



Partners In Torah
San Diego-Los Angeles-Ventura
Take home Dvar Torah

5786 Parshat Lech Lecha

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Hello, Welcome!

**Partners In Torah is a community-wide,
independent and inclusive adult education
program**

**focusing on understanding Jewish
relevancy to our lives by studying text
most interesting to each participant.**

**Through one-on-one discussion for 1 hour
each week, friendships are forged between
mentors and mentees.**

***Partners in Torah
has proven to be effective at reclaiming the
rich
legacy of wisdom, inspiration, and
guidance
for many who have, until now, lacked
access.***

Thank you for joining us!

**Please encourage friends to join you in
participating so that we may grow
together as
a community.**

תשפ"ו Lech Lecha

This week's portion introduces us to *Avraham Avinu*, Avraham our forefather, whose dedication to Hashem was so great that he made it his life's mission to teach the world about Him. Hashem, in turn, loved Avraham so much that He found Avraham worthy of a ברית (*brit* - a covenant) with Him and with his progeny. Avraham Avinu was the founding father of the Jewish nation.

The verse in this week's parsha informs us (Genesis 15:1):

(א) אַחַר הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה הָיָה דְבַר יְדֹד אֶל אַבְרָם בַּמַּחֲזֵה לֵאמֹר אֵל תִּירָא אַבְרָם
אֲנִכִּי מִגֵּן לְךָ שְׂכָרְךָ הַרְבֵּה מְאֹד

1) After these events, the word of Hashem came to Avram (his name has not yet been changed to Avraham) in a vision, saying, "Fear not Avram, I am a shield for you, your reward is great."

To what events is Hashem here referring? And why in reference to those events did Hashem have to reassure Avram that his reward was great?

The Midrash tackles the problem.

מדרש רבה בראשית - פרשה מד פסקה ד

ורבנן אמרי חדא לפי שהיה אבינו אברהם מתפחד ואומר ירדתי לכבשן האש ונצלתי ירדתי למלחמת המלכים ונצלתי תאמר שנתקבלתי שכרי בעולם הזה ואין לי כלום לעתיד לבא אמר הקב"ה אל תירא אנכי מגן לך וכל מה שעשיתי עמך בעולם הזה חנם עשיתי עמך אבל שכרך מתוקן לעתיד לבא שכרך הרבה מאד היך מה דאת אמר (תהלים לא) מה רב טובך אשר צפנת ליראיך

The Rabbis explain. Avram Avinu was concerned that since he went into the burning furnace and survived (The wicked king Nimrod had given

Avram the ultimatum of either bowing down to him and accepting him as Avram's god or throwing him into a raging fire. Avram accepted the latter, and Hashem miraculously saved him from being burned alive.), and since he had gone to war and had single-handedly defeated the four mighty kings to rescue his nephew Lot, perhaps he had used up all the reward for his good deeds that was waiting for him in the World to Come, and there will be nothing for him when he arrived there! To this Hashem responded, "Do not fear, I am a shield for you, and all that I did for you was a gift. The reward for your good deeds is still awaiting you in the World to Come.

At this point Avram asked Hashem,

(ג) וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָם הֵן לִי לֹא נָתַתָּה זָרַע וְהִנֵּה בֶן בֵּיתִי יוֹרֵשׁ אֹתִי

3) Then Avram said, "See, to me You have given no offspring; and see, my steward inherits me..."

Avram was able to read the stars and see his future. He told Hashem that he can see in the stars that he is not destined to have children with Sarai. So what good is all the reward in the World to Come? My purpose in this world is to have all mankind believe in You and worship You. But without a son to carry on my mission, how will that happen?

(ה) וַיּוֹצֵא אֹתוֹ הַחוּצָה וַיֹּאמֶר הִבֵּט נָא הַשָּׁמַיְמָה וְסַפֵּר הַכּוֹכָבִים אִם תּוּכַל לְסַפֵּר אֹתָם וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ כֹּה יִהְיֶה זְרַעֲךָ

5) And He took him outside, and said, "Gaze, now, toward the Heavens, and count the stars if you are able to count them!" And He said to him, "So shall your offspring be!"

