

Beit Hamidrash Hameir Laarets | Issue 235

Lech Lecha | Selfless Kindness and the Value of Tzedakah



MESILOT

Pathways to the Soul

Illuminating teachings and insights on the weekly Parsha
of **Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel Zt"l**

From the weekly lessons of his son
Rabbi Yisrael Abargel Shlita

פרשת לך לך | אנגלית

...PATHWAYS TO THE SOUL...

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Parshat Lech Lecha

The Prince and the Pauper

The Cohen children finished reciting the Keriya Shema prayer and climbed into their beds.

Moshe, their father, dragged a chair to the middle of the room and began to share a bedtime tale.

Moshe would usually insist that his children say the Shema prayer beforehand—lest they doze off mid-story and miss its recital, yet no child would ever fall asleep; Moshe's stories were fascinating and suspenseful.

Yet the tales were often so long that he would break off at the height of the suspense and resume only the following night, and the children had already become accustomed to that.

Moshe began:

"Our story took place many, many years ago, before electricity had been discovered and before anyone knew about

the force of gravity—an age of simple, guileless, hard-working folk.

The world's landscape then was utterly unlike what you know today.

Most houses were single-storied, surrounded by pastureland and endless fields.

Cheerful shafts of sunlight, falling gently on the vegetation-clad earth, filtered through the glass windows and filled the human hearts with simple calmness and contentment.

In one of the great kingdoms of that era, there reigned a unique king—warm-hearted and attentive—who carried the weight of the worries of the entire realm upon his mind and heart at all times.

The king and his wife, of course, lived in a royal palace, and a lone maidservant devoted her full strength to serving the queen.

Parshat Lech Lecha - Prison of the Mind

"Now," the father continued, "let us read on from 'Sippurei Ma'asiyot'¹ (Story 11) what occurred in that kingdom:

"There was once a king whose palace housed a maidservant who waited upon the queen.

The queen's time to give birth had arrived—but at that very hour the maidservant was also due to give birth.

The midwife who attended the two of them deliberately exchanged the two infants to see what might come of them and how events would unfold; she laid the prince with the maidservant and the maidservant's child with the queen.'

As a result of that exchange, the prince grew up in the servant's

cottage while the servant's son was reared in the royal palace.

As we know, each and every soul is drawn to its root.² Thus, the real prince conducted himself with nobility, refinement, and extraordinary courtesy, though the atmosphere around him was base and rife with deceit and immorality.

The true servant's son, by nature wild, was nevertheless compelled by palace protocol to try to behave with decorum."

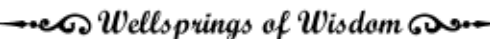
The father paused and glanced up at the clock. "Oh my—it's quite late already; with G-d's help, we'll continue our tale tomorrow."

The children, long accustomed to cliffhangers, closed their eyes and drifted off peacefully.

Prison of the Mind

While his children slept, the father's thoughts took flight:

What a deep tale. The true prince—endowed by his father with



1. Of the holy Rabbi Nachman of Breslov.

2. As Rashi comments (Genesis 21:21):

"People commonly say: 'Throw a branch into the air—it lands on its root.'"

Parshat Lech Lecha - Prison of the Mind

tremendous powers and refined traits—is held captive in a household of slaves, an environment steeped in small-mindedness, self-deprecation, and resignation. Will he ever escape such a place?

His mind kept humming, and suddenly, he recalled a study that he had once read. He closed his eyes and remembered quite clearly now:

Years ago, an intriguing experiment was conducted in England.³

Dozens of volunteers were paid a handsome daily wage; in return, each had to play one of two roles—prisoner or guard.

The assignments were entirely random: half became "prisoners," and the other half "guards."

The guards received pressed uniforms, polished boots, batons, and—most importantly—keys to the cells.

The prisoners, by contrast, were dressed in prison garb and

locked in carefully outfitted cells.

A strict daily schedule was set, and the guards were told to enforce various rules.

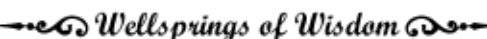
The study was meant to last two weeks, but it was halted after only six days.

To the researchers' astonishment, the volunteers soon became too deeply immersed in their roles:

The mock prisoners developed symptoms similar to those of real inmates who had spent time behind bars. They suffered mild psychological collapse, became submissive, depressed, and unmotivated.

The mock guards—though fully aware it was an act—grew aggressive and violent, embodying society's stereotype of a prison warden.

Alarmed, the researchers convened a panel. One by one, every participant was asked whether he wished to forgo his entire stipend and quit immediately.



3. Quoted in 'She'ifot' (p. 184) by Rabbi Yitzchak Hershkowitz.

Parshat Lech Lecha - The Princely Avraham

The answers were astonishing: all the guards refused the offer to quit, while nearly all of the prisoners accepted it with open arms.

Yet when the panel had ended, the prisoners all, quietly and obediently, returned to their cells—even though no one could force them to.

The researchers were stunned, and their conclusion was:

Although the prison was illusory and the prisoners were perfectly free men, they had entered, in their thought and imagination, the very feelings of the roles they played—and thus, by their own hands, gave reality to their confinement.

They could have walked out at any moment, yet the imaginary shackles became real because they perceived themselves to be prisoners and believed that they

had to obey the system's rules.

In truth, this is not an anomalous case.

Many people spend their lives in similar, intangible prisons.

The way they view themselves and their abilities persuades them that they are bound to their present circumstances and powerless to change them. Thus, they remain shackled by a reality of their own making—prisoners to it in every respect.

Life inside these illusory prisons, unwelcome though it may be, offers one advantage: it is familiar, predictable—and therefore often more 'comfortable.'

Tragically, many prefer the comfort their personal 'jail cell' provides and, without even realizing it, relinquish the chance to break down its walls and transform their lives for the good.

The Princely Avraham

Moshe's thoughts kept flowing. "This tale sharpens the question: did the true prince

ever manage to rise above his wretched surroundings, or not?"

Parshat Lech Lecha - The Princely Avraham

To consider this question, we must ponder whether such a reality has existed before—has a royal child ever been raised before among base and shallow people?

