



From the desk of
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Office of the Rabbinate of Elad, Rosh HaAyin and Herzelia

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OHR

Parashat Lech Lecha

HAMELECH

Tried and Tested

As the *parashah* opens, Avraham is presented with one of his life's challenges.

He is told by the Master of All, "Go, for your own good, from your land, from your birthplace, from your father's household, to the land which I will show you. [If you do so, then] I will make you into a great nation, I will bless you, I will enhance your reputation. Your whole being shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and those who curse you, I shall curse. Through you will be blessed all of the families of the earth."

Rashi comments that travel tends to minimize family size, financial assets and reputation. That is why Hashem singled out these blessings, guaranteeing to grant him children, wealth and honor.

What was the Test

Now, you may wonder: Here is an aged, childless man, on the most-wanted list by the merciless tyrant of a dictator in his homeland; son of the king's henchman who already turned him in to the authorities. Avraham would have burnt to a crisp if not for an unbelievable display of a miraculous salvation. He should not really need too many incentives to escape this place. Nonetheless, here he is showered with blessings and promises by His Heavenly Father in whom he has placed his trust and experienced His salvation from raging flames. Avram is now 75

years old and his wife is 65. Does the promise of a son not talk to him? We would think it would. Maybe he is not desirous of wealth and honor, but at least the guarantee that his basic needs will be met and he will no longer be hunted? So why is this a test at all, to leave his birthplace behind? Any normal human being in such circumstances would happily pick up and run!

Some suggest that that was exactly the test. It was a test of motive. After being given such promises, why will Avram do it? Because of the money, honor and children or just because Hashem said to go? Indeed, the verse testifies, "And Avram went as Hashem told him to." He passed with flying colors. He did it for the right reasons.

Let us suggest an additional approach as well.

Something Doesn't Seem Right

Avraham's test was not so much his response to the original, "Get up and go!" as it was his response upon getting to the Holy Land and meeting up with disappointment after disappointment. First, he gets there and there is no food to eat. A famine. Where is the wealth that he was promised? Prosperity? Forget wealth, where is a slice of bread or two? Nothing. No choice but to descend to the neighboring land, Egypt. But things do not get much better. His wife is confiscated at border control. Who ever heard of that?! Here he is, on his holy mission to the holy land to finally father holy seed on the holy



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soil, and his wholly holy wife is ransacked, taken to be contaminated by a most unholy monarch of a most unholy heathen nation!

How is that for reward for a most loyal servant of Hashem?! But Avraham asks no questions. His *emunah* remains staunch.

Then he gets back to the holy land, parts ways with his wayward nephew, who claims to be his sole heir, only to come to his rescue when he is taken captive by four mighty empires.

Years pass. Still no children. His righteous wife advises him to take her maidservant as a wife. Maybe in this merit, Sarah herself will be blessed with fruit of the womb. But to no avail. Hagar gets pregnant and mocks Sarah, casting aspersions as to her degree of righteousness. More pain in Avraham's home.

And then, and then... Hashem asks Avraham to perform Brit Milah, a mitzvah which the Rambam says minimizes a person's desire to propagate. It seems to be taking one step further away from seeing his dreams realized. But Avraham asks no questions. He is a loyal servant. He goes ahead and does whatever his Patron in Heaven tells him to do.

Like Father, Like Son

Avraham paved the way. He was a trailblazer. He was a first. He set the tone for all generations. Do not make any calculations. Just do. Just do exactly as you are told from On High. You will not lose out. Reward need not come immediately. We are

in this world to do as we are told. To follow directions.

At first, directions were direct. Our forefathers merited direct communication from Hashem. Our nation had prophets for centuries, until the Destruction of the First Beit Hamikdash. Then we have the Sages. We still had a High Court, Sanhedrin, with a Nasi and Av Beit Din. Even after our exile and dispersion to the four corners of the earth, Hashem planted righteous leaders in all generations. We must turn to them and heed their calling, for their word is the Divine word.

The Real Yom Kippur

Some two thousand years ago, when Rosh Hodesh was established based upon the testimony of witnesses, two fellows came along, thirty days after Rosh Hodesh Ellul, and offered their testimony. Rabban Gamliel and his Beit Din accepted their words and declared the day to be Rosh Hashana, the first of Tishrei. Rabbi Yehoshua was skeptical. He smelled something fishy. He was sure that those two "witnesses" had not seen the new moon at all. His calculations proved otherwise. It couldn't be. Rosh Hashana ought to be one day later, he thought. That would push off everything one day. No problem, he thought. I cannot outwardly protest. Rabban Gamliel is the current leader. I'll just keep Yom Kippur twice.

But Rabban Gamliel got wind of Rabbi Yehoshua's plans and did not want Klal Yisroel



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splitting in two. He demanded that Rabbi Yehoshua appear before him on Rabbi Yehoshua's Yom Kippur, together with his staff and his wallet. Rabbi Yehoshua was perplexed. What should he do? He did not wish to show disrespect for the Nasi, but he also did not want to violate the day which he felt was rightfully Yom Kippur.

Rabbi Akiva came to the rescue. He showed up at Rabbi Yehoshua's door and proved to him that we must follow the ruling of the Nasi and his Beit Din even if they are mistaken or fooled. That is what the Torah demands of us.

Rabbi Yehoshua was convinced and consoled.

Right and Left

The Torah implores us to listen to the rulings of the Beit Din, of the leading Rabbinical figures in each generation. "Based upon the Torah which they teach you, the conclusion which they say to you, act. Do not deviate from that which they tell you, not to the right, nor to the left." (Devarim 17:11) "Even if the Rabbi tells you that right is left or left is right." (Rashi ad loc.)

