

# Toronto Torah

## Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Lech Lecha

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This issue of Toronto Torah is dedicated by Ruth and Gerald Warner

in memory of Ruth's dear parents,

Margaret and Mike Smaye ז"ל ויחיאל מיכל בן יהושע ז"ל

### Avraham and the Nature of Faith

Rabbi Baruch Weintraub

As Ramban notes, the Torah does not explain to us why did G-d choose Avraham, calling him to leave his land and family and promising him an eternal reward. (Commentary to Bereishit 13:2) Thus, it was left for our sages to fill in the gap, and indeed they suggested various explanations as to why Avraham was chosen. We will survey three main positions:

1. "Rabbi Yitzchak compared Avraham Avinu to a man who was traveling from place to place, when he saw a castle illuminated. He then asked: Could it be that such a castle would not be managed? Immediately, the castle's owner looked out at him and said, 'I am the owner of the castle.'" (Bereishit Rabbah 39:1). According to this midrash, Avraham was approached by G-d after he was able to deduce G-d's existence. Rambam, in his Hilchot Avodah Zarah (1:3), also describes Avraham's achievement as mainly intellectual: "After this mighty man was weaned, his mind began to wander... How is it possible for the sphere to continue to revolve without anyone controlling it? Who is causing it to revolve?... Ultimately, he reached the way of truth and understood the just path through his accurate comprehension. He realized that there is one G-d who controlled the sphere, that He created everything, and that there is no other deity. He knew that the entire world was mistaken."
2. A very different approach is suggested in another well-known midrash. In this version of

Avraham's early life, he proved his complete faith in G-d by his willingness to be thrown into a fire for refusing to bow to idols. (Bereishit Rabbah 38:13) G-d chose Avraham, then, not for his intellectual ability to uncover His existence, but rather for his courage to follow this knowledge.

3. A third and distinct view is presented by the second Gerrer Rebbe, in his *S'fat Emet*: "Ramban asked why the Torah records 'Go forth' without first mentioning Avraham's beloved status. In the holy Zohar it appears that Avraham was praiseworthy because he heard this call of 'Go forth', which comes out from G-d to all people at all times, as the Zohar says, 'Woe to those who sleep in their holes (and do not hear)!' But our father Avraham heard and accepted." (*S'fat Emet* Lecha 5632) According to the *S'fat Emet's* presentation of the Zohar, the main cause for Avraham's chosenness was neither his bright mind, nor his complete trust, but instead his openness to listen and to seek the Divine call.

These different interpretations serve not only to enhance the biblical story, but also to highlight Avraham Avinu's unique character and special role as the "head of the faithful". (Pesikta Zutrita Shir HaShirim 4:8) They represent three different attitudes to the very nature of faith itself, and its main virtue:

1. According to the first approach, faith is mainly the belief that a certain truth is correct. Avraham is praised, thus, for reaching the right

conclusion, and later for disseminating it among his neighbours.

2. According to the second approach, the primary focus of faith is not in 'believing that', but rather in 'believing in'. Avraham will indeed prove, in trial after trial culminating in the Akeidah, that he not only knew that G-d existed, but that he was willing to give Him everything that was precious to him.
3. Last, according to the third view, faith is not only knowledge or attitude towards the Divine; the expression 'man of faith' is understood to refer not to specific knowledge or a particular relationship, but to one's personality and disposition. Seen in this light, faith is the virtue of looking beyond the here and now, the ability to hear a voice calling when others conveniently look away, the willingness to step up and take responsibility even when it is more comfortable to stay put. This characteristic of Avraham will, eventually, be explicitly praised by Hashem as the reason to make his children the "Chosen People": "For I have known him, because he will command his sons and his household after him, that they should keep to Hashem's way, performing righteousness and justice, so He will bring upon Avraham that which He spoke concerning him." (Bereishit 18:19)

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**Summary**

Chapter 2 opens with “Tefillat Chanah” [Chanah’s Prayer], Chanah’s beautiful song of thanks to G-d for providing her with her son Shemuel. (2:1-10) Although his family returned home from the Mishkan after this prayer, Shemuel remained behind in Shiloh to serve Hashem under the guidance of Eli. (2:11) We are later told that Chanah made Shemuel robes for him to serve in, and that she would bring new robes with her year after year, when she would come visit. (2:18-19) Eli blessed Elkanah and Chanah, and she gave birth to an additional 3 sons and 2 daughters, who all grew up without their brother Shemuel. (2:20-21)