Rabbi Nathan of Breslov, of blessed memory, explains⁴ that such a case does, in fact, appear in the Torah:

Abraham our forefather was the true prince, while Nimrod was the maidservant's son, as in the tale.

Ultimately, Abraham overcame every difficulty and obstacle.⁵

Deep lines furrowed the father's brow. "How did he succeed? How did he do it?"

Before we answer, let us provide some background.

~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~

4. Likutei Halachot, Laws of Birkat Ha-Shachar, 3:8.

5. Moreover, Abraham founded a new nation wholly bound to its G-d—hence the title Avraham Avinu, our forefather.

Rabbi Baruch Rosenblum tells the following tale ('Doresh Tov,' Bereshit I, p. 205):

It was Yom Kippur, during the brief pause between Musaf and Minchah, and ten Cantonist soldiers—abducted in childhood by the Czar's army and forced to serve there twenty-five years—entered the Slonimer Rebbe's for the holy day's prayers.

The assistant handed them tallitot and machzorim, but never having held a prayer book, they did not know how to manage the unfamiliar book and garb; they stood silently at the side, listening.

Before Ne'ilah, the Rebbe mounted the lectern and began a tale:

In a certain town lived a successful man who owned a huge, handsome rooster, gifted with a wondrous voice and decked in plumes of many colors.

He showed off the bird at every chance, and crowds came to marvel.

Another townsman, eaten by envy, could not bear the miracle rooster.

One night he crept in and stole it, but knowing that the bird would sing and betray his thievery, he cut its vocal cords.

Two years passed, and one bright day, the rooster's wings sagged—it had grown old.

"Time to slaughter and eat it," thought the thief—"but on a second thought, if I kill it, everyone will know that I stole it."

He devised a plan: to pluck every single feather.

The Two Wayward Generations

In a talk delivered by my father, Rabbi Yoram Abargel, of blessed memory, he said the following:

The Mishnah (Avot 5:2) teaches, “Ten generations passed from Adam to Noah, and ten from Noah to Abraham.”

Abraham was born in the year 1948 to Creation, and thus the

average generation spanned nearly a century.

Among these twenty generations, two were exceptionally infamous: the Generation of the Flood and the Generation of the Dispersion.⁶

Both were exceedingly wicked and impure to the point that they had to be uprooted and dispersed entirely.

~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~

Thus, mute and bare, the rooster was led to the slaughter.

On the way to the slaughterhouse, the true owner met the thief, saw the bird, and shouted, “Thief! That’s my rooster.”

“Calm down,” said the thief. “Can’t you see this rooster is mute and bare? It isn’t yours.”

They went to the rabbi, who ruled: “Release the rooster and see where it goes.”

Freed, it walked straight home to its rightful owner, upon which the rabbi fined the thief heavily.

The Slonimer Rebbe concluded:

The Mishnah (Kelim 17:13) says: “Everything in the sea is pure—except the sea dog, because it flees from the water to the dry land.”

Flight and movement reveal to ask where one truly belongs.

Here, before us all, stand ten Jewish soldiers who, for twenty-five years, were forcibly deprived of their Judaism, and were taught nothing of the prayers.

But at the very first moment that they were released, they fled—to the synagogue, because that is where they truly belong.

“Ana B’Koach — By the great might of Your right hand, G-d, release the bound and captive!”

Set the Jewish people free and allow them at once to return and rebuild their Temple, their true home.

6. It was when Abraham was eighty-four that the Generation of the Dispersion was punished.

Parshat Lech Lecha - The Two Wayward Generations

Yet despite that common denominator, they differed in many other respects.

The Generation of the Flood pursued the lusts of their hearts—every desire and every craving was directed to the aim of deriving more enjoyment and pleasure.

In that age lived a wondrously righteous man—Noah—who refined himself to the utmost, attaining complete transcendence of materiality and corporeality. The Torah itself attests: “Noah was a righteous man, wholehearted among his generation” (Genesis 6:9).

He was utterly pure, free of any material corruption that is abhorrent before Heaven.

His contemporaries, by contrast, were steeped in lust like unbridled horses, and they refused to heed Noah's

rebuke—despite knowing deep inside that he was right.⁷

Because they would not repent, G-d brought the Great Flood upon them. They were wiped from the face of the earth and erased from the chronicles of history—we possess no information about those people and their history at all.

Noah eventually emerged from the ark with his sons Shem, Ham, and Japheth. He planted a vine; a miracle occurred, and grapes ripened that very day. Noah pressed them, drank their wine, and became drunk. Ham, his son, approached and emasculated him.

When Noah awoke and realized what Ham had done, he pronounced a punishment:

“Know this, Ham—your fourth son yet to be born shall be a ‘slave of slaves’ to his brothers—a perpetual servant; even in an era when he will not be actively

~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~

7. Job 21 describes at length the Flood generation's stature: they knew their Master and His ways, yet their hearts were aflame with lust, and it kept them from following Him. Therefore, they

begged G-d to strip them of intellect and to make them lowly like the beasts: “They say to G-d, ‘Depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of Your ways’” (Job 21:14).

Parshat Lech Lecha - The Two Wayward Generations

enslaved, his soul will remain forever lowly and debased.”

Years passed; Ham fathered four sons: Cush, Mizraim, Put, and Canaan.

Indeed, Canaan was the fourth son, and the curse came to fruition upon him: "Cursed be Canaan; a slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers" (Genesis 9:25).

Ham's troubles didn't end there, as articulated in Parshat Noah.

Ham's firstborn, Cush, soon celebrated the birth of a son and named him Nimrod—but Nimrod would soon bring a terrible calamity.

Nimrod guided and raised up a new generation—the Generation of the Dispersion. The Torah says, “Cush fathered Nimrod; he began to be a mighty man upon the earth” (Genesis 10:8). Rashi explains: “A mighty man”—he led the entire world in rebellion against the Holy One, with the counsel of the ‘Generation of the Dispersion.’

