



5785 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Reuven Schreier Parashat Lech-Lecha / פרשת לך-לך

Shomer Achi Anochi: the City of Brotherly Responsibility

An obvious and classic question is annually asked on the *Shabbat* of *Parshat Lech Lecha*. Hashem speaks to *Avraham Avinu*, selecting him for the most awesome divine mission that will change the destiny of his progeny forever. He is promised a great nation, fame, and blessing. Not many people in history merited direct communication with the Almighty, and certainly didn't receive the great promises that *Avraham* did. But why was *Avraham* chosen? The Torah gives us no biographical details concerning *Avraham* that would explain this divine chosen-ness. Yes, *Avraham* was the preacher of monotheism who sanctified God's name even as he was threatened by the fiery furnace of *Ohr Kasdim*. But the Torah conspicuously doesn't mention any of these stories from his earlier life.

Instead, the Torah and *Chazal* put emphasis on a different aspect of *Avraham's* persona: his willingness to take responsibility for others, and more particularly, his family. At the end of *Parshat Noach*, *Avraham* marries his niece, *Sarah*. As *Chazal* explain (with proof from *Parshat Vayera*), *Avraham* took her as a wife after her father *Haran* died. This is a very early example of *geulat kerovim*, where a family member takes responsibility for the household of a deceased relative. (See Rav David Fohrman's writings for his beautiful and extensive approach on this topic.) In ancient times, family members would step in and marry the daughters or wives of the deceased relative to ensure that they are taken care of. The *mitzvah* of *yibum* is an expression of this concept.

Not only does *Avraham* marry *Sarah*, but he also takes in his nephew as an adopted son. *Avraham's* loyalty to *Lot* is emphasized throughout our *parsha* and the next. He refuses to quarrel with him, parts with him on peaceful terms, and ultimately girds himself for battle to redeem him when *Lot* is taken captive. *Avraham* literally takes on the four most powerful kings when he hears that *Lot* has been captured. "וַיִּשְׁמַע אַבְרָם כִּי וַיִּנְשָׂה אֶתְלוֹ," the Torah emphasizes that *Avraham* viewed *Lot* as a brother; despite their moral and spiritual differences, *Avraham* never abandoned his loyalty to *Lot*.

Again and again, the Torah puts intense emphasis on *Avraham Avinu's* loyalty and dedication to family. His attitude starkly contrasts with other familial relationships that precede him in the Torah. *Kayin*, after murdering his own brother, exclaims "*hashomer achi anochi?* Am I my brother's keeper?" However, there is one righteous individual who also took responsibility for a disgraced family member. In *Parshat Noach* (9:23), *Shem* leads the effort to cover his father's nakedness (see *Rashi* *ibid*). Like *Avraham*, he will not sit idly by when a family member's honor is on the line.

Perhaps it isn't a coincidence that *Avraham's* willingness to sacrifice and fight for *Lot's* redemption is followed by him meeting with *Malki Tzedek*, King of *Shalem*. As *Chazal* explain, *Malki Tzedek* is in truth *Shem* the son of *Noach*, and *Shalem* is none other than the city of Jerusalem. Distinguished by his insistence on taking responsibility for his brother, *Avraham* merits his first encounter with the eventual spiritual capital of



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his descendants. *Lot* was far from being a perfect member of *Avraham's* family. He was very spiritually distant from his sanctified uncle. Nonetheless, *Avraham* would never give up on his brother. It is due to this stubborn and persistent loyalty that *Shem* chooses *Avraham* as his successor in ruling the city of *Shalem*.

Jerusalem is the city of brotherly unity, כעיר שחבורה לה יחדו, the city that bonds together all of *Klal Yisrael* (*Tehillim* 122). Every single Jew, no matter how estranged from spirituality and *halacha*, was welcome and encouraged to ascend to Jerusalem. ששם עלו שבטים שבטי י-ה, tribal divisions melted away as the Jews would come to *Yerushalayim*. Our mutual responsibility to each other is what made our initial foothold in Jerusalem. The city's vibrance depends on our willingness to fight for all our brothers and sisters, even if they are as distant as *Lot*. Our holy city reminds us that a Jew is always a *shomer anochi*, and that we cannot rest until every brother and sister is returned home.

