



MESSAGE FROM THE RAV

Dear Chevra

Firstly, I would like to welcome you to our minyan this week. Secondly, I would like to congratulate and thank everyone who has taken upon themselves a role in helping run our shul and its events. We would like to encourage everyone to take part in our community and join in the suggestion making and implementation.

Lech Lecha tells us the story of the first initiative taker in history. For nearly 2000 years since creation, there had been many people who had knowledge of HaShem and spirituality and even kept the mitzvot. Some had even started yeshivot to allow people to come and learn about the beauty of true G-d worship. But Avraham went out to the masses and strove towards world perfection – a world where everyone would know about the beauty of filling our lives with holiness and raising all activities from the level of mere physical to recognition of the internal holiness in everything all around us.

Avraham was commanded to make his way to the source of spirituality, what was to become Eretz Yisrael. But his work didn't stop there. He continued bringing people closer to knowledge of HaShem and a relationship with G-d, showing people how to imbue every aspect of their life with spirituality.

We have followed in his footsteps and have also journeyed to or been brought up here in Eretz Yisrael. Our challenge is to encourage the continuity of Yahadut in every aspect of our lives and enhance the kedusha therein – the kedusha inherent in every grain of sand and breath of air of Eretz Yisrael.

May we show initiative in our Judaism and always be growing and striving through Torah, and may our community go from strength to strength.

Shabbat shalom,

Rav Shmuel

OVERVIEW OF THE PARSHA

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 recognize G-d's existence, and thus merits that G-d appear to him. At the beginning of this week's Torah portion 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 weekly portion concludes with G-d commanding Avram to circumcise himself and his offspring throughout the generations as a Divine covenant. G-d changes Avram's name to Avraham, and Sarai's name to Sarah. Hashem promises Avraham a son, Yitzchak, despite Avraham being ninety-nine years old and Sarah ninety. On that day, Avraham circumcises himself, Yishmael and his entire household.

GREAT LIKE THE STARS

When Abram mentioned to God that he was childless, God dramatically promised that his children would be as numerous as the stars in the sky: "[God] took him outside and said, 'Look at the sky, and count the stars if you can! So will be your descendants.'" [Gen 15:5] Later God promised Abraham that his children would be like "the sand on the seashore". [Gen 22:17] Why are the people of Israel compared to both stars and grains of sand?

The Sages noted the rarely used word 'so' in God's promise, "So will be your descendants". According to R. Yossi, this 'so' hints to their future prominence upon leaving Egypt: "So said God, 'My son, My first-born,



is Israel." [Ex 4:24] R. Eliezer said that it alludes to their future greatness at Mount Sinai: "So shall you say to the family of Jacob". [Ex 19:3] What is this disagreement about? What do the Exodus and Mount Sinai have to do with stars? One final question: The Psalmist says that God bestows a name to every star. [Ps 147:4] Why do stars need names?

A name reflects the inner essence of an object. A name defines the nature of its existence, and indicates its fundamental purpose. Stars are wonderful, tremendous creations. Each star has a unique function for which it was created. And each star has a unique name which corresponds to its special purpose. God compared Abraham's descendants to the stars, indicating the importance and greatness of every individual. As the Sages wrote, "One who saves a Jewish soul has saved an entire world". [Baba Batra 11] Every soul is a universe unto itself.

But the Jewish people also have a collective purpose - bringing about the world's spiritual perfection. "This people I have created for Me [so that] they will recount My praise." [Is 43:21] Therefore the Torah also compares Israel to the sand, emphasizing their collective importance and purpose. A single grain of sand has no special importance. But together, these grains of sand form a border against the oceans, creating dry-land and enabling life in the world.

It is logical to first establish the collective purpose of Israel, and only afterwards adding their individual goals. Upon leaving Egypt, Israel was formed into a people with a unique collective purpose. Later at Sinai they were granted an additional measure of purpose at the personal level.

The disagreement between R. Yossi and R. Eliezer revolves around the meaning of this comparison to stars. For while each star is a unique creation with its own special function, there also exists a common, united purpose for all the stars together. The prophet says that God "calls all of them by name" [Is 40:26] - one single name. This refers to their collective name, their collective purpose. According to R. Yossi, the stars represent the collective purpose of Israel, set in their souls during the Exodus from Egypt. The collective goal of Israel is an integral part of their very essence, as the verse cited by R. Yossi emphasizes, "My son, my first son, is Israel". The father-son relationship is a natural one, independent of specific virtues or deeds. When leaving Egypt, the Jews were bereft of merits and good deeds. "And you [Israel] were naked and bare". [Ez 16:7] But R. Eliezer felt that the prominence of the stars symbolizes the special purpose of each individual, which Israel acquired at Mount Sinai.

These specific goals are a function of their individual efforts, their deeds and Torah learning. This level relates to Mount Sinai, when the Torah and its mitzvot were revealed to the people. The Midrash states that when Israel promised to obey the laws of the Torah, the angels tied crowns to the head of every Jew. These crowns reflected the importance of each individual. Every Jew was a prince, bearing his own unique crown of holiness.

(From the Rav Kook mailing list: [Midbar Shur 110-121])

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

*IF ANYONE NEEDS A PLACE FOR LUNCH, OR IF ANYONE HAS A SPARE PLACE AT THEIR TABLE, PLEASE SPEAK TO RAV SHMUEL AND TALI BLOOM AFTER SHUL, AND WE WILL DO OUR BEST TO ACCOMMODATE ALL.

*FOR COMMENTS ON THE PARSHA PAGE OR QUESTIONS FOR RAV BLOOM PLEASE E-MAIL: RABBI@LATEMINYAN.COM

*IF ANYONE WOULD LIKE TO SPONSOR THIS WEEKLY PARSHA PAGE IN MEMORY OF A CLOSE ONE OR IN HONOUR OF AN UP-COMING SIMCHA, PLEASE CONTACT TAMMY WILSON AT: 02-5671289

*IF ANYONE WOULD LIKE TO SPONSOR A KIDDUSH IN HONOUR OF AN UP-COMING SIMCHA, PLEASE CONTACT GALI DORN AT: GALI@TALI.ORG.IL

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