are really only two answers to the question of how to maintain Jewish Continuity. Both are learnt from the life of Abraham.

1) LIVE BY EXAMPLE

Abraham's 13 year old son, Yishmael, was willing to be circumcised, because he saw his father do it, at age 99. Abraham taught, not by preaching, but by being a living example. He taught the notion of thanking G-d, by feeding guests, and then refusing to take credit for his kindness. He taught commitment to G-d, and to Judaism, by following the Commands of G-d, no matter how difficult they may be.

We know that children learn by example. While we bemoan the lack of commitment in our youth, we must ask ourselves, "what level of commitment and Jewish observance did they see in their parents?" Compare our commitment to Judaism, and to Jewish values, with those of our parents, or grandparents? What direction did we take? Did we maintain their level of commitment, or even strengthen it? Or did we neglect those values, let them slide and degenerate, slowly but surely, until it was too late? What examples did we set for our children?

2) EDUCATION

There is another crucial element in the recipe for Jewish commitment. EDUCATION. This too, we learn from Abraham, who was not satisfied to lead by example. He taught people the lessons of faith, 'the souls he had made in Charan'. He sought out visitors, whom he could teach about thanking G-d. He actively engaged in moral lessons to all around him, and to his family. For what commitment can we possibly hope for, if our children don't KNOW what being Jewish is all about? Meaningful Jewish education, which emphasises the centrality of Torah to our identity as Jews, has always been the key to Jewish survival, and our continuity. Torah education, for the Jewish people, is not a luxury. It is a matter of survival! It is our investment in our children's Jewish future.

Our Sages lauded the mitzvah of the study of Torah over and above all other Mitzvot: Talmud Torah keneged kulam, "Torah study matches all other Mitzvot." In Jewish law, the sanctity of a school of Torah education is greater than the Sanctity of even a Synagogue!

There is a beautiful legend in the Midrash that when the Messiah will come, G-d will throw two bridges across the ocean, one made of steel, the other of paper. The nations of the world will try to walk across the ocean on the bridge of steel, but it will collapse beneath them. The Jewish people will walk across the bridge of paper, and it will sustain them, and they will safely reach the Promised Land.

This is the truth of history. The nations of the world have put their faith in steel, in might, in cannons, and in bombs. While we have built a bridge of paper, the paper of the wisdom and teachings of our Sages, our literature, philosophy, and exegesis, the pages of the prophets, the Mishna and the Talmud. The foundations of this bridge are the strongest possible: the laws of the Torah, 613 Commandments!

Through a strong meaningful Jewish education, where Judaism is taught and lived by example, we build the future of Israel. In this way, we have a hope that our children shall indeed be our guarantors for the future of Jewish commitment. For our children are our future.

"And I shall make you into a great nation" (Bersishit 12:2) - this is the source for the words "God of Avraham" in the opening berakha (blessing) of the Amida prayer. "And I shall bless you" - this is the source for the words "God of Yitzchak." "And I shall make your name great" - this is the source for "God of Yaakov." Should we not, then, in closing the berakha, mention them all again? The answer lies in the final clause of the promise to Avraham: "And you shall be a blessing" - they will conclude [their blessing] with your name, not with theirs [those of Yitzchak and Yaakov].

(Rashi, Bereishit 12:2)

Both early and later commentaries have pointed out the peculiarity of Avraham's appearance on the stage of history without any prior introduction. The Torah tells us nothing of the early years of his life, his righteousness, his activities or his personality. It is as if he springs up suddenly out of nowhere, and God immediately promises him, "I shall make you into a great nation."

It seems that this sudden appearance on the part of Avraham Avinu is characteristic of his essence. He is a character created "ex-nihilo." His origins, the home in which he grew up and the environment which surrounded him leave us surprised, astonished, amazed. His entire society - including his father's household - are deeply immersed in the world of pagan gods, idols and icons. How could a person from such a background achieve such closeness to God and reach such an elevated spiritual status?

Whether we accept the midrash according to which "Avraham recognized his Creator at the age of three" or the opinion that he was forty at the time, this phenomenon is clearly an outstanding one, and represents the appearance of something entirely new.

The modern study of the social sciences is based on the principle of causality. Every phenomenon has its cause. In every event we tend to see the mover and that which is moved. Avraham Avinu proves that a different reality is possible.

Avraham represents a great challenge for all of us. The Rambam writes that a person must always strive upward, saying, "When will my actions equal those of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov?" Even if a person is incapable of reaching the spiritual levels attained by the forefathers, he must still strive and try - at the very least - to create his own path to serving God. Avraham embodies the proof that it is possible to free oneself from the pressures of society and family and to swim against the current - with great strength. That small grain which for a tiny moment out of eternity broke through the barriers of his family and his society, became the father of a whole nation.

This is Avraham's essence. They go their way - and he goes his. The whole world stands on one side, and he on the other. Therefore, according to the midrash, he is called "Avraham ha-Ivri" (Avraham the Hebrew). [The source of the word 'ivri' is 'ever,' meaning 'over' or 'on the other side,' therefore we can interpret his name as "Avraham who stands opposite" - "the whole world stood on one side and he stood on the other."] The father of the nation teaches us that it is within a person's power, if he but wills it, to beat his own path, to clear himself a way, to create his own current. This character represents an enormous challenge, and presents a great demand of us.

At the same time, it also serves as a source of comfort. When a person is overcome with despair at the rushing, tumultuous streams facing him, he can take comfort in the knowledge that he can prevail - if only he wishes to act against them. Perhaps he will not give rise to a new nation - "they will conclude with your name" - but he will find the strength needed for his struggle

(Originally delivered on Leil Shabbat Parashat Lekh Lekha 5732. Translated by Kaeren Fish.)

Yeshivat Har Etzion's Eighth Annual Shabbaton with our Rosh HaYeshiva HARAV AHARON LICHTENSTEIN at the Riverdale Jewish Center, Riverdale, NY November 22-23, 1996 For more info, contact our NY office 212-732-GUSH (4874)

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PARASHAT LEKH LEKHA

SICHA OF HARAV LICHTENSTEIN SHLIT"A

Avraham the "Ivri"

Summarized by Rav Eliyahu Blumenzweig

"rmk@yoss.org""drasha@torah.org"

MISSION IMPASSABLE --DRASHA PARSHAS LECH-LECHA

The news came from a most unlikely source. Og, a feared giant, came to Avraham (Abraham) and informed him that his orphaned nephew Lot, was captured in a war. Avraham felt compelled to do something. Lot's father, Haran, was Avraham's younger brother. After Avraham was miraculously saved from death by incineration, Haran, also trying to emulate Avraham's monotheistic beliefs, was thrown into a burning furnace. But, miracles don't happen for everyone and Haran was burnt alive. Now Avraham, the man of peace, was thrust into war. He joined five kings, including the King of S'dom, and battled four of the most powerful kingdoms on Earth. Yet he emerged victorious. He propelled the five kings to a victory that was unprecedented in history. And Lot was returned to his family, unharmed.

