

# POWERFUL PARSHA PERSPECTIVES

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## *Parshas Lech Lecha*

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## *Parshas Lech Lecha*

### **Like Fathers, Like Sons — History Repeats Itself**

In this parsha we are introduced to our grandparents.

I want to share with you a famous Torah principle, and then we will focus on one specific application of it.

We are introduced to Avraham Avinu in this parsha. In this and the next parsha, vayeira, Avraham goes through his Ten Tests.

Initially, when G-d tells Avraham to leave his birthplace, he goes to the land of Canaan. In chapter 12, verse 6, we are told: “And Avraham passed into the land, until the place of Shechem, until Elon Moreh – and the Canaanites were still living in the land.”

This is just one example in which the Torah is giving us seemingly unimportant details about the story of the Patriarchs. Does it really matter in which towns Avraham stopped along his way? What matters is the Ten Tests he underwent. Why does the Torah insert these details?

Nachmanides, the Ramban, states a very important principle, one that we should apply extensively throughout the book of Genesis. He comments on the words: “And Avraham passed into the land.” He says: “I will tell you a principle by which you’ll understand all the coming portions of scripture concerning Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov. It is indeed a great matter, which our Rabbis mentioned briefly, saying, ‘Whatever happened to the Patriarchs is a sign for the children – **“Ma’asei Avot Siman laBanim”**.’

Ramban elaborates on this principle: “It is for this reason that the verses narrate at great length the details of the journeys of the Patriarchs, the digging of the wells, and other events. Now, a person may consider them unnecessary and of no useful purpose. But, in truth, they all serve as a lesson for the future. When an event happens to any of the three Patriarchs, that which is decreed to happen to his children can be understood in light of that previous event.”

This principle can be understood on many levels. We call Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov our Patriarchs – our Avot (Fathers) – because they blazed a trail for the Jewish People. They lay the foundations for our People. It is much more difficult to blaze a trail than to follow a path that has already been cleared. Many of the things that Avraham does will lay the groundwork for what the Jews will do later in history.

The Ramban continues: “It is for this reason that the Holy One, Blessed be He, caused Avraham to take possession of the land, and symbolically did to him all that was destined to happen in the future to his children. Understand this principle.”

For example, in our verse, we read that Avraham goes to Shechem. Why does he go to Shechem? Because he sees that in the future, there will be a terrible calamity happening in

Shechem. His children will be going to war against the inhabitants of Shechem and they will be in great danger. And so Avraham is praying now because he sees that in the future there will be a great war in Shechem.

Much of what happens to Avraham is a synopsis of Jewish history. For example, a few months after Avraham arrives in the land of Canaan, there is a famine in the land. This famine forces Avraham to go down to Egypt. Pharaoh showers him with riches in order to curry favor with Avraham so that he can marry Sarah, whom Pharaoh abducts. But at the end of the day, Sarah is released unharmed, untouched, and Avraham leaves Egypt a very wealthy man. Does this story sound familiar? A few hundred years later, the Jewish People go down to Egypt because of a famine in the land, the Jews are “abducted” and become slaves to Pharaoh, and the Talmud tells us that, in spite of the fact that the Jewish People were slaves, and, under normal circumstances, the moral standards of slaves are compromised, not one Jewish woman was every compromised by the Egyptians (similar to the case of Sarah), and when the Jews left Egypt, they left with great wealth. We see from this example how Avraham blazed the trail.

And as we go through the stories of the Patriarchs, we will see the principle of Ma’asei Avot Siman LaBanim active in all the episodes that take place in the book of Genesis.

Now, this principle goes even deeper.

## **Like Fathers, Like Sons — Character Traits**

Whatever characteristics we will ever be able to cultivate within ourselves, they are all characteristics initiated by the Patriarchs. For example, let’s take the character trait of “kindness.” How do we know how to do kindness? Avraham taught us. Moreover, by blazing the trail in developing the trait of kindness, he wasn’t inoculated against making mistakes along the way, and often suffered because of them. For example, he was too kind to Yishmael, and Yishmael didn’t turn out too good because of that misplaced kindness. But as he moved through his life, Avraham worked through and developed and perfected the trait of kindness.

