

## Lech Lecha - Rabbi Lerner - October 30, 2011

Avraham's Hidden Background - Why Was He Chosen?

12:1: *Hashem commands Avraham to leave his home and his land and to go to a new land that He will show him.* Where is this coming from? Why does Hashem out of the blue tell Avraham to do this? Where is the background for this command? Why is he chosen? Furthermore, at the beginning of Noach, the Torah gives a background about his greatness - he is a tzaddik, he is Tam - why not list any of Avraham's Meylis here as well?

The first question that needs to be resolved is where was Avraham born? **Ibn Ezra** says that he comes from Ur Kasdim - the proof is that in 11:31 it says that Avraham took his family from Ur Kasdim, they traveled towards Canaan, but stopped in Charan. Since it says they left from Ur Kasdim, that would seem to be proof that this was his homeland. And in 11:28 it says that Haran died in Ur Kasdim, his birthplace, seemingly more proof. **Ramban**: if that were the case, then Avraham would have been born in the land of Cham, a land whose people are cursed - this can't be the case - he could not have been born there. Charan however is the land of Shem. Avraham is called Avraham HaIvri - this can mean that he was on the other side from the rest of the world, or he was a student of Ever, that he was from the land of Shem and Ever. So he must have been born in Charan, and he just migrated to Ur Kasdim at some point.

If Ur Kasdim was not his birthplace, why did he go there? That is where he got into trouble. **Ramban**: Ur Kasdim means the fire of Kasdim - it is not a real place - it is an oblique reference to Avraham's history - that he questioned his family's background and objects of worship; he recognized on his own that idol worship was nonsense; he smashed his father's idols, got into trouble when his father reported him; he refused to recant and Nimrod threw him into a fiery furnace, the same furnace used to make the bricks of the Tower of Bavel; God miraculously saved him. All of this was alluded to by this reference to Ur Kasdim. Later on Hashem says to Avraham that He *took him* out of Ur Kasdim, the same language that Hashem uses when He says that He *took the Jews* out of Egypt - it implies a miraculous exodus.

**Meshech Chachmah**: Avraham at this point was a ben Noach, and he was chayiv to observe the seven mitzvos, one of which was to believe in God and not pagans. This principle implied that if he was threatened that he must bow down to idols or be killed, he would not have to sacrifice his life - this was not a responsibility of a ben Noach, as opposed to Jews who must give up their lives. So, if Avraham was threatened with death for not bowing down, he should have just bowed down, not actually worshipping it in his heart, and not died for it. Instead, Avraham chose not to, he chose to die in a kiddush Hashem. It indicated an incredible amount of love for Hashem; he felt his life would have been meaningless had he given in. The gemorrah learns from a pasuk in Yeshayahu (41:8) where it says "Yisrael Avdi, Yaacov who I have chosen, you are the descendants of Avraham *Ohavi* - Avraham who loved me." It is only Avraham who is the ultimate symbol of love for Hashem. **Rav Schlessinger**: this is why Avraham was chosen, because of his incredible love of Hashem - he is the paragon for all others who follow him. He was not commanded to die for Hashem - it was a complete act of Avraham's love of Hashem, as opposed to fear of Hashem.

To further this idea, the **Rambam** in Hilchos Teshuva says that a person who worships God should not say that he does all of the good things, all of the positive mitzvos, in order to get reward, and he does not commit sins just to avoid punishment - this is a lower level of serving Hashem, it is serving out of fear; it is better to serve God out of love of Hashem - this is a much

higher level. One who serves God out of love is not doing it out of incentive to stay healthy and have a good life; it is because God is truth and he is convinced that it is the only way to live his life. This is the greatest level of Judaism, and most cannot attain this level. This was the incredible greatness of Avraham, who Hashem called *Ohavo*. He was the trailblazer, and this was the ideal; this is what we say in Shema, that we should love God - that is the best way to serve him. This is the main reason why Hashem chose Avraham. But, we don't know why was this not spelled out more clearly in the Torah.

