

SHAILOS L'CHAZARA

Review Questions

Likkutei Sichos Vol. 1

לקוטי שיחות · חלק א

Parshas Lech Lecha

פרשת לך לך

3 sichas in this booklet

Sicha 1: Going Down to Go Up · §§1-5

Sicha 2: Yishmael or Yitzchak? · §§6-14

Sicha 3: A Gift from Above · §15

TEACHER'S EDITION

Answers are printed in italics on the answer lines, with the section (§) of the sicha.

★ easy ★★ medium ★★★ harder

Each sicha has questions, a true chassidishe story, and a lesson for you.

Going Down to Go Up

לך לך מארצך וממולדתך ומבית אביך

Likkutei Sichos vol. 1, Parshas Lech Lecha (pp. 15–22), sections 1–5. From a sicha of 13 Tammuz 5714 (1954).

The point: *The Torah spells out “Lech Lecha” (and only hints at Ur Kasdim) because Lech Lecha happens in every Jew’s life: the neshamah goes down into a body and that brings it higher; then we “leave” our natural wants and habits, and in the end even our own holy limits.*

QUESTIONS ★ easy ★★ medium ★★★ harder

- ★ Avraham Avinu had ten nisyonos. Which nisayon was one of the first, and maybe one of the greatest, but the Torah only hints at it?

The nisayon of Ur Kasdim (being thrown into the fiery furnace). (§1)

- ★ Which is the first nisayon that the Torah tells us openly?

“Lech lecha mei’artzecha u’mimoladtecha u’mibeis avicha”: leave your land, your birthplace and your father’s house. (§1)

- ★★ Why does the Torah spell out Lech Lecha, but not Ur Kasdim?

Because Lech Lecha is part of the avodah of every Jew: from above to below, from below to above, and even within “below” itself. The Torah tells what is a lesson for every one of us. (§1)

- ★ When the neshamah comes down into a body, we find two opposite things. What are they?

(1) It comes down against its will: “al korchacha atah chai.” (2) Yet through this very descent it reaches a higher level than it had before: “yeridah tzorech aliyah.” (§2)

- ★★ Why is going down into a body so hard for the neshamah that it goes “against its will”? Give two reasons from the sicha.

Before it comes down, the neshamah is very high (“carved from under the Kisei HaKavod,” and even higher, “tehorah hi”). And as the Frierdiker Rebbe said, before it comes down it is shown Gan Eden and Gehinnom so it knows what lies ahead. (§2)

6. ★★ In the first explanation (from above to below), “artzecha,” “moladtecha” and “beis avicha” are levels of the neshamah. What do they stand for?

They are the neshamah’s levels above, from the highest down: artzecha = the soul as it is in

Hashem’s ratzon (will); moladtecha = as it is in chochmah; beis avicha = as it is in binah. (In

the worlds: above Atzilus, Atzilus, Beriah.) The neshamah is told to leave all of them. (§3)

7. ★★ In the brachah “Elokai neshamah shenasata bi,” which words show the neshamah coming down step by step?

“Tehorah hi” (pure, in Atzilus) → “Atah verasah” (Beriah) → “Atah yetzartah” (Yetzirah) → “Atah nefachtah bi” (into the physical body). (§3)

8. ★★★ Why is “v’Atah meshamrah b’kirbi” (You guard it inside me) higher than “tehorah hi”?

Because the guard is stronger than what he guards. Only after the neshamah is in the body does

Hashem “guard” it, and this reaches a level higher than its source. (§3)

9. ★★ In the first explanation, what is “the land that I will show you”? Why can a Jew reach Hashem’s Essence specifically down here?

It is the physical body and world. As Tanya ch. 4 says, Hashem can be grasped only through Torah

and mitzvos, and they are “lo bashamayim hi,” not in Heaven but here in this physical world. (§3)

10. ★★ In the second explanation (from below to above), what must a Jew “go out” from, and where must he go?

Artzecha (from ratzon) = the wants of the animal soul; moladtecha = natural thinking and natural

middos; beis avicha = habits from upbringing and habit that are not as they should be. He goes “to

the land I will show you”: the shul and beis medrash, where the wants of the G-dly soul rule. (§4)

11. ★ Why does a person need special strength to overcome the yetzer hara?