With this verse, Hashem answers Avram's vexing question. Rashi quoting the Midrash explains,

ולפי מדרשו אמר לו צא מאצטגנינות שלך שראית במזלות שאינך עתיד להעמיד בן אברם אין לו בן אבל אברהם יש לו בן וכן שרי לא תלד אבל שרה תלד אני קורא לכם שם אחר וישתנה המזל

According to the Midrash, Hashem told him, "Abandon your stargazing mode where you saw that you are not destined to have children. Avram cannot have children, but Avraham can. Sarai cannot have children, but Sarah can. I am destined to change your names, and your 'mazel' will change."

From here the Sages teach us: אין מזל לישראל - *the Jewish nation is not under the control of the zodiac*. All other nations are controlled by the laws of nature except the Jewish people. Hashem alone controls the destiny of the Jewish people, and He is above nature. Our very existence proves this axiom.

The Torah records Avram's response.

(ו) וְהֶאֱמַן בְּיָדוֹ וַיִּחְשְׁבֶהָ לוֹ צְדָקָה

6) *And he trusted in Hashem, and **He** reckoned it to **him** as righteousness.*

This verse is (deliberately) ambiguous. It is clear that it was Avram who trusted in Hashem, but who was it that reckoned it to whom as a righteousness? Did Hashem reckon it a righteousness to Avram, or did Avram reckon it as a righteousness to Hashem?

The translation (ArtsScroll) cited above, which capitalizes the "H" of *He reckoned* follows Rashi's interpretation of the verse, that the "He" refers to Hashem.

Rashi explains that Avram showed his trust in Hashem by not asking for a guarantee on the promise, and that Hashem accepted it as a merit and a gesture of righteousness from Avram for not doing so.

The Ramban, on the other hand, wonders how Avram's trusting Hashem to give him a child could be considered a merit. Indeed, to a person who had so much trust in Hashem that he was ready to sacrifice his son on command, and give up his life not to worship an idol this should have been a very simple task.

Therefore, the Ramban explains that *Avram* was so humble that he felt that he had no merit or virtue for which Hashem should fulfill his wish for a child. Rather, Avram attributed Hashem's promise for a child the result of Hashem's great kindness to him, even though he was unworthy. Therefore, the interpretation of the verse is that **he** - Avram reckoned it a righteousness to **Him** - Hashem.

6) And he trusted in Hashem, and he reckoned it to Him as righteousness.

Here lies a great lesson for us. We tend to think that Hashem "owes us a living." Somehow, we think that we are worthy or deserving of all the goodness that Hashem bestows upon us. Yet Avram, Hashem's most trusted and loyal servant, had no expectation based on who he was that Hashem would grant him his wish. Rather, he was asking for an outright gift. How much more should we understand how unworthy we are and that Hashem bestows unending kindness upon us each day. For this, we should have overwhelming gratitude to Hashem for all the good that He gives us.

Rav Shach (1899-2001) writes:

מאז ומתמיד הייתי מתפלא למה מכנים למצוה זו אמונה? הרי בפשוטו שזהו מהמושכלות ראשונות. שאי אפשר לעולם בלא מנהיג. וגם מבשרי אחזה אלוך והחכמה הנפלאה שבכל יצור קטן אין להעריך. ומכל שכן החכמה ביצור האדם ואיך אפשר שכל זה בלא מנהיג?

*I always wondered, how do they call the mitzvah to **believe** in Hashem - "Emunah?" Belief in Hashem is obvious and elementary! It is impossible to have a world without a director. Also, from my own flesh I see Hashem! It is impossible to describe the amazing wisdom in the smallest creature, how much more so in the human being! How is it possible that all of this is without a director?*

ושאלתי זאת למרן הגאון הגדול רבי ימחק זאב סאלאוויציק זצוק"ל ואמר לי שגם הוא עמד על זה ושאל זאת לאביו הגר"ח זצוק"ל ואמר לו שודאי עד כמה ששכל האדם מגעת הוא מושכל ראשון ואין זו אמונה והיא ידיעה אבל חיוב האמונה מתחיל ממקום שכלה שכל האדם.

