



Parshas Lech Licha

October 15, 2021

A Taste of Torah

Unreasonable

by Rabbi Aharon Wilen

What is worse, being thrown into a furnace for your beliefs or being forced to emigrate?

The Medrash (Bereishis Rabbah 38:13) recounts that upon our Patriarch Avram's (later to have his name changed to Avraham) rejection of idol worship and declaration of belief a single, all-powerful G-d, Nimrod, the ruler of the land and an ardent idolater, had him arrested and brought before him.

"If you don't bow to idols," said Nimrod to Avram, "at least bow to fire, the most powerful force in nature."

"It would be better to bow to water," responded Avram, "because water puts out fire."

"Then bow to the water."

"But the clouds carry water - maybe I should bow to them?!"

"Then bow to the clouds."

"But the wind moves the clouds..."

Upon Avram's refusal to worship Nimrod or any of his deities and Avram's logical philosophical argument, Nimrod had Avram cast into a fiery furnace. Avram was miraculously saved by Hashem from the raging fire.

This entire ordeal seems like quite a test of faith, more challenging than emigrating to distant lands, yet the Rambam in his commentary on Pirkei Avos (5:3) counts the command of *lech licha*, when Hashem commanded Avram to leave his father's home and travel to a yet-unknown destination, as the first of Avraham's ten tests. What happened to this test of being

thrown into the furnace as he stood by his belief in the one, true G-d?

It is also interesting to note that all of Avraham's other tests are recounted at length in the Torah. Why isn't this story included?

The Chassid Yavetz (Rabbi Yosef Yavetz; 15th-16th century) in his commentary to Avos (ibid.) explains that there is no doubt that being cast into the furnace for refusing to abandon his belief in Hashem was a tremendous test of *emunah* (faith) for Avram. However, that faith was the product of reason. Avram discovered monotheism and the existence of a Creator through his powers of logic and deduction, as evidenced by the philosophical debate with Nimrod discussed earlier. There are many other philosophers in the world who are also convinced of the total truth of their ideas. There are many people who are prepared to go to extremes for their ideals and even give their life for their principles.

That is not the approach of Torah and Judaism. Yes, Avraham began his journey through a logical foundation. But being a true servant of Hashem means that a person is prepared to listen to Hashem even when one doesn't understand the logic of Hashem's command. This is the theme of the original, famed declaration of the Jewish People at Mt. Sinai, "We will do and we will listen;" we will do it anyway, even if we do not understand why it must be done.

The command for Avram to leave his homeland defies logic. Couldn't

Stories for the Soul

Circumventing to Circumcise

The Bluzhever Rebbe, Rabbi Yisroel Spira (1889-1989) was a survivor of the Holocaust who had suffered in the camps throughout the war. During one particular brutal assignment of chopping wood, he overheard the Nazis instructing all infants, children and mothers to line up. The Rebbe understood very well that this meant that they were next to be killed. Amidst the cries and moans of the mothers, the Rebbe heard a mother cry out, "A knife, a knife! I need a knife."

The Rebbe, thinking that it was a distraught woman who wanted to take her life, quickly ran over and tried calming her down. An S.S. officer who witnessed the scene came over and demanded to know what they were discussing. The woman repeated her request for a knife. Smiling, the officer proudly presented the woman with a knife. The woman placed her infant on the ground, recited the blessing, and circumcised him before the stunned Nazi.

Turning toward Heaven, she exclaimed, "Master of the Universe! Eight days ago you gave me a child. I know that neither I nor he will long survive in this accursed place. But now, when you take him back, you will receive him as a complete Jew."

Bris milah, given to Avraham in this week's parsha, is the ultimate symbol of Hashem having chosen us as His nation. And we remain His nation, and continue to perform *bris milah*, even in the most dire circumstances.

