



שמע קולנו

WHEN TO SAY L'CHAIM

Rabbi Michael Taubes

(YUHSB '76, RIETS '82)

Rosh Yeshiva - YUHSB

Rabbi - Kehilas Zichron Mordechai

When Avraham Avinu returns home victorious from his battle with the four kings after rescuing Lot from their hands, he is greeted by Malki-Tzedek, the king of Shaleim, who brings out bread and wine and subsequently blesses both Avraham and Hashem (Genesis 14:18-20). Although at first glance this appears to be a very noble gesture, appropriate for one described by the Torah (*passuk* 18) as a Kohein, the *gemara* in Nedarim (32b) finds fault with Malki-Tzedek's actions because of the order in which he pronounced his blessings. As the *pesukim* indicate, Malki-Tzedek, identified in the Midrash cited by Rashi as Sheim, the son of Noach, first blessed Avraham and then blessed Hashem, thereby praising the servant before the Master, which is obviously out of order. The *gemara* concludes that because of this, Hashem decided that Malki-Tzedek descendants would not all be Kohanim as he was.

The Sedei Chemed (Asifas Dinim, Ma'areches Berakhos 1:45) presents an interesting discussion among the *posekim* based on this idea, which frequently has relevance when people get together at a Kiddush or a *simchah* and wish each other a "leChayim" over a cup of wine or liquor. Is it appropriate for one to first say leChayim to a friend, blessing him, and then to make berakhah to Hashem and drink the wine or liquor, as seems to be the common practice? Or is it preferable for one to first make a berakhah, then drink something immediately (to avoid any interruption between the recitation of the berakhah and the consumption of the drink), and only then

wish one's friend a leChayim, so as not to repeat the error of Malki-Tzedek by blessing Hashem only after blessing a fellow human being?

The Sedei Chemed cites opinions on both sides of the issue. Some hold that since the *gemara* says that Malki-Tzedek was ultimately punished for failing to acknowledge Hashem before acknowledging Avraham, then we certainly ought to be careful to recite the proper berakhah to Hashem before wishing leChayim to any friend. Others, however, point to the *gemara* in Berakhos (19b) and other places which states that *kavod*

haBeriyos, giving honor to or preserving the dignity of another person, can sometimes take precedence even over the concern for avoiding the violation of an *aveirah* from the Torah. Certainly, then, it should not be a problem to honor a friend by wishing him a leChayim and then to make a berakhah and have one's drink.

The Kaf haChaim (Orakh Chaim 175:55) quotes one authority who writes that he asked his Rebbe why he was careful to always make the berakhah and drink something before wishing the others at the table well and was told that it is improper to honor a person before honoring Hashem, presumably a reference to the aforementioned *gemara* in Nedarim. But he adds that he disagrees with his Rebbe for two reasons. First, he mentions the *gemara* in Berakhos which places such a high value on the honor to be given to human beings. Then, he quotes a statement from the Maharshal in his Yam Shel Shlomo on Bava Kamma (*perek* 8 *siman* 64) concerning how one should respond after being wished good health upon sneezing. There is a long-standing practice to wish someone well (using one expression or another) upon hearing him sneeze; Rabbi Akiva Eiger, in his Gilyon haShas on Berakhos (53a s.v. Rashi), says that the source of this custom is found in Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer (*perek* 52)

where it is explained that originally one died by sneezing, as his breath left his body. Now that this is no longer true, one's life and health should be toasted when he sneezes. The Maharshal writes that there is also a practice to recite a *passuk* then to thank Hashem, but that this *passuk* is to be recited by the person only *after* he acknowledges and thanks those who wish him good health. This ruling is accepted by the Magein Avraham (Orakh Chaim 230:6); apparently, there is no problem blessing Hashem after blessing a fellow human being. Nevertheless, this authority concludes that he tries to follow his Rebbe's practice of first saying a *berakhah* and drinking before praising any human being or wishing anyone well.

