

Good Shabbos, everyone.

Thank you to the sponsors of this week's drasha:

- Eva Katznelson, in memory of her father, Fred Sterba, whose yahrtzeit is the 16<sup>th</sup> of Cheshvan.
- Mervyn and Adele Myers, in memory of Mervyn's father, Alec Myers, whose yahrtzeit is the 16<sup>th</sup> of Cheshvan, and in memory of Adele's mother, Pauline Bellon, whose yahrtzeit is the 27<sup>th</sup> of Cheshvan.

Thank you all for your generous support of the shul. May the *neshamos* have an aliya, and may you be rewarded with *bracha* and *hatzlacha* and good health!

I want to remind everyone that this Tuesday is election day. I encourage you to vote. I would like to share a letter written on October 3, 1984, by **Rav Moshe Feinstein** encouraging the Jewish community to vote. *“On reaching the shores of the United States, Jews found a safe haven. The rights guaranteed by the United States Constitution and the Bill of Rights have allowed us the freedom to practice our religion without interference and to live in this republic in safety.*

*A fundamental principle of Judaism is hakaras hatov — recognizing benefits afforded us and giving expression to our appreciation. Therefore, it is incumbent on each Jewish citizen to participate in the democratic system which guards the freedoms we enjoy. The most fundamental responsibility incumbent on each individual is to register and to vote.*

*Therefore, I urge all members of the Jewish community to fulfill their obligations by registering as soon as possible, and by voting. By this, we can express our appreciation and contribute to the continued security of our community.”*

In Parshas Lech Lecha, we are introduced to our Patriarch, Avraham Avinu, not with any grand adjectives, but with a profound mission. This mission is to follow God wherever He directs him לך לך מארצך ממולדתך ומבית אביך אל הארץ אשר אראך. And Avraham is guaranteed that if he follows Hashem, he will have a bright future.

בראשית פרשת לך לך פרק טו פסוק ה

(ה) וַיֹּצֵא אֱתֹו הַחֹצֵצָה וַיֹּאמֶר הִבְטַחְנָא הַשְּׁמַיְמָה וּסְפֹר הַכּוֹכָבִים אִם-תּוּכַל לְסַפֵּר אֹתָם וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ כֹּה יִהְיֶה וַרְעֵד:

Hashem tells Avraham Avinu that his descendants will be as abundant as the stars. They will light up the world...and illuminate the darkness. They will be an אור לעמים.

But He also makes Avraham Avinu aware that there will be challenging times ahead.

בראשית פרשת לך לך פרק טו פסוק יב - יד

(יב) וַיְהִי הַשְּׁמַשׁ לְבוֹא וַתְּרַדְמָה נִפְלְאָה עַל-אַבְרָם וַהֲגִהָ אֵימָה חֲשֹׁקָה גְלוּלָה נִפְלֹת עָלָיו:

(יג) וַיֹּאמֶר לְאַבְרָם יָדַע תְּדַע כִּי-גֵר אֶהְיֶה וַרְעֵדָ בְּאַרְצוֹ לֹא לָהֶם וַעֲבָדוּם וַעֲנִי אֹתָם אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה:

(יד) וְגַם אֶת-הַגּוֹי אֲשֶׁר יַעֲבֹדוּ יְהִי אֲנֹכִי וְאַחֲרֵי-כֵן יֵצְאוּ בְּרִכְשׁ גָּדוֹל:

12) *As the sun was about to set, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a great dark dread descended upon him.*

13) *And He said to Abram, “Know well that your offspring shall be strangers in a land not theirs, and they shall be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years;*

14) *But I will execute judgment on the nation they shall serve, and in the end they shall go free with great wealth.*

Hashem told Avraham Avinu that his descendants will suffer hundreds of years of slavery and oppression, but at the end Hashem will redeem them and will execute judgment on those who afflicted them. And one last thing—they will come out with great wealth.

The Sefer ***Hakesav Vehakabala***, written by Rav Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenberg, a chaver of Rabbi Akiva Eiger, asks the obvious question: Is this wealth so important? Is it some kind of ultimate goal? Does

this payoff make up for hundreds of years of slavery? Would any of us agree to go through a holocaust because at the end we would receive reparations?