Kollel Happenings

MEET YOU IN THE MIDDLE: LITIGATION AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION AT NOV 3 T4T ON ZOOM

Join Abraham Z. Melamed, Esq., Mediator at Melamed Mediation, and Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher, Senior Educator for the Denver Community Kollel, as they negotiate the ins and outs of conflict resolution on Wednesday, Nov. 3 at 7:30 pm via Zoom. Visit denverkollel.org or email info@denverkollel.org for details and Zoom info.

RABBI YOSSI EPHRATHI NOW TEACHING LEARN 2 LEARN GESHMAK

You may have limited experience learning Talmud. You may think that you don't enjoy serious Talmud study, that it's just not for you. But you haven't tried Learn 2 Learn Geshmak. A gemara program crafted to give you the satisfaction and joy of learning, Learn 2 Learn Geshmak is now being taught by Kollel Scholar Rabbi Yossi Ephrathi, and is beginning a new topic. Contact Rabbi Nesanel Kipper at rnk@denverkollel.org for further details.

AVOS UBANIM ON SHABBOS AFTERNOON CONTINUES

The Kollel's Avos Ubanim program continues this Shabbos afternoon at the West Denver Kollel Torah Center. Learning begins one hour before mincha, followed by nosh and raffle. For sponsorships and more info, email info@denverkollel.org.

Halacha Riddles

Last week's question: How would one's appetite affect his obligation to recite *Birkas Hamazon*?

Answer: If one eats a bread meal and is satiated, he has a Torah-level obligation to recite *Birkas Hamazon*. If, however, one is not satiated, the obligation to recite *Birkas Hamazon* is Rabbinic. If one is unsure if he recited *Birkas Hamazon* or not, he must recite it if he was satiated, since an uncertainty of a Torah obligation requires one to be stringent. If

the person was not satiated by the meal, *Birkas Hamazon* is not recited, since one is lenient regarding a Rabbinic obligation (and, in fact, he is not allowed to recite it due to the rule of *safeik brachos lihakel*, that one is lenient and does not recite a [Rabbinically-imposed] blessing in a case of uncertainty. (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 184:4 with Magen Avraham 8)

This week's question: When would a woman have a choice if she should recite *Birkas Hamazon*?

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

Rabbi Meir Shapiro - Part XXI

However, the offer came with a major catch: Rabbi Shapiro would need to resign his position in the Agudah. Rabbi Shapiro could not abide this condition, reportedly commenting, "It is not that I am in the Agudah; the Agudah is in me!"

Following this rejection, the Gerrer Rebbe, Rabbi Avraham Mordechai Alter, asked Rabbi Shapiro to become the leader of the Agudah. Ger (named after the town it originated in, Gura) was the largest Chassidic group in Poland, with followers estimated to be more than 100,000, and the Rebbe wielded considerable power and influence. His

backing of the Agudah was a major element of its ability to succeed and flourish, as his followers would all back it, as well.

Rabbi Shapiro was hesitant to accept the Rebbe's request, as he had plans to open a major yeshiva in Poland, and he feared these plans would be derailed if he took on the mantle of leadership for the Agudah. The Gerrer Rebbe persisted, though, and told Rabbi Shapiro that he would assist his efforts to open the yeshiva if he'd accept the offer to lead the Agudah. In 1923, Rabbi Shapiro accepted, and he became the president of Agudas Yisrael.

A Taste of Torah

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he accomplish so much more and spread his message so much better in a place where he knew the language and culture?! Why would he go to a foreign land where he was unknown and would essentially need to start again from scratch, dealing with a new language and cultural norms? But Hashem told him to go, so he went. That faithfulness was the first step in the building of the Jewish People.

As the founder and first father of the Jewish People, Avram was laying the foundation for future generations.

He was tested in his faithfulness to Hashem precisely with a situation that he couldn't understand. These tests are the focus of the Torah, not the trials that he understood. That is why the test of the furnace is not counted and barely hinted to in the Torah.

In our own observance of Torah and mitzvos, while it adds meaning and flavor when we can understand what we are doing as we perform mitzvos and obey Hashem's commandments, the underlying focus must be that we are fulfilling the will of Hashem.

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