



LECH LECHA

GLOBAL REACH, LOCAL CONCERN

Never Too Big to Care for Those Closest to You

PARSHAH OVERVIEW

Lech Lecha

G-d speaks to Abram, commanding him, “Go from your land, from your birthplace, and from your father’s house, to the land that I will show you.” There, G-d says, he will be made into a great nation. Abram and his wife, Sarai, accompanied by his nephew Lot, journey to the land of Canaan, where Abram builds an altar and continues to spread the message of a single G-d.

A famine forces the first Jew to depart for Egypt, where beautiful Sarai is taken to Pharaoh’s palace; Abram escapes death because they

present themselves as brother and sister. A plague prevents the Egyptian king from touching her and convinces him to return her to Abram and to compensate the brother-revealed-as-husband with gold, silver, and cattle.

Back in the land of Canaan, Lot separates from Abram and settles in the evil city of Sodom, where he falls captive when the mighty armies of Chedorla’omer and his three allies conquer the five cities of the Sodom Valley. Abram sets out with a small band to rescue his nephew, defeats the four

kings, and is blessed by Melchizedek, the king of Salem (Jerusalem).

G-d seals the Covenant between the Parts with Abram, in which the exile and persecution (*Galut*) of the people of Israel is foretold, and the Holy Land is bequeathed to them as their eternal heritage.

Still childless ten years after their arrival in the Land, Sarai tells Abram to marry her maidservant Hagar. Hagar conceives, becomes insolent toward her mistress, and then flees when Sarai treats her harshly; an angel



PARSHAH OVERVIEW

Lech Lecha

convinces her to return and tells her that her son will father a populous nation. Ishmael is born in Abram's eighty-sixth year.

Thirteen years later, G-d changes Abram's name to Abraham ("father of multitudes") and Sarai's to Sarah ("princess") and promises that a son will be born to them; from this child, whom they are to call Isaac ("will laugh"), will stem the great nation with which G-d will establish His special bond. Abraham is commanded to circumcise himself and his descendants

as a "sign of the covenant between Me and you." Abraham immediately complies, circumcising himself and all the males of his household.



What advice would you give someone who asks how to set priorities and balance competing responsibilities?

TEXT 1A

Genesis 17:5

וְלֹא יִקְרָא עוֹד אֶת שְׁמִי אַבְרָם, וְהָיָה שְׁמִי
אַבְרָהָם כִּי אֲבִי הַמּוֹן גּוֹיִם נִתְּקִיף.

Your name will no longer be called Abram; your name will be Abraham because I appointed you father to multitudes of nations.

TEXT 1B

Rashi, *ad loc.*

"כִּי אָב הָמוֹן גּוֹיִם":

לְשׁוֹן נוֹטְרִיקוֹן שֶׁל שְׂמוֹ.

וְרִי"ש שֶׁהִיְתָה בוּ בַּתְחִלָּה

- שְׁלֹא הָיָה אָב אֶלָּא

לְאַרְם שֶׁהוּא מְקוֹמוֹ,

וְעַכְשָׁיו אָב לְכָל הָעוֹלָם -

לֹא נָזְחָה מִמְקוֹמָהּ.

“Because I appointed you father to multitudes of nations”:

[Abraham is] an acrostic for *av hamon goyim* [Hebrew for “father of the multitude of nations”].

The letter *resh*, which was in his original name, connoted that he was father only to the nation of Aram—his native land. [Though] he was now father to the entire world, this letter did not move from its place.

אֶבְרָם
to
אֶבְרָהָם



QUESTIONS

1. Why does Rashi assume that Abram has meaning?
2. Why did Rashi not present the meaning of Abram when it first appeared in the Torah?
3. Why did Rashi say, “It did not move from its place”?

TEXT 2

*Rabbi Chaim Vital, Shaar
Hagilgulim, Ch. 23*

כאשר נולד האדם, וקוראים לו אביו ואמו שם אחד העולה
בדעתם, אינו באקראי ובהזדמן, כי אם הקדוש ברוך הוא
משים בפיו השם ההוא המוכרח אל הנשמה ההיא.

When a child is born and the parents choose a name, the name choice is not random. G-d places the name that belongs to their child's soul in the parents' minds.

ANSWER

2. When Terach named his son Abram, no one knew its meaning. It only became known once G-d changed his name to Abraham.

TEXT 3A

*The Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem
Mendel Schneerson, Likutei
Sichot 25, p. 65*

און דאס דייטעט אן רש"י בלשונו - "ואפילו
רי"ש שהיתה בו בתחלה, שלא היה אב אלא
לארם שהוא מקומו כו".

