Dedicated in memory of Rachel Leah bat R' Chaim Tzvi

תורת אמך WOMEN'S TORAH WEEKLY

Volume 18 Number 34

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Ultimate Benefit- Parshas Lech Lecha

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

The phrasing of Hashem's command to Avraham to leave Charan contains within it the lessons we, Avraham's descendents, can derive from it. "Go for yourself from your land, your birthplace, and from the home of your father to the place I will show you." Rashi explains, "For your good, for your benefit." If Hashem promised Avraham such great rewards as the ensuing verses state, how could Avraham's following Hashem's command be a test of his faith? Doesn't the promised reward negate the challenge?

That is the exact point of the challenge and Avraham's rising above it. The Torah implies that although Avraham heard Hashem's promises, his motivation was not the reward. Instead, his motivation was to do Hashem's will and thus forge a closer bond with G-d.

This explanation, however, leaves us with a further question. How could obeying Hashem's command be for Avraham's benefit if these promised rewards do not come into play? We know that our ultimate purpose is doing Hashem's will. As Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller points out, the yetzer hara, the evil inclination, tries to deter us from attaining our higher goals. But now we have a tool to trick the yetzer hara into joining us to do a mitzva. We can tell him about all the material rewards in store for us. Naturally, the yetzer hara will believe he will have so many more tools at his disposal to entice us away from service to Hashem. Once we have disabled his wiles, we can now perform the mitzvot truly leshem shamayim, entirely for His service, with no ulterior motives. Undermining the yetzer hara is indeed of great benefit to us.

And yet, the benefits continue to accrue. True, Avraham was greatly blessed with material wealth. Material wealth, however, is meant to be a means to our goal. The rewards – of material wealth, of reputation, and of family connections – can become great tools in furthering one's service to Hashem. As Avraham used his wealth and his influence to increase the knowledge of Hashem's presence on earth, we can learn from our patriarch and use our blessings to expand ourselves in His service.

One greater, immeasurable benefit still awaits exploration, the benefit to our inner, true selves as we obey Hashem's commands. We know each action we do has a ripple effect on the world around us. But there is also an intrinsic benefit to our very souls for each mitzva that we perform. Each time we do Hashem's bidding, we not only improve our external world, but also improve the personal, intrinsic, internal world of our soul. In this respect, we are doing chesed with Hashem.

This concept requires some clarification. Chesed is performed by providing someone with something he cannot achieve on his own, whether it is food for his family or the ultimate chesed of a Jewish burial. It seems sacrilegious to say that there is something Hashem cannot achieve on His own.

However, this is precisely the way He created the world. He created Man neither as a robot nor as an angel, but with the free will to perfect himself and his soul. This is the only gift we can give to He who has everything: our purified, perfected soul. As our Father, He wants us to experience this great joy, but as any human father knows, the child must learn to create that inner world of peace, serenity and wholeness within himself.

Our challenge is to recognize that in order to create new and stronger ties to our Maker, we must get out of the ruts we have fallen into, break old habits, so that what we do, even when they are prayer and mitzvot, does not remain just rote, physical action, but becomes internalized to change our essence and perfect our souls. We must desire not only to do, to give tzedakah and do chesed, but to be baalei tzedakah and baalei chesed. After all, we are not human doings, but human beings.

As our ancestor Avraham did, we must leave the constrictions and ruts created by our physicality (artzecha – the earth of our body), our natural instincts (moladitcha – your birthplace, genetic makeup), and the negative influences of our environment (beis avicha – your father's house), and search for our inner essence along the path Hashem will show us.

In the Merit of Righteous Women: The Power of the Jewish Woman

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

"Eishes chayil ateres baaleh," A righteous woman is the crown of her husband. She makes her husband a king by believing in him and trusting him. Her willingness to receive from him inspires him to find the place within himself that mirrors Hashem's malchut (kingship). The mashpiyah, the one giving forth, has no way to be himself unless there's a mushpah, someone to receive his influence. In return, the one receiving has to be selective from whom she will be influenced. The highest possible level a woman can attain is to receive what is offered to her from above.

A man wants to give. But if the woman is only interested to receive what comes from his negative side, that is the person he'll become. Hence it says in the Gemara that in the times of Hillel and Shamai, a righteous man married a wicked woman and became wicked and a wicked man married a righteous woman and became righteous. A man's nature is to want to give what his wife desires to receive. He will give over that aspect of himself and neglect the rest. Therefore, the wife wields subtle, potent power in the marriage.

