

Parshas Lech Licha

This week's Parsha Lech Licha, which provides detailed accounts of specific incidents in Avraham's life, offers Mepharshim colour and guidance in our time. For example, when Avraham parted ways with Lot's shepherds, the Torah is very explicit in telling us that the optics of the deal were as fair as possible. Meaning Avraham gave complete agency to Lot to choose which direction to go, when parting from Avraham's flocks (there were quarrels between Lot's shepherd and Avraham's shepherds, over the use of land and whether they were allowed to graze on land that wasn't explicitly public). Avraham gave Lot a choice to go right or left, and no matter which way Lot went, Avraham would go the opposite direction. The posuk then says in 13:10 that Lot assessed the land, and that's the direction Lot went. Meaning, Lot or any decedents cannot complain that they were coerced into going in any direction, other than of their own volition. There is a significant subtext and thread about human psychology, but something we see playing out in our enemies, even to this day. If a person (Lot in this case) who got wealthy through his relationship with Avraham decided that Avraham somehow slighted him, or that he feels indebted to Avraham, they would become mortal enemies. We see this all the time when partners in a business fight. One partner may "pull his weight" and raise the other partner, and there would be bad blood.

The second partner can feel entitled and take credit for the growth, while the first partner, doing all the work, can feel animosity and anger toward his partner for "not pulling his weight." This is a normal human reaction for which there are contracts and shareholder agreements. But on a global level, our enemies who exist on all sides of the spectrum of beliefs will find a way to point out that the Jews are somehow a plague and a problem, even if they were treated like Avraham to Lot, which was you do whatever you want.

Another point is that in Pirkei Avos, 5:10, where a person says what's mine is mine and what's yours is yours, it is called the Middah of Sodom, because these types of people who purport to be "fair" are actually selfish. One can also say that Avraham was creating a boundary between him and Lot, which is an ideal way for people to exist, rather than make it seem like all is ok, because "what's mine is mine and what's yours is yours."

This theme recurs when the King of Sodom offers to pay Avraham for rescuing him, but Avraham refuses all payment. Because the King of Sodom would have held over Avraham's head that Avraham was indebted to him, even though Avraham was deserving of the pay. Rashi, in fact, further clarifies the matter by pointing out that Avraham's rationale for not taking the payment was so that it wouldn't use up Avraham's credits of goodness for his reward. Meaning

Avraham was deserving of material goodness including a progeny. Avraham didn't want the wealth from Sodom to be considered part of that reward, because the king of Sodom was ultimately not a righteous person (although Mepharshim say that, in the moment of his salvation, he returned to Hashem).

The thread and the subtext also point out that, even though Avraham seemed to accumulate wealth naturally, i.e., by being remunerated for a service, the Parsha also teaches us that Hashem is in the natural "teva" as much as in the supernatural. If you view the narratives of the Parsha through the lens of Hashem being directly involved in the outcomes of every action, even the "natural ones," you will see that all parts of the story connect to later (exodus from Egypt), and that every part of the story has divine providence in all of its. Meaning, even the part of Avraham going to Egypt connects for us the idea that Egypt played a specific role in Jewish history, beginning with the meeting of Avraham and Sarah and the Pharaoh. Even though Egypt's role in the enslavement of the Jews was prophesied, they are punished for their misdeeds, because they could have changed their outcome. Rashi tells us that a person's destiny can be altered by changing their name (hence why Avraham and Sarah's names were changed, to bring about the next era in their lives: they would have a child and an heir, who would be a forefather to us Jews).

If we are to take one thing away from this Parsha, it is that whether we see it in the moment or not, Hashem is involved in everything, and the outcome that needs to happen will, but we are able to have the right outcomes when we live with Hashem, as Avraham and Sarah did.

Good Shabbos