



Strings and Shoestrings: Parshat Lech Lecha

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles
Summary by Channie Koplowitz-Stein

The first war documented in *Tanach* is in *Parshat Lech Lecha*. Lot, Avraham's nephew, was taken captive in war. Immediately, Avraham ran toward the battle and almost singlehandedly won the war for the four kings, rescuing Lot. Following the protocols of war, the king of Sodom told Avraham, "Give me the people and the possessions take for yourself." Avraham's lifted his hand as if swearing, "...If so much as a thread or a shoe strap, or if I shall take anything of yours! So, you shall not say, 'It is I who made Avraham rich,'..." Rav S. R. Hirsch explains that Avraham's raising his hand was to indicate that all power comes from Heaven above and that we should shun even the most trivial things if they may adversely affect our reliance on Hashem.

Mizkeinim Esbonan asks, why was taking from the King of Sodom different than taking gifts from Pharaoh and Avimelech? Avraham wanted to distance himself as far as possible from Sodom in every way, especially since these riches were probably obtained through illicit means, opines Rabbi Wachtfogel. In addition, Avraham felt there was a possibility of a desecration of God's name, that perhaps the king of Sodom might say that he had enriched Avraham, says R. Chasman.

What is the significance of the threads and shoe straps? The Gemara tells us, Hashem rewarded Avraham's descendants with the *mitzvot* of *tzitzit* threads and *tefillin* straps. The

Mishchat Shemen notes that men wear *talit* and *tefillin* only for *shacharit*, the service established by Avraham, the first person to refer to Hashem as Master, signifying a personal relationship with Him. Rabbi Kofman cites Rabbi Lopian that the purpose of *tefillin* and *tzitzit* is to remind us of Hashem's ubiquitous presence so that we refrain from sin. Avraham understood how easy it is to fall into the trap, and so he swears in order to strengthen his resolve.

Avraham's refusal to take from man was at the core of his essence. He was satisfied with little, always looking to see what people needed and always wanting to give, writes Rabbi Lopiansky. He was happy for others and had an *ayin tovah*, a good, expansive eye. In contrast midat Sedom were unwilling to give and saw what others had as a detriment to themselves.

We can achieve great heights from even the lowliest of circumstances notes Rabbi Lopiansky. The *tzitzit* were to have a thread of techeilet/blue to remind us of heaven and Hashem's throne of glory. With the proper mindset, the most mundane of items can become a vehicle for deep spirituality. These *mitzvot* were to become the antidote for unbridled materialistic desire. Avraham Avinu realizing how powerful material desire can be, fortified himself with an oath.

The Shemen Hatov cites the Gerrer Rebbe that Avraham raised his hand to talk directly to it, "Don't think you have accomplished. It is the work of Hashem that has brought victory." Avraham was afraid of becoming prideful and therefore Hashem rewarded him with these two *mitzvot* as a constant reminder of His presence.

Taking anything, even a shoelace would diminish God's glory. Doing *mitzvot* is not about me, but about God. All the gifts Hashem has given us are for the purpose of helping and giving to others. In contrast, everything in Sodom was tainted with selfishness and ego. Avraham wanted nothing to do with it. Therefore, Hashem would give him *mitzvot* that would surround him externally with the *talit* and give him the internal mechanism with *tefillin* as constant reminders of His presence.

The *talit* represents the marriage of Hashem to *Bnei Yisroel* at *Sinai*. The *Midrash* tells us that at *Sinai*, *Bnei Yisroel* saw a vision of Hashem wrapped in a *talit*, and the *Torah* symbolized the ring. What was this spiritual *talit*? Hashem had wrapped Himself in the light of creation. With *Bnei Yisroel's* acceptance of the *Torah*, creation itself was now complete. Now, the bride, together with her husband, would continue the work of creation by building their homes with the principles of *Torah* and *kedushah*.

Traveling the Journey of Life Tehilim 13 Part II

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

The generation of the desert were on a very great spiritual level. They witnessed countless miracles; the ten plagues, the Exodus from Egypt, the splitting of the sea, the giving of the *Torah*, yet the *Chumash* recounts how they failed time and again. Is there hope for us? How can we ensure we will succeed? There is what Hashem will do and what we will do. When we fail, Hashem sends consequences that are meant to bring us back. It's a process that takes time. Hashem maneuvers history without interfering with our free choice, in a way that will enable us to succeed. Chapter 78 ends with Hashem choosing David as king.

King David is the guarantee of the future. *Mashiach* will come from him. Our mission is to bring the world to its destiny. When Adam lost the opportunity to keep the one *mitzva* he was commanded to do, Hashem gave the future Jewish nation 613 opportunities to choose correctly. How can we succeed in our choices? Let's explore chapter 24 to glean direction.

Chapter 24 was written by King David. It begins, "To Hashem is the earth and its fullness, the inhabited land and those who dwell in it, for he founded it upon seas and

established it on rivers..." When something is created, there is usually a purpose in mind. All men are anticipated to ask- "Why are we here, what is our essence and mission?" Although Hashem let us know His will, free choice allows people to make the wrong choices for which they must then pay a heavy price. Later generations could look back at the mistakes of previous generations and still they failed.

