



SHABBAT PARSHAT LECH LECHA · 11 ELUL 5773 - OCT. 25, 2012 · VOL. 20 NO. 3

PARSHA INSIGHTS

## LIFE IN THE FAST LANE

*“Go for yourself...” (12:1)*

Very soon, only the speed of light will limit our ability to communicate a thought, a picture, a sound or a sentence from one side of the world to the other — and beyond.

The meaning of the word “distance” has changed forever. Just as the electron has shrunk our world, so too there has been a quiet and maybe even more fundamental revolution in the way we look at traveling. We see nothing special in the fact that several hundred people can file into a large metal room and find themselves on the other side of the world in a matter of hours.

A little more than a hundred years ago, to circumnavigate the globe would have required months of arduous, dangerous and expensive effort — almost beyond our imagining. Nowadays, the major drawback in circling the earth in a plane is an aching back from sitting in a reclining chair that doesn’t quite live up to its name.

We have breached the last frontier. Distance has become no more than a function of time spent in a chair.

The electron and the 747 have had their impact on our culture in other ways. Our cultural mindset mandates that speed is of the essence. “How fast can I get there?” vies in importance with “Where am I going?”

Immediacy has become an independent yardstick of worth. How fast is your car? Your computer?

Our age has sought to devour distance and time, rendering everything in a constant and immediate present. Now this. Now this. Now this. (Interestingly, the languages of the age — film, television and computer graphics — are languages which have trouble expressing the past and the future. They only have a present tense. Everything happens in a continuous present.)

All of which makes our spiritual development more and more challenging.

Spirituality is a path. And like a path you have to walk down it one step at a time. Your fingers cannot do the walk-

ing on the spiritual path. You cannot download it from the Internet.

Everything in the physical world is a paradigm, an incarnation, of a higher spiritual idea. Travel is the physical equivalent of the spiritual road. The quest for spirituality demands that we travel — but this journey is not a physical journey. Many make the mistake of thinking that hitchhiking around the world and experiencing different cultures will automatically make them more spiritual. The truth is that wherever you go — there you are. When your travel is only physical you just wrap up your troubles in your old kit bag and take them with you.

Spiritual growth requires the soul to journey. Our soul must notch up the miles, not our feet. The spiritual road requires us to forsake the comfortable, the familiar ever-repeating landmarks of our personalities, and set out with an open mind and a humble soul. We must divest ourselves of the fawning icons of our own egos which we define and confine us — and journey.

Life’s essential journey is that of the soul discovering its true identity. We learn this from the first two words in this week’s Torah portion. “Lech Lecha.” “Go to yourself.”

Without vowels, these two words are written identically. When G-d took Avraham out of *Ur Kasdim* and sent him to the Land of Israel, He used those two identical words — *Lech Lecha* — “Go to yourself.”

Avraham experienced ten tests in his spiritual journey. Each was exquisitely designed to elevate him to his ultimate spiritual potential. When G-d gives us a test, whether it’s the death of a loved one or a financial reversal or an illness, it’s always to help us grow. By conquering the obstacles that lie in our spiritual path — be it lack of trust in G-d or selfishness or apathy — we grow in stature. We connect with the fundamental purpose of the journey — to journey away from our negative traits and reach and realize our true selves.

We “go to ourselves.”

## PARSHA OVERVIEW

Ten generations have passed since Noach. Man has descended spiritually. In the year 1948 from Creation, Avram is born. By observing the world, Avram comes to the inescapable Truth of G-d's existence, and thus merits that G-d appear to him. At the beginning of this week's *Parsha*, G-d tells Avram to leave his land, his relatives and his father's house and travel to an unknown land where G-d will make him into a great nation. Avram leaves, taking with him his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, their servants and those whom they converted to faith in G-d. When they reach the land of Canaan, G-d appears to Avram and tells him that this is the land that He will give to his descendants. A famine ensues and Avram is forced to relocate to Egypt to find food. Realizing that his wife's beauty would cause his death at the hand of the Egyptians, Avram asks her to say that she is his sister. Sarai is taken to Pharaoh, but G-d afflicts Pharaoh and his court with severe plagues, and she is released unmolested. Avram returns to *Eretz Yisrael* (Canaan) with much wealth given to him by the Egyptians. During a quarrel over grazing rights between their shepherds, Avram decides to part ways with his nephew Lot. Lot chooses to live in the rich but corrupt city of Sodom in the fertile plain of the

