

TorahFax: Lech Lecha
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Monday, Mar-Cheshvan 8, 5784 / October 23, 2023

This week's Parsha, Lech Lecha, tells about many of the tests which Abraham and Sarah endured, beginning with G-d's commandment to Abraham at the age of seventy-five, and Sarah who was sixty-five to leave their birth place and immigrate to an unknown land.

At the age of seventy-five, Abraham became the first wandering Jew. Abraham and Sarah left their home and went to an unknown destination--the land of Canaan. When they finally arrived, G-d brought a famine upon the land and again they had to move. This time, they journeyed to Egypt where they experienced more trials and tribulations.

The entire Parsha is about the trials and tribulations which Abraham and Sarah endured. G-d put them through ten trials, and they withstood them all.

"Torah" comes from the word "hora'ah" - meaning "a guide and lesson." For even the stories of creation and of our patriarchs and matriarchs are not just about historical events which took place thousands of years ago. They are read year after year to guide us in each generation and at all times.

Torah commentaries ask, why does the Torah use the words "Lech Lecha" which literally means, "go for you," when only the word "Lech" ("go") would have sufficed?

Rashi explains that G-d is telling Abraham that although this commandment may seem difficult at this time, it is in fact, "for your benefit and for your pleasure." For, whatever G-d does and whatever He wants us to do is in truth for our benefit and if we accept it as such, it is also for our pleasure, whether we see it at the time or not.

A wise person said, "Generally, the things in which a person finds pleasure are not necessarily for the person's benefit. However, the pleasure one derives through performing G-d's commandments are indeed for our benefit."

Rabbi Moshe Leib of Sassov had a unique way of dealing with difficult situations, so that they do not get in his way of serving G-d with happiness.

He would say: "What is in the past is already in the past and there is nothing I can do about it anyway, so why worry about it. As for the future, it didn't happen yet, so why worry. I put my trust in G-d that things will be good. The only worry I can see having concerns for is the present. But the present is so short, it lasts only a moment, and anybody can handle a little trouble for one moment..."

A wise person remarked about difficult situations he went through, "In the end things will be good. If they are not good yet, that's a sign that it's not the end yet..."

Tuesday, Mar-Cheshvan 9, 5784 / October 24, 2023

In this week's Parsha, Lech Lecha, G-d commands Avram (It was later changed to Avraham), to leave his birthplace and his father's home and travel to, "The Land which I will show you." Avram was seventy-five at the

time and his wife Sara, sixty-five and they were childless. G-d promises them that in the new land they will be blessed with wealth and a great name. They are also promised descendants and to become a great nation.

Q. The numerical value of the name of the Parsha, Lech Lecha is 100. Why is this significant?

A. The Parsha begins with G-d's commandment to Avram, who had no children, to leave his country, his birthplace and his father's home and travel to, "the land which I will show you." G-d promised Avram that there, "I will make you into a great nation." Avram was 100 years old when he had his son, Isaac (Yitzchak). The numerical value of the name Parsha, Lech Lecha, alludes to this.

Q. As mentioned, Avraham was originally called Avram. In the Parsha we find that G-d changed his name from Avram to Avraham. What is the significance of this name change?

A. Avraham was born in a place called Aram. Originally, he was named Avram, which means, "leader of Aram." Until then Abraham was a leader only in his birthplace. But G-d changed his name to Avraham which means, "father of a multitude of nations," as many nations came from him.

Q. Except for being husband and wife, were Avraham and Sarah related?

A. Yes. Sarah was Avraham's niece – she was his brother, Haran's, daughter.

Q. In the Parsha, G-d blesses Avraham, "And I will make your children as the dust of the earth. Just as a person cannot count the dust of the earth, so too, your descendants will not be able to be counted." What is the significance of comparing the Jewish people to the "dust of the earth"?

A. Maimonides, in a comforting letter to a Jewish community that experienced much oppression and suffering, explains this blessing as follows, "Everyone walks and steps upon the dust of the earth, yet, the dust is here forever, long after those who stepped on it are gone. So too," writes Maimonides, "Jews may be stepped upon and oppressed, but in the end, like the dust of the earth, the Jewish people will outlive them and be here much after those who oppressed them, are gone."

How true are the words of Maimonides; Over the past 3000 years many nations have trampled on us and tried to destroy us, but in the end, the Jewish nation outlived and survived them all.

As we follow the news from Israel these days, it is worth mentioning that so many times in this Parsha, and the following Parshiot, G-d promises our forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, "To your descendants, will I give this entire Land." The Land of Israel is G-d's special eternal gift to the Jewish people. Am Yisrael Chai – The people of Israel live and will live.

Thursday, Mar-Cheshvan 11, 5784 / October 26, 2023

In Parshat Lech Lecha, which we read this Shabbat, we find that G-d put Abraham and Sarah through many tests to see if their faith in Him will not waver. The beginning of the Parsha, where G-d commands them to leave their birth place and their family and move to an unknown land, was one of the tests.

Although it was a major sacrifice on their part, in addition to being a test, there was also a benefit from Abraham and Sarah's moving from place to place.

The Midrash uses the following analogy to explain this: A bottle of perfume, of superb fragrance, was placed in the corner of a shelf. As long as it remained there, no one appreciated its fragrance. Only when someone moved the perfume from place to place did everyone enjoy its wonderful fragrance.

The same was with Abraham and Sarah. G-d wanted them to move from place to place so that people could get to know them and learn from their pious and generous ways.

Today, the 11th day in the month of Cheshvan, is the day of passing of our Matriarch Rachel. The story of her passing is told in the Book of Genesis, in Parshat Vayishlach. Although the Torah doesn't give the exact day of her passing, it is by tradition that we know that it is on the 11th of Cheshvan.

Rachel passed away at a very young age, immediately after giving birth to her second son, Binyamin (Benjamin). Thus, Binyamin's birthday is the same day as his mother, Rachel's, day of passing.

Of all of Yaakov's 12 sons, Binyamin was the only one born in the Holy Land.

Rachel is one of the Four Matriarchs of the Jewish nation. The other three are: Sarah, Rivkah & Leah.

Rachel was buried at the side of the road by the city of Bethlehem, near Jerusalem. Rachel is the only one of the Matriarchs who is not buried in the Cave of Machpailah, in Hebron, near her husband.

Tens of thousands of people will be praying at her grave today that she intercedes in heaven on their behalf. There is no prayer like a mother's prayer for her children. This is the reason Yaakov buried her at the side of the road. He knew that one day the people of Israel will be exiled from Jerusalem with the destruction of the Temple, and they will be passing by her gravesite. At this point she will pray for them and for their return.

The prophet Jeremiah says, "Thus says G-d, A cry is heard in Rama of wailing and bitter weeping, Rachel is weeping for her children, she refuses to be comforted for her children who are gone." The prophet continues, "Thus says G-d, restrain your house from weeping, your eyes from shedding tears... There is hope for your future. Your children will return to their country."

Our matriarch Rachel surely has much to cry for her children in Israel. May her memory be a blessing. May her prayers on high bring healing to us all, especially during this very difficult time. Amen.

Friday, Mar-Cheshvan 12, 5784 / October 27, 2023

Q. The name of the Parsha, Lech Lecha, is translated as, "Go to you." What lesson is there for us in these two special words?

A. The noted Chassidic Rabbi, Reb Zusia of Anipoli would say, "After I pass on from this world and come before the Heavenly Court, I'm not worried that they will ask me why I wasn't as righteous as Abraham or Moshe. That would be an unrealistic expectation of me because I could never be as righteous as Abraham or Moshe."

"What does worry me is, What if the heavenly court asks me, 'Zusia, why weren't you Zusia! Why didn't you achieve and accomplish to the best of your abilities? To that I will have no answer.."

The name of the Parsha, Lech Lecha, conveys this very important lesson: "Lech Lecha" means, "Go to you." G-d expects each person to "go" – to excel and to achieve to the best of their ability. One is not expected to be what they cannot be, but everyone is expected to be the best they can be.

Q. In the Parsha, G-d promises Abraham that his descendants will be like the dust of the earth and like the stars in heaven. The Torah tells us that G-d told Abraham, "Look to the heaven and count the stars if you are able to count them. And G-d said to him, "So will be your children." What is the significance of comparing the Jewish people to the stars?

A. Just like the stars provide guidance and direction not to get lost and wander in the darkness, so too, every Jew should be like a star, who influences others and guides them out of the darkness into the path of spiritual light.

Also, when one looks at the stars, their size is very deceiving. Although they appear to be small, in reality they are very large. The reason they seem small is because the distance between us and the stars is so great. The same is with us. If another Jew seems small and insignificant spiritually, it may be because of our distance from that person. Only when we become closer to each other can we truly appreciate the true qualities of each other.

Our sages tell us in Pirkei Avot that G-d tested Abraham with ten tests. Abraham passed all the tests and he didn't question G-d's ways. Abraham's faith never wavered even under the most difficult situations when his personal experiences seemed to contradict what G-d had promised him.

Our sages tell us that everything in life is a test. Each and every one goes through tests. To some, G-d's tests come in the form of hardship and poverty while others are tested through wealth and prosperity. Our sages caution us that the test of prosperity may at times be more difficult to pass. So, while it is preferable to be tested through prosperity, it is very important to recognize it as such.