

# LECH LECHA



## INSPIRATION

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FROM THE PAGES OF OU PRESS

### CHUMASH MESORAS HARAV

ויהי בימי אמרפל (בראשית יד:א)

Now it came to pass in the days of Amraphel. The domination of the kings by Chedorloemer and their refusal to pay tribute to him sparked a conflict that had no relevance to Abraham per se. Yet this battle set a precedent that has followed the Jewish people throughout the ages. The Jew is repeatedly thrust into international conflict. We were caught between the empires of Babylon and Egypt during the period of the first Temple and were caught up by Rome and its efforts toward world conquest during the second. We were embroiled in the Moslem conquests in the time of the Gaonim. We were involved in subsequent wars on the European continent. This involvement will continue until the final battle of Gog and Magog as a prelude to the eschatological era (Zech. 14). During the war of the kings, Abraham realized that the Jew would continually be involved in conflicts that are not his own, that through his moral and ethical behavior he would be separate from other peoples, and that he

must help his brother even if it would mean conflict with a much stronger foe. Abraham himself waged a long battle against these kings, and his descendants would wage another war against the seven nations for ultimate control of the land of Canaan. Abraham needed morale strengthening in order to wage such protracted campaigns. As a result, God made a covenant with him after this war, a covenant that went beyond the original promise that Abraham would inherit the land. Through the terms of this latter covenant, God Himself agrees to identify with Israel in times of travail: I am with him in distress (Ps. 91:15). When Israel is exiled, the Divine Presence is also in exile. His exile is the guarantee, the collateral so to speak, for the ultimate redemption of the Jewish people. (Boston, 1975)

וספר הכוכבים... כה יהיה זרעך (בראשית טו:ה)

When God promised Abraham that his offspring would be as numerous as the dust of the earth, He used the word למנות, to count (13:16). When God used the stars to convey the same idea here,

He employs a different word, וספר. למנות means simply to count, without any other connotation. לספור, however means to count while trying to understand. [This word derives from the same root word meaning to tell or describe]. God tells Abraham not merely to count the stars, but to try to comprehend them. Can you enumerate the stars, Abraham? Can you explain the cosmic drama, the flying nebulae on the outskirts of the universe? Your great destiny is just as enigmatic and incomprehensible as the great story of the heavens. So will be your seed; the same mystery, the same enigma will be attached to your people.

**The Mesoras HaRav Chumash**, based on the teachings of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, was edited by Dr. Arnold Lustiger.



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### THE INGREDIENT FOR GREATNESS



In Lech Lecha, Hashem commanded Avraham (Avram) to leave his father's home and go to the land that He will show him, a.k.a. Canaan. Avraham listened to Hashem and went to the city of Shechem, where Hashem then informed Avraham that He is gifting the land to him and all of his descendants. The next part of the passuk states that

Avraham then built an altar for Hashem in response. Soon after, he picked up, moved to the city of Beth-el, pitched a tent, and built yet another altar. What's strange about this is that Avraham pitched a tent. After being informed that the land is his, he did not settle down and set up some permanent establishment; he pitched a tent. We

know too that he is not averse to building things since he just spent time building two altars – rather he seems to be averse to building something for himself.

Once he was done in Beth-el, the passuk states that he traveled further south. This all seems very strange to be noted in the beginning parshiot of the Torah. When the parsha begins, we have no

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# FIVELIGHTS

## 5 INSPIRATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS ON THE PARSHA

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**1** Stories should start at the beginning. Strangely, however, Avraham's story begins when he is seventy five years old. **Why isn't the story of Avraham's childhood expressly written in the Torah?**

Rabbi Yehudah Lowe, (Maharal, Netzach Yisroel ch. 11) explains that the story of Avraham's childhood is omitted from the Torah so people don't think there was any specific trait that caused the Jewish people to be chosen. A detailed childhood with stories of piety would have implied that that was the cause of Avraham's being chosen. The Jewish people's relationship with God, however, transcends any specific action or deed.

In fact, Rabbi Tzadok of Lublin (Pri Tzadik Eikev #3) explains that this is why the Jewish people are described as a segulah (Devarim 7:6). Just as a segulah transcends rationality, so do the Jewish people.

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**2** Can you hear me now?

The Sefas Emes (634) explains that God reached out to many people in the time of Avraham. So what made Avraham unique? **Avraham is the only person that listened.** Sometimes we can hear a calling – the only question is who will have the courage to react. Avraham heard the voice of God, as did many, but only Avraham changed the trajectory of his life.

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**3** No Spoilers! God seems to want to keep Avraham in suspense. He tells him to leave his land, his birthplace, but the only hint at the destination is “the land that I will show you” (12:1). Why so coy? Why doesn't God just tell Avraham that he is bringing him to the Land of Israel?

