

Yad Avraham Institute
WEEKLY TORAH COMMENTARIES SERIES

*The Portion of
Lech Lecha*

] In Loving Memory of

Fievel Ben Leibel, o'h

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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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Lech Lecha

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

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1. The Driving Force Behind the Ten Tests of Avraham

The Midrash states regarding Avraham our Patriarch, "One who is meticulous regarding mitzvos, his reward is great." 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 *eiruv 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 its intricacies. G'd said, 'You are meticulous in My mitzvos and you should sit amidst pagans and idol worshipers? You should leave their midst and go to the Land that I shall show you...'"

The Prophet Yeshaya quantifies Avraham as "the beloved of G'd" because he was meticulous in the observance of mitzvos. Demonstrating his exceptional concern that G'd's Will should not be violated by establishing fences for himself was an expression of that love. One would think that Avraham's willingness to give his life for G'd as was demonstrated in Kasdim would be considered the reason he is considered to be "My beloved." Nimrod, the king of Kasdim, gave Avraham an ultimatum to either bow to the idol or be thrown into the fiery kiln and perish. Avraham chose to give his life for G'd and went into the fire. Seemingly there is nothing more precious than one's life – as we say in the Shema, "You shall love Hashem, your G'd, with all of your heart and all of your soul (giving of one's life)" demonstrating that one is even willing to give up what is most precious for the sake of G'd. Nevertheless, Avraham is quantified as "My beloved" because of his meticulous observance of the mitzvos and not for his heroic act of self-sacrifice at Kasdim.

Reb Meir Simcha of Dvinsk z'tl writes that within a certain context it is more difficult to live a continuous life of commitment to G'd, without failing, rather than giving one's life for Him. Although one's life is most precious, the decision to sacrifice oneself for G'd is only for a moment. There is nothing that endures beyond that point. However, living a life of dedication, not succumbing to one's desires and aspirations, and submitting to G'd is an ongoing difficult sacrifice – which is even more difficult. Therefore, the Prophet's quantification of Avraham as "My beloved" is within the context of the meticulous observance of mitzvos.

The Midrash concludes, "You are meticulous in My mitzvos and you should sit amidst pagans and idol worshipers? You should leave their midst and go to the Land that I shall show you..." The Mishna in Ethics of our Fathers tells us that Avraham endured ten tests. All of the Commentators are in agreement that "Lech Lecha – leave your land, your birthplace, and your father's household..." was one of the ten tests. G'd is saying, "Avraham, because you are so special in your observance of My mitzvos, therefore I shall test you." Seemingly, one would think that because Avraham was so exceptional that G'd would provide a setting for him that would not complicate his life. However, this is not so. Rather, it is only because an individual is so special that G'd provides him with opportunities that if he should succeed, he will ascend to another level. Because Avraham had demonstrated his unique love for G'd through his pursuit of mitzvos, G's wanted to expand his spiritual horizon by presenting with the test of "Lech Lecha."

2. The Depth of Avraham's Gratitude

The Torah tells us that when Lot had returned from Egypt together with Avraham, he possessed great wealth. There was a quarrel between his shepherds and those of Avraham. The shepherds of Lot were grazing their flocks in fields that were not theirs. They were in fact stealing from others. When Avraham became aware of the dispute between his shepherds and those of his nephew, the Torah states, "**So Avraham said to Lot, 'Please let there be no strife between me and you...for we are kinsman...Please separate from me: If you go**

left I will go right..." Although Lot's integrity was corrupt, Avraham pledged to come to his aid if he should be in need of him.

The Torah alludes that when Lot separated from his uncle Avraham, he rejected all that Avraham valued, including his beliefs. Lot had become a heretic. In addition, Lot chose to settle in a community that is quantified as the most wicked, as it states, "**Now the people of Sodom were wicked and sinful towards Hashem, exceedingly..**" Despite the fact that Lot has assumed a posture of evil, when Avraham was informed that he was taken captive by the Four Mighty Kings, he immediately went to battle with them in order to rescue his nephew. He needed to rely on many miracles in order to single-handedly defeat the mightiest kings in existence. After Avraham's victory over the Four Kings, G'd came to him and said, "**Do not be afraid, your reward is great...**" Avraham was concerned that all of his merits had been depleted because they were needed to bring about the miracles that were necessary to defeat the Four Kings. G'd reassured Avraham that not only were his merits not depleted, but his reward is great for vanquishing these evil kingdoms. Avraham had risked his entire life's spiritual accomplishments in order to save Lot, although he was a corrupted and evil person. Why was Avraham committed to the safety and welfare of his nephew Lot at all costs?

