

LEARNING HOW TO WALK

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

G-d said to Avram, "Leave your land, and the place of your birth, and the house of your father, for the land which I will show you." (Bereishis 12:1)

The power of "Lech-Lecha" is not just that it once started something small that led to something very big-it is that it continues to start "small things" and empower them with the potential to become big-VERY big. For, these opening words of this week's parshah apply to every Jew, have always and will always until Moshiach comes and makes them superfluous.

They can be re-phrased: G-d asked Avram, "Are you ready for a relationship with Me on MY terms?"

This is because the struggle of Mankind has never really been whether or not he should relate to G-d; the overwhelming passion for idol-worship of all forms reveals Man's need to relate to spiritual forces. Even today, in our so-called "modern society," emptiness is the result of a totally hedonistic lifestyle, and all the money and toys in the world cannot seem to fill that void.

No, the struggle for Mankind has been to relate to G-d on HIS terms, and not on OUR terms. Even in Eretz Yisroel, where, very ironically, anti-G-d attitudes seem to be so strong, a recent poll by an a left-wing newspaper revealed a very high percentage of Israeli belief in G-d. However, everything began to get complicated and convoluted when people were asked, "And what kind of G-d do you believe in?"

Halachically, the Talmud and tradition teach, a Jew is one that is born of a Jewish mother, or, or a gentile who underwent an Orthodox conversion. However, Hashkofically, the posuk teaches, a Jew is someone who finds security only in G-d, and, whose greatest meaning in life comes from the A'lmighty.

This is what Dovid HaMelech meant when he wrote:

One thing I asked of G-d, that will I seek: that I dwell in the House of G-d all the days of my life, to behold the sweetness of G-d and to contemplate in His Sanctuary. (Tehillim 27:4)

In this posuk from Tehillim you have all the elements of the one from the start of this week's parshah. From Dovid HaMelech's perspective, all pleasure -- all TRUE pleasure -- in life comes from

sensing and feeling the presence of G-d, from abandoning oneself to G-d, with what the Chassidic masters have referred to as "hisbatlus" -- canceling one's will in light of G-d's will. Only then can one attach himself to G-d and feel the sublime pleasure from doing so. It is a relationship with G-d totally on His terms; that's what Dovid HaMelech yearned for.

Sounds simple enough: just complete and utter abandonment to G-d; what could be easier?

A relationship with G-d on OUR terms. We human beings, for the sake of security, like to define the parameters of our relationships with just about anything and everybody. We're so afraid of being hurt and left the "loser" in life, that we build psychological and emotional force fields to keep negative situations distant from our lives -- very distant.

"Lech-Lecha" represents the directive to take the plunge and leave that mentality behind, at least when it comes to a relationship with G-d. It is the challenge to stop pursuing G-d and spirituality on our own terms, in order to learn to reach out for G-d on His terms. This is what separated Avram from the world around him then, and, it is what has separated the Jew from the society around him all throughout the generations until this very day, until Moshiach will come.

And, every challenge the Jew faces in the course of his or her life is really just this question echoing throughout the ages -- the tough and the simple challenges. Whether it is to return a mistaken tax refund because the law says so, to side with an unpopular but correct opinion, to be "politically incorrect" because Torah morality says so, to make aliyah to Eretz Yisroel -- whatever. To be Jewish it to pursue a relationship with Him on HIS terms, and to trust that everything, in the end (if not in the meantime), will work out for the best.

Shabbos Day:

He said to Avram, "Know that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs" (Bereishis 15:13)

The "Bris Ben HeBesarim" -- the "Pact of The Halves" -- was the original covenant made between G-d and the Jewish people regarding the future history of Avram's descendants -- us. The agreement speaks both of exile and redemption, giving Avram, and all of his descendants a peek at their history until the end of days.