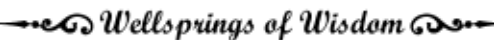
Nimrod set out to conquer minds and hearts through every means at his disposal: speeches, rallies, and above all, mockery.

As opposed to the previous Generation of the Flood, Noach felt and understood that the chief weapon for seizing a person's mindset and altering their values is ridicule, for mockery wields a wondrous power to overturn the listener's perspective.

Mockery takes lofty, sacred values and turns them into a joke.

An example would be categorizing a benevolent and charitable person as a loser who had been taken advantage of. Such ideas constitute mockery, and whoever does so joins the "company of scoffers," who are barred from beholding the Divine Presence in the World to Come.

Nimrod's success exceeded all expectations—his mockery captured the entire world and its inhabitants.⁸



8. Rashi (Genesis 10:9) describes Nimrod's strategy: "He captured people's minds

with his eloquent speech and induced them to rebel against the Omnipresent - G-d."

Parshat Lech Lecha - The Two Wayward Generations

One of Nimrod's closest associates was Terah, whom the Torah brands as having been impure—as the verse states, “Who can bring a pure one from an impure one?” (Job 14:4), which our Sages expound

(Bamidbar Rabbah 19:1):
“‘Pure’—this is Abraham;
‘impure’—this is Terah.”

Into that turbulent era—an age of derision and defilement—Abraham's soul was dispatched.⁹

~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~

9. In a discourse by my father, Rabbi Yoram Abargel (Imrei Noam, Vayigash — Essay 5), he taught the following:

Parshat Vayigash recounts Jacob's descent to Egypt to meet his son Joseph after twenty-two years of separation.

Yet, before Jacob heads for Egypt, the Torah says he first traveled to Be'er Sheva:

"And Israel set out with all that he had, came to Be'er Sheva, and offered sacrifices to the G-d of his father Isaac" (Genesis 46:1).

Why detour to Be'er Sheva instead of going straight from Hebron to Egypt?

In Bereshit Rabbah (94:4) it is explained:

Rabbi Nachman said: He went to uproot the cedars that his grandfather Abraham had planted in Be'er Sheva, as it is written, "And he planted a tree in Be'er Sheva and he called in the name of G-d" (Genesis 21:33).

Concerning the Mishkan, it says, "The middle bar inside the boards" (Exodus 26:28). Rabbi Levi taught: That the middle bar was

thirty-two cubits long—how did they find such an extremely long beam on the spot? This proves that it had been kept with them since the days of Jacob, our forefather.

Thus, Jacob journeyed to Be'er Sheva to uproot the cedars Abraham had planted there.

Still, we may ask, why insist on those cedars? Egypt surely had timber of its own.

The Midrash continues: Jacob, by holy inspiration, foresaw that when the people of Israel would leave Egypt, G-d would command them to build a Tabernacle of acacia wood. After erecting the boards, they would need a bar to pass through all the boards "from one end to the other" (Exodus 26:28)—something they could not easily obtain. Jacob therefore brought the special cedar Abraham had planted, perfectly sized for that purpose.

Moreover, this middle bar worked a wondrous miracle. The Mishkan's boards formed a horseshoe shape—twenty boards on the north, twenty on the south,

Parshat Lech Lecha - The Two Wayward Generations

eight on the west—and the bar had to snake through them all, bending by each corner. Ordinary wood is rigid; only Abraham's cedar, in his merit, became supple, rolling like a serpent through all the boards and then stiffening to hold the structure firm (Targum Yonatan).

Yet beyond this Midrashic reason, there is deeper meaning in Jacob's choice of Abraham's cedars.

It is well known that the most cherished trait before G-d is humility; thus, he ignored all the mighty mountains and rested His Presence on humble Mount Sinai (Sotah 5a).

Conversely, nothing is as loathsome and abhorrent to Him as arrogance: "An arrogant heart is an abomination to the L-rd" (Proverbs 16:5); of the haughty, G-d says, "He and I cannot dwell together" (Sotah 5a).

For every trait, writes the Rambam (De'ot 2:2-3), the golden mean is ideal—except pride: from this one must flee to the furthest extreme, becoming not merely humble but exceedingly low-spirited, as it says of Moses, "very humble" (Numbers 12:3).

Our Sages urge: "Be very, very lowly of spirit."

All of this applies only to one's personal honor; when another person affronts you, answer with humility and forgive.

However, when G-d's honor is violated, one must not practice false

humility. He must rise with courage and pride and protest with all his strength, restoring G-d's glory.

Likewise, when a person strives to draw close to the Creator, and others ridicule him or block his way, he must stand tall—"His heart was lifted up in the ways of the L-rd" (Chronicles 2, 17:6)—as the Rema rules at the very beginning of Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 1:1): "One must not be ashamed before people who mock him in his service of G-d."

Rabbi Simcha Bunim of Peshischa used to say a Jew needs to have two notes, one in each pocket.

On one, the directive of our sages should be written: "Be very, very humble," and on the other: "His heart was lifted up in G-d's ways."

When one's personal honor is slighted, he must reach for the first, but when G-d's honor is trampled, he must reach for the second.

Who was more humble than Abraham, who said, "I am but dust and ashes" (Genesis 18:27), and who welcomed even idolatrous Arab travelers with gentle service?

Yet when the wicked Nimrod sought to incite the world against G-d, Abraham did not respond with meekness; he fought boldly, with pride, and was willing to be cast into the fiery furnace for G-d's sake.

That is the symbolic message of Abraham's planting of an eshel—a tall cedar. The cedar, tall and sturdy,

Parshat Lech Lecha - The Entirety of Torah

He had to stand up against the entire prevailing reality of his

time; he was truly a 'prince born into a pauper's home.'

The Entirety of Torah

The soul of Abraham was a mighty beacon, as the prophet declares: "Who has arisen from the east—righteousness at His heels?" (Isaiah 41:2).

It was precisely his holy and awe-inspiring soul that was made to "touch down" inside the unholy house of Terah.

~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~

symbolizes dignified pride (Rashi, Leviticus 14:4). Abraham hinted: yes, I live humbly, but regarding matters of Heaven, I stand firm like a lofty cedar.

