

Parshat HaShavuah

לך-לך
LECH LECHA
 י"א חשוון תשע"ו
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Candle Lighting

6:27

S"Z Kriat Shema

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Sunset

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Motzei
 Shabbat

7:20



Enriching and Enhancing Your Study of the Weekly Torah Portion

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MOTIVATION FOR ALIYAH
RABBI JONATHAN KROLL

Avram is instructed by God to leave his home and move to the Land of Canaan. The Rambam lists this challenge—making aliyah—as the first of Avram’s ten trials referred to in Pirkei Avot. Avram, the knight of faith, is praised for his initiative to leave his land and settle in Canaan. At the end of last week’s parsha, however, the pesukim seem to suggest that making aliyah was not Avram’s initiative but that of his father Terach!

”וַיִּקַּח תְּרַח אֶת-אַבְרָם בְּנוֹ, וְאֶת-לוֹט בֶּן-הָרֶרֶן בֶּן-בְּנוֹ, וְאֶת שְׂרַי כַּלְתּוֹ, אִשְׁתֵּי אַבְרָם בְּנוֹ; וַיֵּצְאוּ אֹתָם מֵאוּר כַּשְׂדִּים, לָלֶכֶת אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן, וַיָּבֹאוּ עַד-חָרָן, וַיֵּשְׁבוּ שָׁם”

“And Terach took Avram his son and Lot his grandson, and his daughter-in-law, Sarai, and they left Ur Casdim to go to the Land of Canaan. And when they got to Haran they settled there”(11:31).

How do we reconcile the two different narratives of aliyah? At the end Parshat Noach, we get the impression that it was Terach’s idea to go to Canaan and Avram just went along for the ride. At the beginning of Parshat Lech Lecha, we get the impression that Avram is commanded by God to go to Canaan and that Terach is meant to be left behind.

The Radak weaves the two narratives together and explains that Avram was the one who was commanded by God to go to Canaan and that Avram shared that divine command with his father Terach. At that point, at the end of Parshat Noach, Terach takes his family—including Avram—and begins to fulfill God’s command. On the way to Canaan though, Terach stops in Haran because he just can’t bear to completely leave his homeland. He decides to settle in Haran so that he can be close to his son Avram as Avram continued the divinely-commanded journey to settle in Canaan.

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According to the Radak's interpretation, Terach was inspired by his son Avram's encounter with God and sought to support him as much as he could in his religious journey. Ultimately though, Terach realized that the journey was Avram's, not his own, and he supported him from a distance.

Rav Mordechai Breuer presents a novel literary interpretation of the two narratives of aliyah. Each narrative represents different motivations for aliyah. At first the Torah describes Terach's **self-motivated drive** to move to Canaan. God did not instruct Terach to make aliyah. Instead, Terach decided on his own that he would have a better life in Canaan. Perhaps he was motivated by economic opportunity or by political conflicts in Ur Casdim. Whatever motivated Terach though, it was not God. On the other hand at the beginning of Parshat Lech Lecha, it is clear that Avram's aliyah is **motivated by divine command**. When Avram in fact went to Canaan, he was both continuing the path that he had begun with his father as well as charting his own path by following the divine command. Rav Breuer explains that inherent in Avram's aliyah is the pattern for future aliyot of successive generations, including our own. There are those who make aliyah like Terach intended; they want to escape persecution and seek a safer and more secure life. There are also those who see living in Israel as a divine calling like Avram did; they want to move fulfill the divine command to live in the Land of Israel and to build it.

Both the interpretations of the medieval Radak and the modern Rav Breuer present a positive portrait of Terach. Terach is not portrayed as the midrash portrays him, as the proprietor of polytheism whose stores were vandalized by Avram. Instead they each see Terach as a loving father who began a journey which was completed by his son Avram. In addition to serving as a model for future aliyot as described by Rav Breuer, may the relationship between Terach and Avram serve as a model for all parent-children relationships. As the older generation charts a path and begins a journey toward approaching God and improving our society, may the younger generation follow that path and improve upon it.

RECOGNIZING THE GOOD IN EVERYONE SHANEE MARKOVITZ ('16)

Yishmael, Avraham's infamous son, is featured amongst many other familiar figures and stories in this week's parsha, Parshat Lech Lecha.

Yishmael has always bothered me on multiple levels. His very existence raises some of the fundamental, philosophical, unanswerable questions of Judaism. Why did God create such an evil person? This question is especially ironic given that Avraham is his father. One of our most respected and admirable leaders is the father of a nation that continues to live to destroy us! Furthermore, why did God save Yishmael when he was about to die? Why did God perform miracles to provide him with water? It has always seemed to me that God went out of His way to save the very symbol of evil—Yishmael.

The answer is a classic one, but its simplicity is so profound that we should strive to understand it on a deeper level. Every elementary schooler is taught that God believes that every person is capable of perfect teshuva. Even though God saw Yishmael's future evil actions, he judged Yishmael in the moment and gave him the benefit of the doubt. The bottom line is, Hashem judged him for NOW and not for LATER.

