

שבת בשבת



Parshat Lech Lecha No 1647: 11 Cheshvan 5777(November 12th 2016)

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RZA-Mizrachi National Conference

The Religious Zionists of America-Mizrachi held its National Conference on Sunday, November 6th at Congregation Beth Shalom in Lawrence, NY. Notable speakers included Rabbi Herschel Schachter, Rosh Yeshiva of RIETS at Yeshiva University; Rabbi Doron Perez, CEO of World Mizrachi; and Bret Stephens, award-winning *Wall Street Journal* columnist. Several hundred people were in attendance. Thank you to everyone who came and made our National Conference a success!



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AVRAHAM'S MISSION AND HASHEM'S COMMANDS TO HIM

Rabbi Yosef Blau, PastPresident, RZA; MashgiachRuchani, RIETS

New York, NY

Many commentators have questioned the lack of an introduction to Hashem's command of "Lech Lecha" to Avraham. The Torah doesn't indicate why Avraham is chosen. A perspective that sheds light is to contrast Avraham's own sense of mission and that given to him by Hashem.

If one examines what Hashem asks from Avraham and what he promises him, the focus is on his acquiring the land of Israel through settling the land and in return he will have many descendants and his name will be blessed. What is missing is any mention of a relationship between Hashem and Avraham. This relationship is first introduced with respect to Avraham's descendants in conjunction with the command for his and their circumcision and the covenant that accompanies it.



In numerous places we are told of Avraham setting up an altar and calling out in Hashem's name. After his saving his nephew Lot and defeating the four kings, Avraham is adamant about not allowing the king of Sedom to claim that Avraham was fighting for the spoils of war and not for a more noble purpose. This would counter Malki-tzedek's recognizing that the victory should lead to praise on an eternal G-d.

As Rashi in the name of Chazal explains the reference to the souls that Avraham and Sarah made in Haran is to those that they convinced to become monotheists. Avraham, on his own, recognizes that there is one G-d. He accepts as his mission to combat idolatry. A goal that can and should be achieved in every land.

Avraham's mission does not depend on Hashem's revelation and is the given context for the revelation and command to leave his home and family and travel to the land of Canaan. The relationship between Hashem and Avraham is initiated by Avraham succeeding in recognizing Hashem's existence.

On the surface the command to move to Canaan doesn't enhance this mission. If anything it makes it harder. The blessings that are given to Avraham that he will found a nation, his name will become great and that he will be a source of blessing serve to reassure him that he will have success in his mission and that he will have descendants to continue in his footsteps. That this will be connected to a particular land is new and not a concept that Avraham could have understood without Hashem's revelation. Avraham now has to incorporate Hashem's vision and promises to him in rethinking the goal he had determined by himself.

Hashem informs Avraham that a place can have sanctity and that the ultimate success in creating a model to teach the world about Hashem's existence and vision for human behavior will come through a holy nation of his descendants. The combination of a people living a life committed to Torah in a sanctified land will be the vehicle of spreading monotheism and a life of justice and righteousness to all of humankind.

Introducing the New RZA-Aryeh Fellowship!

The RZA-Aryeh Fellowship is a new initiative of the RZA-Mizrachi to strengthen the mission of Religious Zionism. Fifty college and graduate school students from around the country have been invited to spend their winter-break in Israel where they will be studying Torah and attending intensive seminars devoted to Religious

Zionism education. Upon their return the Aryeh Fellows will focus on their year-long Manhigut (leadership) projects designed to bring the message of Religious Zionism back to communities across America. We are excited to profile a different “Aryeh Fellow” each week.

Meet Tehilla Berger



Tehilla Berger hails from Far Rockaway, NY, where she graduated from Torah Academy for Girls (TAG). Throughout high school, she honed her leadership skills by serving on TAG's student council and directing a school performance; she also was a peer tutor, played piano, and participated in various chessed opportunities including medical clowning through an organization called Lev Letyzan. Her medical clowning experience simultaneously encouraged her to develop an interest in medicine, and enabled her to bring a little more happiness into the world.

Tehilla considers her two trips to Israel as the highlights of her high school career; the first with her grandparents and the second as a medical clown. She considers these trips as turning points in helping her deepen her love and commitment to both Am Yisrael and Eretz Yisrael.

