



Lech Lecha



English version

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UNDERSTOOD. RESPECTED. LIKED.

R Nissim Karelitz Zt"l was once asked the reason why some marriages are not blessed with tranquility. Is it a budgeting issue? A cultural issue? Technology? A deficiency in communication skills? Conflict of interests, beliefs personalities, levels of religion? Or, maybe all of the above?

He answered that *marriages that are not smooth sailing are those in which each one is looking for his or her own respect. If each person would be sensitive, looking out for the other's respect, they would have a beautiful time together. If they follow the rules of respect, closeness only brings people together. The reason for so much fighting in marriages is haughtiness. Humility will never lead to disagreement.*

Allow me to quote the Rambam and the Shlah regarding Shalom Bayit. The Rambam for men. And the Shlah for women.

For men only –The Rambam writes in Halacha the following: *Our Rabbis commanded a man to respect his wife more than he respects himself. If he has money, he should increase his goodness towards her, in accordance with the amount of money he has. He shall not cause her fear, anxiety, stress, and his words with her should be calm. He should not be sad, melancholy, sour, angry,*

full of sorrow or grief. (See Rambam Ishut 15;9) Men, you are expected to be the anchor of all positivity, no matter what is going wrong.

For women only- The Shlah goes all the way. The Shlah writes the checklist for the woman that will give her total control over her husband. Here it is, word for word: *The Derech Eretz for a woman is to be giving in to her husband, listening to him, and when she speaks to him, she should speak with charm and with pleading, with respect, with a sense of being undeserving, with humility. And when she does, her voice will be heard, and her will shall be done. She should always show him that she is happy, and she should keep his meal times, make him his favorite foods, put her will aside, and instead, follow his will... even if in her eyes, she totally does not understand him or agree with him!* (Shlah Shaar HaOtiot Dalet- Derech Eretz)

Although Sarah was greater than Avraham in prophecy, she almost never took a stand against all that Avraham did or asked. (See Rashi Bereshit 21;12) And, he asked a lot! Moving to who-knows-where, just following a cloud, putting herself in danger for him, twice, taking her only son to Akeidat Yitzhak! Avraham said at Sarah's Hespel, *בטח בה לב בעלה* *Her husband's heart trusted in her, for*



when he told her to say that she was his sister, she obliged. ושלל לא יחסר. *And spoils, he did not lack.* Because of Sarah, I became rich. As it says, גמלתהו טוב ולא רע. (Tanchuma)

לעולם יהא אדם זהיר בכבוד אשתו שאין ברכה מצויה בתוך ביתו של אדם אלא בשביל אשתו, שנאמר ולאברם הטיב בעבורה. והיינו דאמר להו רבא לבני מחוזא: אוקירו לנושיכו כי היכי דתתעתרו. *A person should always be careful to respect his wife. For the blessing that is found in a man's house is only in the merit of his wife.* As it says, *And to Avraham "he" was good, for her sake. Rava would teach Bnei Mechuza -Respect your wives, so that you will become rich.* (Bava Batra 59a) As great as Avraham was, he did not deserve goodness on his own. He needed Sarah's merit. This teaches that if you are rewarded with blessing, even though you might have merit, ultimately you got that blessing, because you have a wife at home.

Why is that so? Why is it that a man has blessing, only in the merit of his wife? לעולם יאכל אדם וישתה פחות ממה שיש לו וילבש ויתכסה כמו שיש לו ויכבד אשתו ובניו יותר ממה שיש לו, שהן תלויין בו והוא תלוי במי שאמר והיה העולם. (חולין פד) *A person should always live within his budget regarding his level of food, drink and clothing, and he should spend on his wife and children more than his budget. Why? Because they are dependent on him, and he is dependent on the One who spoke, and the world came into being!* (Chullin 84)

As mentioned in Siftei Chaim- (Emunah A, page 33), a fundamental principle of Judaism is that we are just Keilim, tools, to bring out G-dliness and His good in this world. Avraham Avinu was great, because it says, והיה ברכה – you shall be a blessing. Our Rabbis teach that the word ברוך, on a deeper level means, to connect to a greater Source, (See Kad Hakemach Bracha 1), like the word הברכה

regarding Shemitta. Avraham was blessed by G-d to be the link between G-d and humanity, to connect humanity to G-d. By teaching people to recite a blessing over their food, *and on a family level, to provide for his wife.*

Judaism invented this word called merit. Your success is not in *your* merit, but in the merit that you are a nice guy to your wife. That is all she wants from you, that you be a nice guy. And when you are a nice guy to your wife, you will have so much Beracha, you won't even know what to do with it. Beracha in spirituality, beracha in physicality, beracha that you will personify serenity.

