

# AVRAHAM FORESHADOWED SELF-SACRIFICE TO MAKE ALIYAH

*by Rabbi Yissocher Frand*

## Parshas Lech Lecha

### Avraham Foreshadowed Self-Sacrifice To Make Aliyah

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These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 566, Learning Vs. Saving A Life. Good Shabbos!

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One of the major themes in Sefer Bereishis is the theme that events that happen to the Patriarchs foreshadow events that will happen to their children (ma'aseh avos siman l'banim). The Patriarchs were trailblazers of future history. The fact, for example, that Avram was successful in his journey to Egypt, was able to withstand the trials and tribulations of that experience, and left there with great riches enabled subsequent generations to similarly survive the Egyptian experience and remain steadfast.

Rav Chaim Volozhiner and others point out that the fact that Avram was willing to risk his life and jump into the pit of fire in Ur Kasdim and the fact that Yitzchak was willing to give up his life and be bound on the altar enabled Jews thousands of years later to have the courage and the spiritual fortitude to act with self-sacrifice (mesiras nefesh) and great heroism for the sake of Judaism. This too is part of ma'aseh avos siman l'banim.

Rav Elya Svei once remarked that the test of *"leave your land and your birthplace and your father's house to go to the land I will show you"* [Bereishis 12:1] foreshadowed the mesiras nefesh that later generations had to fulfill the mitzvah of dwelling in the Land of Israel (yishuv Eretz Yisrael).

Many people look at the prospect of giving up the comforts of America and going to live in Eretz Yisrael as an act of great self-sacrifice. But 140 years ago, when the disciples of the Vilna Gaon went to Eretz Yisrael, it involved far greater mesiras nefesh. It was literally going to a land that had no economy or means of earning a livelihood. It involved great financial and physical risk. And yet people went with great self-sacrifice. Until this very day, there is self-sacrifice involved in making 'aliyah' and people do it. From where do the Jewish people get this strength of determination? It was

foreshadowed by the self-sacrifice involved in Avram's leaving his home and his birthplace to travel "to the land that Hashem showed him."

### **Lot Was Corrupted by Wealth**

Towards the beginning of the parsha, the pasuk says: *"So Avram went as Hashem had spoken to him, and Lot went with him; Avram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran."* [Bereishis 12:4]. We tend to overlook this. We make a big deal about the sacrifice of Avram leaving his home and his birthplace. However, the fact that *"Lot went with him"* is forgotten in the shuffle.

Why did Lot go with Avram? He had no explicit or even implicit command to accompany his uncle. He went along because he wanted to be with Avram Avinu. He knew that Avram was his spiritual lifeline. Lot is also deserving of our admiration and accolades for the mesiras nefesh he demonstrated in following Avram on this spiritual mission.

However, what happens a mere chapter later? Like Avram, he prospered in the Land of Canaan. He made it big. He accumulated much sheep, cattle, and tents. At that point things started getting uncomfortable. Avram and Lot could not live together any longer. Battles broke out between their shepherds. Lot decided he must part company with Avram. Where of all places in the world does he decide to go? Sodom.

This same Lot who demonstrated such righteousness just one chapter earlier by following his uncle to an unknown destination now throws his lot in with the most decadent society in the world! What happened to Lot between Bereishis 12:4 and Bereishis 13:5?

Rav Elya Meir Block explains that what happened to Lot was very simple. He made money. Money is the great corrupter. Money does strange things to people. Wealth is one of the great tests of mankind. The same person who was totally righteous becomes a different person after he earns a few dollars. The great Lot who left everything to follow Avram, is now willing to give up Avram for a few hundred head of cattle.

### **"So Too Shall Be Your Descendants"**

In a dramatic and famous pasuk, the Almighty takes Avram outside his tent and tells him: *"Look heavenward and count the stars, if you are able to count them. And He said to him, 'So shall your offspring be!'"* [Bereishis 15:5].

The simple reading of this narration is that Avram asked the Almighty what would be with his future legacy (after all, he had no children and was already an old man). G-d told him not to worry. He took him outside and asked him to count the stars. Avram was unable to count them and G-d told him that his descendants would also be too numerous to count. Avram believed Hashem and Hashem viewed this as righteousness on the part of Avram. This is the simple interpretation of this narration.

There are a few problems with such an understanding. First of all, it was not necessary for Avram to

go outside to know that it is impossible to count the stars. He knew that there were billions of stars even before he started counting. The whole episode seems like somewhat of a charade. Second, the equation between the number of stars and the number of descendants of Avrum does not seem to be something that should be taken literally. There seems to be a discrepancy of several orders of magnitude between the celestial population of stars and the earthly population of Jews, even Jews of all generations put together.

Rav Mordechai Kamenetsky gives an interesting interpretation. The Almighty was not interested in having Avram count the stars. He was showing him something symbolic. He wanted him to just look up at the heavens. Looking up at the heavens is looking at one of the great mysteries of the world. To this very day the stars, the heavens, the galaxies, the Milky Way fascinate man. They are one great mystery. The greatest scientists of our own generation are still baffled about what goes on in the deep recesses of outer space. Scientists will be studying the stars from now until the end of time.

The Almighty takes Avram outside his tent and tells him "You don't understand, Avram, how your legacy will be preserved. After all, you have no children yet and you are an old man. I say that you will become a great nation, but you don't understand. Go outside and try to understand the stars. If stars are one of the mysteries of this world that defy explanation -- so too will your descendants defy explanation. Jews also are one of the great mysteries of the world.

Logically speaking, we should have been wiped off the face of the earth centuries ago. We are still around. This is a great mystery. Just like the stars and the heavens and the galaxies are a great mystery "*so too shall be your descendants*".

Mark Twain asked the question:

*His contributions to the world's list of great names in literature, science, art, music, finance, medicine, and abstruse learning are also away out of proportion to the weakness of his numbers. He has made a marvelous fight in the world, in all the ages; and has done it with his hands tied behind him. He could be vain of himself, and be excused for it. The Egyptian, the Babylonian, and the Persian rose, filled the planet with sound and splendor, then faded to dream-stuff and passed away; the Greek and the Roman followed, and made a vast noise, and they are gone; other peoples have sprung up and held their torch high for a time, but it burned out, and they sit in twilight now, or have vanished. The Jew saw them all, beat them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert and aggressive mind. All things are mortal but the Jew; all other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?*

The stars are a great mystery. "*So, too, shall be your offspring.*"

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:

Tape # 028 - Conversion (Geirus)  
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