



# TorahActionLife

## COMMUNITY PARASHA SHEET

### LECH LECHA

10<sup>th</sup> CHESHVAN 5777

Shabbat begins: 16:02

Shabbat ends: 17:06



**RABBI JONATHAN TAWIL**  
DIRECTOR, TAL

Lobster

The lobster is a soft mushy animal that lives inside a solid shell. That rigid shell doesn't expand. So how does the lobster grow? As the lobster grows it feels under pressure of its shell. It goes under a rock to protect itself from predatory fish, casts off its shell and produces another bigger one. Eventually that shell becomes uncomfortable and again it goes through the same process.

The stimulus for the lobster to grow is that it feels uncomfortable. Perhaps if lobsters had a doctor they would never grow; as soon as they felt uncomfortable they would go to the doctor and get a quick cure.

Times of stress are also signals for growth. A tough ride shouldn't be viewed as

adversity, rather as an opportunity to renew, revitalise and strengthen oneself. The Torah goes into great detail regarding the fine nuances of the lives of our patriarchs and matriarchs, for it is written, Ma'aseh Avot Siman L'Banim - Whatever happened to the forefathers, is a sign for the children. Therefore, by studying their lives, we can better appreciate the meaning of our own lives.

Our father Avraham was challenged with ten tests, all of which he passed with great distinction (Pirkei Avot 5:4). Rabbi Dessler Z'l explains that all of the trials and tribulations of future generations are traceable to those ten tests. If, through our long and painful history we have remained faithful to G-d and never lost

sight of our calling, it is because Avraham created the character traits that enabled us to prevail.

But tests are hard, so what is the real purpose of a divinely ordained test?

A student is tested in school so that the teacher can find out how much the student knows. The omniscient G-d, by contrast, is already aware of a person's capacity before the test. The purpose of a divine test, therefore, cannot be to reveal any new information to G-d.

The Hebrew word Nisah, "tested," is derived from the word Nase, which means flag. The Midrash explains that just as a flag flies high above and identifies an army or ship, so too a test is meant to elevate and reveal the innate potential of the person being tested.

A test is always a choice at the upper limit of a person's capacity. Passing the test actually changes the person. Potential becomes actualized. A rose bud contains all the petals of the opened rose, but a rose in full bloom is far more beautiful than a bud.

The Mishna in Yuma (5:3) relates how the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur would sprinkle blood on the Mizbeach (altar). He would sprinkle once upwards and seven times downwards. Each time he would count. He started with the first one above and counted "one", then made the second



### Living with Mitzvos

1. What letter was added to both Avrohom's and Soro's name and why particularly this letter?
2. Why is the great miracle of Avrohom's surviving being thrown into the furnace not recorded in the Torah?
3. Why is it called Bris Bein Habesorim?
4. Why did Hashem wait until Avrohom was 99 years old before instructing him to do bris mila?
5. What do we have out of Avrohom's nisoyin of being told to go to Eretz Yisroel – that of Lech Lecha?
6. When Avrohom left he was accompanied with Loit until their shepherds argued. Why did Avrohom take Loit with him more than any others of his family?
7. When there was a famine, Avrohom went down to Mitzrayim. Was this a correct thing to do?
8. Why did Avrohom accept presents from Paro when we have the possuk, *sone matanos yichye* that one should hate receiving free presents and that this results in life?

Answers On Page 3

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sprinkle which was downwards and said, "one and one". He continued with the third sprinkle and said, "one and two", followed by, "one and three" etc. Our sages are perplexed why at each count the Kohen Gadol had to continue to say "one and". Why didn't he just say number two three etc.?

The Yismach Moshe explains that the first sprinkling the Kohen Gadol carried out would be infused with emotion. But as with everything in this world, the more action we perform the more we lose the original inspiration. The Kohen Gadol wanted to keep that original inspiration with him and so he constantly reminded himself of the first sprinkling throughout the process.

It is the initial test that carries us through all the other trials and tribulations. We sap energy from our tests and use them to grow. Sometimes we fall, but our approach must be based on understanding that Hashem runs the show and only tests those that can withstand and be strengthened from these tests.

When man was created, the Torah relates that the Almighty said, "Let us make Adam (man) in our image and our

likeness" (Bereishit 1:26). The commentators explain that G-d wanted to include His heavenly tribunal of angels in the decision to make man. Even though He did not need to do so, He wanted to teach us to always include others when making a decision, even if they are less worthy than us.

I once heard an amazing idea on this. The Pasuk can be read in a different light. G-d at the outset was teaching us that He will have an input in our lives. He will test us, and it is up to us to withstand this and build ourselves. Both of us are partners in man's creation. G-d says to us – let us make man.

Join Me says G-d in making you into who you can be. Together we will form the real person in you.

Avraham was tested ten times to bring out different facets of his potential. According to the Rambam the first test that the Torah mentions is when G-d instructed Avraham and said to him (Bereishit 12:1): "Go for yourself, from your land, your birthplace, and from your father's house."

