

# THE INTERNAL JOURNEY

*by Rabbi Pinchas Winston*

## Friday Night:

G-d said to Avram, "Go from your land, your birth place, and your father's house, to the land which I will show you. I will make you into a great nation; I will bless you and I will make your name great. You will be a blessing, [and] I will bless those who bless you; the one who curses you, I will curse. All the families of the earth will be blessed through you." (Bereishis 12:1-3)

It's interesting how the Torah works. Last week's parshah praised Noach, and then we're told via Rashi and the Talmud that, as great as he was, Noach could have been better. After that, we are told almost nothing about Avraham, not good or bad, and yet, Lech-Lecha starts off with G-d promising Avraham the world-this one and the next one, for that matter.

What did Avraham do so right?

The answer, of course, lies in the Midrash. The Midrash tells us that leaving home was already Avraham's third test. Avraham had already turned against his society and its idol worshipping ways, and had even braved a fiery furnace in Ur Kasdim to back up his point. The Ramchal (Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto) explains what this meant:

"... There was, however, one exception, and that was Avraham. He had succeeded in elevating himself, and as a result of his deeds was chosen by G-d. Avraham was therefore permanently made into a superior excellent Tree, conforming to man's highest level. It was further provided that he would be able to produce branches possessing his characteristics ... After this, the gate was closed on the era of roots." (Derech Hashem 2:4:3)

This had been a great accomplishment for mankind, and it saved the world from destruction. It had been only 339 years since the Flood, and still mankind found the audacity to challenge G-d and build the Tower of Babel. Had Avraham not come along, then there would have been no justification to maintain creation--again!

Yet, interestingly enough, all of Avraham's merits had not been enough to save him from the furnace of Kasdim, as the following Midrash reveals:

Rav Shmuel bar of Rebi Yitzchak said, "Avraham would not have been saved from the furnace of fire

had it not been for the merit of his future grandson, Ya'akov." A parable explains this: once a man was brought before the Sultan to be judged, who subsequently ruled that the man should be burned to death. However, by way of astrology, it was revealed to the Sultan that in the future, the man, should he not be killed, would father a daughter who would one day marry the king. The Sultan said, "It is worth saving this man's life for the daughter that will one day marry the king!" Thus Avraham was judged to be burned in Ur Kasdim, and when it was revealed before G-d that in the future, Avraham would have a descendant Ya'akov, G-d said, "It is worth saving Avraham in the merit of Ya'akov!" (Bereishis Rabbah 63:2)

This seems to be the exact opposite of what was learned last week. Last week we spoke about how it was Noach's good deeds that led to his miraculous redemption from the destructive power of the Flood, and that they were his true "generations." Now, according to the above Midrash, Avraham's own good deeds were not enough to be saved from the evil Nimrod; it was his children that redeemed him from certain death!

The answer to this question lies in understanding the fundamental difference between the Jewish people and the rest of the nations of the world. The Jewish people are not a people—they are a person, which is why the Talmud specifically refers to them as "adam" (Yevamos 61a; the Chazon Ish used this argument to successfully fend off a blood libel in Russia in the early 1900's). A "people" is a collection of individuals who may or may not have a relationship with each other, or even care about the welfare of one another. With respect to a people, the success of one individual does not necessarily rest on the success or failure of the other.

This is not the case when it comes to Avraham and his descendants. We received the Torah because, as Rashi says, we were able to mold ourselves into the reality of a single individual (Shemos 19:2). The Talmud itself points out that "every Jew is a guarantor for his fellow Jew" (Sanhedrin 27b). The success of a Jew as a Jew does depend upon the success of fellow Jews as Jews—at least in the eyes of G-d.

This is because every Jew represents a link in a chain, an unbroken chain that spans from Avraham until Moshiach, and beyond. That chain represents the fulfillment of G-d's master plan for creation, vis-a-vis the actions of mankind. What good is a "chain" whose last link falls short of the final destination. What good is the original link in that chain, if no links follow after it? And it was because Avraham knew this, as he said:

Avram said, "My Lord, G-d, what will You give to me? I go childless, and the custodian of my household is Eliezer! You have not given me children, and a member of my household instead is my heir!" (Bereishis 15:2-3)

and was devoted to making such "links" that he merited to be miraculously saved from the fire of Kasdim, and all enemies throughout history.

## Shabbos Day:

G-d said to Avram, "Go from your land, your birthplace, and your father's house, to the land which I will show you. (Bereishis 12:1)

We've spoken on many occasions about the centrality of Eretz Yisroel to the Jewish people, and many of its wonders. From the above posuk, we can sense how important Eretz Yisroel is to G-d, for it represents not just another miracle of creation, but a special place that G-d Himself wished to "show off" to Avraham.

