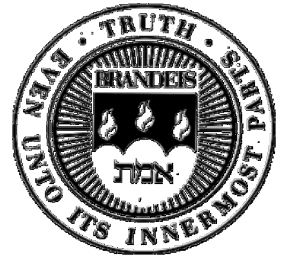




תורת אמת



A Weekly Brandeis Orthodox Organization Publication

13 Cheshvan 5770 / 31 October 2009 Vol. XI Issue 10

PARSHAT LECH LECHA

Candle-lighting: 5:22 pm
Shacharit: 9 am
Sof Kriat Shema: 9:52 am
Sof Zman Tefilla: 10:44 am
Mincha 5:05 pm
Shkia: 5:39 pm
Motzei Shabbat: 6:23 pm

A Continuous Journey

By Rabbi Kaplowitz

Being a Blessing

By Shira Moses '11

Parsha in a Box

- Hashem commands Avraham (then Avram) to leave his land and go to a different land that Hashem will show him
- Avraham and his family go to *Canaan*
- Avraham and Sarah (then Sarai) go to *Mitzrayim* and the encounter with Pharaoh
- Avraham goes back to *Eretz Yisrael* and he and Lot and separate
- Hashem promises Avraham that he will own this Land and become a great nation
- The war of the kings
- Lot is taken captive and Avraham saves him
- *Brit Bein Habetarim* - the covenant between the parts between Hashem and Avraham
- Sarah could not have children so she gave Hagar to Avraham to give him children
- Hagar has Yishmael
- The *Brit Milah* between Avraham and Hashem
- Hashem promises Avraham that Sarah will have a son
- Avraham and his whole household are circumcised - *Brit Milah*

Although we are introduced to Avraham at the end of last week's *parsha*, his character begins in earnest with the very first *pasuk* from this week's *parsha*: "The Lord said to Avram, 'Go forth (*lech lecha*) from your native land and from your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you: I will make your name great, and you shall be a blessing...'" (*Breishit* 12:1-2) The *Midrash Tanchumah* identifies this command of *lech lecha* – go forth – as the very first trial that Avraham faced. It thus serves as a framing moment in Avraham's life, paralleling the final trial that he faces: the *Akedah* (binding of Isaac). There we find: "Some time afterward, G-d put Abraham to the test. He said to him, 'Abraham,' and he answered, 'Here I am.' And He said, 'Take your son, your favored one, Isaac, whom you love, and go (*lech lecha*) to the land of *Moriah* and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the heights that I will point out to you'" (*Breishit* 22:1-2). As the *Midrash* notes, "Rabbi Levy says: The first test was like the last test. Just as the first test was given with the imperative of *lech lecha*, so was the final" (*Tanchuma Lech Lecha* 3). The *Midrash* further explains that the first test of Avraham was one of transformation: "It does not say I will **appoint** you, but I will **make** you. G-d said to him: I will create you anew." The commandment of *lech lecha* is a command for Avraham to transform himself into a new being. Aviva Zornberg explains: "The demand on Abraham and Sarah is to leave one existential environment, one set of paradigms, to emerge from their enclosure in the present ... into a new condition, in which a fertile self-realization becomes possible."

(Rabbi Kaplowitz continued on page 3)

This week's *parsha*, *Parshat Lech Lecha*, opens with Hashem instructing Avram to leave his father's house and the place of his birth, and take his family and all of his possessions to the land that Hashem will show him. Hashem promises Avram that He will make him into a great nation, bless him, make his name great, and then tells Avram that he will also "be a blessing." While this is undoubtedly a great *bracha* for Avram, we can question: what does it mean to "be a blessing"? Moreover, why is Avram merited with the honor of being a blessing and not Adam, the first man, or Noah, who was described as being "righteous" and "walking with G-d"?

If we look at the actions of Avram (later Avraham) during his life, we see him as the embodiment of faith and kindness, even in the face of numerous obstacles. Throughout his years, we can see instances of Avram's greatness as he selflessly fights to save his nephew, Lot, from amidst the war between the Canaanite city-states, as he tries his hardest to save Sodom from destruction, and as he unquestioningly follows Hashem at the *akeidah*. What's more, the *midrash* even notes that, as a boy, Avram was the first iconoclast, going against his father and destroying all of the idols in his house to prove that there is one G-d.