The kings were grateful. They offered Avraham the spoils of war that were rightfully his. Avraham declined their magnanimity. "I lift my hand to Hashem if so much as a thread to a shoe strap," replied Avraham as he refused to take any personal compensation from the spoils. Genesis (14:22) The question is why Abraham, when anguished by Pharaoh in Egypt or Avimelech in Grar, had taken gifts as part of a greater compensation for his humiliation. Why defer now? What was different about this war that removed Avraham from desiring any rightful financial gain?

Rabbi Paysach Krohn in his wonderful work Around the Magid's Table, tells a beautiful story.

One Shabbos afternoon when young Yitzchak Eisenbach was in Jerusalem, he spotted a very valuable gold coin shining in the distance. The value of the coin was enough to support his entire family for 2 weeks! But it was Shabbos and young Yitzele knew that the coin was muktzeh, prohibited to be picked up and taken on the Shabbos. He decided to put his foot on top of the coin and guard the coin until sunset -- a good number of hours -- but worth every moment of the wait. An Arab boy saw Yitzchak with his foot strangely and obviously strategically placed, and decided to investigate further. "What's that you're hiding?" the Arab asked "Nothing," replied Yitzchak as he shifted his body to hide the fact that he was guarding a golden treasure. It was too late. The Arab boy pushed him, saw the prize, quickly grabbed it and ran away. All Yitzchak could do was watch in horror as his attacker melted into the Arab market place.

Dejected, Yitzchak sulked to the nearby Tzernobel Bais Medrash (synagogue) where he sat in a corner. Normally, Yitzchak would help prepare the final Shabbos meal, but today he sat -- dejected and depressed -- until the Sabbath was over. The Rebbe inquired about young Yitzchok's sullen mood and was told the story. Immediately after Shabbos the Tzernobel Rebbe (1840-1936) summoned Yitzchak into his private study. In his hand he held a gold coin, exactly the same size as the one Yitzchak had almost secured earlier that day.

"I am very proud of you," said the Rebbe. You did not desecrate the Shabbos even for a tremendous monetary gain. In fact," he continued, "I am so proud of you that I am willing to give you this same coin." The Rebbe halted. "On one condition. I want you to give me the reward for the mitzvah you did."

The boy looked at the Rebbe in utter disbelief. "You want to trade the coin for the Mitzvah?" The Rebbe nodded, slowly. "If that's the case, keep the coin. I'll keep the mitzvah." The Rebbe leaned over and kissed the child. Avraham underwent tremendous sacrifice to fight the battle which had basically nothing to do with him. But he did it for one reason. The mitzvah of redeeming his own blood. He refused any compensation that would put any monetary value to the mitzvah. Any reward, albeit a strap or thread, would attach a mundane value to an inestimable act.

Pharaoh and Avimelech compensated Avraham for damages. For that he was willing to accept gifts. But for a priceless Mitzvah -- never. Certain actions we do are beyond physical evaluation. By keeping them in the spheres of the unearthly, they remain like the heavens themselves -- eternal.

Dedicated by Dr. And Mrs. Seth Paul in honor of the birth of their daughter Alexandra Lena Mordechai Kamenetzky - Yeshiva of South Shore rmk@yoss.org

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HALACHA FOR 5757

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SELECTED HALACHOS RELATING TO PARSHAS LECH LECHA

By Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

A discussion of Halachic topics related to the Parsha. For final rulings, consult your Rav.

Are your Tefillin Retzous Kosher?

According to the Talmud(1), Avraham's firm refusal to share in the spoils of war with the King of Sodom and his proud, righteous proclamation that Hashem alone is his benefactor, had far reaching results. In the merit of his statement, "If so much as a thread to a shoestraps(2)," Hashem rewarded his descendants with the Mitzvah of Retzuah Shel Tefillin. The term "Retzuah Shel Tefillin" signifies that aside from the Tefillin themselves, there is a special significance to the Retzuah, the straps, of the Tefillin. A review of the related Halachos is in order:

The Retzuah of the Tefillin Shel Yad must be at least long enough to encircle one's upper arm, form the Keshet and tighten it, and extend further to the middle finger. It is preferable to have a Retzuah long enough that it can be wrapped around the arm seven times and encircle the middle finger three times(3).

The Retzuah Shel Rosh must be at least long enough to encircle one's head with an additional two Tefachim [about 7-8 inches] on each side(4). It is preferable to have a Retzuah long enough to extend even further, the right side until the Millah and the left side until the navel(5).

The minimum width of the Retzuah is 11 millimeters. In case of necessity, 9 millimeters is sufficient(6). Frequently, from wear and tear, a Retzuah may narrow at the point at which it is tightened and fall below the required width(7).

The Retzuos must be painted black, "black as a raven", L'chatchilla. To obtain this intense shade of black, the Retzuos must be blackened, allowed to dry, and blackened a second and third time. Bedieved, Retzuos are kosher as long as they can be considered black. Even if they look closer to blue, they are still kosher(8).

When Retzuos get old and the blackness peels off, they must be blackened again. Special care must be taken at the point of tightening, since frequently, the paint peels off just at that spot(9).

It is questionable if the entire Retzuah must be black, or only the length that is the minimum Shiur(10). Harav Moshe Feinstein was asked: How much whiteness on the Tefillin straps renders them invalid? He is quoted(11) as answering: "For what is needed for the Shiur, we are stringent - even if a tiny drop is not black the area must be repainted. Beyond that, the amount does not matter unless it is really noticeable."

The blackening must be done L'shem Mitzvas Tefillin. If a Jew blackened them but forgot to state explicitly or to bear in mind that he is blackening them Lishmah, he may repaint the Retzuos with the proper concentration(12).

A woman may blacken Retzuos. A minor may only do so if an adult is supervising him while instructing him to blacken them L'shem Mitzvas Tefillin(13).

The Retzuos may be blackened at night.

QUESTION: Is one obligated to fast if his Tefillin fall on the ground?

DISCUSSION: It is customary to fast(14) if one sees his Tefillin fall to the ground(15). If he is the owner of the Tefillin that fell but he did not see them fall, or if he saw somebody else's Tefillin fall, he need not fast(16).