Jacob foresaw that this descent to Egypt marked the beginning of the exile and a long slavery.

He realized that if his children adopted false humility—ashamed of their Judaism before the Egyptians—they would abandon their fathers' ways and assimilate.

To withstand Egypt's impurity, they would need to have pride and stand guard over their sanctity like towering cedars.

Therefore, Jacob went to Be'er Sheva, uprooted Abraham's cedars, and planted them in Egyptian soil—thereby planting, in his descendants, Abraham's trait: humility in matters pertaining to self, yet unbending in matters of G-d. They were to hold their spiritual stature high, unashamed of their heritage.

Indeed, the Jewish people's firm stand in Egypt enabled them to keep the core elements of their identity, as the Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 20:22) says they did not change their names, language, or family purity, and in that merit they were redeemed.

The same is true for every Jew in every generation: to guard one's holiness; one must stand upright like a fortified wall, yielding to no pressure—internal or external—to compromise.

The Midrash Shir HaShirim Rabbah (8:8-10) applies the same imagery:

"If she be a wall, we will build upon her a silver turret, but if she be a door, we will enclose her with cedar boards."

The Holy One says: If the Jewish people make their good deeds stand firm like a wall, I will build upon them and save them. But if they sway like a swinging door, I will support them only briefly.

Parshat Lech Lecha - The Entirety of Torah

Terah's home seethed with malignant spirits and fearsome, stubborn kelippot—evil husks spawned by his idolatry and depravity.

When Abraham the infant entered the house, the evil forces tried with all their might to cling to him and to defile him.

Yet because a vast and lofty divine soul dwelled within Abraham's heart, he was drawn on his own accord toward G-dliness and began to conduct himself in the holy ways of G-d.

But then the true trials and ordeals began: the whole world started to belittle him, to mock him, to make sport of him—and their wrath found no rest until they branded him an 'apostate' for having rejected their idol worship.¹⁰

Abraham stood up to the intellects of the wisest men and overturned their entire worldview to the truth and righteousness.

The Gemara (Sotah 42a) teaches that four groups do not receive the Divine Presence:

~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~

May we, too, be walls of steadfast mitzvot, cedars of holy pride, and merit G-d's everlasting protection.

10. When Abraham, our forefather, was 75 years old, he arrived in the Land of Israel—and as soon as he did, a severe and terrifying famine erupted.

Predictably, the country's inhabitants began blaming the local leaders and their policies: "They have no contingency plan for crises like this," and so on.

Then, an official statement was issued from the local ruler:

"Dear citizens, be advised that we did prepare for such scenarios; we stocked

emergency grain silos and water reserves. Yet what can we do? Abraham, the son of Terah, has come to our land, and all the idols are angry at him—for promulgating the denial of their powers. In their rage, they rotted all of the grain and dried up the water," such was the depth of Abraham's contempt in the local idol worshippers' eyes.

Amazingly, the populace accepted this explanation. Instead of admitting the truth—that the famine was a decree from G-d—they latched even further onto their idols (incidentally, this is a scoffer's punishment: his reason and logic are taken away from him until he believes in blocks of wood and chunks of metal—and in similarly absurd notions).

Parshat Lech Lecha - The Entirety of Torah

The sect of scoffers, the sect of liars, the sect of flatterers, and the sect of slanderers.

We shall focus our discussion on the first group: the scoffers.

In a discourse recorded by Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler ('Michtav M'Eliyahu, 5, p. 2118), he cites the Maharal's writings:¹¹

All of Torah was given at Sinai together with the Ten Commandments, and then it was again transmitted in the Tent of Meeting together with the laws of the offerings, and then once again in the Plains of Moab together with the words of the Mishneh Torah.

To further explain:

The teachings of the Torah were revealed in three distinct formats at three different locations—At Sinai, The Tent of Meeting, and With the Mishneh Torah—and only through each of them, and through all of them together, can one grasp the Torah as a whole.

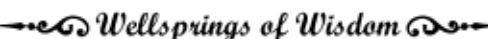
For the Torah of G-d is perfect; it cannot be apprehended in isolated fragments but only through its overarching principles—all of it at once and weaved together as one.

A fine watch is built out of hundreds of gears; one cannot fathom the role of a single cog in isolation; its purpose becomes clear only when it is seen functioning in the inside of the watch, so, too, no single detail of Torah can be discerned except within the whole of Torah.

Likewise, a passage in the Gemara cannot be understood in its local context alone; one must study it through a lens that draws upon the entire Talmud; only then can the matter be seen in its full clarity. That conveys and gives over the wholeness of Torah.

Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra similarly writes (Exodus 21:1, preface to Mishpatim):

“He who gives his heart to the plain meaning—both to the



11. Gur Aryeh (opening of Parshat Mishpatim, on Rashi's words).

Parshat Lech Lecha - The Entirety of Torah

generalities and to the details—will ponder why the portion opens with the copulative “and”: “And these are the judgments.”¹²

In other words, the 'Mishpatim,' the 'judgments,' can only be understood when they are linked back to Sinai and attached back to the entire Torah.

Utmost faith in the teachings of the Sages likewise rests upon this principle. If questions perplex us and we cannot fathom their words, it is because we perceive but one fragment; our Sages, however, saw the totality with a crystal-clear vision.

The Gemara (Temurah 16a) tells us that 1,700 rules and verbal analogies were forgotten during the period of mourning following Moses' death, and Othniel ben-Kenaz restored them by means of his dialectic analysis—that is, because he knew the Torah in its totality he

could reconstruct the lost particulars and details.

The Maharal's main message is that it is not enough to know the grand principle of the Torah from merely a single viewpoint—you must examine it from every side.

Just as one cannot describe a sheet of paper solely by its surface or solely by its edge, so too, Torah matters are only clarified when it is seen from every angle.

In our own day as well, one must know the totality—both the revealed plane and the hidden one—of Torah, if the words of Torah are to emerge in their true form.

