

Dvar Torah for Parshat Lekh Lekha

I—Based on Tzaddik #193 (67)

We have no idea what's going on.

"God is great," said Rebbe Nachman. "We know nothing. So much goes on in the world, yet we know absolutely nothing."

Avraham Avinu (our patriarch Abraham) heard the news that his nephew Lot had been captured (*Genesis* 14:14). Immediately, the Man of Chessed, the personification of lovingkindness, drafted a small army and went to war.

The astute reader will recall that last week we talked about [peaceful skies](#). "Look up at *shemayim* (heaven) and remember—fire and water are getting along peacefully. So why not the rest of us?" Shouldn't Avraham Avinu, who championed kindness more than any other person, have been the first one at the negotiating table?

Not this time. Avraham Avinu knew "there is a time for war and a time for peace" (*Ecclesiastes* 3:8). He knew that Lot's life was in danger (*Bereishis Rabbah* 43:2). He knew that the Four Kings were his enemies. There was nothing to talk about (Or Hachaim on *Genesis* 14:12).

Nonetheless, upon his return home, after saving Lot and defeating the Four Kings, Avraham Avinu had doubts and was afraid (*ibid.* 15:1). "I've spent so much of my life drawing people close to Hashem (God). Now I've killed so many people who could have brought Him honor. Perhaps I have lost my reward?" Hashem told Avraham Avinu not to worry. "I will shield you"—you will not be punished for killing them. On the contrary, "Your reward will be very great"—you will be rewarded for killing them, for none of them was going to provide Me with any satisfaction (*Zohar* 1:89a; see *Matok MiDevash*).

Furthermore, if Avraham Avinu had not saved Lot, King David would not have been born (*Genesis* 19:33, 37). Without King David there would be no Mashiach (Messiah).

"God is great," said Rebbe Nachman. "We know nothing. So much goes on in the world, yet we know absolutely nothing." We have to do what the Torah teaches; Hashem will take care of the results.

II—Based on *The Aleph-Bet Book*

- One who receives a blessing should give some sort of present to the one blessing him. (Blessing B1)
- Don't take the blessing of a gentile lightly. (*ibid.*, B2)
- A person who draws those far from God to His service, is given the power to bless others. (*ibid.*, B3)

Avraham Avinu is an example of each these teachings. When he returned from the war Malki-Tzedek, a

gentile priest, blessed him (*Genesis* 14:19). In return Avraham Avinu gave Malki-Tzedek a present, and a generous one at that (v. 20). Avraham Avinu apparently appreciated Malki-Tzedek's pre-war blessing. (See Rashi on *Isaiah* 41:6 and Ohr Hachaim here, verse 19.)

Since Avraham Avinu was extremely successful at drawing others to God's service (Targum Yonatan on *Genesis* 12:5), God gave him the ability to bless others (Rashi, *ibid.* v.2).

III—Based on *Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom #48*

I reached a milestone in my life this week. I have now made more mistakes than McDonald's has sold hamburgers. It wasn't easy, but Oy! I did it. Some of those mistakes were whoppers (equal time for Burger King). I'm not a perfectionist, as some have accused me. I'm an *im*-perfectionist!

You realize, of course, that one doesn't arrive at this milestone by committing a single mistake a day. I had to make mistakes by the dozens, every hour. Some days I even worked at it overtime. As I was miserably contemplating my sad accomplishment, I thought of Avraham Avinu. He made a serious mistake by asking for a sign that the Holy Land would in fact belong to his descendants (*Genesis* 15:8; see also Rashi on *Isaiah* 43:27). He was punished for this. Those descendants who were to inherit the Land would first have to be exiled and enslaved (v.13). For one slip of the tongue (*Nedarim* 32a)!

How did Avraham Avinu respond, I asked myself? Did he fall apart? Did he pack it in and head back to Ur Kasdim? **NO!** He kept on going. He started again to serve Hashem by doing the good things he had been doing—teaching God's word, praying, and providing food and lodging for wayfarers.

Then I remembered that this is what Rebbe Nachman teaches. No matter how many times a person falls, no matter what temptations a person gives into umpteen times a day, the path to success requires starting again and again. Even if our prayers are hollow and deeds shallow, we have to start again to long to fill them with heartfelt devotion. Even if we've tossed our tefillin or put our Shabbat candlesticks in storage because they have no more meaning for us, let's start again to seek their meaning. Reb Noson writes to his son Yitzchak that starting again means even from the beginning, from *aleph-bet* ("*kametz aleph*"; see *Alim Letrufah*, Letter #351 in older editions, #376 in newer editions and the English version, *Eternally Yours*).

Even though starting again won't make you an Avraham Avinu, it will make you the best Jew you can be!

agutn Shabbos!
Shabbat Shalom!

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