It is interesting to note that when Sarah, the wife of Avraham, had told him that Ishmael needed to be driven from their home because his behavior was inappropriate, Avraham was pained and anguished. G'd told Avraham, "All that Sarah tells you, you should heed her voice." Meaning, Avraham should listen to the prophetic words of his wife, Sarah. It had been confirmed by G'd that Ishmael had assumed certain characteristics that represent the beginnings of evil behavior. Avraham had sent away Ishmael, with his mother Hagar, with a small amount of provisions to survive in the desert. The Midrash states that the reason for this was, "Avraham hated his son Ishmael because of his despicable behavior." Why did Avraham not demonstrate concern for the welfare of his own son Ishmael, as he had for his nephew Lot? Lot had demonstrated a level of evil that went beyond anything that Avraham had seen in Ishmael.

Before Avraham had left Kasdim, Nimrod, the king, had given him an ultimatum to either bow to the idol or be thrown into the fiery kiln. Avraham chose to die rather than bow to the idol. He emerged miraculously unscathed. Haran, Avraham's brother, the father of Lot, was also given the same ultimatum to bow or be thrown

into the fire. He decided that if his brother Avraham emerged alive then he would not bow. Because Avraham had come out alive, Haran chose not to bow and thus was cast into the kiln. Haran perished in the fire. Although Haran's entering into the fire was with the intent to come out alive, as his brother Avraham had, nevertheless because he perished as a result of not bowing to the idol, his death is considered a sanctification of G'd's Name. He chose to give his life rather than bow to the idol. Avraham felt that he had a debt of gratitude to his brother for bringing about such a sanctification of G'd's Name. He thus took upon himself the responsibility to raise and protect his nephew Lot.

In addition, Avraham had a personal debt of gratitude to Lot himself. The Torah states, at the time of the destruction of Sodom, "**And G'd had remembered Avraham.**" The Midrash explains that G'd had remember that when Avraham was in Egypt with his wife and had presented her as his sister, Lot did not reveal her true identity. He remained silent. In the merit of that silence, he was extricated from the destruction of Sodom. Because of this exceptional accommodation, Avraham had a debt of gratitude to Lot himself. Avraham was committed to the safety of his nephew Lot, not as an expression of his own goodness, but purely as a debt that had to be paid – regardless of Lot's evil status. Avraham was a debtor to Lot and his father Haran. Even if he needed to put his spiritual accomplishments of his life at risk, he was not deterred from his responsibility. However, regarding his own son Ishmael, he was not indebted. Therefore, when it was confirmed to him that his son had assumed certain evil characteristics, he drove him from his home with a minimal amount of provisions.

3. The Fruits of Avraham's Success

The Mishna in Ethics of our Fathers states, "G'd tested Avraham with ten tests and he succeeded in all of them." What was the value of these tests? The purpose of one's life is to actualize one's spiritual potential. Although it is true that only G'd knows the end result of one's choices, nevertheless, one must make the proper decisions to actualize his potential. When one transgresses, one is held culpable because it was within his power to prevent that failing. Seemingly each one of the ten tests that were presented to Avraham were to actualize his potential, which was to ultimately become the founding father of the Jewish people. The dimension of his spiritual accomplishments were sufficient that all of his future generations were able to draw upon them.

The Jewish people would not be able to survive the intensity of the Attribute of Justice on Rosh Hashanah, the Day of Judgment if not for the merit of the Akeidah (binding of Yitzchak). G'd tested Avraham at the time of the Akeidah by telling him to bring his beloved son as a sacrifice, despite all that G'd had told him previously-promising him that Yitzchak would be the future Patriarch. Avraham selflessly followed the dictate of G'd. It is in this merit that the Attribute of Justice is suppressed on Rosh Hashanah, allowing the Jewish people to exist.

