

RABBI FRAND ON PARSHAS LECH LECHA

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

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 # 610, The Widow and the Divorcee - How Long Must they wait to remarry?

The Downside of Being "Men Who Are Like Brothers"

Toward the beginning of Parshas Lech Lecha, Lot and Avraham were occupying the same land and their shepherds were grazing their flocks in close proximity to one another. This led to arguments and fights between the two camps. Finally, Avraham suggested to his nephew: "Please, let there be no strife between me and you and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen, for we are men who are brothers." [Bereishis 13:8]

Rashi notes that the simple interpretation of the phrase "we are men who are brothers" is simply that the two were close relatives. However, Rashi cites a Medrash Aggadah that Avraham's concern went beyond their blood relationship: Their facial appearance resembled one another. They could pass as twin brothers. Why should that resemblance necessitate their separation?

The Shemen Tov references the Rashi in the previous pasuk [verse], which elaborates on the cause of the fights between Lot's shepherds and Avraham's shepherds. Lot's shepherds were wicked and allowed their sheep to graze on the private property of others. Avraham's shepherds saw them doing this and chastised them for thievery. The basic issue was that Lot's shepherds stole and Avraham's shepherds did not. But how would one tell the difference between Lot and Avraham? If they looked alike and one of them was out in the field with his shepherds, the bystander would not know if it was Lot or Avraham. The bottom line is that people would not know if it was Lot or Avraham who was stealing.

Avraham therefore explained the necessity for their separation. "We look alike and I have to avoid even the smallest suspicion of thievery on my part. Think of the great desecration of the Name of G-d that would occur if people thought that I or my shepherds were stealing!" Avraham was the representative on earth of the Master of the Universe. It would be a great Chilul Hashem if he were

believed to be a thief.

How Do We Reconcile Avraham's Two Profiles?

Later on in the parsha, the pasuk says: "And the fugitive came and told Avram, the Hebrew (halvri)..." [Bereishis 14:13]. This is a very famous pasuk in that it is the only place in the Torah where Avraham is referred to by the title that became associated with his descendants - the Hebrew (halvri). Our Sages tell us that this title connotes the separation and distinctiveness of Avraham and his descendants. "The entire world was on one side of the river (m'ever echad) and he was on the other side (m'ever hasheni)."

Avraham is the loner among mankind. He is the iconoclast. He is not bothered that he is out of step with the entire world. "This is who I am, these are my opinions, I believe in One G-d and I don't care if the entire world thinks that I am crazy for it." This is one profile our Sages paint of Avraham.

Our Sages paint another profile as well. Avraham is one who influences the masses to follow his ways. He impacts his entire generation and revolutionizes the theology of mankind. He is surrounded by crowds of followers who gathered around him while he was still in Charan! Our Sages contrast Noach who was righteous and influenced his family - but no one beyond his immediate family, with Avraham who influenced the entire world. Avraham is the first Kiruv professional. He influenced everyone with whom he came in contact.

Don't these two images contradict each other? Was Avraham a loner or did he have great influence on people? How can he be both at the same time? We do not usually think of an iconoclast who stands in opposition to the whole world as a person of great influence.

Rav Schach derives a lesson in the correct way to be me'karev [draw people near] to Torah from this contradiction. Some people are tempted to compromise on their own ideals in their zeal to influence others. They feel that it is necessary to "meet these people half way", to join them, and approach them at their own level. Sometimes, they argue, the ends justify the means.

Avraham teaches us that this is not the proper course to follow. Avraham was an Ivri. He stated who he was and stuck to his ideals and let truth show the way. In the final analysis, it will be Emes [truth] that wins out and influences people. One can have much influence and draw near many people without compromising one's own positions. It is essential, in trying to influence others, to remain committed to one's own principles.

This idea is buttressed by the following Yalkut from Parshas Yisro. "All that G-d spoke, we will do and we will hear" [Shemos 24:7]. The Yalkut states that it would have made more sense to state "we will hear and (then) we will do". However, the Jews told the Almighty "before we even heard Your words we fulfilled them." In other words, Klal Yisrael justified their saying "we will do and we will hear" by the fact that their forefathers already fulfilled the entire Torah before it was even commanded.

The Yalkut proceeds to demonstrate how the Patriarchs already fulfilled the commandments. For

example, the first commandments (I am the L-rd Your G-d... You shall have no other gods before Me. [Shemos 20:2-3]) were fulfilled by Yaakov when he said, "Remove the foreign gods from your midst" [Bereishis 35:2]. The Yalkut proceeds to show how Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, Yosef, and Moshe fulfilled the entire set of the Ten Commandments before the Revelation at Sinai.

As an example of fulfillment of the command, "Do not testify falsely" the Yalkut cites the Patriarch Avraham's testimony to the entire world that G-d was Creator and Master of the Universe.

Someone once asked Rav Weinberg about the meaning of this Medrash. How was Avraham's testimony that G-d was Creator of the world a fulfillment of not testifying falsely? The late Rosh Yeshiva of Ner Israel answered that we see from here that if people say falsehoods, one who does not object to these falsehoods, corroborates them. It is as if he has stated the falsehood himself. If the entire world said that there was more than one G-d and Avraham would have stayed in his own 4 cubits without objecting, that would have been acquiescing to falsehood and ultimately corroborating it.

This is the meaning of the Medrash. In fact, Avraham did not keep quiet. He went around and insisted to everyone that Hashem is the One Master of the Universe. Had Avraham not done so, he would have been guilty of the same sheker [falsehood] as everyone else.

This was Avraham's greatness. He had great influence, but he remained true to his ideals. "Everyone was on one side of the river and he was on the other side."

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)
- Tape # 070 - Bris Milah: The Metzizah Controversy
- Tape # 119 - Conversion for Ulterior Motives
- Tape # 166 - The Childless Couple in Halacha
- Tape # 212 - Non-Jews and the Mitzvah of Kibbud Av
- Tape # 256 - Mohel and Baby: Who Goes to Whom
- Tape # 302 - The Mitzvah of Yishuv Eretz Yisroel
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