

Yad Avraham Institute
WEEKLY TORAH COMMENTARY SERIES

Parshas Lech Lecha

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Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

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About the Yad Avraham Institute

The Yad Avraham is a Torah learning institute located in midtown Manhattan. Classes are offered every day during the week starting at 5:50am and throughout the day. Classes in Chumash, Halacha, Hashkofa, Gemara, and general topics are well attended by businessmen, professionals, and students. The Yad Avraham invites you to participate in our extensive offerings of classes and events.

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Parshas Lech Lecha

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Dean

1. Avraham – the True Servant of G'd

The Midrash states regarding Avraham our Patriarch, “One who is meticulous regarding mitzvos, his reward is limitless.” One would think that the Midrash is referring to the meticulous observance of mitzvos; however, it is actually referring to something beyond this. The Midrash continues, “We find that Avraham was meticulous regarding mitzvos. Because of this, he is identified as ‘the beloved of G’d.’ As it states in Yeshaya, ‘They are the progeny of Avraham, my beloved...’ Even the rabbinic law of *eruv tavshilin* was observed in the household of Avraham. As it states, ‘He observed My Commandments, My Dictates, and My Toros...’ Are there many Torahs? We know that there is only one Torah as it states, ‘There is one Torah that shall be yours...’ Why then is the Torah referred to in the plural? It is to communicate that Avraham had observed the Torah and the meticulousness of the Torah.”

Avraham not only observed the mitzvos of the Torah, he established fences to safeguard it. Whenever the Torah is referred to in the plural (Toros), Rashi cites Chazal who explain that it connotes the Written and the Oral Torah. In fact, both are essentially one. The Oral Torah is G’d’s elucidation of what He had stated in the Written Torah. Avraham observed the meticulousness of the Torah as well as the Torah itself. Because fences are essential and crucial for the proper observance of the Torah, the meticulousness (fences) and the Torah itself are actually one. One who loves G’d expresses his love by establishing safeguards to protect the Torah. If one compromises on his personal conveniences for the sake of safeguarding the Torah, it is an indication that he has special love for G’d. Since Avraham lived his life in this manner, he was considered ‘the beloved of G’d.’

If one demonstrates his love for G’d through establishing fences so that he should not violate His Torah, G’d will respond in kind – measure for measure. Chazal tell us that one who recites the Shema slowly and meticulously, the fires of *gehenom* will be cooled for him,

– measure for measure. The Commentators explain that man is naturally a driven being. This is fueled by the life source that is contained within every human being. When one takes control over his natural/reflexive behavior patterns and restrains himself, it is the equivalent of the heat source/ life source being cooled down. If one does not rush through the Shema and articulates every word with proper reverence, this behavior is going against his natural drive. Therefore, if one recites the Shema slowly and meticulously, he will merit having the fires of *gehenom* cooled for him.

One, who is meticulous and deliberate regarding the performance of mitzvos, will go to any length to ensure that the mitzvah is fulfilled in the most perfect manner. There is an ongoing consciousness to address his spiritual responsibility in the most perfect manner – and not for the sake of dispensing an obligation. The Gemara in Tractate Chagiga cites a verse that identifies two individuals: “the one who serves (G’d)” and “the one who does not serve (G’d).” The Gemara explains, “The one who is the servant of G’d is the one who reviews his Torah studies 101 times and the one who does not serve Him is he who reviews his Torah studies only 100 times. One cannot compare a person who has reviewed his Torah studies 100 times to one who has reviewed his Torah studies 101 times.” One would think that a single additional review should not make such a profound difference.

Rabbi Y.Y. Ruderman z’tl (Baltimore Rosh HaYeshiva) explained that man is a goal-oriented creature. Once he attains his goal, he plateaus regarding his initiative/interest for advancement. When one reviews something 100 times, and achieves his goal, he feels accomplished. Therefore, he is not motivated to go beyond that point. However, one who reviews that same subject matter an additional time (101 times), it is an indication that it was not to achieve a goal, but rather it was because of his love for G’d. Therefore, the one who reviews his Torah studies that additional time, is classified as “the one who serves Him.” Similarly, if one’s performance of mitzvos goes beyond the ordinary (the one who fulfills mitzvos as an obligation), then he demonstrates, through

his meticulousness of observance, his love for G'd. It was because of Avraham's concern that the mitzvos should be fulfilled at all cost, despite the inconvenience and difficulty, that he was considered "His Beloved."

