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Parashat Lech Lecha 5771

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## On the Parashah... Universalism and Nationalism

[Tal Chermon]

Avraham's designation as "the father of the multitude of nations" (Bereshit 17:5) indicates his responsibility for the whole of mankind. This responsibility was visibly manifested when Hashem informed him of his intention to annihilate Sedom. Avraham as "the father of the multitude of nations" recognized his responsibility and stepped in to intervene on their behalf. Avraham's moral obligation to mankind emanated from the fact that he was the father of the Nation of Israel, which had received this task, to be a blessing to the nations of the world (ibid. 12:3) by instructing them and redeeming them from both spiritual and physical perils.

There are Jewish thinkers who claim that our mission is to be "a light to the nations" which can only be performed when we are living dispersed among the nations such that we can bring them the morality of the Tanach. Their view is based on a misunderstanding of the verse in Yeshayahu where Hashem says to the Nation of Israel (Yeshayahu 42:6): "I have made you the Nation of my covenant, a light to the nations." We will not be a light to the nations scattered as individuals in Pressburg, Johannesburg, or Williamsburg. On the contrary, we can only effectively illuminate the world as a healthy Nation living in its homeland. Obviously, even as a forcibly dispersed Nation in the Exile, we did our best and our influence was conspicuous wherever we lived. But this was only a pale imitation of the real thing. We are destined to be a massive searchlight illuminating all of the darkness, but this is only possible when we are a Nation in our homeland.

Question: Is it correct to infer from the fact that Avraham is the father of all mankind that all the nations must become Jewish?

Answer: Rashi, in his commentary on the Torah (Bereshit 17:5), hints at this very question. Avraham's name was originally "Avram" which is an acronym meaning "the father of Aram." This means that he was a national leader, the father of his nation, Aram. Later, however, his name (and together with it his mission) was changed to "Avraham" which indicates his universal task as "the father of the multitude of nations." A remnant of his former name remains in his new name which shows that despite his new universal character, he still retains

his national character. He is both universal and particularistic. This is not an anomaly, for the Kuzari (2:36) says: "Israel is the heart of the nations" or as the Zohar puts it: "the mind of the nations" (Zohar, Mishpatim 108. See Orot Yisrael of Rav Kook 1, 1). The comparison to the essential limbs, the heart and the mind, indicates that Israel is on a different level of existence from the rest of mankind, which could be compared to the inessential limbs, such as the leg or ear. We are the central life force present in humanity. However, it must also be remembered that the heart is only of significance when it is connected with the rest of the body, but not as a detached limb sitting in isolation.

We are linked to the rest of the nations and have a responsibility towards them, but we are also distinct and separate from them. Along with them, we possess the Divine image that exists in mankind, but we are above them from our external vantage point, "as a Nation that will dwell alone, not counting itself among the nations" (Bemidbar 23:9). We must use our special characteristics to help them. This state of connection and separateness can be exemplified by the world of ideas. There are ideas that are common to both Jews and non-Jews and it makes no difference if they were conceived by Aristotle or, on a holy level, by the Rambam. These ideas are broad concepts, well beyond national distinctions. A second category of thought is one where the idea is universal but the style in which it is stated is specific to each nation. Therefore, they have to be specially adapted to our specific national style before they can be adopted. This is unlike the first category which can be adopted without any alterations. There is a third class of ideas which are distinctly ours. Regarding them, we are "as a Nation that will dwell alone, not counting itself among the nations." These ideas are specifically ours and have no connection whatsoever with the non-Jews. This example in the sphere of ideas also applies to the practical world. We and our forefather Avraham are one and we act identically. Avraham was connected to the nations as "the father of the multitude of nations," but also a "mighty nation" (Bereshit 12:2), naturally separated from the nations and also a source of blessing to them. In the same way, we are both nationalist and universalistic at the same time and a source of blessing for the entire world.

## Rav Aviner on... A Good Heart

[Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah – Sukkot 5770 – translated by R. Blumberg]

**Question:** One of the important criteria in choosing a spouse, if not the most important, is a "good heart," as many people say. Yet in practice it is no mean feat at all to examine in a date of several hours whether one's date has a good heart. Moreover, sometimes one's emotions can blind one to negative traits. So how can one check on this?

**Answer:** Indeed, it has already come down in the Shulchan Aruch that one should flee from a match with someone who does not have a good heart. "If someone is arrogant, misanthropic and unkind, we fear lest he is a Gibeonite [See Yehoshua 9] (Even Ha-Ezer 2: 2). Not only is he not a good match, but he may not really be a Jew. This we learned already from Avraham's servant, Eliezer, who undertook the daunting task of finding a wife for Isaac, upon which rested the fate of the Jewish People. On his way to Charan, he decided that he would not look for a wealthy, wise, or beautiful girl, but a girl who when asked for water would give it to him wholeheartedly. "She will be the one whom you have designated" (Bereshit 24:14): "She is fit for him, since she will be charitable and will therefore be worthy of admission into the house of Avraham" (Rashi).

Yet how can we know how to examine a prospective mate? For example, if the boy does not buy you a drink, he doesn't have a good heart. The same is true if he leaves you alone in the

dark at the end of the date, criticizes your opinions, feelings or wishes or gives you instructions on which field to study or how to dress. In all these cases, pay attention to those flashing warning lights. Be cautious and check them out.