One is presented throughout life with many (spiritual) challenges only as an opportunity to allow him to develop his potential. Although this achievement affects one on a personal level (one becomes more advanced and complete) it will impact upon one's immediate family and future generations of the Jewish people.

The Midrash presents another understanding of the value of the ten tests that were presented to Avraham, our Patriarch. The Midrash states, "G'd, blessed is His Name, tested this righteous person (tzaddik) because He wanted his good deeds to become known to the world..." Although Avraham's tests could have been on a concealed level where the world would not have been aware of his accomplishments, G'd wanted there to be a greater result-to inform the world of his good deeds. What is the value of the world at large being aware of Avraham's accomplishments?

Ultimately, the Jewish people were taken by G'd at Sinai to be His nation. The Midrash tells us that at that time, the nations of the world complained to G'd that He chose to favor the Jewish people over all of them by giving them His Torah. They did not understand why they were not taken to be His chosen people. G'd said to them that they did not qualify to be His people because they could not establish their pedigree. Due to their promiscuousness behavior and involvement in forbidden sexual relationships, their progeny was rife with illegitimacy. They did not have the purity that was necessary to have a relationship with G'd. In contrast, the Jewish people could prove their pedigree because they had exercised control of their lives. They did not succumb to the lusts and desires of the world. Their ability to succeed and not be drawn towards forbidden sexual relationships was inherited from their forefather, Avraham. He had implanted within his own spirituality, a level of control, that is passed down throughout all of his generations.

Another way to understand the value of making the good deeds of Avraham known to the world is as

Ramban in the Book of Shemos (Portion of Bo) explains regarding the revealed miracles of Egypt. The world had fallen to such a level of paganism and spiritual void that the belief in G'd's existence was no longer an alternative. The context of choice can only exist when an alternative exists. Therefore, G'd performed revealed miracles to inform all humanity, that He is the Omnipotent Being, Who dictates all existence. This was to dispel and delegitimize paganism. Although with time the impact of the miracles will wane and fade, nevertheless the historical fact is on record- thus allowing the context of choice to exist. This is the reason that the Torah in many instances establishes Positive Commandments to commemorate or to remember the exodus from Egypt. It is by remembering the revealed miracles that the Jew will always be in a position to make a choice.

Similarly, the period of time in which Avraham was born into existence was a pagan era. He was the only person in existence who recognized G'd as the Omnipotent Being/Master through his own initiative and thus espoused monotheism. The world had regressed to such a degree that G'd was known only as "the G'd of Heaven." However, through Avraham's initiative and spiritual successes, G'd became known as "the G'd of the Earth." The nations of the world were thus given the opportunity to make the choice between the belief of Avraham/monotheism or Nimrod the king of Kasdim/paganism.

The Mishna in Ethic of our Fathers explains the value of the ten tests of Avraham in another vein. It states, "Avraham was tested by G'd...to teach us the degree of love that Avraham had for G'd." It was only because of Avraham's unique and special love for G'd that he was able to succeed in the ten tests that were presented to him. Thus, G'd established Avraham as the model through which every human being could actualize his potential. Avraham's spiritual success declared that if one has sufficient love for G'd, one is able to overcome all obstacles.

4. The Standard to Which Avraham was Held

The Torah states after Avraham had emerged victorious from the battle against the Four Mighty Kings, "**The Word of Hashem came to Avram in a vision, saying, 'Fear not, Avram, I am a shield for you; your reward is very great.'**" Rashi cites Chazal who explain that since Avraham was only able to defeat the Four Mighty Kings, through G'd's intervention, he was

concerned that he had had depleted his merits to bring about victory. G'd assured Avraham that he was not diminished as a result of the miracles, but to the contrary, his reward would be great for vanquishing evil. The Midrash states, "Avraham was questioning the Attribute of Justice...He had said to himself, 'Perhaps I have received all my reward in this world, because G'd had come to my assistance regarding the kings and at Kasdim, He rescued me from the kiln. I have thus received all of my reward in this world and will have nothing in the world to come.' G'd said to him, 'Since you questioned and reflected upon My actions, you need to bring a burnt offering.'"