Rabbi Mordechai Yosef Leiner of Izbica explains that God was telling Avraham which land he was bringing him to – God is naming Israel “the land that I will show you.” Israel, Rabbi Leiner explains, is a land that needs to be **experienced firsthand.** It is a land that needs to be shown, not just described or spoken about. Eretz Yisroel is “The land that I will show you.” To understand and appreciate our homeland, it needs to be experienced.

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**4** In the heart of every parent is the hope that their children will have a better life than they did. Each generation wants to ensure that they leave the world a better place for the next.

This was Avraham's concern.

God reveals Himself saying, “I am the God that took you out from Ur Kasdim” (15:7). That troubled Avraham, though. At Ur Kasdim, Avraham had jumped into a fiery furnace, rather than worship idols (see Rashi 11:28). Avraham responds to God's revelation with a question, “How do I know I will inherit it?” (15:8).

The Seforno explains that Avraham was asking God **how can he be sure his children will also be a part of the Jewish people.** Avraham wanted to be sure that God was not only interested in developing a relationship with those willing to jump into a furnace for Him. Avraham wanted to be sure that those children who are not as committed to God will also have the capacity to develop a relationship with Him. Avraham was asking about the spiritual inheritance of the next generation.

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**5** After being told that he would have another child, Avraham was astonished. He exclaimed, “O that Yishmael might live before You” (17:18). Avraham felt unworthy. Another son?!? It would be great enough to just have Yishmael continue to live.

Rashi adds an important note. Avraham was not just asking for Yishmael to live in good health, but he was also praying to God for Yishmael to **develop a fear of, and relationship with God.** The Sifsei Chachamim notes that it is not so simple that Avraham could ask God for Yishmael to develop a stronger sense of spirituality and fear of God – don't we normally assume that God does not intervene on others' free will? (See Brachos 33b)

One answer provided is that God will always listen to the prayers of a parent for a child. (See Responsa Me'il Tzedaka #7). The connection between parent and child is so great and so close that God will respond to the prayer of a parent to increase the spirituality of a child – even if that means violating some of the boundaries of free will.

# SEE IT **INSIDE**

Parsha ideas that are so good, you have to see them inside!

<b>KLI YAKAR 12:1</b>	Why was God's command to Avraham to leave his land so lengthy (and specific)?
<b>RAMBAN 12:6</b>	Introducing the famous principle of "Maasei Avos Siman LaBanim." The actions of the fathers are signs for the sons.
<b>RAMBAN 15:6</b>	Why doesn't God also guarantee Avraham reward in the World to Come?
<b>RAMBAN 15:14</b>	If the slavery in Egypt was a decree by God, why should the Egyptians be punished for carrying it out?
<b>OHR HACHAIM 15:14</b>	The real reason the Jewish people are persecuted.
<b>TUR 15:16</b>	The fourth generation will be redeemed – but which one is the fourth?
<b>RAMBAN 16:6</b>	The story of Yishmael alludes to contemporary conflict.
<b>RABEINU BACHYA 17:1</b>	The meaning of the unique name of God revealed prior to Avraham's circumcision.
<b>IBN EZRA 17:14</b>	What is Kares? Sounds scary.

A major focal point of Avraham's covenant with God is the future suffering of the Jewish people, particularly in Egypt. Why is suffering such a major part of Jewish history? Even Moshe was not told the exact reason for suffering, but this story may help change your perspective on how to react to suffering and life's struggles.

Once upon a time, a daughter complained to her father that her life was miserable and that she didn't know how she was going to make it. She was tired of fighting and struggling all the time. It seemed just as one problem was solved, another one soon followed.

Her father, a chef, took her to the kitchen. He filled three pots with water and placed each on a high fire. Once the three pots began to boil, he placed potatoes in one pot, eggs in the second pot, and ground coffee beans in the third pot. He then let them sit and boil, without saying a word to his daughter.

The daughter moaned and impatiently waited, wondering what he was doing. After twenty minutes, he turned off the burners. He took the potatoes out of the pot and placed them in a bowl. He pulled the eggs out and placed them in a bowl. He then ladled the coffee out and placed it in a cup.

Turning to her, he asked, "Daughter, what do you see?"

"Potatoes, eggs, and coffee," she hastily replied.

"Look closer," he said, "and touch the potatoes." She did and noted that they were soft.

He then asked her to take an egg and break it. After pulling off the

shell, she observed the hard-boiled egg.

Finally, he asked her to sip the coffee. Its rich aroma brought a smile to her face.

"Father, what does this mean?" she asked.

He then explained that the potatoes, the eggs, and coffee beans had each faced the same adversity, the boiling water. However, each one reacted differently.