Ramban expounds: The Rabbis say something. You think they're making a mistake. The matter is so clear to you, as clear as the knowledge of which of your hands is right and which is left. Nonetheless, the Torah demands that you heed the words of the Rabbis. Do not say, for example, "How can I eat that which I understand to be forbidden fats?" or "How can we kill this innocent individual?"

Instead, tell yourself, "This is what my Master told me to do. The same Hashem who gave me all the *mitzvot* also told me to do the *mitzvot* in accordance with how the Gedolei Yisroel of each generation explain them. Hashem gave the Torah together with an elastic clause to follow their interpretation and application, even if they err!"

This was illustrated in the above account with Rabban Gamliel and Rabbi Yehoshua.

Continues the Ramban: This mitzvah is of utmost importance. Hashem gave us a written Torah with general rules. The written Torah does not speak out the specific details for each and every case which may arise. Situations will inevitably come up in which different scholars will arrive at different understandings as to how to apply the Torah's eternal teachings. If each person can just act upon his own understanding, before long, there will be very many "torot" and no unified nation. So the Torah itself made clear that we are to follow the final decision of the Great Beit Din. This Beit Din is located in the Beit Hamikdash itself and as such, is given Divine assistance to arrive at the proper conclusions. Hashem tells us to listen to them, even regarding matters which seem to contradict our understanding of common sense.

Make No Mistake

Our Sages teach (Chullin 7a) that Hashem does not allow even the animals of the righteous to stumble in religious matters. Certainly the



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עיר התורה שקרובה אליך

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righteous themselves are guarded. For example, Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair was on his way to perform a mitzvah. He arrived at an inn and asked the innkeeper to feed his animal. They gave it barley, but it refused to eat until they tithed the barley.

From all this we see that our Sages are guarded. No one can say: I do not have to listen to the Rabbis because they are misled by politicians and the like. We are to believe that Hashem has His word leave the mouths of the righteous of each generation, regardless of how many politicians they spoke to. Hashem wants us to follow the rulings of the leading rabbis even if it seems to us that they have been influenced by others.

The Big Picture

We must acknowledge that our vision is limited. We do not see the big picture. We see but a fraction, and sometimes get frustrated when things do not seem to make sense. There seems to be a lack of justice, too much suffering for the righteous and too much comfort for the wicked. Let us review the following story and reinforce our *emunah*.

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi fasted for many days and prayed to be able to meet up with Eliyahu Hanavi. Finally, Hashem arranged for such a meeting. R' Yehoshua asked Eliyahu for permission to accompany him on his various missions. Eliyahu acquiesced, stipulating that the

moment he demands explanation for his actions, the two will have to part ways.

So they go together and arrive at a poor man's house. The husband and wife eagerly greet them. They have not much, but they happily share their meager meal and provide them with a place to sleep. In the morning, on their way out, R' Yehoshua overhears Eliyahu asking Hashem to kill the cow of their gracious hosts. This was their one valuable possession and essentially, their whole source of livelihood. R' Yehoshua started bombarding Eliyahu with questions, but Eliyahu reminded him, "Do you really want to know and to cut your journey short?"

So R' Yehoshua kept quiet.

They travelled some more and came upon a rich man's house. As wealthy as he was, so was he stingy. He gave them nothing to eat and let them sleep on the floor. One wall of the mansion was in dire need of renovation. On their way out, Eliyahu prayed for its rebuilding and the wall immediately straightened up and appeared as new.

R' Yehoshua was flabbergasted. Why did this stingy fellow deserve such a miracle? But he remembered the rules and kept quiet.

They continued on their way and arrived at a large fancy shul. Inside were chairs of silver and gold, and finely dressed men sat upon them. One of them opened the discussion, "Who will tend to the needs of the poor?"



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Another responded, "They can make do with some bread and water, available in shul kitchen." All of the well-to-do citizens were satisfied with that approach and no one invited the wayfarers home. So they slept in the shul. In the morning, Eliyahu "blessed" them, "May you all be leaders." R' Yehoshua, astonished as he was, kept his mouth closed.

They resumed their travels and as evening set in, they came upon a village. The inhabitants came out to greet them and invited them to rest in the best of their lodgings. All residents were eager to tend to their every need. Next morning, Eliyahu bid them farewell, saying, "May you have just one leader."

R' Yehoshua had had enough. He was ready for explanations, even at the price of terminating his excursion. Eliyahu told him: That first couple we stayed with... there was a decree from Heaven that the wife's time had come. In the merit of their hospitality, I prayed that their cow's life be taken instead.

That rich man? Right under the dilapidated wall was a hidden treasure. Had he taken care of the wall himself, he would have unearthed the treasure. Instead, I prayed for the wall to become fixed and for the treasure to remain hidden for now.

When we came to the city which was not interested in helping others, I said that they should have many leaders. A city with many

leaders is bound to have much strife and discord. The hospitable city I blessed that they should have one leader. That is the foundation for unity and success.

Eliyahu reiterated: Many captains sink a ship; one leader settles a city. The success of the wicked is a step towards their downfall; suffering of the righteous is for their ultimate benefit.

In Avraham's Footsteps

So let us follow in the footsteps of Avraham Avinu, never doubting Hashem's ways and never second-guessing the words of our Rabbinic leaders. Hashem's voice emanates from their holy throats. Let us pray for peace and unity, essential tools in enabling us to live lives of Kiddush Hashem.

This lesson is certainly applicable in marriage as well. Some people get married and expect immediate bliss. Then they get disappointed and frustrated etc. We must learn from Avraham Avinu to be patient. Life has challenges, ups and downs. Those who enjoy themselves in the here and now, often suffer later and longer. Those who face their challenges and take them in stride usually stand to benefit in a way which is real and lasting.

May we soon merit to greet Moshiach, speedily in our days.

**Fondly,
Mordechai Malka**