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**Chabad Puts Us All to Shame**

**By Rabbi Elchanan Poupko**

***If we need a meal for someone at the last minute, we say: “if they don’t find anything they can go to Chabad.” Why is it more of a responsibility of Chabad than for any other Jew?***



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Leading a High Holiday service in New York City is one of the highlights of my year. Being able to pray with, inspire and be inspired, along with three hundred of my fellow Jews is something I look forward to the whole year.

It also entails a lot of work. Right after Passover I start thinking of ideas for speeches, inspiring stories, and ideas worth sharing. I am not the only one working. Leading with me is my dear friend, Cantor Laivi, a Lubavitcher who does a magnificent job leading the service with his powerful and beautiful voice. It is when working with him that I realized: Chabad put us all to shame.

We both give the service our fullest, both work hard, and both put our heart and soul into what we are doing. The difference? Cantor Laivi wakes up long before the service. At 7 AM he can already be seen walking the streets of Manhattan speaking to Jews who will not be attending any service on Rosh Hashanah asking them if they want to hear the Shofar on their way to work.



He blows the Shofar at the bus stops, street corners, shops, or anywhere else. Once he has done that he comes fully energized to lead the service with me.

But the difference does not end there. Once we have given it our all, I go to eat the Rosh Hashanah meal and get some rest after an exhausting few hours.

The Cantor? You can find him on the hospital floors at Memorial Sloan Kettering, Cornell, Lenox Hill, and other New York Hospitals. Blowing the Shofar, giving a taste of a Rosh Hashana medley or just being kind to a person that needs a visit now more than ever.

Yom Kippur is not much different. At night after Kol Nidreh, early in the morning, or during the break he is busy doing Mitzvahs. While my friend is a remarkable human being, anyone familiar with the work of Chabad around the globe knows this is not an anomaly. When my wife was doing a medical rotation, focusing on international health, in Nepal, you can be sure that she found warm and extensive Shabbat meals at Chabad of Katmandu.

People who work for no material reward, day and night, often for people who will never see them again and who will not necessarily return a favor in any way. They do it because it is a Mitzvah.

This got me thinking.

Was there anything I learned in my education that was different than what my friends at Chabad have learned? Is there anything that any reform, conservative, orthodox, or ultra-orthodox rabbi has learned in their own education that precludes the kind of dedication we see coming from those educated in Chabad schools? Clearly not.

We have all learned about the concept of Arevut— that Kol Yisrael Arevim Zeh Lazeh—means that all Jews are responsible for one another. Many Israeli Yeshivot teach their students it is a religious obligation to advocate for the secession of public transportation in Tel Aviv even when that transportation does not go through any religious areas because of the concept of Arevut—we are all responsible for each other—and therefore it is my business to make sure that another Jews does not travel on Shabbat.

Where are all the followers of that doctrine on Rosh Hashana morning when they have the opportunity to help their fellow Jews fulfill the mitzvah of Shofar?

Who is sitting at their table on Friday night when the time comes for Kiddush? Do Jews from all walks of life feel welcome at their Shabbat dinners?

We all learned about the incredible value of Ahavat Yisrael—the love we are to have to all our fellow Jews—and how that must follow with caring for the physical and spiritual wellbeing of our fellow Jews. Are we all standing on the paths of college campuses making sure Jewish students know they have a place at our dinner table and that we are there for them?

And yet, for some reason, it is a resounding yes for Chabadniks around the world. Whether it is professional shluchim like Rabbi Chezki and Chana Lifshitz, Chabad’s Shluchim to Kathmandu, Nepal who host thousands of Jews, my wife included, so graciously, or people like my friend Cantor Laivi who is a businessman busy supporting his family. They all find time for Am Yisrael. On college campuses, in small towns, big cities, airports, hospitals, military bases—you name it, Chabad are there.

Why is it that whenever we cannot find a meal for someone who needs to be hosted last minute we say: “if they don’t find anything they can go to Chabad”? why is it more of a responsibility of Chabad than for any other Jew?



Over the past decade or two Chabad has become an integral part of structured Jewish life around the world, recognized by every denomination for reliability, sincerity, kindness, and dedication. Clergy from Hebrew Union College to graduates of Lithuanian Yeshivot like myself all recognize this role. When the Israeli foreign ministry went on strike in 2013 and was not able to offer any support to Israelis abroad, Israel’s Foreign Ministry website [**put out an official notice**](http://shturem.net/index.php?section=news&id=64168) telling Israelis they can turn to the local Chabad.