The potato went in strong, hard and unrelenting, but in boiling water it became soft and weak. The egg was fragile with the thin outer shell protecting its liquid interior until it was put in the boiling water. Then the inside of the egg became hard.

However, the ground coffee beans were unique. After they were exposed to the boiling water, they changed the water and created something new.

"Which are you?" he asked his daughter. "When adversity knocks on your door, how do you respond? Are you a potato, an egg, or a coffee bean?"

In life, things happen around us and things happen to us, but the only thing that truly matters is what happens within us.



# CONVERSATIONS WITH RABBI MICHAEL TAUBES



Rabbi Michael Taubes is the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva University's High School for Boys.

## WHICH PEDAGOGUES DO YOU BELIEVE MOST INFLUENCED YOUR WAY OF EDUCATION?

In terms of my personal learning, as well as my style of thinking and of presentation, my biggest influences were my two primary Rebbeim, HaGaon Rav Aharon Lichtenstein, zt'l, and yibadel l'chaim, HaGaon Rav Hershel Schachter, shlita. I was zocheh to learn in the Shiur of the Rav – HaGaon Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, zt'l, for a number of years, but the years that I was privileged to be in his Shiur were among his last years of teaching in the yeshiva and he was often not well; I therefore did not experience his greatness in the same way that those students a bit older than I did. But I was certainly very much influenced by what he wrote and by what his great talmidim, including my aforementioned Rebbeim, related in his name.

## WHAT ARE SOME DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE WESTERN VIEW ON

## EDUCATION AND THE TORAH'S VIEW ON EDUCATION, AND HOW DOES THAT AFFECT YOUR EDUCATIONAL MODEL?

I would say that the value of emphasizing both breadth and depth of knowledge is an area of similarity, as is the encouragement to challenge and to ask penetrating questions. The major difference is that whereas in general education, the goal is usually to impart information and pique students' interest in studying further, in Torah education, the goal is to mold personalities and influence lives. A history teacher may be flattered if a student opts, because of his class, to pursue history as his area of study, but he generally does not aspire to make every student into a historian. A Torah educator, however, wants his students – each and every one of them – to become bigger Bnai Torah, to grow religiously, and to aspire to reach his level of Torah living and observance. To accomplish that, the Rebbe must do much more than impart information and pique interest – he has to be a living role model of what a Jew committed to a Torah way of life is, and his excitement

and passion have to be palpable. I have tried to live up to those lofty standards to the extent that I can.

## WHAT IS THE GREATEST CHALLENGE YOU'VE EXPERIENCED IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION?

I think the greatest challenge is to successfully present Torah values so that today's students will want to embrace them. With the combination of the growing influence on our youngsters of modern culture (some of which is positive, but some of which is not), with its emphasis on entertainment, leisure, and fun, and its allowing for an often angry, harsh, and biting way of dealing with other people, along with a general sense of apathy towards religion, tradition, and education, this is a tall order, especially when dealing with those students who do not automatically "buy into" the message we are sharing, but whom we very much want and need as part of our Torah community.

*Interview conducted by Eli Szafranski, member of NCSY's National Board.*

## THE INGREDIENT FOR GREATNESS CONTINUED FROM FRONT

background on Avraham. Nothing tells us why he is so special that he should be the father of the Jewish people. All we know is that Avraham had what seems like blind faith in Hashem. To solve this, we have to look at what preceded the story of Avraham.

The last two parshiot spoke about, first, Hashem creating the world for humanity in order to become close with them only to have it lead to a series of major sins ending with the Tower of Bavel. When paralleled, perek 11(Tower of Bavel) and perek 12(Avraham's story) are similar in layout. First, the passuk says each protagonist travels east, the former to a valley, and the latter to a mountain. Then,

it contrasts that the people of Bavel settle down and build a city, while Avraham simply pitches his tent. But the passuk doesn't just say that the people built a city, it says they built a city and a tower, "One that reaches to the heavens, so that they can make a name for themselves." Avraham on the other hand pitches a tent and builds an altar. The people of Bavel built a monument for the sake of their name, while Avraham built an altar in the name of Hashem. Each one cares about legacy, although one cares about their own legacy, and the other cares about the legacy of Hashem. Avraham displays great humility, while the tower builders display great arrogance in wanting to be only for themselves.

But if we jump back to the beginning of Parshat Lech Lecha, we actually see that Hashem promises to make Avraham's name great, but making one's own name great was what we saw in Bavel, and what was ultimately their downfall. Hashem chooses Avraham after generations of failures to start again and begin a nation, but what makes Avraham so special, so qualified, to begin again with? Avraham's nation focuses on making God's name great, so that in this way, Hashem will be able to make Judaism's name great.

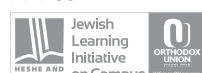
*Siena Rappoport is an Ambassador of Education on NCSY's National Teen Board.*



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