R Akiva was so poor at the outset of his married life that he and his wife lived in a barn. But he was a source of optimism for Rachel. As he had to pick the hay out of his wife Rachel's hair, he promised her that when he would have the money, he would buy her an expensive piece of jewelry called, *yerushalayim shel zahav.* (See Nedarim 50a) Although R' Akiva did not have the money for such a luxury, but out of respect to her, he told her that she deserved it and he promised to give it to her when he could, something he later did.

As I was writing this story, I got a phone call from a client. This fellow learnt in Kollel for a while, and now he is trying to support himself, working in sales. He is an amazing guy, but he is struggling to keep up. His wife asked him for 635 dollars, money he just did not have. He said, no problem. I will get you the money tonight. He had no idea where he would get that money from, but he knew that if his wife asked, he would somehow get it for her. A few minutes later, his boss calls him over and says, Hey, you are doing an amazing job here at the office. I like the vibes you bring. Here is a tip. He pulls out 620 dollars from his wallet!!!!



In the classic sefer on Shalom Bayit, Bayit UMenucha from the Mashgiach of Kamenitz, R Moshe Aharon Shtern write the following:

“The Mitzvah to have children is on Men alone. Not on women. Women do not have the Mitzvah of פרו ורבו. Why not? Tosefot explains, because a woman who becomes pregnant is putting herself in the dangers of childbirth. R Meir Simcha explains, that the Torah does not ask a person to put themselves in danger.

Still, a woman is willing to get married. What more do you need to explain to the man that he owes his wife respect? Difficulty in bringing up children is a curse on women, for the sin of Chava, and raising children just gets harder in each generation. And if raising children alone is not hard enough, the woman becomes pregnant again and tries to be the best mom she can while she is not feeling herself! Hello men!!! All your wife wants from you is that you understand her, that you respect her, for even willing to be a Mom! All that she expects from you is that you can show her that you like her, even when she is wiped out, feeling horrible, and grumpy. (See Yevamot 63a)

R' Nissim Karelitz was once approached with a Halachic query by a man whose widowed mother was ill. She needed her married sons to

take turns being with her, each night. But one of the daughters-in-law claimed it was too hard for her. R' Nissim ruled that although there is a Mitzvah of honoring parents, a man's commitment to be at his wife's side comes first. After all, the husband is committed to her in his Ketubah, ואנא אפלה ואוקיר.

So how do I tap into the blessings through improving Shalom Bayit?

Here are the Selfie Steps.

Most of us want three things from the people we meet: to be **understood**, **respected**, and **liked**. This is parallel to the Triple A of Shalom Bayit : Attention, Affection and Appreciation.

- 1.By giving others our Attention...they feel Understood.
- 2.By displaying our Appreciation... they feel Respected.
- 3.When you communicate Affection, they feel Liked.

If these three are checked, your Shalom Bayit is surely off the charts!!!

THE FIRST TIME

You know, Avraham Avinu, our holy grandfather Avraham Avinu – he prayed to G-d for the *first* time. You know, thank G-d, you and I have been praying all of our lives. But, did you ever taste *the first time*? (Shlomo Carlebach)

I remember 10 years ago, praying at the Wall, experiencing praying for the first time. There was a *baal teshuva* teenager, an extremely

handsome American 17 year-old boy, standing there praying Amidah at 11:30 pm. As if he had all the time in the world, not keeping to any rules, because he did not know them... With an English Siddur, he was talking to G-d, out loud, with passion – as one who speaks to G-d for the first time. *Blessed are You Hashem, our G-d and the G-d of our Fathers, the G-d of Abraham, the G-d of Isaac and the*



G-d of Jacob. The G-d, who is great, Almighty, and awesome...

