

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

NOVEMBER 12, 2016

This week's Insights is dedicated in memory of Mrs. Charlotte Rohr,
Sora Bas R' Yekusiel Yehuda, for whom our campus was named.
"May her Neshama have an Aliya!"

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11 CHESHVAN

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS LECH LECHA

Mo' Money

Hashem said to Avram, "Go for yourself from your land, from your birthplace and from your father's house, to the land that I will show you. And I will make you into a great nation; I will bless you and I will make your name great" (12:1-2).

The Mishnah in *Pirkei Avos* (5:3) states that our forefather Avraham was tested with ten different tests. While there is some discussion by the commentators as to which events in Avraham's life constitute an actual test, Hashem asking Avram to leave his home and go to Eretz Canaan is universally agreed upon as one of the tests.

A frequently asked question is: Seeing how Hashem had promised Avram all kinds of benefits – Rashi (ad loc) says that Hashem promised him children, wealth, and fame – what kind of test was this exactly? With those guaranteed rewards as incentive, who wouldn't agree to travel to a distant, even unknown, land?

One of the classic answers given is that the test was one of intention; would Avram go because Hashem asked him to go or because Hashem promised him great rewards? We see in the following verse (12:4) that "Avram went as Hashem had spoken." This is used as proof that Avram decided to travel because Hashem asked him to, not because of the rewards promised, and therefore he passed the test.

There are several troubling points to contend with if we are to accept this as a working hypothesis of what took place. First, there seems to be a fundamental misunderstanding of the purpose of a test. Hashem doesn't administer a test to gauge a person's loyalty; for Hashem knows exactly how loyal someone is. A test from Hashem is to give one an

opportunity for personal growth. Second, this understanding actually contradicts what Hashem tells Avram. Hashem very clearly tells Avram in the first *possuk*: *Lech Lecha* – go for your own sake. If the incentives were only offered as part of the test, Hashem would have simply said, "Lech – go."

So we are left with our original question: What kind of test is this that Hashem is promising money, fame, and nationhood? Every single one of us would be thrilled to have that offer!

The answer lies in our shallow understanding of these gifts and the responsibility that comes with them. Superficially, one might think it would be great to have a billion dollars – "I could buy the most amazing houses and boats and not have to worry about paying bills and having to work." Similarly, "if I were famous I would be the toast of the town. I would constantly get comped clothes and meals, and get invited to the most amazing parties. Everyone would want to be my friend. I would have enormous power." Additionally, who hasn't dreamed in living in their own country where they make the rules and live how they want doing whatever they want?

This is exactly the test. Are you going to use these gifts for yourself or will you employ them to better humanity? When one comes to the recognition that we live in a theocentric world and not an egocentric world, one comes to the realization that all resources should be



used to further Hashem's plan for the world. Having enormous wealth, fame, or power doesn't mean I can do more for myself; it means I have been "gifted" a ginormous responsibility. In fact, most people, upon realizing that these gifts aren't for personal use, would run in the other direction rather than receive them. This is because properly administering these gifts is a lot of (and usually thankless) hard work.

But, if one is able to succeed in doing the right thing with the resources entrusted to him, he will feel an incredible sense of accomplishment and this is an enormous personal pleasure; accomplishment is the source of everlasting pleasure and the reason we were created. Thus, this is what Hashem meant when he said to Avram – go for your sake.

Did You Know...

This week's *parsha* proclaims (12:3) that the world population will be blessed through the children of Avraham. We decided to take it literally and create a **partial** list of Jewish contributions to mankind:

By way of introduction, between 1901 and 2015, 194 Nobel prizes have been awarded to Jews, more Nobel prizes than any other ethnicity. This accounts for 22% of all Nobels awarded.



Family Ties

There was a quarrel between the shepherds of Avram and the shepherds of Lot...And Avram said to Lot: "Please let there not be strife between me and you...for we are brothers. Please separate from me; if you go to the left I will go to the right, and if you go to the right I will go to the left" (13:7-9).