Following High School, Tehilla learned in Michlelet Mivasseret Yerushalayim (MMY) and, presently, she is a sophomore in Stern, where she intends to major in Biochemistry with aspirations of becoming a doctor.

Tehilla is thrilled to be an RZA Aryeh Fellow and can't wait for the year ahead!

POINT OF VIEW

A Country that is Nationalistic and Democratic

By Rabbi Yisrael Rozen, Dean of the Zomet Institute

“Separate yourself from me. If you go to the left I will go to the right, and if you go to the right I will go left” [Bereishit 13:9].

Replace “Judaism” by “Nationalism”

Everybody is familiar with the term, “A Jewish and Democratic State,” but in actual fact the “democratic” element takes over, **while the “Jewish” side limps along in the background without any practical significance.** The greatest stronghold of Israeli democracy is in the justice system. The knight in shining armor of this edifice, the former President of the Supreme Court, **Aharon Barak**, gutted the meaning of the “Jewish” element as compared to the “democratic” side, disassociated it from Jewish halacha and tradition, and made the word “Jewish” subservient to the concept of “democracy.” In his point of view, Jewish traditions should be taken into account only if they can be used to strengthen the democratic character of the country (see “*Iyunei Mishpat*” 24). For example, the purpose of the “morality of the prophets” in fighting corruption and bribery is considered to be an expression of the “Jewish state.” Evidently this is not so for the concept of Shabbat! The learned judge's disciples on the high court are required to continue on the path which he conquered (in more ways than one). It seems that not one of them would support Jewish elements in making laws and in the behavior required by the authorities which do not completely correspond to the ideas of democracy.

For some time I have been considering a proposal **to replace the term “Jewish and Democratic State” by a different and better term – A Nationalistic and Democratic State.**

I leave it to academic experts and those skilled in the political and legal sciences to determine if such a term exists among any of the other nations in the world. One thing I can definitely say: If a declaration that Israel is a “**Nationalistic and Democratic State**” would have been included in the Basic Law of Respect for Man and his Freedom and the Basic Law of Freedom of Business instead of the existing declarations about a “Jewish and Democratic State,” **we would have been able long ago to finish passing the “Law of Jewish Nationality,”** which at present is stuck while waiting for a coalition majority that is not afraid of the Israeli Supreme Court and the United States President. If we were known as a “**Nationalistic and Democratic State,**” we would long ago **have been able to rescind the citizenship of those who support and praise terrorists, and maybe even Jews who try to undermine the nationalistic aspects of the State of Israel** – both within our land and in international organizations.

A Democratic Minister and a Court President with a Vested Interest

In a transition that is not so sharp, let us move on to the controversy that has recently arisen between **the Minister of Justice, Ayelet Shaked,** and **the President of the Supreme Court, Miriam Naor.** The subject would seem to be of a technical nature – what should be the required majority in the appointment committee out of nine members, three of whom are judges, to choose a new judge in the Supreme Court? Until the year 2008 the requirement was a simple majority of five out of nine committee members. That year a new law was passed – one that is seen as patently antidemocratic – requiring a special majority of seven out of nine to choose a new judge. The Minister of Justice now supports passing a law that will bring the majority back to the original number of five, thereby preserving the bounds of real democracy, but this has been greeted by an unenlightened outbreak by people of the left who usually raise the banner of strict democracy. What seems to me most absurd is the strong and pistol-packing stance of the President of the Supreme Court, that bastion of democracy, against having a truly democratic decision in the committee! The reasons for the position of the President of the Court are plain for all to see, without any shame: **The President of the Court demands a “blocking vote” that will allow a veto by existing judges over any candidate who is not their clone,** although this is a blatantly undemocratic move in that it creates a “special majority.” After all, how can the “simple folks” who are members of the exalted committee be expected to understand the nuances of voting for new judges?