2. The Determining Factor of Success

The Midrash states regarding Avraham, "On the day that Nimrod had decreed that Avraham should be thrown into the fiery kiln, a Divine evaluation of Avraham was made. If Avraham is like a wall, then I (G'd) will build upon it an elaborate edifice of silver. A wall stands unmovable even after being battered by war. If Avraham is willing to give his life in order to sanctify My Name, then I will build upon him the edifice of silver. What is the edifice of silver? It is the Jewish people. If he is steadfast like a wall, then he will be worthy of having the Jewish people descend from him. However, if Avraham is like a door, then he is weak and will not have the resolve to give his life for My Name. I will then place upon him a plank of cedar wood. Just as something that is painted upon a plank of wood can be blotted out/has no everlasting value, so too will Avraham have no permanence. Avraham said to G'd, "I am like the wall. I am willing to give my life for the sake of Your Name- not only me but also my children and the children of my children will give their lives for You - Chananya, Meshael, and Azaria, the generation of Reb Chananya Ben Tradyon and his associates (Ten Martyrs). Because of this, Avraham will have peace come upon him and he will emerge from the fiery kiln unharmed." Deciding to give one's life for the sake of G'd is based on one's own personal choice. What impact does Avraham's willingness to give his life for the sake of G'd have on the decisions of his descendants?

Reb Chaim of Volozhin z'tl writes in his work *Ruach Chaim* (commentary on Pirkei Avos) that the reason every Jew throughout history has the ability to give his life for the sake of G'd is because Avraham had inculcated into his own spirituality a level of clarity to be able to sacrifice himself for the sake of G'd. The Jewish people, being Avraham's spiritual and physical heirs, are thus endowed with that same capacity. Avraham's selfless willingness to die for the sake of G'd/Kiddush Hashem has impacted upon the Jewish people until the end of time.

Avraham's selfless commitment to G'd was unique and pure. It was only because of his level of purity that he was sure that his descendent would also possess the ability to give their lives.

The Midrash tells us that the tenth test faced by Avraham was the binding of Yitzchak (the Akeidah). He was told by G'd to sacrifice his beloved son Yitzchak. Avraham, our Patriarch, lived only for the sake of G'd's Glory. If he were to sacrifice Yitzchak, as G'd had commanded, Avraham understood with absolute clarity that there would be no Jewish people and thus no Sinai event, which would cause the world to revert to a state of pre-existence. Regardless of the far-reaching consequences of his action, Avraham did not hesitate to fulfill the order of G'd.

When he was thrown into the fiery kiln by Nimrod, for not bowing to the idol, he did not have any progeny nor was he assured that he would be the father of the Jewish people. However, at the time of the Akeidah, Avraham was already assured by G'd that Yitzchak, his son, would be the future Patriarch of the Jewish people. Thus, Avraham's unquestioning willingness to sacrifice his son was an even more profound demonstration of his selfless dedication to G'd. If G'd Willed to destroy the future of existence by sacrificing Yitzchak (the future Patriarch), then Avraham would do so. Avraham's life was dedicated to fulfill the Will of G'd – whether it was to live or die. Kiddush Hashem (the Sanctification of G'd's Name) is demonstrated through one's actions, which indicate that G'd's Will is Supreme.

Since Avraham had this understanding of purpose, he was willing to give his own life and that of his son. The existence of the Jewish people and the Sinai event only have value if G'd wants them to exist. If it is G'd's Will that neither should exist, then so be it.

The Gemara in Tractate Pesachim states, "Just as I have received reward for my elucidation of the Torah I will receive reward for its retraction." The Gemara tells us that Shimon Ha'Amsuni, a colleague of Rebbe Akiva, had dedicated his life to elucidating the meaning of every mention of the word "es" in the Torah. (The word "es" has no translation other than being an adjunct to what it predicates). When he attempted to interpret the "es" in the verse, "*Es Hashem Elokecha Teera* – You shall fear Hashem your G'd" it seemed that the word "es" in the verse was coming to equate another being with G'd within the context of fear. Shimon Ha'Amsuni believed that this is something that cannot be true. Thus, without hesitation he retracted his entire life's work of interpretation. He was able to dismiss his life's accomplishment without difficulty only because his initial objective of interpretation was to do the Will of G'd. Thus, he will receive reward for his retraction no less than his initial interpretation because it adheres to the Will of G'd.

When one takes the initiative to engage in a particular spiritual endeavor to do the Will of G'd, even if he should not succeed, he should not be discouraged because in fact he did succeed because that itself was the Will of G'd.

3. Entitlement – The Impediment to Clarity

The Torah states, “**Now Sarai (Sarah), Avram’s (Avraham’s) wife, had borne him no children. She had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar. And Sarai said to Avram, ‘See, now, Hashem has restrained me from bearing; consort, now with my maidservant, perhaps I will build through her.’ And Avram heeded the voice of Sarai.**” Rashi explains, “**I will build through her...**” to mean, “In the merit of accepting a co-wife, G'd will perform a miracle on my behalf and I will be able to conceive.” Chazal explain that Avraham agreed to this because he knew that the basis for his wife’s decision was rooted in her prophetic vision. This is the meaning of the words “**And Avram heeded the voice of Sarai**” – he heeded her voice of prophecy. What was the basis of Sarah’s belief that if she accepted a co-wife into her household, she would merit a miracle and conceive?

The Gemara in Tractate Megillah tells us that Esther would not reveal her nationality/origin to Achashverosh. In order to obtain this information he sought the advice of Mordechai who told him “It is a known fact that a woman is jealous of the thigh of her fellow.” If Achashverosh were to bring another woman into his palace, Esther would feel threatened and thus divulge the information that he sought. This is the reason we find that Achashverosh, although he had already found his queen, had another gathering of virgins in order to select another woman.

Sarah, our Matriarch, asked Avraham to take her maidservant as his wife and consider her of equal status. Sarah understood that in the merit of this humiliation, she would be able to conceive. She believed that the reason she had not yet merited a miracle to conceive was that she had a spiritual shortcoming that needed to be overcome. Sarah understood that unless she would increase her level of humility, she would not be able to identify the nature of her spiritual failing. By bringing the co-wife into her home, she would become more humble and thus gain clarity.

When one possesses humility, one gains clarity. It is because one who is humble does not have a sense of entitlement. The humble person is beholden to G'd for

everything that he receives because he understands that it is not because of his own worthiness that he has been blessed. Rather, it is only out of the kindness of G'd that he has been given a gift. The humble person is continuously introspecting and evaluating his actions to assess how he could improve because he feels unworthy of G'd’s blessing. Contrastingly, one who is not humble will attribute his success to his own ability and worthiness—thus believing that whatever he has done for G'd is more than sufficient.

After G'd had informed Avraham that he would have a child, the Torah states, “**And Avraham believed in G'd and He considered it to be righteous.**” Ramban asks, “Why is Avraham’s believing in G'd’s promise considered an act of righteousness? Because Avraham was a prophet, it is understood that he had believed that his prophecy was absolutely true.” Ramban explains that Avraham, although he knew that he was the most spiritually accomplished person in existence, did not attribute his ability to have a son to his own worthiness. Rather, it was a gift of G'd. Ramban explains that Avraham’s “righteousness” was that he understood that the blessings he received from G'd were unrelated to his own worthiness/achievement. Avraham had no sense of entitlement whatsoever.

The Torah tells us that after Avraham came to Canaan, G'd appeared to him and said, “**To your offspring I will give this land.**” This statement conveyed to Avraham two points: firstly that he would have children (which he did not have at that time) and secondly that the land of Canaan would be his and his progeny. The Torah goes on to say that Avraham immediately built an altar to “**Hashem who appeared to him**” in order to memorialize this prophecy. Rashi explains that the altar was built as a testament of the good tidings that G'd had promised him, namely that he would have children and that the Land would be his.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains this verse differently. He explains that Avraham built the altar only to commemorate G'd’s appearance to him. At this time, Avraham was 75 years old, childless and had no community because he left his homeland at G'd’s instruction. Although G'd had communicated to Avraham during this prophetic vision that he would have children and the Land of Canaan, this was inconsequential to Avraham relative to experiencing G'd’s communication with him. Therefore, the verse concludes that he built the altar only to memorialize G'd’s appearance to him indicating that he was humble and had no sense of entitlement.

Sarah understood that her husband Avraham was uniquely humble. Thus, she concluded that the cause of their not being able to conceive was because of her own shortcoming. She needed to create a setting in which she could become more humble. The sole purpose of this was for her to be able identify her spiritual deficiency. Therefore, Sarah accepted a co-wife in order to bring this about.

4. G'd's Judgment is Fair and Equitable

The Midrash states, "Avraham, our Patriarch had questioned the Attribute of Justice (the system of reward and punishment). He had said (after defeating the four mightiest kings which could have only come about through miracles), 'Perhaps I received all the reward for my accomplishments in this world? G'd had assisted me to defeat the kings and He saved me from the fiery kiln. I may have already received my reward and will have nothing in the world to come. G'd responded, 'Because you questioned (and meddled in My realm), you must bring a burnt offering (olah). You must take your beloved son Yitzchak as a burnt offering....'" A burnt offering (olah) is brought in order to atone for a transgression of thought only when no action was taken. Since Avraham inappropriately concerned himself with G'd's system of reward and punishment he needed to bring a burnt offering to be atoned. His questioning of G'd precipitated the Akeidah (binding of Yitzchak).

The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos tells us that one is not permitted to jeopardize his life. Even if one would feel that he has sufficient merit to be protected and be worthy of a miracle, it is not worth his while because his merits will be depleted. Therefore one must act responsibly and not put his life at risk. We see from the Gemara that one should consider the ramifications of one's actions because of the depletion of his merits in the world to come. If this is a responsible position, then why is it a claim against Avraham our Patriarch?

Simply, the Gemara is addressing a situation in which the individual had not yet taken an action. The Gemara is advising one to live his life responsibly and not risk the forfeiture of his spiritual accomplishments. However regarding Avraham, he had already taken the action and achieved victory. He had already been thrown into the fiery kiln of Kasdim for not bowing to the idol and immersed unscathed. He had already defeated the four mighty kings. Therefore his concern regarding the depletion of his merits at this moment was an irrelevant concern. This was the basis for the need for Avraham to be

atoned. G'd will mete out reward and punishment as He sees fit.

The Torah tells us that when Moshe was told by G'd that he would not cross the Jordan to enter into the Land Israel, he beseeched G'd rescind the decree. The Gemara in Tractate Sotah tells us that G'd had said to Moshe, "Do you want to enter into the Land for the sake of receiving reward for the mitzvos that are dependent on the Land? I will give you all the reward for performing those mitzvos, although you will not cross the Jordan."

The Mishna in Pirkei Avos tells us that one should not serve the Master (G'd) for the sake of reward. The Mishna is referring to how even an ordinary person should serve G'd. Would one think that Moshe Rabbeinu's interest in entering into the land was for the sake of reward (as it is indicated from G'd's response to him)

The Commentators explain that G'd created the world out of kindness. As the verse states, "Olam chesed Yibaneh – the world was created due to (His) Kindness." Because G'd is the essence of Good, He chose to create an existence where man could be the beneficiary of the ultimate Good through his own deeds. The ultimate Good is having a relationship with G'd who is the essence of Good. Moshe did not want reward for his own sake. He understood that the purpose of existence was so that G'd should bestow His Goodness upon man when he adheres to His Will. Moshe, being the selfless servant of G'd, only wanted the objective of creation to be fulfilled. Therefore Moshe's supplication is not classified as one who serves the Master for the sake of reward. Rather, it is classified as one who wants reward for the sake of the Master.

When one adheres to the Will of G'd and performs mitzvos, one must understand that G'd will bring about whatever He sees fit. G'd will mete out reward and punishment based on His Divine Wisdom. One must not involve himself in His computation. Avraham's concern in this area was considered a failing and was thus in need of atonement. The atonement that was needed was the olah offering, which manifested itself as the Akeidah.

5. Taking the Initiative (From Noach)

Regarding the building of the Ark G'd said to Noach, "A **'tzohar'** shall you make for the Ark..." Rashi cites Chazal who offer two interpretations of the word **'tzohar.'** One interpretation is that the tzohar was a window. The second interpretation is that 'tzohar' was a special stone that emanated light to illuminate the Ark. The function of a window is to allow light to enter from

the outside. The Midrash infers from the text that during the time of the Great Flood the luminaries did not function. There was no light whatsoever over the face of the Earth. The world was engulfed in darkness, as it had been before the first day of creation. If this was so, then what was the value of the window?

One could say the purpose of the window was so that Noah would know when the Floodwaters had receded and dry land had returned. Thus, ending his confinement to the Ark. However, this cannot be so, because Noah was not permitted to leave the Ark until G'd gave him permission to do so. What then is the value and purpose of the window?

