

THE PORTION OF **LECH-LECHA**



YadAvNow.com Weekly Video Series: Lech-Lecha

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

Hourly Video: Parshas Lech Lecha

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First A Subordinate, Then an Equal

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Increasing the Challenge by Withholding the Destination

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Ten and the Objective of Creation

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The First to Gives Ones Life to Sanctify G-d

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How Weighty is The Debt of Gratitude

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1. G-d told Avraham to leave his homeland, birthplace, and family.
2. He separated himself from every member of his family including Lot.
3. Why did Avraham agree to take his nephew Lot with him?
4. When Avraham was told by Nimrod to bow to the idol or be thrown into the kiln- he chose to die.
5. Haran, Lot's father and Avraham's brother, stood by the sidelines thinking that if his brother came out unscathed, he would follow.
6. He entered and perished.
7. Haran was the first man to die to sanctify G-d's name.
8. Avraham believed that Lot, as Haran's son, was the exception to the family.
9. Avraham separated from Lot when it was revealed he was a thief.
10. Lot, with all of his possessions, moved to Sedom- the seat of all evil.
11. Before separating, Avraham made a pact with him to be there for him at all costs.
12. When Lot was taken captive by the four mightiest kings, Avraham miraculously saved him, regardless if it cost him his merits. Why?

A Metamorphosis To Begin A New Existence

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1. Avraham was told by G-d that He will make his name great.
2. Rashi: The letter Hey will be added to his name: Avraham is numerically 248, which is equal to the number of parts of the human body.
3. Before Avraham was circumcised he did not have full control over his physicality.
4. He fathered Yitzchok after he was circumcised and added Hey to his name.
5. Gemara: G-d created the world to come with the spirituality of the letter Yud and the physical world with the spirituality of letter Hey.
6. Midrash: Just as the letter "Hey" brought about all existence, when added to your name, it will cause a metamorphic change within you.
7. Avraham became a new creation; one that did not previously exist.
8. The innateness of the Jew is the equivalent of all existence.
9. Midrash: G-d said "I will make you into a great People, not one that will evolve into a great People."
10. The Jewish People coming into being is the equivalent of Ex nihilo.

Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Lech-Lecha



Reverence, An Outgrowth of Love

Torah: “Hashem said to Avraham, ‘Go for yourself from your land, from your relatives...’”

Midrash: “One who is meticulous regarding *mitzvos*, his reward is great.” One would think that the *Midrash* is referring to the meticulous observance of *mitzvos*; however, it is actually referring to something beyond that.

Midrash: “We find that Avraham was meticulous regarding *mitzvos*. Because of this, he is identified as ‘the one who loves G-d.’ As it states in *Yeshaya*, ‘They are the progeny of Avraham, My beloved...’ ...Even the rabbinic law of *eiruv tavshilin* was observed in the household of Avraham. As it states, ‘He observed My Commandments, My Dictates, and My *Toros*...’ Are there multiple *Torahs*? We know that there is only one as it states, ‘There is one *Torah* that shall be yours...’ Why then is the *Torah* referred to in the plural? It is to

communicate that Avraham had observed the *Torah* and its intricacies. G-d said, ‘You are so meticulous in My *mitzvos* and you should sit amidst pagans and idol worshipers? You should leave their midst and go to the Land that I shall show you...’”

Avraham is identified by G-d as “the one who loves Him” because his love created a concern and sensitivity that the Will of G-d should not be violated. His level of love so great that it caused him to establish fences, which are intended to safeguard against even the inadvertent violation of the *Torah*. The fact that Avraham had taken every precaution not to violate the Will of G-d is an indication of his exceptional love.

Rabbeinu Yonah in his commentaries on *Ethics of our Fathers* cites the words of *Chazal* regarding establishing fences. He cites the *Midrash* that states: “The words of the *Sofrim* (*rabbis/fences*) are more beloved (to G-d) than the wine of the *Torah* (Biblical

Dictates).” He explains that the objective of all *mitzvos* in the *Torah* is to demonstrate one’s fear of heaven (*yiras shamayim*).

The purpose of all rabbinic fences is solely to protect that the *Torah* law should not be transgressed. When one adheres to the rabbinic fence, it is a greater demonstration of one’s fear of heaven than when one only conforms to the *Torah* law itself. This is because when one observes the *Torah* law, which it itself is the Word of G-d, one understands its dimension of value and thus does not violate it.

Therefore, observing the *Torah* law does not demonstrate an exceptional degree of fear/reverence of G-d. However, when one adheres to a rabbinic fence, which is only a law based on a precautionary measure to safeguard the *Torah*, one is demonstrating a greater level of a fear of heaven. This is because the law that he is not transgressing is only of a rabbinic nature and not G-d’s Word.

Midrash: *Avraham*’s meticulous observance of G-d’s Will through his establishment of fences is a demonstration of his exceptional love for Him. If this is so, then how do we reconcile the *Midrash* with the *Chazal* cited by *Rabbeinu Yonah* which states that adherence to fences is a demonstration of one’s fear of G-d and unrelated to love?

It is interesting to note that the blessing of “*ahava rabba*” which precedes the recitation of the *Shema* states: “With an abundant love have You loved us... unify our hearts to love and fear Your Name...” We see that in the request that the love of G-d precedes the fear of Him. In addition we find the same order in the prayer “*uval l’tzion*”, “May He open our heart through His *Torah* and imbue our heart with love and fear of Him...” Once again, we see that love precedes fear.

One would think that one must first come to have fear and reverence of G-d and then advance to a level of love. It is known, as explained by *Ramban* in his commentary, that in order to perform a Positive Commandment, he must be motivated to do so. Love is force that motivates and ignites the individual into action. Conversely, when one refrains from transgression by observing the Negative Commandment one demonstrates his fear and reverence for G-d through his refrain.

For one to be meticulous and take precautions not to transgress the Will of G-d, he must be imbued with enormous love for Him. The desire not to transgress His Will is a demonstration of one’s love for the Almighty. However, the actual refrain from transgression through establishing or adhering to existing fences is a demonstration of his fear of G-d. One’s love of G-d will bring him to fear and revere Him. This is the reason we pray to G-d that He should instill in our hearts love so that we could be motivated and sensitive to His Will in order to adhere to it meticulously without exception.

The Objective of the Test of Fire

Midrash citing a verse from *Song of Songs*: “If she is like a wall, we will build upon her a palace of silver. But if she is like a door, we will place upon her planks of cedar wood.’ On the day that *Nimrod* had decreed that *Avraham* should be thrown into the fiery kiln, a Divine evaluation of *Avraham* was made. If *Avraham* is like a wall, then I (G’d) will build upon it an elaborate edifice of silver. A wall remains unmovable even after being battered by war.

“If *Avraham* is willing to give his life in order to sanctify My Name, then I will build upon him the edifice of silver. What is the edifice of silver? It is the Jewish people. As it states, ‘the dove whose wings are gilded with silver...’ If he is steadfast like a wall, then he will be worthy of having the Jewish people descend from him. However, if *Avraham* does not have the resolve to give his life to sanctify My Name, then I will then place upon him a plank of cedar wood. Just as an image that is painted upon a plank of wood can be blotted out/has no everlasting value, so too will I not watch over *Avraham*.

“*Avraham* said to G’d, ‘I am like the wall. I am willing to give my life for the sake of Your Name – not only me but also my breasts shall be the equivalent of towers. My children and the children of my children will give their lives for You – *Chananya*, *Meshael*, and *Azaria*, the generation of *Reb Chananya Ben Tradyon* and his associates (Ten Martyrs). They will all give their lives for the sake of Your Name.” Because of this level of commitment, *Avraham* will have peace come upon him and he will emerge from the fiery kiln unharmed.” Had *Avraham* not been willing to sacrifice himself in

the kiln of *Kasdim* for the sake of G-d, he would not have been worthy to be the founding Patriarch of the Jewish people.

Torah: “Hashem said to Avraham, ‘Go for yourself from your land, from your relatives...’”

Midrash as well as *Rambam*: The first of the ten tests that G-d had presented to Avraham was that of leaving his homeland and family. The final test that was presented to him was the *Akeidah* (binding of Yitzchak).

Eitz Yosef, a commentator on the *Midrash* citing *Pirkei d’Reb Elazar* that tells us that the first test that was presented to Avraham was that of the kiln of *Kasdim*. Avraham was given the choice to either bow to the idol or be thrown into the fiery kiln of *Kasdim*. One would think that Avraham being presented with the choice of living or dying for the sake of G-d should be considered as one of the tests that G-d had presented to him. Why is this not considered as one of the ten tests by the *Midrash* and *Rambam*?

Mishna in *Ethics of our Fathers*: “The world came about through the Ten Utterances of G-d.”