Elsewhere, Rabbi Dessler writes (Michtav M'Eliyahu, I, p. 217):

When a man strives with all his might to understand and attain Torah, he ultimately merits

Wellsprings of Wisdom

12. Parshat Mishpatim begins, "ואלה המשפטים"—“And these are the laws” (Exodus 21:1); the prefixed vav

‘and’ is a conjunctive that links what follows to the verses that came before.

Parshat Lech Lecha - Abraham Stood Up Against the Mockery

to cleave to the Torah, and that his very thoughts become enjoined to the Torah.

Rabbi Zvi Broide, of blessed memory, spoke wondrously in this vein:

We often find ourselves thinking Torah thoughts and developing insights, and we are not surprised or astonished at all—as though it were self-evident that a physical mind can ponder something as spiritual and abstract as G-d's Torah.

King Solomon therefore marveled and said: "Wisdom cries aloud outside; in the squares she raises her voice" (Proverbs 1:20).

Whoever grasps the wonder and miracle that the thoughts of the Torah are open and available to every person—such a person indeed hears the greatest call of all.

Every Jew must yearn to cling to Torah, to merit that Torah becomes ensconced in his very essence.

Abraham Stood Up Against the Mockery

The very antithesis of cleaving to the Torah is the trait of mockery.

Solomon said: "Do not rebuke a scoffer... rebuke a wise man" (Proverbs 9:8).

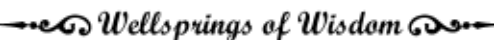
The Vilna Gaon explains that the scoffer is the diametric opposite of a Torah sage.

A scoffer's heart is empty and idle, and because the wisdom of Torah is acquired only

through grasping its totality, anyone whose heart is empty cannot possibly attain that wisdom.

One of the greatest scoffers to have ever arisen was Nimrod; through his mockery, he subjugated the world.¹³

Abraham our forefather—one solitary man—stood against him and against the entire world, and prevailed.



13. In the memorial booklet for Rabbi Yechezkel Yaakov Weinberg, author of

'Seridei Esh' (p. 41), his heartbreaking words are recorded:

Parshat Lech Lecha - Abraham Stood Up Against the Mockery

It is in reference to him that King David sang: "He raises the poor from the dust, He lifts the destitute from the dung-heap" (Psalms 113:7).

Rabbi Dessler writes (Michtav M'Eliyahu, 5, p. 243):

The verse says: "He lifts the destitute from the ash-heap, to seat him with nobles, with the nobles

~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~

"In the Warsaw Ghetto, we saw with our own eyes the depths to which a human being descends when he is empty of the fear of Heaven and bereft of a moral conscience. His cruelty surpasses that of a predatory beast many times over.

After the ghetto was liquidated and every eyewitness to its horrors was annihilated, 'warriors of the pen' of various persuasions came forward to reproach the ghetto's inhabitants for 'allowing themselves to be victims' and not rising up in time against their sadistic tormentors—for standing idle beside the pit of destruction that the murderers had dug beneath their feet, instead of throwing themselves against the enemy, as Samson did when he said 'Let me die together with the Philistines.'

Those complainants do not understand the designs of the world's most sadistic evildoers.

The murderous "Aktionen" (deportation actions) were carried out with cold, calculated planning—systematic cruelty, a mockery of all that is holy—designed to kill every desire to live, to extinguish every spark of hope for rescue.

The extermination did not strike like lightning; it came slowly, step by step, executed with meticulous German 'scientific efficiency.'

By the time the dreadful end arrived, there were no living men, only tortured shadows consumed by despair, fluttering between life and death.

No vital feeling remained in their souls but a yearning for total oblivion that would end their unbearable suffering. Who can wonder that no spirit rose in them to rebel and defend themselves?

Among the ghetto's prisoners, there were many hidden saints. When the war broke out and the ghetto became a slaughterhouse, they locked themselves in their rooms and poured out rivers of tears and ceaseless prayers to turn away G-d's wrath from His people.

I was privileged to see one of them—the holy Rebbe of Ofula, Rabbi Yirmuyahu Kalish. He withdrew from the world and stood in whispered prayer day and night, tasting the little food and drink that was needed to keep his body and soul together."

Parshat Lech Lecha - Man—Wild by Nature

of His people,” and our Sages have taught: “‘Noble’—refers to Abraham” (See Chagigah 3a).

A person may lie in the garbage for many years, yet if he truly overcomes all obstacles, G-d will raise him—granting him a

new heart and a new spirit—until he attains 'comradeship' with Abraham, our forefather.

How, in fact, did Abraham merit such greatness?

Before we answer, we must preface:

Man—Wild by Nature

In a discourse by Rabbi Natan Tzvi Finkel of Slabodka, he said:¹⁴

By their very nature, mankind is "wild." This epithet (being 'wild') is not reserved only for Ishmael; it applies to every human being, as it is written:

“A man is born as a wild donkey” (Job 11:12).¹ Every individual is naturally akin to a wild donkey whose essence is to race and romp and roam free, without bridle or bounds.

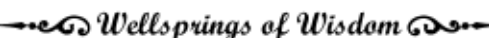
True, man is granted free choice to restrain himself, yet by nature he seeks to look after himself, to survive, eat, and live.

Our Sages have said (Yevamot 25b), "A man is a 'close relative' to

himself"—so close that he is disqualified as a witness—and therefore is suspected of bending the truth whenever his own interests are at stake; even grave prohibitions can appear to be permissible to him.

Without toil in character building, one remains that wild donkey, doing whatever he pleases without restraint. On a daily basis we witness how people revolve around their own needs, grabbing for themselves—and behaving far more like beasts than like human beings.

This is human nature, and if a person does not labor to refine his character traits, the wildness will come to rule over him, and his conduct knows no stops or bounds.



14. ‘Sichot Rabbi Natan Tzvi’ (Bereshit, p. 72).

A primary method of refinement from this wildness is through acts of chesed—loving-kindness.

Loving Kindness - Knowing the Creator

In a talk delivered by the esteemed Rabbi Aryeh Finkel, he said:¹⁵

The Gemara (Nedarim 32a) teaches: “At the age of three, Abraham our forefather recognized his Creator—he stood on his own, with no teacher or guide, yet he knew his Maker.”