Jordan. A war breaks out between the kings of the region, and Sodom is defeated. Lot is taken captive. Together with a handful of his converts, Avram rescues Lot, miraculously overpowering vastly superior forces, but Avram demurs from accepting any of the spoils of the battle. In a prophetic covenant, G-d reveals to Avram that his offspring will be exiled to a strange land where they will be oppressed for 400 years, after which they will emerge with great wealth and return to *Eretz Yisrael*, their irrevocable inheritance. Sarai is barren and gives Hagar, her Egyptian hand-maiden, to Avram in the hope that she will provide them with a child. Hagar becomes arrogant when she discovers that she is pregnant. Sarai deals harshly with her and Hagar flees. On the instruction of an angel Hagar returns to Avram and gives birth to Yishmael. The *Parsha* concludes with G-d commanding Avram to circumcise himself and his offspring throughout the generations as a covenant between G-d and his seed. G-d changes Avram's name to Avraham, and Sarai's name to Sarah. G-d promises Avraham a son, Yitzchak, despite Avraham's being ninety-nine years old and Sarah ninety. On that day, Avraham circumcises himself, Yishmael and all his household.

## LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and *Eretz Yisrael*

### THE SECRET ENTRANCE

When the tribe of Yosef set out to conquer the city of Beit El, formerly known as Luz, there was a serious problem in locating the perfectly concealed entrance to the fortified city. Some advance scouts observed a resident of the city who had exited the city and asked him to show them the entrance. A giant luz tree stood in front of a cave that served as the entrance, and only the city's inhabitants were aware that the tree was hollow and could be traversed.

The scouts promised to reward this fellow with protection if he showed them the entrance. He point-



ed his finger toward the mysterious tree and thus enabled the Israelites to conquer the city. True to their promise they spared the informer and his family. He subsequently moved to the Hittite area of the land and established a city that he named Luz. The kindness the guide showed to the Israelites was rewarded by this new city's invulnerability to death. When its aged inhabitants grew weary of life they went outside the city walls to die.

This is cited by our Talmudic Sages as an example of the great reward for one who helps another in reaching his destination.

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## PARSHA Q&A ?

1. What benefits did G-d promise Avraham if he would leave his home?
2. "And all the families of the earth will be blessed through you." What does this mean?
3. Who were the souls that Avraham and Sarah "made"?
4. What were the Canaanites doing in the Land of Canaan when Avraham arrived?
5. Why did Avraham build an altar at Ai?
6. What two results did Avraham hope to achieve by saying that Sarah was his sister?
7. Why did Avraham's shepherds rebuke Lot's shepherds?
8. Who was Amrafel and why was he called that?
9. Verse 14:7 states that the four kings "smote all the country of the Amalekites". How is this possible, since Amalek had not yet been born?
10. Why did the "palit" tell Avraham of Lot's capture?
11. Who accompanied Avraham in battle against the four kings?
12. Why couldn't Avraham chase the four kings past Dan?
13. Why did Avraham give "ma'aser" specifically to Malki-Tzedek?
14. Why didn't Avraham accept any money from Sodom's king?
15. When did the decree of 400 years of exile begin?
16. What did G-d indicate with His promise that Avraham would "come to his ancestors in peace"?
17. How did G-d fulfill His promise that Avraham would be buried in "a good old age"?
18. Why did the Jewish People need to wait until the fourth generation until they returned to Eretz Canaan?
19. Who was Hagar's father?
20. Why did Avraham fall on his face when G-d appeared to him?