A burnt offering is brought to G'd when one needs atonement for having an improper thought. Since Avraham had questioned G'd's actions in his heart, he needed to be atoned. It was considered inappropriate for someone of Avraham's spiritual caliber to be concerned about his future reward- G'd's Judgment. Therefore, the Midrash concludes, "G'd said to Avraham, 'You must bring your only beloved son as a sacrifice...'" The burnt offering that Avraham was to bring for atonement, was Yitzchak at the Akeidah. This was the most difficult of the ten tests that Avraham was presented with. Although G'd had promised Avraham that Yitzchak was to be the future Patriarch of the Jewish people, he was to be brought as a burnt offering. How is one able to reconcile both of G'd's statements? Yitzchak was to be the future of existence and simultaneously he was to be brought as a sacrifice.

It is not within the human capacity the seeming conflicting statements made by G'd. G'd, who is the essence of Truth does not renege on His Promises. Although G'd's dictate was something that Avraham could not reconcile, he negated himself and selflessly followed G'd's command without delay. He brought Yitzchak, his beloved son to the Akeidah. When Avraham acted without hesitation, he in effect corrected his original failing which was being concerned about how G'd would deal with his record – would he have a share in the world to come or not? Thus, the test of the Akeidah was an atonement for his original inappropriate concern. The ultimate in spiritual achievement is to perform the Will of G'd purely for His sake, negating one's own personal concerns and motives.

The Vilna Gaon z'tl would appoint an agent every year well in advance of the holiday of Succos to purchase a special esrog on his behalf. One year the esrog yield was not favorable and it was difficult to procure a beautiful esrog for him. The agent of the Vilna Gaon, after a long search, finally came upon a wealthy individual who was in possession an esrog that would meet the Vilna Gaon's

approval. The agent informed the owner that he was seeking to purchase an esrog on behalf of the Vilna Gaon and was willing to pay any price that he would request. The man responded that he was already a man of means and was therefore not interested in selling the esrog. The agent asked him, "What then would you want in exchange for your esrog?" The man responded, "I will only give you the esrog in exchange for the Vilna Gaon's share in the world to come." Reluctantly, the agent agreed and returned to Vilna with the esrog. When the Vilna Gaon asked him, "What was the cost of the esrog?" He hesitantly responded, "Your total share in the world to come." The Vilna Gaon joyfully replied, "Baruch Hashem (Thank G'd) I can for the first time in my life perform a mitzvah completely selflessly for its own sake, without any consideration of reward." The Vilna Gaon appreciated performing a mitzvah in the most perfect manner. He was not concerned that he had to forfeit all of his personal accomplishments for the sake of one mitzvah. It was performed purely for G'd's Glory.

Avraham appreciated his failing and therefore understood the significance of the Akeidah. He negated himself for G'd's Will. The Akeidah was the ultimate demonstration of doing a mitzvah on the most pure level.

5. Noah's Compensating for His Personal Failing (from Noah)

The Torah states immediately after Noah had emerged from the Ark, "**Then Noah built an altar to Hashem and took every clean animal (kosher species) and every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. Hashem smelled the pleasing aroma, and Hashem said in His heart, 'I will not continue to curse again the ground because of man, since the inclination of man's heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again continue to smite every living being, as I have done.'**"

After Noah had brought the offerings, G'd had taken an oath never again to destroy the world despite man's propensity for spiritual failure. G'd promised to maintain the world by allowing His Attribute of Mercy to exist at a special level. It is evident from the text that had Noah not brought the offerings, G'd would not have taken the oath "**Hashem smelled the pleasing aroma, and Hashem said in His heart, 'I will not continue to curse...'**" It was the special merit that was generated through the offerings that Noah had brought that allows existence to continue.

Since Noah was instructed by G'd to take into the Ark two of every non-kosher species and seven of every kosher species, it was evident to him that upon leaving the Ark, he would bring the kosher species as offerings. Although he was not told by G'd to bring the kosher species as offerings, he took the initiative to bring them. Even though Noah did not fully appreciate the far-reaching consequences of his actions, he nevertheless brought the offerings without delay because he understood that after such destruction and failing of humanity it needed to be done.