Avraham was comfortable where he was. He had built up a fantastic name for himself, people knew him and it would be difficult to leave the country and live in an

unknown land. Nevertheless he went forth. Through passing this test he was able to build an even greater family, bearing children in the land of Israel.

Avraham's tenth and final test is also introduced with the words "Go for yourself". He was told to sacrifice his beloved son Yitschak. Ten tough tests culminating in the ultimate challenge; being ready to accept that all that you have been blessed with and worked hard for should ultimately belong to G-d. He withstood the test, became our patriarch and gained a nation.

Until today we reap the rewards of his actions. We tap in to his stamina, eagerness and selflessness in the service of G-d. It was through him "going for himself" that he was able to realise himself and create the future Jewish people.

We are all tested on our own level, but this week when we read the Parasha and take pride in our ancestor's strength of character let us apply it to our own lives. We can pass any test that G-d gives us, it is for our good, and we will only grow from it. I never thought I would say this, but next time you get tested, just remember the lobster!



**RABBI JONATHAN SHOOTER**

**Making A Change**

Hashem said to Avraham 'Go for yourself, from your land, from your birth place, and from your father's house to the land that I will show you' (Bereishis 12:1). Rashi says that the destination was not revealed immediately in order to endear the mitzvah to Avraham and to give him reward for each separate word. Therefore according to Rashi there was just one mitzvah, to leave, but to increase his reward it was split into 3 parts. Rav Chaim Brisker explains that usually when a person goes from place to place, he leaves his house, then his birth place, and then his country, why then is the order reversed in this instance? He explains that in fact this teaches us that there were 3

separate mitzvos here; had it been written in the usual order, then we would have understood it as being just the one mitzvah, to leave his land. The order would have been just the normal order one follows. The reversing of the order shows us that in fact it is 3 separate mitzvos. So now we understand the words of Rashi; that the lengthening of the instruction was to give more reward for each word, that it was in fact 3 separate mitzvos.

Rav Leib Chasman asks what was the difference between Avraham and Lot? Lot also travelled with Avraham, he wasn't even commanded by Hashem to go, so maybe it was harder for him and he was greater? Yet we see that Lot ended up in Sedom, intermingling with the locals, and with its outcome. How did it go so wrong for Lot? He answers by explaining that you can have a person who wants to move upwards in a particular trait, he puts in the effort, but never seems to actually move up. Why is this? The answer is that he never really let go of his past. Either his actions or his hashkafos, were left intact. He may have taken something on cosmetically, but he was stuck in the past because he never truly exorcised what he needed to. Says Rav Chasman, a person who wants to truly move up, in Torah, or

yirah, or middos, has to exorcise the past. Only once that is done, can he be receptive to acquiring the good traits; and they will take a hold inside him.

This idea is seen in the order of our verse 'from your land, from your birth place, and from your father's house'. These refer to 3 influences that were needed to be discarded. The order goes from the lightest to the more intense influence. Firstly one's country, that is relatively easy to separate from. Then one's birthplace, until finally one's family. Once one exorcises those influences, then he is ready for 'the land that I will show you'. That was the difference between Avraham and Lot. Avraham first forsook the negative influences, thus he could really soar upwards. Lot meant well, he also wanted to be great like Avraham. However he didn't forego his past, he hang on to it. Therefore as soon as a small challenge came Lot's way, he failed miserably. He saw some nice pastures, said goodbye to Avraham, and settled as far as Sedom.

Rav Chasman says we see this problem greatly in our generation. You have people who intellectually want to move up, but they remain in their place. One who doesn't look for ways to uproot and separate his past, he is a talmid of Lot. He



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may hang around Avraham for a bit, but he will separate when it suits him and go his own way. One who wants to purify himself, and leave behind his former culture, he will then soar in Torah and Yiras Shomayim. Rav Chasman points out this doesn't mean one shouldn't start to do good until one has exorcised everything, rather one should work on both at the same time, and then one will soar upwards. But just to add mitzvos to his veneer of non-Torah values will not help him attain any real growth.

Let's face it. Many of us are brought up with the culture of Hollywood, soccer, technology and whatever else. If one learns Torah without trying to exorcise any of this, then it's just Torah placed on Hollywood. Nothing will come out. It will be 'Torah im Hollywood'. If one starts the process of exorcising these alien ideas, then the Torah will find a welcome home within which to take root in, and will flourish quickly. In other words you can't remain with the culture and ideals of goyim, and have some mitzvos superimposed. Get rid of the goy lurking within, and the path to growth is waiting. We also see this idea in the verse 'remove from evil and do good'. First we are told to

remove the evil from within us, and then we can do good, and that good will be truly good.

We find this idea also later on in the parsha regarding the mitzvah of bris mila. The Beis Halevi brings a discussion of the Rishonim as to whether one is removing a blemish, or is adding something positive, an extra kedusha that he didn't have before. The Beis Halevi says that in fact both elements are present. On the one hand, the orlah is a somewhat derogatory matter, that its removal is needed, as in the verse 'walk before me and be perfect' (Bereishis 17:1). On the other hand the bris is also described as a holy covenant with Hashem, showing that it's like the receiving of something extra, a higher level of kedusha.

