

YISKA, SARAI, SARAH

Parshas Lech Lecho

By Rabbi Menachem Rokeach

The Midrash elaborates on the special qualities of Abraham prior to Lech Lecho. His defiance of Nimrod's orders, his smashing idols, his proclamation of the truth of G-d, are experiences of Abraham BEFORE his encounter in which G-d reveals Himself to him and commands him "Get thee out... unto the land that I will show thee." In the Chumash itself, however, there are a few passages relating to Abraham's earlier years, and on the surface, no spectacular achievement to warrant the Lech Lecho, which is the initial chosenness of Abraham as the father of the Jewish people.

Yet, upon reflection one finds a clause, in the Chumash sufficiently indicative of Abraham's potential greatness. The Torah relates in the end of Parshas Noach that "Terach took his son Avrom, his grandson Lot and his daughter-in-law Sarai, and they went with them from Ur Kasdim to go into the land of Canaan" (Braishis 11:30). Though the passage begins with "And Terach took", in the singular, it continues, "and THEY went with THEM", in the plural. "Terach and Avrom went with Lot and Sarai" (Rashi). Terach was given a leadership role as a sign of respect, but actually the journey was initiated by Abraham (RAMBAN). For Abraham sensed the assets of the high level of holiness in this land, which was later to become the Holy Land, and which is more conducive to the attainment of divine wisdom (see Sforno). Abraham then, possessed the rare qualities of a tenacious searcher, with a profound urge to even go from place to place to seek the truth. He demonstrated the thirst to know, the incentive to understand, the passion to become an assiduous student. These were the qualities G-d found in Abraham, and which earned him the command LECH LECHO.

The original plan to go to Canaan was not realized immediately. They stopped midway at Choron and did not complete together the journey to the land of Canaan (11:31). This may have been part of the divine plan that Abraham separate himself from his idolatrous father, and continue the journey on his own. However, it also proves that this journey was a most difficult one. The very plan to undertake it was a sign of great courage and stamina. This is too, the first time that the Chumash records such a journey. This speaks well for Abraham even before the Lech Lecho revelation.

It is this zealous journey for the truth that occupies Abraham also after the encounter of Lech Lecho. This time it is not only for the purpose of growing himself in divine wisdom and

service of G-d, but also to promulgate his newly found truth. “And he called in the name of G-d” (12:8) means according to the Midrash (quoted by Ramban), that Abraham called out the name of God in public, in order to promote and popularize the truth of G-d. More than a dozen times Abraham is found moving about from place to place for this cause of publicizing the omnipotence and awe of G-d: “And Avrom went” (12:4), (and they went forth” (5), “And Avrom passed through the land” (6), “And he removed from there into the mountain” (8), “And Avrom journeyed” (9)), “And Avrom moved his tent” (18), etc.

Abraham had a great sense of mission, to conquer hearts to the truth of G-d. For this he moved about tirelessly. Indeed Isaiah’s description (current haftarah) is most relevant: “And they that wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not grow tired, they shall walk and not become weary” (Isaiah 40:31).

“Run my friend, and be though like the roebuck...” (Shir Hashirim 8:1.4). R’ Bachya (Braishis 15:5) quotes a Midrash that this passage refers to Abraham. The knowledge of the truth of G-d so overwhelmed Abraham’s mind and heart that his feet became light as of a roebuck to run from place to place to burst it out to fellow humans. Only by sharing this knowledge could his soul calm.

Most of the above, however, are revealed after Abraham has been chosen, and commanded “Lech Lecho”. Our curiosity, and urge to search, is for the source (at least by Remez (indication) before the Lech Lecho command, i.e. in Parshas Noach.

It was shown, above, that Abraham possessed leadership aptitude. Moreover, he had an unquenched urge, to conquer the entire world for Hashem. **בהבראם** (Beraishis 2:4) a reference to world creation, contains the same letters as **באברהם** (Through Abraham the world will acknowledge the Creator).

Is there any additional “Remez” (indication) in Parshas Noach to warrant the “Lech Lecho”? One wishes to suggest in the affirmative. It is the name “Yiska” (Noach 11:29). Who is Yiska? Informs us the Talmud, Yiska is Sarah, and here she is called “Yiska” because she possessed Ruach Hakodesh (spiritual vision), from Socha, possessing far sight (Megila 14b, quoted by Rashi).

Not every person has two separate names. Some great personalities do. Yisro had seven names (Rashi Shemos 18:1). Moshe possessed ten names (enumerated in Simchas Torah Piyut at returning the Sifrei Torah to the ark). Sarah is also called (originally) Yiska, because her spiritual (near prophetic) vision of future development is most crucially consequential. The Talmud (ibid and Sanhedrin 69a) expounds the significance of Sarah’s (Yiska’s) vision, for Hashem told Abraham “Whatever

Sarah tells you, heed her voice” (Beraishis 21:12). This command was given in connection with her witnessing Yishmael thoroughly corrupt and evil, and thus requesting Abraham to send him with Hagar away from home. “For the son of this slave woman shall not inherit with my son, with Yitzchok” (ibid 21:10), “with the righteous Yitzchok, even if he would not be my son, certainly so since Yitzchok is my son” (Rashi).

It is animating to think of Sarah’s, Yiska’s, far-far sightedness. Her spiritual vision, Ruach Hakodesh, even before Lech Lecho, stretched more than three and half millennia, to the current bitter conflict between Knesses Yisroel and descendants of Yishmoel, as to who is the inheritor of the Promised Land. One word “Yiska”; how mind-boggling.

As every word in the Torah is eternal, so is Hashem’s command to Abraham to listen to Yiska’s, now Sarah’s, prophetic voice that only Yitzchok and his descendants have a right to Eretz Yisroel.

The name change from Yiska to Sarah did not come directly. First it was changed to שרי (Sarai). Fifteen times the name Sarai is mentioned in the Chumash, until Hashem tells Avrohom not to call her Sarai for her name is (now) Sarah. (Sarai means “my” princess, she is now Sarah, princess of the entire world - Rashi.)

Now the letter Yud in the name שרי did not simply disappear. It was kept and given to another prominent personage, Joshua. According to the Jerushalmi (Sanhedrin 9:6) the letter “Yud” from the name שרי complained to the Al-mighty for having been taken out from the name of the Tzdaikes Sarai. Hashem pacified the Yud saying the letter Yud will now adorn a great person in the beginning of his name, that of יהושע, as stated (in connection with the mission to check out the land) “Moshe called Hoshea son of Nun יהושע, Joshua” (Bamidbar 13:16).

How fascinating the connection: Sarai (with the letter Yud), before the name is changed to שרה, is mentioned mainly in the context of her distancing from Hagar. “...for the son of slavewoman shall not inherit with my son, with Isaac” (loc. cit.). Comes יהושע, the Yud added to Hashaia, (in the year 2488) 440 years later, and conquers the Land for the Jewish people, exclusively.

Here is the realization of Yiska’s (Sarah’s) Ruach Hakodesh (prophecy), her prophecy came true through Joshua. From Yiska to Sarai to Sarah.



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