It must be admitted that there are political considerations involved in appointing judges, especially to the Supreme Court, on such issues as “right or left,” conservatism versus liberalism, nationalistic as opposed to universalist, and so on. There are also some people who claim that the Minister of Justice erred in her mathematical calculations, since even with the new law the three judges on the committee can make a deal with the two representatives of the Israel Bar Association, while the Minister and only two Knesset Members will lose the vote. In any case, such calculations are legitimate for political figures, but when the President of the Supreme Court sees it proper to fight tooth and nail against democratic values (the simple majority in an appointment committee) it is a clear case of **trampling democratic values with an “enlightened” foot.**

* * * * *

In a fast search that I conducted using the Bar Ilan responsa data base, I found that **in every verse in the Tanach the right appears before the left** (how could it be otherwise?). The verse quoted at the beginning of this article is no exception, in that “I will go to the right” appears before “I will go to the left.” In the end, I found only one exception to this rule: **“His left hand will be under my head, and his right hand will embrace me”** [Shir Hashirim 2:6]. Can any of my readers suggest an explanation for this?

As Shabbat Approaches

The First One Who Went

By Esti Rosenberg, Head of the Midrasha for Women, Migdal Oz

The Torah portion of Lech Lecha begins with the command, “Go for your sake from your

land" [Bereishit 12:1], and ends with the covenant that Avraham was commanded to seal on his own flesh. In the middle, Avraham traverses the land, and calls out in G-d's name. Between "Go for your own sake from your land" and "Go for your own sake to the Land of Moriah" [22:2] (for the Binding of Yitzchak), Avraham is given commands to "Rise up and traverse the land" [13:17] and "Go before Me and be perfect" [17:1]. Avraham responds by travelling through the land, its length and breadth, but he also adds something else – he also calls out in the name of G-d. "And he built an altar there and called out in the name of G-d" [12:8]. What is this referring to?

Rashi explains, "He prophesied that his descendants would sin at that place when Achan took spoils of war, and he therefore prayed for them." Thus, this is a case of fatherly concern for future generations. The Ramban, on the other hand, emphasizes Avraham's actions in his own generation. "He would declare the Divinity of G-d to the people... to teach and publicize about Him... He wanted the name of the Holy One, Blessed be He, to be recognized by all of humanity... He taught human beings the secrets of the behavior of the world." Avraham Ibn Ezra writes in a similar way: "He called out to the people to serve G-d." For Avraham and Sarah it is not enough to simply tour the land. They travel around as harbingers of an important message and actively spread the word of G-d. Avraham and Sarah strive to teach all the people the blessings for food and for the unity of G-d, the fact that He is the head of "the palace" (the world) and how to serve Him. They call out loud and clear in the name of G-d. They take on a great responsibility and on their own initiative spread the word of G-d.

However, even this is not enough for them. Avraham is also active in day-to-day activities. He moves around and tries to take action in the name of G-d. He reacts to the existence of evil in the land and copes with the problems caused by Sarah's beauty, he hears about fights with his shepherds, and he is upset when his relatives are captured. Together with Sarah, he is upset by the fact she is barren and wonders how to properly overcome this. Avraham, who is alone, calling out to G-d, understands that it is not sufficient to build an altar and cry out but that it is necessary to play an active role. He goes out to fight for his brethren, he listens to Sarah's advice and tries to continue his line through her maid servant Hagar. He wants to be a partner in spreading the proper way to live as part of mundane day-to-day living, doing so in a moral and righteous way.

In the Covenant of the Pieces, the Holy One, Blessed be He, says to Avraham, "Do not be afraid" [Bereishit 15:1]. The Midrash explains that "he was afraid that there might have been at least one righteous man among all those he killed in the war." His attempt to incorporate the word of G-d into daily living gives him a fear that he might have made wrong decisions. Taking on responsibility and becoming involved in reality can lead to errors and a fear of causing harm. However, Avraham does not give up. He continues to call out in the name of G-d and to show how to utilize this call in making decisions about life. Avraham's challenges in life are varied and many, both public and personal. Avraham, the first one to travel through the whole land, demands a very high standard from his offspring – to call out in G-d's name and to remain deeply involved in real events, to operate within these boundaries, and never to have any fear.

A PARSHA INSIGHT

How should we Paint a Picture of the Patriarch Avraham?

By Rabbi Asaf Harnoy, Post-Graduate Beit Midrash for Torah and Leadership, Jerusalem

If you are asked to draw a picture of our Patriarch Avraham, you would most probably return to the famous image seen in kindergartens of an old man with white hair and a long beard, sitting in front of his tent with a large book in his hands.

