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The Actions of the Fathers are a Lesson for their Progeny

In his introduction to Sefer Bereishis, The Netziv tells us that the Sefer is often called Sefer Derech Eretz because its narratives teach us about how the Avos interacted with their gentile neighbors. The Avos could not insulate themselves in an environment of complete spirituality. Instead, they encountered unscrupulous individuals who disavowed Torah ethics, such as Avimelech, Efron, Shechem, Pharaoh and others, dealing with each accordingly. Consequently, says the Netziv, we, as their descendents, must learn from them how to conduct ourselves in a world full of people who have no connection to Hashem and Torah. From every historical account recorded in Sefer Bereishis, we, the children, must learn from the actions of our forefathers.

In this week's Parsha, after Avram returns from Egypt, we are told, "And there was strife between the shepherds of Avram and the shepherds of Lot; and the Canaanite and the Perizite were then living in the land" (13:7). Yet the pasuk does not tell us what the subject of the strife was.

Rashi quotes Bereishis Rabbah and explains that Lot's shepherds would allow their flocks to graze in the fields of others, and Avram's shepherds would then chastise them for their act of theft. Lot's shepherds retorted that the land was promised to Avram, and as he had no son, Lot was the logical heir, as such they were not stealing. The pasuk tells us otherwise: the land was at that time, inhabited by the Canaanite and the Perizite, so in actuality Lot's shepherds were stealing from their neighbors.

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Moshe Fink
Junior

The Value of a Shoelace

In this week's Parsha we learn of Avram's miraculous victory against the four kings where he saves Lot and incidentally Sedom and its four sister cities. After the battle, the grateful 'king' of Sedom offers Avram all the spoils of the war, yet Avram refuses to take anything; even "as much as a thread or shoelace. (14:23)" Avram explains his rejection by saying that he would not want the king of Sedom to take credit for enriching him. Rashi explains that Avram did not want this to happen as Hashem already promised him wealth. The Gur Aryeh elaborates that Avram did not forgo the spoils out of arrogance; rather he wanted everyone to realize that his wealth was the work of the Divine, not the product of earthly spoils. The Sifsei Chachamim, is puzzled by Rashi's logic. If Avram did take a thread or perhaps something of more valuable, how could the king of Sedom possibly claim that he made Avram wealthy? What was Avram's rationale in maintaining that an insignificant trinket can impart wealth? A Gemara in Maseches Taanis may suggest an answer. The Gemara teaches that the reward for giving Ma'aser is wealth. Perhaps Avram did not want to take some spoils, which would force him to give Ma'aser, and become wealthy thanks to the generosity of a wicked mortal instead of the one true G-d.

Benyamin Akhavan
Sophomore

The Actions of the Fathers are a Lesson for their Progeny *continued*

The Ramban offers a different explanation the quarrel, was over how Avram and Lot were going to be perceived by the nations surrounding them. Given the enormous amount of sheep they both owned, Avram was concerned that “high visibility” would incite anger and jealousy from the nations around them. Therefore, Avram’s shepherds urged the shepherds of Lot to graze elsewhere, so as not to attract animosity and jealousy from the surrounding nations.

According to Rashi, the lesson we must learn from Avram is that we must always distance ourselves from anything that even resembles theft or dishonesty. According to the Ramban, we, as Jews amongst the nations, must behave in a quiet and unassuming way that does not call attention to us.

The simple reading, however, is that the land could not support both of them, due to the amount of livestock they owned. Yet, is unlikely that a land that was to be divided among Three Million Jews only three-hundred years later could not support Avram and Lot’s flocks.

We can ask a similar question in Parshas Bereishis where it says “And Cain spoke to his brother Hevel, and when they were in the field, Cain rose up against Hevel his brother and killed him” (4:8). What was the source of their argument?

Bereishis Rabbah quotes three opinions as to why the brothers fought. In one opinion, the fight was LeShem Shamayim: each brother wanted the Beis HaMikdash built in his territory. Another opinion is that while Cain had a twin sister born with him, Hevel had two sisters born with him. Hevel claimed both of his sisters for himself but Cain felt he deserved a “double portion” as first born. According to a third opinion the brothers divided the world between themselves, one taking all the land, the other all the movable objects. The one who took the land ordered the other to get off his land and fly in the air. The one who took the movable objects ordered the other to take off his clothes because the clothing belonged to him. Such a division was untenable, so Cain rose up and murdered Hevel.

We can readily understand that men will fight for their religious beliefs and they will certainly fight for women. But in a world so large with just two people to divide it, why didn’t the brothers reach a more equitable agreement?