The posuk quoted above is speaking about the Egyptian exile, and, even in advance of it. It is warning Avram that security and a homeland will be an issue for some time to come, until the Jewish people undergo the necessary spiritual transformations necessary to warrant their living on their own land in serenity. However, the Arizal has a different way of looking at the above posuk as well:

"It is well-known what the rabbis have said on the posuk, "He (Yosef) moved the people from city to

city across Egypt" (Bereishis 47:21), that he moved them (the Egyptians) to avoid any embarrassment to the Jewish People, since they (the Egyptians) were also moved around land that was not theirs. This is what the posuk means when it says, "Know that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs," since the land is not "theirs," that is, not of the EGYPTIANS who dwell there, because he moved them from city to city, as we said." (Sha'ar HaPesukim)

Isn't that just like G-d to turn an apparent "curse" into a blessing for the Jewish people? And, isn't that just like Kabbalah to find a nuance in a posuk that reveals this silver lining within the cloud of exile?

You will come to your fathers in peace, and be buried in a good old age. (Bereishis 15:15)

Again, through the eyes of the Arizal, the above posuk takes on new meaning:

"It would seem that this is not the place for this posuk; the two possukim should have been written together, the one regarding exile and the one about redemption -- "Know that your descendants will be strangers" and, "the nation that will oppress them I will judge," and, "the fourth generation will return." The posuk, "you will come to your fathers in peace" should come either before or after them.

Know, though, regarding Terach, Avraham's father, he reincarnated into Iyov, who was called "G-d-fearing." And, through the suffering he underwent, he performed complete teshuvah, and, this is hinted to when it says, "you will come to your fathers in peace." As Chazal say, "Terach returned in teshuvah" (Bereishis Rabbah 30:4).

However, the reason for Iyov's suffering was as Chazal say, because, as one of Paroah's three advisers, he told Paroah to inflict them with suffering (Sanhedrin 106b), and therefore, he suffered as a result. We find, therefore, that their oppression was the result of Iyov's advice, and therefore, he was forced to suffer, and because of this, he did teshuvah.

Thus, this is the reason why the posuk is juxtaposed here, since "the nation that will oppress them" was the cause of "you will come to your fathers in peace." Then, after that, "the fourth generation will return," after the forty years in the desert."

In other words, the promise G-d was giving to Avraham in this prophecy was that even his own father, Terach, who had lived a life of idol worship, would eventually do teshuvah, and be there waiting for Avraham when he finally left This World. Between his own lifetime, and the lifetime of his reincarnation, Iyov, Terach would repent, and atone for his sins of the past, and therefore, become worthy of the World-to-Come as well. This was a very gratifying piece of news to hear for Avraham, who had spent so much time trying to save the souls of as many people as he could.

Hence, just from the unusual juxtaposition of possukim, we gain an important history lesson, and connection between the generations. As we have discussed before, the story of Iyov is a complicated one, but not the mystery others want to believe.

And, it is true of all of Jewish history. Jewish history is long and complex, but not a mystery. There

are rules and axioms that govern the history of all of mankind, but, particularly that of the Jewish people. And, almost all of the events of yesteryear and today take on new meaning when viewed in light of such principles, and help to direct the Jew, especially in times of spiritual darkness.

SEUDAH SHLISHI:

Avraham took Yishmael his son, and all those born in his house, and all those acquired by money -- every male of Avraham's household -- and he circumcised the flesh of their foreskins as commanded by G-d, on the same day G-d had spoken to him. (Bereishis 17:23)

It is amazing how many things of the past, seemingly small in importance at the time, have had such major ramifications in the future, and now, in our present? Today the Jewish people are under siege by the Arab world -- over 150,000,000 B'nei Yishmael -- and the Western media that support their cause and who carry a lot of weight in the eyes of so many in the Western world.

It is unbelievable how close this once came to not being so:

She (Hagar) herself went and sat down opposite him (Yishmael) at a distance of about a bowshot and said, "I cannot watch the death of the child." Therefore she sat across from him, and cried out loud G-d revealed a well of water to her. She went and filled the skin with water, and she gave the boy a drink. (Bereishis 21:16)

Yishmael had been on the brink of death at that time, and at the time that he needed his mother most to comfort him at his dying moment, instead, Hagar considered her own feelings over her son's. For this reason, the Midrash says, G-d answered Yishmael's cries for mercy, and not hers. Was this the beginning of a "tradition" that we are witnessing in action today? Consider the following article:

PALESTINIANS CYNICALLY EXPLOIT KIDS IN ARAFATS 'CHILDREN'S CRUSADE' Thursday, October 26, 2000

By ROD DREHER

THE Children's Crusade of 1212 is remembered today as one of history's cruelest and most absurd examples of how adults will sacrifice children's lives on the altar of religious fervor and political ambition. Today, we find it unthinkable that parents would put their children at this kind of risk.

