

## Parshat Lech Lecha: Eternal Call

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

What was it about Avraham that he was chosen to be the father of the Jewish people? While the Torah tells us about the righteous character traits of Noach, not much is said of Avraham. The Ramban explains that one of the most pivotal events that showed Avraham's extraordinary faith in Hashem was when he was thrown into the fiery furnace in *Ur Kasdim*. The Ibn Ezra asks, why was this not written in the Torah? The Ramban answers that it would have been impossible to record it without mentioning the idolatrous beliefs of Nimrod, which the Torah did not want to do.

The Maharal in *Derech HaChaim* quotes the *Mishna* in *Avot*, "Love that is dependent on a thing will not last. Love that is not dependent on anything is eternal." The Torah says that Hashem chose Avraham, but it does not say why. This teaches us that Hashem's love for

us is eternal and not dependent on anything. But we do know that Avraham was chosen for his good deeds and we have many statements in the Torah testifying to this. The Torah says, "I am Hashem who took you out of *Ur Kasdim* to give you this land." The Ramban says Avraham merited to receive the land of Israel because of the self sacrifice he displayed at *Ur Kasdim*. How can we say he wasn't chosen for any reason? And if we say Avraham and the Jewish people were chosen randomly, why in fact were they chosen?

The Shvilei Pinchas explains that Avraham was considered a ben Noach and according to Jewish law he was not allowed to give up his life for Hashem. How then can we say that his act was meritorious? The Midrash says that Avraham was saved from the furnace in the merit of Yaakov, whose attribute is truth. Avraham understood in the deepest recesses

of his soul that he couldn't possibly stay alive if Hashem's name was at stake. He understood that the ultimate truth was to give up his life. When he decided to let himself be thrown into the furnace, he knew that he could potentially be forfeiting his life in the next world for doing something forbidden. Yet his love for Hashem was so great it wasn't contingent on any reward. The *Netivot Shalom* says, it was not such a wonder that Avraham wasn't burned in *Ur Kasdim*. The bigger wonder was why *Ur Kasdim* wasn't burnt by the fiery love of Avraham for Hashem. As a result of his actions, Avraham merited measure for measure that Hashem chose him and his descendants out of love not dependent on anything. Avraham's extraordinary strength and self-sacrifice was passed down through the generations. Our love for Hashem and His love for us is everlasting.

## Honorable Mentchen II – The Motives of Tzedaka

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hanoach Teller

Our sages teach that the benefits of giving *ellecharity* are so significant that Hashem will credit a person for giving *tzedakah* even if his intentions weren't altruistic. Many people are less generous than they could be, because they are afraid they will lose their money if they give too much. Yet the *Shulchan Aruch* writes that one's assets will never be reduced by giving charity. On the contrary, the *gemara* says, "*Aser kedei she'titasher*. Give a tenth so that you will become wealthy." The *Gemara* says there's a prohibition to test Hashem, but in the area of charity one may test Him.

In medieval France, Jews would often have the table on which they had served poor people fashioned into their coffin as a reminder that man can take nothing with him except his good deeds. People often think when they see a poor man, "I have faith in Hashem that He will protect him and provide for him." But the Chassidic masters say, be less of a *baal bitachon*. As Rabbi Abraham Twersky says, "Have trust in Hashem for yourself and see what you can do to help others."

Charity is a privilege and we have to view ourselves as fortunate rather than burdened, if we can give to the poor. In the early 20th century there was a generous English

businessman, Abraham Pinchas Landau, who lived in London. In 1921 he experienced a severe setback in his business. His family insisted that he stop giving money to the poor. Mr. Landau felt that a decision of this magnitude warranted the approval of a great Torah sage. So he made the long trip from London to Vienna to consult with the *Chofetz Chaim* who had come to participate in the *Knessiah Gedolah*, the convention of the *Agudath Yisrael* movement. The *Chofetz Chaim* would speak to Hashem like a close friend. At the third Shabbat meal he began reciting the psalm, *Mizmor l'David*. When he got to the words, "*Ach tov v'chesed yirdefuni* (May only good and kindness pursue me)," he explained. There will always be hindrances in life. Far better that people pursue you for your kindness and charity, than for other misfortunes. Mr. Landau walked out a happy man.

The *Sefer Chassidim* writes that the highest level of charity is giving *tzedakah* in a way that the recipient doesn't feel he's getting charity. If someone comes around selling something, even if you don't need it, buy from him. In an essay in the *NY Times*, Alice Allan writes that she was sitting in a restaurant with a friend when they noticed a poor man frantically searching in his pockets for cash to pay for his meal. She recounts, "My friend approached

him, made as if a ten dollar bill had fallen off the table and bent down to pick it up for him. The man, his face beaming said, 'Thank you, I was sure I had that bill.'" She writes, "My friend did a great kindness. It wasn't just the ten dollar gift. It was treating the poor man with care and respect so that he would not know that he had received charity."

In the same vein, it's better to give someone a loan rather than charity to spare him shame. If he's incapable of paying you back, try to avoid meeting him to save him from embarrassment. Giving of your professional services to the poor is also form of charity. People who work with children are in a position to discern their needs. Rav Aryeh Levin would stand and watch the children in *Eitz Chaim*. He would notice which children had tattered shoes or torn pants and he would give them money to buy extra food or to take a bus home on a cold day.

The *Noda B'Yehudah* was asked to give money for a worthy cause. He gave a significant sum, but not all of it. He acted as the *Mishna* in *Avot* says, one should not take all of the *mitzvah* for himself but let others participate as well.