The yetzer hara comes first: it enters a person from the moment he is born, long before the yetzer

tov (at bar mitzvah). The neshamah is given this strength when it comes down. (§4)

12. ★★★ After a person has “left” his animal soul’s land, birthplace and father’s house, what higher Lech Lecha is asked of him? Why is this a step up?

To go out even from the G-dly soul’s own wants, its own chochmah and its holy hisbonenus, and reach above reason and understanding. Even holy understanding has limits; Hashem wants us to keep going beyond our own level. (§5)

A CHASSIDISHE STORY

A Step Back to Jump Higher

Soon after the Rebbe became Rebbe, a young man from Chicago named Mendel Greenbaum began learning in the Lubavitcher yeshivah in Brooklyn. A few months later, he got a letter: he was being drafted into the army.

Mendel was very upset. “When I wasn’t frum, I had all the time in the world and wasted it. Now that I finally use my time for Torah, I’m not my own master anymore. How could Hashem do this to me?” He went to the Rebbe.

The Rebbe said, “Sometimes in life one must take a step backward in order to go forward.” Mendel looked puzzled. So the Rebbe got up from his desk, took a chair, and explained: “If I wanted to jump over this chair, I couldn’t do it standing right in front of it. But if I take a few steps back and get a running start, I can clear it.”

With the Rebbe’s brachah, Mendel served two years in the army in Western Europe. He kept every mitzvah, found time to daven and learn even in hard places, and began helping dozens of Jewish soldiers put on tefillin, prepare for Pesach and learn the parshah. The “step back” turned him from a student into a leader.

Source: Rabbi Mendel Kalmenson, “Positivity Bias,” ch. 20, “Setback or Springboard?” (chabad.org)

Think: How is the Rebbe’s chair like the neshamah coming down into the body?

Going down into the body is the step back; it gives the neshamah the “running start” to reach higher than it was before (yeridah tzorech aliyah).

THE LESSON FOR YOU

Every “going down” is for the sake of going higher. Hashem put your neshamah in a body and in this world so it could reach more than it ever could above. And don’t stop at your comfort zone: leave your natural wants, then grow even past your own “good” level.

For example: Your family moves and you land in a new yeshivah where you don’t know anyone. It feels like a step back. Use it as a running start: be the one who says hello to the new kid, learns with a chavrusa no one picked, and comes to minyan on time even though no one would notice if you didn’t.

Yishmael or Yitzchak?

כי ביצחק יקרא לך זרע

Likkutei Sichos vol. 1, Parshas Lech Lecha (pp. 15–22), sections 6–14. From a sicha of 6 Marcheshvan 5718 (1957).
The point: *Yishmael's bris at 13 came from his own understanding; Yitzchak's bris at eight days tied him to Hashem above understanding, in a "bris olam."* True Jewish nachas comes from Yiddishkeit that is above calculations, so a child gets a full measure of Yiddishkeit from day one.

QUESTIONS ★ easy ★★ medium ★★★ harder

1. ★ What did the Frierdiker Rebbe often say about the parshah of the week?

A Jew is connected to the Torah, and the division of the Torah into parshiyos shows that from the weekly parshah we can learn lessons for what happens that week. (§6)

2. ★ Which two sons did Hashem give Avraham, and which was born first?

Yishmael and Yitzchak. Yishmael was born first. (§7)

3. ★ When Hashem promised him Yitzchak, what did Avraham ask for, and what did Hashem answer?

"Lu Yishmael yichyeh lefanecha": if only Yishmael would live before You (in Your fear, as Rashi says). Hashem said: No. You will have nachas from Yishmael too ("ul'Yishmael shma'ticha"), but "b'Yitzchak yikarei lecha zara"; true nachas will come from Yitzchak. (§7)

4. ★★ Why did it make sense for Avraham to be satisfied with Yishmael? Give two reasons.

Avraham was 99, had served Hashem for decades and knew what true nachas is; he would guide Yishmael in his own ways. And Yishmael's mother Hagar was so refined that her deeds were compared to the ketores (so she was called Keturah). She was Pharaoh's daughter and left the palace to be a maid in Avraham's house: mesirus nefesh. She raised Yishmael that way. (§8)

5. ★ What is the first difference between how Yishmael and Yitzchak were born?

Yishmael was born naturally. Yitzchak was born through a miracle; no one believed that Avraham and Sarah could have a child in their old age. (§9)

6. ★ How old was each one at his bris?

Yishmael was 13; Yitzchak was eight days old. (§9)

7. ★★ Why does the sicha point out that Yishmael was exactly 13? What could Yitzchak not do at eight days?

