

# PARSHAS LECH LECHA

תשפ"א

This week we begin Parshas Lech Lecha. This parsha is making a key transition in the Torah. Parshas Bereishis and Noach talk about the foundation of all humanity, and here in Lech Lecha, the Torah shifts its focus to the development of Klal Yisroel.

Avrohom Ovinu was a unique individual. He grew up in a society run by Nimrod. To understand who Nimrod is, the Torah tells us that he was a gibor before Hashem. It means he rebelled against Hashem and saw to it that the philosophy of avodo zoro achieved total hegemony over his entire civilization. All opposition to the concept of avodo zoro would not be tolerated and must be brutally put down. This is because the idea of Hashem is a dangerous idea.

Avrohom told Avimelech that he was afraid of getting killed over his wife because he realized there is no yiras Hashem in this place. When you acknowledge the idea that Hashem exists and created the world, it means there is absolute right and wrong. This moral truth doesn't bend and doesn't budge for anything or anyone. It is not subject to the liberal twisting and handstands we see people making constantly in today's crazy world to justify outrageous things. People don't tolerate this idea of Hashem's authority because it means everyone is held to an absolute standard – and my ego can't determine how I should live.

Hashem chose Avrohom Ovinu to establish His chosen nation because He knew that the ideals of tzedoko and mishpot of Avrohom were not humanistic like today's liberal philosophy. It is rooted in the Derech Hashem – it is absolute. The only true, genuine tzedoko and mishpot comes from Hashem Himself. Every other source of morality is subjective and corrupt.

When Moshe and Aharon confronted Pharaoh with the demand from Hashem that he release Klal Yisroel, Pharaoh replied, Who is Hashem that I should listen to Him? Chazal explain that Pharaoh looked up his directory of all the various gods and deities and didn't find Hashem there. Of course not. The ancient world at the time believed in paganism. Each nation and each force of nature had its own spiritual being controlling it. There was no concept of a single absolute power who created everything and controlled everything, and to whom all human beings owe complete obedience. This is Y-K-V-K. This is a very dangerous set of beliefs and people resist it with all their power. Hitler, in his book Mein Kampf, laid this problem out very clearly. The Jews represent a conscience and morality in human civilization, and because of that, I can't live my life in the animalistic way that I want. So the Jew and the morality he represents has to be eliminated from the world.

Avrohom Ovinu came to the conclusion on his own that Hashem exists and that all avodo zoros are meaningless nonsense. It's one thing to keep this realization to yourself. But Avrohom started to talk to people and debated people and started convincing people he was right. He quickly became a threat to his entire society's way of life. Some people respond to the truth with a genuine realization that they must change how they think and how they live. But most people just want to continue doing what they've been doing and not be bothered by the troublesome truth. It is too hard to suddenly start rethinking everything.

Nimrod couldn't tolerate this and decided to throw Avrohom into the fire. Horon, Avrohom's brother, is just a practical person who likes to go with the winner. He can't gather the strength of conviction to follow the truth no matter where it leads like Avrohom.

Nimrod confronts Avrohom and threw him into the furnace. He

miraculously survived. Avrohom is the winner. So now Horon is willing to do the same, and they throw him in too. But Hashem doesn't like this approach. If you want to be saved, you have to have strong convictions and be willing to sacrifice for those convictions – not just to go along with the winning side after the fact. So Horon is not saved from the fire and he dies. Then Terach takes his family out of Ur Kasdim and they stop in Choron. Then we see in this week's parsha, Hashem communicates with Avrohom for the first time, telling him 'Lech Lecha' – continue traveling to Eretz Canaan.

The midrash explains with an example of someone who was traveling and saw a tremendous palace with bright lights and a lot of activity going on. He reasoned to himself that there must be someone who is in charge of this palace. It couldn't be just a series of pure random coincidences – like thousands of monkeys typing on a computer – that just happen to create this great palace with all this activity. The traveler knows things don't just happen by themselves. Someone must have built this structure and is running it. At that point, the owner of the palace emerges and identifies himself to the traveler saying, I am the master of this palace.

Similarly, Avrohom looked at the amazing size and complexity of the universe and realized on his own that such a system could not have just developed on its own. A Supreme Being must have created it and is running it. At that point, Hashem reveals himself to Avrohom Ovinu and teaches him how this world is being guided. So Avrohom now has the clarity of how this whole world works, and Hashem wants Avrohom to go out and mold a new society based on this knowledge. There was already a yeshiva of Shem V'Ever, but it was operating as a small enterprise with no intention of impacting the world. They did not see it as their role to publicize their knowledge to the world. Avrohom took up that role of representing Hashem to the world.

Avrohom's nephew Lot stays with Avrohom throughout his travels. But eventually, after they come back from Egypt with great wealth, they decide to part ways. But why? Isn't there enough land for both of them to live comfortably together? Apparently, Lot felt that it wasn't enough. Lot was Horon's son and he inherited his father's practical approach to life. Avrohom Ovinu, for all his lofty and spiritual ideals, is coming to a dead end. He has no children to inherit him and carry on his legacy, so why not take the land for myself now? He lets his animals graze on other's fields without muzzles, thinking that it is all destined for him in the end anyway.

Avrohom didn't accept such behavior and told Lot to go elsewhere to avoid conflict. So Lot looks for the most fertile and productive area in the region and decides to go to Sdom. What about the fact that it is known that these are very evil people? Moral and spiritual considerations were not the biggest priority for a practical person such as Lot. Prosperity come first.

Then a world war broke out and the four kings of Mesopotamia come all the way to Eretz Canaan to put down the rebellion. Who is leading these kings from Mesopotamia? Rashi tells us that it is none other than Nimrod. This means Nimrod couldn't tolerate Avrohom Ovinu setting up a new society even though he is so far away from Iraq. Even from there, Avrohom is a threat. They set up this entire invasion of Sdom, planning to take Lot captive in the process and lure Avrohom out in order to finally kill him. The midrash finds all kinds of allusions in the pesukim about this war between the kings which reveal that Avrohom Ovinu represents Hashem's absolute morality in the world.

There is absolute right and wrong – and therefore he poses a threat to their way of life – even in far-off Mesopotamia. They want to deny any absolutes and remove the source of this idea by getting rid of Avrohom Ovinu.

The war unfolded. The kings of Sdom and Amorah fall into tar pits, and Lot is captured along with all the property he amassed in Sdom. But Avrohom didn't react indifferently saying Lot got what he deserved for going to such an evil place for the sake of money. The posuk says that one is not allowed to abandon one's relatives and ignore their situation. The Rambam in Moreh Nevuchim uses this to explain the posuk that one cannot act hatefully to a ger who is descendant from Eisov. He is your relative. This is despite the fact that Eisov's nation made itself a mortal enemy of Klal Yisroel! It doesn't matter. You have to be concerned about all members of your family.

Sitting in Chevron, Avrohom hears about Lot's capture from a refugee of the battle and organized his army to chase out the marauders. Avrohom chased them all the way up north out to the Golan area and restored everything back.

Who was this refugee? It was Og. He has his own agenda in telling Avrohom about Lot's capture. He also wanted Avrohom to be killed – not for ideological-kefiroh reasons, but because he wants to marry Soroh. The kings are interested in kefiroh and he is interested in taivoh. Yet we find that Og is given credit for telling Avrohom about Lot's capture and is eventually rewarded. This raises the question – what if you do the right thing for the wrong, self-serving reasons?

Chazal are clear. Og had no good motivations for telling Avrohom about Lot's capture. But Hashem says He will reward Og for every step he took to save Lot. He was given a very long life. For his intention to kill Avrohom, his punishment will be that he will live to see the

hundreds of thousands of Avrohom's descendants before they destroy him. So there is reward for every good deed, but with the reward is the punishment itself – unbelievable dikduk hadin.

Then we come to the Bris Bein Habesorim. What relevance does this bris have in our lives today?

We live in a very morally corrupt world. Klal Yisroel represent Torah and the Torah represents truth. Hashem chose Avrohom to represent His values in this world. The posuk says Avrohom's commitment to tzedoko and mishpot comes from one Hashem, one Torah and one absolute source of values. What was murder 100 years ago is murder today. It is not the twisted thinking of morality that we see in the world today.

The Derech Hashem includes tzedoko and mishpot. We are not animals. We have a tzelem Elokim and we treat all human beings with dignity and respect. The world hates us for these values, but that is our mission. Nimrod couldn't tolerate Avrohom preaching the truth in Ur Kasdim and Avrohom preaching the truth in Canaan! He had to come all the way from Iraq to try and stop Avrohom. What saved Avrohom? Not Lot's practical approach to life. Hashem didn't select us to be practical people. Even though the world hates us for our values and principles, but as long as we represent Hashem in this world, Hashem grants us success in return.

When people make important decisions in their lives, they first have to know who they are. The first question that has to be answered is what am I here for? Am I just like everybody else? What is my job in this world? It is to represent Hashem in this world. Avrohom goes from nisayon to nisayon and he sails through – he always comes out secure and successful because he never loses focus that his mission in this world is to represent Hashem.