

PARSHA

LECH LECHA

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THE TEST OF RICHES

Rabbi David Pinto Chlita

It is written, “And the L-RD said to Abraham, ‘Leave your country . . . to the land that I will show you. And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great. And you will be a blessing” (Gen 12:1-2). Rashi explains that travel causes a decrease in three things: In children, in wealth, and in honor, which is why Abraham needed the three blessings that G-d promised him (descendants, riches, and renown).

If G-d blessed him with renown, riches, and above all with offspring (which he had so hoped for up to that day), what did Abraham’s test consist of then? Who wouldn’t accept to leave his country, his native land, and his father’s house and go to a foreign land if G-d assured him of such things?

The answer lies in the fact that a person who is rich and famous has very little free time, as the Sages say, “increasing possessions increases worry” (Perkei Avoth 2:7). His spirit is not free to occupy itself with spiritual matters and personal growth. And if such is the case for people in general, how much more so for someone like Abraham, who had begun to serve G-d with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his strength since his youth: “At the age of three, Abraham knew his Creator” (Bereshith Rabba 30:8). He also observed the entire Torah (Yoma 28b), he studied the Law of G-d without stop, and observed it in its entirety. Therefore for him, to leave his country was a great test, for if he were to become very rich and famous, and if people were to come to ask him for help, advice, and bother him at all hours, it follows that he wouldn’t have time to occupy himself with the Torah and serving G-d. This in itself is a great test, which is why G-d told him, in effect, “Over there, everyone will come to ask for your advice and seek your blessing.” What’s more, Abraham cared about satisfying people’s spiritual needs as well their material ones. He brought people to the knowledge of G-d (Bereshith Rabba 39:21), and instituted a shelter at Beer Sheva open to all: “The tent of Abraham had doors on all four sides so that whatever direction people came from, they didn’t have to look for the entrance” (Bereshith Rabba 48:9). His servant of many years, Eliezer, was in charge of managing his possessions (Gen 24:2). Abraham entrusted him with the task of dealing with financial affairs, as well as to distribute portions to the poor, as Onkelos translated: “he managed the household” (Gen 15:2). The Sages interpret the word *damessek* (“of Damascus”)

as if it were written *doleh ou mashkeh* (“Eliezer drew and spread the Torah of his master to others”). What was the Torah of his master? To bring close to the knowledge of G-d those who are far, to distribute money to the poor, and to see to the requirements of the needy. Eliezer was put in charge of all these tasks, and Abraham, instead of being dominated by his riches, dominated them.

That being said, Abraham didn’t have any children, and the “son” of his house – the one who managed his possessions – was his servant Eliezer of Damascus. G-d told Abraham, “This one shall not inherit from you, but one that will come out of your bowels – he shall inherit from you” (Gen 15:4). The Sforno writes, “Your son will successfully manage your possessions in your lifetime” (ibid.). It is not your servant Eliezer that will inherit from you, for he doesn’t know how to manage your goods, but the one that will be born of you, he will know how to manage your goods and your wealth. This is difficult to understand. G-d blessed Abraham with a son who would know how to manage his possessions, instead of a son who will be pious, holy, and will inherit all his virtues! Could Abraham be satisfied with a son that would limit himself to administering his possessions without following him in the path of a spiritual and sanctified life? If this is the case, what did the promise to Abraham consist of?

In light of what we said earlier, we can now begin to understand. Abraham knew very well how to manage his own possessions; he dominated his riches and didn’t subjugate himself to them. He distributed his possessions to the poor and spent his riches on doing good around him, and it’s in that way that he resisted the test of riches, a test initiated so that riches would neither turn him away, nor prevent him from serving G-d. This is why he merited the divine promise that the son born to him would use his riches in the same way as he did, and would overcome the test of money. He would have a son who would know how to manage his possessions and dominate and use wealth to do good, which was not the case with his servant Eliezer. Even though he was a faithful servant, if he were to have inherited that fortune, he wouldn’t have known how to manage it because he didn’t possess the sublime character traits of Abraham Avinu.

In the same way that Abraham overcame the test of riches and didn’t let himself get sidetracked, in our own time the saintly Rabbi Israel of Rozhin,

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and other virtuous and pious men, overcame the test of riches and didn't let themselves get diverted from G-d, from His ways, and from His service. For us, this serves as a valuable moral teaching, for wealth is a far more difficult test to endure than poverty. One must not fall into these traps, but to the contrary, with money we must at all times, and at every hour, carry out the commandments and perform good deeds. We should not resemble those of whom it is said, "But My people have exchanged their Glory for worthless idols" (Jer 2:11). The Sages compare this to "the son that erred when he received much gold and money from his father" (Berachot 32a). One must devote one's wealth to doing good, helping one's fellow, and obeying the commandments; we must completely follow the example set by Abraham Avinu.

I once heard a fine explanation from the Chief Rabbi of Austria, Rabbi Riezberg. He said that of all the tests that Abraham underwent, the test of leaving his country was the most convincing and difficult of all, for the others were temporary, but this one was permanent. It meant always progressing "from strength to strength" in the Torah, which means to be always occupied in serving G-d.

