



Sefer Bereishis - Parshas Lech Lecha

Everything Has It's Time And Place

Avraham and Hashem spoke many times. We find that after the instruction to leave his birthplace, something happens that never happened before:

– וַיִּפֹּל אַבְרָם, עַל-פָּנָיו; וַיְדַבֵּר אֲתוֹ אֱלֹהִים, לְאָמֹר –
Avraham fell on his face, and God spoke to him. (17:3)

Hashem tells him what truly lies ahead for Avraham, and tells him that the symbol of the covenant will be the mitzvah of circumcision.

Avraham falls over, as if he is recoiling, as though he were burned. This is unique to this command – Avraham doesn't fall over at any other time Hashem speaks to him. So what changed now, that it never happened before?

R' Chaim Soloveitchik explains that until the command to circumcise was delivered, the fact he hadn't done it yet didn't render him – ערל the term used for an uncircumcised person. The beginning of the communication requiring it was when it was expected – it suddenly became a deficiency, and literally could not stand God's presence in this state.

R' Shlomo Farhi explains that this rubs both ways. What is expected of all Jews is nothing less than absolute, perfect dedication and diligent mitzvah performance. But everything is a long way away from anything less than that, so improvements can be gradual. So long as a person is not ready to take on more, the fact they haven't yet done so is no problem at all – it's perfectly reasonable in fact!

But equally, the moment they are ready for more and are content to stay out, suddenly a new burden is cast upon them – וַיִּפֹּל אַבְרָם, עַל-פָּנָיו.

There's nothing wrong with someone not ready for more. But sometimes more is expected, and the challenge must be taken.

Growth – Transcending Your Comfort Zone

Avraham's true ascent to greatness begins when Hashem calls on him:

– וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל-אַבְרָם, לֵךְ-לְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ וּמְמוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ, אֶל-הָאָרֶץ, אֲשֶׁר אֲרָאָךְ –
Hashem said to Avram; "Go – לך from your land; from your birthplace; the home of your

ancestors; to the land which I will show you. (12:1)

The instruction is an odd one, without delving into the nuances of the structure of order things to leave. לך-לך is taken at face value to mean “Go, for you” – ie it is in his interests to follow.

The Kli Yakar takes issue with this, and says that לך is not “for you”, but “to you” – “you” is the destination, by way of אֶשֶׁר אֶרְאֶה. He is told to leave where he is to become who he will be – independent and great. This is – לך be all you can be. Therefore it stands to reason that Hashem did not state a destination – Avraham could go as far as he wanted to.

Avraham was not the first to recognize Hashem, nor was he the only righteous person of his day. But he was the first who taught and lived accordingly – he is not noted for his great faith, but for his great kindness and warmth.

This was what made him remarkable. There was a synthesis between what he believed and how he lived.

Recognition of Hashem is very little without recognition of the soul – the spark of God within us all. There needs to be a fusion of these two components to meet the responsibility incumbent on us to be a – לך independent, quality people.

Be all you can be

Hashem’s very first communication with Avraham begins with an instruction to abandon all he knows:

לך לך מארצך וממולדתך ומבית אביך אל הארץ אשר אראך –
 “Go for yourself, from your land, your birthplace, and the house of your father, to the land which I will show you”. (12:1)

The pasuk focuses on departing Haran, rather than arriving in Israel, which seems odd if getting him to go to Israel was the primary function of the instruction. Why discuss where he was leaving from at all?

Lastly, his sequence of departure makes little sense. When travelling, you leave your home first, then the area, and then the country. Avraham is commanded to leave his country, then his homeland, and lastly, his father’s house. Shouldn’t the sequence be reversed?

The Nesivos Shalom explains that Hashem’s actual command to Avraham was that he discard the negative characteristics endemic to these places. Our environment is instrumental to our development as human beings. The more familiar the environment, the greater the affect it can have.

As such, a home environment is more influential than a neighborhood, which in turn is

more influential than a country. The command is brought to greater light; Hashem was telling Avraham to abandon the influences he picked up from his country, homeland and father's house, listed in ascending difficulty.

Rashi points out that Hashem told Avraham that this journey would be for his own benefit, which seems difficult to understand. Was Avraham motivated by personal gain?

