

PARSHAS LECH LECHA

תשפ"ו

As we are finishing Parshas Bereishis and Noach and beginning Lech Lecha, the Chumash turns to discuss the creation of the Jewish people. An amazing thing comes into existence in Parshas Lech Lecha – the neshomo of a Jew. This neshomo is an incredible thing. We make a special brocho every morning, praising and thanking Hashem for giving each of us our own unique neshomo. Hashem created it, formed it, and bestowed it to me when I was born. It sustains me and keeps me alive.

The Rambam in Hilchos Geirushin says a Jewish court is allowed to beat up a recalcitrant husband until he consents to give a get that the beis din demanded. Why is this not considered coercion which invalidates a get? The Rambam explains that deep down in the neshomo of every Jew is the desire to be Jewish and follow the halacha. But his yetzer is blocking this inner desire from expressing itself and giving a get. So the beis din can apply pressure through beatings to counteract the influence of his yetzer and allow his true inner desire to come to the fore. So his consent to give a get after the beating down of his yetzer is 100% genuine.

The Rambam had a deep belief in the desire of every Jew to keep Torah and mitzvos.

You can read many of the stories of hostages who were completely secular going into Gaza, and in the two years of unspeakable tortures and hardships, came out with a deep emunoh and a thirst for Torah and mitzvos. The men who never wore tefillin before in their lives, came out of Gaza and said the first thing they wanted is to put on tefillin. Their neshomos' true rotzon was released under the pressures of captivity.

The first person to become a Jew was Avrohom Ovinu. How did this come to be? What was his journey?

Avrohom started in Ur Kasdim which was ruled by a king called Nimrod. His name tells us that he wanted to get the entire world to rebel against Hashem. He wanted to have avodo zoro instituted everywhere and that is how he would control the world. Avrohom Ovinu grew up in this society. Through his unbelievable search for the truth, Avrohom began thinking and asking and probing in his mind until he came to a full emunoh in Hashem. He rejected the avodo zoro of his entire generation because he couldn't stand the sheker of it. He began talking with people and debating people and convinced them to reject avodo zoro as well.

Avrohom is called Hashem's 'ohavi'. Why? The Rambam defines 'Ahavoh' as having something you are totally infatuated with – something you talk about all the time and are always eager for others to share your excitement. Some people are infatuated with sports or some other form of entertainment. They can't stop talking about it – they try to share it with others and get them excited about it like they are.

But this new understanding of Hashem and rejection of avodo zoro was against the social order. Nimrod ordered Avrohom to be burned in the fiery furnace for trying to spread this subversive philosophy. Avrohom is faced with a test. Is he willing to give up his life for the truth? Remember, this is before Hashem revealed Himself to Avrohom. All he had so far was his own thoughts and conclusions about the emes of Hashem and the sheker of avodo zoro. He was completely on his own. But the drive for emes and disgust for sheker is so strong that he cannot tolerate living a life of sheker. He'd rather be killed – even

without knowing the concept of dying for kiddush Hashem.

A miracle happens and Avrohom is saved from being burned – in front of everyone. But no-one responds to the truth. It is too inconvenient and not worth the trouble of changing your entire life. Horon basically felt the same way. The emes itself wasn't important to him. It was simply that he wanted to follow the winner – whoever he may be. So when he was thrown into the furnace, Hashem didn't perform a miracle for him. His motivation wasn't pure emes like Avrohom's.

Then something interesting happens. Terach has to move out of Ur Kasdim – his future in that place is finished. He was deeply shaken by what happened to his sons Avrohom and Horon. And he heard about a yeshiva of these strange, quirky people who have a yeshiva in Be'er Sheva where they talk about Hashem. This is the yeshiva of Shem and Ever. So he took his entire household out of Ur Kasdim and began to travel to Canaan to be part of that yeshiva. On the map, Ur Kasdim is in the east – Iraq. But you can't just travel due west straight to Canaan because there is a massive, uncrossable desert in between. You first have to travel north to Turkey and then come down the coast of the Mediterranean to Canaan. So Terach first went north to Choron which is Turkey. And he planned to continue to Canaan, but he ran out of steam. He remains in Choron and dies there. He never finishes the trip. Like many people he got inspired but couldn't finish the job. It is a challenge to be like Avrohom and finish the job. He took his inspiration to the finish.

Avrohom is busy talking to people and making geirim everywhere he goes. Hashem tells him: Lech Lecha. Chazal explain that Avrohom has gotten as far as a human being can get on his own power. With his brilliant, penetrating intellect he came to understand that Hashem exists and created everything in the universe. He was able to deprogram himself from all the indoctrination he received from the entire society he grew up in. He chose to give up his life for this emes and risked being killed for his beliefs.

Now there is the next step where Hashem reveals Himself to Avrohom directly. "I am the baal habiroh". Avrohom is developing and growing until he reaches his maximum potential and Hashem picks him up and brings him to the next level.