## Spiritual Serenity: The Holy Day of Shabbat

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

What is it about Shabbat that makes it so special? Why is it one of the most fundamental *mitzvot* in the Torah? The Zohar calls Shabbat, *yoma d'nishmata*, the day of the soul. It is the ultimate pleasure of the soul, the highest expression of love between Hashem and the Jewish people. The sages say Shabbat is *me'ein olam habah*, a taste of the World to Come. The Ohr Hachaim in Shemot teaches that enjoying the Shabbat day is a privilege and a requirement. We have to experience the pleasure of Shabbat in this world to be able to move on higher to the full pleasure of the soul in *olam habah*.

The Rambam writes that if one keeps the Shabbat, it is as if one has kept the whole Torah. If one worships idols, it is as if one has desecrated the whole Torah. He rules that if a Jew violates the Shabbat purposely in public, he has desecrated his holiness as a Jew and has the halachic status of an idol worshiper. He is disqualified from giving testimony and cannot be a *shochet* (ritual slaughterer). Just as idol worship is a violation of a basic fundamental of the Torah, so is violating the Shabbat.

The sages say that the Shabbat contains more blessing and holiness than any other holy day. We also see that desecrating Shabbat is more severe than desecrating *yom tov*. If a Jew violates *yom tov* he is punished by *kareit* (his soul is cut off in this world and the next), while if he violates Shabbat he is punished by the death penalty of stoning. What about Shabbat makes it the holiest day of the year?

The Kobriner Rebbe notes that Shabbat is the fundamental connection between the Jewish people and Hashem. The Bereishit Rabbah says that when Hashem created the world He paired each day with a partner. Shabbat was left alone and so Hashem said, "The Jewish people will be your partner in marriage."

The Zohar writes that the 613 *mitzvot* help the soul maintain its holiness in a world of evil and defilement. The Torah is a roadmap showing us the way to traverse through the obstacles of this world so that the soul can eventually return to a higher place in heaven. Shabbat is the most potent way for the soul to

tap into its holiness. When a Jew keeps Shabbat he connects to the holy light of the Creator that joins the soul to its original root under the throne of Hashem in heaven. For six days the soul struggles in a dark, evil, world filled with challenges. On Shabbat, the soul gains new energy for the coming week. The prophet Yeshaya said, "Az titanag al Hashem." The pleasure of Shabbat is being with Hashem, holding His hand, and basking in His embrace. The Ramchal says this is the goal of life. Man must navigate the maze of life and rediscover Hashem.

The Baal Shem Tov says *deveikut Hashem* is not meant to be reached in the World to Come. The pleasure of cleaving to Hashem can be experienced in this world on Shabbat. The Rambam says those who keep Shabbat get their reward in this world. It is the pleasure of being with Hashem experienced through the *neschama yeteirah*, the extra soul, that we get on Shabbat.

The Netivot Shalom writes an inspiring thought from the Avnei Nezer based on the Avudraham. On all the holidays, *Shachrit*, *Mincha*, and *Maariv* share the same basic prayer format. However, on Shabbat each of the three prayers are different. This is because Shabbat represents the marriage of the Jewish people with the seventh day.

The Jewish marriage has three levels. The first stage is *kidushin*, when the groom gives the bride a ring. The second level is *nesuin*, when he brings her into his domain. The third stage is *yichud*, when they merge into one entity. Similarly, Shabbat and Klal Yisrael are joined in a holy sanctified marriage that involves three stages. Friday night is *kedushin*. In Maariv we say, "Ata kedashta," You created a holy relationship. In *Shachrit* we advance to the next level of *nesuin* when we become one family unit. In *Mincha* we reach the final stage. The Zohar calls it *rava d'rava*, the deepest most profound love. We say, "Ata echad," You are one. The most joyous day of the week is Shabbat when the Jewish people, the groom, unite with the *Shechina*, the Shabbat bride.

Shabbat is the fusion between Hashem and Israel. Therefore, if a Jew violates the day, it is as if he cuts off his connection to the Almighty, as if he breaks the marriage contract and

divorces from Hashem. To some extent, someone who violates Shabbat damages his holiness as a Jew and loses some of his Jewishness. But there is a road back. If he repents and observes Shabbat again, he can remarry Hashem and come back to full Judaism.

There is significance to the communal aspect of Shabbat. The Netivot Shalom points out that the gemara says, *kneset Yisrael*, the collective of Israel will be the marriage partner of Shabbat. Whereas an individual Jew can marry out of his religion and be lost to his nation, the Jewish people as an entity can never break its connection to Hashem. Hashem and Israel are married forever. The Almighty promised that He would always stay connected to us. When we keep Shabbat it's not only the individual keeping it, but the nation who can never be severed from Hashem or Shabbat.

This explains why the Netivot Shalom places great importance on joining a communal gathering to celebrate Shabbat. The beauty of Kabbalat Shabbat reaches its peak as communities of voices sing *Lecha Dodi* together. On Shabbat day, we have the communal *mitzvah* of reading the Torah. Jewish law even allows a mourner to come to shul on Shabbat because it is through the community of Israel that we can connect to Hashem. The collective soul of *nishmat Yisrael* can never be defiled. It's above time and place and comes from a world where there are no sins.

Shabbat is the connection of the soul of Kneset Yisrael with the holy spirit of Hashem that comes into the world on the seventh day. We say in davening, "V'yanuchu bo kol Yisrael." The national soul rests on Shabbat. The Kozhmitzer Maggid and the Noam Elimelech taught that the union of love of the Jewish people on Shabbat is a collective experience, more than it is an individual experience. This is why if someone violates the Shabbat he is cut off in a certain sense from the Jewish nation. May we merit to experience the true sweetness and tranquility of Shabbat, the taste of *Gan Eden*, that is truly Shabbat.