After he finished, I approached him to tell him how deeply he had inspired me. He had no idea what I was talking about. He was just praying to G-d. He knew no other way. It was his first time, and it was so sweet. So holy. So precious.

Fortunes are invested for the sole purpose of making advertisements stick in our memories. I can never forget the advertisement for a new flavor of Nestea: “מתי בפעם אחרונה עשית משהו?” – “When was the last time you tried something for the first time?” What is stopping us from praying like Avraham Avinu, from praying a “first-time” prayer? Is there a way that we can taste the taste of a first time, every time? What holds us back from being able to taste the first time?

The problem seems to be that we have gotten so used to knowing that G-d is always there for us, waiting for us to *daven* to Him. He gives us so much space, so much leeway; it brings about a certain haughtiness. The only way to be able to taste the first time in prayer is through humility. We actually remind ourselves, before each prayer, to be humble when talking to G-d. We even pray to G-d for permission to pray. For permission to move our lips. שְׁפֹתַי תִּפְתָּח וְפִי יִגִּיד תְּהִלָּתְךָ אֲדֹנָי *My Master, open my lips, and my mouth will say your prayers.* Without G-d, I cannot even open my lips. Because the key to tasting the first time is humility.

Avraham Avinu not only prayed to G-d for the first time. Every time he prayed, he prayed for the first time. He felt that everything that happened to him was something he was not worthy of, but that G-d had bestowed upon him, in His kindness. Every time he got out of

trouble, Avraham Avinu called out, והוא אלי וחי – *And He is my G-d, my living Redeemer and Rock to save me from my pain in time of distress.* Every time he went to sleep, every time he woke up, he said, בידו אפקיד רוחי בעת אישן ואעירה – *Into His hand I shall entrust my soul, when I go to sleep, and He restores it when I awake.* Whenever he was afraid, he said, ועם רוחי גוייתי אדני לי ולא אירא – *And with my soul, my body. Hashem is with me, and I will not fear.* This is why we say Adon Olam – the prayer that was inaugurated by Avraham Avinu – in the *siddurim* before Shacharit. Because Adon Olam was the poem that Avraham Avinu lived by.

To live like this, to be like this, Avraham Avinu was willing to give up a lot. He was offered millions, but he turned them down, because he did not want the giver ever to think or say, “I made Avraham rich.” אִם-מְחוּטָל וְעַד שְׂרוּדֵי-נֶעֱל וְאִם-אֶקַח מִכָּל-אֲשֶׁר-לָךְ וְלֹא תֹאמַר אֲנִי הִקְדַּשְׁתִּי אֶת-אֲבָרָם: After Avraham won the world war, all of Sodom, its people and booty were returned. So, the King of Sodom came to Avraham and said, “Give me the people, and take the booty for yourself.” Avraham then vowed to G-d that he would refrain from taking the booty: *...from a thread, to a shoelace, and will I take nothing that is yours, lest you say, I made Avraham rich* (Bereshit 14; 24).

Ever wonder why we wear *tallit* and *tefillin* only at Shacharit, and not for Mincha? According to the Meshech Chochma, this is learnt from the words of the Talmud on the above passuk. The Talmud teaches that in the merit of the word “thread,” Avraham’s children merited the thread of *t’chelet*, the blue-dyed string of *tzitzit*. And in the merit of the word “shoelace,” we merited the mitzvah of *tefillin* (Hullin 88b). Shacharit, which Avraham inaugurated,



needs *tallit* and *tefillin*. This is the reason we tie our left shoe first – because the Torah gives respect to the left hand in *tefillin*, something we merited because of Avraham's refusal to accept even a shoelace (R' Akiva Eiger).

But what was so powerful in these words that we merited *tallit* and *tefillin*? And in what way could the King of Sodom's shoelace possibly make Avraham rich?