While it is undeniable that Avram is a man of exemplary virtue, and is, as the Rambam says, one who "does what is right because it is right," in examining his actions, we find that he is not like other religious 'heroes' in *Tanach*. Avram was never almost sacrificed like his son, Yitzchak, nor is he a "dweller of tents" like Yaakov. Avram also does not give laws or liberate like Moshe Rabeinu. Therefore, what differentiates him from others? And what is it that makes Avram worthy of being "a blessing"? The answer to these questions can perhaps be found through exploring the deeper meaning behind Avram's original commandment of *lech lecha*, "go for

(Shira Moses continued on page 3)

Stick to Your Guns

By Zahvi Glasenberg '11

At the end of *Parshat Noach* the Torah tells us, “Terach took up his son Avram, and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of Avram, and they departed with them from *Ur Kasdim* to the land of *Canaan*” (*Bereishit* 11:31). Terach takes his family on a journey to the land of *Canaan*, to *Eretz Yisrael*, but the journey is cut short, as the Torah continues to tell us that, “they arrived at *Haran* and they settled there . . . and Terach died in *Haran*” (*Bereishit* 11:31-32). Apparently, when Terach reached *Haran* he decided to settle there and not continue on to *Eretz Yisrael*, and he spends the rest of his life in *Haran*. The beginning of this week’s *parsha* now holds a new significance. Hashem turns to Avraham and not only tells him to leave for a new place, but to continue and complete the journey begun by Terach to *Eretz Yisrael*: “Go for yourself from your land, from your relatives, and from your father’s house to the land that I will show you.” (*Bereishit* 12:1) Terach, for reasons unknown, is not able to or chooses not to complete his move, and it seems that he has given up on the ideal of reaching his goal. Hashem counts on Avraham, on the other hand, to be committed.

The Chafetz Chaim said that this is a lesson to learn from Avraham: one should not become sidetracked from the goals he sets for himself. To succeed in any venture, one must complete what one begins, and it is this level of commitment and determination that helps Avraham successfully reach *Eretz Yisrael*, in addition to passing all subsequent tests put forth by Hashem.

We read a few *perakim* later that Hashem took Avraham outside to count the stars and say to him, “*koh yehiyeh zaracha*”, “thus shall be your seed”. In addition to the literal interpretation that his children would be as many as the stars, Rashi cites a *midrash* that teaches that Hashem removed Avraham from this world and informed him that **Avram** would not have a son but **Avraham** would; Hashem would change his name and his destiny. Rashi (17:1) explains the significance of adding the letter ‘*hey*’ to Avram’s name as signifying Avraham’s ability to control and master the five organs; Avram grows into Avraham. Rav Chaim Yaakov Goldwicht zt”l, explains that the *pasuk* “*koh yehiyeh zaracha*,” can be interpreted as saying that just as Avraham’s commitment enabled him to pass his tests, so too his children would possess the ability to stay committed and consistent; to stick by their beliefs and by this means rise above their challenges and pass their tests.

It is this aspect of consistency and the struggle to maintain constant belief in the face of difficulties that we see Bnei Yisrael struggle with at the beginning of this week’s *haftorah*. Yeshayahu asks why Bnei Yisrael thinks their “path is concealed from Hashem” and their “judgment alludes Him”. (*Yeshayahu* 40:27) According to the Metzudat David, Bnei Yisrael in their exilic state are failing to see that Hashem is still actively involved in the world. Yeshayahu, therefore, reminds them that they are “*zera Avraham*” (41: 8), and that they must renew their commitment to seeing Hashem as the ultimate and ever-involved power at all times. They must draw upon the commitment and consistency shown by Avraham to maintain their devotion.

In *Parshat Shlach*, we see a command very similar to “*Lech lecha*”, as Hashem tells Moshe “*Shlach lecha*”; send men to spy out *Canaan*. However, we see the two stories as almost anti-parallel: The invitation to Avraham to go to *Eretz Yisrael* ended an exile in a sense, allowing Avraham to complete Terach’s journey, while the result of the invitation to investigate the land resulted in the beginning of one. The *meraglim* knew where they were going, and after having experienced the miracles in the *midbar*, knew they would be kept safe. However, with all this knowledge and reassurance, they were unable to maintain this resolution because they were lacking an internal com-

mitment to Hashem and *Eretz Yisrael*. Avraham, on the other hand, undertook to journey to a completely foreign destination, yet his consistency in his beliefs ensured that they were maintained.