In both the cases, the Midrash may be attempting to teach the same lesson. If people choose to argue, they will argue with or without justification. Cain and Hevel had the entire world to themselves, yet they still argued. Avram and Lot’s shepherds had the entire Canaan to graze, yet their shepherds still argued about not having enough land. Perhaps the lesson we should learn from Avram in this instance is that we must distance ourselves from trivial arguments lest they end with tragedy as did Cain and Hevel’s.

Understanding Anticipation in the Context of Hashem’s Master Plan

**Aaron
Kattan
Senior**

The first pasuk of Parashat Lech-Lecha records Hashem’s command to Avram to leave his homeland and travel “to the land which I (Hashem) will show you. Hashem was as we know, referring to the Land of Israel, which was then called Canaan. In issuing this command, however, Hashem chose not to inform Avram of where he was to go. Instead, He simply ordered Avram to start traveling, and when he arrived in Canaan, Hashem informed him that he might settle down.

Why did Hashem withhold this information from Avram? Why not just command Avraham to travel to Canaan at the outset?

Rashi famously explains that Hashem withheld this information from Avram “in order to endear the land to him,” meaning that Avram would experience greater excitement and joy upon arriving in Canaan as his destination was a pleasant surprise of sorts. Avram journeyed without knowing how long or where he would have to travel to. When Hashem finally informed him that he had arrived at his destination, that the period of wandering had ended, he was ecstatic. After the many weeks of tension and anxiety, of wondering when and how he would finally reach the land he was promised, the experience of joy and gratification upon concluding the journey was particularly meaningful. This experience far exceeded the joy he would have felt had he known from the outset where he was headed and how much time the trip would take.

Rav Pam derives a practical lesson from Rashi’s comment. The more challenging and difficult an endeavor is, the greater the sense of satisfaction when success is achieved. Goals attained through relative ease, without any hurdles or setbacks to overcome, bring a person far less joy and gratification than those achieved through diligence, determination and hard work.

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Avram Avinu: The Paradigm of Ahavas Hashem

**Evan
Linder
Senior**

This week's Parshah raises a striking question. Why does Hashem just appear to Avram without any qualification and choose him to spread the word of Hashem? What was so special about Avram?

Our Haftorah from Yeshaya may provide an answer. The Jewish people are referred to as "Zera Avraham Ohavi" The descendants of Avraham who loved me. Rashi explains that until Avram recognized Hashem, people only related to Hashem's attribute of stern judgment. Avram was the first to relate to Hashem out of love. But to truly understand Avram's unique relationship to Hashem, we must first examine the other notable Tzadik who related to Hashem before Avram, Noach.

Rashi's comment implies that even Noach "a complete Tzadik in his generation" did not love Hashem. He may have been a righteous man 'who walked with the Lord' but the Torah never indicates that he loved Hashem.

What exactly is Love of Hashem? The Rambam writes in the final perek of Hilchos Teshuva that an Ohev Hashem must be lovesick for G-dliness, Hashem pervades his thoughts at all times: while he's eating, drinking and even sleeping. In fact, Noach was lacking in complete Ahavas/Emunas Hashem. He entered the Teyva "Mipnei Mei Hamabul," on account of the waters of the flood, not the word of Hashem. Perhaps Noach was far more concerned with his own survival than the fulfillment of Hashem's Mitzvos.

Avram's actions lie in direct contrast to those of Noach highlighting Avram's uniqueness. Avram was clearly not driven by some desire to survive, but by a true love for Hashem. Avram's response to Hashem's command "Lech Lecha May' Artzecha" supports this point: it would not have made sense for Avram to uproot himself from his land at an advanced age unless he had done so out of love for Hashem and His commandments. A more powerful proof can be drawn from the Midrash which relates that Avram preferred to die in a furnace than to reject Hashem.

May we all endeavor to achieve to constant love of Hashem in thought, speech and action, and in that merit, we shall all herald the arrival of Mashiach Tzidkeinu, Teikef U'Miyad Mamash (speedily and powerfully in our days).

Understanding Anticipation in the Context of Hashem's Master Plan *continued*

Rav Pam applies this lesson to the experience of students in the Yeshiva. A Rabbi can either give his students a lecture, or have them research the topic independently and arrive at the conclusion on their own. They would have to carefully analyze all the difficult texts on the topic, from the Talmud through contemporary authorities, and then determine what is forbidden and what is permissible. At the end of this process, their sense of satisfaction would certainly far exceed the feeling they would experience upon simply hearing the final Halacha from their Rabbi.