Chazal: The objective of existence is for the sake of the Jewish people to be able to fulfill the *Torah*. We find significant events that pertain to this objective occurring within the context of “ten.” For example, in order for the Jewish people to be qualified to stand at Sinai to receive the *Torah*, they needed to witness and be impacted by the Ten Plagues of Egypt. Through the Ten revealed miracles that they had witnessed, the Jewish people were extricated from their pagan beliefs in order to be able to declare their unequivocal commitment to G-d at Sinai. The culmination of this process was the receiving of the Ten Commandments, which correspond to the Ten Utterances of Creation.

Similarly, the ten tests that were presented to Avraham have relevance to the future of the Jewish people only if he is the one who is qualified to be their founding father. Although the choice of sacrificing himself for the sake of G-d in the kiln of *Kasdim* was a test of Avraham’s dedication to G-d, it is excluded from the ten tests that were presented to him as the Patriarch of the Jewish people. It was only after he had chosen not to bow to the idol and thus sacrifice himself for the sake of G-d did he qualify to become the forefather of the Jewish people. Therefore, the

ten tests that were presented to Avraham, only began with “*lech lecha*” because they are the ones that have relevance to Avraham as the Patriarch of the Jewish people.

The Tzaddik’s Function as a Role Model

Midrash Tanchuma: “G-d had said to Avraham, “*Eikev asher Shemata beKoli* –Since you have heeded My Voice.” Avraham our Patriarch lived for 175 years.

Reb Chanina explains that the numerical value of “*Eikev*” is 172 (The numerical value of the letter “*aayin*” is 70, “*kuf*” is 100, and “*bais*” is 2) Thus, out of his 175 years of life, Avraham had heeded His Word for 172 years. Meaning, he had said that he recognized G-d at the age of three. Although Avraham was born into a pagan world, he came upon monotheism. He subsequently dedicated his life selflessly to the espousal of G-d’s existence regardless of its cost. He had been pursued and victimized for his beliefs by the members of his generation.

Mishna in *Ethics of our Fathers*: Despite Avraham’s spiritual achievements, “G-d had tested Avraham with ten tests.” If Avraham had already proven himself to be a G-d-fearing individual, what was the unique value of the ten tests that G-d had presented to him?

Rambam in the *Laws of Teshuvah*: Because one is not compelled to do good or evil, one’s choice of either is attributed to his own initiative. Thus, if one chooses to do what is proper, he is fully deserving of reward. On the other hand, if one chooses to transgress he will be fully culpable and liable. Thus, the value of a test within a spiritual context is to allow the individual to perfect himself.

As the founding father of the Jewish people, Avraham needed to experience and succeed in the ten tests that were presented to him in order to inculcate within his spiritual makeup the necessary elements that would insure the spiritual potential of the Jewish people. Therefore, G-d presented Avraham with ten tests so that he should not only perfect and advance himself spiritually, but also so that the Jewish people should be beneficiaries of his accomplishments. It is true that the value of a test is to give the individual the opportunity to advance himself spiritually; however, the *Midrash* tells us that regarding Avraham there is another dimension of value.

Midrash: "G-d tested *Avraham* so that the world should know his good deeds..." Why is it relevant for the world to know *Avraham's* good deeds? In order for *Avraham* to succeed in his objective, as the founding Patriarch of the Jewish people, he needed to be established as the spiritual role model for the world. G-d wanted him to set the standard for all to understand what is a true servant of G-d. In order for *Avraham* to be effective in this capacity, G-d needed to make his good deeds known to the world.

We find that *Avraham*, *Yitzchak*, and *Yaakov* our Patriarchs were blessed with exceptional great wealth. People of this dimension of spirituality, although they had no relevance to the material for its own sake, needed to be effective role models for mankind. The *tzaddik* can only impact upon the world if he is recognized and revered as a special person. Thus, the purpose of the ten tests of *Avraham* was to establish him in the eyes of the world as a uniquely dedicated *tzaddik*/devout person. Being in this position, ultimately, *Avraham* would be the beneficiary because it was only through him that the world was impacted positively.

The acknowledged profile of the *tzaddik* in the eyes of the world has its advantages and disadvantages, which are both great in magnitude in the positive and the negative. If the *tzaddik* should succeed in his mission and impact the world as he was meant to, he will be the beneficiary of that positive influence. However, if the *tzaddik's* actions or demeanor should be perceived as something negative, thus causing people to justify transgression, then the *tzaddik* will be held accountable.

Gemara in Tractate *Yomah*: *Rav* had said, "If I should purchase meat from the butcher and did not pay the bill on time, it would be considered a desecration of G-d's Name (*chilul Hashem*)."¹ This is because the butcher would process the withholding of payment as stealing. Thus, this would allow the butcher to justify theft.