## PARSHA Q&A!

### Answers to this Week's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 12:1 - He would become a great nation, his excellence would become known to the world, and he would be blessed with wealth.
2. 12:3 - A person will say to his child, "You should be like Avraham."
3. 12:5 - People they converted to the worship of G-d.
4. 12:6 - They were in the process of conquering the land from the descendants of Shem.
5. 12:8 - He foresaw the Jewish People's defeat there in the days of Yehoshua due to Achan's sin. He built an altar to pray for them.
6. 12:13 - That the Egyptians would not kill him, and would give him presents.
7. 13:7 - Lot's shepherds grazed their flocks in privately owned fields.
8. 14:1 - Amrafel was Nimrod. He said (*amar*) to Avraham to fall (*fel*) into the fiery furnace.
9. 14:7 - The Torah uses the name that the place would bear in the future.
10. 14:13 - He wanted Avraham to die trying to save Lot so that he himself could marry Sarah.
11. 14:14 - His servant, Eliezer.
12. 14:14 - He saw prophetically that his descendants would make a golden calf there, and as a result his strength failed.
13. 14:20 - Because Malki-Tzedek was a *kohen*.
14. 14:23 - G-d had promised Avraham wealth, and Avraham didn't want Sodom's king to say, "I made Avraham wealthy."
15. 15:13 - With the birth of Yitzchak.
16. 15:15 - That his father, Terach, would repent and become righteous.
17. 15:15 - Avraham lived to see his son Yishmael repent and become righteous, and he died before his grandson Esav became wicked.
18. 15:16 - They needed to wait until the Amorites had sinned sufficiently to deserve expulsion.
19. 16:1 - Pharaoh.
20. 17:3 - Because he was as yet uncircumcised.

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*Based on the Talmudic Sages found in the seven pages of the Talmud studied each week in the Daf Yomi cycle*

## SHABBAT 23 - 29

*“Don’t do something which will arouse suspicion.”*

Our Sages were very concerned that a Jew might be suspected of being lax in fulfilling a mitzvah, and therefore made special rules for performance that would be above suspicion.

Two examples are given in our *gemara*.

A Jew is ideally supposed to light Chanukah lamps at the entrance to his home. If he has two entrances each on a different street, he must light lamps by both entrances to avoid a situation where those passing by on the side of the other entrance and seeing no lamps there would suspect that he has not lit any lamps at all.

The other example given is the mitzvah of *peiah* – leaving a corner of a harvested field for the poor. One is advised to designate that corner at the very end of the field. Should he designate an earlier section and be seen completing his harvest on an empty field, he runs the risk of being suspected of not having left *peiah* at all.

• *Shabbat 23a*

*“One who loves rabbanim will merit having sons who are rabbanim.”*

To this encouragement of affection for Torah scholars, the Sage Rava adds advice that respect for them will gain him sons-in-law who are Torah scholars. One who honors Torah scholars, he concludes, merits himself becoming a Torah scholar or at least someone whose words will be respected like those of a Torah scholar.

• *Shabbat 23b*

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## NO NOSE JOB

**From: Melissa**

*Dear Rabbi,*

*Let's say I know someone who wants to have a nose job because she feels she has too much of a "Jewish nose" and she feels self-conscious about it and she says it affects her confidence and she's not happy because of it. Would that be an acceptable reason to do it? And is there anything wrong with it from a Jewish point of view anyway?*

Dear Melissa,

The Torah prohibits mutilating the body in any way. Therefore a person is not allowed to cut, scratch or gash the body, whether directly himself, or by having another person do so. In times of old, people would do this as an expression of mourning, or for spiritual elevation, or to seal a pact, or for any other number of reasons. Despite the fact that doing so might be for some significant or meaningful reason, it's still forbidden because it damages the integrity of the body. All the more so it's prohibited as an act of self-affliction, even if done for temporary alleviation, as in the case of what's become unfortunately too common nowadays - "cutting".

However, for the purpose of adorning the body, it is permitted to cut or pierce. The reason for this is that the person's intention is not to destroy the body, but rather to beautify it. So earrings are permitted for this reason, and the Torah also mentions the use of nose rings and other piercings that were practiced even by our Patriarchs and Matriarchs. Although this expression of beautifying and

adorning is subjective and a function of cultural norms, much of today's piercings which are done to be cool by being shocking and grotesque probably fit under the first category of forbidden mutilation. Tattoos would be another example of forbidden cutting or piercing despite it being done to beautify or adorn the body.