I asked this question to my teacher Rabbi Yitzchak Zev Solevechik, זצוק"ל and he told me that he had the very same question, and that he had asked it to his father, Rabbi Chaim Soloveichik זצוק"ל, who told him that whatever a person perceives intellectually is not called "Emunah;" rather, it is called ידיעה – knowledge. The obligation to have "Emunah" in Hashem begins where the human mind ceases to understand.

A person is limited in his perceptions by time and space. What is above time and space exceeds our comprehension. Hashem is beyond time and space and exists in a realm that is beyond human conception. That is where the obligation to have "Emunah" begins.

The Chidushei Harim (d. 1866) takes a novel approach to this verse.

6) *And he trusted in Hashem, and he reckoned it to him(self) as righteousness.*

He explains,

והאמין בה' ויחשבה לו צדקה כו' פי' אברהם אבינו ע"ה חשב את האמונה הזאת שהאמין בצדקה מהשי"ת שגם זה ממנו ית' וזה עיקר גדול בעבודת השי"ת שידע שכל מה שהאדם משיג וכל ההארות הכל מהבורא ית"ש

This means that Avram Avinu felt that the "Emunah" that he had in Hashem was the greatest gift that Hashem could give him, because he realized that even his "Emunah" in Hashem, was a gift from Hashem.

Avram sees in the stars that he and Sarai are incapable of having children. He has no future, and, as far as he can see, his life's work of bringing the world to believe in Hashem, at which he is being very successful, will abruptly halt at the end of his life. Hashem tells him, "You have Emunah in Me, and there is nothing that I cannot do, so, despite what the stars seem to say, "You are not subject to their predictions. I can lift you above the stars."

Avram breaths a sigh of relief and is completely relaxed without a worry in the world. It's all in Hashem's hands. I can rely on Him for the best possible outcome. And you know what else? Even if Hashem decides that, for some reason, I should not have a son, as it seemed when Hashem asked him to bring Yitzchak his beloved son as a sacrifice, knowing that it is from Hashem, I will be able to handle that, too. Avram considers the gift of Emunah in Hashem the greatest gift that Hashem could have given him, because it empowered him to deal with any challenge in the world.

What an arresting statement to ponder. In a world filled with billions of people who either deny the existence of a Creator or believe in a total imposter, Hashem has presented us with the greatest gift in the world - belief in Him! And, just as Avram Avinu considered the gift of Emunah the greatest possible gift that Hashem could give him, we too should feel that same privilege and elation for the good fortune of having received the gift of Emunah from Hashem. With Emunah, there is no challenge in life that we cannot overcome, as we understand that it comes from a loving and caring Hashem, Who has only our best interest in mind. And although we cannot understand Hashem's thinking, we can rest assured that He knows exactly what He is doing.

One of the greatest challenges that people face is losing a child. It is so difficult to see pure, innocent, sweet children suffer with an illness and then leave the world at such a tender age. Going to the funeral and consoling the bereaved is dreaded by all. What is there to say? How we wish we were not there experiencing this moment.

Such a situation made a profound impact on me. I can still remember what the father of a 9-year-old boy who suffered from cancer for several years and who ultimately succumbed to it, said at the boy's funeral, many years ago.

"Nine years ago, Hashem was looking for a home in which to place a special soul that would only have 9 years to live. He found our home, and we feel so privileged to have been the hosts for this special soul. Thank you for choosing us Hashem. We have grown so much from the process."

Because they had Emunah, these parents were able to deal with the catastrophic loss with calm and assuredness.

Just a week and a half ago, Saturday night, October 19, 2025, four boys, Yaakov Kilberg, Aharon Nosson Lebovitz, Shlomo Abba Cohen, and Chaim Simcha Grossman, all yeshiva students around 20 years old and alumni of Yeshivas Chedvas Hatorah in Monsey, NY, were travelling south on the NJ Turnpike, when a drunk driver going in the wrong direction struck their car head on, killing all four boys instantaneously. Four beautiful boys, each a gem with a bright future, snuffed out in one second by a drunk driver.

Chedvas Hatorah is a small, close-knit yeshiva in Monsey, NY, which specializes in educating serious, high quality yeshiva boys who were not thriving in their previous yeshiva. The Yeshiva has been successful with all their students by providing them with love, warmth, and personal attention guiding them in their studies, elevating and molding them into confident, self-sufficient scholars. The students of this yeshiva study together, eat together, dorm together, and grow together in their studies.