דערמיט זאגט רש"י אז דא איז דא א קשיא: לויט
נוטריקון, ווי קומט דער רי"ש אין שם אברהם?

ובמילא - מוז אויך דער רי"ש האבן א פירוש
בהתאם צום תוכן השם אברהם - "אב המון גוים".

This is what Rashi means when he writes,
"The letter *resh*, which was in his original
name, connoted that he was father only to
the nation of Aram—his native land."

With these words, Rashi informs us that
there is a problem: the letter *resh* does not
belong in the Abraham acrostic.

Its presence in the new acrostic tells us that
the name Abram also has meaning: A
meaning that is consistent with the meaning
of Abraham—father of multitudes of nations.

ANSWER

1. By leaving a letter of the old name, Abram, in the new name, Abraham, Rashi derives that the old name had meaning as well.

TEXT 3B

The Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, Ibid.

און רש"י איז מבאר "שלא היה אב אלא לארם כו'
לא זזה מקומה".

דער תוכן פון דעם רי"ש איז - וואס ער איז "אב
לארם", און דער ענין איז דאך געבליבן אויך
דערנאך.

"אב לכל הגוים" איז כולל, און ניט שולל דעם
ענין פון "אב לארם", עס איז נאר א הוספה.

Rashi goes on to explain the meaning of Abram: "He was only the father of Aram . . . [and] this did not move from its place."

With this, Rashi informs us that the letter *resh* [of the original name] means that he is the father of Aram. And this [kinship to Aram] remained in place after the name change.

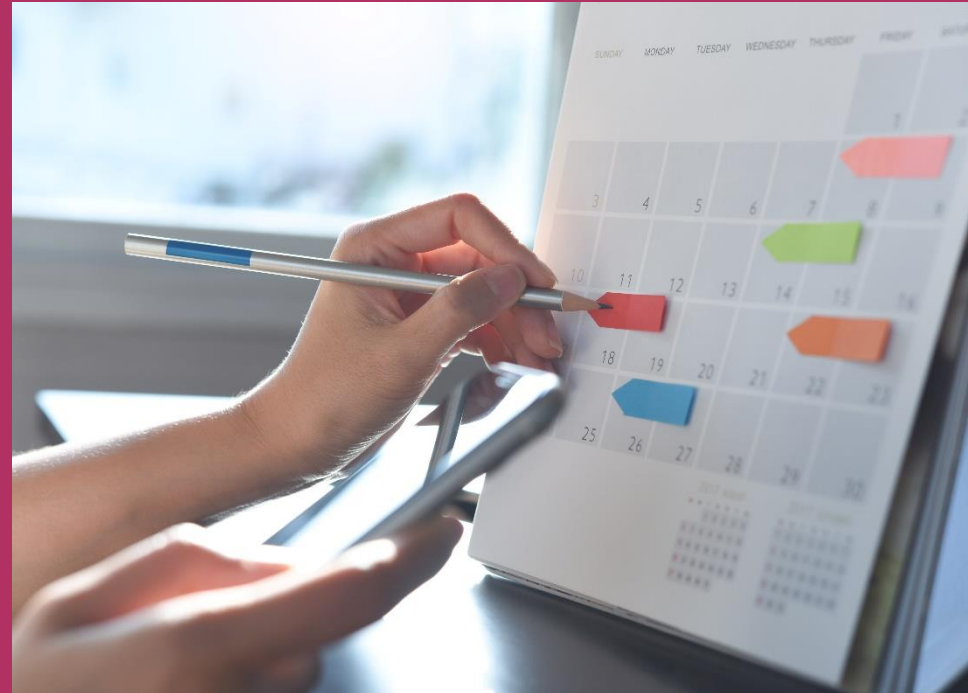
[In other words, the new name] father to all nations, did not exclude fatherhood to Aram. It includes Aram and expands on it [to include all the nations].

CALENDAR



Discard the progress

PLANNER



Build on each accomplishment

TEXT 3C

The Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, *Ibid.*

און דאס איז דיוק לשון רש"י - "לא זזה ממקומה"
(און זאגט ניט "לא נטלה ממנו" כו' כנזכר לעיל).