All that time, Eli’s sons, Chofni and Pinchas (who were working alongside Shemuel) were abusive to those who came to bring sacrifices, and angered Hashem through various sins, including not properly following the laws of eating sacrificial meat. (2:12-2:17) In his old age, Eli heard about how they were also acting inappropriately with married women. Rashi, following Shabbat 55b, understands that they delayed bringing sacrifices that would permit the women to their husbands, whereas Radak

believes that they actually committed adultery. Eli rebuked them. (2:22-25a) However, they did not accept this rebuke, since G-d had hardened their hearts, wishing to kill them for their sins. (2:25b) [See Radak for a discussion of this “hardening of their hearts”.] Nevertheless, Shemuel remained faithful to G-d and acted properly with people. (2:26)

A man of G-d, identified as Elkanah by various commentators, rebuked Eli for the way his sons treated the holy work of the priesthood. (2:27-30) He also told Eli that due to their sins, his descendants would die young, his two sons would die on the same day, and his family line would lose the priesthood to a more worthy candidate. (2:31-35) Furthermore, his descendants would have to resort to begging for support from other priests, so that they would not starve. (2:36)

**Lesson**

Although this episode will not be featured in our upcoming “Tanach: Book of Failure?” program, an important lesson can be learned from a clear contrast between success and failure in this chapter. While the central figures of our story seem to be

Chofni, Pinchas, and Shemuel, there is a cast of secondary characters as well. Elkanah, Chanah and Eli are all mentioned in this chapter, and it is their influence that really shapes the story. While Chanah and Elkanah take a very hands-on approach to their parenting, often visiting and bringing gifts for their son despite his living away from home, Eli seems to be altogether unaware of what his children are doing. There is also no mention of his wife, who seems to be uninvolved as well. Chofni and Pinchas’ terrible actions go unnoticed until someone explicitly tells their father about their bad behaviour, and even then, he is content with a light rebuke. (Rashi and Ralbag to Shemuel I 3:13) Perhaps for this reason, Chazal point out that the anonymous prophet who came to rebuke Eli and bring the message of his punishment was Elkanah, who demonstrated strength in the area in which Eli struggled.

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**Holy Land Halachah Demanding a Referendum****Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner****Rabbi Eliezer Waldenberg, Tzitz Eliezer 21:9  
20<sup>th</sup> century Israel**

Question: A community has elected a council to deal with municipal issues. A new issue has come up, and a member of the community wishes to pursue a referendum rather than rely on the elected council. Would that be halachically acceptable, or would it undermine the halachically recognized authority of the council?

Certainly, halachah authorizes a community to elect officials whose decisions bind that community, including the minority who did not vote for them. As explained by Rabbi Shlomo ibn Aderet (Shu”t Rashba 1:617), their authority comes solely from their communal appointment, irrespective of their personal wisdom or stature within the community. [See Tzitz Eliezer 2:23-24 and 3:29 regarding how such elections should be conducted.] Further, based on a passage in Talmud Yerushalmi (Megilah 4:2) as well as the ruling of Rabbi Moshe Isserless (Yoreh Deah 229:31), Rabbi Waldenberg contended that the council’s authority includes all circumstances which may arise, including unanticipated and unusual issues. Rabbi Waldenberg noted that this has been the published position of numerous halachic authorities over the centuries; an elected council’s word is binding, unless it runs counter to halachah.

Rabbi Waldenberg noted the significant dissenting position of Rabbi Moshe Trani. (Shu”t Mabit 1:84) Writing in sixteenth century Tzfat, Rabbi Trani contended that a decision made by an elected council regarding a new or unusual issue could be overturned by the majority of the community. Elections only give the council the default presumption of support by

the majority, but their position on an unanticipated issue could be overturned. However, Rabbi Waldenberg noted that halachic authorities have generally disagreed with Rabbi Trani’s position. Further, the majority sought by Rabbi Trani is not determined through a private ballot, but through a communal gathering and public vote in the presence of the council themselves.