We would humbly like to add a few more words concerning this subject. Rashi comments on the verse that states, "If you walk in [i.e., if you perform] My statutes" (Lev 26:3) by saying the following: "It is not enough to perform the commandments. One must also study the Torah." In that verse we see that the Torah is termed "statutes", not "commandments". In effect, the study of Torah is accompanied by difficult trials. The evil inclination wishes to prevent such study, and it uses all types of arguments to disturb the one who studies it, in the hope to make him abandon it. This is why G-d orders us to "walk in My statutes." It is to teach us that the study of Torah is a law that one must not transgress, even if we don't understand the reason for this decree; all the arguments put forward by the evil inclination to prevent such study are nothing but a trick. The study of Torah is a law that has its own reason, to be sure. It is a divine decree that must bring us to the observance of all the commandments, and in so doing defeat the evil inclination.

This allows us to explain why the study of Torah is categorized under the term "statutes" and why the Torah uses the expression "walk". According to the Ohr HaChayim in his various commentaries on the verse, "If you walk in My statutes", he concisely brings out the following: "Do all that you have to do – eat, drink, speak – in order to occupy yourself with Torah." He also says, "My laws [חוקים] are the rations of sustenance that I dispense [the Hebrew word חוק can mean both "law" and "ration"], and if you want to receive your share of food, you should likewise observe My commandments."

It is written, "If you walk in My ways" and in the same verse, "if you obey My commandments" meaning, as much as in that which concerns man's relationship to G-d, as in that which concerns man's relationship to his fellow. A man will easily manage to overcome the test of riches if he practices what is written in the verse, "Each man would help his fellow, and to his brother he would say 'Be strong!'" (Isa 41:6). Such a victory over that test allows one to reach the greatest heights of perfection, even to the point of being counted amongst those "close to G-d". It is the sacred duty of every man to strengthen himself in the study of Torah, with toil and sweat, all while observing the commandments and performing good deeds. This is

without doubt the sense of the following Mishnah: "It is good to combine the study of Torah [religious laws that regulate the relationship between man and G-d] with an occupation [the social laws that manage relationships among men], for the effort required by both of them keeps sin out of mind" (Perkei Avoth 2:2). Man possesses only the commandments that he practices, and thus he can be happy in this world and the next.

Eishet Chayil

Laws Of Prayers

According to Rav Ovadia Yossef, Zatsal

- Women are exempt from the obligation of saying Pesukei d'Zimra and the blessings of the Shema. They may begin praying (after having said the morning and Torah blessings) at the recitation of the Shema and the Amidah only. If they want to also recite the Pesukei d'Zimra and the blessings for the Shema, they may do so, but without pronouncing G-d's name in the blessings of Baruch She'amar, Yishtabach, Yotzer, Ahavat Olam, and Emet VeYatziv. On the other hand, women of Ashkenaz descent nevertheless have the custom of mentioning G-d's name in these blessings.

- Women are obligated to recite the Amidah at least once a day. It is desirable that they perform the Morning Prayer with the morning blessings, the blessings of the Torah, the Shema, and the Amidah.

- According to Halachah, women have the right to go to the Beit HaKnesset (synagogue), or to the Kotel HaMa'aravi when they are impure. As well, they have the right to look at the Sefer Torah when it is raised. They can be personally stricter regarding this subject, but we are not in the habit of being strict during Yamim HaNoraim (the days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur). Women are obligated to recite the prayers when they are impure; they do not have the right to forgo it under such a pretext.

- A married woman is obligated to cover her hair; how much more so when she prays or recites blessings.

- Women must pronounce the words they read when praying; it is not sufficient just to think of them.

- While a woman is praying, she doesn't have the right to interrupt herself to reply to a show of courtesy or to greet another person. During the Amidah, one shouldn't interrupt their prayer unless one is in danger.

- During the Amidah, we bow only in those directions fixed by the Sages. The blessings for which we bow are the following: Those at the beginning and the end of the benediction concerning the Avoth, and those at the beginning and the end of the benediction of Modim. For all other blessings, we bow neither at the beginning nor at the end.

- At the end of the Amidah, before stepping back three steps for the recitation of Oseh Shalom, one must bend the knees and bow just until the spinal column is bent. We step back first with the left foot and place it just behind the right foot, then move the right foot to just behind the left foot, and finally move the left foot back once more. After having taken these three steps back, we remain bowed and say, while turning to the left, "Oseh Shalom..." Then we turn to the right while saying, "Hu Berahamav..." then finally we bow ourselves toward the front, like a servant before his master, and say, "Ve'al Kol Amo Israel..." and then we stand up straight.

- A woman is not obligated to recite Vidui, Ashrei, or any other prayer that is said after the Amidah, and thus she can end her prayers. However, it is good and just that she recites Vidui by measure of piety, as well as the remaining prayers. She should recite Alenu at the end of the prayer.

IT'S NOT IN THE STARS

“And He brought him outside and said, ