

Parshat Lech Lecha

Friday, November 11, 2016

י חשוון תשע"ז

From the Lower School

1. Why did Avraham leave Cana'an?
2. Where did Avraham go?
3. What is the name of the city where Lot moved to when he separated from Avraham?
4. Why did Avraham have to save Lot?
5. What is the name of Avraham's oldest son?

— *Rabbi Aron Srolovitz, LS, Assistant Principal*

Answers can be found on the last page.

From the Middle School

Putting the Needs of Others Before Our Own

Did Avraham do the right thing or wrong thing by going down to Egypt? On the one hand, God told him to go to *Eretz Canaan*, and that's where he should have stayed. He should have believed that God would provide for him. On the other hand, we know we don't rely on miracles. There was a famine; Avraham and Sarah needed food, so they had to put in the effort to get food, even if that meant leaving the land to which God told him to go.

This question was debated already by the *rishonim*. According to the Radak, Avraham was being tested here, and He passed. In other words, he did the right thing. He knew that one may not rely on miracles and he made the decision to take his family down to Egypt. However, according to the Ramban, Avraham made the wrong decision. Avraham should have believed that Hashem would provide for him despite the famine. Therefore, by going down to Egypt, Avraham sinned. The

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Ramban says, though, that Avraham acted בשגגה. Usually the word בשגגה is used to mean, an unintentional sin. According to the Ramban that Avraham did the wrong thing and should have believed that Hashem would provide for him, why would this be considered an unintentional sin?

Rav Shimon Schwab, explains that Avraham did believe that Hashem would provide for him. He had full faith in Hashem to save him from the famine. However, Avraham didn't travel alone to Egypt. He brought his wife, Sarah, his nephew, Lot and a whole myriad of people that Avraham and Sarah had converted to monotheism. Avraham was willing to rely on the salvation of God for his own sake, but he felt that it wouldn't be right to do so for the sake of the others with him. Although he fully believed that God would provide for him, solely based on faith, he couldn't rely only on faith to provide for the others with him. In this way, Avraham did the wrong thing, because he should have realized that God would save his followers because of Avraham's merit, but it wasn't purely wrong because he had in mind the best interest of others. That's why the Ramban calls it a שגגה. Granted he did the wrong thing, but it was tempered by a good sentiment, so it can be considered unintentional.

Our lesson from Avraham is that we need to be satisfied with what we have and trust that God will provide for us. However, we cannot be satisfied with what our friends, family or neighbors have. We have to always be looking to see what they need and what we can give to them. If we can do that then hopefully we will be given the *bracha* that Avraham was given of ונברכו בך כל משפחות האדמה. As the Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks says, "Our greatest blessing is our ability to be a blessing to others."

- Rabbi Adam Hertzberg — MS, Director of Educational Programming

From the High School

Where Are All the Details?

The Torah is filled with a plethora of *mitzvot* and with the details of how they are to be fulfilled. There are full *parshiyot* simply devoted to outlining the *mitzvot* of the Torah. It is peculiar to note that there is a *mitzvah*, one of the most spoken about and acted upon of all the *mitzvot*, which does not seem to have almost any details attached to it. This *mitzvah* I am referring to is the *mitzvah* of *chesed*. If one looks through the entire Torah from start to finish, one will not be able to find any place

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that highlights how the *mitzvah* of *chesed* is to be performed. How could it be that we are left in the dark about how to perform one of the most basic *mitzvot* of the Jewish people? After all, the *Gemara* in *Yevamot* 89 states the one of the three character traits of a Jew is someone who is a *gomer chesed*!

There are times when a definition limits an idea as opposed to clarifying an idea. Had the Torah simply stated that in order to perform the *mitzvah* of *chesed*, one must do these twenty acts, the Torah would be doing a disservice to the *mitzvah* of *chesed*. By deliberately not clarifying the *mitzvah* of *chesed*, the Torah is saying that there are an endless amount of possibilities of how one can perform this *mitzvah*.

In the *Sefer Bereishit*, we are introduced to the *avot*, who are the paradigmatic examples whom we are to emulate. The stories that are weaved through the *sefer* are not just there because they are a good read, but to teach us lessons as to how to be a Jew. Over the coming weeks we are given many examples of how *chesed* is performed. We should learn from these stories about how we can expand our *chesed* mentality.

- Rabbi David Schlusberg—HS, Judaic Faculty

Remove the Walls

Commenting upon the words "*Lech lecha*" (12: 1), Rashi says, "L'hana'atcha u'letovatcha," "for your favor and for your good." However, in the story of the *akeida*, when Avraham was commanded to take his son Yitzchak to sacrifice him on Mount Moriah, the words "*lech lecha*" (22:2) also appear, but there Rashi does not offer the same explanation. It seems that in the second instance Hashem is telling Avraham to leave behind his "narrow self," to remove the fence that he may have built around himself, and to involve himself in the wider world. Hashem thus tells him: Serve those who need your service, guide those who are waiting for your guidance, and inspire the ones who yearn for your inspiration.

This commandment is so applicable to us today. Indeed many are the "great walls" and the small ones we have erected around ourselves. The worst and perhaps the strongest of all walls is the one raised between one man and the other. It is the fence of petty grievances, jealousies, and hatreds. We build it between ourselves, our neighbors, our friends, and even our family members.

There is another powerful wall, the wall of smugness. It is set up by the person who goes through life seeing no one but himself. Such a

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person doesn't hate; he just doesn't care. He is concerned only with "me," "myself," and "I."

The story is told of the great Chernobler Rebby who was imprisoned by the Tsar in Russia on false allegations. An elderly person once came to visit him and said, "Do you know why you were imprisoned? Because you always go around to collect money for *pidyon shvuyim*, the redeeming of those who have been captured. Now you know how important this *mitzvah* is, for now you feel their taste, you realize how much they suffer and go through. You will appreciate their position and know from experience how much they need your help of *pidyon shvuyim*. And so, go out and perform this *mitzvah* with enthusiasm and love, for many are waiting for it."

This is what Hashem meant when He said to Avraham "Lech Lecha:" Remove the fence that walls you in and secludes you from your fellow man. Go out into the world. Leave your narrow self and feel how desperately people need your guidance and leadership. Do this and you will become a blessing unto all mankind.

- Rabbi Richard Kirsch —HS, Judaic Faculty and Director of Athletics

Answers to questions on page 1

- (1) There was a famine
- (2) Egypt
- (3) Sodom
- (4) He was captured when Sedom was attacked
- (5) Yishmael

Shabbat Shalom from

JKHA/RKYHS!