When Avraham returns from *Mitzrayim*, the Torah states that Avraham went back to the place of the *mizbeach* “*asher asah sham barishona*”, “which he had made there at the first”. Even after the trials of famine and the “confusion” with Pharaoh and Sarah, Avraham is both physically and theologically able to return to the same mindset and the same level of faith he had possessed before.

It is no wonder that the *Gemara* in *Brachot* is able to see one of the times for *tefillot* stemming from Avraham. Set times for *tefillah* were not only instituted to make Hashem a constant in our lives; they are to ensure that we ourselves can remain constant and consistent in our relationship to Hashem.

May we all be *zoche* to, like Avraham, have the willpower and determination to finish our journeys to *Eretz Yisrael* and beyond, and maintain a strong and consistent relationship with *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*.

Zahvi has a blog that been praised by NY editors. You should check it out at: <http://bilvavshalem.blogspot.com>.

Be Like Avraham

By Hannah Perlman '11

The beginning of *Parshat Lech Lecha*, G-d bequeaths Avraham, commanding him to “Go from your land, from your birthplace and from your father’s house, to the land which I will show you,” where Avraham is promised that he will become in and of himself, a blessing: “I [G-d] will bless you, and I will aggrandize your name, and [you shall] be a blessing.” Ever the faithful and obedient devotee, Avraham complies, not knowing the full clairvoyance of the command, and journeys through the process that ultimately shapes his character.

At this junction, we ought to ask ourselves: what does it mean to **be** a blessing? We are all familiar with what it means when G-d bestows a blessing upon us, or the commandment to make a blessing over significant object or events—but what does it really mean to be a blessing, oneself?

Rashi, elucidates, explaining that “[you shall] be a blessing,” means that blessings are now entrusted into Avraham’s hands, whereas they previously existed in G-d’s hands alone, figuratively speaking. Rashi asserts that G-d is referring to G-d’s blessing to Adam and Noach prior to Avraham, thereby illuminating a turning point: from now on, Avraham may also bless whomever he wishes. It is precisely by a closer understanding of this commentary that we can see the inter-dimension of being a blessing. Avraham’s charge to be a blessing ultimately reflects the epicenter of his journey, that is, to take a proactive role in the trajectory of life’s events, as well as take proactive measures to positively impact others.

Although life’s challenges may tempt us view ourselves as mere pawns, unable to determine or choose our fate to any degree of reasonable certainty, this interpretation provides an alternative perspective. Essentially, as we engage in the processes of life’s journeys, we can learn from the embodiment of Avraham’s actions. In much the way that Avraham internalized G-d’s charge to be a blessing, so too can we each approach and fashion our lives in making proactive choices that aggrandize both our inter and intrapersonal relationships.

Hannah loves partaking in extracurricular activities. Want to start a new club? Need someone to serve on your board?

Hannah is there for you!

M O D A O T

- **BOO First-Year/Upperclassmen Dinners** The time is finally here for the fabulous, delicious and entertaining semesterly First-Year/Upperclassmen Dinners! Upperclassmen, get the privilege of hosting first-years and meeting the next generation. The dinners are taking place this Friday night so don't forget to follow your hosts home! Enjoy your delicious meal
- **BOO Chulent Kiddush Competition Shabbat October 31st at Kiddush in Alumni Lounge** Get excited for BOO's annual chulent competition! At Shabbat Kiddush on October

31st there will be a panel of judges taste testing each contestant's chulent.