It is interesting to note that the concept of bringing an offering to G'd was first initiated by Adam. Cain and Abel had also brought offerings as their father had done. The original offerings that were brought were to express an appreciation to G'd for His Beneficence. When Noah chose to bring the kosher species as sacrifices to G'd, he introduced into existence a concept that did not previously exist. His sacrifices were primarily for the purpose of atonement for the past. An outgrowth of Noah's actions activated a level of Mercy that had never previously existed. Even if man should again fail as seriously as the generation of the Great Flood, the Attribute of Mercy would not allow the world to be destroyed.

Throughout the Torah we find that whenever sacrifices are mentioned, the only appellation of G'd that is associated with them is "Hashem (YKVK)," which connotes the Attribute of Mercy. The appellation of Elokeem, which connotes the Attribute of Justice is never associated with sacrifices. Although the reality of man is that he is inclined by nature for evil, and it is likely that he will fail, nevertheless because man has the ability to reign in on himself, he would be held culpable. Thus, G'd would destroy existence. However, because of Noah's initiative, G'd had entered into a covenant with existence never to destroy the world despite mankind's failings. This is expressed through the rainbow, which is the sign of the covenant that He had made with existence.

One of the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy is that "He carries the defiant, deliberate, and inadvertent sins." Rabbi Moshe Cordavero (RAMAK) in his work, Tomar Devorah explains that based on the laws by which the physical and spiritual world are governed, when one does an act, positive or negative, it brings about an immediate consequence. When one sins, there is a negative/impure force that is created. Just as all creation is sustained by G'd, so too does the impure force that is created by man need to be sustained. According to the laws of judgment, because man had created the impure force, it should be his responsibility to nurture and sustain that force. In essence

it would mean that the person who sinned would need to suffer at a level that would be the equivalent of something that is lethal. It would destroy his existence. Therefore, the exceptional Attribute of Mercy of G'd assumes responsibility for nurturing the negative force in order to give man the opportunity to repent. RAMAK compares the process of nurturing the negative force to a leech that attaches itself to a living species. The leech will only detach itself when it is sated with blood. So too the negative force would attach itself to the individual who had sinned and sap him of his life.

Before the Great Flood, although G'd had created the world with the Attribute of Mercy, because the world could not survive solely on the Attribute of Justice; nevertheless, the degree of mercy was not sufficient to sustain the world, if man should fail and fall to his lowest level. If Noah would have succeeded in his original mission to influence the world to repent, the Great Flood would have not occurred. This would have allowed the Attribute of Mercy that was in force to be sufficient. However, because Noah did fail, as we find in the words of the Prophet – the waters of the Flood are referred to as "the Floodwaters of Noah (mei Noach)", he compensated for his failing by taking the initiative that would guarantee that the destruction of existence would never repeat itself again. This was brought about by the sacrifices that he had brought when he had left the Ark.

YAD AVRAHAM DAILY CLASS SCHEDULE

Monday Through Friday

5:50- 6:00 am	Chumash with Rashi
6:00- 6:15 am	Pirkei Avos (Maharal)
6:15- 6:30 am	Mishna Berurah
6:30 -6:45 am	Mussar – Derech Hashem
6:45 -7:25 am	Talmud—Chulin
7:25 - 8:20 am	Davening Followed by Breakfast
8:20 - 8:45 am	Mishna - Rabbi Rovner
9:00 -10:00 am	Daf Yomi
2:00pm	Mincha

Special Weekday Classes

Monday

11:30 – 12:30pm	Talmud: Taanis Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25 th FL.) Enter on 54 th Street
12:30 – 1:30pm	Talmud: Pesachim Location: Shandholt 488 Madison Avenue Between E.51 st and E.52 st

Tuesday

12:10 - 1:10pm	Torah Insight Based on the Parsha Location: Yad Avraham
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Wednesday

11:30 – 12:30 pm	Talmud: Taanis Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25 th FL.) Enter on 54 th Street
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1:00—2:00 pm Daas Tevunos

Location: Yad Avraham

Thursday

10:30 –11:30am Duties of the Heart

Location: Yad Avraham

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