Although not a Chabad follower myself, I and millions of other Jews look to Chabad with admiration mixed with envy. If just we can all have that same dedication and sincerity, kindness and hospitality...Yes, hopefully one day we will also make sure every Jew feels welcome at our Shabbat table, knows we have their back, and can turn to us in their time of need. Until then, Chabad puts us all to shame.

*Reprinted from the October 27, 2019 email of Arutz Sheva (IsraelNationalNews.com*

**Beware of Envy**

**By** [**Rabbi Moshe Meir Weiss**](https://www.jewishpress.com/author/rabbi-moshe-meir-weiss/)



Did you ever notice that the Ten Commandments only address one character trait? “Thou shall not be envious.” Isn’t that amazing?! The Ten Commandments contain nothing on anger, laziness, greed, or stinginess. They make no mention of the evils of arrogance or being self-centered. The only harmful feeling it warns us about is envy.

In truth, this fact should come as no surprise since, from the very start of the Torah, jealousy is repeatedly discussed. Rashi informs us that Hashem decided to make man in His image on earth since the earth would be jealous if only the heavens contained creatures (i.e., angels) in G-d’s image. Amazing! The very creation of mankind was an anti-jealousy move.

Elsewhere, Rashi informs us that Hashem created man from a synthesis of Divine breath and earth. He chose this composition to avoid jealousy. Rashi explains that creation alternated between heaven and earth.

On the first day Hashem created both. On the second day He created the firmament above. On the third day He cleared the dry land below. On the fourth day, He created the luminaries above. On the fifth day, He created the fish below. To give equal attention to both heaven and earth, therefore, G-d had to create a synthesis creature on the sixth day. Otherwise, there would be no symmetry in creation, which would result in jealousy.

Imagine! If man would have been created solely from the Divine, He would have been spared all base desires. But G-d gave him an earthy ingredient because He wanted to dodge the dangers of jealousy.

Rashi tells us that the sin of the Tree of Knowledge also stemmed from jealously (of Chava by the snake). The same is true of the murder of Hevel. Kayin was jealous of his brother whose sacrifice was favored by Hashem.

The Torah is known as “Toras Chaim” – an instruction for living. It contains advice on all aspects of life. As we are taught in *Pirkei Avos*, “*Hafoch ba, hafoch ba, de’kula ba* – Turn it around, turn it around, as everything is contained in it.” Since Hashem’s syllabus for life begins with so many warnings about jealousy, it’s obvious that Hashem, our manufacturer, is informing us that coveting is one of the ugliest pitfalls.

The Orchos Chaim L’HaRosh states that jealousy is a vicious sickness *that has no cure*. Evidently, the Rosh is advising us to make sure we don’t get in to the habit of looking enviously at others because, once we fall into this habit, it is very difficult to creep out of.

In *Pirkei Avos* we are taught “*Eizehu ashir*? *Ha’same’ach b’chelko* – Who is happy? He who is happy with his own lot.” Wealth and happiness is found in a person who derives satisfaction from his own blessings. It is a great lesson in life: Dwell on the many riches we have and not on what we think we are missing. While it is easy to believe your neighbors have it better, remember that we say a blessing every day with the words “*she’asa li kol tzarki* – Hashem makes for me all my needs.” What I see elsewhere might look tempting, but Hashem gives me what I really need to fulfill my purpose.

Obviously, since Hashem warns us about jealousy in the Ten Commandments and at least four times in the beginning of the Torah, a true Ben Torah and Bas Yisroel has to work to eradicate it from his or her personality. Thoughts like “I wish my wife would be like that,” “If only I could have such children,” “Wouldn’t it be swell to have such a home or vacation?” and “Why can’t my husband have such a job?” are all prohibited by the Tenth Commandment.

May it be the will of Hashem that, in the *zechus* of learning Hashem’s Torah, He empower us to be happy with what we have and not gaze enviously at the success of others, and in that merit may He bless us all with good health, long life, and everything wonderful.