There is something on the clothing that you wear, and – most probably – you don't know its name: A flugelbinder, or an aglet. An aglet is a small sheath, often made of plastic or metal, used on each end of a shoelace. An aglet keeps the fibers of the lace or cord from unraveling. Probably, the most important article of your clothing is your flugelbinder. Why? Because if your flugelbinder falls off, then your shoelaces unravel. And if your shoelaces unravel, you can't tie your shoes properly. And if you can't tie your shoes, you are in big trouble, because your shoes are more important than your home. לעולם ימכור אדם – קורות ביתו ויקח מנעלים לרגליו – Better sell the pillars of your house than walk barefoot. (Shabbat 129a)

The morning blessing, שעשה לי כל צרכי, "...that He prepared for me all of my needs," was meant to be recited on the gift of shoes (Berachot 60b). On Tisha B'Av and Yom Kippur, when we do not wear leather shoes, we are to skip this blessing. What? Why are shoes considered all that I need?

The Aboudraham writes that the reason we make this blessing is because as long as a person is barefoot, he cannot go out and make a living. Once he has shoes, he can get things done. This reminds me of the time one of my children threatened me that he wanted to leave home and never come back. I said, "No

problem. But the only thing is, you cannot take your shoes with you. *I paid for the shoes, and if you take them, you are stealing my shoes.*" The child left the shoes at the door, but could not get too far from my house. I was able to settle things with this child, because the child realized how dependent a child is on his parents. Even for just being able to cross the street with shoes. We need G-d to let us have shoes, and without them, we cannot even cross the street! How humbling!

The King of Sodom was so haughty that if he had given Avraham even a shoe lace, and if it had even any farfetched ramifications of helping Avraham become rich and famous, he would have believed Avraham's success was to his credit. This is why, specifically from the King of Sodom, who had just been saved by Avraham, Avraham did not want to take anything. But from Avimelech or Pharaoh, Avraham was willing to accept a lot of presents. What is the difference? Because when Avimelech gave and when Pharaoh gave, they gave out of humility, after having being plagued by G-d. But the King of Sodom gave out of haughtiness, so Avraham would not take even a shoelace!

If you ever did someone a favor, remember that it is not you who really helped him. The Chafetz Chaim in Ahavat Chessed (chapter 2) teaches that when you do someone a *chessed*, all of the outcome, for all generations, that is a result of that *chessed* is accredited to you. Still, it is not *because of you* that things worked out. Good intentions go far, but all they can ever be is good intentions. Without G-d, without His shoelaces, without His flugelbinders, we can't even cross the street!

How many times do we feel that our strength, wit, potential, family importance, looks, etc., etc., even something as miniscule as a



shoelace, is what makes us successful? If we ever feel like we are praying a stale prayer, this

is the reason why...

ALL YOU REALLY ARE

The Serenity Prayer is a prayer that is used by Alcoholics Anonymous. This is a prayer that has helped many people get out of various addictions. The prayer has a lot of wisdom to it. “G-d, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.” The serenity question is, how many things in life can you change? And the question of choice, of exactly what is your locus of control, is a big focus in coaching.

What happens too often is that we naturally think that we can change everything in life. But many times, the only thing that we do not realize that we actually can change is the way we think. And, like in the Serenity Prayer, when focusing on what we cannot change, we forget to focus on what we *can* change. The reason why you forget to focus on what you can change, is because you can focus on only one thing at a time.

Our Rabbis tell us very clearly what is in our hands and what is in the hands of G-d. “Everything is in the hands of G-d, except for fear of G-d.” The only area of life you have control over is fear of G-d, how much fear of Heaven you have. Fear of Heaven, of course, is as wide a spectrum as a spectrum could be. It affects every area of life.

Interestingly enough, Rashi in this week’s Parasha says that Avraham actually prayed that his son, Yishmael, have Fear of Heaven. (לו ישמעאל יהיה) (ביראתך. Rashi adds, 18 ;17) The Siftei Chachamim asks, from the aforementioned statement, “If everything is in the hands of G-d, except for fear of Heaven,” that means that Yishmael’s fear of Heaven is up to Yishmael, alone. How, then, would praying for Yishmael to have fear of Heaven be in any way effective?

