
א ביסל תורה!

The Maimonides School Parsha Newsletter

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לך לך

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How תורה Changes Us

By Avi Berlove

לך לך begins with the famous words of 'ה telling אברהם to go to, "הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֵרָאֶה," "The land I will show you." רש"י implicitly asks the question of why 'ה refrains from telling אברהם the actual name of the land. Why does 'ה say "הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֵרָאֶה" rather than "ארץ כנען"? רש"י gives a cryptic answer to this question, saying "ולא גלה לו מיד, כדי לחבבה בעיניו ולתת שכר על כל דיבור" "And [which land] was not revealed to אברהם immediately, so as to make it dear in his eyes and give a reward for each word." The 'ה's answer gives an insight into the transformative power of connecting with 'ה's words during challenging times.

The שפתי חכמים explain how רש"י's answer gives us this powerful message about uncertainty as a religious test. The שפתי חכמים interprets רש"י as saying that 'ה omitted which land in his command to אברהם "So that אברהם would not know the spot, and [worry] that maybe the place [he was going to] is worse than the place he went out of". 'ה wanted to make אברהם's act of leaving his land even harder by making אברהם ignorant of the destination. אברהם had no guidance except for 'ה's promises and command of "סו". 'ה wanted to see how אברהם would respond if he had nothing but the Divine word to guide him. Rabbi Shlomo Farhi adds that אברהם's test here was not only about whether he would go, but also how he would go. Would אברהם leave resentful of an overpowering, Divine command? Or, would he leave with confidence, knowing that 'ה had his back? The test that 'ה gave to אברהם was one that faces many person at some point in their religious lives, what to do when advancing religiously means operating only on 'ה's word.

The episode of אברהם's departure from חרן suggests that the highest level of dealing with uncertainty in life is moving with surety that 'ה has your back. Our tradition adds that seeking the word of 'ה is the best way to achieve confidence for the journey itself. Rav Yissocher Frand of Yeshivat Ner Yisrael writes that תורה remakes an individual. The word of 'ה remakes a person, it has a core role in a person attaining that confidence for the journey ahead because he is now a new person. Yossi before learning Daf Yomi is not the same as Yossi after learning Daf Yomi. תורה raises an individual up from a life of drudgery to a life that is inspired and based on one's relationship with 'ה. Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks puts on the caveat that a Jew should not wait for 'ה to call on him to begin this process. Rather, man must forge his path independently. We must find 'ה ourselves.

In our world of uncertainty, we often ask ourselves "Why did 'ה do such and such?" but פרשת לך לך calls on us to deemphasize the existentiality of that question. We can and should ask it, but it should not change how we view 'ה or the world. To quote משלי, "וְאַתֶּם בְּנֵי־יַעֲקֹב לֹא כָלִיתֶם:", "For I 'ה have not changed, and you Children of יעקב are not wiped out." By finding the eternal 'ה through prayer, acts of loving kindness, and especially תורה, helps us internalize unchangingness from his ways. Through the path of תורה and עבודה, אברהם assumed his special role as 'ה's emissary in this world, and through this path so will we.

The הלכות Surrounding Israeli Military Conscription

By Ephraim Fischer

In this week's פרשה, לך לך, we have the battle of the four kings and the five kings. In this battle, לוט is taken captive. When אברהם hears this news, it is said that "וירק את-חניכיו ילידי ביתו שמנה עשר ושלש מאות וירדף", and אברהם armed his students, those of his house, 318 people, and he pursued them as far as Dan. The גמרא on א עמוד ל"ב states the following: "אמר רבי אבהו אמר רבי אלעזר: מפני מה נענש אברהם אבינו: 'וירק את חניכיו ילידי ביתו', ונשתעבדו בניו למצרים מאתיים ועשר שנים? מפני שעשה אנגריא בתלמידי חכמים, שנאמר: 'וירק את חניכיו ילידי ביתו'", said in the name of רבי אלעזר: Why was אברהם punished by having his descendents enslave for 210 years? Because he created a draft of תורה scholars, as the פסוק states, "and he armed his students, those of his house". This גמרא has many implications nowadays. Due to the current situation happening in Israel, I think it's important to talk about one obvious ramification: military conscription in Israel.

Through the plain reading of this גמרא, it seems like religious Israelis who are engaged in learning should not have to serve in the army. When אברהם took them away from their תורה learning, he was committing an עבירה by sending them off to war. So too in modern times, we are committing an עבירה by sending religious Jews to war. However, as can be seen later, it is easy to misinterpret this גמרא into saying this point.

