

Lech Licha

Vol. 1 Issue 3

October 30-31, 2020

12-13 Cheshvan 5781

Mission: Learn what not to be

This week's Parsha- Lech Licha literally translates into "go out for yourself". Hashem tells Avram to leave his father's home and sojourn in order to capitalize on the blessings that Hashem has in store for Avram. Rashi opens his explanation on the parsha by stating that Hashem is telling Avram to leave for his pleasure and benefit; that can only be derived by it seems by leaving, forward bound to create memories and new experiences that come along with such a journey.

As the parsha proceeds, Lot – Avram's nephew's shepherds and Avram's shepherds get into a fight about grazing pastures, to which Avram's solution was to part ways so as not to fight. Lot turned to the land which was still fertile, in the region of Sodom. Whereas Avram settled in the land of Canaan.

The Torah tells us (Ber. 13:13) that the people of Sodom were bad, and sinful to Hashem. By a matter of comparison, in Ber. 6:5 the posuk tells us that the people in the land were "ra'ah" the same word to describe the actions of sodomites. There has to be a parallel between the activities of the generation of the flood, and the sodomites who were eventually overturned as a city. The king of Sodom was known as "ברע" Bera – which Rashi explains as evil to heaven and evil to people. (The word ברע is comprised of ב-רע that is "2" evils, to Hashem and to people). Just as an aside the names of kings were all rooted in the evil and wicked ways they acted¹.

Back to the story. There was a war between an alliance of 4 kings against 5 kings. The 4 kings won the war initially, resulting in Lot's capture and eventual

involvement of Avram to free Lot. Avram defeated the 4 kings, freeing the 5 kings, the King of Sodom among them. The king of Sodom (who's liege Lot- as mentioned earlier Lot settled in the land of Sodom) is the focus of an exchange between him and Avram. The king of Sodom wanted to repay Avram for freeing him, to which Avram politely declines his offer to pay himself, and rather asks that his fighters (the 318 men) take some food:

אִם-מִחוּט וְעַד שָׁרוּף-נָעַל וְאִם-אֶקַּח מִכָּל-אֲשֶׁר-לָךְ וְלֹא תֵאמָר אֲנִי אֶקַּח; הִנֵּנִי שְׂרָתִי אֶת-אַבְרָם: I will not take so much as a thread or a sandal strap of what is yours; you shall not say, 'It is I who made Abram rich.'

Rashi explains that Avram was waiting for Hashem to provide Avram with wealth, but if we peel back another layer, perhaps Avram is commenting on a sodomite character trait. Avram is teaching us a profound lesson in psychology. In order to truly be powerful, and or beholden to a higher entity

In Perkei Avos Chapter 5 mishna 10, the Tanna says:

אַרְבַּע מִדּוֹת בְּאָדָם. הָאוֹמֵר שְׁלִי שְׁלִי וְשָׁלָךְ שְׁלָךְ, זֶה מִדַּת בִּינוֹנִית. וְיֵשׁ אוֹמְרִים, זֶה מִדַּת סְדוֹם. שְׁלִי שְׁלָךְ וְשָׁלָךְ שְׁלִי, עִם הָאֶרֶץ. שְׁלִי שְׁלָךְ וְשָׁלָךְ שְׁלָךְ, חֲסִיד. שְׁלִי שְׁלִי וְשָׁלָךְ שְׁלִי, רִשָּׁע:

The "what's mine is mine, and what's yours is yours" is an intermediary, or the characteristic of a sodomite. The fact that the Mishna states a Benoni, and Sodom is not coincidence. The trait of Sodom that is most evil is extreme selfishness and self-centeredness. This is also learned out from what Avraham said. Selfishness and self-centeredness is a person who is devoid of any other person, and especially their true ability to serve Hashem. The statement of "what's mine is mine, and what's your is your's" seems fine, but it is stasis, there is no growth from being in such a space, it represents absolute complacency, benign (maybe from the word "Beinonyi"), and absolution from taking responsibility.

involvement, there may have been cures and technologies that existed at that time to prolong people's lives (which were prescribed by Hashem to use). Perhaps there were moments in history that we digressed as a society and lost the knowledge, and it was further hidden by klipos that we forgot the root. We would only begin to appreciate the advanced technology now as we are revealed more and more. For example, if the Vilna Gaon read this Rashi 300 years ago, the concept of a flying contraption would not have been what we interpret as flying. Rashi himself would have had no frame of reference of what human flight is; which would infer that Rashi's explanation from the Medrish Tanchuma was that there was the technology to be able to fly plane (see what I did there) and simple.

Anyways more on technology and Torah later

¹ Interestingly Rashi explains שמאבר "Shamever" as שם אבר ("sim ever") he put on an artificial limb to fly and leap- and rebel against Hashem. This gets me to think in Rashi's simple explanation that he had some sort of flying contraption, literally not a figurative set of wings to show his Chutzpa to Hashem. It is highly plausible (as we also learned in the Gemara Eruvin- that there was a tanna who knew how to "fly"). Perhaps there was advance technology that existed historically, that was only revealed to select few to do good with, as the world was not ready to accept the technology without denying the existence of Hashem. As we've progressed "slowly" as a society we are slowly being revealed the wonders of technology. I mean the parallels are uncanny, the early characters of the Torah all lived exceedingly long lives. Then humans proliferated and it became the norm for people to pass away younger. Aside from Hashem's direct

Furthermore, there is the opportunity to actually do harm by someone with such an attitude, as reflected with Avram's encounter with the King of Sodom.