So we have various kinds of people in this story who react to Avrohom's experience.

We have the average citizen of Ur Kasdim – who heard about or saw with his own eyes how Avrohom was miraculously saved and it didn't phase him in the slightest.

It is similar to the response people had to the fact that two years ago, Hamas attacked the southern communities. There were 14 communities and 4 of them were shomer Shabbos. Hamas did not infiltrate any of those communities that were shomer Shabbos. And the rest were either exclusively secular or mixed. When you read the accounts of the events of October 7th, you can't help but be shocked by the open miracles that occurred which saved these communities. The yeshivos in Netivot and Tifrach were saved by open nissim.

Some people want to studiously ignore all these events and what they point to. But many people did get the message.

After two years of a harrowing, devastating war, the majority of hostages start to keep mitzvos. Little by little, the secular population starts moving closer and closer to Yiddishkeit – keeping Shabbos,

wearing tzitzis and tefillin. Deep down in the neshomo of every Jew is the desire to keep mitzvos. You can never know what spark will ignite a Jewish neshomo and awaken that deep desire.

These events bring to mind the gemara in Sanhedrin which asks how Moshiach will come – through teshuvoh or without teshuvoh? If Moshiach only comes with teshuvoh, and it's up to Klal Yisroel's bechiroh, what will happen if chas v'sholom Klal Yisroel don't choose to do teshuvoh? The gemara answers that if that happens, Hashem will bring a terrible ruler like Homon who will threaten to annihilate the Jewish people and this will frighten us into doing teshuvoh.

Smart people don't have to be frightened too much. They see the clear message being sent and they respond quickly. Others take longer because their neshomos are asleep and Hashem needs to knock on the door to make the neshomo wake up and let Him in.

I read a story recently about a family living in a secular kibbutz. The father grew up in a traditional family but got married and moved to a completely secular kibbutz. Two years ago, on Yom Kippur, he is playing a game in his house with his son. He reminisces to his son about his youth when his father took him to shul for Yom Kippur. He decided to take his own son to shul at the end of neilah and they heard the last shofar blast of neilah. His son asked him, "what is that sound?" Being totally secular, his son never heard a shofar in his life.

Then this father talked about the times he built a sukkah when he was a boy, and spontaneously decided to build a sukkah this year for his family. He and his family were saved when Hamas invaded his kibbutz through a complicated series of events.

Hashem sends signals to people telling them, "I'm here!" And many Jews responded to the war and all the suffering by taking on more mitzvos.

The Rambam addresses the most basic question of Sefer Iyov: why did Iyov have to suffer? The Rambam answers that after the whole ordeal of horrible suffering that Iyov went through, Iyov came out of it with a higher understanding of Hashem and a greater connection than he had before the suffering. Hashem pushed this elevation and it justified everything.

And for these hostages who underwent unimaginable suffering, the fact that they emerged with such a strong emunah and connection to Torah and mitzvos made it all worth it.

Avrohom is now communicating directly with Hashem and he is on an entirely different level.

Lot is there with Avrohom – he is sticking with a winner. But soon after they arrive in Eretz Canaan, there is a famine that they have to pick up and leave. Avrohom isn't discouraged. He doesn't second guess Hashem. He trusts that somehow this famine and sudden dislocation to Egypt is going to work out for the best.

As crazy as it sounded, Avrohom has no doubts about Hashem's care and guidance – even though he just arrived in Canaan! And sure enough, Avrohom comes back a very wealthy man. Why did Hashem make Avrohom go through this whole thing? It was to test Avrohom to see if he is worthy of all the promises being made to him. Hashem has to see that Avrohom believes and trusts in Hashem without doubts and reservations.

Hashem makes the first neshomo of a Jew in Avrohom Ovinu. The Ramban says that this came with the bris. In order for Hashem to take that neshomo and lift it to the point of full kedushas Yisroel, Avrohom had to earn it first – by passing through all kinds of tests and trials. But today we all receive that neshomo when we are born.

We have to appreciate how special our Jewish neshomo is. The kedushoh of a Jewish neshomo is indestructible. No matter how long we can cover over it and contaminate it with tumah, there will always remain a spark of kedushoh which yearns for connection to Hashem that cannot be extinguished. Our job is not to let it remain a little spark but to fan it with Torah and mitzvos until it becomes a raging fire.

Our problem is that we take many things for granted. We don't realize what kind of gifts Hashem gave us. And one of the most special gifts He gave us is a Jewish neshomo and the opportunity to develop that neshomo through limud haTorah.

We grow up frum and go through the standard path of yeshiva life that we are expected to travel. We don't decide anything important for ourselves because it is so natural and built-in to our social routine and we get pre-occupied with all the peripheral non-sense instead. We never ask ourselves: "why are we going to yeshiva?" We never stop and think that it isn't a given.

Previous generations didn't have this opportunity. We never look at it as a conscious choice to dedicate years of our lives to connecting to Hashem on the highest level and developing our neshomos through learning His Torah.