*Reprinted from the October 27, 2019 website of The Jewish Press.*

**Mastering Lashon Hakodesh**

**By Rabbi Yosef Farhi**



R Noach Wienberg, zt”l, established Aish Hatorah because he could not bear seeing a spiritual holocaust in America. R Yonason Rosenblum wrote, regarding R Noach’s passion, there is a spiritual Holocaust facing the Jewish people today no less devastating in its implications for the Am Hashem than the physical extermination of six million Jews in the Holocaust. Those six million constituted approximately one-third of the Jewish nation. At least two-thirds of Jews today have little connection to the Jewish people, certainly not enough to prevent them from intermarrying.

For Reb Noach, the “spiritual Holocaust” was no metaphor; it was the driving force in his life. And he sought to make it the driving force in the life of every Jew with whom he comes into contact.

At times, I wonder if it is correct to say if there is an educational holocaust going on in the world today. So many people who come out of the ultra-Orthodox systems do not know basics. If in post high school, a public school student who comes out from a Kiruv Yeshiva of just two years of learning Kodesh, like Ohr Sameach or Aish Hatorah, can out smart in learning the post high school boys that grew out of the ultra -Orthodox systems, where parents paid 20k a year for tuition, something is very wrong.

A little while back, I wrote in my parasha papers, that have a readership of 20k+ readers, that seven out of 10, 18 year old + yeshiva boys from America, England, Europe, that I ask them to say the Aleph Bet, from beginning to end, cannot. Just last week, a boy in R’ Barry Klien’s yeshiva pulled me over as I was distributing some parasha sheets.

“Are you the one who writes these parasha sheets? Are you Rabbi Farhi? I did not believe what you wrote, how few American Yeshiva bachurim know the Aleph Bet by heart. I was sitting in an apartment of 10 bochurim from various yeshivas, so I started to test them one by one. YOU WERE RIGHT!! Seven out of 10 could not finish the Aleph Bet!!!

This problem is universal. Every country. Every level of Ultra-Orthodoxy. Sons of the biggest rabbis, just don’t know basics. How could it be that a yeshiva bachur who is 18 years old doesn’t know what the words Yirat Shamayim mean? How could it be that an 11-year-old ultra-Orthodox boy does not know what the words Bassar Vechalav mean?

(When the mother of the boy that I was learning on skype heard this in the background, that her son does not know what Bassar means, she started pulling out her hair!) How could it be that most kids when I ask what the words Kivud Av Vaem mean, don’t know? ( If the mother would have heard that her son does not know what Em means, she would have also pulled out her son’s hair!)

One Israeli parent who lives in Brooklyn that comes to Deal, NJ each summer with his family told me that he is happy with the school his children are in. They learn Hebrew well there. I called over the 9-year-old boy and he did not know what the word Amar means. I called over the 11-year-old daughter and she did not know what the word Achal means. The father almost fainted.

What is the excuse for this? How could it even be?

Without knowing Hebrew, we cannot talk to G-d through prayer. Without Hebrew, G-d can’t talk to us through his Torah. Without Hebrew, learning is full of fatigue, frustration and failure.

People tell me to calm down. Not to be so aggressive… Maybe if I would cry like R’ Noach Weinberg cried over the intermarriage stats, maybe people will understand me.

Hebrew is not hard to master. There are only 250 words in the whole Lashon Hakodesh. There are only a certain amount of Dikduk laws that one needs to master that can make each and every one of the 250 turn into thousands and thousands of words. The problem is, that Dikduk is something that is really annoying to learn.

This is why the systems teach it when the kids are too young to be smart to complain that is annoying to learn the second language then. But the kids are too young then to get it, to see its importance. So they fail in their Hebrew, and fail again, until they feel that regarding the whole Hebrew reading, they are just one big failure.

But Dikduk for most kids, can be taught through one-on-one. This is what I believe in. Over the last 15 years, the new generation has gotten used to learning from devices. Through one-on-one. Movies, computer games, video clips, social media… These are all information devices that goes in one-on-one. Not in a classroom setting of 25 students on one teacher. With the right books, the right amount of patience, the right tutors, and with the help of G-d, the child can start to pick up the language for life

*Reprinted from the Parashat Beresheet 5780 email of Shabbat Shalom from* *Cyberspace edited by David Bibi.*

**Red Sox Hires Orthodox Jew As New Chief Baseball Officer**

**By** [**JNS News Service**](https://www.jewishpress.com/author/jns/)

[](https://www.jewishpress.com/wp-content/uploads/New-Red-Sox-chief-baseball-officer-Chaim-Bloom-Screenshot.jpg)

**New Red Sox chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom (Photo Credit: Screenshot (JNS)**

The Boston Red Sox on Monday officially announced the hiring of the Tampa Bay Rays’ senior vice president Chaim Bloom as its new chief baseball officer.