Similarly, not only is it permitted to cut the body in order to adorn it; it's also permitted to do so in order to remove harmful or even unattractive blemishes. So surgery to remove some harmful situation, or correct some harmful defect is certainly permitted. And even cosmetic surgery to remove or cover some conspicuous and embarrassing blemish like a mole, birthmark, scar etc. is also allowed. This is so even if the person's embarrassment seems exaggerated or unnecessary. Nevertheless, since he or she is sensitive enough about it to the point of wanting to remove it, they are permitted to do so.

The question is, where does removing a "Jewish nose" fit into this discussion. On the one hand, it clearly can't be considered mutilation - it's being done to "enhance" one's appearance. On the other hand, it's clearly problematic to compare it to the removal of a mole or birthmark. If the surgery is needed to aid in breathing or to eliminate chronic congestion, for example, that would be corrective and permitted. And even if the person simply felt embarrassed by an oversized "shnoz" looking ugly or unattractive, that might also be acceptable.

However, it sounds like in the case of your friend, and that's certainly true in many cases, that the only reason for having a nose job is to remove the "blemish" or "defect" of being and/or looking Jewish. This form of extreme, neurotic assimilation-ism is certainly unacceptable. The person would be better off learning to be proud of her Judaism and working to acquire the level of maturity and inner peace to be happy with being and looking Jewish.

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### THE MISMATCHMAKER

**Question:** As a professional matchmaker I once suggested a certain young man for the daughter of a friend. I provided him with the name of the boy and the yeshiva in which he studied. My friend's investigations about the candidate indicated that he was a good catch and it wasn't long before I was invited to the engagement party. When I was introduced to the *chatan*, I was shocked for he was not the one I had suggested but rather another boy with the same name in the same yeshiva! Of course I have no intention of harming this match by revealing my error, but I would like to know whether I am entitled to my matchmaker fee for indirectly bringing about this *shiduch*.

**Answer:** When such a question came before Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky of Bnei Brak, he ruled that the matchmaker had no claim and could view his role in the successful match as nothing more than a cog in a Divine plan. He illustrated this point with a story.

A Jew who had lost his wife hired a girl to take care of his young children. She did her work faithfully each day and then returned to her home. One day she bought a raffle ticket which

she told her employer about. Even before she became aware of it, he learned that she had won a big prize. He then decided to propose marriage to her so that he would share in her good fortune and only later tell her about her windfall. His plan seemed to work perfectly until he told his new young wife that she was a wealthy woman. To his shock she informed him that before the prize was announced, she had sold her ticket to a friend.

When her disappointed husband discussed with his local rabbi the idea of a divorce, he was soundly scolded:

Look how many things G-d had to do to get you to marry this girl. He took away your first wife, brought this girl to take care of your children, persuaded her to buy a lottery ticket, and even arranged for her to win a big prize. After all of this was arranged so that you should marry her, how can you even contemplate divorce?

The moral of the story, concluded Rabbi Kanievsky, is that in this case the matchmaker's role was only a part of a Divine plan and a fee is due him only when he was the agent who directly made the match.

### THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

#### THE KIBBUTZ BAKER'S LEGACY

The inscription on the tombstone marking the graves of Yankele Tofor and his wife is hardly what one expects to find on a Jewish monument in Israel. The recording of the dates of birth and death only according to the civil calendar is not too surprising since this couple lived and died in the secular Kibbutz Naan. What is surprising is the "legacy" of this kibbutz baker that his survivors decided to transmit to future generations.

What did they consider the most fitting legacy of a man who had achieved culinary fame for his pastry?

The recipe for "Yankele's Yeast Cake"!

There it is, with the ingredients and measurements for doing it yourself. Tofor family members say they have received a number of calls from people who said they visited the grave and copied the recipe.

But why, they were asked, were there no instructions as to how to use the recipe? Their answer was that anyone who knows anything about baking needs no instructions.

Perhaps they should be told that anyone who erects such a monument for his father does need instructions as to what sort of legacy he expects to be written on his own tombstone.

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