Rashi (ad loc) explains that there was an ongoing philosophical argument between the shepherds of Lot and those of Avram. Avram's shepherds criticized Lot's shepherds for grazing their herds in fields that didn't belong to them. Lot's shepherds retorted that all the lands were eventually going to be given to Avram and, at this point, Lot was the only heir to Avram. Therefore, they reasoned, Lot was really the rightful owner and his sheep could graze wherever they pleased. But the Torah refutes their argument by saying that Avram had not yet come into possession of the land; therefore Lot had no rightful claim to the land at all.

Avram's comments to Lot (see above), and his resolution to this conflict, seem to be fairly straightforward. Avram appears to be telling Lot, "We need to separate, you go one way and I will go other." This seems like a very reasonable way to avoid further strife and confrontation. But Rashi (13:9) interprets Avram's words in a puzzling way, and in fact, Rashi's interpretation seems to directly contradict what Avram actually says.

Rashi explains that Avram told Lot:

"Wherever you dwell I will not distance myself from you. I will stand by as a protector (for you) and to be of service." How can Rashi possibly see this in Avram's words? Avram seems to be telling Lot the exact opposite!

This Rashi is a terrific example of how carefully Chazal read the *pesukim*; which in turn, allows them penetrating insight to determine what is really being said.

Rashi is bothered by the subjective terms that Avram uses; "If you go left I will go to the right, and if you go to the right I will go to the left." Right and left aren't really opposite directions – in fact it totally depends on which direction you're facing. In other words, if two people are facing each other, the right of one is the left of the other. Had Avram truly intended that they go opposite ways he should have said, "you go north and I will go south" or "you go east and I will go west." By using the subjective right and left, Avram was telling Lot that they were both the right and left of a single entity.

Interestingly, Avram doesn't tell Lot he is wrong and that he has to change. In fact, Lot may have a point: Sarah was physically

unable to produce an heir; Lot and Avram's fates are, at this point, inextricably tied. Therefore, Avram is allowing for Lot to have his own point of view. In effect, Avram is telling Lot: "You can have your own perspective; but **because we are really 'brothers' the most important thing is that we don't fight.** Therefore, we need to separate." But this was only a separation, not an amputation. This is why Rashi asserts that Avram was telling Lot that he would always be there to protect him. Because when you're a single entity an attack on the right is also an attack to the left; after all, brothers need to have each other's back.

Avram's message to Lot is remarkably relevant to today's world situation: Whether one is a Republican or a Democrat, Charedi or Chiloni, it doesn't really make a difference. We need to remember that at the end of the day we all need each other, and that we are all different elements of the same body. After all, the very fact that we all exist is a message from Hashem that, in the grand scheme of things, we are all necessary for His plan.

This is startling considering Jews only account for .0025% of the world population.

Simply put, we have achieved five hundred times what our population should statistically account for. Perhaps more remarkably, some famous Jewish contributors to the fields of science and medicine never even won: 1. Sigmund (Shlomo) Freud—arguably the father of the field of psychoanalysis 2. Jonas Salk—creator of the Polio vaccine, which saved millions from death and the devastating effects of Polio 3. Claude Levi-Strauss (not

the guy who invented jeans—though he probably wished he had) who is considered the father of modern Anthropology.

Here are some other famous contributions to the world by Jews: Robert Oppenheimer—father of Atomic bomb; Edwin Teller—father of Hydrogen bomb. No matter what you think of the "Bomb" – imagine how horrific it would have been had Russia or China or, of course, Germany, developed it first. Laszlo Biro, a Hungarian Jew, invented the ball point pen; Morris Michtom invented the Teddy

Bear; Ruth Handler created the Barbie Doll.

Sergey Brin and Larry Page (co-founders of Google) are both Jewish. Michael Bloomberg, who was estimated by the NY Times as contributing over \$700 million to the city of New York while he was mayor, is also Jewish. We would have added Mark Zuckerberg to this list but, alas, the DYK editorial board does not consider Facebook much of a contribution to society. In fact, it may be a stupefying liability to society. Time will tell...



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