This brings to light that לך לך means "Go for yourself" – the true beneficiary of this journey would be Avraham. Hashem told him that he had outgrown his environment; for further achievement, more was required. He would need to uproot himself from the culture he'd lived his whole life in – מארצך וממולדתך ומבית אביך. Once Avraham abandoned his past, he could achieve. אל הארץ אשר אראך.

Note that righteous people tend to face adversity and challenges frequently, this being one example. The Sfas Emes explains that righteous people need and look for opportunities to test and exhibit their qualities. If Avraham really was the first person to intuitively understand what God wanted from mankind, and be on the right wavelength, he'd have to show it. When things are easy, they are by definition not challenging. It is easy to stagnate or atrophy in such an environment. This is why Avraham had to leave.

It's important to try to be the best you can be. But, environments, particularly negative ones, have insidious, powerful influence, and must be addressed.

Circumcision, and man's achievement

Avraham enters into a covenant with Hashem, and is blessed that his descendants will be many, they will be great, and they will inherit the land of Israel. The sign of the covenant, is circumcision:

וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה אֶל-אַבְרָם, וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֲנִי-אֱלֹהֵי-הַתְּהֵלֶךְ לְפָנֶיךָ, וְהָיָה תָמִים –
And Hashem appeared to Avraham, and said to him; "I am The Omnipotent, be before me, and be perfect". (17:1)

Hashem instructs Avraham that his mission is to perfect himself – וְהָיָה תָמִים.

The Gemara records a conversation between Rabbi Akiva and Turnus Rufus, a Roman. He felt that the existence of imperfection disproves God. He argued the same for circumcision; if God wanted people circumcised, why not make them that way?

The Beis HaLevi points out that the name Hashem uses to identify Himself to Avraham is אֱלֹהֵי שְׂדֵי. This means Omnipotent; and Chazal explain that the word is a portmanteau – Hashem could have kept creating and building from Creation, but said "די" – "enough". Had Hashem not chosen to stop, creation would manifest itself perfectly, all creatures would give birth to adult offspring, food would not need preparation, and there would be no sickness. But Hashem said "enough".

Creation is not meant for us to enjoy in serenity, as the Torah tells us at the onset of Shabbos, the transition from Creation to existence, **כִּי בּוֹ שָׁבִית מְכַל-מְלֵאכְתּוֹ, אָשֶׁר-בָּרָא**, – **אֶל הַיָּמִים לַעֲשׂוֹת** – for on that day did Hashem refrain from all His work, which He made to be done. (2:3).

The point of existence is – **לַעֲשׂוֹת** to be done by man. Our instruction of **וְהָיָה תְּמִיִּם**, to be perfect, is our own responsibility, not God's. We have to make it happen.

Circumcision, is a microcosm of the principle that nothing in life comes free.

Embittered Lives

Hashem told Avraham that his children would be enslaved in a land not their own for 400 years. Yet we find that they left after just 210 years of actual enslavement. Where are the missing 190 years?

There is an answer suggested that Egypt treated the Jews much worse than they should have, so as we say in **ברוך המקום** during Seder night:

ש"ה הקבה חשב את הקץ - Hashem calculated the end. What "end" is this talking about? Hashem hastened the **גאולה** and reckoned off **190 – קץ** (from 400)- leaving us with 210.

In the Haggada we read how **וַיִּמְרְרוּ אֶת חַיֵּיהֶם** - They embittered their lives (Shemos 1:1) The Vilna Gaon points out how this is very subtly hinted to by the notes. The notes on **וַיִּמְרְרוּ אֶת חַיֵּיהֶם** are **קדמא ואזלא**, which literally means "they got up and went". Additionally, the numerical value of this is 190! They were over-embittered to a value of 190, so they got up and went!

R' Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld points out that the redemption from Egypt was only completed 7 days after it began, when the Red Sea parted and when Paroh and his army were destroyed, so where is this reflected in historical events?

He answers that the 400 years were counted from Yitzchak's birth. The extra week is found at his circumcision. Yitzchak was only circumcised 7 days after his birth – so only became Jewish then, and only 400 years from then were the Jews genuinely free.