Why do we need to know this? The answer is that if we want to be kind people, we can’t just do what our hearts (our emotions) tell us to do. Avraham methodically built up and perfected the trait of kindness, and if we want to access that information, we have to learn how Avraham acted. By delving into his deeds we will be able to tap into the trait of kindness. The same applies to Yitzchak, who developed the trait of self-control, and Yaakov, who perfected the attribute of mercy. If we look at the Patriarchs, we will be able to understand our spiritual potential are and how to cultivate that spiritual potential.

And so, when we read these stories, the details will always have messages for us. And if we want to know what it means to be a Jew and how to succeed as a Jew, look to the Patriarchs: they have already tackled these issues. There is nothing that you and I are going to confront in our lives that the Patriarchs, to a great extent, did not already tackle.

For example, how do we deal with Anti-Semitism? How do we deal with hostile non-Jewish enemies? Yaakov, in his confrontation with Esav, taught us how to do this. He taught us how to live when you’re dealing with someone who wants to kill you. The whole idea of “shmearing” people to get things done originated with Yaakov. Jews had to “shmeare” the KGB on many occasions. They learned this trick form Yaakov.

Everything is in the Torah. The Patriarchs cultivated life-sustaining concepts for us to access. The parashot are more than nice stories: they teach us all about our life as Jews.

With this principle in mind, let us examine a few stories about our Patriarchs and come to a greater understanding in one specific area: Let us see if there are perhaps some inconsistencies in their lives.

## **The Patriarchs – Warriors or Wimps?**

### ***a. Avraham***

In chapter 12, we read about the hunger in the land of Canaan. Avraham and Sarah go down to Egypt. What is his approach? He realizes that Sarah is very beautiful, and he doesn't want anyone to find out who Sarah is. The reason for his concern is that he knows the Egyptians are a people of "high moral principles" and would never dare take a married woman against a husband's will. They would get around this problem very easily by killing the husband and then taking the poor widow. Afraid of this possibility, Avraham told Sarah to say she was his sister, and thus the Egyptians wouldn't kill him. Also, he would also put Sarah in a box, so that when they went through customs perhaps the Egyptians wouldn't find her and thus the whole problem would be avoided.

Well, when the couple comes to the border, the Egyptians insist on opening up every box, and they find Sarah. Sarah is immediately taken to the palace. Pharaoh tries to win Avraham's favor by showering him with riches. What is Avraham's reaction? He seems quite passive about the whole thing. Then Pharaoh tries to take the initiative on his own of being intimate with Sarah. G-d comes to the rescue and smites Pharaoh with a horrible disease. Pharaoh turns to Avraham and says, "Avraham, I didn't know she was a married woman. Why didn't you tell me?" What is Avraham's reaction? He doesn't say a word!

If you examine the whole story of Avraham's stay in Egypt, you will see that there is no narrative involving Avraham. He doesn't speak at all! If you see the progression of the story and notice that Avraham doesn't seem to be involved at all, you are bound to ask yourself, What kind of guy is Avraham? He comes across as a very timid fellow. He doesn't take any initiative; he tries to cover up; he doesn't stand up to Pharaoh. If it weren't for G-d's intervention, there would have been major problems.

In Chapter 14, the First World War takes place. It is a major war between the kingdoms of Canaan (the area of Sodom) and the kingdoms of the East (the area of Iraq). This is known as the War of the Four Kings against the Five Kings. In this war, the four kings are victorious. What does all this have to do with Avraham? He's studying Torah and minding his own business in central Israel. It's his business because his nephew Lot is living in Sodom and he has been taken captive by the four kings. Someone comes and tells Avraham what has happened. What does Avraham do? He tells his servant Eliezer, "We have to save his life! A terrible desecration of Hashem's name has been committed! You and I – Let's go to war!" The two of them take on the Axis powers of evil (the midrash tells us the enemy numbered 2.6 million soldiers) and they go to battle. Not only do they go to battle, but they also win! The two of them chase the armies of those four countries all the way up to the northern border of Israel.

Now, is this the same passive Avraham we saw in Egypt? For his wife he does nothing, but for his no-goodnik nephew who gave him nothing but problems and headaches he risks his life? What's going on here?

How do you react when a relative is abducted? If you ask Avraham, he would seem to say: "Well, if it's your wife you do nothing, but if it's your nephew, you go to war!" What can we learn from this?

### ***b. Yaakov***

Let's see if there are any inconsistencies in the story of Yaakov Avinu. He has to run away from home, and he spends twenty years in the house of his uncle Lavan. How would you characterize Yaakov?