Not so the Palestinians, who with a medieval sense of the value of their kids' lives, and a 21st-century sense of public relations, send their young out daily to provoke Israeli guns.

Often these boys function as a rock-throwing shield behind which stand grown men -- profiles in courage, all right -- throwing Molotov cocktails and firing rifles.

When deaths inevitably result, the Palestinians claim the dead kids as innocent martyrs, dispatched gloriously to heaven by the Zionist infidel's bullets. And each child's body, when shown on TV throughout the Arab world and the West, is a formidable propaganda weapon.

"The impression one gets by seeing the way the Palestinians are presenting it to the international community is that Israeli soldiers are going around looking for children and shooting them," says Alan Baker, an international lawyer who serves as legal adviser to the Israeli foreign ministry.

Absurd, says Baker, a top Israeli peace negotiator who helped draft the rules of engagement for Israeli soldiers. Israeli soldiers are only authorized to use lethal force in life-threatening situations. But when children are deliberately sent into a war zone for the purpose of acting as shock troops, inevitably some will die.

The grown-ups who run Palestinian society don't seem to care that international law and common decency demand that children not be used as combatants in war. "I told the Palestinians we were negotiating with that no matter how justified they thought their cause was, for G-d's sake, please keep their children home," Baker says.

But the destruction of Israel has been drilled into the kids' heads at home and at school. The Oslo Agreements called for both sides to prepare their people psychologically for peace, in particular schoolchildren through textbooks. But textbooks used in Palestinian Authority schools in the post-Oslo period have not even included Israel on maps.

An Ariel Center for Policy Research analysis on contemporary Palestinian schoolbooks concluded that: "Israel is systematically demonized, delegitimized and dehumanized, and the texts selected to educate the children leave no doubt as to the total rejection of the Jews and of Israel, now and in the future."

With a poisonous ration of holy war and hate force-fed to children by adults, the wonder is not that these kids hit the streets prepared to kill and die in Yasser Arafat's Children's Crusade.

End of article.

And, because Yishmael survived that incredible close call, he lived long enough to create a progeny over 150,000,000 people strong, with just about every one of them hating the Jews to the point of extreme violence with joy, and, just about every one of them claiming the right to everything we Jews have ever held sacred.

In what merit? In what merit did Yishmael survive back then, though, the Midrash explains, the angels were frantically trying to convince G-d to let him die because of how he would inflict the B'nei Yitzchak in the future? What is the basis of Yishmael's and his descendants' ability to maintain a hold over Eretz Yisroel?

With respect to the latter ability, the Zohar says that it was Yishmael's entry into the covenant of Bris

Milah that gave him the ability to live in Eretz Yisroel, and to maintain some control over it until the time of Moshiach. We can assume, therefore, that Bris Milah is also the source of Yishmael's and his descendant's strength in all respects, perhaps even the cause of his Divine Providence to sit on top of one of the most important commodities and bargaining tools in the world today: oil.

In fact, the only reason why the Arab's will not be able to maintain that control and enjoy that success forever is because they do not perform a complete Bris Milah, thank G-d. Nevertheless, how empowering Bris Milah was for little Yishmael, who, at the age of thirteen, allowed himself to be circumcised!

On that note, it is historically interesting that Kever Yosef was destroyed during this last period of rage by the Palestinians. After all, it was Yosef who, during the time of famine in Egypt, had all the Egyptians circumcised to receive food (Rashi, Bereishis 41:55). Furthermore, if there is anyone from our history that personifies the concept of "shmiras haBris" -- the "Adherence to the Covenant" embodied in the Bris, it is Yosef HaTzaddik.