If Tefillin fall to the floor when they are covered, fasting is not required(17). Even the thin plastic boxes used nowadays for Tefillin protectors can be considered as "covers" in regard to this Halacha(18). Instead of fasting, he should give charity(19).

There is a view that holds that if Tefillin fall from a height of less than three Tefachim (approx. 10 in.), fasting is not required(20).

The following people may be lenient about fasting and give charity instead, if fasting will pose a hardship and deter them from their work: A physically weak person, a Torah scholar, a Torah teacher or a communal activist (Askan)(21).

FOOTNOTES:

1 Chulin 89a 2 Bereishis 14:23. 3 OC 27:8. Mishnah Berurah 27:44. 4 Mishnah Berurah 27:44. 5 Mishna Berura 27:41. 6 OC 27:11 and Mishnah Berurah 42. The exact measurements are taken from Siddur Minchas Yerushalym. 7 Mishnah Berurah 27:42. 8 Biur Halacha 33:3. 9 Mishnah Berurah 33:19. 10 Biur Halacha 33:3. 11 Guide to Practical Halacha pg. 158. 12 Biur Halacha 33:4. 13 Mishnah Berurah 33:23. 14 Be'er Heitev OC 571:1 says that the fast should be on the day that the Tefillin fell. Other Poskim hold that it is better to fast the next day, in order to accept the fast during the previous day's Mincha - Yalkut Yosef (Tefillin 15). 15 Mishnah Berurah 40:3; Igros Moshe OC 3:3. There are some Poskim who imply that if the Tefillin fell by accident and not due to his negligence, than charity is sufficient, see Daas Tora h 44:1. 16 Shaarei Teshuva 40:1; Igros Moshe OC 3:3. 17 Mishnah Berurah 40:3. 18 Oral ruling of Harav S.Y. Elyashiv (quoted in Avnei Yashfe 2:1). Note that according to the view of the Gr"a, quoted in Mishnah Berura 44:8 without dissention, the box that holds the Tefillin must be at least a Tefach (approx. 3.5 inches) large. Otherwise, it becomes secondary to the Tefillin, and is not Halachically considered as a covering. 19 Shaarei Teshuva 40:1; Mishna Berurah 40:3. 20 Kaf Hachayim m 40:7. 21 Chida (Chaim Shoal 12); Ben Ish Chai (Chayei Sarah 18). Yabia Omer 2:28. See also OC 571:1 and Mishnah Berurah there.

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"yhe-metho@jer1.co TALMUDIC METHODOLOGY by Rav Moshe Taragin

The entire VBM staff wishes Mazal Tov to Asher David Taragin upon his brit this morning.

This shiur is in memory of Mr. Julius Katz, father of David Katz, a madrich for the Shana Alef talmidim in the Yeshiva.

The Public Recital of Kiddush

The gemara in masekhet Pesachim, while addressing the various halakhot governing the recital of kiddush, discusses the role of the kiddush recited Friday evening in shul after ma'ariv. This article will explore the nature of this public recital of kiddush.

A well known fundamental machloket between Rav and Shmuel impacts upon our understanding of the kiddush recited in shul. According to Rav, kiddush may be recited anywhere whereas according to Shmuel, it is only valid if recited in the location in which the meal will be eaten - "ein kiddush ela bi-mekom se'uda."

This machloket, which has significant ramifications regarding kiddush in general, has a specific impact upon the recital of kiddush in shul. As the gemara reasons, according to Rav, the kiddush recited in shul, despite its being recited in a non-se'uda setting, is valid. For those in attendance, this represents their principal kiddush and they need not recite an additional kiddush upon their return home. Presumably, they repeat kiddush only to be "motzi" those who did not attend shul that evening. According to Shmuel, however, the gemara questions the validity of the kiddush recited in shul as it is recited in a non-se'uda setting. The gemara therefore asserts that in the days of the Talmud guests would sleep and eat in the rooms adjacent to the shul, thus justifying the recital of kiddush in shul and defining it as "kiddush bi-mekom se'uda." Only the contemporary practice of guests lodging in the shul, according to the gemara, could account for this minhag of reciting kiddush in shul.

According to Shmuel we must ask the following question: If no guests are lodging in shul for shabbat, or in a society in which guests NEVER sleep or eat in shul, how may we explain the persistence of this minhag in our own day? Not only is it unnecessary, but it may also be problematic. Tosafot comment that, according to Shmuel, without reasonable justification kiddush in shul may even constitute a "berakha le-vatala." What possible rationale might justify the continued recital of kiddush in shul despite the lack of resident guests?

The Ran attempts to solve this dilemma by invoking the principle that any practice which was instituted as a formal takana can only be suspended by an actual rescinding of that takana. Just because the basis upon which the takana was instituted ceases to persist, that does not mean that the halakha may be disregarded. Although guests may no longer sleep in shul, once kiddush was formally instituted to address their needs it must be recited until the takana is formally repealed. In fact, the Beit Yosef in siman 169 cites a responsa of the Maharam Mi-Rotenburg who compares this phenomenon with the abbreviated chazarat ha-shatz recited after ma'ariv on Friday evening. This "berakha achat me-ein sheva" was originally instituted so that all congregants, out of concern for safety, would depart for home at the same time. Adding this "appendix" to davening allowed the

late-comers to 'catch up' with the rest of the minyan. Once instituted, however, it remains an integral part of davening even when a common departure time ceases to be a necessity.

The comparison struck by the Maharam is certainly problematic. Firstly, while this truncated chazarat ha-shatz was actually formalized as a takana and is therefore immutable without a subsequent reversing decree, we have no indication that kiddush in shul underwent a similar transformation from a minhag into a formal takana. The need for a formal rescinding might only apply in those instances in which a practice was instituted as a formal takana. Furthermore, in the latter case of the "berakha achat me'ein sheva," once instituted the recital became an integral part of the tefillah Shabbat; once integrated into the liturgy it cannot simply be discarded, rather it must be removed by decree - any change in liturgy must be a product of a takanat Chakhamim. The same does not hold true for the kiddush which is recited after tefilla, as it is independent of tefilla. Even if it WERE the product of a takana, we might not require an actual formal takana to rescind it. The disappearance of its original basis may be sufficient to annul its practice.