Here's a guy who arrives in Charan, penniless. Lavan expected he would arrive with money, but seeing as he had none, Lavan let him work for a month for nothing. Then he asked Yaakov how much he wanted to earn for his work. And Yaakov answered that he wanted to marry Rachel. Lavan said, No problem. You work for me for seven years in return for marrying Rachel. We know what happens. On the wedding night, Lavan does a switch and substitutes Leah for Rachel. The next morning Yaakov sees what happened and now it's too late. He goes to Lavan and says, What did you do to me? And Lavan says, Don't worry about it. We'll give you Rachel, too – work for me another seven years. And Yaakov says, Okay.

Now, is this how you would react?

Then, when the seven years are up and Yaakov wants to leave, Lavan says, Don't leave, I want you to stay. And Yaakov says, Okay. And during this whole time, Lavan keeps cheating him and swindling him and switches his wages hundred times. Yaakov doesn't stand his ground at all. It was only because Hashem performed many miracles for Yaakov (the speckled and spotted goats and sheep), everything worked out for Yaakov, in spite of Yaakov's not being a tough businessman. Poor Yaakov – it seems he can't stand up for himself.

Now, when it was time to leave Yaakov's home, how does Yaakov proceed? Does he go and shake hands and tell him that G-d sent him a message that he has to leave and that he's already worked for twenty years and it's time to say goodbye? No. Instead, he waits until Lavan has to go out of town and he sneaks out with his family – like a bunch of thieves. When Lavan finds out, he chases after the family and berates Yaakov for having left so surreptitiously. Yaakov doesn't react. He seems like a real nebuch!

Now, when Yaakov undertakes the journey home to Canaan with his family, he hears that Esav is coming out to greet him. Yaakov is not sure what Esav's intentions are. He has heard that Esav is coming out with 400 soldiers. Will Esav make war on him? What is Yaakov's reaction? He turns into a warrior! He's the general! He's splitting up the camp into various divisions. The commentary says that Yaakov said, "If Esav wants to fight, he'll have to fight me first."

The night before Yaakov's meeting with Esav, Esav's angel, a super-transcendental being, appears before Yaakov and fights with Yaakov. Yaakov holds his ground and he is tough. The angel begs Yaakov to let him go. But Yaakov says to that warrior angel, "I won't let you go until you bless me." How do we explain the metamorphosis that took place in Yaakov? What can we learn from this story?

### **c. Yaakov's Sons**

When Yaakov comes to the land of Israel, he buys a portion of land in the city of Shechem (Nablus). Unfortunately, his daughter Dinah was abducted by the mayor's son. She is compromised and the brothers find out about this. Shimon and Levi take matters into their own hands. With guile, they convince the people of Shechem that if they all become circumcised, they will let the mayor's son marry Dinah and that now the doors would be open for intermarriage between the people of Shechem and the Jewish People. When the people of Shechem were recovering from their circumcision, Shimon and Levi went from house to house and killed all the men – "That will teach you to mess with the Jewish People!"

Now, when Joseph is the viceroy of Egypt and the brothers come down to Egypt for food, Joseph accuses them of being spies. They tell him that they are not spies, but have simply come for grain. Joseph pretends he doesn't believe them and takes their brother Shimon as hostage. Moreover, he tells them that they can't appear before him until they bring their brother Benjamin as proof that they are not lying. What is the reaction of the brothers? "Yes, sir, whatever you say, sir." And they go back home and persuade their father to allow them to take Benjamin back with them to Egypt. You know the rest of the story – how Joseph puts the goblet in Benjamin's sack and how the brothers finally realize they are being punished for what they did to Joseph. How are we to understand the incredible inconsistencies in all these stories? Let's try to solve the mystery.

## **What the Sources Have to Say**

### **a. The Talmud, Masechet Berachot**

Quite often, the Talmud will take verses from the prophets and interpret them. In one section of this tractate, the Rabbis discuss the prayer Ashrei, which we say three times daily. We know what makes Ashrei unique: It is an acrostic poem – the letters follow the order of the alphabet, starting with Aleph. The only exception is the letter "nun," which is missing.

