



## Parshat Lech Lecha: Iconoclast Introduction

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

Other than the genealogical listing of Avraham as the son of Terach and his marriage to Sarai, we hear nothing about the life of Avraham Avinu until he is 75 when Hashem commands him, "Go for yourself from your land..." While the *Medrash* tells a bit about Avraham's journey to monotheism, the *Torah* itself is silent. Why did Hashem choose Avraham and why was this first command to him and his obedience so significant?

Ramban explains that if the *Torah* were to record Avraham's journey, it would need to record the views of the idolaters and Hashem didn't want to give them a platform. The *Torah* could still have said that Avraham was righteous, but according to the Maharal, Hashem had "personal" reasons for choosing Avraham. As the Ben Melech notes, Noach was saved as a reward for his past righteousness. In contrast, Avraham was chosen for his future potential, that he would, "Command his children after him to follow Hashem's path..."

The reasons for Hashem's choosing Avraham are beyond our understanding, writes Rabbi Schlesinger, and the unconditional love between Hashem and *Bnei Yisroel*, is equally unexplainable and constant even when unearned. The Ner Uziel extends this idea of unconditional love to the love *Bnei Yisroel* have for *Eretz Yisroel*. While Yehoshuah and Kalev loved the land unconditionally, the other spies were only willing to accept the land without the challenges. The spies' sin, and subsequently that of the nation, was that love of the land was conditional. If love is to last, it must be unconditional, even when the object of the love is flawed and doesn't meet expectations.

Hashem's love for Noach was contingent on his righteousness and when his descendants were no longer righteous, the covenant was no longer valid. In contrast, continues Rabbi Milevsky, Hashem's covenant with Avraham was unconditional, as was His gift of the Land. The first command to Avraham cements both relationships. Hashem will continue to love us even when we are unworthy. And our love for *Eretz Yisroel* must be equally unconditional.

That connection between the descendants of Avraham and *Eretz Yisroel* has never been severed. Just as we have yearned to return to the Land throughout the millennia of our exile, so has the land yearned for the return of her people. We have never stopped praying for our return to Zion. The two are inextricably intertwined, writes the Nachalat Yosef. Our connection to *Eretz Yisroel* is part of our very essence, for it is the only place where our prophets could receive the word of Hashem, and it is the place from which the deepest secrets of *Torah* can be studied and revealed, adds the *Aderet Kohein*.

*Beit Av* brings us back to our original question. The value of one's actions lies in following Hashem's command even without understanding. This was the first command Hashem gave Avraham, and he followed it without question, proving his worthiness of receiving Hashem's blessing.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe points out, our connection to Hashem was initiated by Hashem Himself, and it is through the *mitzvot* that we grow the relationship. Our *mitzvah* observance, must stem from our desire for the relationship. *Mitzvah* observance brings our bodies as well as our souls into the relationship. *Kiruv* is most effective when one begins

with doing rather than with intellectual discussion. *Na'aseh/Do*, follow Hashem's command on faith because it is His command, before *nishma/hearing* the details. Hashem commands Avraham - "Go *mei'artzecha/your ratzon, Mimoladitcha/your familiar habits, Umibeit Avicha/your seat of your identity, your thought processes.*" This is the paradigm for every Jew. Hashem has wired us to seek that connection and has given us the process through *Torah* and *mitzvot*. When one performs a *mitzvah* because he has been so commanded, one reaches a greater connection than when one initiates the act.

The *Torah* is not a story book. It begins with what is relevant to *Bnei Yisroel*, not with what may be interesting writes the *Sam Derech*. What becomes paradigmatic is itself recorded in great detail. The emphasis is on the positive, on the souls Avraham and Sarah made in *Charan*. Great people, writes the *Zos Hatorah*, focus on the constructive, not on the destructive. Focus on bringing more light, on strengthening the faith, rather than on highlighting the darkness. With enough light, the darkness of evil will disappear. This is what we must focus on when interacting with our children.

Rabbi Reiss quotes the *Sefat Emet*, based on the *Zohar* that the call of lech lecha, go for yourself, was a universal call. But only Avraham answered the call. And just as Avraham Avinu heard that call, so do our neshamot hear that daily call. We too need to separate ourselves from our egos, so that we can hear the voice of Hashem calling to us. We must approach every day as a new opportunity to connect and observe the *mitzvot* with renewed focus and love.

## Tehilim 95- Lechu Neranena

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Dr. Esther Shkop

Tehilim 95 begins the *Kabalat Shabbat* service. As the sun sets and the six days of the work week come to an end, Jews dressed in their finest greet the *Shabbat*, "Come let us sing to Hashem, let us trumpet to the rock of salvation..." This psalm is the first of six celebratory psalms that correspond to the six

days of creation followed by the 92nd psalm, *Mizmor shir l'yom haShabbat* corresponding to the seventh day.