It was clear from the recounting of the narrative in Bereishis Avram, by his own strength, or by the strength of Hashem was able to defeat the very strong adversarial kings, in order to free his nephew. It was sheer determination that won his war. Avram knew where his powers lay, with Hashem, but in Avram knowing Sodomite mentality, he knew that even in that instance, where there would be a moment for Avram to possibly state to the king of Sodom to take the treasures for Hashem, or even as compensation for his triumph. The Sodomite way would be to lay claim over this. They will say what's mine is mine, that is my payment to you allows me to have power and dominion over you. Alternatively, and more clearly, they will deny that there was an outside power that actually aided them.

Pirkei Avos 6:6 states "הא למדת שכל האומר דבר בשם אומרו" "מביא גאולה לעולם" that is anyone who gives credit to its source brings redemption on the world. Sodom was the opposite of that, perhaps, they inappropriately took credit in their selfish and self-centered way, which is an absolutely toxic characteristic to have.

On Eruvin 49a it is explained, that in a shared courtyard people can carry from 1 courtyard to another and the gemara concludes that not creating a shared Eruv and barring your neighbor from carrying "וכגון זה כופין על מדת" "קדום" is likened as a trait of Sodom. This is explained because we the rabbis want to compel people against the behaviours of Sodom as Rashi says quoting Avot 5:10 that what is mine is mine. Sodom wasn't just an amoral place; it was a place of extreme selfishness; which is antithetical to the Jewish way of life.

The Chassidic lining, I conjecture, is that in our yearning to serve Hashem through our Avoda, we given a constant opportunity to turn elements into their pure spiritual form (IsKafiya and IsApcha). In our path to this in Tanya we are to strive to be a בְּיִנוּנִי. My above note would seem to contradict the Alter Rebbe. The Alter Rebbe painstakingly explains in all the chapters of Tanya that in order to be a בְּיִנוּנִי you are ultimately becoming a Tzaddik and your Avoida is to constantly have IsKafiya (withhold/resist) in order to accomplish IsApcha (to flip [revealing the spiritual potential]). The Avoida of the בְּיִנוּנִי is the first part, when you've achieved IsApcha you are a tzaddik. The root of the word בְּיִנוּנִי can be "Ben Oni" (the Aleph is dropped)² Rashi explains Ben Oni means Ben Tza'ari – son of my pain (Ber. 35:18) based on the fact that Rachel passed in

childbirth, and or other pain she experienced. I bring this to tell us that the idea of a בְּיִנוּנִי is work, and growth through pain- even though literally it means intermediary. In modern Hebrew the word בְּיִנוּנִי means "so-so" or mediocre, which is what Avram saw, Pirkei Avos tells us not to be, and the gemara devises Halacha so we ought not be like "sodomites".

In Pirkei Avos (5:10) the Sheli Sheli line points to the fact that there is an impossibility to recovering from a what's mine is mine attitude. At least in the wicked person, what's yours is mine there is a clear ability to recover and be an Alter Rebbe Beinoni and become a righteous person where what's mine is yours takes over (IsKafiya and IsApcha).

In summary, starting with Avram, to practical living today, we understand the importance of not to be complacent, and not to be selfish.

One final separate observation that I thought was interesting.

Rashi resolves an amazing potential contradiction. Avram constantly relied on the promises and covenants of Hashem, which all came true. One of them being that the eventual generation that leaves the Egyptian exile will leave "B'rchus Gadol" with great [Material] wealth (Ber. 15:14) ...and the fourth generation will return (Ber. 15:16)...as Rashi explains based on the earlier promise that "they will inherit it [the land]" (Ber 15:7 earlier).

But we know later on that the generation that left Egypt did not in fact inherit the land, as many died out in the desert (from the sin of the Egel, or the death as a result of the spies). There are 2 promises given to Avram, 1) the wealth, 2) the inheritance of the land. 1) simply, the Jews got material wealth from the 9th of 10 plagues (darkness) when they took money from the Egyptians, and the spoils as a result of the legions of Egypt who drowned in the splitting of the sea (in Az Yashir we know they took material wealth); but 2 may not have come true 'exactly'. So Rashi explains on "Dor Rivii" (V. 16) very clearly the calculation of the generations. 1) Yehuda, 2) Peretz his son 3) Chetzron the son of Peretz 4) Kalev the son of Chetzron (who according to the gemara is Kalev the son of Yephuneh). Since Kalev entered, then Hashem made true on his promise that the 4th generation will enter the land, it doesn't mean the entire 4th generation.

named Ben Oni by Rachel just before her passing. She had a very difficult labour and ultimately passed in childbirth.

² Which is the root of the name Binyamin – the last of the 12 tribes who was called this by Yakov even though he was