The Gemara says there are three partners in the formation of a child. Hashem provides the spiritual soul, the father provides the white matter, the brain and skeleton, and the mother provides the red matter, the flesh and blood. We can understand this allegorically. Our forefathers provided the middot, and our foremothers provided the ability to take what the avot gave and bring it into the world of action. While Sarah very much paralleled

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Avraham, she was also different. Sarah symbolized din while Avraham signified chesed. She converted the women as he converted the men. Her tzniut and inner qualities corresponded to Avraham's external accessibility. Rivkah married Yitzchak who was way above her in age, development, and personality. Instead of being defensive, she took herself down from the camel so that she wouldn't meet him from a superior position. Unlike Yitzchak, she was able to recognize Esav's personality and devised a scheme for Yaakov to receive the blessing. Her middah of chesed contrasted Yitzchak's gevurah. Yet her life goal to sanctify Hashem's name and her complete submission to her husband's calling made them a true zivug (predestined match) more than just two people with complimentary traits.

In the early stages of Yaakov's development he had to be married to Rachel, who was involved in this world. When his name changed to Yisrael, he needed Leah, the one with spiritual vision. Nonetheless, Rachel is still called the akeret habayit (mainstay of the home) because deeds are significant. Yet to act with integrity one needs spiritual vision. So the visionaries of Klal Yisrael, Levi and Yehuda were from Leah and those who actualized the vision were the tribes, who together broadcast Hashem's message in the world. In the end, both Rachel and Leah were the perfect match for Yaakov whose essence was truth.

Although the nature of a woman is to receive, Devora, the wife of Barak, also gave. She led the Jews in battle, she was a prophetess, and a judge. Still she referred to herself as a mother in Israel. She went where Hashem led her but she never sacrificed herself as a woman by doing so. All the roles she undertook were for the sake of her people. It wasn't to prove herself or her capacities. She saw herself as a nurturer doing what she had to just as a mother would for her child. Yael acted in a similar way. Hashem planned for Sisera to escape to her tent. She moved into the role she was chosen for, not as a means of self-fulfillment, but as acceptance of Hashem's will. Even at the moment that she was killing Sisera, she chose not to use a weapon so she wouldn't be perceived even by herself as a warrior.

Parshat Lech Lecha: Man's Search For Meaning

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur on Chassidut by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

In Parshat Lech Lecha, Hashem tells Avraham to leave his birthplace and travel to the land of Israel. The midrash says this is compared to a man, who while walking through a dark forest, comes upon an abandoned home. He wonders why the home is alit if there seems to be no one there. Suddenly, a man appears and exclaims, "I am the owner of this home." Similarly, Avraham looked at the world and questioned how it could exist without a Higher Being. Hashem then appeared to Avraham, and declared that He is the Owner of this world. After this, he tells Avraham to leave Charan and go to Israel. What is the connection between these two seemingly unrelated events?

Avraham recognized Hashem at either 3 or 40 years of age. However, he only received his first prophecy at the age of 75. What was inadequate about his initial discovery? The midrash says that Avraham was worried how he would cleanse himself of all his years of worshipping idols. Hashem reassured him that his sins would fly away like dew. Why are his sins compared to dew? What is the difference between rain and dew?

Rain seeps into the plant and makes it grow. Dew rests lightly on the leaves, gives it renewed energy to work with its own resources, and then evaporates. Sometimes we obtain spiritual inspiration from external resources such as Torah study and prayer. We absorb these experiences like rain and they ignite a spark of renewed vigor within us to accomplish our goals. Alternatively, the environment we find ourselves in can inspire us, like dew, to tap into our own internal energies. In chinuch too, as much as parents teach explicitly, they also teach implicitly. Many times we tell children to do the right thing, but if they see us conducting ourselves correctly, they will find their own internal core of righteousness.

The midrash means that Avraham's sins were like dew. They inspired him, by means of the process of elimination, to come to an internal recognition of Hashem. Avraham concluded that his evil side was a contradiction to his righteous side. He recognized that Hashem created such incredible potential within man and that he must develop his good strengths to come closer to Hashem. Any goal without Hashem in the picture is futile and meaningless. He realized therefore, that there had to be a Greater Being. Avraham was ready to give his life for this idea, and when he was 75, Hashem determined that he was ready for the next level. Therefore Hashem said, "Lech lecha, Go away."

G-d told Avraham to leave in three different ways: "Me'artzecha," from your land, symbolizes nefesh – physicality. "Mi'moladitcha," from your birthplace, signifies ruach – family, emotional makeup. "Mi'beis avicha," from your father's house, which represents neshama – intellect. Hashem told him to look at the types of breakdown that can happen on these three levels if spirituality is missing. Now that Avraham had reached an abstract level of knowledge of Hashem, Hashem said, "Lech lecha...el haaretz asher aarecha, Go to the land that I will show you." I will take you to the next level, from intellectual knowledge to experiential insight.

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