Tehilim 95 expresses our joyous gratitude and is a celebration of life and of our special relationship with Hashem. "Let us greet Him

with gratitude." Many commentators view this psalm as a vision of *Yemot ha'Mashiach* described as *Yom shekulo Shabbat* - a day or a life that will be all *Shabbat* without stress, when we openly commune with our Creator and our fellow Jews uniting together to sing to Hashem who has saved us. At that time it will

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I become apparent that Hashem has bestowed his special protection on *Am Yisrael*; for He is "*Melech gadol al kol Elohim*." In this case *Elohim* refers to all the forces of nature and the political powers to which we have been subject to, which will all disintegrate to nothingness.

*Malbim* points out that psalms 91-100 are attributed to *Moshe Rabbeinu* and share an underlying theme, namely the ways of Hashem and in particular the two manners in which He runs the world. One is through the unbreachable laws of nature where the guiding hand of Hashem is obscured. The second is through open intervention. *Am*

*Yisrael* has special hashagacha protection seen through the miraculous events that defy scientific explanation which distinguish us from other nations. This psalm celebrates the hidden miracles in natural phenomenon and the revealed miracles limited to Hashem's chosen people.

The poet reminds us that we are Hashem's sheep and He is our shepherd and that he will again perform miracles, but on condition that we heed His voice. "When your ancestors tested Me; they tried Me, even though they had seen My work." It seems that open miracles were insufficient to sustain the *Bnei Yisrael's* faith. Even with irrefutable proof of

Hashem's existence and of His love they repeatedly lost faith and as a result Hashem says, "I swore in my anger that they would never come to my resting place. This refers to *Eretz Yisrael*. A new generation would arise and conquer the land. The psalm ends with a dire warning not to be like the freed slaves who died in the desert and never reached the promised land.

I believe this is a warning for our generations as well. For who like us saw open miracles and victories in battle, in which Israel won against formidable foes. Yet so many forget that this is on condition that must heed Hashem's voice.

## Rivka: A Rose Among Thorns Part II

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

When Yitzchak blessed Esav, he blessed him that the younger brother would serve the older. This seems bewildering as in the prophecy Rivka got when she went to *Shem V'Ever* she was told the exact opposite- that the older would serve the younger. The Ramban asks this question and he notes that even though Hashem told Rivka what would be, she never informed Yitzchak about it. She reasoned that he was a prophet and if Hashem would want him to know, he would know. She didn't interfere with Hashem's plan and keeping quiet when she felt an urge to talk required tremendous strength. Rachel, Esther, and Shaul Hamelech are described as having this same middah of silence, which stems from the middah of *tzniut*-focusing on the internal and putting one's own interest aside to do the will of Hashem.

If Yaakov was perfect and didn't need any blessings, why did Rivka send him to Yitzchak to get the brachot? She could see externalities and internalities with a clearer vision than Yitzchak and could separate the good from the evil. The world was created with justice. We are meant to deserve the reward we receive. However, Hashem added mercy so that the world could continue to exist. Rivka saw prophetically that the descendants of Yaakov would falter. Although their external

appearance might appear corrupt, their inner essence would always remain attached to Hashem and could be reawakened with the power of Yitzchak's blessing.

The Shem MiShmuel explains that Hashem put Rivka in an evil place to begin with so that she could fully focus on the internal. To perfect one's middot, a person has to face the opposite extreme. Hashem spurred Rivka to grow by putting her in situations that challenged her greatest quality, *chesed*. By following Hashem although it was against her nature, she perfected her character traits. Rivka grew up in the house of Besuel and Lavan who were focused on externalities and dishonesty. Her resolve in the face of such wickedness became stronger, as she saw how corrupt her environment was.

Rivka laid the groundwork for future generations. She is the mother of Yaakov, who when he went into exile taught us how to overcome darkness and difficulties. Hashem doesn't punish to get even with us. Every retribution is a way to help us overcome challenges and bring us to the ultimate redemption. Each of the four exiles served to rectify different sins. Therefore, Hashem put us in different environment where we saw those evils, arousing us to reflect on our deeds and repent.

Rashi says about Rivka that she was like a rose among the thorns. This is a term from Shir Hashirim which creates a connection between Rivka and the Jewish people. Any wind that rustles the rose brings it towards the thorns which makes a hole in the petals. Yet Rivka maintained her beauty and color. Rashi says this is how the Jews are among the nations. They entice us to sin. Yet we remain loyal following in the footsteps of Rivka. She is not merely a role model, but a part of her is within us. There's an inner quality of divine greatness that every Jew can actualize on their level. Although we might be living among Lavan and Besuel, we have the strength to rise above it.

Being focused on internality is being a person of truth. The only real truth is spirituality which is eternal. David Hamelech says in Tehilim about the *tzadik*, "Everything he does will be successful." Rav Hirsh explains, the key to happiness is going from one side of the river to the other, overcoming resistance and reaching the other side. This describes the *tzadik* who knows the truth and is ready to struggle to overcome challenges to get there. Rivka's ability to do *chesed* stemmed from this. She knew the truth and she was committed to pursue it, come what may.