In a very accurate sense, Yosef HaTzaddik represents our spiritual edge over our Arab cousins in the End-of-Days. Knowing this certainly adds depth to two somewhat cryptic statements in the Zohar about this time-period:

Many camps will arise in Land of the Galil, because that is where the Moshiach is going to be revealed, since it is part of Yosef's territory. It will be the first place to be destroyed. It will begin there ahead of all other places, and then spread to the nations (Zohar 220a)

... The Children of Yishmael will go up at that time with the nations of the world against Jerusalem ... (Zohar 1:119a)

It just goes to show once again how all the events of the present and spiritually and physically rooted in the past. To sever that connection and abandon our past is to leave ourselves blind-sided to the dangers of the present and the future.

MELAVE MALKAH:

A Song of Ascents for Shlomo. If G-d will not build the house, its builders work in vain; If G-d will not guard the city, the watchman was vigilant in vain. (Tehillim 127:1)

The next of the Shabbos Tehillim is addressed to Dovid HaMelech's successor, and future builder of the House of G-d -- the Temple -- Shlomo. In a sense, this psalm is a living will of a father to a son, imparting to him the most important lessons for survival -- spiritual and physical.

However, according to Rashi, this psalm is really a warning to Shlomo HaMelech in advance of his sin, and that was the marrying of the daughter of the Pharaoh of that time, literally the night before

the dedication of the new Temple. Just to show how far reaching this sin was, the Talmud says that it lead to the creation of Rome who would later destroy the Second Temple (Shabbos 56b)!

Dovid HaMelech was telling his son and future king something that all of us need to know, and that is, that G-d can't be bought off. Mitzvos do no wipe away sins. They count as mitzvos and bring reward at the right time, but, sins are sins and must be atoned for, or else paid for through suffering in one way or another.

Can a beautiful house built upon a faulty foundation stand?

Furthermore, a person can struggle to reach his personal goals with everything he has, but, if those goals are not sanctioned by G-d, then, even should he succeed at first, his success will only be temporary. Eternal success is only possible when the goal and effort is sanctioned by Torah and imbued with a spirit of holiness. Shlomo built the Temple in the end, and it stood, only to later be destroyed in a most vicious way by Nebuchadnetzar and his ruthless army.

It is futile for you, those who rise early, who sit up late, and, who eat the bread of sorrows, because, He gives His dear ones sleep. (2)

In other words, man has needs. There are two ways to go about fulfilling those needs, and they are: relying on G-d and receiving Divine help, and, working hard to secure those needs. In the former case, one must build and service an ongoing relationship with G-d, which requires humility, self-sacrifice, but, most important of all, loyalty to G-d and Torah.

This is why many people opt for Path #2: self-reliance. Along this path, one need be loyal only to himself and those upon whom he depends. He can even be powerful and nasty, and still get ahead in life, well, at least materialistically-speaking.

The down-side to this is all the worry and concern one has to live with lacking omniscience and omnipotence. It is not a very reliable world out there, and, subject to the laws of nature, one can easily be victimized. However, trust in G-d means leaving the worrying to G-d, and relying upon Divine Providence to take care of the details after we have made a Torah-responsible effort to take care of our needs.

Behold! Children are the inheritance of G-d, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of youth. (3-4)

No where is help from Heaven more obvious, and more necessary than in child-rearing. As I have mentioned before, one rabbi said that raising children requires eighty-five percent help from Heaven, and, fifteen percent help from Heaven. No "house" requires a good foundation to stand more than one's children; they are the true house parents build.

Why "arrows"? Because, arrows are things we control while they remain in our hands. However, once shot, they speed in the direction in which they were "shot," for better or for worse. It is the same with

children: in the early years they are aimable, but, once "shot," that is, they become independent thinkers, they are going to be what they have been raised to be, for better or for worse.

Praiseworthy is the man who fills his quiver with them, they shall not be ashamed, when they speak with enemies in the gate. (5)

When one contemplates the possible errors that can result from "building" anything in This World, be it homes or people, then one might consider not starting in the first place. Indeed, many people have chosen to avoid child-rearing altogether, and this is part of their decision-making.

However, one must try, and use the opportunity to trust in G-d. Chizkiah didn't, and almost died as a result, holding back from getting married in order to avoid having evil children (Brochos 10a). Build we must, but only with the blessing of G-d; then, and only then, can the "building" be strong all the way from the bottom up.

Have a great Shabbos,
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