The Talmud states, "Rabbi Yochanan asks, 'Why is there no nun in the Ashrei?' " The gemarah answers, "Because the nun is associated with a verse that represents the downfall of [the enemies of] the Jews." To what verse are they referring? The verse they are referring to is found in Amos 5:2. There it says, "She has fallen; the Virgin of Israel (i.e., the Jewish People) will no longer rise." This is a pretty tragic verse. This is not the kind of verse that King David was going to put into his Psalm. [Of course, there are other, perhaps more auspicious, verses starting with nun, but for reasons we will not be focusing on at this time, we are discussing only the aforementioned verse.]

After the destruction of the Temple and the dispersion of the Jews, two great centres of Jewish life arose in the Middle East: one was in what we now call Iraq – Babylonia – and the other was in Israel. Each centre had its own academy of learning – the Babylonian Talmud and the Jerusalem Talmud. The comments we have been discussing so far are written in the Babylonian Talmud.

Now the Jerusalem Talmud explains the aforementioned verse differently. There it is written, "She has fallen, but will no longer fall – Arise, O Virgin of Israel."

How can the same verse be explained in two so different ways? The difference lies in the placement of the comma. The academy in Babylonia put the comma after the word “nafla” (“has fallen”). But the Academy in Israel put the comma after the words “lo-tosif” (“no longer”).

This is a classic example of different interpretations made by two different schools of thought on the same verse. Which one is right? The answer is, Both of them are right. How can they both be right? It depends on where you are learning. The Jews in the Diaspora (Babylonia) understood the verse as follows: When a Jewish community in the Diaspora falls, it will never be rebuilt, because we are not in our land and we have no connection to that land. Historically, we see that their interpretation was absolutely correct.

For example, in Spain, there were thousands of Jews in the 12<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries – and there was a hub of Jewish activity, with great Jewish philosophers and incredible Rabbinical scholars. What happened? The Jews were expelled. What was left? Have you seen any great yeshivas in Spain lately?

If you go back to Europe – Poland, Hungary. There were millions of Jews in Europe. Europe was the centre of all Judaism after Spain. What happened after World War II? Europe was “cleaned out” of Jews. All that’s left today is anti-Semitism. The Jewish communities there are finished.

And have you seen any yeshivas in Iraq lately? Iraq is where the Babylonian Talmud was written. Never has there been scholarship as great as in the days of the Academy of Babylonia.

Rashi lived in France. France was once a tremendous beacon of Judaism. What does France have to offer today besides good kosher wines? Jews living there today are afraid for their lives! There may be half a million Jews living there, but there is no Jewish centre! There is no centre of Torah scholarship. There is nothing of significant value that France has to offer the Jewish world.

And so, the Rabbis in Babylonia understood full well that once the Jew in the Diaspora falls, he will never get up. Wherever you have a hub of Torah activity, that is the Virgin of Israel referred to by the prophet. The leadership of the Jewish People was in Babylonia; when it got destroyed, it ceased to ever again be a focal point for the Jewish People. The same happened in all the other aforementioned countries.

In our days, the spiritual power of the Jewish People is found in only two places in the world – Israel and America.

Now, what about Eretz Yisrael? After the Temple was destroyed for the second time, the Rabbis in Israel said, “She falls and will never fall again – Arise, O Virgin of Israel.” Israel was destroyed and rebuilt, destroyed and rebuilt. Then the Rabbis said: When Israel is rebuilt a third time, it will never be destroyed. This verse is true when applied to Eretz Yisrael.

### ***b. Rashi***

Rashi comments on Joseph’s taking his brothers to meet Pharaoh for the first time. Joseph did not want his brothers to make too favourable an impression on Pharaoh. Why? The reason, says Rashi, was that, if his brothers appeared to Pharaoh as strong, strapping fellows, Pharaoh would probably enlist them in the Egyptian army, and the Egyptian army was not the best place

for a religious Jew. And so he decided to take only some of his brothers and take only those who looked like weaklings. Who, then, were the brothers that Joseph chose to take with him to meet Pharaoh? Reuven, Shimon, Levi, Yissachar and Binyamin. Now, how do we know they were the weaker ones? The proof is that, toward the end of the Torah, when Moshe blesses all the tribes, there are certain tribes whom Moshe mentions by name twice. It was really not necessary to refer to their names more than once. From this, the Rabbis inferred that the tribes who were named twice were the stronger ones; consequently, the inference is that those who were named only once were the weaker ones. And the weaker ones are the ones whom Joseph chose to present to Pharaoh. What is Rashi's source? He bases his statement on the midrash called Bereishit Rabba..