Yet that isn't enough, because there are boys who are wonderful when everything is easy and pleasant, but when reality hits them in the face, a beast suddenly bursts forth. So, please, artificially create situations like that. I know I am asking something hard, but there is no choice. So one time, come extremely late to a date and see how he reacts. He may get very angry. We all do. We're only human. Yet it all depends on how he gets angry. Suggest to him that you sit inside, and then outside, and then say, "Well, actually, let's sit inside, but it's really better outside." In short, drive him crazy and see how he reacts. After the wedding, it's certainly probable that you will drive him crazy without meaning to. Order juice, then say, "No, it doesn't taste good, and anyway, I didn't really order juice"... You get the idea.

Yet none of this is enough either. An important rule is not to go out with someone without finding out about him beforehand. Before you go out, you should ask questions of objective people who you can trust, and who know him or her. You can approach his teachers or his dormitory roommates, or fellow soldiers. All of these know him in real-life situations of tension and difficulty.

It's true. Emotions blind us. We have to be very wary of them. They can't be the deciding factor in such a fateful decision, but only a secondary factor. First, one has to check out if the suggested candidate is appropriate, if he can be included together in the roster of reasonable, potential candidates. Only when he fits into that roster can one follow one's emotions.

### *Kitzur Tefilat Amecha - #13*

[adapted for middle-schoolers by Rabbi Shmuel Jablon from Rav Aviner's three-volume commentary on the siddur "Tefilat Amecha"]

In Birkot Ha-Shachar in the prayer "A person should always be in fear and awe of Hashem both in private and in public," we tell Hashem that it's not due to our righteousness, good deeds or strength that we can turn to Him. "It's only because of Hashem's great mercy." When we daven, sometimes we forget that davening is not a magic trick. Hashem doesn't have to do something simply because we ask for it. Hashem doesn't owe us anything. We owe Hashem everything. He has given us all that we have - as individuals, Jews and human beings. And one of the things He has given us is the ability to daven to Him.

## **Shut She'eilat Shlomo - Questions of Jewish Law**

### Name Change and Pregnancy

Question: I was told that when a couple is having difficulty in giving birth the wife should change her Hebrew name, is there logic to this idea, even if she is not sick?

Answer: There is no connection between the two, rather the couple should engage in doing Teshuvah and giving Tzedakah.

### Text Message Responsa

Ha-Rav answers hundreds of text message questions a week. Some appear in the parashah sheets "Ma'ayanei Ha-Yeshu'ah" and "Olam Ha-Katan." Here's a sample:

#### Non-Jew

Q: I was on an extremely crowded bus and the driver was wonderful. I wanted to call the company and praise him, but I heard him speaking Arabic...

A: You should call. It is permissible to praise a non-Jew for his proper character traits.

#### Theft

Q: Is sneaking into an amusement park without paying considered theft?

A: Yes.

#### Male Hairdresser

Q: Is it permissible for a bride to go to a male hairdresser to "do" her hair for the wedding?

A: It is forbidden. Shut She'eilat Shlomo (vol. 2 #349).

#### Non-Religious Government

Q: Must the rulings of a non-religious government be followed? Source?

A: Yes, like Achav (Tosafot on Sanhedrin 20).

#### Tzedakah

Q: Is it preferable to give a little Tzedakah each day or a lot at one time?

A: Separate a little each day and give it at one time (see the Rambam's commentary to the Avot 3:15).

#### Forgot Yaale Ve-Yavo in Bircat Ha-Mazon

Q: If someone forgot Yaale Ve-Yavo in Bircat Ha-Mazon on Rosh Chodesh, does he have to repeat it?

A: No (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 424:1).

#### Forgot Yaale Ve-Yavo in Shemoneh Esrei

Q: If someone forgot Yaale Ve-Yavo in Shemoneh Esrei on Rosh Chodesh, does he have to repeat it?

A: At Shacharit and Minchah (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 422:1).

#### Electric Shaver

Q: Is it true that most authorities rule that it is forbidden to use an electric shaver?

A: Yes.

Q: Then what can one do to avoid all problems?

A: Grow a beard. or remove it with cream (see "Hadrat Panim Zakan" by Rav Moshe nisan Viner).

#### Tevilat Kelim

Q: When one immerses utensils in a mikveh, is it enough to remove the sticker or must the glue be removed as well?

A: All of the glue.

#### Asking Forgiveness

Q: Is it permissible to ask forgiveness in a letter? E-mail? Phone? Text message?

A: It depends of the extent of the transgression. The essence is that the person who was hurt is truly appeased.

#### Insurance

Q: Is it permissible to destroy an object on which I have insurance in order to receive a new one?

A: G-d forbid. It is theft.

#### Pregnancy

Q: Should a woman in the first month of pregnancy refrain from going to a wedding?

A: There is no problem.

#### Age of the World

Q: It is forbidden for a child to learn in a Talmud Torah which teaches that the world is hundreds of thousands of years old?

A: There is no problem since it does not contradict the Torah. These were worlds which preceded ours. Hashem created worlds and destroyed them. Igrot Re'eiyah vol. 1 p. 105.

#### Honoring Parents

Q: My parents are emotionally unstable and it is difficult to honor them. What should I do?

A: Honor them to the best of your ability. Hilchot Kibud Av Ve-Em of the Rambam and Ra'avad.

#### Insulting a Non-Jew

Q: If I insulted a non-Jew, do I have to ask forgiveness?

A: Yes. There is no obligation to love a non-Jew, but it is forbidden to maltreat him.

#### Outside Wedding

Q: Does it matter if an Ashekenazi Jew gets married inside or outside?

A: The custom is to get married outside unless there is an opening in the ceiling (Rama, Even Ha-Ezer 61:1. See, however, Penini Ha-Rav p. 219 and Shut Igrot Moshe, Even Ha-Ezer 1:93).

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