A second approach in the Rishonim actually attempts to legitimize this "shul kiddush" according to Shmuel even in the absence of guests. The problem arose in light of Shmuel's position that kiddush must be recited at the site of the se'uda. By redefining this halakha, we might justify reciting kiddush in shul even in the absence of dorming guests. The Rosh, for example, cites the position of the Rabbenu Yona that even according to Shmuel the requirement of "kiddush be-makom se'uda" is only mi-derabanan. On a biblical level, kiddush may be recited anywhere. Hence, one cannot absolutely invalidate kiddush in shul EVEN if no guests are dorming. It retains, at least on a biblical level, some validity and hence is recited even though the Rabanan demand another kiddush to be recited upon arriving at the site of the meal. A similar suggestion is raised by Rabbenu Nissim Gaon who claims that the halakha of "ein kiddush ela be-makom se'uda" does not require one to recite kiddush in the exact location of a se'uda, rather it demands an association between the two. Generally, this association is formed by reciting the kiddush in the locate of the meal. However, such an association can also be established by reciting kiddush in one place with the intention to continue the meal in another. When kiddush is recited in shul, with clear intent to continue the meal at home, the condition of kiddush be-makom se'uda has been fulfilled, despite the absence of actual guests eating an ACTUAL meal in shul.

Both the Rabbenu Yona and the Rabbenu Nissim Gaon attempt to redefine the principle of kiddush be-makom se'uda so that kiddush in shul, despite the apparent lack of se'uda, remains valid.

Though these position succeed in justifying this form of kiddush, one is left to wonder why this kiddush remains a NECESSITY. Indeed, kiddush, if recited in shul, can be authenticated (possibly even on a de-oraita level), but why go through the 'bother' of reciting it at all? Can we discern within kiddush in shul some unique function which cannot be accomplished by merely reciting kiddush at home - thus warranting our practice of reciting kiddush even in the absence of itinerant guests?

Tosafot cite a peculiar position of Rabbenu Nutrani Gaon which imputes a completely new basis to kiddush in shul. The recitation of kiddush remains necessary for medical purposes, based upon the gemara in Berakhot (43b) which claims that running too quickly weakens a person's eyesight; this condition, according to Rabbenu Nutrani Gaon, is remedied by reciting kiddush at night. Rav Nutrani Gaon maintained that this evening kiddush which might restore vision referred specifically to kiddush in shul. The peculiarities of the medical beliefs adopted by medieval commentators and their interface with the world of kabala is not the subject of this article. What is interesting is if the attempt of the part of Rav Nutrani to explain a difficult halakhic vestige based upon medical/mystical reasons.

A second approach towards understanding the necessity of reciting kiddush in shul involves our overall perspective of kedushat Shabbat. We are accustomed to contrasting the kedusha of Shabbat with that of Yom Tov. Typically, we define kedushat Shabbat as that which was instilled by God from the beginning of creation and which automatically recurs every seven days, independent of human authorship or activity. By contrast, kedushat Yom Tov is completely dependent upon the human discretion and beit din's fixing of the new month which in turn determines the moment of Yom Tov. The Rav zt"l, who dealt extensively with these concepts in Shiurim Le-zekher Abba Mori, claimed that although the basic difference between Shabbat and Yom Tov is undeniable, the human still plays an active role in conferring upon Shabbat a secondary level of kedusha which complements and completes the basic kedusha which Hashem awarded Shabbat. According to the Rav zt"l, the conferring of this kedusha is performed by kiddush, a berakha which doesn't merely respond to the presence of kedusha but actively creates or expands it.

Though his comments were made with regard to kiddush in general, it is reasonable to state this concept with greater conviction in the case of kiddush recited in shul. This kiddush is performed in the presence of the tzibbur which, ultimately, is the source of authority with regard to establishing kedusha relating to time. As the Rav himself wrote in Shiurim Le-zekher Abba Mori, when beit din would set the calendar they did so merely as the representatives and surrogates of Am Yisrael - the only entity with actual authority to create kedushat zeman and institute calendaric changes. Hence, it may be even more reasonable to view kiddush in shul as the medium in which the added kedusha of Shabbat is dealt by a human hand, as opposed to the private, individual kiddush which may be less likely if not unable to perform this function. This idea might be alluded to by the Or Zaru'a who in the first volume 752:9 writes "the original takana (of kiddush in shul) was instituted to SANCTIFY the Shabbat and testify to its holiness... in public (and not merely for dorming guests)."

The Or Zaru'a reinterprets the original basis provided by the gemara and assigns an active role to this public kiddush.

...
AFTERWORD: ----- A comprehensive survey of the various reasons for and against minhagim surrounding kiddush in shul can be found in a recent sefer entitled "Minhag Ashkenaz Ha-kadmon" written by Yisrael Ta Shma in Israel. I highly recommend this chapter as well as the book in its entirety.

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MESSAGE FROM THE HAFTORAH LECH LECHA Yeshaya 40:27

This week's haftorah teaches us never to despair. The prophet Yeshaya opens with words of rebuke to the Jewish people for their disgraceful attitude regarding Hashem's direct involvement in their lives. Yeshaya asks, "Why does Yaakov say that my path is concealed from Hashem and my judgment alludes Him?"

This desperate claim of the Jewish people was based on the firm control the nations exercise over the Jewish people during their years of exile. The Jews exclaim in bewilderment, "If Hashem really knows and cares how could He possibly permit the world to remain in its present state of affairs!? Where is all the reward that the Jewish people so rightfully deserve? Why are there no repercussions for the nations who have so harshly treated Hashem's beloved nation?" These questions reflected the deep-seeded feelings of the Jewish people in those times that Hashem remained aloof and was not even involved in His world and its developments.

This same claim is forever expressed by the mighty powers of the world who perceive themselves to be in total control. In this week's haftorah, Hashem responds to these powers and engages them in a heavy dialogue. He calls upon them to defend their position that Hashem is in fact, incapable of protecting His people from their harsh decrees and firm control. Hashem says, "Be silent distant nations and mighty powers, recharge yourself with strength. Draw near and speak, come together for judgment. Who inspired the dweller of the east to proclaim My righteousness with his every step? Who delivered nations into this dweller's hands and gave him the control over the kings? Who empowered (the dweller's) sword to render the nations into dust, his bow to crush them like straw? Who safeguarded this man when chasing his enemies over unfamiliar paths? It is I, Hashem, who declares the earliest generations from their inception and it is I who will remain with the final ones." (41: 2-4)