Those who have studied Rashi's commentaries know that Rashi never says one superfluous word. He always says what he has to say in the most concise, precise form. But when talking about this situation, Rashi adds four words that are totally out of character for Rashi. After he acknowledges the source as being the Midrash Bereishit Rabba, he explains that this midrash is the aggadah that is taught in the land of Israel. Now, Rashi has already cited Midrash Rabba numerous times previously in the book of Genesis. Why, all of a sudden, does he add the fact that Midrash Rabba was written in the land of Israel? Who cares where it was written?

Rashi continues: But in the Babylonian Talmud, we have found that they have a different opinion. There it is written that those whose names Moshe repeated were the weak ones. Because they were weak he had to repeat their names in order to strengthen and uplift them. Again, there seems to be a debate between two schools of thought. Rashi goes out of his way to focus on the different mindsets of the two Talmudic schools of thought. Rashi is asking a pragmatic question: Who needs more strengthening: the weak or the strong?

The Rabbis in Eretz Yisrael said that we have to strengthen the strong ones, because they have to build up the land. **If you have good and strong Jewish leadership in your own country, then the strong Jewish brothers will make sure that the others are taken care of.**

But, the Rabbis in Babylonia opined differently. Who is more at risk living in the exile in the Diaspora? The Jew who is spiritually strong, or the Jew who is spiritually weak? Who is in greater danger of assimilation? It's not a question of building up a Jewish national homeland in the city of Toronto, but rather a question of Jewish survival. Who needs more strengthening – the religious, Orthodox Jew who is strong in his convictions, or the secular Jew who couldn't care less? **This is why the Rabbis in Babylonia concurred that the weaker brothers needed strengthening.**

This is an incredible lesson. And the logic is very simple. When you're in Israel, you are in your homeland and you are living your own manifest destiny. And what you build is what you are going to get. The stronger you are, the greater ability you will have to help those weaker than you. But when you're in Chutz La'aretz, the strong Jew will take care of himself – it's a question of survival, and the weak need help: every Jew counts.

Now we come to the third source, which will unlock all the doors for us.

### ***c. Pirkei Avot – Ethics of the Fathers***

In chapter 5, mishna 23, it says: Yehudah ben Teimah says: “Be as bold as the leopard and as light as the eagle and as fleet-footed as the deer and as strong as a lion – to do the will of your father in Heaven.”

This is such an important saying, that it is used as the first line of the Code of Jewish Law. The Code of Jewish Law borrows this statement from the Rabbi of the Talmud, and this is the statement that introduces all of Jewish Law – Orach Chayim (the laws of daily living). A Jew needs energy to be able to fulfill the mitzvot!

Yehudah ben Teimah also says, in mishna 24, “The brazen go to Gehinnom, but the humble go to Paradise.”

Now, he continues with a statement that makes no sense in this context:

“May it be Your will, Hashem, our G-d and the G-d of our forefathers, that the Holy Temple be rebuilt, speedily in our days, and grant us our share in Your Torah.”

This sounds like the statement a Rabbi would make at the end of a sermon. What is it doing here in Pirkei Avot, which is a book of ethical principles? This is the question asked by Rav Yaakov Emden (the Yaavetz), a great scholar who lived about 300 years ago. And he comments: “This statement cries out for an explanation. What is this concept of a prayer and a request in the middle of this mishna? We don’t find any example of this anywhere in the Talmud! What is the nature of this statement? It causes us to wonder. And it causes us to wonder even more why no other commentators ever asked this question.

“I humbly submit to you that this is something we must really think about,” says the Rabbi. “Now that we are a people living in exile, our boldness and our might have disappeared. And our heart and our courage have been taken away from us. Why? The answer is that **the place is the cause**. If a person wanders from his place, his heart is not with him.”

In other words, a Jew who lives in the Diaspora is a Jew without any umph! “This is not my place. What can I accomplish here? I’m a stranger!” says the Jew in the Diaspora.

And Rabbi Emden continues: “Therefore he asked G-d that it may His will to rebuild the Temple and return it to us, and that the attribute of boldness be returned to us – an attribute that is necessary in order for a Jew to be a complete Jew.” The Yaavetz is saying that a Jew who isn’t bold is an incomplete Jew. How true these words are!