In practice, Rabbeim might consider constructing their shiurim in the following manner: the first twenty minutes of a shiur can be devoted to review of the previous day's material ensuring that the students have properly grasped the material covered previously and can build on it. The next portion of the Shiur might be devoted to actually allowing the students to examine the primary texts that the lecture will be based on b'chavrusa allowing the students to toil in Torah and develop their own unique understanding. The final portion of the Shiur should then be devoted to the Rebbi's lecture which the students are now more likely to appreciate. The more difficult the process, the greater the gratification one enjoys upon its completion. Such is human nature.

In truth, this lesson applies in all areas of life. Whenever we are confronted with a difficult situation, we should realize that we might be experiencing a blessing in disguise. Hashem hid Avram's destination out of love so he would have a greater ultimate experience. Similarly, we are often presented with hardships and obstacles, that we must surmount to achieve our goals. Hashem placed these obstacles in our paths for the benefit of his master plan which will eventually lead to pure revealed good for all to see in the days of Mashiach Tzidkeinu, Bimheira Vi'yameinu, Amen.

Torah Observance: A Passionate Routine

In His initial appearance to Avram, G-d instructs the soon-be-patriarch to relocate to Eretz Canaan and offers His blessing. Among G-d's promises to Avram is, "I will make you a great nation, I will bless you, I will glorify your name, and you will be a blessing. (12:2)" Chazal, cited by Rashi, understand this verse as an allusion to the "birkas avos," the first berakha recited in our thrice-daily Shemone Esrei prayer. "I will make you a great nation" alludes to our reference to G-d in that prayer as "the G-d of Avram"; "I will bless you" hints to the expression, "the G-d of Yitzchak"; and "I will glorify your name" points to the recitation of, "the G-d of Yaakov." G-d's final words to Avram - "and you will be a blessing" - indicates that at the conclusion of this first berakha of Shemone Esrei we refer to G-d as simply, "the Shield of Avram," omitting any reference to the other three patriarchs.

If each of the three patriarchs is deserving of independent mention with the Name of G-d, why does Avram earn the particular privilege of having his name alone form the conclusion to the blessing? The Ksav Sofer answers with an insightful analysis of different approaches to Jewish observance. One can perform the mitzvos out of conviction and strong resolve to follow G-d's commandments, or simply out of routine, having been accustomed to a Torah lifestyle from a young age. Avram undoubtedly belonged to the first category. As the Midrashim relate, Avram was raised in a pagan family among a pagan civilization. His recognition of the one, true G-d and his decision to follow His mandates clearly evolved out of genuine conviction. Less obvious but just as accurate, the last two patriarchs served their Creator with a strong sense of belief and devotion, not just from habit. Unlike Avram, Yitzchak and Yaakov grew up in homes where faith in Hashem permeated everyday life. Yet, as they developed their individual sense of spirituality, they chose to serve G-d, willingly and resolutely, not merely as a result of years of habitual conditioning.

Thus, explains the Ksav Sofer, each of the three deserve independent mention with G-d's Name: "the G-d of Avram, the G-d of Yitzchak and the G-d of Yaakov." Nevertheless, Avram earns special distinction. He was the first to spread the word of G-d; for him the knowledge of the oneness of G-d was revolutionary, and thus he faced far greater challenges as he embarked upon his road of avodas Hashem.

This message - of the continuous "choosing" of Torah of mitzvos, rather than indifferent, habitual routine - may underlie Chazal's comment that all Jews from all time - past and future - stood at Har Sinai and accepted the Torah. Perhaps an important lesson we can derive from this dictum, is that we must see ourselves as accepting upon ourselves the Torah as did our ancestors, without prior conditioning from our parents. Our relationship to the commandments must be such that we continuously reaffirm our dedication to them, rather than performing them by rote. Some have noted that the festival of Shavuot - which commemorates Ma'amad Har Sinai - is referred to as "Zeman Matan Toraseinu," the day of the giving of the Torah, rather than "Zeman Kabbalas Toraseinu," the day of the receiving or accepting of the Torah. The reason is that the acceptance of the Torah must occur every day of one's life - not only on Shavuot!

Needless to say, forming good habits is an integral and indispensable part of one's growth in Torah observance. At the same time, however, one must ensure that one's passion and love for mitzvos is maintained, and that mitzvah observance never remains a mere force of habit. Torah observance must be a part of, or even the essence of our daily routine. But we must make sure that our attitude towards that routine is one of true understanding, with constant reconnecting passion.

**Reb Noam
Horowitz
Rebbe**

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