Aside from the power of the community’s election, Rabbi Waldenberg also noted the view of Rabbi Moshe Schick. (Shu”t Maharam Schick Choshen Mishpat 19) Rabbi Schick suggested that all of the members of a community are viewed as partners in all communal matters, but partnership enterprises are vulnerable to neglect if each partner thinks the other one is going to manage it. Therefore, particular individuals are assigned to manage the community’s affairs, to the exclusion of others, in order to ensure that the affairs are looked after. Allowing a communal referendum could lead to inefficiency, and ultimately to abandonment of responsibility.

Finally, Rabbi Waldenberg contended that a popular referendum would put important matters in the hands of people who lack knowledge and training regarding the issues under debate. Rejecting the decision of an elected council on the basis of a vote of the broad population could damage the community’s interests.

For all of these reasons, Rabbi Waldenberg rejected the idea of holding a communal referendum to challenge the judgment of an elected council.

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## Biography

### Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky

Rabbi Baruch Weintraub

Young Yaakov was born in 1891 in Kalushkove, Lithuania (now Belarus). At the age of eleven he was sent to Minsk to learn Torah from the best local teachers; at fifteen he advanced to Yeshivat Knesset Yisrael of Slabodka, where he learned under Rabbi Natan Tzvi Finkel ("The Alter of Slabodka") for twenty-one years, with a short break during World War One. He married Ita Etil, the daughter of Rabbi Dov Hirsch Heller from the Slabodka Yeshiva.

After serving in rabbinical positions in a few small towns, Rabbi Kamenetsky looked for a position that would enable him to put his full abilities to use in the service of Torah, and would also enable him to sustain his growing family. After rejecting a proposal to become a Dayan (judge) in the reputable Beit Din of Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzinski, Rabbi Kamenetsky understood that he should begin to look for a position overseas.

In 1937, Rabbi Kamenetsky moved to Seattle, Washington where he replaced the local Rabbi for a few months. In 1938, he moved to Toronto, where he served as Rabbi of Congregation Toras Emes and Rosh Yeshiva of Eitz Chaim's Maharil Graubart Yeshiva. Rebbetzin Ita Etil Kamenetsky passed away in 1954, and in 1958, Rabbi Kamenetsky married Mrs. Chana Urman of Toronto.

In 1945 Rabbi Kamenetsky left Toronto to become a Rabbi in the New York Yeshiva Mesivta Torah Vodaath; he became the Rosh Yeshiva three years later. Rabbi Kamenetsky was soon recognized as one of the greatest Torah scholars in North America, joining Agudath Israel of America's Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah when it was established in 1949. He became a forceful engine for Torah learning in post-World War Two Jewish society, and one of the leaders responsible for the blooming of Torah study from which we see fruit now.

Rabbi Kamenetsky's legacy is primarily found in his many students and descendants who took on rabbinical positions in North America. However, he also left behind commentaries on the Chumash, Gemara and Shulchan Aruch; all of these are named *Emet LeYaakov*.

Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky passed away on the 29th of Adar 5746 (1986).

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## Torah and Translation

### Why did Avraham Endanger Himself for Lot?

R' Yaakov Kamenetsky, Emet I'Yaakov Bereishit 14:14

Translated by Rabbi Alex Hecht

וישמע אברם כי נשבה אחיו וירק את חניכיו.

הנה אילו היה אברהם שואל שאלה אי חייב לילך להציל את לוט בודאי היה נענה שהוא פטור, דהא אין אדם מחויב להכניס את עצמו בספק סכנה בכדי להציל את חבירו [עמ"ש"כ בענין זה להלן סוף פרשת מסעי], אלא מה שעשה כן אברהם הוא משום שהאבות נקראו "ישרים" [עבודה זרה דף כ"ה ע"א], והיינו שכל הנהגתם היתה לא על פי דיני התורה אלא על פי השכל הישר, כי האלקים עשה את האדם ישר, ועל פי הישר היה מוטל על אברהם להשתדל להציל את לוט וכדביארתי לעיל [י"ג פ"ט] כי אברהם הרגיש את עצמו כאחראי לשלומו של לוט מכיון שהיה אביו מת בכבשן אביו משום שאמר שהוא מאמין באלקי אברהם, ולכן ע"פ הישר, "מענטשליך קייט", הוכרח אברהם להריק את חניכיו ולרדוף אחר המלכים. ובאמת כל חיי האבות, שחיו קודם זמן תורה, היו מונהגים על פי הישר, וזהו ביאור מאמר חז"ל [ויק"ר פ"ט א"ג]: דרך ארץ קדמה לתורה, והיינו שהאבות התנהגו על פי דרך ארץ והישר עוד קודם שניתנה תורה.