This proof is strengthened by the explanation of this פסוק later in the גמרא. After this discussion, the Gemara says: "וירק את חניכיו ילידי ביתו", רב אמר: שהוריקן בתורה. ושמואל אמר: שהוריקן בזהב. "And he armed his students, those of his house", רב says that this means he showered them with תורה, and שמואל says this means he showered them with gold. The phrase "שהוריקן בתורה" doesn't necessarily mean that אברהם showered them with תורה. The phrase שיטה מקובצת brings down in the name of רבי יצחק אבן גיאת that מפני הבטול "שנתבטלו בלכתם למלחמה שכחו תלמודם שהיה בידם ונתרוקנו ממנו", because of the neglect for תורה that אברהם's servants endured when they went to war, they forgot all of the learning that they had, and they were left barren of it. According to the interpretation of the שיטה מקובצת, it's obvious why religious Israelis should not be required to enlist, as going to the army is a neglect of תורה.

However, a distinction may be drawn between the case of אברהם and the case of modern day Israel. In Judaism, there are two types of wars: A מלחמת מצווה, a war by commandment, and a מלחמת רשות, a war by authorization. There are many differences between these two types of wars, such as that a מלחמת רשות must be authorized by סנהדרין, while a מלחמת מצווה may be fought immediately. For our purposes, the main difference between these two types of wars is that by a מלחמת רשות, there are many exemptions for people who aren't required to go, including one who is afraid, while during a מלחמת מצווה, everyone is required to go to battle, even a newlywed bride and groom. The גמרא on א עמוד מ"ד סוטה says that הירא ורך הלבב זה "המתירא מעבירות שבביתו", that when the תורה says one who is afraid and soft hearted doesn't have to go to war, this includes one who is afraid of his sins. From this גמרא, we can infer that someone who is learning תורה does not need to fight in a מלחמת רשות because he may be afraid of the sin of ביטול תורה. As to the criteria for what is a מלחמת מצווה and what isn't, רמב"ם states (משנה תורה, הלכות מלכים ומלחמות ה:א) that "ואי היא" "מלחמת מצווה זו מלחמת שבועה עממים. ומלחמת עמלק. ועזרת ישראל מיד צר שבא עליהם", what is a Milchemet Mitzvah? A war against the seven nations who occupied Israel, a war against Amalek, and a war to aid Israel from a nation attacking them. In the case of אברהם, these criteria are not met. Even though לוט was taken, this was not grounds for אברהם to launch an attack, as in Judaism, we never risk one life for another. Therefore, when אברהם prepared his servants for war, he was taking תורה scholars away from their learning for a מלחמת רשות, which is ביטול תורה, as stated above. On the other hand, in Israel today, we have many different countries trying to attack the Jewish nation. All of these different wars are being fought against עם ישראל as a whole, so they are all in the category of a מלחמת מצווה. Even minor jobs on the army bases, such as transporting supplies aid greatly in Israeli war efforts. Because these are מלחמות מצווה, it would not be an

עבירה for them to fight in these wars, and in the times of the מלכים, they would even be required to go to war. Therefore, the conscription of religious Jews may be allowed.

We see another proof from the גמרא on עמוד א ל"ב נדרים as to why the conscription of religious Jews is allowed. The גמרא states a different reason why אברהם's descendents were punished. רבי יוחנן אומר: שֶׁהִפְרִישׁ. "בְּנֵי אָדָם מִלְהֶכְנֶס תַּחַת כְּנָפֵי הַשְּׂכִינָה, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "תֵּן לִי הַנָּפֶשׁ וְהִרְכָּשׁ קָח לָךְ שְׂכִינָה, as the פסוק states, "[The king of סדום says:] Give me the people [hostages] and you may take the wealth". אברהם let the king of סדום keep the hostages, and by doing that, he distanced them from the שְׂכִינָה. Had אברהם not listened to the king of סדום, he would have rescued the hostages, and he would have been able to teach them תורה and מצוות, and therefore he was punished. רבי יוחנן is saying that אברהם should have fought harder to rescue the hostages for the sake of bringing people closer to תורה. When the Israeli army goes to war, their fighting also brings Jews closer to the תורה. By keeping Jews safe, the Israeli army is allowing them to learn תורה all day without the threat of other nations attacking them. Furthermore, the army has conducted numerous missions which have brought Jews from countries who were hostile to them into Israel, such as מבצע משה to rescue Ethiopian Jews, מבצע על כנפי נשרים to rescue Yemenite Jews, and מבצע עזרא ונחמיה to rescue Iraqi Jews. All of these operations were performed to allow Jews to continue observing Judaism and to be proud Jews in a place that was safe for them to do so. Just as אברהם was required to rescue the hostages so that they would come closer to the שְׂכִינָה, so too it is a מצווה for every Jew to fight in the Israeli army to bring other Jews closer to Judaism.

From this גמרא, we see arguments why religious Jews should and should not be conscripted into the Israeli army. However, one must also take into account the ethics of not serving in the army. If you live in Israel, a country surrounded by war, you are forced to join the army for a good reason. Israel needs as many people as possible to join the army in order to keep the country safe. If certain people don't join the army so that they can continue learning, they are benefitting from the safety which the government gives them without actually giving anything in return. There are many Halachic sources which point to the fact that joining the Israeli army is actually a מצווה. However, the real motive for joining the army shouldn't come from a place of Halachic obligation. Rather, it should be to give back to society and to help our people.

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