At 13 a boy has da'as and becomes bar mitzvah, so Yishmael agreed with his own understanding to connect to Hashem and gave himself a bris. A baby of eight days cannot agree to anything, yet Yitzchak was tied to Hashem with a bond that cannot be cut: a "bris olam." (§9)

8. ★★★ What is the problem with Yiddishkeit that rests only on understanding ("the way of Yishmael")? Give both reasons.

(1) There is no guarantee it will last; any change in his thinking can put it in doubt. (2) Even while he is connected, his Yiddishkeit is limited to the measure of his understanding; it may not be complete. (§10)

9. ★★ What happened when Yishmael seemed to threaten Yitzchak's inheritance? What did Hashem make clear?

Yishmael could not stay in Avraham's house; Hashem told Avraham to send him away, "ki b'Yitzchak yikarei lecha zara." Hashem made clear that the Jewish people and every Jew live above nature, from their very beginning. (§10)

10. ★★ How do we know that the Torah is not a history book?

We read the Torah again every single year. That shows its stories are lessons for every time and place: how a Jew should act at home, with friends and in the community. (§11)

11. ★★★ What mistaken idea about chinuch does the sicha reject? What does the story of Yitzchak teach instead?

Some think we should give a child a "thin" Yiddishkeit and wait until he grows up and can understand. That fits things built on understanding, but Jews are above calculations. On the eighth day we give a child a full measure of Yiddishkeit and tie him to Hashem in a bris olam, not for a year, ten or twenty-five years, but forever. (§§12–13)

12. ★★★ What should young people be taught about “calculations”? What promise does such a child receive?

That the Jewish people and every Jew are not bound by natural calculations: we come from a people born beyond nature, with the oldest Torah, who survived so many tests by miracles. So he should not build on human calculations. To him applies “b’Yitzchak yikarei lecha zara”: true nachas, in ruchniyus and in gashmiyus. (§14)

A CHASSIDISHE STORY

The Secret Bris

In Soviet Russia, a bris could cost a man his job, or send him to Siberia. Reb Chanoch Hendel Galperin, a chassid who had already spent years in Siberia, was ready to do a bris anyway.

One freezing day an elderly woman came to him in secret. Her son Abrasha was a director in the Communist Party and wanted nothing to do with a bris for his new baby. She would not give up, and finally he agreed, on one condition: it must be secret, and he would not be there.

Reb Chanoch thanked her: “Because of you, I’ll merit connecting another soul to its Creator forever.” With two trusted chassidim he went to the apartment and brought the baby into the bris of Avraham. They named him Yisrael, after the Baal Shem Tov.

As they sat with a little cake and a l’chaim, a knock froze everyone. It was Abrasha, home from the office. Reb Chanoch put a kippah on his head and had him make a brachah. Slowly Abrasha began to remember cheder and his father’s davening, and he sang his father’s niggunim with tears running down his face. By morning he had promised to start putting on tefillin and keeping Shabbos. Within a few days he left his government job.

Source: Asharon Baltazar, “The Secret Soviet Circumcision,” *chabad.org*, as told by Rabbi Shlomo Galperin, Reb Chanoch’s son

Think: The baby didn’t understand anything, and his father’s calculations said no. How does this story show “the way of Yitzchak”?

The baby was tied to Hashem in a bris olam above understanding and above calculations, and that bond even woke up his father’s Yiddishkeit.

THE LESSON FOR YOU

Our bond with Hashem is not a deal that holds only while it makes sense to us. It is a bris olam, above understanding. Understanding is good, but our Yiddishkeit does not wait for it, and “calculations” don’t get to decide.

For example: Your team makes the playoffs and the big game is on Shabbos. The “calculation” says you’ll lose your spot. A Yid isn’t run by calculations; skip the game, and you’ll see real nachas come from it.

A Gift from Above

ומל ה' אלקיך את לבבך

Likkutei Sichos vol. 1, Parshas Lech Lecha (pp. 15–22), section 15. From a sicha of Shabbos Parshas Lech Lecha 5711 (1950).

The point: *Avraham opened the “pipeline” of mesirus nefesh for every Jew, even geirim. The week after Lech Lecha must be full of simchah: everything Avraham reached until 75 was by his own effort, but milah was a gift from Above that draws a light higher than all of creation.*

QUESTIONS ★ easy ★★ medium ★★★ harder

1. ★ Who was the first to “open the pipeline” of mesirus nefesh and pass it on to all Jews?