Bloom, 36, will be “responsible for all baseball operations matters” for the team. He previously spent 15 years with the Rays.

Bloom grew up in Philadelphia and went to Jewish day school before studying Latin classics at Yale University, where he graduated in 2004.

He is an observant Jew and as such will not work on certain Jewish holidays and Shabbat, despite the demanding schedule as a baseball executive. In 2011, he missed the Rays’ final game against the New York Yankees, which would determine whether the Rays would make the playoffs, because of Rosh Hashanah.

“Leaving town that morning to go to Boston to spend Rosh Hashanah with my in-laws was one of the more difficult things we’d done in my career,” he recalled in an interview with [Tablet](https://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-life-and-religion/282617/chaim-bloom-tampa-bay-rays) magazine.

Bloom, his wife Aliza, and their two sons, Isaiah and Judah, lived near Tropicana Field in St. Petersburg, Fla., in part so he could easily return on Friday nights to celebrate Shabbat with his family before returning to the stadium to watch the Rays play at home games.

During his time with the Rays, Bloom also had a large jar of gefilte fish on his desk, part of an ongoing bet with an employee.

“The idea that your Judaism is an impediment to your career is something that I have not experienced at all, to my knowledge,” he said, “even as I’m aware that there’s plenty of anti-Semitism in the U.S. at large. I’m fortunate. I don’t think my parents felt that growing up; I think they felt it was a strike against them.”

*Reprinted from last week’s The Jewish Press.*

**A Thought that**

**Counts for the Parsha**

*And Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin* (Gen. 17:24)

If, as our Sages tell us, our forefathers observed all the mitzvot even before the Torah was given at Sinai, why did Abraham wait until G-d explicitly commanded him to circumcise himself?

"Your blood, on which your lives depend, will I require," the Torah states, prohibiting the infliction of bodily harm on oneself.

Abraham needed to be told directly by G-d that the mitzva of circumcision supersedes the prohibition against drawing blood before he would take such a drastic step. *(Likrat Shabbat)*

*Reprinted from the Issue #339 of L’Chaim Weekly (Parashat Lech Lecha 5755/1994)*

**Rav Avigdor Miller on**

**Asking for a Life of Glory**



**QUESTION:** On *Shabbos Mevorchim* we ask Hashem for a חיים של עושר וכבוד, a life of wealth and glory. But didn’t we learn that glory is something that is inappropriate to run after in this world?

**ANSWER:** Good question. Why do we ask for a life of *osher v’chovod,* a life of wealth and glory? The answer is this: We are not looking for glory – but we hope Hashem will help us behave in such a way that we deserve glory.

If people will honor us because of our good character, we don’t mind. We want to succeed in behaving in such a way that we deserve *kovod*, yes. I would like people to say, “Miller – he's a nice fellow!” I would like that, yes. Because that means that most likely I did something that would please people.

So you should do things in such a way that people should approve of you — but you’re not living for *kovod*. And so, in that *tefilah* we ask Hashem, “Please, give us a life of *kovod;*please help us this month so that we should behave in a dignified manner; decently and *Torah’dik*, and then we deserve to get *kovod* from people.” Oh, if we succeed in doing that this upcoming month, then we’ll be very happy because that means that we’ve had a successful month.

*Reprinted from the October 25, 2019 email of Toras Avigdor adapted from Tape #E-244.*

**G-d’s Gift of Creating a Unique**

**Bond with the Jewish People**

**From the Talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

**Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, Zt”l**



Although our Sages tell us that Abraham our Forefather had already "recognized his Creator" by the age of three, no mention of Abraham's early life is actually made in the Torah (aside from an account of his genealogy).

In fact, this entire time period, during which Abraham devoted himself to spreading the belief in One G-d among mankind, to the point of being thrown into a fiery furnace for his convictions, is omitted.

The Torah begins its narration of Abraham's extraordinary life in this week's portion, Lech Lecha, with the words, "And the L-rd said to Abram: Go out of your land, out of your birthplace and from your father's house" -- a commandment Abraham received when he was already 75 years old!

Every word and letter in the Torah is exact, revealing countless lessons for us to apply in our daily lives. The Torah's omission of Abraham's early years is therefore significant, and contains a valuable teaching about the essence of the Jew.