אפילו ווען מען וואלט דעם רי"ש ניט
אריינגעשטעלט בשמו (און שמו וואלט געווען
"אבהם") וואלט עס ניט געמיינט אז מ'האט
צוגענומען דעם תוכן פון דעם רי"ש - זיין תוכן
("אב לארם") בלייבט אויך דעמאלט. אבער אין
דעם פאל וואלט עס באדייט אז דער רי"ש
"בלייבט" אין א צווייטן "מקום" - נאר אלס טייל
פון "עולם" — "אב לכל העולם".

די הדגשה אין "לא זזה ממקומה" טוט אויף אז
אויך דערנאך בלייבט דער רי"ש אין זיין "מקום",
דער "אב לארם" בלייבט מפורט בנוטריקון אינעם
שם (אברהם) אלס אן ענין פאר זיך (אף על פי
וואס ער איז בכלל פון "אב ל)כל העולם").

This is why Rashi used the phrase “did not move from its place” rather than “was not removed from it” or the like.

Even if the letter *resh* were erased from the new name, rendering the new name Abham, it would not imply the cancelation of its meaning. Abraham’s role as father to Aram would have remained intact. However, it would have implied that the *resh* [Abraham’s relationship with Aram] had been folded into Abraham’s new status as father to the world.

By saying that “it did not leave its place,” Rashi emphasizes that the *resh* remained rooted in place. Abraham’s role as father to Aram stood out in the new acrostic because his role as father to Aram remained independently significant despite his new role as father to the world.

ANSWER

3. Despite adopting a larger and more important role, Abraham never stopped treating the people of Aram as family.

TEXT 4A

*Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra,
Genesis 10:8*

אל תבקש טעם לכל השמות אם לא נכתב.

Don't seek meaning for names to which the Torah does not attribute meaning.

TEXT 4B

Nachmanides, Genesis 23:9

ואין צורך לבקש טעם לשם המקומות.

There is no need to seek meanings for the names of places.



If we can change more people's lives for the better, we should. But never at the expense of the people we already know.

Three Tiers of Responsibility:

1. Self and family
2. Community and friends
3. Distant strangers





It begins with you!

If you are in a healthy
state of mind, you can
then help others.

TEXT 5

The Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, Igrot Melech 2, pp. 292–294

בחיי אנוש עלי אדמות, והרי העיקר אצל האדם הוא חייו הרוחניים, חלוקים באופן כללי לשלושה תחומים, ובכל אחד מהם נדרשת הדרגה הגבוהה ביותר של שלימות שאליה מסוגל כל אחד להגיע . . .

שלושת התחומים הם:

ראשית, להגיע לשלימות עצמית המקיפה את האדם בשלימותו ואת כל הנהגתו . . .

התחום השני בחיי האדם הוא הקשר שלו עם אנשים אחרים ועם כל הסביבה. לעשות ולפעול בעזרה וסיוע לאנשים שאתם הוא בא במגע, להביא שלימות בחייהם ובכלל להכניס אלקות וקדושה.

Our primary responsibility in life is to make ourselves spiritually whole. This can be divided into three general tiers, and we must do our best in each. . . .

The three tiers are:

First is to be the best that we can be in terms of character and behavior. . . .

The second is our relationship with our community. To assist everyone, we strive to be the best that we can be and introduce G-dliness and holiness to our surroundings.

TEXT 5

*The Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem
Mendel Schneerson, Igrot
Melech 2, pp. 292–294*

התחום השלישי בחיי האדם קשור באותו חלק מן
העולם אשר לכאורה אין לו שייכות אליו. הוא
רחוק ממנו בפשטות, או מבחינה רוחנית, והוא לא
מסוגל להגיע אליו. ברם חייב אדם לומר,
"בשבילי נברא העולם" (סנהדרין ד, ה). הכרחי
איפוא, למצוא דרך להשפיע גם על חלק זה.

The third is a tier for which we are ostensibly not responsible. These are people beyond our physical or spiritual reach. However, we must do our best to reach them, too, for one is obligated to say, "The world was created for me [to improve]" (Sanhedrin 4:5). Therefore, they, too, are within our scope of responsibility.

TEXT 6

The Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, Torat Menachem 5743:4, p. 1743

אף שתפקידו של האדם הוא להתייגע ולנצל את כחותיו כדי לפעול בכל הסביבה כולה, ועד לפעולה והשפעה בכל העולם כולו - הרי כדי שעבודה זו תהיה עבודה מסודרת, עליו להתחיל - לכל לראש - עם עצמו . . . כלומר, לכל לראש עליו לדעת בעצמו את המעשה אשר יעשה כו', להתנהג על פי צדק ויושר.

