

PARSHAS LECH LECHA

תשפ"ה

The first two parshiyos in Sefer Bereishis are a lead up to Parshas Lech Lecha. At the end of Parshas Noach, we read about how Avrohom's family got started. It is interesting to note that the Torah explicitly identified the wife of Nachor as being one of the daughters of Horon, but this is not made explicit about Avrohom's wife, Soroh. The name 'Yiska' is identified as being the second daughter of Horon, not as Soroh, the wife of Avrohom.

It is quite surprising that all of Klal Yisroel's ancestors – all the Ovos and Imahos – came from Terach's family. Avrohom Ovinu and Yitzchok Ovinu were very insistent that their sons who will carry on their legacy find a wife from the family of Terach. But Terach himself was a very ordinary person. Why did he merit to have all of Klal Yisroel descend from his family?

Avrohom was confronted in Ur Kasdim and arrived at the conclusion that Hashem exists. This discovery threatened the status quo and made him a dangerous person who needed to be eliminated. He was thrown into a fiery furnace and survived. So Terach picked up and gathered Avrohom, Soroh, and Lot and went to Choron. Terach originally made a living making idols. But when Avrohom defied the establishment and miraculously survived, he was shaken up by it. He couldn't remain in Ur Kasdim and he left together with the part of the family who was similarly shaken by what happened.

Terach initially planned on going to Eretz Yisroel and join the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever and that small group of people who believed in Hashem. On the way, he stopped at Choron, and he had a change of heart. He remained there. If you study the map, you realize that you can't just travel straight across from Ur Kasdim in Iraq to Eretz Yisroel. You have to first travel north through Choron – which today is Turkey – to avoid the uncrossable desert terrain, and then go south to Eretz Yisroel.

Terach began his spiritual and physical journey after being inspired by what happened. But his enthusiasm petered out and he couldn't make it all the way to Eretz Yisroel. He died in Choron – physically and spiritually. There is an important lesson in this. Many people get inspired to make a drastic change in their life direction. But it is harder to hold on to that inspiration and translate it into reality and stick with it through all the ups and downs of life.

What is interesting is that Terach left Nochor and his family behind in Ur Kasdim. He only took Avrohom and the children of Horon. At that point, Nochor wasn't willing to join Terach on his journey. Yet in Parshas Chayei Soroh, Avrohom tells Eliezer to go get a wife from his brother's family. Nochor is in Choron – not Ur Kasdim. Apparently, when Nochor heard that his father Terach didn't make it all the way to Eretz Yisroel and settled in Choron, this was a manageable transition, and moved his entire family there to join Terach. So Yitzchok and Yaakov got their wives from Choron.

Holding on to inspiration long enough to make lasting change is a great challenge. At the beginning of Sefer Yechezkel, Yechezkel Hanovi says he is recording his nevuos 'in the 30th year.' But the 30th year from what event? Chazal tell us it is 30 years since King Yoshiyahu found the Sefer Torah, which inspired him to make Klal Yisroel do teshuvoh. But this inspiration petered out and this made golus Bavel inevitable. We have to make sure inspiration doesn't fizzle out with the passage of time.

Hashem tells Avrohom that in order to follow Hashem and fulfill his

destiny, he has to cut himself off from his past – even from his family – and start over somewhere completely new. Avrohom isn't even told where it is! He just has to start leaving. Hashem promises him that he will eventually give rise to a great nation. But it will only happen far in the future. In the short-term, life will be very difficult and challenging.

Lot decides to join Avrohom and didn't stay back with Terach in Choron. Lot is a complicated personality, as we will see. When Avrohom and his family arrive in Canaan, there is immediately a famine and they have to leave. This is one of Avrohom's major challenges. He already came all this way to follow Hashem, gave up everything he grew up with, and now he has to pick up and move again – right after he finally arrived and was promised this land would be his!