The answer is, that our own Fear of Heaven is in our control, it is in our hands, by praying for it. R’ Ben Tzion Abba Shaul actually puts a spin on the words of our Rabbis and says, “Everything is in the hands of Heaven, i.e., it is up to G-d to say “no” to any one of your prayers or requests from Him. But when one prays for fear of Heaven, G-d never says no.

We pray for fear of Heaven when we say before Shema in the morning, ויחד לבבנו לאהבה וליראה את שמך, when we say, after U’va Letzion, וישים בלבנו הרחמן הוא יטע, אהבתו ויראתו. תורתו ואהבתו בלבנו ותהיה יראתו על פנינו לבלתי נהטא. The Chafetz Chaim prayed that he not engage in forbidden speech, that he would not see what he was not supposed to look at, and that he would not listen to what he was not supposed to hear. Even the Chafetz Chaim prayed for Fear of Heaven. Maybe that was how he became the Chafetz Chaim.

Avraham prayed for Yishmael to have Fear of Heaven, because the way that a child gets Fear of Heaven is by seeing how important Fear of Heaven is to the parent. Avraham was praying for his own Yirat Shamayim, that it be strong enough, that it would affect Yishmael.

Reb Moshe Bloy, when visiting America, spent Shabbat by a working fellow, who cried to him over his children who were not following the way of the Torah. Over his Shabbat stay, one of the children touched Muktzeh, and the father told him calmly that it is forbidden to touch Muktzeh on Shabbat. On Motzaei Shabbat, the child took the father’s money from his wallet, and was playing with it. The father screamed so furiously that the whole house shook.

Reb Moshe told him, “Now I know why the kids don’t keep Torah. They see that when it comes to



issues of Halacha, you are very calm and reserved. But when it comes to your money, you scream!”

Think Lot. Lot was a man who had so much. But he wanted more. He let his animals graze in the fields of the Canaanites, without even considering asking their permission or thinking that he should pay them. Avraham asked him why. Lot said because the Land would belong to him anyway, because G-d gave the Land to Avraham, and when Avraham would die, childless, Lot, as Avraham’s nephew, would be the only inheritor. Avraham told Lot that they could not stay together. So Lot chose to go to Sedom. From here, Lot’s spirituality, Lot’s Fear of Heaven, went downhill.

Reb Reuven Karlshtein asked, why didn’t Avraham try to be “mekarev” his own nephew? Avraham was the Outreach King; couldn’t he change his own family member? The answer Reb Reuven gives is that when a person commits a sin with a

logical justification, it is much harder to change his behavior than it is to influence a more neutral, random “Joe Shmoe”.

But, I believe that the reason why Avraham did not try to be mekarev his nephew was because Lot had “dollar signs” in his eyes. When someone is running after money, more money than he needs, Kiruv becomes very difficult. Because when a person is focusing on materialistic goals, if he believes that this is an area where G-d gives him ultimate control, there is absolutely no room in his agenda for anything spiritual.

It seems that this is what King Solomon, the wisest of men, meant when he said. סוף דבר הכל נשמע את סוף האדם ירא האלקים All you are, at the end of the day, is the amount of Fear of Heaven you have. Because that is your only choice, and the only place where G-d gives you control.

KING OF THE CLASS

According to Chassidut, the weeks of these Parashiot are weeks when we can ask ourselves the age old question, *When will my actions reach the actions of my Forefathers*. There is a special Hashpa’a during these weeks, when we can connect ourselves to Avraham Avinu, to his Emunah, to his Hessed and to his Greatness.

The first thing that Avraham ever heard from G-d was “Lech lecha”. Go. Go through life, test after test, traveling towards your life goals. Go. Don’t get stuck on what people have to say about you, what people want to do to you. Go, until I tell you to stop. Just keep on going.

I believe we can all tap into that message. For every Jew, the job in life is – to go! Not to get stuck. But to keep on growing, and growing and growing. Whenever something is bothering us in life, if we are jealous, if we are angry, if we are depressed, if we are insulted... there is only one real reason why. It is because we are not

performing the mitzvah “Lech Lecha.” We got stuck.

