

DARCHAI NOAM

Its ways are ways of pleasantness - דרכיה דרכי נעם

(Mishlei 3:17)

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How can the Parsha help us grow this week?

Lech Lecha – tapping in to our spiritual heritage

A family is living comfortably in a community with strong ties and good friends. All of a sudden, for no apparent reason, they make the decision to sever all ties and move to Israel. The decision is not simple and the follow through is a challenge. They need to find a new community, a new home, a new source of livelihood, new schools, and new friends.

Where did this seemingly illogical desire come from? What gives the family the ability to overcome the hardships of moving home and following through with their decision?

In this week's Parsha of Lech Lecha, Avraham was commanded by Hashem to leave his homeland and wander to an unknown land. This was one of the ten tests that Avraham had to overcome. Avraham had to listen to a G-d that no-one else recognised, a G-d that he couldn't see or feel, a G-d that his parents did not believe in, and cut all ties with his homeland, pack up all of his belongings and leave.

Rav Chaim of Volozhin¹ in his Ruach Chaim (a commentary on Pirkei Avot) explains that Avraham Avinu bequeathed his spiritual accomplishments to his descendants². Rav Chaim notes a discrepancy between two Mishnah's in Pirkei Avot³:

"There were ten generations from Noah to Avraham..." (Pirkei Avot 5:3)

"Avraham Avinu was tested with ten trials and he passed them all..." (Pirkei Avot 5:4)

In the first Mishnah, Avraham is just called 'Avraham'. In the second Mishnah he is called 'Avraham Avinu' (Avraham our forefather). Rav Chaim explains the discrepancy with the help of a pasuk in Mishlei (Proverbs):

"One who walks in innocence is a Tzaddik; fortunate are his children after him"
(Mishlei 20:7)

Why are a Tzaddik's children fortunate? A Tzaddik has to invest enormous effort to achieve his spiritual accomplishments. The Tzaddik's children inherit the benefit of the Tzaddik's work. They are fortunate because they do not need to work as hard as the Tzaddik did. They can ride on the waves of spirituality that their father created. With only a little bit of effort they can achieve the same accomplishments.

Now we can understand the discrepancy between the two Mishnayot quoted above. The first Mishnah refers to Avraham *before* he had faced the ten tests. Therefore he is just called 'Avraham'. The second Mishnah refers to Avraham *after* he passed the ten tests. By facing and overcoming these tests, Avraham cleared the path for us his children, and made it

¹ 1749 – 1821, the most prominent disciple of the Vilna Gaon.

² I first heard this idea from Rav David Goldenberg.

³ Ruach Chaim, as seen in *Trust Me* by Rabbi Eliezer Parkoff, Feldheim 2002, p143.

easier for us to accomplish great things. That is why he is called Avraham Avinu. He is our father, and we, his children, are fortunate.

Many Jews throughout history have been imbued with Avraham's powerful emunah which enables them to pass difficult challenges in the name of Hashem and even give up their lives as a Kiddush Hashem. According to Rav Chaim's explanation, this spiritual strength was inherited from Avraham Avinu who chose to be thrown into a fiery furnace in Ur Kasdim, rather than submit to King Nimrod's demands to participate in idol worship⁴. This also explains how a family can all of a sudden make the drastic decision to make Aliya. This too was inherited from our forefather Avraham when he passed the test of Lech Lecha. As descendants of Avraham, Jews who make difficult decisions in the name of Hashem are emulating Avraham and demonstrating a similar spiritual strength. This spiritual strength was passed down to Avraham's children in their 'spiritual DNA'.

Avraham also bequeathed other spiritual powers to us. Avraham was a giant in acts of kindness. Later on in the week's Parsha, after Avraham and his nephew Lot part ways, Lot is taken captive by the four kings. Avraham risks his life and battles the world superpower to rescue Lot. In next week's Parsha, we will see how desperate Avraham is to provide hospitality to guests even though he is very old, there is a scorching heatwave and he is recovering from his brit milah. We will also see Avraham arguing with Hashem to defend the wicked citizens of Sodom and Gemorrah in case there are some righteous people living amongst them.

Considering Avraham's propensity for kindness and pleasing others, we can now view the enormity of the challenge he must have faced in leaving behind his family and friends to fulfill the command of "Lech Lecha". He made a deliberate and active decision which undoubtedly caused heartache and confusion to those he loved, all in the name of emunah in Hashem.

As Avraham's descendants we also inherited Avraham's ability to perform unbelievable acts of kindness. As Rav Chaim teaches us, with just a little bit of effort on our part we can tap into Avraham's middah of kindness and gevurah and accomplish amazing things, beyond what we think we are capable of!

Let's try something this week:

1. When we find ourselves struggling to summon the courage of gevurah to go beyond our limits, think back to what Avraham Avinu accomplished. Remember how he managed to uproot himself from all of his ties and travel to a faraway land based solely on his beliefs! What emunah! As his descendants we can tap in to that greatness and achieve much more than we otherwise could.
2. Let's try to move out of our comfort zone and perform acts of kindness that we would not ordinarily consider doing. Whether it's giving extra tzedaka, giving up more of our time, or rolling up our sleeves and giving someone a hand.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Ledder.

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⁴ This incident at Ur Kasdim took place before the Lech Lecha command. Most commentators include this incident as one of Avraham's ten tests.

About Darchai Noam

The passuk in Mishlei (3:17) describes the Torah as follows: "Its ways are ways of pleasantness (Darchai Noam) and all its paths are peace". The Torah is our guidebook for life. It is packed full of good advice as to how we should live our lives.

The aim of the Darchai Noam weekly email is to examine an idea from the weekly parashah that usually relates to good middot (character traits). It will focus particularly on treating each other with respect and how to interact with each other in a more peaceful and pleasant manner. It will also suggest some practical tips for implementing these ideas in our daily lives.

By learning together each week, and making an effort to regularly put the ideas into practice, with Hashem's help we can all gradually improve our character traits and our observance of 'v'ahavta l'reiacha kamocho' – loving one's fellow as oneself.

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