

United We Stand

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Parshas Lech-Lecha

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The Parsha's Paths

In this week's Parsha, we're introduced to Avram/Avraham, the Father of the Jewish nation. He is told by G-d to travel to the Land of Canaan, and his nephew, Lot, travels with him. However, after quarrels between Avram and Lot's shepherds, they realize it's best to part ways, and Lot moves to the city of Sodom. Shortly thereafter, a war breaks out and four kingdoms vanquish five other kingdoms, including that of Sodom. The four victorious kings plunder Sodom and kidnap Lot and his possessions. Avram is informed of this, and immediately takes action. He gathers the people of his house-318 men-and wages war against the four mighty kings, vanquishing them and saving Lot.

How did Avram defeat four mighty kingdoms, fighting against thousands upon thousands of people-if not more-on his own? There is a cryptic Pasuk in Yeshayahu (41:2) which the Midrash explains provides the answer: Avram threw dirt and pebbles at the armies, and the dirt and pebbles miraculously turned into swords and arrows which devastated them.

This Midrash is made famous by the story in the Gemara (Taanis 21a) of Nachum Ish Gam Zu. He was entrusted by the Jewish people with delivering a tribute to the Roman Emperor, a chest filled with precious jewels. Along the way, Nachum stopped at an inn. While he was sleeping, the people there stole his jewels and filled his chest with dirt so he wouldn't immediately detect the difference. Indeed, he did not discover the switch until he gave the chest to the king, who was furious and wanted to kill all the Jews. Despite the impossible circumstances, Nachum said Gam Zu LiTova and trusted in G-d. Eliyahu HaNavi appeared, disguised as one of the king's officers, and suggested that maybe the dirt Nachum brought was the same dirt Avraham used which transformed into swords and arrows. The Emperor agreed to test it, as there was an area his army has been trying to conquer but failed to up till now, and sure enough the dirt did the trick. The king awarded Nachum much honor and gave him a generous helping of precious jewels from his storehouse. On the way back, Nachum stopped at the same inn. Incredulous as to why the King honored him so much, the people of the inn figured their dirt had some special quality, and dug it all up. They presented it to the king, but it turned out to just be normal dirt, and they were all killed.

Why was Nachum Ish Gamzu's salvation manifest through the exact same miracle that was done

for Avraham? Of all the ways Nachum's story could have gone, why is it so distinctly parallel?

Perhaps we can understand this by looking deeper into the circumstances and motivations of both Avraham and Nachum. Both of them were in an extremely tight situation, where their fellow was at stake- in Avraham's case, he had to rescue Lot, and presumably Nachum's tribute to the Emperor was of dire importance. At the same time, to pursue the necessary steps to reach their goal, they had to cope with circumstances which seemed insurmountable. However, all they wanted to do was help their fellow man, and this was the only way. What more could they do but try their best and turn to G-d? After all, G-d put them in the impossible situation they found themselves in, so clearly He would help.

Avraham and Nachum both teach us a crucial attitude when it comes to helping and influencing our fellow man- we CAN do it, no matter how difficult or even impossible it may seem, because G-d will help. Sometimes a Chessed project seems too overwhelming, and other times people don't seem like the type receptive to advice or too independent to accept help, and sometimes it seems like if we make a fuss we'll just look like fools, but if something needs to be done, then it *could* very well be G-d telling us that we need to do it. And when we take the first step, acknowledging that fact, we can be sure that G-d will take care of the rest.

Deeper Meanings

At the end of Elul Zman in Kerem B'Yavneh, there were optional tests on Gemara and Halacha. When we came back after Sukkos, we recieved these tests back, graded. If you get high enough scores, you get various amounts of Shekels to use in the Seforim store on campus. I asked some people how much money I got for my test scores, but nobody knew. I then went to the Seforim store and asked there. The man wasn't sure, but he estimated around 60 shekels. I was then directed to a man in the offices, who had a record of the money everyone was entitled to. Unfortunately, I was not on record yet, but the man there estimated around 15 shekels. I still have not gotten a final answer.

