

Parshat HaShavuah

לך לך

LECH LECHA

י"א חשוון תשע"ג

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חלקינו מה טוב

Enriching and Enhancing Your Study of the Weekly Torah Portion

Candle Lighting

6:24

S"Z Kriat Shema

9:40

Sunset

6:42

Motzei
Shabbat

7:18

MRS. AMY HOROWITZ

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AVRAHAM THE ALTRUIST

MRS. AMY HOROWITZ

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This week's parsha introduces us to our physical and spiritual ancestor, Avraham, founder of monotheism and father of *Am Yisrael*. Most of us already know a lot about Avraham—his discovery of Hashem at the tender age of three, his

destruction of his father's idols in a dramatic attempt to disprove *avodah zarah*, his walk through fire, his relocation of himself and his family at Hashem's command, and his readiness to sacrifice his beloved son in the name of his beliefs.

Indeed, if I were asked to describe Avraham's character, I would use terms such as "heroic", "intrepid", and "resolute." Yet, when the mishna (Avot 5:17) attempts to determine exactly what makes Avraham special, we discover that in order to emulate him, we simply need "a good eye and a humble spirit." In other words, Avraham was just a really good guy.

What?!?! Does this mishna even begin to do justice to Avraham's courage, his unshakeable faith, and his undeniable heroism?

The Slonimer Rebbe explains that, of course, Avraham's "good eye" and humble spirit are not his only praiseworthy qualities. They are, however, the only qualities that help him pass each and every one of his famous ten tests.

Having a good eye means being truly happy for your friend, even when you may have reason to feel jealous; having a humble spirit means appreciating your talents and gifts, but also recognizing your limitations. This selflessness, says the Slonimer Rebbe, is what helps Avraham face his tests, because each of these ten tests deals with something that is in a person's nature to be selfish about.

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Selflessness is definitely a word that aptly describes Avraham. Certainly, his selflessness is what motivates him to welcome visitors to his home despite his discomfort as he recovers from his brit milah. But the question remains: does this description do him justice? What about his courage, his great faith, and his power to inspire?

Chief Rabbi of England, Lord Jonathan Sacks, suggests that indeed what makes Avraham special is his very ordinariness! Of course Avraham gets the credit for all of those unparalleled acts of heroism mentioned above. But the mishna is telling us that in order to be a "student of Avraham," in order to follow in his footsteps, we have to emulate his everyday qualities.

We have to treat others with kindness and generosity. We have to stand up for what we believe. We have to wait patiently for Hashem to answer our prayers. In other words, we have to try to be "a really good guy."

Most of us will not be called upon to walk through fire or to sacrifice our children, but we can still be as great as Avraham by living an ordinary life of extraordinary virtue. If we succeed, we are truly heroic!

I PROMISE...

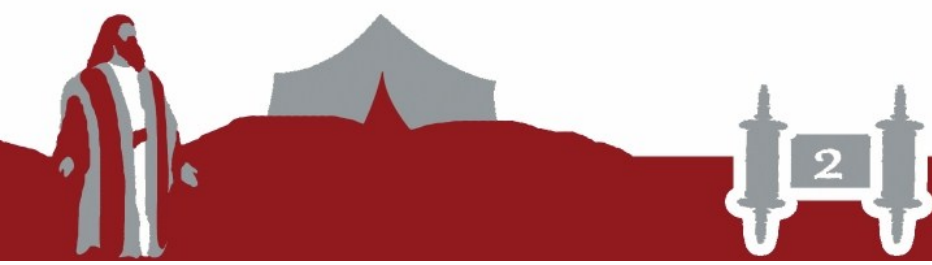
RENA BEN-EZRA ('13)

In Parshat Lech Lecha, Hashem appears to Avraham and tells him to leave his land, his birthplace, and his father's house and go to Canaan. As a reward for following Hashem's command, Avraham is promised, "וְאֶעֱשֶׂה לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל וְאֶבְרַכְךָ וְאֶגְדָּלְךָ שְׁמֶךָ וְהָיָה בְרַכָּה" — "And I will make of you a great nation, I will bless you, and make your name great, and you shall be a blessing" (Bereishit 12:2).

While there are numerous midrashim and commentators that provide insight to the purpose of this bracha, there are even more possibilities of interpretations of these brachot. The first blessing Avraham receives is that he will be made into a great nation. However, how is this blessing fulfilled if the number of Jewish people today is so few? The bracha was not intended to mean that the Jews will be great in number, but rather if one was to calculate the total number of all Jews throughout time, it would outnumber all the other nations who have existed and disappeared.