- **Hot Topics: The Goldstone Report and J Street: Making Sense of it All**, Shabbat day 4:30pm, International Lounge. Join Rabbi Kaplowitz for his weekly Hot Topics class. Richard Goldstone will be here next Thursday so it might be important to go to this Hot Topics!
- **Dr. Arnold Slyper—Scholar-in-Residence (and Leeyat's dad)** will be joining us for Shabbat. He will be speaking at 1:30 pm in the Bet Midrash about "Your Money and

Your World; How Much Does it Mean?" Be sure to check it out

- **Melave Malka and Shiur by Rav Menachem Leibtag Saturday Night October 31st at 8:30 PM in the Beit Midrash** Leading Tanach scholar and educator Rav Menachem Leibtag will be joining us for a Motzei Shabbat shiur, schmooze, and snacks in the Beit Midrash. Rav Leibtag will be speaking on the topic of: "The Flood – A story about Noah, or a story about Moses?" Can there be a better way to start off the week? For more information, contact Zahvi Glasenberg.

(Rabbi Kaplowitz continued from page 1)

With this in mind, it is interesting to note that Avraham and Sarah become the paradigms of *teshuvah*, as described by the Rambam. "Among the methods of *teshuvah* (repentance) are... [the penitent] should change his/her name, as if to say, 'I am another, and I am not the same person who did those acts.' He/she should also change his/her actions for the better, to a straight path, and be exiled from his/her place" (*Hilchot Teshuvah* 2:4). Avraham and Sarah go through all of these steps: they uproot themselves to a new place and both of them have their names changed. Zornberg further explains, "It is possible, the Sages insist - and Abraham is the first to live this possibility -- to move to a new place, to deconstruct all the structures of the old place of being... to create entirely new paradigms of reality."

We would expect the beginning of Avraham's career to be a time of tremendous growth and transformation. After, all he is the founder of a new religion and a new way of life. But the end of his life and career are also defined by the command of *lech lecha*, of transformation. Avraham is still on a journey and still open to the possibility of change and newness in his life, even as it nears its end! This is the greatness of Avraham. The Sefat Emet has a beautiful insight into the lives of the *avot*. He explains that the *avot* are the pillars upon which our nation is built. They established new paradigms and ways of life for all of us. One of the things that Avraham initiated is the notion of being on a journey – the idea of *lech lecha*. The Sefat Emet explains that just as Avraham blindly followed Hashem to a strange land, the Jewish people blindly followed Hashem into the desert – *lechtech acharai ba-midbar*. As we have seen, the idea of *lech lecha* runs much deeper. It is an idea of personal growth and transformation and self-realization. May we all merit to live up to the legacy of our namesake, Avraham Avinu.

Rabbi Kaplowitz Fun Fact: Rabbi Kaplowitz won the breakdance competition at his high school.

(Shira Moses continued from page 1)

yourself."

In instructing Avram to "go for [himself]," Hashem may not only have been telling him to go for his own benefit and good; rather, Hashem may also have been telling Avram to "go with himself," to go with his beliefs and faith, and to "go by himself," to leave what is familiar behind and stand alone on behalf of his convictions. In accepting Hashem's command of *lech lecha*, to "go for himself," Avram courageously took the initiative to travel away from what he knew, and to uphold monotheistic and just ideals in a culture deficient of both.

According to this read, to "be a blessing" as Avram was means to go out and take the initiative to spread good to others. As Rashi holds, "and you will be a blessing" means that until now, the power to bless was in Hashem's hands alone, as he blessed Adam and Noah before Avram; yet, now, Hashem placed the power to bless in Avram's hands, allowing him to go out and bless whomsoever he desires. Avram's status as a blessing is seen through the fact that even though Hashem already promised him that he would be great, Avram still went out and brought to others the blessings already given to him by Hashem.

Ultimately, Avram's transition to a blessing is evident through his name change at the conclusion of the *parsha*. With the addition of a *hey* to Avram's name, in conjunction with his circumcision and his entry into a covenant with Hashem, Hashem anointed Avraham to a leader of *hamon*, multitudes. In being the father of many, Avraham is able to encourage others to be righteous and moral, just as much as he was able to when he was first commanded to *lech lecha*, go for himself.

By and large, *Parashat Lech Lecha* is not only the story of Avram's individual's journey, but is also the ongoing story of the journey of the Jewish people. To be a blessing is to continue the journey started by Avram and go out and be a source of good in the world, even if it means standing alone. While we may have the power to "bless" others, we must remember that we are not inherently given this honor. Rather, we must take initiative to better ourselves and become closer to Hashem, bringing others along with us as we continue on this journey.