In life, nobody knows the system of reward and punishment, and the Torah never even explicitly talks about reward and punishment in the next world. Two reasons for this include the fact that we're supposed to focus on Torah and Mitzvos for the sake of

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This week's bulletin is dedicated for a Refuah Sheleima for HaRav Gedalia Dov Ben Perel, Yosef Shalom Ben Shira Miriam, Yisroel Altar Ben Chava Chana, and Gavriel Margoliot Ben Malka. Please have them in mind in your Tefillos.

servicing G-d, and not get distracted or limited by thoughts of reward, and that the entire system of reward and punishment is extremely subjective, depending on each person's challenges and effort in every particular instance.

Reflecting back, I am reminded of how in school we were always taught about how great particular Mitzvos were, and the rewards for doing them. We were also taught about the tremendous punishments that awaited particular sins. They were so many stories of people getting afflicted with various punishments for having deficiencies in this world, and people who got various rewards for certain merits. I now see that this makes Judaism seem inappropriately whimsical- that certain deeds definitionally produce certain results. Reward became the definition of a good deed, and punishment of sin. It wasn't so much about working on oneself and being the best person one can be as it was about doing acts that had lots of reward and avoiding vices that were subject to punishment. This is the antithesis of Judaism's approach, and perhaps that is why I'm not meant to know the rewards for my test. The point of these tests is to help me sharpen my skills and become the best I can be, not get Seforim credit. Let us all strive to put every facet of our lives in a logical, objective perspective, working to come closer to G-d in all ways and not just getting out with some reward, and that is the mindset that truly leads to the greatest reward of all.

Words on Writings

Someone suggested that we move on to Sefer Daniel, in Ketuvim (Writings). Thus the change of the section title, at least until we move back into Neviim.

In the first Perek of Sefer Daniel, King Nebuchadnezzar lays siege on Yerushalayim and conquers it. Nebuchadnezzar orders Ashpenaz, the chief officer, to bring some Jews (youths) of royal descent and nobility, who were handsome, proficient in wisdom, knowledgeable and intelligent, and capable of serving in the Royal Palace, to be taught the language and writings of the Chaldeans for three years. From these, the king would select the best to be his advisers. During their time of study, the King allotted them with daily rations from his own food and wine. Daniel was one such youth, and as the food and wine was not kosher, he sought to refrain from eating it. G-d made the chief officer predisposed towards Daniel and let him do as he wished. However, he told him that he feared that the king would notice that Daniel looked out of sorts from a lack of proper nourishment, which would jeopardize the chief officer's life. Daniel turned to the guard that was in charge of him and three other youths- Chanania, Mishael, and Azaria- and asked for one chance- feed them legumes and water for ten days instead of the king's food, and see how they would come out after that. After the ten days, they looked better and healthier than all of the other youths. Thus the arrangement continued, and G-d made all four of

these lads intelligent and proficient in wisdom, and Nebuchadnezzar put them into his service.

Daniel had lost everything. The Beis-Hamikdash had just been destroyed, he was under the subjugation of a foreign people, isolated from his family, and G-d seemed to have left. All he had was rich, luxurious unkosher food, with every justification for eating it- and yet he resisted. Determined not to contaminate himself, he risked everything to eat only Kosher and as a result was led to brilliance and success, while all those who succumbed were led to failure. This small episode is the very picture of life itself- there's always challenges that are particularly difficult, where it's so easy to settle for less and so insurmountable to climb higher, but when we're determined to win out and do the will of G-d when the stakes are high, we'll find that G-d will take care of our other problems better than we ever could have had we not followed His path.

Goal of the week

Commit to act in a different way in a particular circumstance (inviting people you meet to meals, greeting your co-worker, saying something when someone starts talking Lashon Hara, etc.)

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Shabbat Shalom!

Our Mission is to bring the third Beis- Hamikdash by facilitating the only thing that will cause it: Unity. The Beis Hamikdash was destroyed due to Sinas-Chinam, blind hatred. Thus we must stop and reverse this deed, for nothing else can save us from Galut. Unity is key.