This is not an error, since the Torah portion of Vayeira does indeed give us a picture of Avraham sitting at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. But this week's Torah portion is very different.

Riding in a Limousine and with a Sword in his Belt

If you want to paint a picture of Avraham as he appears in this week's Torah portion it would probably be very different from our first picture of a man sitting near his tent. Avraham of the portion of Lech Lecha is a warrior and a fearless hero who leads a world war in order to rescue his relative. Avraham of the portion of Lech Lecha is a wealthy man, who has many sheep, and much gold and silver. Avraham is a universalist who is deeply involved in matters that are far away from his close proximity, as when he tries to rescue Sedom from doom.

Thus, the best image of Avraham would be a man with a sword hanging from his belt, driving around in a limousine (in today's world).

They will Give Me Gifts

The portion of Lech Lecha seems to present us with a contradiction in the behavior and the image of Avraham. On one hand, after his great victory in the war against the kings, the King of Sedom comes to Avraham and offers him all the spoils of war. But Avraham refuses adamantly and declares that he will not even take a single shoelace from the great wealth.

On the other hand, when Avraham descends to Egypt he turns to Sarah and asks her, "Please say that you are my sister, **so that they will be good to me for your sake...**" [Bereishit 12:13]. Rashi explains that Avraham asks Sarah to say that she is Avraham's sister so that **they will present him with gifts**. Avraham succeeds, and as soon as Sarah is taken to Pharaoh's palace the King is good to Avraham and gives him great wealth.

How can we explain this apparent contradiction between Avraham's desire to receive gifts from Pharaoh and his absolute refusal to receive even a piece of string from the King of Sedom?

Repaying his Debt

To solve this apparent paradox, we must remember that Avraham went down to Egypt because of a famine, when he was poor and had nothing. On his way to Egypt he stopped at a number of inns, but he did not have the money to pay for his stay. He makes a deal with the owners along the way that at the first opportunity that he gets some money he will return his debts to them. And then he continues on to Egypt.

Avraham understands that it would not be right for the messenger who has a mission to reveal the name of the Holy One, Blessed be He, in the world to be in debt and to be poor. He knows that in order for him to sanctify the Holy Name he must be able to stand on his own, he should not need to depend on charity from others.

When he arrives in Egypt, Avraham sees that he has found an opportunity to obtain great wealth and gifts – not for his private use but as part of the process of sanctifying G-d's name in the world.

When he leaves Egypt, Avraham continues on "his journeys" [Bereishit 13:3]. He returns to the same inns where he stopped before. Rashi explains that he returned specifically to repay the debts that he incurred to the owners of the stations. He returns to the same places but not as a pauper. This time he stays in the choicest areas, with his prestigious "limousine." He pays his debts, and all who see him praise him and the Creator for the kindness that He showed Avraham.

Together with the image of the elderly Avraham with his beard, who refuses to accept even a shoelace that does not belong to him, we must remember that there is another image. It is a picture of a brave and wealthy warrior who will do all he can to enhance the love for the name of the Holy One, Blessed be He, throughout the entire world.

WHEN THE CHILDREN OPEN THEIR HEARTS

A Very Special Child

By Meirav Maggeni, Author of Content and Stories in Chemed, the Religious School

Nir complained bitterly to me. "Our team always comes in last! I don't want him to hear me, but it's really his fault!"

I said to myself, "Nir is right." Ever since our physical education teacher divided us into groups of three and assigned Gilad to our group, no matter how hard we try or what we do – we are always last, in everything. We come in last in races, we always lose a tight rope contest. We come in last in climbing and in calisthenics. In every activity and in every competition we are always last. On the other hand, we can't really blame Gilad, he does not do this to us on purpose. He is physically handicapped. He is heavy and awkward, and he moves slowly. Some of the boys from other classes make fun of him, and I think that is not nice. Nobody in our class mocks him, and they try to help him. But I know that deep in their hearts all the others are very happy not to have Gilad in their group, and they are disappointed when he joins them temporarily.

"Come on, Gilad, faster. We want a victory for our group," Nir shouted at him when we were in a 2500-meter race. Nir is very competitive. When he is in a competition the only thing that he can think about is to win.