One of the greatest plies of the yetzer hara is to make a Jew forget what his Tafkaid in life is, why we came here and where we are going. What is important, and what is not. We all know that we were brought to the world with a Neshama, with a purpose. And just like the very first thing G-d told Avraham, the first Jew, was “Go”, so too, every Neshama, before being sent down to this world, is told by G-d Lech Lecha. *Go wherever I send you. Go away from what is comfortable. Go for the challenges in life. Until I ask for your Neshama back.* לך אל הארץ אשר אראך, Go to the land which I will show you. How does G-d show us that land, in our personal life? Your “אראך” – binoculars – is the Torah, a similar root. Growing in the ways of the Torah is the essence of Lech Lecha, the only way to “go” somewhere in this World. This is why Halachot are called Halachot, for they show you how to “go” in life. הליכות עולם לו – אל תקרי הליכות ילכו מחיל אל חיל יראה אל-ל And, as it says,



אלוקים בציון The passuk that is the source of the Halacha that one must go from praying Shacharit, directly to learn Torah in the study hall. (Sh”A 155)

As one goes through life, each stage of life has its own “king”. In kindergarten, the king of Gan is the child who bites the hardest. From first grade till fourth, the king of the class is, commonly, the kid who kicks the strongest. Fourth till High, the kid who has the strongest elbows or is best at sports may be considered king of the class. In Yeshiva Ketanna or high school, the one who knows best how to degrade the other, verbally, might be the [despised] king. And, in Yeshiva Gedollah, the one who can ask the question to challenge the Rosh Yeshiva’s shiur is, in some way or other, king of the Yeshiva. From then on, political figures and the rich might be kings of society.

But each one of these examples is no more than a “fake king” – the king who everyone is scared of, but whom nobody sincerely admires or respects. There is only one real king, only one “genuine ruler”. And he is the undercover king all along, who reigns from kindergarten till his last days on earth. Sometimes, the people of the world discover the identity of the real king only when he is a grandparent. And, sometimes, unfortunately, only from the eulogy at his funeral. The king is the one who is master over himself, over his desires and his temptations. The one who allows his soul, his spirituality, to reign over his wants and wishes, desires and emotions. The real king, the Melech, rules from inside out. Not from outside in.

The letters מלך are really the ראשי תיבות, the first letters of the words מזה, לב, כבוד. In the מזה, our mind, we have our Neshama, our G-dliness. In our לב, our heart, rests our Ruach, and in our כבוד, liver, our Nefesh. The Ruach is the source of pride, anger, jealousy, and honor. The Nefesh is the

source of physical temptations and materialistic drives. If we allow our Neshama to reign, and the letters are in the right order, allowing the Neshama to rule the other two, then we are the מלך, the genuine king. But if we switch around our priorities, allowing our כבוד (Nefesh), or our לב (Ruach) to rule the מזה (spiritual/intellect), then the letters are switched around, making the letters כל(ו), nothing. When you feel emptiness in life, or you feel that your self esteem is very low, like a “nothing”, it is because you are “out of order”. You have allowed your feelings and desires to rule over your “hard drive”, your intellect and spirituality.

So, G-d tells the Neshama before its decent, Lech Lecha. ‘Just make certain that *the Neshama* is the one who takes the initiative and chooses the **direction** through life, not letting the Nefesh or Ruach tell you where to go.’ The way that the Nefesh or the Ruach control the Neshama is by confusing the intellect into perceiving this world as a permanent place, not a place of Lech Lecha.

This lesson hit me as I put away the last board of my Succah. After shlepping my big Succah up 4 flights for only a seven day period, after being rained on the first night of Succot, after being woken up 3 out of 7 nights from the dew that dripped on me at 3 am, I was confronted by my anti religious neighbor, who topped it all off with his annual, annoying, anti-religious question. “So, was it worth all the hassle for just 7 days?” I did not answer. He asked me if I have an answer. I said I don’t, because it is not question. He agreed.

I did not lie to him. I did not have an answer *for him*, an atheist. I had a real question to ask, both to the atheist and to myself, but I decided not to ask him, preferring to keep my distance. *Is it worth it to invest so much in our career, in our homes, in our cars... if it is only for 120 years?*

We are not here to stay. We’re just in transit.

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IN LOVING MEMORY OF SONNY AND IRENE GINDI A”H