Avraham Avinu. (§15)

2. ★ Who is included in Avraham’s “family” who are not his children by birth? What are they called?

Geirim (converts). They belong to Avraham and are called “bnei Avraham,” children of Avraham.

(§15)

3. ★★ What is the difference between Avraham and Yitzchak or Yaakov in who is counted as their children?

Only actual descendants are counted as children of Yitzchak and Yaakov, but even geirim are

counted as children of Avraham, because he is the father of every ger. (§15)

4. ★★ What did the Rambam rule in his famous teshuvah (based on the Yerushalmi)?

That even a ger may say “avoseinu,” our fathers (“Elokei avoseinu”), because Avraham Avinu is the

father of every ger. (§15)

5. ★★ Since Avraham’s power of mesirus nefesh was passed to geirim too, what is asked of them?

To keep Torah and mitzvos with full strength, even when it takes mesirus nefesh. (§15)

6. ★ Why must the week after Lech Lecha be even more joyful?

Because then we read about Avraham after he kept the mitzvah of milah, which is a very lofty

thing. (§15)

7. ★★ How did the Frierdiker Rebbe describe Avraham at 75, before Lech Lecha and before his milah?

A Jew of 75, a "ba'al achuzos" (master of his property), master of all his conduct, who had reached "sechel hane'elam mikol ra'ayon," a very hidden and lofty level of understanding. (§15)

8. ★★ How did Avraham reach all the levels he had before the milah?

With his own strength, because all those levels had to do with things of the created world. (§15)

9. ★★★ Why was milah different from everything Avraham reached before?

Milah was given to him from Above. Avraham's milah is the "milah of Above" ("u'mal Hashem Elokecha es levavcha"), and through it lights are drawn down that are higher than creation and all of seder hishtalshelus. (§15)

10. ★★★ Why is milah connected to birth?

A newborn child is a brand-new creation, a revelation of the infinite power of Ein Sof down below, and milah too draws down a light above creation. (§15)

11. ★★ The sicha says the following weeks must also be joyful. What example does it bring?

On Simchas Torah the general makif, which includes all the makifim of Tishrei, is drawn down, and from Simchas Torah it spreads over the whole year. (§15)

12. ★★★ If Avraham was already so great at 75, why does the Rebbe say we can't even imagine what he reached through milah?

Because everything before was the most a created being can reach by its own effort; milah was a gift from Hashem beyond creation, so its level cannot be measured by what Avraham reached on his own. (§15)

A CHASSIDISHE STORY

Tears of Joy

In 1941 the Frierdiker Rebbe told what happened when he was eleven. Early on Shabbos Parshas Lech Lecha he walked into his father's room. His father, the Rebbe Rashab, was reviewing the parshah in very high spirits, and tears were streaming from his eyes. The boy was confused: how could someone be so happy and cry at the same time? He didn't dare ask.

Every Motzaei Shabbos his father tested him on what he had learned that week and on the mishnayos he knew by heart. If he did well, he got a gift: a story or a maamar. That night, after the test, the boy finally asked about the tears.

"Those were tears of joy," his father said. "The Alter Rebbe once said: one must live with the times, which means living each day with the parshah of the week. Bereishis is a happy parshah; Noach has the Mabul, with a happy ending: Avraham is born. But the truly joyous week is Lech Lecha. Every day we live together with Avraham, the first to give himself over to bring G-dliness to the world, who left his mesirus nefesh as an inheritance to every single Jew."

Source: Yanki Tauber, "Living With The Times" (Kehot; chabad.org), from the Frierdiker Rebbe's account (1941)

Think: How do the Rebbe Rashab's "tears of joy" match what this sicha says about the week of Lech Lecha?

The sicha says the whole week we live with Avraham, who opened mesirus nefesh for every Jew, so

the week must be full of simchah; that is exactly why the Rebbe Rashab was so happy.

THE LESSON FOR YOU

Avraham's koach of mesirus nefesh is your inheritance; it is already inside you. And be b'simchah: the greatest things in your Yiddishkeit, like your bris, are a gift from Hashem, beyond anything you could earn on your own.

For example: On mitzvot you feel shy to ask a stranger to put on tefillin. You don't need to make the courage from scratch; Avraham already gave it to you. Walk up with a smile, and be happy that you get to be part of it.