וסייעני בזה ידידי מורה"ש חן טוב, מדמצינו בהרבה מקומות שמחובר לרכוש מלת "רב" "כי היה רכושם רב (לעיל יג,ו) כי מלת "רב" בהנחה ראשונה יורה על רבוי הכמות, וזה שייך יותר לרכוש ממון, ושינה כאן לחבר לרכוש מלת "גדול" שיוורה בהנחה ראשונה על האיכות וחשיבות הדבר. "כי גדול ה'" (שמות יח, יא) גם האיש משה גדול" (שם יא, ג), הנה יורה בבירור שהמכון ביצאו ברכוש גדול גם רכוש נפשי ודבריו נכונים."

To answer this, he differentiates between the phrases *rechush rav* and *rechush gadol*. He says *rav* is the appropriate adjective to describe **physical** abundance, while *gadol* describes **spiritual** greatness. With this distinction, he suggests that Hashem is saying that the Jewish people, in addition to leaving with material wealth, they will emerge spiritually uplifted, with ennobled character, enlightened life lessons, and spiritual clarity.

In his words:

יצאו ברכוש גדול. כל משכיל ע"כ יודה שאין רכוש הממון תכלית המכוון בשיעבוד, כי היתרצה איש לסבול תחלה ענוי ועבדות בשביל הרוחת ממון אחריו, הלא יאמר לא מעוקצך ולא מדובשך, גם הכי נמנע בחקו ית' להשפיע להם רכוש ממון בדרך אחרת, ועוד רכוש ממון מכסף וזהב הבל המה לכל משכיל ע"ד אמת ומוכרחים אנו לומר כי אחת דבר אלהים שתיים זו שמענו, ואף שהדברים כפשטן, בכל זאת אין ספק כי רכוש נפשי היה תכלית המכוון בשיעבוד, וזה, אחרי שהבטיח הוא ית' לאברהם להוציא זרע קודש ממנו שיהיו כככבי שמים להאיר ליושבי תבל אור אמת מציאותו השגחתו ויכלתו וכדומה מדיעות אמתיות, וראתה חכמתו העליונה כי למעלה גדולה כזו לא היו מגיעים אם היו יושבים בשובה ונחת שלווים ושקטים, גם לא היה באופן זה מקום לשיתחדש ביניהם המסות הגדולות האותות והמופתים הנצרכים להקדימם לפרסם בעולם על ידיהם ידיעות האמתיות, גם לא היו מתרצים לקבל עליהם עול התורה והמצות, לכן הסכימה חכמתו העליונה ית' להכניע הדור ההוא תחת עול השיעבוד, כדי לצרפם כצרוף את הכסף שיתבררו ויתלבנו להיות זכים וטהורים, להסיר מתוכם כל טומאה ולכלוך לזכך נפשם מכל דעה משובשת, וע"י האותות והמופתים שנעשו במצרים על ידיהם, נתפרסם ברבים אמתות מציאותו השגחתו ויכלתו, כמ"ש כמה פעמים למען תדע כי אני ה' בקרב הארץ, ונעשו ישראל מוכנים וראויים להנהגה אלהית בלתי אמצעי ולרשת התורה הקדושה, הנה זה הרכוש הנפשי הגדול בערכו לבלי תכלית, אשר לתכליתו היה העינוי והשיעבוד, וזהו בלי ספק המכוון העקרי שהודיעו ית' לאברהם באמרו אליו יצאו ברכוש גדול, וע"ז אמר (ואתחנן ד' כ') ויוציא אתכם מכור הברזל ממצרים להיות לו לעם נחלה, עמש"ש.

*"everyone of intellect will agree that monetary wealth was not the goal of the slavery. Would a person willingly suffer oppression to make money? Most people would reject persecution no matter the monetary benefit. Also, if the intent is to give the Jewish people money—Hashem could find a different way of doing that."*

Therefore, he concluded that *"in addition to leaving Egypt with material wealth, the "rechush" spoken about here is spiritual wealth, which was the intention of the slavery. The Jewish people were formed and purified in the Egyptian slavery, learning lessons that would not have been attainable without the difficult years..."*

**Rav Kook, in his Haggadah,** asks why we begin our seder by discussing the fact that we were slaves. He answers that *"Our experience as slaves inculcated in us a servile attitude, which can come in handy even when one has attained freedom. In a truly free state, one is free to lower and humble oneself when it is appropriate to do so, namely in the service of God...."*

But this begs the question: why did they go out with monetary wealth? Why was that aspect necessary? I believe it led to a character-building lesson, to complement the spiritual wealth with which they departed. As we say in dayeinu, ואלו נתן לנו את ממונם ולא קרע לנו את הים דיינו, if You had given us their money and not split the sea...dayeinu. There was enough benefit in this specific act of leaving with wealth...that deserves our attention and thanks.