This moving dialogue reveals the hidden secret of the patriarch Avrohom's development. Our Sages (see Bereishis Rabba 43:3) explain that "the dweller of the east" spoken about refers to none other than Avrohom Avinu. The prophet Yeshaya tells us that, in truth, it was Hashem who was responsible for the total upheaval and awakening of an entire generation. Hashem was the one who inspired this lone soul to reject the universal practice of paganism which had spread to nearly every human being on the face of the earth. Hashem kindled that fire within the soul of Avrohom Avinu to alert the ~~entire world of their perverted approaches and foolish beliefs.~~ Hashem

protected Avrohom Avinu against every attempt to thwart this sacred undertaking to preach the unpopular truth to the masses. And finally, it was Hashem who assisted Avrohom Avinu in his miraculous war against the four kings which ultimately resulted in the universal recognition of Hashem's supremacy. (See Beraishis Rabba 42:3; Rashi Lech Lecha 14:17)

This response gives us a significant perspective regarding Hashem's involvement in the world and its affairs. The unfortunate setting of Avrohom Avinu's time was one of total despair relative to any possible recognition of Hashem. The entire world had no clue of the true Hashem and had sunk into aggressive practices of idolatry. But, as we know, Hashem maintains His control and is intimately involved in the development of His world. He secured from the outset, that one of the greatest of all minds would be born into that dark generation of religious misbeliefs. Hashem inspired this incredible mind of Avrohom Avinu to oppose the entire world and launch a campaign, single-handed, to fill the world with the understanding and belief in the one, true Hashem. From this unbelievable accomplishment we see that Hashem is completely involved in His world and secured its salvation from the start. In order to accomplish this, Hashem, therefore planted the most brilliant of minds, that of Avrohom Avinu in the generation where it was most desperately needed.

This remarkable development of Avrohom Avinu serves as perfect testimony to Hashem's involvement in the world. The mere fact that one lone soul could single-handedly effect an entire world and inspire the majority of civilization to abandon their previous beliefs speaks for itself. The shocking phenomena that this one person wasn't persecuted or executed for his beliefs and was even miraculously victorious when waging war, single-handed, against the

mightiest powers of the world tells the complete story. It is Hashem who controls the world and directs its through its necessary developments at all times. And, it is therefore only with the permission of Hashem that the powers of the world maintain their tight control, subject to Hashem's interference at all times. Yeshaya responds to the Jewish people and states, emphatically, that Hashem knows and cares about them and is intimately involved in their experiences. If Hashem appears to be removed it is only the result of their wrongdoings but, in truth, Hashem is actually quietly involved in every step of their lives. In fact, Hashem is engaged at all times in securing the ultimate perfection of the world. Working under cover, Hashem is perpetually involved in directing the world's events in preparation for the final redemption. (see Daas Tevunos)

This timely insight is so apropos for our times. The rapid moral decline in our times along with the mass rejection of observant Judaism are certainly significant factors for despair. The descending direction in which the world is headed projects the world's ultimate detachment from Hashem through secularism and immorality. However, Hashem declares that He never loses sight of His world and His people. He secured the appearance of Avrohom Avinu, inspired him to lead his nearly insurmountable campaign and protected him during every step of his most difficult battles. In this same vein Hashem has secured the salvation of His final generation through the eventual arrival of Mashiach. Hashem will plant an individual from the illustrious dynasty of Dovid Hamelech whose intelligence will even surpass that of Shlomo Hamelech and whose level of prophecy will near that of Moshe Rabbeinu. This person will totally devote himself to Torah and Mitzvos, educate and inspire all the Jewish people to follow in the Torah's ways and fight the wars of Hashem. (see Rambam Laws of Kings Ch. 11 Law 4, Tshuva Ch. 9 Law 2) Hashem never forsakes His world or His people and has therefore engineered from the beginning of time the security of His name. The successful campaign of Mashiach, likened to that of Avrohom Avinu, will eventually educate the entire world and bring about their true recognition of Hashem in its fullest capacity. May we merit to witness this soon in our days.

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"kenblock@dorsai.org" yitorah@jer1.co.il" NCYI Weekly Divrei Torah-Parshat Lech Lecha 13 Cheshvan 5757 Saturday, October 26, 1996

Guest Rabbi: Rabbi Elimelech Goldberg Young Israel of Southfield, Michigan

"And he believed in HaShem and He considered it to be an act of righteousness." The Ramban questions why Avraham the great prophet would receive such adulation for the simple act of belief? It is not possible, that the man who willingly runs to bring up his son as a sacrifice should be credited here with the most rudimentary aspect of faith. Therefore, counters the Ramban (seconded by Chizkuni, the Rabbenu Bachya and others) the text must be understood to be read with a small "he". Namely, it was Avraham who understood that the promise of an Eternal People would be unconditional. The children of Avraham would continue regardless of their lack of merit or open rebellion. "And he (Avraham) considered (this promise regarding his children) an act of tzedakah, an unconditional charity, from HaShem. Rashi, however with the Rosh, Radak and Sforno, to name just a few, follow the plain reading of the verse. In the simple faith of Avraham, HaShem found great joy.

The mitzvah of faith, is derived from the first of the Ten Commandments, "I am the L-rd Your G-d, who brought you out of the Land of Egypt." Rambam, uses two different languages to define this commandment. In the Sefer Hamitzvot, the Rambam writes that there is an obligation to believe in HaShem. The beginning of the Mishna Torah describes this mandate as the need to know that there is a G-d. By using two different phrases the Rambam defines the act of faith as somehow synonymous with daiah, knowing that

there is a Prime Mover. In what way is knowing equal to believing? "And he believed in HaShem and He considered it to be a tzedaka." The act of tzedakah, according to the Rambam in Moreh Nevuchim is, by definition, greater than what one receives in return. It is the enhancement of oneself beyond one's natural inclination. In fact, Avraham's faith in his Creator was greater than all of the perceptions that could be attributed to his knowledge, prophetic or otherwise. The Sefer Vikarim suggests that emunah in its purest of forms is above what one learns and understands. The Maharal in Netzach Yisrael likewise attaches to faith the concept of total connection. He highlights the verse in Hoshea, "And I will betroth you forever..., and I will betroth you with faith and you will know HaShem". The language of "knowing" ascribed to betrothal is a description of complete intimacy. The Biblical "knowing" is used in regard to husband and wife. Thus, faith transcends the "knowing" of learning and is the equivalent of daiah, of loving. It is the sense of clinging and completion that comes with the realization of our Father's closeness to His children. All boundaries of self and ego, of individualism and ownership that complement our ontological awareness are removed from between man and HaShem. This is the level of faith that Avraham gained at that moment. Seeing the nation unfold before his prophetic vision, eternally bound by the loving protection of our Father in Heaven, fostered the highest level of faith, the clinging or "knowing" of G-d that remains the obligation of that mitzvah. (Similarly, as we are commanded each day to "love the L-rd, your G-d" in the Shema, we first need to recount the unbridled love that He maintains for us, "ahava raba ahavtanu".) In that sense, both knowing and believing come together.