Reb Yochanon had said regarding himself that if he were to walk four cubits without wearing *tefillin* and being engaged in *Torah* study it would be considered a *chilul Hashem*. Again, it would be a desecration of G-d's Name because of the misperception of his behavior. These negative lessons can only be drawn from these individuals because of their special

dimension of spirituality and the prominence that they carry in the eyes of the community.

Torah: Regarding the *Akeidah* (the binding of *Yitzchak*), which was the most difficult test presented to *Avraham*, "And it happened after these things (words) G-d tested *Avraham* and said to him...Please take your son, your only one, whom you love – *Yitzchak*..." Why did G-d need to say "please" when presenting the test of the binding of *Yitzchak*?

Rashi citing the *Gemara* in Tractate *Sanhedrin*: If *Avraham* would have failed regarding the *Akeidah*, it would be a reflection on all of the other tests that he had successfully performed. The nations of the world would say that the other tests that he had passed had no value. Meaning, if in fact all the tests were performed with dedication, it would indicate his unyielding selfless commitment to G-d.

However, if he should choose to fail the test of the *Akeidah*, it would be a reflection that the previous tests were only done for self-interest. Therefore G-d had implored *Avraham* to succeed in the test of the *Akeidah*. Thus, *Avraham* succeeding in the ten tests was for the sake of the world to understand and appreciate his dimension of spirituality and devoutness.

Avraham, the All-Encompassing Founding Patriarch

Midrash: Regarding *Avraham* our Patriarch, "*Reb Yehoshua* of *Sichnin* says, 'G-d had given a sign to *Avraham*. Whatever he would experience his descendents would also experience.' For example, *Avraham* was chosen from his father's household. As it states, 'You are *Hashem*, G-d Who had chosen *Avraham* and taken him out of *Ur Kasdim*...' Similarly, G-d chose the Jewish people from among the seventy nations of the world. As it states, 'You are a holy nation to *Hashem*, your G-d...you will be a chosen people from among all the nations of the world.'... *Avraham* was unique in the world. As it states, '*Avraham* was one of a kind...' Similarly, the Jewish people unique. As it states, 'Who is like Your people, Israel- one such nation in the land...' ...When there was a famine in the land of *Canaan*, *Avraham* descended to *Egypt*. So too did his descendants go to *Egypt* when there was a famine in the Land..."

Chazal are teaching us that *Avraham*, in his essence, was an embodiment of the Jewish people. All that he possessed and experienced was to be possessed and experienced by his descendants. Whatever was relevant to him would be relevant to his descendants. Although *Yitzchak* and *Yaakov* were also Patriarchs, and spiritually unique in their own right, *Avraham* the founding Patriarch was the one who encompassed all that was relevant to the Jewish people. Why is this so?

Chazal: Each of the Patriarchs chose to emulate G-d in a specific manner by assuming one of His Attributes. *Avraham* our Patriarch chose to emulate G-d through the personification of the Attribute of Kindness (*chesed*). *Yitzchak* chose to emulate G-d through the Attribute of Justice and *Yaakov* chose to emulate Him through the Attribute of Mercy. This is the reason the commentators explain that we say in the first blessing of the *Amidah* (silent prayer), "...the G-d of *Avraham*, G-d of *Yitzchak*, and G-d of *Yaakov*" and not the "G-d of *Avraham*, *Yitzchak*, and *Yaakov*." It is because each of the Patriarchs had chosen to emulate another aspect of G-d. Why did *Avraham* choose the Attribute of Kindness rather than the other Attributes?

King *David* in *Psalms*: "*Olam chesed yibaneh* – the world was created out of (His) Kindness." G-d is the perfect and complete Being who is in need of nothing. In addition, there was nothing that had existed that merited His creating the world. He created existence only out of His Kindness to give man the opportunity to merit the ultimate reward. If he, through his free choice, chooses to do the Will of G-d, he will be rewarded. If, however, he chooses to transgress, he will be culpable.

This opportunity for spiritual advancement is only due to the Kindness of G-d. Just as existence was initially brought about as an expression of His Attribute of Kindness, so too did *Avraham* chose to begin with the Attribute of Kindness. *Avraham*, the founding father of the Jewish people, was in essence the beginning of a new spiritual creation. The *Chesed* through which G-d created existence contained within it everything that would manifest itself until the end of time. So too was *Avraham* all-encompassing, through the Attribute of Kindness, in order to establish the totality of the Jewish people.



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