ונראה שזהו פשוטו של מקרא להלן סוף פרשת משפטים [כ"ד פ"ב]: ואתנה לך את לוחות האבן התורה והמצוה, דבשלמא מצוה היינו מצוות שנצטוו בהן, אבל מה זה "התורה". ונראה שהכוונה היא לסיפורי התורה של האבות שנכתבו בתורה קודם המצוות...

אבל לפמש"כ נראה שבאמת על פרשיות אלו לא קשה כלל, דמהסיפורים האלו אנו למדים מה צריכה להיות הנהגת האדם על פי הישר והדרך ארץ, ודבר זה אפשר לתבוע אפילו מהגויים, כי אע"פ שמצוות לא ניתנו להם, אבל אעפ"כ לחיות על פי ישר זה יכול כל אחד אם הוא רק רוצה בזה, ודו"ק.

"And when Avram heard that his kinsman was taken captive, he armed his disciples..." (Bereishit 14:14, Artscroll tr.)

If Avraham had asked the [halachic] question of whether he was obligated to go to save Lot, he would certainly have been answered that he was exempt, since a person is not obligated to bring himself into [a situation of] possible danger to save his friend. Rather, that which Avraham did was because the Patriarchs were called *yashar* (decent). (Avodah Zarah 25a) All of their conduct was not according to the laws of the Torah, but was rather according to intuition of decency, since G-d made man decent (Kohelet 7:29), and decency dictated that it was up to Avraham to try to save Lot, as I have explained earlier. (13:9) Avraham felt responsible for Lot's well-being, because [Lot's] father Haran died in his own father's furnace because he said he believed in the G-d of Avraham. (Bereishit Rabbah 38:13) Thus, based on decency, "*mentschlichkeit*", Avraham was obliged to arm his disciples and pursue the kings. In fact, all of the Patriarchs, who lived before the Torah was given, were governed by decency, as our Sages said (Vayikra Rabbah 9:3), "*Derech erez* (proper behaviour) precedes the Torah," that the Patriarchs conducted themselves based on decency and proper behaviour, even before the Torah was given.

And it appears that this is the simple meaning of the verse at the end of Parshat Mishpatim (24:12), "And I will give you the stone tablets [and] the Torah and the mitzvah." It is understandable that "mitzvah" refers to the mitzvot that were commanded to [the Jewish people]; but what is "the Torah"? It appears that this is intended to refer to the stories of the Patriarchs, which were written in the Torah before the mitzvot [were given]...

According to what we have written, it appears that, in truth, there is no difficulty [that the Torah begins with stories of the Patriarchs], since, from these stories, we learn the conduct according to which a person needs to conduct himself, according to decency and proper behaviour. And this is possible to demand even from the nations of the world; even though the mitzvot were not given to them, nevertheless, to live according to decency, every person is able if he desires.