"With what shall I know that I will inherit it?"

Avraham, upon hearing that his children will inherit the land asks a question that is both chided and lauded by our literature. Unlike the Talmud Nedarim, most medrashim see within this request a continuation of Avraham's avowal of love. The Ksav V'hakabalah looks at the word "daiah" as the qualifying term. He interprets the verse, "What is the basis of this great love that you are showing to me." With this HaShem answers; it is faith. By showing him the symbols of historical sacrifice and travail, HaShem, describes the secret of our greatness. Through all of the carnage, "the bird He did not divide". Wounded and decimated by the animals of the field, preyed upon by hordes of vulture, the bird, the symbol of the Jewish People, will not be divided. We know HaShem. We often lack knowledge of the whys and wherefore of our historical challenges but we continue with the simple faith that is built upon our connection to our Creator. We bless Him in mourning knowing full well, that our darkness will give way to the morning of sunshine and return. And with a perfect faith, "even if he delays, with all of this I shall wait for Him each day that He shall come."

With what love do we inherit the land?

After being shown the horrific blood stained pages of our history, Avraham Aveinu is told. "The fourth generation will return." This promise is sealed by the most unique and for us, overwhelming symbol of Jewish return. A smoking oven, accompanied by a flaming torch passes through the bloody carnage. No place else in the Bible is the image of a smoking oven similarly invoked. What image does it conjure up for our generation? After the exile of Egypt, the galus of Babylonia and the enduring subjugation of Rome the fourth generation has returned to our land but not before the smoking ovens of Europe belched their darkness across an entire continent and spread their ashes upon our people. But even that darkness did not divide us from our Creator. The flame of faith, of Torah, of the sacrifices of our father Avraham, was never extinguished. We have continued with the simple faith of unquestioning love to believe in Him and this, "He considers to be an act of righteousness."

How can the greatest of our Rishonim be divided regarding the simple explanation of the text? Why does the Torah use an ambivalent modifier to lead to such confusion? Of course; "These and these" are correct. The love of knowing HaShem allows for the mutuality of our relationship. We look to His world with a faith in His unconditional love that the Jewish People will always survive. We know, in time, we will come home. He looks at the perfect faith adorned with the knowing love of our fathers and accounts our

deeds as righteousness. Just as we refer to the Passover holiday as Pesach, HaShem Yisbarach, in the Torah refers to it as the Holiday of Matzos. He points to the love of His children who ate the bread of affliction and travelled with Him in the wilderness of history. We point to the passing of the angel of death over the houses of the Jews because in that description we find His love for us. "We are for our beloved as He is for us". He is for us as we are for Him. To us it is His tzedakah; to Him it is ours.

"bircas@netmedia.net.il" Parshas Lech Lecha (14:12)

adapted from the Toras Moshe - Chasam Sofer on the Torah (article #25) by Yehuda Greenman

After Avraham and Lot returned to Canaan from Mitzraim with a tremendous wealth of flocks and herds, friction arose between their shepherds. Accepting Avraham's offer to separate, Lot chose for himself the Plains of Jordan alongside Sodom in which to live. Responding to the King of Sodom's attack, the five kings swept into the plains of Jordan, and along with the other inhabitants, Lot was captured, as the Torah says: "And they took (va'yik'chu) Lot and his possessions, Avram's nephew, and he was living (yo'shev) in Sodom" (Bereishis 14:12). When we look into this verse, several questions arise: First, why is Lot identified both as Lot and as Avram's nephew? Second, why is it necessary for the Torah to mention that Lot is Avram's nephew, since the Torah has already mentioned this fact previously? Third, if the verse is coming to tell us about Lot's capture, why does it tell us that he was living in Sodom? From the words of the Chasam Sofer, we can derive answers to these questions as well as a beautiful message that reflects the heart and soul of every Jew.

The Chasam Sofer cites Rashi who says that anytime the Torah uses the language of "to take" (ki'chah) in reference to human beings, it always points to a very special type of taking; i.e. when a person is "taken" by virtue of his heart having been "spoken to" and moved. In contrast, the Chasam Sofer says that if a person is taken from one place to another against his will, he is taken only in the sense of being physically relocated, in the same way that a mound of dirt is moved from one place to another. His mind and thoughts, however, which are the essence of his being, will remain in the place that he was taken from unless he has been "taken" with words and persuaded to direct his heart to the place that he is taken to. The capture of Lot comprised both types of taking, because Lot had conflicting feelings about being taken away. In one respect, Lot was truly "taken" by the five kings because, according to our Sages, Lot's true intention in choosing a land separate from Avraham was not the acquisition of more grazing land; rather, it was to separate himself from Hashem by separating from Avraham. Therefore, when the five kings whisked Lot away from the plains of Jordan, they actually fulfilled his desire to be distanced from Avraham. This is reflected by the Torah's use of the words "And they took" (va'yik'chu), because, as regards Lot's being "Avram's nephew" and his desire to get away from Avraham, he was truly "taken" in the sense of the word explained by Rashi. However, in another respect, Lot was only taken physically, because Lot wanted to live in Sodom (the place that fulfilled the twisted desires of his heart). Thus, reflecting the forcible taking discussed by the Chasam Sofer, the Torah tells us that, although his body had been taken to another place, Lot was still "living in Sodom"; i.e., his mind and thoughts remained in Sodom. The Chasam Sofer utilizes the contrast between being physically taken and spiritually and emotionally taken to resolve a difficulty raised by the Ramban, and, in doing so, teaches us a most beautiful lesson about the Jewish People.

The Sifri teaches us that the words "And place these words of mine on your heart..." in the second paragraph of the Krias Shema (Devarim 11:18) refer to the words that precede them: "...and you will swiftly be banished from the good land which G-d gives you" (11:16). From this we learn that even though Hashem told us we would be banished from the land of Israel, we must still constantly observe His word and laws in exile so that when we are returned fully to the land we will be fluent in the practice of the Torah. The Ramban

finds it difficult to justify the Sifri's teaching that the paragraph is speaking about the exile in light of the fact that the paragraph concludes with the verse: "In order that your days and the days of your children will be prolonged upon the ground that G-d has sworn to your ancestors to give them as the days of the heaven upon the earth" (11:21). If the paragraph is speaking about the exile, it is inconsistent for it to conclude with the words "In order that your days and the days of your children will be prolonged upon the ground ..." which refer to Eretz Yisroel.