The prophet, however, says, “You shall grant truth to Jacob, kindness to Abraham” (Micah 7:20), implying that Abraham’s defining trait is chesed—loving-kindness.

Which came first—Abraham’s faith or his legendary kindness?

Did Abraham’s recognition of the Al-mighty give birth to his acts of chesed, or did the trait of chesed within him lead him to recognize G-d?

The Midrash (Bereshit Rabbah 39:1) relates:

Rabbi Yitzchak said: This may be compared to a man who was traveling from place to place and an illuminated home and declared, “Can you imagine that such a home would not have a caretaker?”

Upon saying so, the owner of the home looked out from a window and said, “Indeed I am the owner of this home.”

So, too, Abraham would go around and declare, “Does anyone imagine that the world exists without a Creator?”

Upon saying so, G-d looked upon him and said, “I am the Master of the world.”

Rashi explains that the “illuminated home” in the parable refers to the sun, the moon, and stars—Abraham beheld the universe glowing and brimming with light and kindness; wherever

Parshat Lech Lecha - Loving Kindness - Knowing the Creator

one only turned, there was a radiance of benevolence:

“Who makes the great lights—His kindness endures forever;” “He Who gives bread to all flesh—His kindness endures forever.”

Because Abraham was the very embodiment of chesed, he sensed how this divine trait operates throughout the cosmos.

Therefore he thundered, “Can the world possibly run itself?” If the world is governed with such goodness, there must be a Creator who tends to it with great care.

G-d thereupon appeared and revealed, “I am the Master of the world.”

From this it is evident that by perceiving and embodying lovingkindness, Abraham came to know the Creator.

Indeed, the Torah states explicitly that acting with kindness is equated with the very knowledge of G-d.

As Jeremiah says to King Zedekiah: “He performed acts of justice and charity... judged the

law for the poor and the destitute; is that not what it means to know Me?—says the L-rd” (Jeremiah 22:15-16).

For what is knowledge of G-d if not knowledge of His attributes? As our sages teach, “And to cleave to Him” (Deuteronomy 11:22) means to cleave to His character traits.

The prophet furthermore declares, “Thus says the L-rd: Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom... but let him who glories glory in this: that he understands and knows Me—that I am the L-rd Who practices kindness, justice, and righteousness in the earth, for in these I delight” (Jeremiah 9:22-23).

The Radak comments on this verse:

“Knowing G-d means walking in His ways—doing kindness, justice, and righteousness, as He does with the inhabitants of the earth; whoever walks in His ways is a person who knows Him.”

Since Abraham perceived that G-d’s governance is one of kindness, he felt obliged to serve

the Creator in kind through performing the Creator's own work.

If G-d's "task" is to sustain the entire world with kindness, the servant must shoulder that task as well, for this is G-d's desire: that people act with chesed—as it is written, "For I desire kindness" (Hos 6:6).

Thus, Abraham—through being the nicest and most generous man in the world—knew

his Creator better than anyone else.

Recognizing that this is G-d's way, he reasoned that fulfilling G-d's will must outweigh even basking in the Divine Presence; hence, he left the presence of the Shechinah to welcome guests, for "greater is one who serves G-d and performs His will than one who merely enjoys the radiance of the Shechinah."

Authentic Chesed

We must stress the following point:

The prophet declares, "He has told you, man, what is good and what the L-rd seeks of you: only to do justice and loving kindness" (Micah 6:8).

The Chafetz Chayim, Rabbi Yisrael Meir HaKohen, writes:¹⁶

The phrase "love kindness" teaches a great and novel lesson in which, alas, many of us stumble.

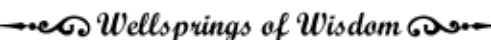
We do perform acts of kindness, but only out of

necessity—when the unfortunate and needy come to us once or twice, it is hard to turn them away; we help them, yet without real willingness or a good heart.

Therefore, the prophet says, "What the L-rd seeks of you... loving-kindness."

Do not imagine that occasionally doing a favor suffices.

A person must cherish and love the trait of chesed and, out of that love, actively seek ways to bestow kindness—doing



Parshat Lech Lecha - The One to Blame for Everything—Money

everything with a generous eye
and a bountiful heart.

One whose heart truly shines
with the love of kindness finds
that all impurities, disgraces,
and hindrances fall away, and

the Creator of the world
appears and says to him,
"I am the Master of the
world."

Let us now turn to this week's
Torah portion.

The One to Blame for Everything—Money

A large part of our Torah
portion deals with the conduct of
Sodom and the wars that raged
around it. Below is a brief
account of Sodom's story:¹⁷

After the Generation of the
Dispersion was punished and G-d
scattered humanity across the
earth, a band of people gathered
in the Jordan plain and founded
five cities: Sodom, Gomorrah,
Admah, Zeboiim, and Zoar.

Those surrounding mountains
were rich in rare minerals, and
the rich climate was truly "like
the garden of the L-rd, like the
land of Egypt" (Genesis 13:10).

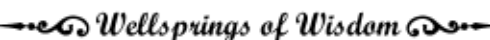
Not long after their founding,
Chedorlaomer, the king of Elam,

conquered the cities and
compelled them to pay tribute
and serve him.

For twelve years they were
subjugated; in the thirteenth, they
launched a revolt against
Chedorlaomer that dragged on
for thirteen years. In the
fourteenth year of the revolt (the
twenty-sixth year of Sodom's
existence), Chedorlaomer resolved
to purge Sodom and its environs
and to quell the rebellion.

He dispatched messengers to
his allies—Nimrod, king of
Shinar, Tidal king of Goiim, and
Arioch, king of Ellasar:

"Come up and help me attack
all the cities of Sodom and their



17. Based on Rashi (Shabbat 11a).

Parshat Lech Lecha - "And He Gave Him a Tithe of Everything"

inhabitants, for they have rebelled against me these thirteen years."

At opposite ends of the Valley of Siddim, the camps took their places—the four kings (led by Chedorlaomer) against the five kings of the plain—awaiting the signal, and when it came, war exploded in full fury.