The Kaf haChaim continues by citing *posekim* who reject the comparison to responding after one says "God bless you" or the like following a sneeze, because the Maharshal himself bases his opinion on the statement of the *gemara* in Bava Kamma (92b) that when one prays for the wellbeing of a friend when he is himself in need of such a blessing, he himself is answered first. Therefore, specifically in such a case it may be permissible to respond and bless one's friend before blessing Hashem. Moreover, there may be a difference between responding to someone who has wished one well as opposed to initiating a blessing on one's own before saying a *berakhah*. The Kaf HaChaim thus rules that honoring Hashem should take precedence and that therefore one should not say *leChayim* until after making a *berakhah* and taking a drink.

Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank, in his Seifer Mikra'ei Kodosh on Yamim Nora'im (*siman* 7), discusses when to recite the "*yehi ratzon*" over the apples and other special foods eaten on Rosh Hashanah night, in relationship to the *berakhah* required for these foods. Citing a *gemara* in Berakhos (31a) which says that one should first praise Hashem before davening to Him, he rules that the *berakhah* (and a bite of the food) must precede the *yehi ratzon*. He then quotes an authority who says for the same reason that one must first make a *berakhah* and take a drink before saying *leChayim* to a friend. This seems to be the preferred view among the *posekim*.

LECH LECHA: SEEING IS BELIEVING

Yehi Cohen (18)

In Parshas Lech Lecha, we meet the first of the Avos, Avraham. Avraham is the first person in the modern world to stop and realize that there is a Creator to the world. The Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 39:1) gives the analogy of a person who walks along a highway and comes to a city ablaze with flames. He thinks to himself, "This city must have had a builder! Now it's on fire...where is the leader of this city? It is impossible to have a city without a leader." So too it is impossible to have a complex and breathtaking world without a Creator. This is what Avraham realized and brought to the world. The Midrash goes on to say that once Avraham came to that conclusion, and said "There must be a Leader to this 'city'," only then did Hashem turn to him and say "I am the Leader, the Creator and Maintainer of this world." First Avraham realized there must be one G-d who created the world, and only then did Hashem speak to him and reveal the secrets of creation, establishing a connection with Avraham.

When did this new connection start? The first *passuk* of our *parsha* tells us:

לֵךְ לְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וּמְמוֹלַדְתָּךְ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ אֶל הָאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֶרְאֶךָ:

"Hashem said to Avram, "Go for yourself from your land, from your birthplace, and from your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation; I will bless you, and I will make you name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and the one who curses you I will curse; and all the families of the earth will be blessed through you (Bereishis 12:1-3)." Although Hashem speaks to Avram now, in this *passuk*, before he left to go to Eretz Canaan, we see that Hashem says "Go to the land that *I will show you*." Meaning, "Once you get there, to Eretz Canaan, I will show you new insights, and new levels of understanding Me and the nature of the world." And so it was. When Avraham arrived in Shechem we are told that "Hashem appeared to Avraham and said 'To your offspring I will give this land' (Bereishis 12:7)." That is when this new connection started.

However, there is one last question to ask: What were these new levels of insight? What were these

incredible levels that Avraham, the first of the Avos, the founder of Monotheism, reached? What is it that Hashem revealed to him? The answer is in the *pesukim* we have already discussed: "Go to the land that I will show you," "Hashem appeared to Avram". When you see something you know it is true. As the old expression goes, "seeing is believing." Once you see something, you know it is true. It's a fact. It exists. You see your hand in front of your face and know it is there. Hashem revealed to Avraham that He exists, and that He is all existence. It was as clear to Avraham as could possibly be. It was a fact. It was existence.

Our forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, are the foundation of our people. What they achieved became our spiritual DNA. Each of them developed and excelled in a different area of understanding Hashem and His world and passed that on to us. Avraham was the first. He realized and came to absolute clarity in the recognition that there is one Creator of this world and that all existence comes from Him. Moreover, He is all of existence. That clarity and vision lies within each of us. If a person were to look within himself he would find it there. For generations the Jewish people, when faced with a choice between giving up Judaism and death, chose death. To them it wasn't even a choice. Judaism wasn't just a nice way of living, or rewarding, or whatever other valid reason that motivate us to keep the *mitzvos*. Those are true, but it's more than that. It is existence. It is the spiritual physics of the world. It's a fact.