The Torah tells us that when Avraham was informed by G'd that Sidom would be destroyed, he prayed on their behalf that the decree should be annulled. When Moshe was told by G'd that the Jewish people were going to be destroyed after the Sin of the Golden Calf, he prayed on their behalf and beseeched G'd not to destroy them. Avraham and Moshe were permitted to intervene in G'd's plan and pray to annul the Divine Decree. This is because G'd had intimated to them that their intervention of prayer could and may make a difference. However, if there is no indication that G'd is allowing intervention, then one must remain silent because it is His Will.

Forty days after Noah had seen the mountain peaks, he sent out the raven to determine if the world was inhabitable; the raven returned – indicating that it was not. Noah then chose to send out the dove and it too returned, indicating that the land was not yet dry. Subsequently, the dove was sent out again and this time it returned with an olive leaf in its mouth – indicating that the world had returned to its original state. The third time Noah sent out the dove, it did not return. At that time, Noah realized that the world was fully inhabitable. If Noah was not permitted to leave the Ark without G'd's directive, what was the value of sending out the raven and the dove? Was Noah simply curious to know if the Floodwaters had receded and the world was ready for reentry?

Reb Elya Lopian z'tl who was the last living student of the Alter of Kelm had spent his latter years in Israel as the Mashgiach (Dean of Men) in a Yeshivah that was located in Kefar Chasidim. At that time, a Kefar in Israel would only have public transportation available a few times a day. One day during the summer months when the heat in Israel is oppressive, Reb Elya was waiting at the bottom of the hill for over one hour for a bus to arrive. At one point, he thought that he had heard the sound of the bus approaching and turned his head in that direction.

After this occurrence, he had said, "If I was still in Kelm and turned my head for the sake of curiosity, I would have been reprimanded." The conditioning of the students of Kelm was that one should always be in control of his inclinations and not allow himself to be subject to them. Giving in to one's curiosity is an indication of a lack of self-control. Regardless of one's satisfying his curiosity, the events will unfold as they are meant to.

The Torah identifies Noah as "perfect in his generations." Chazal explain that he was perfect in his characteristics/qualities. Noah was a dimension of person who only acted and responded when it had value. Why then did he send out the birds? He understood that if G'd had instructed him to build a window for the Ark, it was to serve a purpose. If the luminaries did not function during the year of the Great Flood, then the value of the window was unrelated to allowing light to filter into the Ark. Evidently, the window was for sending something out of the Ark. He understood from G'd's commandment to build a window into the Ark that his initiative would be able to bring an end to the era of the Great Flood.

The Gemara in Tractate Makos states, "Whatever path one chooses to walk in, he will be assisted (by G'd)." If one takes the initiative in a certain area, although initially that event may have not been meant to transpire, one's initiative is able to bring it about. This principle is applicable in a positive vein as well as in a negative vein. The placing of a window in the Ark clearly indicated to Noah that through his initiative he could expedite the process of bringing about the new existence.

Often in life, one may see that he is not progressing or succeeding regarding his financial situation. Chazal tell us that in this situation, one should "not push the hour." Meaning he should be patient and wait for an indication that the climate of opportunity is available. However, regarding one's spirituality one must always take the initiative in order to succeed. Based on the principle of "Whatever path one chooses to walk in..." if one takes the initiative regarding his spiritual advancement, G'd will definitely assist him to achieve levels that he had not even considered.

YAD AVRAHAM DAILY CLASS SCHEDULE

Energize your day...
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Monday Through Friday

5:50- 6:00 am	Chumash with Rashi
6:00- 6:15 am	Pirkei Avos
6:15- 6:30 am	Mishna Berurah
6:30- 7:25 am	Halacha
6:30 -6:45 am	Mussar
6:45 -7:25 am	Talmud—Tractate Avodah Zorah
7:25 - 8:20 am	Davening Followed by Breakfast
8:20 - 8:45 am	Mishna
9:00 -10:00 am	Daf Yomi

2:00pm Mincha

Special Weekday Classes

Monday

11:15 – 12:15pm **Talmud: Sanhedrin**
Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25th FL.)
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12:30 – 1:30pm **Talmud: Pesachim**
Location: Shandholt 488 Madison Avenue
Between E.51st and E.52st

Tuesday

12:15 - 1:15pm **Torah Insight Based on the Parsha**
Location: Yad Avraham

Wednesday

11:30 – 12:30 pm **Talmud: Sanhedrin**
Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25th FL.)
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1:00—2:00 pm Derech **Hashem**
Location: Yad Avraham

Thursday

10:30 –11:30am **Tehilim with Malbim**
Location: Yad Avraham

12:00 – 1:00 pm **Talmud: Sanhedrin**
Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25th FL.)
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