Here is a fundamental lesson of all of human history. If there is a famine in the land, it isn't merely because of a lack of rainfall and you just need some kind of climate control to solve the rain problem. Hashem caused the famine to occur exactly when it did, to give Avrohom a nisayon to overcome. There are two aspects of the nisayon. One is to be able to live with the contradiction in Hashem's instructions. He is told directly by Hashem to come and settle in Eretz Yisroel, and then Hashem makes it impossible to stay and settle in Eretz Yisroel! What does Hashem want from me? Secondly, Avrohom understood that this nisayon is ultimately for his benefit. This is Hashem's way of inducing Avrohom to grow spiritually and also prosper materially. Avrohom told Soroh that Hashem making us go to Egypt, is somehow part of Hashem's plan to cause us to become wealthy through you.

When they come back from Egypt wealthy, Lot leaves Avrohom and heads for S'dom. Then we have the first war in the history of humanity. In reality, war is insane and illogical. Soldiers get killed on both sides. It doesn't make sense for people to join an army to risk getting killed for someone else's benefit. So why do they do it? Why did these kings come all the way from Bavel to fight a war in Eretz Yisroel? The midrash answers that everything that nations do in the world is being orchestrated by Hashem for the ultimate sake of Klal Yisroel. Chazal tell us that the real motivation behind this war was to kidnap Lot in order to drag Avrohom into the war zone and get him killed. Hashem arranges these nonsensical wars to show us that Klal Yisroel are at the center of world events. Avrohom is put in this vulnerable position, but goes out to battle with Eliezer and his household and he saves Lot.

In next week's parsha, Avrohom asks Soroh to tell people she is Avrohom's sister in order to protect him from harm. Avrohom explains that from the moment he accepted Hashem as the absolute moral authority over the world, he has become a marked man.

The fact that Klal Yisroel has different values and goals inevitably makes the rest of society feel threatened. Avrohom Ovinu was so dangerous that four kings traveled thousands of miles to make a pretext to get Avrohom killed. They felt that this one Jew sitting in Eretz Yisroel was undermining their entire way of life. Hitler felt the same way and Iran feels the same way today. Even one Jew remaining alive is a threat because we represent Hashem in this world.

Those who learn Nefesh HaChaim know that the state of everything that exists in this world is a result of the spiritual impact Klal Yisroel have through their mitzvos and aveiros. Chazal say Hashem has nothing in this world outside the four amos of halacha. The Rambam explains that there could be a man who goes into business and builds up a great financial empire, owning mansions and gardens. He will

think that all his luxurious properties exist because of his superior business skills. But he is completely wrong. Hashem allowed his wealth to increase because somehow, this wealth will come to serve the needs of a passing tzaddik sometime down the line.

Every war that is fought is somehow connected to serving Hashem's plans for Klal Yisroel. We are at the center, because we represent an idea that is very threatening.

We are in the middle of a very dangerous war. There are billions of people living on the planet and Jews are a small fraction of a percent of the world population. But what preoccupies the attention of the world constantly – more than anything else? Klal Yisroel and Eretz Yisroel. What is a major factor in the United States election? The Jewish people and Israel. Sometimes this connection to world events isn't so clear, and sometimes it is right in front of your face. But our very existence is a threat to the world order. Hitler expressed this problem very clearly. He believed human beings are animals and they all should follow the rules of the jungle – the strong should dominate the weak. But the Jew and his idea of a conscience and absolute morality undermines this entire world-view. He needs to get rid of them if this philosophy is going to succeed. Not one Jew can be spared.

Whether we understand that we represent Hashem or we don't, the world understands that this is our job. In the end of the day, the world looks at us as a spiritual people. Hashem didn't choose us because of our business acumen or our high-tech capabilities.

Avrohom Ovinu was told to totally dissociate himself from his previous identity. He is starting a brand new nation with a brand-new idea driving it. Hashem promises Avrohom that He will make Avrohom's name great. Hashem will be known as Elokei Avrohom. There is an intimate connection between Hashem and Avrohom's descendants.