The Chasam Sofer reconciles the Ramban's difficulty by differentiating physical exile from spiritual and emotional exile: Since we were forced to leave Israel against our will, our bodies alone are in exile, but our minds and thoughts, which are the essence of our being, remain (through our fulfillment of the Torah) in Eretz Yisroel. No matter where on Earth the Jewish People may live physically, we dwell on the Holy Ground in our thoughts, so that (even in exile) we can aptly apply the verse: "In order that your days and the days of your children will be prolonged upon the ground that G-d has sworn to your ancestors to give them as the days of the heaven upon the earth."

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Anglo-Jewry: The Pre-Expulsion Community 1066-1290 -
[all 4 parts from last 4 weeks here]

by Elkan D Levy, President of the United Synagogue

Nobody knows who was the first Jew to set foot in England, or when. The Phoenicians from Gaza and Ashkelon traded tin with Cornwall a century or more before the First Temple was destroyed, and possibly brought adventurous Hebrews with them. Doubtless Jews travelled to Britain in Roman times, as they did to all parts of the known world, and almost certainly there were Jewish soldiers in the legions that garrisoned the province and served on Hadrian's wall. Coins from Judea have been found in archaeological excavations, and more fanciful romantics would interpret the name of the Cornish town of Marazion, near Penzance, as the Hebrew words for "The bitterness of Zion", bestowed on it by refugees from the destruction of the Second Temple.

When William the Conqueror seized the crown in 1066, he brought with him Jews from his own lands in Normandy and within a relatively short time communities were established in London, Oxford, Cambridge, Lincoln, Norwich, York, and other towns important to the government and financing of the kingdom.

Occasionally the problems of mediaeval Anglo-Jewry have a familiar ring. A statute of 1267 forbade Christians to purchase meat which Jews found ritually unfit, which must have caused the community some economic problems.

Great wealth existed even to the end of the community; in 1286, a Jewish wedding in Hereford was of such ostentation that the local Bishop tried, on pain of excommunication but unsuccessfully, to stop Christians attending. In 1277, the Jews of Colchester went hunting with their Christian friends, and all parties committed the offence of chasing a deer through the town. A clerk at the subsequent trial relieved his boredom by producing a caricature of one of the Defendants in the margin of the court record, unflatteringly describing him as "Aaron, son of the Devil".

Some Jews kept inns frequented by both Jews and Christians, while others served in the army as crossbowmen, and even on occasion agreed to settle their differences by ordeal of battle. Occasionally, especially during the reign of King John, they were compelled to act as torturers and executioners. A number of Jews were physicians, (some in areas where their patients must have been almost-exclusively non-Jewish) and we also find a goldsmith, a ladder-maker, and even a fencing-master. There were also Jewish

cheese-makers, and wine merchants, at least one artist who painted holy images for use in church, and some of the coinage was minted by Jews (while others engaged in the illegal practice of coin-clipping).

Relations between Jews and Christians were generally friendly. They met socially, drinking Kosher wine which was imported from France or Germany. In times of unrest Jews sent their possessions for safekeeping to Churches or Monasteries. Converts to Judaism included Christian clergy as well as laymen.

The community spoke Norman-French among themselves, although some of them could read and write (and occasionally forge) documents in Latin. Unlike the women, the men retained exclusively Jewish names but these were shortened and corrupted in translation. Thus Yitzchok became Cok, Chayim Hagin, and Rabbi Joseph, leader of the London community at the beginning of the Twelfth Century, is immortalised as Rubi Gotsce. Even surnames are not unknown, and l'Eveske, or Episcopus, is the mediaeval Anglo-Jewish equivalent of Cohen, although Archpresbyter Judaeorum seems to be more the equivalent of President of the United Synagogue than Chief Rabbi! The main occupation of the community was moneylending. Canon law

forbade the practice of usury by Christians, and the Jews of the realm, regarded as the personal property of the King ("Servi Camerae Regis" - Serfs of the Royal Chamber) were well placed to lend money and handle the international aspects of the transactions. Some Jews became very wealthy and much involved with royalty and nobility; at one stage, Jewish capital is estimated to have been one-third of the liquid wealth of the nation. Aaron of Lincoln, whose house is still to be seen in Steep Hill, financed the building of the cathedrals at Lincoln, Peterborough, and St Albans. When he died in 1186, the King exercised his right to seize the estate, and set up a special branch of the Exchequer to sort out Aaron's financial affairs, which took almost twenty years.

Throughout the whole of the period, Jewish women such as Belaset of Wallingford and Licoricia of Oxford were in business as financiers on their own account, not merely as assistants to their husbands, attesting to the high status of women in the mediaeval Anglo-Jewish community.

The long and peaceful reign of Henry II (1158-1189) was a cultural and economic high-point in the life of the community. The Jews were under the direct protection of the King, to whom they belonged, and were granted jurisdiction to run all their own internal affairs in accordance with Jewish law, except for matters of public order. Jews even took part in monastic politics; when a new abbot was to be elected at Canterbury and at Bury St Edmunds, they offered prayers in Shul for their favoured candidate!

The great teacher and commentator, Abraham Ibn Ezra, visited the London community in 1158, and wrote two of his most famous works Yesod Morah and Iggeret Hashabbat while here. He also experienced English fogs; commenting on the plague of Darkness, he says that in England they get a darkness so thick that you cannot tell day from night, and sometimes it lasts five days "and I have been there many times".

Clearly the community housed a number of scholars, as well as a number of medieval chassidim. Jacob of Orleans, who lived in London, and Elijah of York are mentioned among the Tosaphists, Talmudic commentators based mainly in Northern France. Rabbi Elijah ben Menachem of London wrote a detailed commentary on the Haggadah, while Rabbi Yomtov of Joigny, who perished in the massacre at York, wrote the Piyut Omnam Ken which still forms part of the Kol Nidre service (Routledge Machzor p 38)

In 1286, Rabbi Jacob ben Judah the Chazan published the "Etz Chayim", which sets out in detail the Siddur of the pre-expulsion community, and also the text of a number of legal documents; one of them interestingly describes London as being on the Rivers Thames and Walbrook. In the text of Birkat Hamazon, the Grace after Meals, he adds the unusual prayer Harachaman Hu Yarbe Gevuleynu Betalmidim, that G-d should increase the number of scholars within our borders.

In 1144 the death of a young apprentice in Norwich led to the first recorded instance of the infamous accusation that Jews practise Ritual Murder.

Although no allegation was made that the blood was needed for ritual purposes, this terrible lie, an English invention, has caused Jews throughout the world untold misery.