This becomes clear, later, when the Torah teaches us (Devarim 15) how to treat the downtrodden.

לא תִּטֶּה מִשְׁפַּט גֵּר יְתוֹם וְלֹא תִּחַבֵּל בְּגַד אֶלְמָנָה:

*You shall not subvert the rights of the stranger or the orphan; you shall not take a widow's garment as pawn.*

וְזָכַרְתָּ כִּי עֶבֶד הָיִיתָ בְּמִצְרַיִם וַיְפָדֶנְךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ מֵעֵלְיוֹן אֲנֹכִי מִצְרַיִם לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת־הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה: (ס)

*Remember that you were a slave in Egypt and that the LORD your God redeemed you from there; therefore do I enjoin you to observe this commandment.*

The **Chizkuni** points out the expectation of enhanced empathy—as you left Mitzrayim with a deep understanding of what it is like to need help, to be vulnerable.

חזקוני דברים פרק כד פסוק יח

(יח) וזכרת כי עבד היית כשתזכור בעצמך שהיית עבד כבר וצריך לאחרים תרחם על גר יתום ואלמנה ולא תטה משפט

But the **Baal HaTurim** points out a different understanding of the link between our ancestors' travails in Egypt and our responsibility to help the downtrodden. He writes that we must remember our experience in Egypt--that we were a downtrodden people and God made sure that we left with riches, with self respect. God arranged for us to leave with more than the basics—*b'rechush gadol*--more than we deserved--to guarantee our self respect.

בעל הטורים דברים פרק כד פסוק יז

ולא תחבל בגד אלמנה. וזכרת כי עבד היית במצרים. הזכיר זה על לא תחבול לומר שתזכור שהיית עבד ונתתי לך חן בעיני מצרים ושאלו לך כלי כסף וכלי זהב ושמלות, על כן אני מצוך לא תחבול:

This reminds us that we were helped beyond what we deserved, but more than that **it teaches to build our righteousness and compassion, our attitude towards kindness, not only upon the element of suffering but upon our salvation. Not only upon our unfortunate servitude, but upon our fortuitous assistance by people from whom we least expected it. To build on the positive aspects of all life experiences, even the bad, and share them with others.**

We should help people, not only because of guilt—because we identify with their misery and suffering, but should be propelled by positive feelings--because we remember that we were once the beneficiaries of strangers, and that sense of gratitude—rather than the misery—lingers with us and causes us to bestow our grace and assistance upon others.

In truth, those two attitudes must work together; to identify with the downtrodden because of our shared identity of suffering, and to give to them, in the same way that we have received from others or because of what we learned in our time of suffering. We left with **an attitude towards compassion; learning how to be compassionate to the orphan, the widow, and the stranger, people in need, the same way compassion was showed to us in our time of need.**

As the *Mesilas Yesharim* writes about chasidus in Perek 19:

נפש, שישתדל לעשות לחבירו כל קורת רוח שיש בידו, בין בעניני הכבוד, בין בכל שאר הענינים, כל מה שהוא יודע שאם יעשהו לחבירו הוא מקבל נחת רוח ממנו, מצות חסידות הוא לעשותו, כל שכן שלא יצערנו בשום מיני צער כלל, יהיה באיזה אופן שיהיה.

*Spirit: to strive to bring however much contentment to his fellow that he can. This applies to matters of honor or any other area. If he knows that he can do something to his fellow that will give him contentment, it is a mitzvah of Piety to do so. It goes without saying that he will not cause him any pain of any kind whatsoever.*

וכלל כל זה הוא גמילות חסדים אשר הפליגו חז"ל בשבחה ובחובתינו בה. . .

*The general matter of all this is "acts of kindness", which our sages, of blessed memory, greatly emphasized to us on its great worth and our obligation in it. . .*

*Chesed* is not about doing the minimum for others. It is about giving them the dignity and self respect we would like for ourselves. We, as Jews, understand what it is like to be vulnerable. We also understand what it is like to be aided and assisted in times of need. We must channel that feeling and awareness to help others; to shower others with dignity and self respect.

The role model for learning from challenges is Avraham Avinu. The Mishna in *Avos* (5:2) teaches that he underwent ten tests and passed them all.

What was the purpose of those tests?

The **Ramban** writes that tests help us actualize potential.

רמב"ן בראשית פרשת וירא כב פסוק א

(א) והאלהים נסה את אברהם - ענין הנסיון הוא לדעת, בעבור היות מעשה האדם רשות מוחלטת בידו, אם ירצה יעשה ואם לא ירצה לא יעשה, יקרא "נסיון" מצד המנוסה, אבל המנסה יתברך יצוה בו להוציא הדבר מן הכח אל הפועל, להיות לו שכר מעשה טוב לא שכר לב טוב בלבד. ודע כי השם צדיק יבחן (תהלים יא ה), כשהוא יודע בצדיק שיעשה רצונו וחפץ להצדיקו יצוה אותו בנסיון, ולא יבחן את הרשעים אשר לא ישמעו. והנה כל הנסיונות שבתורה לטובת המנוסה

In a vivid description, the **Medrash Tanchuma** explains (*Tehillim* 11) that Hashem tests only the righteous—as He knows they will become strengthened through their trials and tribulations.

מדרש תנחומא (ורשא) פרשת וירא סימן כ

(כ) [כב, א] והאלהים נסה, וזה"ל ה' צדיק יבחן (תהלים יא) אמר רבי יונה הפשתן הזה כל זמן שאתה כותש עליו משתבחת, אימתי כשהוא יפה אבל כשהוא רע אתה כותש עליו והוא מתפקע, כך אין הקדוש ברוך הוא מנסה אלא לצדיקים, *Said Rabbi Yonah – flax, the more you pound it, the more it improves. When is this true? When it is of good quality, but when it is of inferior quality, if you pound it, it bursts. Similarly, God tests none but the righteous.*

As **Rav Hirsch** sums up (*Breishis* 22:1): “Every trial or test is an ascent, in that it strengthens and energizes powers that already exist but have not yet stood the test of the further or higher challenge...In the case of physical and moral powers, testing strengthens and elevates them.”

Avraham Avinu’s tests strengthened him. They made him a bigger person. And how did that greatness manifest itself? It made him think less of himself and more of others...

As the **Psikta Zutresa** teaches

פסיקתא זוטרתא (לקח טוב) דברים דף טו עמוד א

א"ר יוחנן כל מקום שאתה מוצא גדולתו של הקדוש ברוך הוא שם אתה מוצא ענותנותו.

Wherever you find Hashem’s greatness, you find His humility. **Rabbi Jonathan Sacks** writes:

“...surviving despair is a character-transforming experience. It is when your self-esteem is ground to dust that you suddenly realize that life is not about you. It is about others, and ideals, and a sense of mission or vocation. What matters is the cause, not the person. That is what true humility is about. As **C. S. Lewis** wisely said: humility is not about thinking less of yourself. It is about thinking of yourself less. When you have arrived at this point, even if you have done so through the most bruising experiences, you become stronger than you ever believed possible. You have learned not to put your self-image on the line. You have learned not to think in terms of self-image at all. That is what Rabbi Yochanan meant when he said, “Greatness is humility.” Greatness is a life turned outward, so that other people’s suffering matters to you more than your own. The mark of greatness is the combination of strength and gentleness that is among the most healing forces in human life.

The Jewish people came out of *Mitzrayim* with real lessons of compassion and lessons of empathy. With *rechush gadol*—lessons of humility and true *chesed*.

May we all learn this lesson well, and may we all continue the Jewish mission to spread genuine light in the world through kindness, empathy, and compassion. May we use all the challenges in our lives to learn to become bigger, greater and more humble, and may we see the day of ultimate greatness, when the Beis Hamikdash is restored...*bimhera viyamenu*...amen.