## Weekly Highlights: Nov. 9 – Nov. 15 / 11 Cheshvan – 17 Cheshvan

Time	Speaker	Topic	Location	Special Notes
<b>SHABBATON AT BAYT: DISCOVERING G-D</b> <b>Friday 4:30 PM, Ezer Diena, Parshah &amp; Kugel: Balancing Faith and Reason</b> <b>Friday before Maariv, Ezer Diena, Avraham's Hidden Journey</b> <b>Friday 8:00 PM, HIGH SCHOOL ONEG FOR BOYS with R' Bergman, R' Hecht, Ezer Diena, at 17 Gailcrest</b> <b>Friday 8:15 PM, R' Mordechai Torczyner, Oneg at 49 Michael Ct. "Seeking G-d: Chasidim &amp; Mitnagdim"</b> <b>Hashkamah Dvar Torah, R' Sammy Bergman: Avraham's Emunah Evolution</b> <b>8:40 AM, R' Mordechai Torczyner, Pre-Shacharit Parshah: Avraham, Shimshon &amp; the Limits of Faith</b> <b>9:30 AM, R' Sammy Bergman, Minchat Chinuch: Monotheism and the Process of Elimination</b> <b>No-Frills Dvar Torah, R' Mordechai Torczyner: The Ger's Discovery</b> <b>JLIC Minyan Dvar Torah, R' Alex Hecht: Fitting G-d Into Our Schedules?</b> <b>Bais Medrash Minyan Dvar Torah, Ezer Diena: Did Avraham Change Mitzvot for Outreach?</b> <b>3:30 PM, R' Mordechai Torczyner, Hebrew Shiur: חיי גדעון השופט: גם לנסים יש גבול: חיי גדעון השופט</b> <b>Seudah Shlishit, R' Sammy Bergman: Faith or Loyalty?</b>				
<b>Before minchah</b>	R' Alex Hecht	Daf Yomi	BAYT	<b>Rabbi's Classroom</b>
<b>Sun. Nov. 10</b>				
<b>8:15 AM</b>	R' Sammy Bergman	Contemporary Halachah: Studying Other Religions	Yeshivat Or Chaim	
<b>9:15 AM</b>	Netanel Klein	"Imitating My Neighbours" 2	Adas Israel Hamilton	
<b>4:30 PM</b>	<b>R' Mordechai Torczyner</b>	<b>Race in Judaism</b>	<b>Limmud 2019</b>	<b>www.limmud.ca</b>
<b>Mon. Nov. 11</b>				
<b>7:30 PM</b>	<b>R' Mordechai Torczyner</b>	<b>Legal Ethics: Sharp Practice</b>	<b>Shaarei Shomayim</b>	<b>Laypeople welcome</b>
<b>8:30 PM</b>	R' Sammy Bergman	Artificial Intelligence 2: Robots Baking Matzah	Shomrai Shabbos	<b>3rd Floor; Men</b>
<b>Tue. Nov. 12</b>				
<b>1:30 PM</b>	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Yeshayah, Ch. 22	Shaarei Shomayim	
<b>7:30 PM</b>	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Book of Shoftim, Ch. 5	129 Theodore Pl.	<b>Men</b>
<b>7:30 PM</b>	Ezer Diena	<i>L'ilui Nishmat R' Arye Rosenberg</i> Parshah: G-d's Bikur Cholim	BAYT	<b>New mini-series! Boardroom</b>
<b>Wed. Nov. 13</b>				
<b>10:00 AM</b>	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Life After Death 2: Why We Survive Death	Beth Emeth	<i>There is a fee torontotorah.com/life</i>
<b>8:00 PM</b>	R' Alex Hecht	Bringing G-d Into Our Lives #2: Belief or Certainty?	Shaarei Tefillah	<b>New 5-Part Series!</b>
<b>8:00 PM</b>	R' Sammy Bergman	All Things Shabbat	Shaarei Shomayim	<b>Open to All!</b>
<b>Thu. Nov. 14</b>				
<b>1:30 PM</b>	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Shemuel I, Ch. 13	49 Michael Ct.	<b>Women</b>
<b>8:30 PM</b>	Ezer Diena	Gemara Beitzah	ediena@torontotorah.com	<b>Men, Advanced</b>
<b>Fri. Nov. 15</b>				
<b>10:30 AM</b>	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Bava Metzia	Yeshivat Or Chaim	<b>Advanced</b>
<b>For University Men, at Yeshivat Or Chaim</b> <b>10:00 AM Sunday, R' Aaron Greenberg, Gemara Shabbat</b> <b>11:00 AM Sunday, Beit Midrash Rotation: Contemporary Halachah: R' Bergman, Studying Other Religions</b> <b>8:30 AM Wednesday, Ezer Diena, Mishlei</b> <b>8:30 AM Friday, R' Mordechai Torczyner, Parshah</b>				
<b>Seder Boker for Men with Rabbi Moshe Yeres, at Yeshivat Or Chaim</b> <b>10:00 AM to Noon, Mon./Wed. Masechet Megilah, Orot of Rav Kook, Chovot haLevavot</b> <b>10:00 AM to Noon, Tue./Thu. Parshanut on the Parshah, Sefer Yehoshua, Pninei Halachah</b>				