



MISHNAS CHAYIM

משנת היום

MISHNAH ON THE PARSHAH

פרשת לך לך תשי"ע 5770 Parshas Lech Lecha

JEWISH HISTORY – THEN AND NOW – THROUGH THE EYES OF CHAZAL

Here's a real-life mystery that would be simply fascinating – were it not so tragic.

There are huge tracts of land throughout the world that are controlled and administered by various ethnic groups – Arabs, Caucasians, Hispanics, etc. By comparison, the amount of land over which the Jews have dominion is miniscule: what amounts to little more than a dot on the map. One would have thought that the nations of the world could tolerate the Jews holding on to such a pittance.

Yet it seems that in the eyes of the nations, even this tiny strip of land is “too much” for the Jewish people. Most of them want the Jews out entirely; the more “humane” and “reasonable” among them merely want to minimize their area and dictate which houses the Jews can build and where.

How did this bizarre set of circumstances come about? Once again, Chazal provide the key.

AVRAHAM AVINU

An obvious difference emerges by comparing two neighboring Mishnayos in Avos (5:2):

עֲשָׂרָה דורות מִנֶּח וְעַד אַבְרָהָם, לְהוֹדִיעַ כְּמָה אָרְךְ
אֲפִים לְפָנָיו, שֶׁכָּל הַדורות הָיוּ מְכַעֲסִין וּבְאִין, עַד
שֶׁבָּא אַבְרָהָם וְקִבֵּל שְׂכָר כָּלָם... עֲשָׂרָה נְסִיוֹנוֹת
נִתְּנָסָה אַבְרָהָם אֲבִינוּ עָלָיו הַשְּׁלוֹם וְעִמְד בְּכָלָם...

“There were ten generations from Noah until **Avraham**, which reveals the extent of Hashem’s forbearance; for all successive generations caused Hashem increasing anger (through their wickedness, though he did not destroy them), until Avraham came and received the reward for them all... There were ten trials with which **Avraham Avinu** (our father) of blessed memory was tested, and he passed them all...”

When comparing Avraham to his predecessors, the Mishnah refers to him merely by name. When referring to the tests he underwent, he suddenly receives the title of “Avraham Avinu.” Why is that so?

R’ Chaim Volozhiner (*Ruach Chaim, Avos, Ibid.*) explains that reflected in this Mishnah is actually a very fundamental principle concerning the *Avos* (forefathers) and their relationship with the Jewish nation. An “*Av*” is much more than a mere “founding father,” someone who just happened to be the first of a country or nation. The uniqueness of the *Avos* of the Jewish people is their role in building the nation and implanting them with the spiritual strengths they need to survive as a people. In other words, they laid the groundwork for the essential characteristics the Jewish people would carry with them throughout their history. It was during their trials that this groundwork was being established.

For instance, we are often awed when we look back on the many harrowing experiences to which our ancestors were subjected and the almost superhuman way in which they responded. When faced with the choice of conversion or the sword, whole communities – men, women, and children, scholars and the unlearned – willingly offered up their lives. From where did they derive their strength? It was implanted in them through the *akeidas* Yitzchak, when Avraham hearkened to Hashem’s command to sacrifice his son – both of them going willingly.

LOPSIDED VICTORIES

In Sefer Shoftim (*ch. 7*), we read about Gideon’s incredible military victory over the Midianite enemy. What is particularly amazing about this victory is the fact that, as per Hashem’s instructions, Gideon took with him a force of only 300 soldiers against the *entire* Midianite army.

לזכר נשמת
פיגא ריזא בת ברוך שלום ע"ה

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of משה בת ע"ה, a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of her neshamah.

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MISHNAS
CHAYIM

משנת חיים

פרשת לך לך תש"ע 5770 Parshas Lech Lecha

R' Elya Lopian (*Lev Eliyahu, vol. 3, beginning of parshas Devarim*) explains that this type of experience was not limited to Gideon; rather, it is a manifestation of the general manner in which Hakadosh Boruch Hu conducts the affairs of Klal Yisrael. That is, whereas the lives and events of the other nations are orchestrated in a more "regular" or "natural" way, Hashem guides the Jewish people's existence in an "extra-natural" fashion.

It could very well be that the precedent for this phenomenon was established through Avraham Avinu (acting in his capacity as a nation-builder). This week's *parshah* describes the military campaigns of the four kings vs. the five, wherein the greatest military powers met in battle. The events culminate with Avraham's intervention, when he himself – together with a few hundred associates – battled the mighty four kings and their armies in an effort to save his kinsman, Lot. Miraculously, Avraham emerged victorious, in what was obviously a Divinely-assisted supernatural victory.

**THE BLACK DEATH AND THE U.N.
(UNFRIENDLY NATIONS)**

Along with the remarkable blessing of an existence transcending the laws of nature comes a singular obligation: recognizing this wonderful gift and responding gratefully to the Almighty. Failure to do so could lead – G-d forbid – to the removal of this special protection, with severe consequences emerging in its wake.

As an illustration, R' Elya points to the Bubonic Plague that devastated the European continent in the Middle Ages. While a huge percentage of the population was decimated, the Jews – miraculously – were almost totally unaffected by comparison. This, R' Elya asserts, was a manifestation of the unique "hands-on" manner in which Hashem guides His people, lifting them above the normal course of human events. Such a wondrous circumstance surely warranted true recognition and gratitude, at the very least.

But what did people do? The more shallow-minded elements among them began circulating a "logical" explanation for this phenomenon. Instead of attributing the Jews' salvation to a Higher Power, they ascribed it to their lifestyle. Jews, they contended, are much more hygienic in their habits, as opposed to their swine-eating neighbors; hence, they avoided contracting the deadly disease.

What was the result of this "hypothesizing"? Soon, the general populace turned against the Jewish people, falsely accused them of poisoning the wells, and effected wholesale slaughter against large segments of the Jewish population.

R' Elya concludes that the events in Eretz Yisrael can be understood in a similar light. Hashem granted the Jewish people miraculously lopsided victories. Instead of recognizing the Hand of Hashem, however, all too many people attributed the successes to military ability and exceptional skill. The result? Much of what was gained and achieved in these campaigns, in the end, had to be returned...

Mishnas Chayim

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