Curses! The sensitivity of syntax

After entering into a covenant with Avraham, Hashem grants an incredible blessing to him and his descendants:

– **ואברכה מברכיך ומקללך אאור** –

I will bless those who bless you and those who curse you, I will curse. (12:3)

Why does the sentence structure change? If the first part is **ואברכה מברכיך**, shouldn't the second be **ואאור מקללך**, thereby keeping the syntax the same?

The Vilna Gaon explains that a blessing given by a successful person is more generous than that of a poor man, as he conveys his experiences in the blessing. Conversely, a poor man, who is perceived to suffer more, will likely give more potent curses than a wealthy man. Therefore, **ואברכה** first before **מברכך**, so that anyone who is blessing you should already be successful at the point in time he blesses you, so that the blessing is maximized. However, when it comes to **מקללך**, it only says that Hashem will curse him afterwards, so that at the time he curses Avraham, his curse is minimal.

Alternatively, the Kli Yakar explains that there is a concept of **מחשבה כמעשה** – that Hashem treats our thoughts as if they were acted upon. However, Chazal point out that this is only with regards to our intended mitzvos. With regards to sins, Hashem doesn't treat our negative thoughts as having been acted upon.

Therefore, **ואברכה** occurs even before a man is an actual **מברך**, even at the point that he thinks it. Not so with regard to the **מקלל** who will only receive the reciprocal curse from Hashem if he vocalizes it. Therefore, **אאור** only takes place after confirming it is deserved!

Avraham & Ur Kasdim in the Torah?

Our Shemona Esrei, the staple point of prayer, begins by mentioning the Avos. How Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov each accepted and were accepted by Hashem. The Bracha ends off with **ברוך אתה...מגן אברהם**.

The Beis Yosef quotes a Midrash that each part of Shemona Esrei is what the angels said when an awe-inspiring event happened in Jewish history. For example when Yitzchak was willingly submitted and tied to be sacrificed, the angels cried out **מחיה המתים**, or when Yosef was taught 70 languages by the angel Gavriel, they cried out **חונן הדעת**. So what is the story behind **מגן אברהם** ?

The Midrash teaches that he figured out on his own that there was a single cause creator of the universe, and he traveled around the world teaching people this theory. This angered Nimrod, the most powerful man at the time, and he was captured, and sentenced to execution by burning. They threw him into a fire from which he walked out 3 days later, unscathed, as Hashem had protected him. At this point the angels in heaven cried out **מגן אברהם** – shield of Avraham. In our Shemonah Esrei we commemorate this incredible miracle.

This is a beautiful Midrash which shows how Avraham was willing to sacrifice his life for G-d before Hashem ever showed Himself to Avraham, confirming our theory. There is only one question: Why didn't the Torah tell us about this incident?

All the Torah says is:

אני ה', אשר הוצאתיך מאור כשדים-לָתֵת לְךָ אֶת-הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת, לְרִשְׁתָּהּ –
 "I am Hashem who took you out of Ur Kasdim to give to you this land as an inheritance," (15:7).

Tanach contains numerous examples of people dying to preserve the sanctity of Heaven, why overlook mention this one? It is referenced in the Oral Torah , but this was one of the watershed moments of Avraham's life, so why wouldn't the Torah mention it?

The Shla answers that the Torah requires us to give up our lives rather than commit adultery, murder, or worship an idol, among other circumstances. It is better to die than violate these laws and live.

This Halacha is true only when forced to commit the sin. But if the Jew brought the issue on himself, it would not be called dying – אל קידוש ה – it isn't because of heaven at all, but simply because he brought it upon himself – and Avraham did just that. He stepped on too many toes to convince people that there was a G-d.

Since Avraham did not act entirely correctly, in spite of being correct, the Torah didn't record it. Therefore the only way we could mention Avraham's heroic self-sacrifice is in the Oral Torah.

Wondering why Avraham had to act out of his jurisdiction at all, the Shla answers that it was at a time when the world was so immersed in idol worship that Avraham needed to put himself in danger to put an end to it. This was fine for Avraham, as Hashem clearly agreed with his course of action. But it is not a way for us to live and emulate. We are not required to act this way, therefore the story teaches inspiration, but not action. Thus it is only hinted in our Torah in the two words "Ur Kasdim".

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