ומהפרט מגיע הוא אל הכלל, היינו, כאשר הנהגתו האישית תהיה כדבעי, אזי יוכל להפעיל את השפעתו בסביבתו. לכל לראש בשכונתו, ואחר כך בעירו וכו', עד להשפעה בחוגי המלוכה. וכל זה – כאמור - לאחר הוראת "דוגמא חיה" מהנהגתו האישית.

Though it is our mission to utilize our talents and abilities to impact our surroundings and the entire world, it must begin with us.

. . . First, we must ensure that our own behavior is just and appropriate, and only then can we influence others. Once we ensure the propriety of our behavior, we can exert positive influence on others. First others in our neighborhoods, then in our city, etc., until our influence extends to government officials and national leaders. It all begins with being a living example in our personal lives.

TEXT 6

The Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, Torat Menachem 5743:4, p. 1743

ונוסף לזה, רק כאשר הנהגתו האישית היא באופן המתאים, זוכה הוא לברכתו של הקדוש ברוך הוא שיצליח בהשפעתו על הסביבה כולה. וכפי שרואים בפועל - "מעשה רב" - שההצלחה בעסקנות ציבורית (באיזה שטח שתהיה) תלויה במדה רבה ומכרעת באופן הנהגתו האישית. היינו, שכאשר הנהגתו האישית היא כדבעי, אזי גדולה השפעתו על כל אלו שנמצאים מסביבו, מפני שהם מעריכים, מוקירים, ומכבדים אותו על הנהגתו האישית על פי צדק ויושר.

Moreover, only when our personal behavior is fitting can we merit Divine blessing to influence others successfully. We see this from experience. The success of any community activist depends largely on the activist's personal integrity. When we behave appropriately, our circle of influence expands because people value, esteem, and respect our propriety and integrity.

Our children are our
first obligation.

We can't sacrifice their
happiness for the sake
of others.



TEXT 7

*Maggie Ethridge, "Protest V
Parenthood: How The
Children of Political Activists
Suffer in Silence,"
www.theguardian.com*

Rebecca Walker is a case in point. . . . Walker has long struggled to come to terms with how her parents' civil rights activism absorbed her childhood. . . .

"My parents were so deeply involved in the civil rights movement that a lot of my needs as a young person were not fully seen and addressed, or considered as important as the movement. . . . It wasn't an intentional neglect. . . . [They were] missing what was happening in our lives because there was so much consuming their lives. It felt very lonely and vulnerable. Gandhi's children had a lot of problems with him; it's hard to find children of very visible and profound activists whose children felt cared for and nurtured in the same way the movements were." . . .

The words "anxiety," "insecurity," and "no communication" come up frequently in interviews of children of rigorous activists—something meticulously documented in John Blake's book, *The Children of the Movement*, which catalogs a series of interviews with the adult children of civil rights activist leaders. Most expressed a lifelong anxiety about their relevance in their own families, but also about whether they had even been seen as a person outside of the concerns of the movement.

In many cases, consent was not even considered; devotion was required. As Brown writes, "A large number of [adult children of activists] are emotionally distant from their parents who, they say, are more suited for protest than parenthood."

TEXT 8

*Rabbi Moshe Miller, The
Nechomah Greizman
Anthology, Section Two,
Family Harmony*

While you are working with your hands, talk to them and listen to them. Try to do work that requires concentration when they're not around, and easier work when they are.

Look for small opportunities to spend time alone with each child—even if only for a few minutes. One excellent method is to take only one child with you in a rotation system when you go out to the dentist, shopping, bank, etc. It makes the child feel very special. Buy him a little treat and talk to him, and the rewards will come.



Involve your child in your work—it benefits all parties involved.

TEXT 9

*Maimonides, Mishneh Torah,
Laws of Gifts to the Poor 7:13*

עָנִי שֶׁהוּא קְרוֹבוֹ, קֶדֶם לְכָל
אָדָם.

עָנִי בֵיתוֹ, קוֹדֵמִין לְעָנִי עִירוֹ.

עָנִי עִירוֹ, קוֹדֵמִין לְעָנִי עִיר
אֲחֵרָת.

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "לְאָחִיךָ, לְעָנִיךָ,
וּלְאָבִינְךָ בְּאֶרֶץ־ךָ"

(דְּבָרִים טו, יא).

