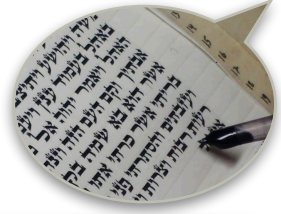




The Collective Conversation

*Weekly Torah Essays from the
Young Israel of Scarsdale Community*



Sefer Bereshit

Parshat Lech Lecha

Cheshvan 5784 / October 2023

Emunah in the Face of Despair

By Matthew Loren

In this week's parsha, *Parshat Lech Lecha*, we are introduced to Avraham Avinu. Avraham was a pillar of faith and was known for his exemplary display of *Chessed* (acts of kindness). After his brother Haran is killed by the wicked king Nimrod, Avraham takes responsibility for his son Lot, and raises him like his own child. Unfortunately for Avraham, Lot keeps on failing him, and Avraham asks him to separate from him. Lot eventually settles in the wicked city of Sodom and gets taken captive by King Kedarlaomer, which leads to the War of the Four Kings.

The pasuk (*Breishit* 14:14) states:

וַיִּשְׁמַע אַבְרָם כִּי נִשְׁבָּה אֶחָיו וַיֵּרָק אֶת־חֲנִיכָיו יְלִידֵי בֵיתוֹ שְׁמֹנֶה עָשָׂר שָׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת
וַיִּרְדָּף עַד־דָּן:

And when Avram heard that his brother was taken captive, he led forth his trained servants, born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued them to Dan.

The Midrash (*Breishit Rabbah* 43:2) states that the 318 men were actually just one man, Avraham's servant Eliezer, based on the observation that 318 is the *gematria* (numerical value) of his name. This Midrash raises an obvious question: Avraham wouldn't go in and rescue Lot with just one man, because by doing so he would be relying on a miracle to occur on his behalf. So, we should ask, what is the significance of the number 318?

This Midrash raises an obvious question: Avraham wouldn't go in and rescue Lot with just one man, because by doing so he would be relying on a miracle to occur on his behalf. So, we should ask, what is the significance of the number 318?

This number is significant in several different ways. It represents the faith that Avraham had in Hashem, as he wished to go in and rescue Lot with Eliezer alone. And it represents the belief that Eliezer had in the contribution of others. We see here the impact of one person when they are willing to be *moser nefesh* (self-sacrifice, putting one's life at risk). Eliezer was ready to be *moser nefesh*, even in the face of a major war like the one

described in this week's parsha. So we see from here that Avraham took exactly 318 men who represented "Eliezer alone."

I think that we can draw a great comparison from this episode in this week's parsha to the current situation going on in Eretz Yisrael. Having spent Simchat Torah in Ramat Beit Shemesh, I woke up that morning in the face of a situation that made us want to give up hope. We, all of Klal Yisrael, woke up that morning in the face of despair. The Hebrew word for despair is יָאִוֵּשׁ (yeiush.) The *gematria* of יָאִוֵּשׁ is 317. Avraham took 318 men — one more than יָאִוֵּשׁ — and together with Eliezer, he showed an excellent level of *bitachon* (trust in Hashem.) We can draw a lesson from the war described in this week's parsha to the current war with Hamas, and that is that we should never lose trust in Hashem because He will always take care of His cherished nation, Am Yisrael.

I dedicate this dvar Torah to all of the victims of this horrific war who died *al kiddush, Hashem*, for the sole fact that they were Jewish, and to the IDF soldiers who are willing to be *moser nefesh* for Am Yisrael. May we only know from good, and may we merit to see the coming of Moshiach speedily and in our days!

Matthew Loren is a proud second-generation native of the Dale. Having spent two life-changing years in Israel at Yeshivat Ashreinu, he is now in his first semester at Yeshiva University. He is continuing his Torah Studies while pursuing a degree in Accounting.

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