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THE LESSON OF LECH LECHA JORDAN LANDES ('18)

In the first pasuk of the parsha, Hashem commands Avram: “לך-לך מארצך וממולדתך ומבית אביך, אל-הארץ, אשר אראך” — “Go forth from your native land, your birthplace, and from your father’s house to the land that I will show you” (12:1). Hashem does not tell Avram where his destination is or why he is being sent. Despite this, Hashem makes it clear that wherever Avram and his family are going is important. Avram needs to trust Hashem that this journey is worthwhile.

This is not the only time that Hashem tells Avram, “לך-לך”. In Parshat Vayera, next week’s parsha, Hashem commands Avram to take his son Yitzchak, “...ולך-לך, אל-ארץ המריה...” and “...go forth to the land of Moriah...” (22:2).

Why does Hashem use the term “לך-לך” for both of these journeys? Is the Torah telling us that the journeys are identical to one another? Is one more important than the other? In the first case the command is general, a land that is not described by God. In the second case the command is very specific; take your son to the place where the Beit Hamikdash will be constructed and become the holiest site in the world.

The sefer Menachem Zion provides an answer. The use of “לך-לך” in both journeys tells us that both commands are critical. In the first journey we are told that Eretz Yisrael is the place for the Jewish people to live forever. In the second command, we are told that, in this land, we need to be centered around the holiness that is represented by the Beit Hamikdash.

Today we face great challenges in ensuring that the Jewish people will be able to grow and thrive in the land that Hashem promised Avram. We must do all that we can to protect and defend the State of Israel, the fulfillment of Hashem’s promise. To make this life in Israel meaningful, we must dedicate ourselves to the performance of mitzvot and the study of Torah that are represented by Har HaMoriah. Both commands of “לך-לך” are essential.

RESISTING PEER PRESSURE NETANYA MEYEROWITZ ('17)

Throughout Avraham’s life, as exemplified in Parshat Lech Lecha, Hashem tests Avraham’s loyalty towards Him. Hashem commands Avraham to leave his father’s house and his homeland for an unfamiliar destination. Avraham is placed in a tough situation: he must obey Hashem’s command, but in doing so, he is leaving behind all that he cares about—his home.

In the end, Avraham follows Hashem’s command and is met with many other tests. Avraham had the choice to disobey Hashem’s request; however, he goes against the rest of the population at the time by choosing to follow and believe in only one God.

Children often ask their parents for permission to attend an event to which many of their friends are going. On the occasion that his parents do not agree to this activity, a child often yells, “Everyone else is going to the event, so I should go too!” The child’s parents usually respond, “Just because everyone is doing something does not make it the right thing to do.”

We see this parental outlook within Avraham’s actions: even though everyone worshipped idols and believed in many gods, Avraham understood that it was not necessarily the right thing to do. By leaving his father’s house, homeland, and past ideals behind, Avraham proves to God that he is ready to believe in Him, and only Him, which makes him successful with the rest of Hashem’s tests. Having this *emunah* in Hashem is something we should all strive for as it ultimately shaped Avraham into the great man we regard as our role model.

But we can take this one step further. God saw the good in him even when there was plenty of evil to choose to see. So what about us lowly human beings? Do we choose to see the good in people? I don't think we choose to see the good in others as often as we should. Too often we judge our peers unfavorably. Too often we do not bite our tongues, we do not withdraw judgment, we do not see the good and we only see the bad.

And so we must refer back to this parsha and remember that God went out of His way to save Yishmael, the father of evil in the world. Therefore, how much more so should we make an effort to see the good in the average person. Once we do so, we can alter our relationships with both the people around us and our Creator, and we can emulate Hashem in a most beautiful way.

THE UNTOLD DESTINATION

ETAN WINOGRAD ('16)

In this week's parsha, Hashem tells Avram to leave Charan, his homeland, and go to a land that Hashem will show him. As a reward for doing so, Hashem promises Avram that he will be the head of a great nation. Avram leaves Charan with his wife Sarai and his nephew Lot. They travel to the land of Canaan, the land to which Hashem leads him. When they arrive, Hashem tells Avram that He will give the land of Canaan to his descendants.

Why doesn't Hashem tell Avram his destination of Eretz Yisrael before he leaves? It seems that the emphasis is on leaving — leaving his birthplace, leaving his homeland, leaving his father's house. In this case, would it have detracted from the test for Hashem to tell Avram where he was going?

Rashi cites a midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 39:9) that suggests that Hashem didn't tell Avram that his destination was Canaan because not knowing the location increased Avram's reward. He received a reward for every step he traveled. Malbim explains that when someone knows his destination he can anticipate his arrival, making the journey easier. When one does not know his destination, however, he is uncertain, and every step is a challenge. Avram's journey required tremendous faith, so he deserved a greater reward.

The faith that Avraham exhibited can teach us an important lesson. Although it is difficult and challenging to follow the instructions and commands of our parents, teachers, and Hashem, we must always remind ourselves that they are our ultimate advocates. Hashem tested Avram for his own benefit and reward. We are also often challenged and it may not be immediately apparent to us that it is for our benefit. We must always remember that although we may not understand the full reason or meaning for every step of our challenge, the ultimate goal and destination is be for the greater good. Often, the benefit and reward of a challenge is not revealed until the journey is completed.

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