Up until the age of 75, Abraham was like any other human being.

Blessed with a gifted mind, he was able to reach the intellectual understanding that G-d existed. Yet it was only at the age of 75 that Abraham's life as a Jew, and as the progenitor of the Jewish people, truly began.

For no matter how strong a person's belief in G-d may be, when one's connection to Him is predicated on human understanding, it is necessarily finite and limited.

Even Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his life was rooted in intellectual conviction.

G-d's command to Abraham to leave the country of his birth began a whole new chapter in his and the Jewish people's relationship with G-d, one which transcends human understanding.

The Jew's connection to G-d is eternal, based not on our limited intellectual faculties but on the fact that the Jewish soul is "a veritable part of G-d Himself."

A son is connected to his father not because he appreciates his qualities, but because he is a part of him.

Similarly, our connection to G-d is so deep and profound that it cannot be attained simply by our own efforts. Only G-d Himself could have created a bond of this magnitude by choosing us to serve Him.

When G-d told Abraham, "Go out of your land, out of your birthplace and from your father's house," He was commanding him to embark on a whole new level of service.

Abraham would no longer be just a human being -- he and his children would henceforth be Jews, connected to G-d on the very deepest level possible.

The words "Go out of your land" marked the beginning of this supernatural connection between G-d and the Jewish people, a connection that transcends the limitations of nature.

It therefore follows that even those Jews who, for whatever reason, have had little connection to a Torah way of life need not wait until acquiring a deep intellectual understanding of Judaism to begin observing mitzvot.

On the contrary, as the Jew is already firmly connected to G-d, fulfilling His will, will serve to enhance the Jew's intellectual understanding of Torah and strengthen his eternal bond with the Creator.

*Reprinted from the Issue #339 of L’Chaim Weekly (Parashat Lech Lecha 5755/1994)*

**Rabbi Berel Wein**

**On Lech Lecha**

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It is interesting to note that the Torah in its opening chapters deals with the lives of individuals with a seemingly very narrow focus. It portrays general society for us and tells us of the events that led up to the cataclysmic flood that destroys most of humanity, but even then, the Torah focuses on the lives of an individual, Noah and his family.

This pattern continues in this week's reading as well with the story of human civilization condensed and seen through the prism of the life of an individual Abraham, his wife Sarah and their challenges and travails.

Unlike most history books which always take the general perspective and the overview of things, the Torah emphasizes to us that history and great events spring forth from the actions of individuals and even though Heaven preordains events and trends, they only occur when individuals actually by their choice, implement them and make them real. The prophet Isaiah described Abraham as “one” – unique, alone, individualistic… important and influential.

We often think that an individual really doesn't make much of a difference in the world of billions of human beings. However, all of history teaches us that individuals are the ones that shape all events, both good and better in the story of humankind. For every individual contains within him and her seeds of potential and of future generations, of events not yet visible or foretold.

The greatness of Abraham is revealed to us in the Torah through the fact that he was a person of strong and abiding faith. We are taught that his faith in G-d never wavered and that the L-rd reckoned that trait of faith as being the righteousness that transformed him into being the father of all nations.

However, faith in G-d carries with it the corollary of faith in one's self and one’s purpose in life. There is a great difference between the poison of arrogance and hubris and the blessing of self-confidence and self-worth.

Abraham describes himself as being nothing more than dust and ashes. Yet, as a sole individual standing against kings, armies, societies and the accepted mores of the time, he is confident in the success of his mission, in calling out for the humankind to hear, over the millennia, the name and sovereignty of the L-rd.

It is the sense of mission within us that drives our creativity and accomplishments in all spheres of our existence. The journey of the Jewish people through the ages of history and the countries of this planet are the journeys of our father Abraham and our mother Sarah during their lifetimes. Both sets of journeys are driven by this overriding sense of mission, of the importance and worth of every individual who shares that sense of purposeful existence.