The fighting was brutal. In the end, the four kings routed the five, seized all the wealth of Sodom and Gomorrah, and carried off Lot together with his possessions, as they did with all of the inhabitants of the rebelling cities.

Abraham learned that Lot, his brother's son, had been taken

captive, and feeling a surging sense of responsibility stirred within him, Abraham mustered all of his disciples and marched out to war.

Because Abraham knew that he was but an instrument in the Al-mighty's hand to manifest G-d's will on earth, he nullified himself utterly to the Creator—and G-d, in turn, set aside His own will for Abraham's.

Since Abraham desired to rescue Lot, G-d annulled the power and capability of the armies, and Abraham won the battle, leaving many slain combatants on the battlefield.

"And He Gave Him a Tithe of Everything"

Abraham achieved his aim: he retrieved Lot together with all of his property, and in addition he recovered the entire wealth of the five Jordan-plain cities, together with all of their inhabitants, men and women.

They all marched from their place of captivity to the Valley of Shaveh, which is

the King's Valley (Genesis 14:17), and when he arrived, two kings were already waiting for Abraham: the king of Sodom and Malchi-Zedek, the king of Salem.

Our Sages reveal (Targum Yonatan, Genesis 14:18) that Malchi-Zedek was another name for Shem, Noah's son.

Parshat Lech Lecha - "And He Gave Him a Tithe of Everything"

Whereas the king of Sodom greeted Abraham empty-handed—as befitted the Sodomite custom—Shem honored him with bread and wine and even blessed him: "Blessed be Abram of G-d the Most High, Maker of heaven and earth" (v. 19).

Abraham turned to Shem and said: There is a mitzvah to give 'ma'aser kesafim'—a tithe of one's money—and since you are a priest to G-d and preside over the academy of Shem and Eber, I wish to give you a tithe of all of the wealth. "And he gave him a tithe of everything." (v. 20)

As the Midrash says (Pirkei De'Rabbi Eliezer, chapter 27):

"Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korchah said: Abraham was the first in the world to tithe. He took the entire tithe of the possessions of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the tithe of Lot, his nephew, and gave it to Shem, son of Noah, as it is written: "And he gave him a tithe of everything."

The laws of ma'aser kesafim apply even today, and they are set out at length, in clear and concise language, in 'Ahavat Chesed,' a work authored by the Chafetz Chayim.

Needless to say, one should make an effort to ensure that their tithes reach worthy charitable causes.¹⁸

~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~

18. In this connection we bring an excerpt from a talk by my Father, Rabbi Yoram Abargel (Imrei Noam, Parshat Re'eh, ma'amar 1)

In Parshat Re'eh, the Torah commands: "Guard yourself lest you forsake the Levite, all your days upon your land" (Deuteronomy 12:19).

This verse bids us to gladden the members of the tribe of Levi—regularly

granting them the tithes that are their due and sharing with them, on every festival, from the wealth G-d has given us so that they, too, may rejoice with meat, fish, and other delicacies.

Because the Levites were chosen to serve in the Temple and were given no territorial inheritance from which to earn a living, the rest of the Jewish nation is obligated to support them with a generous hand.

Parshat Lech Lecha - "And He Gave Him a Tithe of Everything"

That requirement was clearly present when the Temple stood, and the Levites labored there. Today, however—when the Temple lies in ruins and the Levites earn their livelihood like any other Jew—this obligation continues with regard to Bnei Torah: men willing to devote their entire lives to Torah study, even willing to live in great material straits.

Their aim is to give pleasure to the Al-mighty, to draw down grace, kindness, mercy, and protection for all of Israel wherever they dwell. They are the “tribe of Levi” in our generation.

As the Rambam writes (Shemittah V’Yovel 13:12):

“Why did Levi receive no share in the Land of Israel and its spoils with his brothers? Because he was separated to serve the L-rd, to minister to Him, and to teach His upright ways and righteous judgments to the multitudes.

Therefore, he was set apart from the ways of the world: he does not wage war like all of Israel, nor does he acquire property by physical might; he is the army of the L-rd and the Holy One, blessed be He, provides for him.”

The Rambam continues (ibid. 13:13):

“Not only the tribe of Levi, but any person in the world whose spirit moves him and whose intellect instructs him to set himself apart and stand before the L-rd, to serve Him and to minister to Him,

to know the L-rd, and who casts off the yoke of the many worldly reckonings—

such an individual is sanctified, to be holy of holies.

The L-rd is his portion and inheritance forever; in this world, he will receive what suffices him, just as the priests and Levites did. As King David said: ‘The L-rd is my allotted portion and my cup; You safeguard my lot’ (Psalms 16:5).”

Hence, when the Torah warns, “Guard yourself lest you forsake the Levite,” it includes a grave prohibition against ignoring the plight of the devoted Torah scholars.

Every Jew bears the sacred duty to overcome the urge to be tight-fisted, and to open their heart and hand, and grant the learners of Torah a worthy share of the bounty G-d has bestowed upon them.

The Baal ha-Turim (Deuteronomy 12:19) notes that immediately after this warning, the Torah continues: “When the L-rd your G-d enlarges your border” (v. 20). The juxtaposition hints that supporting Bnei Torah never brings one any loss; on the contrary, it widens one’s borders and brings great wealth, as the verse says, “A person’s gift will make room before him” (Proverbs 18:16).

Later in the Parshah we read: “You shall surely tithe all the yield of your seed” (Deuteronomy 14:22). Our Sages

Parshat Lech Lecha - "And He Gave Him a Tithe of Everything"

expound (Ta'anit 9a): "Tithe so that you may become rich."

Indeed, giving ma'aser is a tried-and-true segulah for great prosperity.

We must also remember that, in our harsh exile, we have nothing but the holy Torah; only it can shield us from the raging waters that threaten to sweep us away.

By virtue of Torah study, the Jewish people enjoy divine protection from the nations that surround us and thirst for our blood—may G-d save us.

As the Midrash teaches (Vayikra Rabbah 25:1):

"Rabbi Huna, in the name of Rabbi Binyamin ben Levi, gave a parable:

A king said to his son, 'Go forth on business.'