But then there are practical people in this world. Lot originally followed Avrohom for idealistic reasons and he became wealthy. But, he forgets his idealism and why Avrohom is special. He only hangs around Avrohom because it makes him wealthy. He leaves Avrohom the minute he felt Avrohom was a dead-end and was holding him back. He turns to S'dom –knowing these are the vilest people on Earth – and decides this is where I can grow my fortune. He doesn't care that being associated with these people will corrupt him. He forgot where all his wealth came from.

Jews take pride in Israel as being their homeland. But having a homeland specifically in Israel is connected to the history of this land. It is connected directly to Hashem's giving us this land and keeping Torah and mitzvos. But people want to forget all that and just see Israel as a national homeland and nothing else. It doesn't work that way.

When Avrohom returns the people of S'dom from captivity to their king, the king offers him money, and Avrohom refuses. He doesn't want to give anyone credit for his wealth besides Hashem. This is a nisayon everyone has.

Then Avrohom has another nisayon. Hashem promised him that he will father a nation with Soroh, but Soroh is physically incapable of having a child! Avrohom thinks this promise can't be fulfilled and Hashem takes him outside to look at the stars. Hashem tells Avrohom that

he has to stop thinking in terms of the physical limitations of nature. Hashem is taking Avrohom above the limits of nature – that is how Klal Yisroel will exist, from the very beginning of their conception. The fact that Klal Yisroel exist today and survive is not explainable through natural forces. Hashem promised Avrohom that Klal Yisroel will exist and that promise itself is what keeps us in existence through 3500 years of oppression, exile and persecutions.

We live in a world that makes no sense. There is an election where everyone realizes the outcome is completely in Hashem's hands. Iran is threatening to destroy us immediately after the elections. Everyone knows that everything that has happened for the past year – including the attack on Simchas Torah – is not explainable by natural causes. There were 14 settlements near Gaza – 10 were either secular or mixed and four were completely Shomer Shabbos. Hamas went only to attack the 10, and the other four weren't infiltrated at all. In the mixed settlements, there were two major yeshivos. In Ofakim, the terrorists were all over the place and they had plans to massacre the yeshiva bochurim there, but got distracted by one thing or another. Iran attacked with hundreds of missiles – twice – and nothing happened! This is insane – there is nothing normal or rational about our situation.

We are at the center of everything that goes on in the world, and we can never forget that. By sitting and learning Torah, we are vital to maintaining that awareness – within Klal Yisroel itself – that we represent Hashem in the world and it is worthwhile for Hashem to maintain our supernatural existence.

At the end of the Parsha, Hashem is preparing Avrohom Ovinu to have a child. He has to have a bris miloh first. Until Avrohom reaches the level of perfection of היה תמים he cannot father a Yitzchak Ovinu. This teaches us that Avrohom's entire life is one of growth and overcoming nisyonos. Some people come to yeshiva just to have a good experience in Israel and coast through the year. Other people come to yeshiva because they know it is a place that you have to push yourself to grow in Torah and yiras shomayim beyond your natural limits. Avrohom wasn't able to have a child until he reached 99 years old, when he reached the necessary level. Look at the spiritual distance he had to travel from when he started in Ur Kasdim in order to fulfil his destiny! This also applies to us. We have to grow in our Torah and yiras shomayim and our davening, and every area of avodas Hashem. It doesn't stop at any period of life – there is no other option of relaxing and coasting through life.

Yaakov Ovinu came back from all the troubles he had from Lovon and Eisov and Shechem and he wanted to settle down with his father in Eretz Yisroel. But Hashem said no. He has to keep on going through nisyonos and keep on growing. Only in the last 17 years of his life did Hashem acknowledge that he reached that madreigoh. Life is continual growth.

We live in very unusual times where nothing makes sense. Hashem is showing us in front of our eyes how He is running the world hands-on, and at the center of it all is Klal Yisroel. We are so small and insignificant in numbers, but we have been central to the world from the very beginning. Why? Because we have to recognize and show who we are – we represent Hashem and we continue to grow to be היה תמים.