A different approach as to why Avraham was chosen can be seen from the Mishnayos in **Pirkei Avos**: 5:2 and 5:3: *There were 10 generations from Adam to Noach* - this is to tell us how much patience Hashem has - it started off great and then deteriorated with each generation, and Hashem waited until the tenth generation before destroying the world. *Then there were 10 generations from Noach to Avraham* (Avraham was 58 when Noach died) to again show God's patience - they apparently learned nothing from the catastrophe of the destruction brought by the flood 10 generations earlier. Avraham came at the end of this generation and "*he collected the reward for all of them.*" What reward was there? Each generation was worse than the other? **Beis Halevi**: **Rashi** says that while Noach walked with God, Avraham walked before God; Noach needed support while Avraham did not. Noach was a good person but when surrounded by evil it is overwhelming and easy to get sucked in and sin - he knew what was right, but he was a human being who can easily succumb to outside pressure - therefore, he needed Hashem's support not to give in to the rotten society surrounding him. But Avraham was so strong, he did not need Hashem's support to avoid sin, even if the whole world was sinful. So, Avraham doesn't collect their reward - he gets greater reward for living in a world that was full of sin - he resisted; so he got reward for resisting all of the temptation of the whole world. That is why he is Avraham *Halvri*, the one who is on the other side of the whole world. He had incredible strength and resisted the most overwhelming temptation without God's special support. He had incredible discipline and strength. That is why he was chosen by Hashem - he was, and we should be impervious to the evil influences of the world around us. He had the incredible capacity not to give in. His conviction and clarity of belief in Hashem made him unshakable.

Another trait of Avraham: Why does Hashem love Avraham? Hashem says in pasuk 18:19 before He destroys Sedom that he knows Avraham well, that he will excel at parenting, at charging his household after him to follow Hashem. He will get all of them to guard the path of Hashem, to do mitzvos and follow the Torah. He will transmit his love of God to the next generation, thus creating a model nation that will usher in the Messianic Era. **Alshich**: the greatest tool we have in making ourselves good parents is to show that what we do, we do with love. In Vayerah 18:19 the Torah says first there is the love between Avraham and Hashem, and then that he will teach his children - first is the mitzvah of loving Hashem - there is this juxtaposition to tell us that we will be successful teaching our children to go on the right path if we show a great love of Hashem. Fear of God will not necessarily transmit values to one's children; Love of God will.

There is yet another reason for Hashem's choosing Avraham. **Reb Nissan Alpert**: Why is there no introduction to Avraham's greatness in this parsha? It just says Lech Lecha. It does not even say where to go to - just that he should go to the place that Hashem will show him. Avraham packs his bags as God says, and then the Torah says that they headed out to go to the land of Canaan and they ended up there. How does Avraham know where to go, that Hashem's goal for him is the land of Canaan? Hashem had incredible trust in the judgment of Avraham's mind, that he had such clarity that He wouldn't even have to tell him anything; that Avraham

would just do everything the right way. It was a test when Hashem tells him *to go to the land He will show him*, and Avraham figured it out himself that Canaan was this land - he knew intuitively the place that God had in mind. He had clear, straight thinking and did not go off the derech. He knew what to do at every moment.

**Netziv**: in 11:31 it says that Terach was the driving force on their going to Canaan. **Ibn Ezra** - how can they be going to Canaan before Avraham was commanded in Lech Lecha? This was clearly out of order, an example of Ayn Mukdam Uma'uchar Ba'Torah - Lech Lecha preceded this travel that is described in parshas Noach. **Ramban** and others reject this interpretation, and say that initially they were going on their own, without any command from God, and they got side tracked and ended up in Charan; later Hashem commanded Avraham to go. But why was this first journey led by Terach? **Netziv**: Avraham was clearly the driving force; Terach took charge only of the logistics, charting the route and making the plans; it was Avraham who was the idealist, the driving force behind the journey. Terach was a ba'al teshuva who came on board with this, but it was Avraham who was the one who was driving the family to make this journey to Hashem's land.