How many of us living in Toronto (or any other Diaspora city) are bold when it comes to our Judaism? The very first statement in the Orach Chaim – the day-to-day guide to living as a Jew – is that **you can’t be a Jew if you’re not as bold as the leopard, as swift as the deer. If you don’t have that in your repertoire, it’s a sign that you’re not a complete Jew!**

Yehudah Ben Teimah was living in Babylonia, and for him that verse was a fact of life. How bold are we to tell our boss that we’re living at 2:00 pm on a Friday in winter because we observe the Shabbat? How many Jews are bold enough to tell our boss that our religion comes first and we can make up the hours another day? Some of us are bold enough to wear our kippah to shul on Shabbat. But how many of us are bold enough to wear our kippah to work? It’s not chutzpah; it’s boldness (courage).

People who are not bold in their Judaism – are they bad Jews? No, they're not bad, but **they're missing the key ingredient: pride in being Jewish.** The Yaavetz was right when he said, "The place is the cause." When you're surrounded by non-Jews, it's hard to buck the trend. The atmosphere is not conducive to perfecting our selves as Jews. And this makes us incomplete Jews.

Now we can understand why Yehudah ben Teimah asked G-d to rebuild the Beit Hamikdash. His added statement is not meant to be a conclusion to a sermon. Rather, it's relevant to the issue he is bringing up. At the same time he's telling us to be bold, he realizes that we'll never be bold in Chutz La'aretz. And therefore, he asks G-d to help the Jewish People be bold by bringing back the Beit Hamikdash. Once we're back in Israel, then we can demand that every Jew be bold.

But once we're back in Israel and we've become bold, we have to worry about the flip side – brazen behaviour. Boldness that is not channelled properly can turn into brazen behaviour. As Yehudah ben Teimah said, "The brazen go to Gehinnom." Now we have a problem: if you're outside of Israel, you're too meek and humble and not bold enough to manifest your yiddishkeit. But once in Israel, you might go to the other extreme.

For example, here in Canada, if we're on the road and another car cuts us off, we don't bother to react. But in Israel, boy oh boy! If someone so much as looks at you the wrong way, you already get your gander up! Talking about chutzpah – it's a country full of chutzpadik people. Everything is done with passion in Israel. Everything is a big deal, and everyone has what to say! In 1973, the Prime Minister said, "I'm not going to open up Chevron – over my dead body!" And that's the way it was. And then, in 1980, a woman's baby was killed, and she said, "I'm going to bury my son in Chevron." And the Prime Minister said she couldn't do it. And she said, "The h... with you, I'm doing it." And she took hundreds of people from Kiryat Arba and they went to Chevron. The officers tried to stop her. She said, "Tell the Prime Minister I'm going to bury my son in Chevron." And the officers called their superior. And the superior called the Prime Minister and said, "Mr. Prime Minister, if you want to stop her, you'll have to come down and stop her." And this woman stood up against the Prime Minister and buried her son in Chevron. And twenty years later, you have a thousand Jews in Chevron whom the government doesn't want there at all. Have you ever seen such a thing? One lady can outdo the whole government. And it's not just her!

All over Israel, if you don't like the way something is done, you just don't follow it, and that's that! If you have enough chutzpah, you can get what you want. In Canada you have three political parties; in Israel you have 103 parties! It's a totally different lifestyle. When you live in Eretz Yisrael, you know you're home. But ... the problem is you can become too brazen. **And too much chutzpah can send a person to Gehinnom.**

But there is a solution! The last thing Yehudah ben Teimah says is, "... give us a portion in your Torah." The attribute of chutzpah, which is an extreme form of boldness, can be tempered via the crucible of Torah. When boldness exists in the proper measure, it is a positive attribute. Rabbi Yaakov Emden comments: "We find this chutzpah mostly in Eretz Yisrael, but when we have Torah in Eretz Yisrael, we won't use our boldness in a chutzpadik way, but we will apply it to doing the will of G-d."

Yehudah ben Teimah's mishnah is beautiful. He emphasizes that a complete Jew is a bold Jew living in Eretz Yisrael, and that attribute of boldness must be balanced with the study of Torah. This statement sums up the historical drama that has been playing itself out in Israel.

Today in Eretz Yisrael, there is a civil war – not yet a physical war, but a war of the mind – being played out between two camps.

One camp is the group who founded the State of Israel with secular intentions, with no idea of G-d and with no idea of Torah. They were blessed and were very successful. However, although they showed tremendous potential, they also acted with a bit too much chutzpah. Their wish is for Israel to be a totally secular state like every other secular country in the world.