*Reprinted from this week’s website of Rabbiwein.co*

**Another Thought**

**For the Parsha**

*I will not take from a thread even to a shoelace* (Gen. 14:23)

Rabba explained: In the merit of Abraham's refusal to accept these two things from the king of Sodom, the Jewish people merited an additional two mitzvot: the thread of blue (the mitzva of tzitzit--ritual fringes), and the strap of tefillin. *(Talmud, Sotah)*

*Reprinted from the Issue #339 of L’Chaim Weekly (Parashat Lech Lecha 5755/1994)*

**We Are Always**

**G-d’s Children**

**By Rabbi Eli J. Mansour**



The Torah in Parashat Lech-Lecha tells the story of Abraham Abinu’s sojourn in Egypt, where he was forced to relocate due to a famine which struck the land of Canaan. While he and Sara were in Egypt, Sara was abducted by Pharaoh. That night, we read, G-d punished Pharaoh and his household with various afflictions, compelling Pharaoh to return Sara and then send Abraham out of Egypt with great wealth.

The Ramban (Rabbi Moshe Nahmanides, Spain, 1194-1270), in a famous passage, notes how this episode served the purpose of “Ma’aseh Abot Siman La’banim” – establishing events that Abraham’s descendants would experience.

Abraham’s descendants, too, would go to Egypt to escape a famine in Eretz Yisrael, and they would be mistreated and tormented by the Egyptians. G-d would then afflict the Egyptians and force them to send Beneh Yisrael away with great wealth.

After making this point, the Ramban proceeds to make a very surprising comment, writing (based on the Zohar) that Abraham sinned by moving to Egypt. Rather than remaining in Canaan and trusting that Hashem that would sustain him during the years of harsh drought, Abraham left the land promised to him by Hashem and went to Egypt, placing himself and his wife at risk.

There is much to be said about this comment of the Ramban, but the question we ask here is why the Ramban makes this point in the context of his discussion of “Ma’aseh Abot Siman La’banim.” The Ramban in this passage speaks of how Abraham’s experiences in Egypt foreshadow the experiences of his descendants. How is the fact that Abraham sinned by going to Egypt relevant to this discussion?

The answer is that this, too, is part of the “Ma’aseh Abot Siman La’banim.” Despite the fact that Abraham acted incorrectly by going to Egypt, nevertheless, G-d harshly punished Pharaoh for abducting Sara and saw to it that Abraham would leave Egypt with wealth.

Similarly, even though Beneh Yisrael were not necessarily deserving of the miracles of the Exodus, G-d struck the Egyptians with ten plagues for enslaving Beneh Yisrael, and brought them out of Egypt as they carried all the country’s treasures.

The model established by Abraham was not merely that of slavery and redemption, but also that of G-d’s unconditional love for His people.  Even when we are unworthy, He still cares for us and is prepared to help and protect us.

This is something which is vitally important for all of us to know and be mindful of. Parents do not abandon their children, even when their children misbehave. We are all Hashem’s children, and He never abandons us. Even when we make mistakes, He is still there helping us, and He is always waiting for us to improve and return to Him.

A person should never feel that G-d no longer cares about him and is not interested in having a relationship with him. A parent might become upset with a child and punish him, but he still loves him and will continue caring for him and helping him. And this is precisely Hashem’s relationship to us. Even if we’ve slipped and made mistakes, He is still here with us and will always be here with us.

*Reprinted from this week’s website of the Edmond J Safra Synagogue of Brooklyn website.*

**The Shmuz onParshas Lech Lecha**

**Gedolim Were Human**

**By Rabbi Bentzion Shafier**

**Founder of TheShmuz.com**



*And HASHEM said to Avram, “Go for yourself from your land, from your birth place, and from your father’s house to the land that I will show you.”* – Bereishis 12:1

**The Making of a Gadol**

With these words begins one of the ten great tests of Avrohom. The Ramban explains that these were trials by fire, designed to bring the Avrohom’s greatness to the surface, taking it from the potential to the actual. They helped form him into the singular *tzaddik* that he became.

Rashi notes that in this test, HASHEM is very expressive about the place where Avram is leaving from, but fails to mention where he is to go to. “Leave your land, your birthplace, your father’s house, and go. . .”

Rashi explains that this was all part of the test, and added to the reward he would receive when he passed. Each description of where he was leaving from increased his longing and attachment to it, making it more difficult. Not telling him where he was going to made it even more difficult because now he had to blindly listen to HASHEM.

Rashi continues that this is similar to the *akeidah* when HASHEM challenged Avrohom: “Take your son, your only son, the son that you love.” Each phrase further increased the test because it highlighted and stirred up the love Avrohom felt for his son. So too here: “your birth place, your homeland…”

When we focus on who Avrohom was, this Rashi is difficult to understand. The Avos were spiritual giants, men whose feet may have been on the ground, but who lived up in the heavens. What difference did it make to Avram where he was leaving from? He didn’t really exist there; he lived in a world of spirituality, barely cognizant of his physical surroundings. And what makes this question even more pointed is that it is hard to imagine that Avram was particularly attached to either his birthland or his father’s house.