The second promise made to Avraham is that his name and his descendants' names would be great. By observing the esteemed positions that Jews have held and their accomplishments throughout history, it is evident that Jews have established a good name for themselves .

The final promise made to Avraham is that his offspring will be a blessing. In spite of all the ridicule of Israel and all of her enemies, Israel has still contributed tremendously to the progress of the modern world. These explanations of Avraham's blessing show that Hashem's promises to Avraham were fulfilled and are still being fulfilled, even in today's world.





WHERE THERE IS A WILL THERE IS A WAY

GABRIELLA SOBOL ('13)

In this week's parsha, Hashem promises Avraham that he will have children. When Avraham questions Hashem's promise, Hashem responds by telling him, "Look up at the sky and count the stars — can you count them? So shall your children be." Rav Meir Shapiro comments that if one is told to count the stars, he would see right away what an impossible task it is and never even bother attempting this feat. Yet when Avraham is asked to do this by Hashem, he does it, even though it seems impossible. In response to Avraham's optimism, his refusal to admit that something is impossible, Hashem says, "*ko yiheyeh zarecha*" — "so will his children be." His descendants will be characterized by that same optimism, by the fact that no matter how difficult a task may seem, they will not give up but they will try and try again.

When you do try, you often find strengths and abilities that you never knew you had; when you attempt the impossible, you can pass boundaries that once seemed impenetrable.

The story is told of a blind Jew who brought a book of his *chiddushim* to Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer. He asked Rav Isser Zalman to look at one particular piece he wrote — the last piece he wrote before he went blind. He explained to the rav that he worked on his *sefer* for many years, laboring over numerous *poskim* and *rishonim*, and was fairly successful in his compilation. Sections of his book were very good, but they took a lot of effort, and the man was getting older. After finishing this one particular *chiddush*, he closed his *sefer* and decided he would no longer work on creating *chiddushim*; he would still learn Torah, but the effort of making the *sefer* was too much. Right then and there he became blind! When he went to the doctors, they told him that based on the condition of his eyes; he should have gone blind 10 years earlier. For 10 years, he had done the impossible — studied and written *chiddushim* with eyes that should have been blind.

As descendants of Avraham, we are all able to accomplish the impossible!

TIME TO SAY GOODBYE

SAIGE ROSENBERG ('13)

In Parshat Lech Lecha, Hashem commands Avraham: "Go for yourself from your land, from your relatives, and from your father's house to the land that I shall show you" (Bereishit, 12:1). Avraham leaves the security of his homeland and journeys blindly, with only his faith in Hashem to direct him. A midrash compares Avraham to a bottle of perfume: if the bottle is closed, the beautiful scent can only be found at the small tip of the bottle and cannot be spread throughout the room. Similarly, when Avraham is confined to his homeland, he is not able to spread his belief in Hashem. Only after Avraham has left his comfort zone is he able to share his faith with others and make an impact on the world.

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Rosenberg continued

Avraham's necessary voyage away from home can relate to the necessity of leaving home after high school. Each and every one of us is uniquely beautiful, and our beauty should be shared not only with those in our WYHS "bubble," but with the entire world. The time will come for each of us to leave home and embark on our own journeys. May all of us be privileged with the opportunity to allow our inner beauty to shine, and may we use every occasion to bring light unto the world.

TRUST ABOVE ALL ELSE

YONINA LOSKOVE ('13)

In this week's parsha, the Torah introduces man's contemplation of ethical monotheism. The previous parshiot, Bereishit and Noach, focus on humanity as a whole. From the parents of civilization, Adam and Eve, to the savior of the entire human race, Noach, it appears as if Hashem's relationship to His world is focused on society and not the individual. Why, then, do we suddenly shift Hashem's involvement toward an individual, Avraham Avinu?

Ever since the beginning of Bereishit, Hashem is on a path to discover a human-to-God relationship. Bereishit is a description of Hashem's work and man's interaction in His world. Noach continues with the concept of man's responsibility to impact society.

Lech Lecha combines these two aspects. Hashem is asking Avraham to build a relationship with Him and make a difference in society. This is observed by the very first pasuk, where Hashem asks Avraham to leave his comfort zone and everything he knows. Hashem is asking Avraham to trust Him exclusively.

To create and build any relationship, trust is an essential component. Avraham is the first person to appreciate this truth. With this complete and unwavering trust, Hashem is able to have a true partner and begins the evolution of His chosen nation.

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