Furthermore, as the Torah hints, Eretz Yisroel is the only true place for a Jew to find himself or herself. The words "lech-lecha" literally mean "go to yourself," as if to say, leave Charan and travel to Eretz Yisroel, a land that serves to reveal one's true inner being--one's soul.

One of the reasons this is true emerges from a posuk in last week's parshah:

Sarah was barren; she did not have a child. (Bereishis 11:30)

The Talmud says:

The rabbis taught: If a person is married to a woman for ten years and she does not give birth for him, he should divorce her and give her a kesuva, because maybe he doesn't merit to build a family through her.

Though there are halachic ways to avoid divorce in such situations, the Talmud still continues:

Even though there is no proof for this, there is an allusion to it: Sarai, the wife of Avram took Hagar the Egyptian, her handmaid, after Avram dwelled in the land of Canaan for ten years, and gave her to Avram, her husband, as a wife. (Bereishis 16:3). We learn from here that his stay outside of Israel did not count [in the ten years]. (Yevamos 64a)

"After ... ten years ... He was with Hagar, which means he did not marry her before he came to Eretz Yisroel, though there were many years spent in Padan Aram. These teaches you that the time outside the Land did not count for him; perhaps the transgression of [living] outside the land caused them barrenness." (Rashi)

It is as if to say that time only makes a difference in Eretz Yisroel. But why would that be so? We use the same clocks, and the same calendars in Israel as we do outside of Israel. There may be a time difference, but six o'clock in the morning is still six o'clock in the morning everywhere in the world!

Everyone knows that we tell time differently when travelling on a journey between two destinations than in the normal course of day. On a normal day, "What time is it?" means, "How much of the day is left?" However, when we ask, "What time is it?" along a journey, we are really asking, "How close am I

to my destination, to fulfilling the point of my journey?" The former is a function of merely dealing with time; the latter, a function of anticipation of something wonderful about to happen.

Lech-Lecha was more than a command to change physical locations; it was a command to change spiritual locations, to move from Point A to Point B, where Point A symbolizes the child at birth--all potential and little realization--and Point B represents the fulfillment of the individual and the world he lives in. Eretz Yisroel is both a place on the world map, but more importantly, it is an extremely high level of spiritual consciousness.

Hence, when Avraham finally made the the move physically, he also made the move spiritually, and as a result, time took on a different quality for him and his wife, a different meaning; it became a measure of his journey through life on the way to fulfillment and greatness. This is why the numerical value of the words "lech-lecha" is 100, a number that symbolizes physical and spiritual completion, and the age at which Avraham and Sarah were finally able to have a child together.

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#### SEUDAH SHLISHI:

When the sun had set, there was a thick darkness. A smoking furnace and a flaming torch had passed between the [cut up] pieces [of the carcasses]. On that day, G-d made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your de scendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates; [the land of] the Kenites, the Kenizites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites." (Bereishis 15:17-21)

We have also spoken about the concept of Bris Avos before, but it is in this week's parshah that the actual covenant between G-d and Avraham is made.

The essential underpinning of a covenant is that it is an agreement made to not be broken. A covenant is a pact, a promise, and therefore it cannot be taken lightly by anyone of integrity. It demands fulfillment even when the parties who made the promise to each other do not feel like honoring their agreement. It is binding--that is, it binds the two parties together and makes them one (hence the symbolism of passing through two parts of something).

However, even covenants can be broken when made between people. Usually, such agreements are based upon conditions, a commitment by each side to perform in such a way as to make the agreement worthwhile. Failure to honor one's commitment results in dissolution of the covenant, often de facto.

However, when it comes to Bris Avos, it can never be annulled. G-d knows, as do we, that we have not fulfilled our part of the bargain made between G-d and Avraham first, and then G-d and the Jewish people (at Mt. Sinai), at all points during our long history. In fact, today, though the population of the Jewish people numbers over twelve million, bli ayin hara, only a handful of that population

lives by Torah and mitzvos, and so many don't even know what Torah is about.

Yet, the relationship continues, for the following reason:

"... This is done as a result of Bris Avos, which is in the 620 'Pillars of Light' Keser (the highest of the ten sefiros); in that place is the mystery of Bris Avos and Yisroel, and from there the Torah was given, and this is the 620 letters of the Ten Commandments ..."