And Gilad tried as hard as he could to close the gap. He breathed heavily, and he ran. "Let's go," Nir egged him on. Then, suddenly, Gilad stopped and fell heavily to the ground. Nir yelled at him, "What are you doing?" But Gilad didn't answer. He tried to steady his breathing but he didn't try to get up.

I said to Nir, "Keep running, I'll stay with Gilad." But Nir said, "What's the point? Anyway, we lost the race again."

I looked at Gilad. Maybe he is awkward and slow, but he is definitely not stupid. Gilad knows very well that we always lose because of him, and he is upset about it. I had pity on him, and in my heart I was angry with Nir for not being more sensitive to Nir's needs.

I said to Nir, "Sure, it's important to win, but the question is what we are winning."

"What we are winning? It's a race!" Nir shouted at me, and he kept on with his running.

I stayed with Gilad and tried to get him to stand up. I gave him a water bottle to take a drink. But Gilad didn't get up. He took a sip of water, and from the corner of my eye I saw a small tear come from his eye, and then another one. His tears were catching. Very soon I felt warm tears well up in my eyes too.

Suddenly, rain drops began to fall on us. The rain got mixed in with our tears. I said to Gilad, "Look, even the sky is crying." Gilad surprised me with a big smile. He said, "Maybe this is a rain of blessing. Just this morning we asked for rain in our prayers, and G-d is already answering our prayers. We must thank Him for every drop."

I was surprised to see that Gilad could still thank G-d and be happy when he had such difficulties in his life. And Gilad went on, surprising me even more. "Do you know why we ask for rain in the month of Cheshvan? Why don't we ask for rain on Shemini Atzeret, when we say, 'He who blows the wind and brings down the rain' in order to mention rain in our prayers? In fact, why don't we start to pray for rain at the beginning of the month, or on any other date?"

"That's a good question – Why indeed?"

And Gilad started to discuss the matter with me: "Just imagine that the entire nation prays for rain on Shemini Atzeret. It's the last day of Succot and we no longer have a need to sit in the Succah. What could be better than blessed rain in the beginning of the fall?"

"Right, G-d will hear the prayers and start to bring rain," I said. And I wiped another drop of rain from the tip of my nose.

"Okay, but what about the pilgrims who came to Jerusalem for the holiday? Should they be caught riding through the rain on their camels and donkeys, with their wives and children and

with all their luggage?"

I said, "You're right, I didn't think about that. Then we have to wait about three or four days, until they can get from Jerusalem to all over Eretz Yisrael. And then we can start to pray for rain, right?"

Gilad was ready with an answer. "What about those who came all the way from Babylon? They will not reach home in a few days, not even in a week. Don't we have to consider them too? The sages checked how long it would take for the people from the places farthest away from Jerusalem to reach home. They decided that after Shemini Atzeret we should wait a full fifteen days before beginning to pray for rain which is so necessary to water the fields. They said not to ask for the rain which the earth needs so much, in order to take the needs of special people into account."

I was surprised by all of Gilad's knowledge. "Wow, that's amazing. How do you know all this?"

"Since I have trouble running and dancing around, and because I get tired quickly, I read and study a lot. Every bad thing also has good aspects. It just depends on how you look at things."

I picked myself up and I said to Gilad, "You really are special, you just taught me some important things." And he said to me, "Look, the rain is getting stronger, everybody must be looking for us." Gilad tried to get up too, and I gave him my hand to help him. And we slowly walked together to class, trying to avoid the rain.

"When we pay attention to the needs of everybody in the nation of Yisrael, we are indeed worthy of being blessed with rain," I thought to myself. I was happy to see the rain falling down onto the earth.

"Vetein Tal U'Matar - Please give us dew and rain as a blessing over the face of the earth."

NATURE AND THE TORAH POTION

He who in His Goodness Renews the Days of Creation Continuously Every Day

By Dr. Moshe Raanan, Herzog College and the Jerusalem College for Women

Farmers have been waiting for two weeks. Our Succot have been dismantled and stored away, we already prayed for rain on Simchat Torah, but the nation which dwells in Zion holds back and still does not directly pray for rain. Tishrei has passed and Cheshvan is here, the land and the trees are parched, and we still waited until the seventh of Cheshvan to start our prayers. This is the date when the last of the pilgrims will arrive home after visiting Jerusalem on the holiday. The desired request was held back with great patience – "Give us dew and rain as a blessing."