"Who may ascend the mountain of Hashem and who may stand in the place of His sanctity... We have to climb a mountain. We have the capacity to make good choices,

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although it may seem overwhelming and challenging. But we must also 'stand' i.e., remain at that elevated plane. The dor hamidbar reached great heights. They followed Hashem into the desert faithfully with young children and old people and little food. They jumped into the *Yam Suf* and accepted the Torah without question. There were many moments of greatness and a greater part of the time they remained on a high spiritual level. Ten mistakes in 40 years is a superb record. The question remains- how can we ascend and also remain there? All of us have

moment of spiritual highs and elevated clarity. How can we stay at that level?

David Hamelech tells us that the *avot* succeeded because they had, "Clean hands and a pure heart and did not swear in vain." To make the right choices we need these three prerequisites. It's relatively easy to ascend during peak moments of closeness to Hashem. But staying there is much harder; free choice can pull us in the opposite direction. Clean hands indicates action, purity of heart is the soul, refraining from swearing in

vain is speech. When we work on subjugating these three aspects to Hashem's will, we will have the clarity and enthusiasm necessary to maintain spiritual elevation. Based on this we can explain the dynamics of free choice. The state a person is expresses itself in his thoughts, speech, and actions. Man was created to grow. Therefore, Hashem will send him tests to push him to ascend to a higher level. The more a person invests in the struggle, the easier it gets. When he ascends higher, things that were difficult in the past are no longer a battle anymore.

Melechot Kotev Temporary Writing Part II

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Shimon Isaacson

What is the *din* when it comes to *kesiva* (writing) on *Shabbat* that is not long lasting, such as using disappearing ink. The *Mishna* in *Shabbat* tells us, anyone who does a *melacha* that is long lasting is *chayiv*. This is mentioned in connection to *melechot kosher*. *Melechot kosher d'oraysa* means forming a long-lasting knot. The *Mishna* seems to indicate that this has broad application to other *melachot* as well. It is considered *melechot machshevet*, sophisticated quality work that is long lasting. *Melacha* done in a flimsy manner where it will be quickly undone is not considered *melechot machshevet*.

The *Shaarei Zion* quotes a disagreement between the *Rambam* and *Rashi* exactly how to read the *Mishna*. The first approach would be, if you do a lasting *melacha* on *Shabbat* that will never be undone you're *chayiv*. The second approach would be, if you do a *melacha* and it will last only over *Shabbat*, you're *chayiv*. The first approach says the *melacha* has to last a long time analogous to a *keshet shel kayama*, a permanent type of action applying to all *melachot*. The second approach says, *keshet shel kayama* is attaching two things together with a permanent type of attachment. But when it comes to

other *melachot*, as long as you have some reasonable amount of permanence on *Shabbos* itself, you would be *chayiv*. *Shaarei Zion* says *kesiva* would seem to need a *davar hamiskayim*. Even if it only lasts through *Shabbat*, one would be *chayiv*. This is the view of the *Rambam* and as a result perhaps the *din* of *kiyum* in *melechot kotev* also might be unique to that particular *melacha*. It's a fundamental disagreement between *Rashi* and *Rambam* and its unclear whether all *melachot* require a *kiyum l'olam*.

This has a lot of applications. For example, the question of diapers on *Shabbat*. Gluing is a *tolda* of *tofer*. When diapers are manufactured, the adhesive is glued down as part of the packaging. If you open it on *Shabbat*, did you just tear a permanent type of gluing or can you say it was designed to be undone? It's certainly not temporary as it's already been glued down for weeks and was definitely designed to stay glued for more than a day. The question remains how to understand the *Mishna* and how to interpret it in connection to *kotev*.

The *Mishna* says, if you write on skin you're *chayiv*. If you write using fruit juice or dust which is not permanent, the *din* is *patur aval*

ossur. The ink used must be long lasting. The *Gemara* continues, if you write with proper ink you will certainly be *chayiv*. So, the *Mishna* says, to be *chayiv melechet kotev* you need a bonafide type of ink. The *Rambam* points out even further that in order to be *chayiv* for *kotev* both the ink and surface must be long lasting like wood, leather, or paper. If you use ink that is not permanent like fruit juice or if you write on a lettuce leaf that will wither away after some time, you aren't *chayiv*. The *Mishna* only says the ink must be long lasting, it doesn't mention the surface. The *Rambam* however counters, why should it make any difference. The writing has to last and therefore both the ink and surface must be permanent. The *sugya* of *kotev* in *Masechet Gittin* is strikingly parallel to *melechot Shabbat*. The *Mishna* says you can write a get with any kind of ink as long as it's long lasting. However, you can write on any surface even on an olive leaf or on the horn of a cow. The *Baale Hatsofot* ask, if you need a lasting *ketiva*, how can you write on a leaf which will disintegrate? *Tosfot* answers it refers specifically to an olive leaf which is very strong and durable and will last a long time. Therefore it is considered *miskayem*.