The son replied, 'Father, I fear highway robbers on land and pirates at sea.'

What did the father do? He took a staff, hollowed it out, placed an amulet inside, and handed it to his son, saying, 'Keep this staff with you, and you need not fear any creature.'

So, too, the Holy One said to Moses: 'Tell the people of Israel, My children—occupy yourselves with the Torah, and you need not fear any nation.'

One who, for whatever reason, cannot learn Torah all day yet wishes to remain

constantly connected to G-d and to enjoy its protection for himself and his family should follow the ruling of the Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh De'ah 246:1, Rema):

"Whoever is unable to study—whether for lack of knowledge or because of pressing occupations—should support others who do study, and it will be reckoned to him as though he himself were learning."

By sponsoring Torah students who learn day and night, a person is credited in Heaven with their hours of study, and their Torah learning shields him and his household from every harm, in the spirit of the verse "It is a tree of life to those who grasp it, and its supporters are enriched" (Proverbs 3:18). Note the Midrash's precision: both "those who grasp it"—the learners—and "its supporters."

The same Midrash (Vayikra Rabbah 25:2) adds:

"In the future the Holy One will build canopies of glory for those who fulfilled mitzvot (the givers of charity) alongside the canopies of Torah scholars in the Garden of Eden."

In other words, besides the magnificent halls prepared for those who toiled in Torah, G-d will erect halls for every Jew whose generosity enabled those scholars to study with a joyous, untroubled heart.

Summary and Practical Conclusions

1. The Torah commands us to gladden the hearts of the members of the tribe of Levi and to provide them, on a regular basis, the tithes due them, sharing with them during the festivals from the wealth that G-d has granted us so that they, too, may rejoice in the feast.

2. Today, when the Temple no longer stands, and the Levites earn their living regularly, as other Jews do, this obligation persists with regard to Bnei Torah—those who devote their entire lives to the study of the Torah, even though they often live in material straits.

Being that their intent is to give pleasure to the Al-mighty and to draw down grace, kindness, mercy, and superior protection upon all of Israel - they are the tribe of Levi in our times.

3. The Torah sternly forbids ignoring the distress of these dedicated scholars whose whole lives are consecrated to G-d.

Each and every Jew bears the sacred duty of overcoming the natural impulse to be tight-fisted and to, instead, open the heart and hand and grant Torah students a respectable share of the blessings G-d has bestowed upon them.

4. The Torah promises that when one channels part of the wealth G-d has

given them to support Bnei Torah, not only will he suffer no loss—on the contrary, G-d will broaden his borders and grant him great prosperity. Giving a tithe to charity is a tried-and-true segulah and a good omen for attaining and retaining wealth.

5. In our bitter exile, we have no true safeguard but the holy Torah; only it can shield us from the surging waters that threaten to sweep us away.

Through Torah study, the Jewish people merit superior protection from the preying nations that surround us and thirst for our blood—may G-d save us, as the Midrash states.

Anyone who, for whatever reason, cannot study Torah all day yet wishes to remain constantly connected to it and to have its protection act on behalf of himself and his family must support Torah scholars financially.

It is then reckoned in Heaven as though he himself studied during those very hours that they have studied with the funds that he provided them and that Torah learning shields him and his household from every harm.

6. When G-d bestows upon a person more wealth than they need for their own sustenance, G-d is telling him that he has been chosen as a worthy

Parshat Lech Lecha - Summary and Practical Conclusions

conduit to channel great spiritual bounty to the poor and to the needy and to reveal the Kingdom of G-d upon Earth by assisting Torah scholars—thereby increasing Torah in the world and manifesting G-d's sovereignty.

However, it must be noted that a conduit that remains clear and lets the flow pass through is itself continually refilled, but if it clogs and refuses to let the bounty pass, the filling stops and it ultimately runs dry.

7. There is great value in fulfilling the obligation of separating one-tenth of one's income to charity.

If one wishes to give more than a tenth (but less than a fifth), he should first set aside one-tenth and designate it explicitly as ma'aser; any additional amount can then be given as further charity.

Likewise, one who wants to give a full fifth of their net income to charity should do so in two steps: first, separate a tenth and declare, "This is ma'aser," then separate another tenth and declare again, "This is ma'aser." in this way, he will not forfeit the special merit attached to the giving of tithes, a tenth of one's income to charity.

Shabbat Shalom!





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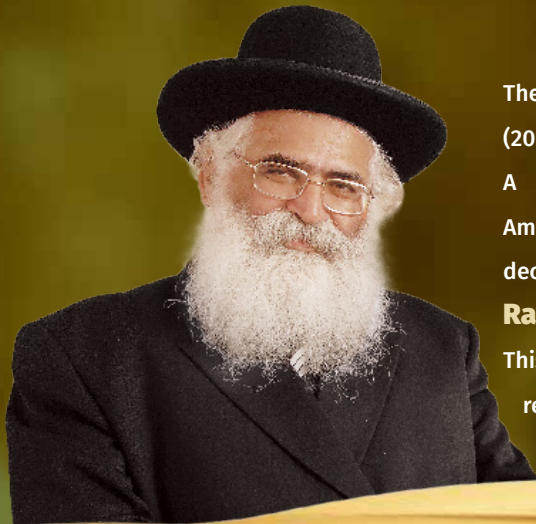
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Shabbat Times Lech Lecha

10th of Cheshvan ,5786



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New York	5:35 pm	6:34 pm	7:04 pm
Miami	6:22 pm	7:14 pm	7:51 pm
Los Angeles	5:43 pm	6:38 pm	7:12 pm
Montreal	5:24 pm	6:26 pm	6:53 pm
Toronto	5:51 pm	6:52 pm	7:20 pm
London	4:17 pm	5:25 pm	5:45 pm
Jerusalem	4:35 pm	5:25 pm	6:00 pm
Tel Aviv	4:31 pm	5:21 pm	5:57 pm
Haifa	4:29 pm	5:23 pm	5:57 pm
Be'er Sheva	4:32 pm	5:25 pm	6:00 pm

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