

Lech Lecha 5712

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Most of us are all familiar with the famous phrase in this parsha- that when Avram was told to leave Charan and go to the land which G-d will show him, Avram took with him his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, and then-the phrase- “*VE’ET HA’NEFESH ASHER ASU B’CHARAN*” [and the souls they made in Charan] (12:5). We know it is humanly impossible to “create a soul”, so Rashi tells us that it does not mean in the literal sense, but rather that Avram was *megayer*[converted] *the men and Sarai was megayeret the women*. And since a Ger [convert] is like a newborn child [Yevamot 22a], so it’s “as if”, they created a new human being. Of course, “converting” in the days of Avram is not the same as converting in our times. Today the Ger is required to accept Kabbalat HaMitzvot, complete acceptance of all Mitzvot, which we received at Har Sinai in the days of Moshe Rabbeinu. So the converts of Avram merely had to accept the concept of Monotheism and negate all other deities.

That monumental task that Avram and Sarai accomplished, was continued by their children Yitzchak and Rivka, and then further perpetuated by the grandchildren, Yaakov and his wives, as Chazal note on “*VA’YEISHEV YA’AKOV B’ERETZ ‘M’GUREI’ AVIV*”[37:1], that MEGUREI means Megayeir. That Ya’akov continued with the task of converting people to monotheism. However, once Ya’akov attained a family of twelve sons and a daughter, there was no further need to continue this program of converting the world but rather the focus was to be on his own family. We, therefore, are not charged with the responsibility of converting the world but we concentrate on our own family and our own people. Jews are not missionaries.

However, the Gemara Sanhedrin [99b] has a different interpretation on VE’ET HA’NEFESH ASHER ASU. It states, “*KOL HA’MELAMED ET BEN CHAVEIRO TORAH*” “Whoever teaches his fellow’s son Torah- is regarded as if he “made” [that son]”, based on our pasuk. The Targum Onkelos translates our pasuk “*V’yat Naf’shata De’sha’abidy L’Orayta B’Charan*”, the people that Avraham and Sarah made “subject to the Torah”. Thus, we see that when one person offers another religious instruction and forms him into a Torah-observant Jew, the instructor is regarded as having “made” him, as having spiritually created-his student.

The Maharsha explains that a person who is not knowledgeable in Torah is just a living creature. Through knowledge of Torah, however, he becomes elevated to the status of “man”, which is the purpose of his creation.

The fact that the Gemara speaks about a Ben Chaveiro, “his fellow’s son” rather than “another person” is because it wants to teach us that one is considered a parent’s son only as far as physical existence is concerned. However, his soul comes from G-d, and if it properly nurtured by a teacher, that teacher becomes the child’s spiritual father.

We all have the Mitzvah of V’AHAVTA ET HASHEM , loving G-d. How can we express and show that love of G-d? When we love a certain food we ate, a book that we read or a place we saw, we share our experience by telling others about it. So too with the Mitzvot of HaShem. We love learning about them and we love doing them; so our love must be expressed by sharing and teaching them to those that are not familiar with them. This is the way Rambam in Sefer HaMitzvot-Mitzvat Asei Gimel, describes “Loving G-d”. That is why the Navi Yeshayahu [41:8] in this weeks’ Haftarah, describes Avraham as “Avraham O’havei”, “Avraham who showed his love for Me,” by teaching the world about Me.

Let us constantly share our knowledge of Yiddishkeit, of Torah, Laws and Customs, with our fellow Jews who are less knowledgeable and thus fulfill the Mitzvah of Ahavat HaShem at every opportunity..