In the last few hundred years this has been lost, to a great extent. But until then, throughout our entire history, these things were clear. Avraham made them clear for us, and that clarity is planted deep within each one of us. One just needs to look within and realize who they really are, and this will lead them to the conclusion that there is no city without a leader. And then, the "Leader" of this great city turns to each of us and says "*Ani hu ba'al habirah*—I am the Leader of this city."

JOURNEYING TO YOUR DESTINATION

Moshe Loew ('20)

This week's *parashah* is Lekh Lekha, which begins with Hashem telling Avram, "Go for yourself." (Genesis 12:1) The main theme throughout this *parashah* is 'going.' If you include the end of last week's *parashah*, we have four different journeys made by four different people. Each journey differs in fundamental ways which can teach us about our own journeys.

The journey at the end of last week's *parashah* is Terach's. Without explaining why, the Torah tells us that Terach takes his family and starts traveling to the Land of Canaan. They don't make it there. The Torah tells us that they get to Charan and they settle there. This is the place where Terach ultimately dies, short of his goal. Terach's journey was never completed.

One of the journeys in this week's *parashah* is Hagar's. A pregnant Hagar runs away from Avram's house after Sarai treats her harshly. An angel finds her in the desert and asks her, "*ay-mizzeh vat ve'ana teileichi*, where have you come from and where are you going?" (Genesis 16:18) Hagar answers saying, "*mippenei Sarai gevirtti, anokhi borachat*, I am fleeing, from the presence of my mistress Sarai." (Ibid.) Hagar answers the angel's first question of where she is coming from, but never answers the second question because she no idea where she is going! Hagar's journey is directionless.

Another person who 'goes' in this week's *parashah* is Lot. Avram decides that he and Lot have to part ways because their shepherds get into a dispute, which Rashi explains is over Lot's sheep eating other people's grass. Avraham says to Lot, "*im-hassemol ve'ayminah*

ve'im-hayyamin ve'asme'yilah, If you go left, I'll go right, and if you go right, I'll go left." (Genesis 13:9) The orientation used in the Torah is that forward is east. This is why Onkelos translates this *passuk* as, "*im at le'tzipuna*

Rabbi Joshua Kahn
Head of School

Rabbi Michael Taubes
Rosh Yeshiva

Rabbi Baruch Pesach Mendelson
Rabbinic Advisor

Dov Tuchman
David Tanner
Editors in Chief

Yonatan Chudnoff
Yehuda Snow
Executive Editors

Yaakov Bienstock
Aryeh Margolin
Distribution Coordinators

ana le'daromah ve'im at le'daroma ana le'tzipunah, if you go north, I'll go south, and if you go south, I'll go north." The Torah then tells us which direction Lot chooses: "*vayyissa Lot mikkedem*, and Lot traveled from the east." (Ibid.) Lot ends up going west! But west isn't one of the options given to Lot by Avraham Avinu, the *gadol hador*! Lot goes in the wrong direction, settles in Sodom, has his wife turned into a pillar of salt, etc. Lot's journey is self-destructive.

Contrast all of these with the first journey in this week's *parashah*. Hashem tells Avram to travel, "*el ha'aretz asher areka*, to the land that I will show you," (Genesis 12:1) and Avram does so. As opposed to Lot, Avram is going in the right direction. Unlike Hagar, Avram's journey has a purposeful destination. And though his father Terach never arrived at his destination, Avram finishes his journey and, when he arrives in Canaan, essentially completes the journey of his father as well.

These journeys teach us about the paths we can take in life. As human beings, whether we physically travel to new lands or we do not, we are on a path of change and growth. We each have the responsibility to choose where we go and why. The journeys of Terach, Lot, and Hagar all have important qualities missing from them, which is why they were unsuccessful. We must model our journeys after that of Avram and follow the path which Hashem has laid out for us. If we travel like Avram, then, *im yirtzah* Hashem, we will all attain our goals and reach our ultimate destination as *benei Torah*, closer to Hashem.

This *dvar Torah* is based on a *shiur* by Rabbi Dovid Miller and on *Unlocking the Torah Text* by Rabbi Shmuel Goldin.



שבת שלום!