The Beis Halevi then says we see these two aspects in the mitzvah of Mila. There is the cutting, and what's known as the priah. The cutting is the removal of the orlah, and removes the bad. Then the priah is done which is the mark of the holy bris, the addition of kedusha to the new baby.

No discussion of bris mila would be complete without mentioning the words of the Sefer Hachinuch (Mitzvah 3). He says that in the same way one can make a change

on one's flesh which leads him to perfection, so too is it within his ability to make a change in one's nefesh to reach towards perfection. People often think how can I change, I was born this way, it's too difficult to be a real Jew. Yet the mitzvah of Mila tells us we can re-cut ourselves out for better things. Nothing is impossible.

Let us conclude with some lomdus. As we know, the avos kept the whole Torah even before it was given. The question then is asked, why did Avraham wait until Hashem commanded him, instead of doing it off his own accord beforehand? The Brisker Rav says that the definition of the mitzvah is that it's a covenant between Hashem and the person it's performed upon, therefore it wouldn't have been fulfilled until Hashem had commanded this bris to be made. Another answer he gives is that the mitzvah of mila can only be performed upon one who has the status of being an orel (uncircumcised). Once it is performed, that person has the status of being mahul (circumcised). The mitzvah is to remove what is classified by the Torah as the orlah. Only post Hashem's commanding, was it given the status of orlah that would then have

## Living with Mitzvos

1. The letter Hei. Perhaps this letter was chosen is because they were looking for a new beginning in order to have children. This world was created with the letter Hei and therefore it represents a new start.
2. The Maharal says that it is in order that we should know that Hashem picked Avrohom and the Jewish Nation not based on any action or reason.
3. Bris means a covenant and Bein means between and Besorim means flesh. This bris was formed by cutting animals into two parts and going between them.
4. The last Mishna in Pirkei Avos Chapter 5 says that at the age of 100 a person is like dead and left this world. It is when his physical desires are at a minimum. Avrohom had bris mila at 99 so that Yitzchok would be born with minimal physical desires so that he could devote himself to spirituality and Hashem.
5. R' Chaim Volozhin (Ruach Chaim, 5:3) explains the phraseology and emphasis of Avrohom Ovinu, our father. All his trials, nisyonos, were the first of such done by man and therefore to him they were extremely difficult. However, after doing them, to his descendants they are now part of our nature and therefore much easier for us to do. The moshol to this is like the electrician who puts in the wiring and then afterwards everyone can just use a light switch to work it. What we came out from the nisyonos of Lech Lecha is the Jew's unnatural arousal and feelings for Eretz Yisroel.
6. Perhaps this is because Avrohom felt a personal responsibility to look after Loit since he was indirectly the cause of Loit's father, Horon, death. (see Rashi, Noach, 11:28) Horon died after seeing Avrohom miraculously saved from the furnace and therefore he chose to also follow Hashem and was thrown in and died.
7. The Ramban says that Avrohom made two mistakes. Avrohom despite the famine should have stayed in Eretz Yisroel and relied on Hashem to provide for him. Also he brought his wife into a dangerous situation by bringing her down to Mitzrayim and again he should have relied on Hashem. However, the Ran argues and says that Avrohom acted correctly both in going to Mitzrayim and trying to save himself and not to rely on miracles.
8. The Kli Yokor says that this principle of hating free gifts applies only to extras and not the basics. Avrohom here accepted the basics. Another answer is that this principle only applies to receiving gifts from Jews. Why then did Avrohom only accept from Paro and not the king of Sedom? Avrohom did not want to get benefit from sinners. Maskil Lidovid answers that this only applies in Eretz Yisroel – therefore Avrohom accepted from Paro but refused from King of Sedom. Another answer is that really all free presents should be hated. However, had he not accepted them from Paro it would have looked suspicious.

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to be removed. Beforehand, there was nothing that was called orlah that had to be removed, so it couldn't have been fulfilled before the commandment was given.

Another answer is brought down by Rav Yaakov Naiman, who says if there was not yet a commandment of mila, then to do so

would be causing harm to one's body. This even a ben Noach is commanded against. Therefore Avraham couldn't have performed mila without the mitzvah, as there was the prohibition of harming oneself that existed beforehand. Rav Yaakov Naiman's own answer is that the gemora says only one who is

obligated in mila, can perform it on others, if one is exempt himself then he cannot perform it on others. Seeing as Avraham had no obligation on himself, he could not perform the mila on himself either.

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**"The Sages say that one's torah study does not endure unless it is with strenuous effort and reverence for the teacher. But torah study with pampering and comfort does not endure, and a man does not enjoy this kind of study. The Sages said this explicitly - "torah that I learned with difficulty - it endured with me". (Rambam Avot)**

**"Torah study is hard, gruelling labor but which eventually brings the greatest joy." (Rav Moshe Feinstein, zt'l Derash Moshe).**



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