Right. Perhaps that was a little too Kabbalistic for most of us. What this translates into is this: the reason for the existence of a Jewish people is intimately bound up with the purpose for creation. This is why, in spite of the fact that we stray and lose so many along the way that G-d promised to always keep at least a "remnant" around:

I will heap My evils upon them, and expend My arrows on them. (Devarim 32:23)

"This curse as a punishment implies a blessing: My arrows will end, but they (the Jewish nation) will never end." (Rashi)

They say that at the "End of Days," this will be the "Big Test." Apparently, one viable scenario for the end of history as we know it will be that everything will create the impression that G-d has abandoned the Jewish people ... that Bris Avos was not a real covenant. Many will fall for this, and feel like abandoning the Jewish nation; many will. However, in the end, miracles even greater than those performed in Egypt to free the helpless and hapless Jewish people will occur for us as well. Those who believed in Bris Avos to the very end will be very glad they did, while those who gave up the ship will look back with tremendous regret, to say the least ...

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## Melave Malkah:

And the angel of G-d said to her [Hagar], "You are pregnant, and you will give birth to a son. You will call him Yishmael, because G-d has heard [shamah] your affliction. He will be a wild man. His hand will be against everyone, and the hand of everyone [will be] against him. Yet, he will dwell over all of his brothers." (Bereishis 16:11-12)

(Please pardon the political overtones, which I usually try to avoid (or at least hide). However, this week's parshah combined with the current events makes it very difficult not to point out certain ideas and their historical ramifications.)

It is ironic that, as we wind down our history, the very source of most of our troubles today is the very nation that our ancestor gave birth to. In fact, the Zohar says that it will be the people of Yishmael who will lead the nations against Jerusalem in the final battle of Gog and Magog.

As if that wasn't ironic enough. Before Yishmael (and even today), the other half of our pain and

sorrow has also emanated from a close relative: Eisav. It was Eisav who was the father of Edom, and, according to Tradition, of Rome as well. For the Jew throughout history it has often been a religious battle on two fronts.

Some say that it is in the merit of circumcision that the descendants of Yishmael have had success in gaining and controlling parts of Eretz Yisroel, including the Temple Mount. After all, if you think about it, it is highly unusual (not to mention a major threat to one's security) to have a hostile nation control one of the most sacred of your sites--right in the middle of your own capitol city! It wouldn't happen in Washington, Ottawa, London, Paris, or another city around the world!

Other religions have coveted the holy Temple Mount, but have never succeeded in erecting a place of worship there. The source of the present Arab occupation and stronghold (rumor has it that there are enough weapons and ammunition under the Temple Mount to arm a decent-sized army for a while), therefore, is also in this week's parshah:

Avraham was 99 years old when he was circumcised. Yishmael, his son was 13 years old when he was circumcised. (Bereishis 17:24-25)

In fact, to this very day, Arabs are circumcized at the age of 13. (I was told by a Mohel that they gain experience by performing Bris Milah on Arabs who seek them out.)

Perhaps all of this is indicative of the real source of the Jewish struggle; perhaps it reveals that the Jewish struggle is an internal one. If so, then external security would be dependent upon internal security with who we are as a nation, and our Divine mission. Avraham understood this when he asked:

The word of G-d came to him saying, "This one will not be your heir. Rather one who will go out from your own bowels--he will be your heir." He brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them!" He said to him, "So will be your descendants." He believed G-d, and he considered it as righteousness. He said to him, "I am G-d who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give to you this land as an inheritance." And he said, "My L-rd G-d, how can I know that I will inherit it?" He said to him, "Take a three-year-old female calf, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtle dove, and a young pigeon." (Bereishis 15:4-9)

Avraham said before The Holy One, Blessed is He, "Master of the Universe! Perhaps Israel, G-d forbid, will sin before You, and You will deal with them as you did the Generation of the Flood and the Generation of the Dispersion!" ... He answered him, "Take a three-year-old female calf ..." (I.e., the Jewish people will bring sacrifices to atone for their sins, and maintain their hold on the land). He said, "Master of the Universe! That's fine while the Temple is standing--what about when the Temple is not there?" He told him, "I already established the saying of the sacrifices, and whenever they read the sacrifices, then I will look at it as if they offered the sacrifices themselves, and I will forgive their sins!" (Megillah 31b)

Elsewhere, Rashi is more direct:

"I have separated you from the peoples that you should be Mine ..." (Vayikra 20:26)

"If you hold yourselves apart from them, then you will be mine, but if not, you will become subject to Nebuchadnetzar and others like him..." (Rashi)

Hence, it seems that how we view ourselves and our mission is directly reflected in the level of control we have over our lives and the land we live on. That is why this parshah is about a journey--an internal journey--which, when performed properly leads to Eretz Yisroel, and a secure life therein.

Have a great, contemplative Shabbos,

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