Shira Moses is always doing random acts of chessed just like Avraham.

SHORT VORTS

Actually, Walk in Front of Me

By Josh Jerusalmi '11

Although we are introduced to Avraham at the end of last week's *parsha*, his character begins in earnest with the very first *pasuk* from this week's *parsha*: "The Lord said to Avram, 'Go forth (*lech lecha*) from your native land and from your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you: I will make your name great, and you shall be a blessing...'" (*Breishit* 12:1-2) The *Midrash Tanchumah* identifies this command of *lech lecha* – go forth – as the very first trial that Avraham faced. It thus serves as a framing moment in Avraham's life, paralleling the final trial that he faces: the *Akedah* (binding of Isaac). There we find: "Some time afterward, G-d put Abraham to the test. He said to him, 'Abraham,' and he answered, 'Here I am.' And He said, 'Take your son, your favored one, Isaac, whom you love, and go (*lech lecha*) to the land of *Moriah* and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the heights that I will point out to you'" (*Breishit* 22:1-2). As the *Midrash* notes, "Rabbi Levy says: The first test was like the last test. Just as the first test was given with the imperative of *lech lecha*, so was the final" (*Tanchuma Lech Lecha* 3). The *Midrash* further explains that the first test of Avraham was one of transformation: "It does not say I will appoint you, but I will make you. G-d said to him: I will create you anew." The commandment of *lech lecha* is a command for Avraham to transform himself into a new being. Aviva Zornberg explains: "The demand on Abraham and Sarah is to leave one existential environment, one set of paradigms, to emerge from their enclosure in the present ... into a new condition, in which a fertile self-realization becomes possible."

With this in mind, it is interesting to note that Avraham and Sarah become the paradigms of *teshuvah*, as described by the Rambam. "Among the methods of *teshuvah* (repentance) are... [the penitent] should change his/her name, as if to say, 'I am another, and I am not the same person who did those acts.' He/she should also change his/her actions for the better, to a straight path, and be exiled from his/her place" (*Hilchot Teshuvah* 2:4). Avraham and Sarah go through all of these steps: they uproot themselves to a new place and both of them have their names changed. Zornberg further explains, "It is possible, the Sages insist - and Abraham is the first to live this possibility -- to move to a new place, to deconstruct all the structures of the old place of being...to create entirely new paradigms of reality."

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Josh's two favorite teams are facing each other in the World Series—the Yankees & the Phillies. He cannot even decide for whom to root.

Love Hashem With All Your Might

By Zack Sax '12

In *Devarim* 6:5 the Torah states "You shall love Hashem with all of your heart, all of your soul, and all of your might". Rashi expounds on the phrase "all of your might" to mean all of your experiences.

The question then is how do we express love for Hashem through our experiences?

The answer can be found in a story about the Chernobyl Rebbe, who was famous for collecting money to negotiate with the Russian government to free Jewish captives during the late 1800s. Once the Rebbe himself was taken to jail, during which time he became very distraught. He had been the one to free Jews from jail so why would he be put in their place?

The story goes that he had a dream in which he was asked why Avraham *Avinu* was told to leave his home, "*lech lecha*", and travel to an unknown land. The Rebbe was told that the *mitzvah* Avraham specialized in was *Hachnasat Orchim*, caring for guests. When Avraham was told to leave his comfortable home, he became just like the guests he had once invited in so readily, thereby helping him to develop a new appreciation for what he had been doing by fully understanding the mindset of a wayfarer.

The Rebbe then understood why he had been put in jail. He could now empathize with the feelings of a prisoner and could translate this newfound understanding into reinvigorated passion for the *mitzvah* to which he felt so closely connected. When the Rebbe was finally set free, he worked for the freedom of Jewish captives with new appreciation, just as Avraham had with his *mitzvah* of *Hachnasat Orchim*.

By connecting the end of the Torah with the beginning, we can see how to fully grasp the idea of serving G-d through "all of our might".

May we all derive positive benefits from unforeseen situations of "*lech lecha*" to find ourselves in a space of new appreciation and understanding of our purpose as individuals and as the Nation of *Am Yisrael*.

Shabbat Shalom

Zack Sax loves wearing sweaters. His Shabbat outfit is not complete without one.

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