The other group says that we have a right to Eretz Yisrael because it's G-d's land and G-d wants us to keep the mitzvot of Eretz Yisrael and live a Torah life in Yisrael.

This is the ongoing struggle in Israel. And our Rabbis are telling us that Jews without Torah have such a tremendous amount of chutzpah that eventually they can destroy the country with their chutzpah. Only with more Torah in the land will the land be able to survive – with the proper amount of Azut (boldness). This azut will give us the courage not to be afraid of what the rest of the world says and at the same time will safeguard us from crossing the line and become chutzpanim (which would lead us to Gehinnom).

With these principles in mind, we can now re-examine the incongruous behaviour of our Patriarchs.

## Resolving The Contradictions in the Behaviour of the Patriarchs

If you go back and look carefully, you will now see the common denominator in the stories of the Patriarchs. In order to solve the mystery, only one question need be asked: "Did the story happen in Eretz Yisrael or outside of Eretz Yisrael?"

We saw Avraham's behaviour in Egypt. He was a stranger in that land. He was a wimp! He could do nothing. He was afraid to challenge Pharaoh, and he needed direct intervention. But as soon as he was again living in Eretz Yisrael and his nephew Lot was captured, he was not afraid of anything. Without a moment's hesitation, he took his servant Eliezer and they both went to war against 2.6 million people.

And when we re-examine the story of Yaakov, we see his behaviour in the land of Charan. But as soon as he crosses over to Machanaim (which technically is on the East Bank but is halachically part of Eretz Yisrael) he receives a welcome from the guardian angels in Israel. Immediately he becomes bold and goes out to meet his brother Esav.

When their sister was defiled in Shechem (which is halachically in Eretz Yisrael), Yaakov's sons were bold and wiped out the city. But when they went down to Egypt and had to face Joseph (in his disguise of Tzafenat Pa'aneach), they didn't have the courage to say anything.

These examples illustrate the precept, "Ma'asei Avot Siman LaBanim" – "The Deeds of the fathers are a Sign for the Children." **When we're in doubt and do not know how to act, whom do we turn to? The forefathers.** In his mishna, Yehudah ben Teimah was simply reiterating

that well-known fact: Certainly a Jew has to be bold, said Yehudah ben Teimah. But he added that if you live in Chutz La'aretz, you're an incomplete Jew and you'll never be bold, and you shouldn't think you're better than Avraham or Yaakov or their children.

This message is consistent throughout the book of Genesis: **If a Jew lives outside of Israel, he'll never be as bold as he can be. And when he moves to Eretz Yisrael, than he will be able to be as bold as he can be.** This principle plays itself out in so many different ways.

Look at Sharon. In front of the people, he is Mr. Tough. "Arafat is insignificant. We'll decide what to do with him. Maybe killing him is enough." But when he goes to Washington: "Yes, Mr. President, whatever you say, Mr. President. You want to sell our country down the line? – Yes, Mr. President." Once they cross the ocean, the Israeli Jews become wimps. Each and every Prime Minister talks big in Eretz Yisrael and becomes a wimp outside of Eretz Yisrael. The lesson? They should never leave Eretz Yisrael. The Prime Minister should be saying, "Mr. President, if you'd like to speak to me, you have an open invitation to come and see me in the Knesset any time you wish."

It is not so easy for a Jew who lives in Israel to leave Eretz Yisrael, even for a trip. For this reason, there are certain halachot involved. Unless it is for a compelling reason, one is not allowed to leave Eretz Yisrael. And we can understand this. To leave our boldness behind? To spend a month or two as an incomplete Jew? Who would want to do this? Whatever a Jew can do, he can do it so much better in Eretz Yisrael.

On the flip side, when people live outside Israel and plan a trip to Israel, what is their one concern? It's dangerous! The truth is, there is certain legitimacy to their concern. While we were on our mission to Israel, on Motzaei Shabbat of the week before we left Israel, a young couple was killed right in the main square. Now, part of our itinerary was to spend our second Shabbat in Chevron. I spoke to Rav Avinoam, the Rosh Yeshiva of Kiryat Arba. He said he would understand if we backed out. A lot of people thought we were crazy to go ahead with our plans. But we went ahead and had an amazing Shabbat experience in Chevron.