As you can well imagine, in addition to the profound blow to the individual families of the boys who perished, the Yeshiva faculty, students, and all their family members have been severely impacted by this horrific event.

What is there to say in a case like this? Most people would say, “What bad luck! They were just in the wrong spot at the wrong time. Just a few minutes earlier or a few minutes later and they probably would have missed that drunk driver. Such a shame, they were such nice boys.”

Then starts the endless stream of questions trying to figure out how it could have been avoided. “If only they would have left just three minutes earlier ... What if the drunk driver had only ... Why didn’t they

...? Etc. The questions come and go over and over again until they drive you mad. Why did this have to happen?

For a Jew, this is where Emuna comes into play. There are no questions. Things could not have been any different. From the beginning of Creation, these four precious souls were destined to come to this world for twenty years, impact the world and leave. This was their mission. All things were exactly as they were supposed to be. Hashem orchestrated this event, and all the players were exactly where they needed to be, so that they could complete their mission in this world. It was an act of Hashem, plain and simple. Our minds are too small to grasp the Master's plan, and we surrender our thoughts and emotions to Hashem with the understanding that "Hashem knows best." We will find out later what the plan was.

At a special gathering in the yeshiva to help the boys deal with the tragedy the Tuesday night after the accident, the Rosh Yeshiva Rabbi Yehuda Binyamin Cohen said to his boys.

We're gathered tonight for something that we're all still in pain about, something that is too much to describe. Tonight, we are confronted with 4 kashas (questions, a reference to the 4 questions at the Passover seder). Chaim Simcha Grossman, Shlomo Cohen, Aharon Nosson Liebowitz, and Yaakov Kilberg. The theme of all these kashas is "Ma Nishtana?" Why these four? And "Ma Nishtana?" and why was it our friends that were taken? and "Ma Nishtana?" Why are we different than them that we survived? We don't know the answers; but after all the kashas comes – עבדים היינו (the answer to the four questions in the Haggadah, "we were slaves

to the Pharoah in Egypt...) There's a storyline, and Hashem has a plan from the beginning of creation until the end. There's a storyline, and you have 4 kashas; but they would all get resolved if you knew the big picture. But we don't know and we don't understand, we're not up to understanding, we're not even up to handling the pain, and that's why we're here tonight just to strengthen each other.

The Yeshiva brought in a senior Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Uren Reich, to address the boys and give them moral support.

After a speech illustrating to the boys through the words of the Torah and Sages how precious and loved each of us is to Hashem, and that even though Hashem has dealt us a severe blow, the true and only source of compassion is with Hashem and it is only through Him that we can find comfort, Rabbi Reich closed with the following words.

When a gentile sees that someone died, he says, "If wouldn't have been for this or if wouldn't have been for that, it wouldn't have happened, it's tremendous tragedy." Of course it's a tragedy, but we know that everything that happens, happens from Hashem. Their purpose in this world was to live a short life, and ours is to live on with simcha, to grow, to become - with Hashem's help - each one on his own and in his own way, a real ben Torah, a real servant of Hashem. Hashem should give you all tremendous strength ...

There's an expression that people use, and I don't like it, but it's used all over. "Taken before their time." I don't think they were taken before their time. I don't think that's the way to see it. The way to see it is that Hashem has an understanding more than us - what the time is; this is for them, it was their time. And for us, we're never

going to forget them, Hashem doesn't want us to just forget it and put it behind us, He wants us to remember them, to have a spot in our hearts always for them, and to continue to grow in our service to Hashem, may it be a tremendous source of elevation for their souls.

How blessed we are to know that we have a loving and compassionate Hashem who does what He does only for our good. It wasn't an accident, it was meant to be from the beginning of Creation. It is a very bitter pill to swallow; a pill it is nevertheless, and it is designed to help and heal us of some malady that we have.

As we take a candid look at the imploding world around us, we can, like Avram, thank Hashem for our Emunah in Him and rest assured and feel comfortable knowing that "Hashem runs the world" and that He has everything under control.