**The Home of Terach**

There is a well-known Medrash that at a tender young age, Avram recognized the folly of idol worship. He set out to teach the people of his town the error of their ways, but they were less than accepting of his teachings. His father Terach in particular was dead set against them, as he owned a store that sold idols. One day, his father asked him to watch the idols, and when he came back, he found that all the idols were smashed. He turned to Avram and asked, “What happened?”

Avram answered, “Someone brought in food for the idols. One of the smaller ones took it, the bigger idol got jealous, and they had a fight – punching, kicking, and smashing. This is what is left.”

Terach was not impressed with the cleverness of his son. In fact, he was so unimpressed that he took him to Nimrod the king, who pronounced him an enemy of the state and attempted to execute him. That resulted in another of the tests of Avram: the fire of Ur Kasdim.

This being the case, it is hard to imagine that Avram felt any great attachment and connection to his homeland and his father’s house. So what does Rashi mean that each expression made it harder for him to leave?

The answer to this question can best be understood with a perspective.

***Gedolim Stories***

Despite this being a very long and difficult exile, we have we have succeeded in creating our own Torah culture. We have our own manner of dress and speech; we have our own goals and priorities. We even have our own newspapers, music, and books. We now even enjoy a vast body of Torah literature. Whether stories of our *Gedolim* or fictional novels that convey Torah values, it is a great accomplishment and necessary to remaining an exalted nation.

However, there is a small fly in the ointment. It seems that the *Gedolim* written about in the popular books today are presented as *molochim* – as if they never failed, never suffered any setbacks, and never went through *nisayonos*. The average *Gadol* started learning *Mishnayos* at age two, mastered *Shas Bavli* at age 10, polished off *Yerushalmi* for his *bar mitzvah*, and then spent the rest of his life reviewing! Never fell. Never questioned himself. Never felt lost or confused. He just knew from a tender young age that he was destined to greatness and followed that path unerringly throughout a lifetime of growth and accomplishment.

The reality is quite different. Every *Gadol* has suffered. Every great person goes through tests and tribulations. Each of the *Avos* and *Imahos* had periods of darkness and difficulties, and on some level, they all failed. The true distinction between those people who became world class *Gedolim* and those who didn’t is how much they were willing to pay the price, how committed they were to serving HASHEM, how many times they were willing to get knocked down and get back up again.

If you find a *Gadol* story that doesn’t include dark times, you are reading pure fiction. In the world that HASHEM created, fighting fights is integral to growth, and fighting means that sometimes you win, and sometimes you lose. The *Mesillos Yesharim* explains that man was put on the planet to learn, to serve HASHEM, and fight the fights of life. There is no fighter in existence who hasn’t gotten knocked down. No fighter ever entered the ring without being ready to get hit. That is just part of life.

It seems that in an attempt to portray *Gedolim* as great, we have made them non-human – angels just barely wearing human form. While this may stem from a noble motivation, it is false, and it brings with it a real danger. If a *Gadol* is barely human, I can’t learn from him. After all, I am *very* human. I have ups and downs, moments of great inspiration, and times of doubt and questions. I fall down and need to pick myself back up. If *Gadolim* were such perfect angels, what connection do they have to me? How can I learn from them?

This seems to be the answer to the question on Rashi. Avram was a human being. Granted he was on a remarkable level of spirituality, but he was still a human with real feelings, real attachments, and real emotions. For him to leave his birthplace and his homeland was difficult. He grew up there. He had memories and connections there from most of his life. It was home.

Was there a question in his mind about listening to HASHEM? Certainly not. But each expression was an added dimension to the test because it made it somewhat more difficult, thereby increasing his reward.

Understanding that the Avos were genuine people with real feelings, goals, and aspirations allows us to understand that while they may have functioned on a different level than we do, they were people much like us. They suffered setbacks and had difficult moments, yet they became who they were because of their powerful commitments.

This allows us to use them as guideposts for our own growth, allows us to look up to them for inspiration and motivation, recognizing that their lives were much like our own. We then see them as shining stars by which we can set our own path in life.

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