The truth is, the moment the plane touched down in Ben-Gurion Airport our fears vanished. One week later, at 11 o'clock at night, we're standing at the very spot where that couple had been killed the week before. A temporary memorial had already been set up. Tzahal soldiers lined the main street with their rifles cocked and aimed at the surrounding mountains, and we were standing around saying Tehillim. Not only that, but somehow my luggage was misplaced, and at 2:30 a.m., I was going up that same main road to an apartment to find my luggage – on the very same road where Arabs had killed people just a week earlier. Am I normal?

The answer is that Eretz Yisrael gives you the strength. It gives you the power. There is nothing to be afraid of.

This phenomenon also explains why Westerners have such a difficult time dealing with Israelis, and vice versa. We are different people, with different mentalities. When a person contemplates making aliyah and has qualms about being able to cope with the Israeli mentality and survive in the country, something interesting happens. When that person gets to Israel, all of a sudden you feel you can cope. You're able to acquire that same Israeli chutzpah and you get along fine.

It's true: When you're sitting in Toronto, you're legitimately timid. And your feelings are 100% accurate, and you'll always feel that way until you cross the ocean and come into the land. As soon as you are there, the metamorphosis takes place instantly: "Ma'asei Avot Siman LaBanim."

## Closing Remarks

In the opening words of Parshas Lech Lecha, Hashem says to Avraham: “Leave your birthplace, and the house of your father, and your land – and go to the land which I will show you.” The Hebrew word for “I will show you” is “Ar’eka.” Now, grammatically, this word is incorrect. The correct way to say it would be to use two words “Ar’eh **lecha**” (that is, “I will show **to you**”).

I heard a Rabbi give a wonderful answer to explain this deviant grammatical structure. Hashem was *not* telling Avraham to go to the **land** He would show him but **He would show Avraham what Avraham could be**. He wasn’t going to show him a piece of real estate in Eretz Yisrael. He was going to help Avraham see his potential. Avraham, the man who was thrown into a fiery furnace in Ur Kasdim and could do nothing to save himself; the man who went into exile in Egypt and saw what it was like to be helpless; the man whom only G-d could save while he was in the Diaspora – that same man could be much more. Hashem was promising Avraham that he would be going to the land that would bring out the courage and excellence in Avraham and that would make him a different person. The story of the Patriarchs is the paradigm for the history of our People.

If you can have the merit of living in Eretz Yisrael, that’s when G-d will show you who you really are. Whoever you think you are now, know that you are an incomplete Jew until you are able to live in Eretz Yisrael.

May it be the will of our G-d, the G-d of our fathers, that He build the Beit Hamikdash speedily in our days and that we should have a portion in His Torah.

## **Parshas Lech Lecha: – Having Faith Under the Rainbow:**

1. **Bereishis 9:9-17:** And as for Me, behold, I establish My covenant with you and your offspring after you, and with every living being that is with you – with the birds, with the animals, and with every beast of the land with you – of all that departed the Ark, to every beast of the land. And I will confirm with you: Never again shall any flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.... This is the sign...I have set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign ...and I will look upon it to remember the everlasting [Bris Olam] covenant between G-d and every living being...
2. **Talmud, Midrash:** There was never the sighting of a rainbow in the generation of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai.
3. **Talmud Kesuvos 77b:** Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai refused entrance to Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Levi, because there was a rainbow sighted during this great leaders generation.
4. **Isaiah 41:2:** Who inspired the one from the east...
5. **Bereishis 6:9:** Noah walked with G-d.
6. **Bereishis 17:1:** Walk before me and be perfect.
7. **Bereishis 18:19:** For I have loved him, because he commands his children and his household after him that they keep the way of Hashem, doing charity and justice...
8. **Psalms 45:11:** Hear, O daughter, and see, and incline your ear; forget your people and your father's house.
9. **Midrash Tanchuma:** This is comparable to a person traveling from place to place and saw a castle that was lit up [dolekes]. He said, "Is it possible for there to be a castle without a master?" The master shined forth and said, "I am the master of the castle!" Similarly, Avraham said, "Is it possible to that there is a world without a master?" Hashem shined forth and said to him, "I am the master of the world!"
10. **Midrash Leckach Tov:** "Similarly, 20 generations passed from Adam until Avraham, and their actions were destructive... Avraham came forth from the generation of the dispersal, and thought to himself, "Can there be a world without a master?"...