The religious zealotry aroused by the Crusades led to the greatest of the tragedies of the community. A Jewish deputation went to the Coronation of Richard I in 1189, probably to seek a renewal of their charter of privileges, but a disagreement with an officious doorkeeper rapidly developed into a riot, in which a number of Jews were killed. Despite efforts by the King to control the disturbances, further massacres took place in Kings Lynn, Lincoln, Norwich, and other towns until the unrest reached its tragic climax in York.

The local baron Richard Malbisse - his surname is preserved in a local place name - took the opportunity to incite the crowd and incidentally to destroy the records of his indebtedness to the Jews. The local community sought the protection of the Castle, and were housed in Clifford's Tower, then a wooden structure standing alone on an artificial mound. The anger of the crowd increased as Easter drew nearer, until eventually on Erev Shabbat Hagadol, 16 March 1190, exhorted to do so by their Rabbis, the community set fire to the Tower and then committed mass suicide, rather than await the inevitable massacre. The City of York was reputed to be under a Cherem, a decree of Rabbinic excommunication, while the atrocity itself was recorded in a number of Kinot for Tisha B'Av still recited in English communities to this day (Rosenfeld's Kinot pp 168-172).

The stone rebuild of Clifford's Tower can still be visited, and the tragedy is commemorated by an inscription in Hebrew and English at the base of the mound.

Unusually in mediaeval England, the private houses of leading members of the community were of stone, largely for security. A number of these have survived, especially in Lincoln, including the house of Belaset the Jewess. The Shul was situated on the first floor of Jews' Court, the building adjoining her house, and to this day can be seen in the huge mediaeval stones of the east wall a recess, large enough for three Sifre Torah, which served as the Ark of the community. The pre-expulsion cemetery at York was recently discovered during excavations for a new supermarket, while the alleged Mikveh of the Bristol community has of late acquired new life as a source for local mineral water.

English synagogues of the period seem to have been decorated with mural painting. They were usually small, and each community had a number of Shuls. As well as the usual communal announcements, civil proclamations were made there in Latin and Hebrew.

At the head of each community stood the Baillivus or Parnaz (Parnass - Warden). The salaried officials included the Chanteur or Cappelanus (Chazan) while each community had a Shochet and also a Scriveneur (Scribe). Internal jurisdiction even included the right to inflict physical punishment, or to put members of the community into the stocks. By 1272, traditional methods of Jewish livelihood were coming under attack. The Church was attempting to clamp down on usury, and was uninterested in the argument that the Jews were not subject to Canon Law. Edward I tried to broaden the ways in which Jews could earn a living, and allowed them to become merchants and artisans, and to lease farmland for cultivation.

All of this however proved unsuccessful, and eventually Edward solved the problem in the most drastic way. On 18th July 1290, which happened to be the Fast of 9th Av, he promulgated a decree in Council which obliged all Jews to be out of England by the following 1st November; their property would devolve to the Crown. Impoverished and downhearted, the Jews crossed to France, many of them falling victim to attack en route. Some families preserved a recollection of their Anglo-Jewish origins through surnames such as "l'Englois" or "Ingles"; some took papers with them - the deeds of an English monastery are believed to have been discovered in the Cairo Genizah; clearly there were small clandestine groups of Jews, unofficial and unrecognised in England throughout the succeeding years; but to all intents and purposes England disappeared from the Jewish world for four centuries.

The Weekly Internet

P A R A S H A - P A G E

by Mordecai Kornfeld of Har Nof, Jerusalem (Kornfeld@jer1.co.il)

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= Parashat Lech Lecha 5757

AVRAHAM'S REWARD

[The four warring kings] captured all the goods of Sodom and Amarah, and... Lot ... the nephew of Avram, and they departed... . When Avram heard that his nephew was captured, he armed his trained men... and smote [the captors]... and recaptured all of the goods... .

The king of Sodom came to meet Avram upon his return... and said to Avram, "Return to me the captives and take the goods for yourself." Avram replied to the king of Sodom, "I lift up my hand in an oath to Hashem, the G-d Most High, Maker of the heavens and the earth, that I will take from the booty neither thread nor shoe-strap. I will not take anything that was yours.

(Bereishit 14:11-23)

Rava said: In reward for Avraham's refusal to take "neither thread nor shoe-strap," his children were given two special Mitzvot: The blue thread (Techelet) that is worn in Tzitzit and the leather straps of Tefillin (phylacteries). (Gemara Chullin 89a)

Hashem's rewards are given on the basis are based on the axiom of "measure for measure" -- Middah K'negged Middah (see Sotah 9b, Parasha-Page Metzora and Chukat 5756). A string and strap were prominent in Avraham's reward because of he mentioned those two objects in his retort to the king of Sodom. Is this the sole relationship between Avraham's virtuous act and his reward? One who is familiar with Midrashic literature, would expect to find a stronger relationship than that. After all, Avraham's good deed did not involve those two objects any more than the other rescued objects that he refused. A deeper understanding can perhaps be gleaned from a careful study of the Mitzvot of Tefillin and Tzitzit.

II If one speaks after he dons Tefillin on the arm but before he dons them on the forehead, it is considered a sin. One who has sinned in such a manner may not join the Jewish troops in war [as he is not promised divine protection]. (Gemara Sota 44b)

Through keeping the Mitzvah of Tefillin [on the arm and the forehead] properly, Hashem fulfills for the Jewish armies the blessing, "He shall smite the enemy's arms and foreheads" (Devarim 33:20 -- Rashi: They would sever the head and arm [of the enemy] with one blow). (Rosh, Hilchot Tefillin, sec.15 -- see also Kol Eliyahu chap. 132)

Tefillin possess the ability to help us successfully defeat the enemy in war. (See also Parasha-Page, 9th of Av 5756 at length.) What is it about Tefillin that affords them this unique quality? Tefillin symbolize our acknowledgment that we are powerless without Hashem's assistance. The parchment we place inside of our Tefillin, with its description of the omnipotence of Hashem and the Exodus from Egypt, bears out this theme. By wearing Tefillin on our arms, we remind ourselves that all physical strength is really His. What this is our attitude, Hashem grants us strength in return.

When [Bar Kochba, leader of the revolt against the Romans in Beitar.] would go out to war [with his 400,000 mighty warriors] he would declare, "Master of the universe, I don't need your help, as long as you do not hinder me!" (Yerushalmi Gittin 4:5)

Forty baskets of *Tefillin* boxes were found on the heads of Bar Kochba's warriors who were killed in Beitar when Beitar fell.

(Gemara Gittin 58a)

One who trusts in personal prowess, has