A poor person in your family comes first.

Poor people in your household receive priority over poor people in the city.

Poor people in your city receive priority over poor people in other cities.

This is inferred from [the order of] the passage, “To your brother, to your poor person, and to the needy in your land” (Deuteronomy 15:11).

TEXT 10

The Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, Igrot Kodesh 29, pp. 249–250

וביחד עם זה תמהתי תמיה רבה שכאילו היתה הצעה שכבוד תורתו יחשוב ויתענין להעתיק מעירו למדינה אחרת וכו'. ואף שבטוחני שאין זה מעשיי כלל וכלל, שהרי רבים צריכים לכבוד תורתו, ולא רק בעירו האמורה ממש, אשר גם היא עיר ואם כו', אלא גם בסביבותיה, ובכל המדינה ובמדינות הסמוכות, וצריכים להוראת במעשה בפועל ולהתעוררות בעבודת ה' באהבת ה' וביראת ה' וכו' וכו'.

בכל זה מרשה אני לעצמי להעלות על הכתב את הכתוב לעיל בגודל הבטחון - שבודאי ובודאי ימשיך לנהל קהילא קדישא דיליה והמדינה כולה בהיותו במקומו עתה. ויארץ ימים על ממלכתו (מאן מלכי רבנן), ומתוך נחת שדבריו מתקבלים והנהגתו מצליחה.

I was surprised to hear that your honor was advised to consider relocating to a different country. I am certain the suggestion is impractical considering the multitudes, not only in your city—itsself a thriving community—but also in its environs, in the country at large, and in neighboring countries, who require your honor's mentorship. They require your Halachic guidance and your inspiration to love and fear G-d, etc.

Nevertheless, I permit myself to write about this in the confidence that you will certainly continue to lead your sacred congregation and the country in which you reside. May you continue in your seat of rabbinic governance for many years, and may you experience the joy of witnessing the efficacy of your work.



TEXT 10

The Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, Igrot Kodesh 29, pp. 249–250

ואם הוראת חכמינו זכרונם לברכה היא "עניי עירך קודמים", על אחת כמה וכמה עניי מדינה כולה קודמים. ולדכותיה דכבוד תורתו האריכות בהאמור אך למותר. ובטוחני שכיוונתי לדעת כבוד תורתו בלאו הכי, ובסגנון הידוע "מקומך אל תנח" (קהלת י, ד). ואדרבה - יוסיף חיל לחזק שם לימוד דבר ה' ותורתו והידור קיום מצוותיו, במרוקו וסביבותיה וכו', וזכות הרבים מסייעת.

If our sages of blessed memory taught, “The poor people of your city come first” (Mishneh Torah, Laws of Gifts to the Poor 7:13), it is certainly true that the poor people of your entire country come first. For one such as yourself, elaboration is quite superfluous. I am certain that you are of similar mind in accordance with the well-known saying, “Do not abandon your place” (Ecclesiastes 10:4).

May you continue to strengthen Torah study and observance in Morocco and its environs, and may the merit of the entire community stand by you.

TEXT 11

*The Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem
Mendel Schneerson, Likutei
Sichot 25, p. 69*

אף על פי אז א איד דארף אויפטאן בכל העולם כולו, דארף ער אבער
וויסן, אז לכל לראש ליגט אויף אים א חיוב צו משפיע זיין על מקומו
וסביבתו, און ערשט דערנאך, ווען ער ווערט אן "אב למקומו", צו זיין אן
"אב לכל העולם".

Though all Jews must exert whatever influence they can the world over, they must know that their first obligation is to their local community. Only after becoming a “father” to your local community can you become a “father” to the world at large.

We have a responsibility to help anyone we can reach, but our primary responsibility is to those closest to us.



KEY POINTS

1. Abraham's first life mission was to be the spiritual father of Aram, his birthplace. His father unwittingly called him Abram, an acronym for *av aram*—father of Aram.
2. When he was ninety-nine, G-d appointed him father to all nations. At that time, G-d changed his name to Abraham, an acronym of *av hamon*—father to multitudes.
3. A proper acrostic would be Abham. G-d called him Abraham to indicate that though his portfolio expanded, his first responsibility to Aram remained intact.
4. From this we learn that though we must help every person we can reach, our first responsibility is to those who are closest to us.
5. Our pyramid of responsibilities is three tiered. First ourselves and our children. Then our local community. Finally, people from afar. We must help everyone, but those closest to us come first.

