

LOCATION IS EVERYTHING

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Rabbi Frand on Parshas Lech Lecha

*These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 346, Trading Terrorists for Hostages.
Good Shabbos!*

Location Is Everything!

Hashem [G-d] told Avram to go to the Land of Canaan. Avram traveled to the Land of Canaan, and pitched his tent. The Torah narrates: "From there he relocated to the east of Beth-el and pitched his tent, with Beth-el on the west and Ai on the east; and he built there an altar to Hashem and invoked Hashem by Name" [Bereshis 12:8].

Is it not strange that the Torah uses so many words just to tell us where Avram pitched his tent? We know the general vicinity. Does it really matter for all eternity if it was west of Beth-el or east of Beth-el? At any rate, we do not have the exact geometric coordinates of where the tent was pitched. The Torah is always so 'stingy' in the use of words - why is the Torah suddenly so verbose?

Anyone who has dealt in real estate knows that the three cardinal principles of real estate acquisition are: Location, Location, Location. If one is going to open a new business, he must very carefully research the location that he is choosing. Is there traffic? Is it open? Is it accessible? Is there parking? Location is everything.

The Chofetz Chaim explained the verse as follows: Avram was concerned about this concept. Avram was also going into 'business'. He was in the business of drawing people close to Hashem ('kiruv'). Therefore, he needed to be very particular about where he pitched his tent. He could not afford to just pitch his tent on a side street, where someone would straggle by once every three days. That

would not be good for Avram's business.

Avram carefully chose the main crossroads between the two major cities of the area - Beth El and Ai, so that everyone traveling anywhere in the area would pass by his tent. He specifically built his altar in that location.

The question that we must ask ourselves is as follows: how much time and effort and thought do we invest in planning where to place our business so that our business will be successful, and how much time and effort and thought do we invest in placing ourselves in a situation where our spirituality will be successful? This is the difference between Avram and us. The location of Avram's tent was crucial because his spirituality was his 'business'.

Shlomo [Solomon] wrote in Mishlei "If you will pursue it (fear of Hashem) like you pursue money, then you will find fear of Hashem." [Mishlei 2:4-5]. We call consultants and we spend sleepless nights and we spend fortunes to ensure that our businesses are successful. We must apply the same effort to success in areas of spirituality.

At a Siyum (a festive meal made when one completes learning a portion of Torah) we say, "We toil and they toil. We toil and receive reward and they toil and do not receive reward. We run and they run. They run to a pit of destruction and we run to the life of the World to Come."

I once heard an insight from Rabbi Nachman Kowalsky, of Blessed Memory: who cares what 'they' do? What difference does it make that they toil or that they run? Why is that included in the recitation at the Siyum? After all it is 'our' siyum!

The answer is that if we want to know how to be successful in our learning endeavors we must look at how 'they' toil in 'their endeavors' and how 'they' run towards their aspirations in life.

It always amazes me that when seats go on sale for a World Series, people camp out in line for a night or two beforehand to make sure that they can purchase "good tickets". (For 'Rock Concerts' the advance wait in line can be 4 or 5 nights!)

Imagine the best Torah teacher in the world -- whoever that might be -- would be coming to town and tickets would go on sale for that lecture. How many people would camp out a whole night to guarantee that they would receive good tickets to the shiur [Torah class]?

"If like money you will pursue it..." If one runs after spirituality like he runs after money or like he runs after sports or after all of life's trivialities, then he will find fear of Hashem.

This is why the Torah went to such great lengths to describe the process by which Avraham pitched his tent. Location mattered to him, because location would determine the success of his spiritual endeavor.

Our Thirst Should Not Be So Easily Quenched

"And there was a famine in the Land and Avram descended to Egypt because the famine was severe in the Land" [Bereshis 12:10]. Our Sages tell us that there were ten global famines in the history of mankind. The first was in the time of Adam. Pirkei D'Rebi Eliezer records a second famine in the days of Lemech. The famine that occurred in the beginning of Lech Lecha was already the third famine in the history of the world. The tenth and final famine will be that described by the Prophets in the days preceding the coming of the Messiah. "Behold days are coming, Hashem says, and I will send a famine to the land. But it will not be a famine of bread nor a thirst for water but for hearing the words of Hashem". [Amos 8:11]

We are probably experiencing this famine in our time. People are thirsty to hear the word of Hashem.

Pirkei D'Rebi Eliezer notes that this will be the worst of all the famines. The Ponevicer Rav once asked: why is this considered such a terrible situation? Why does Pirkei D'Rebi Eliezer consider this to be the worst of all the ten famines? The Ponevicer Rav answered that when people are experiencing a famine and they are given a scrap of bread, it becomes a holiday for them. When people are dying of thirst and they receive a canteen of water, they become totally satisfied. "Wonderful! This is all that we need!" That is our problem in the famine of hearing the words of Hashem. As famished as we are, we are satisfied with too little! We are satisfied with scraps. We are happy with an occasional shiur here, and an occasional peek into a sefer [Jewish book] there. We quickly feel as if we have learned enough, we are no longer thirsty for the word of Hashem!

This is not good enough. As beautiful as things are today -- with Daf Yomi [a program for studying the entire Talmud, one folio per day] and Dial-A-Daf [to hear a Rabbi teach the day's folio by phone] and Torah more accessible than ever before, it appears to us to be so much and so plentiful, because we are famished. It seems so great as a result of the famine. But we cannot be satisfied. Torah is too vast and the day is too long to be satisfied with mere "scraps". We have been starving for so long that we have forgotten what it is like to be full. Even a little crumb does the trick. That should not be enough. There should always be room for more.

We Begin Avraham's Prayer By Calling Hashem 'Master'

Before the Bris bein ha'Besarim [Covenant Between the Pieces], Avram referred to Hashem by the term spelled out "Alef Daled Nun Yud" (from the root word "Adon", meaning master). The Talmud [Berachos 7b] states that this was the first time in the history of the world that any human being referred to Hashem by the title of 'Master'.

There was a Maggid [itinerant preacher] who wrote a commentary on the prayer book and brought it to the Vilna Gaon for his approval (haskama). In his commentary, the author advanced the theory that the reason the Siddur begins with the prayer Adon Olam (Master of the World...) is because the morning prayer (Shacharis) was the prayer originated by Avraham, and the Talmud states that Avraham was the first person to use the term Adon-ai in referring to Hashem.

The Gaon commented that the whole commentary on the Siddur was worthy of being published just

for the sake of this one insight.

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This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Lech Lecha are provided below:

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