Many people ask: Why do we show consideration for the pilgrims only at the beginning of winter, when they are on their way home after the holiday of Succot? Why don't we show the same consideration for the pilgrims at the end of winter, in the month of Nissan, as they leave their homes on the Perat River. Why don't we show our sympathy for their difficult journey when they are on the way to offer the Pesach Sacrifice during the holiday? Why don't we stop praying for rain at the beginning of Nissan, so that they will be able to make the journey to Jerusalem in comfort?

** * * * *

I have heard two satisfying answers to this question. The first one I heard from a very smart and understanding young man. He said that we wait with the prayer after Succot not because we have sympathy for the farmers but rather because we want the prayer for rain to be recited on Succot with full intent by all the people of Yisrael. If the pilgrims from Babylon will feel that the prayers might make their journey home more difficult, they might not participate fully in the prayers for rain.

Thus, we delay the start of the prayer for rain until the seventh of Cheshvan in order to make sure that the entire nation shares the desire for rain and participates willingly in the prayer. We are not giving preference to the Babylonian pilgrims over the local farmers. Rather we are trying to create unity and a full consensus with respect to the prayer for rain during the holiday of Succot.

* * * * *

In order to understand the second answer to our question, we must first explain about the two types of roads that were used by our ancestors. For example, the way from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv can take two paths. One route is the low path through the wadi (Route 1), and the other goes along the mountain ridges (Route 443). These are two possible types of routes, one going along the mountaintops and the other down below, in the riverbeds. There are many other examples of the same principle, such as the Jordan Valley route that passes through the valley itself as opposed to the Alon Road, which is on the hilltops overlooking the valley.

There are two advantages to the lower path, following the riverbed. It is in general shorter and faster, and in addition it is closer to sources of water and springs. And there are two different advantages to the mountain road. In general, it provides better safety against robber gangs and other dangers, and as opposed to the riverbed routes which are not passable in winter because of rain and flooding, the hilltop routes are usable all year round.

Let us now return to the pilgrims who come to Jerusalem three times a year. When they returned home in Tishrei they could use the lower roads, in the riverbeds, which were still open. In order to prevent these routes from becoming blocked, we delayed asking for rain. In Nissan, when the people began their journeys to Jerusalem before Pesach, most of the riverbed routes were blocked and impassable. The pilgrims were forced to use the hilltop routes whether rain fell or not, and there was therefore no advantage in stopping the prayers for rain at the beginning of the month.

* * * * *

This question about the different types of routes is relevant for an ongoing dispute between the residents of the city of Efrat and the people living in Gush Etzion, nearby. Which route did our forefathers Avraham and Yitzchak take on their way from Chevron to Mount Moriah? In a map from the year 1880 there are two different routes linking Chevron to Jerusalem – one on the hilltops, and the other along the riverbed.

The route along the hilltops (which is commonly called “the Route of the Patriarchs”) passes close to the regimental base Etzion (known as the Russian Monastery), passes through Alon Shevut (passing about 20 meters underneath a porch on my house), and from there continues to the settlement Elazar. It then continues to the neighborhood “Nativ Ha’avot” and on to Neve Daniel.

The riverbed route, on the other hand, passes through the Gush Etzion Junction, continues along Route 60 until the southern Efrat Junction, and from there continues in the direction of Bi’ar. It passes through the Bi’ar Wadi, which is underneath the city of Efrat, reaching the Dagan Hill.

Which route did Avraham and Yitzchak take, the road of the Efrat Local Council or the road of the Gush Etzion Regional Council? It pains me to admit it, but based on our above reasoning it seems likely that our eastern neighbors in Efrat are the winners of this controversy. According to our traditions, the Binding of Yitzchak took place on Rosh Hashanah. At that time the riverbed route is still open, and it is therefore reasonable to assume that the path to the Binding went through the Bi’ar Riverbed, which is today within the city boundaries of Efrat. If we do not want to assume that for some external reason (a fear of thieves, and so on) our forefathers chose to take the path which was longer and without springs, we must admit that the logic is on the side of our friends who live in Efrat.



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