

Lech Lech 5771

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On the pasuk “*VAYIKACH AVRAM ET SARAI ISHTO VE’ET LOT BEN ACHIV VE’ET KOL RECHUSHAM ASHER RACHASHU*” (Avram took his wife Sarai and Lot, his brother’s son, and all their wealth that they had amassed) “*VE’ET HA’NEFESH ASHER ASU BE’CHARAN*”.(and the souls they made in Charan).

Gemara Sanhedrin (99b) discusses the meaning of “making or creating a soul”. We know that it is humanly impossible. So Resh Lakish interprets it to mean that Avram taught them Torah – and teaching someone Torah is tantamount to “making a new person out of him”. Rashi adds upon this and states that Avram converted the men and Sarai converted the women.

Question is, whatever happened to these converts? We don’t hear from them and we never hear anything about them in the Torah, nothing positive and nothing negative. In Teshuvot Mahabit 2, O”C –6, it states that these converts never took hold and eventually petered out, despite the efforts of Yitzchok and even Ya’akov, who tried to maintain their interest and commitment, but to no avail. The lofty project of Avram and Sarai failed to accomplish any lasting effect.

What went wrong? Of course we must realize that the term “converts” does not have the same meaning as “converts” in our days. Today- a (male) convert must have a Brit Milah. But in the beginning of our parsha not even Avram had a Brit Milah. He was later instructed to perform a Brit Milah upon himself, and then upon his entire household, but not in the beginning of the parsha. Secondly, he requires Mikvah, and thirdly- Kabbalat HaMitzvot, acceptance of all the Mitzvot in the Torah.. But Avram himself was not commanded on these Mitzvot. All he had was the seven Mitzvot of a Ben No’ach. (I know that Chazal say he observed all the Mitzvot that were given to us through Moshe Rabbeinu, but Avram was not commanded, at best he observed Mitzvot as an “*EINO METZUVA VE’OSEH*”, as one who performs Mitzvot without being commanded, which is considered a lower level of performance.

So there was no REAL Geirut (conversion). All that Avram was able to do is to inculcate within them a BELIEF in HaShem, in monotheism, and remove them from pagan ideology, which is one of the “Seven Mitzvot of Bnei No’ach”. If that was his only goal and agenda then why did he fail?

We see something very profound from this event. For someone to believe in HaShem without the observance of Mitzvot is merely an exercise in futility.. Observance of the Taryag (613) Mitzvot is the way to inculcate Emunat HaShem. Rambam states in his opening Halacha in Yad Chazaka – “Leida She’yesh Sham Matzui”, to know, to study and realize that there is a G-d. But he does not begin by saying to “believe in G-d”. That goes without saying. Without believing in HaShem we wouldn’t want to observe the Mitzvot. Who would observe kashrut, ta’harat mishpacha, Tefillin, Tzitzit, -without believing in G-d?

So we begin our life of observing Mitzvot by believing in HaShem. Then, in order to maintain and to strengthen that belief we observe the Mitzvot. The Mitzvot elevate us to a higher spiritual level that enables us to enhance and enrich our Emunat HaShem.. Without Mitzvot, our Emunah would remain on the lowest level which would have no chance of being with us and a part of us for the rest of our lives. That is why Avram failed. Not because he was not a good teacher, pedagogue or role model. He failed because without Mitzvot there was no solid foundation for Emunat HaShem.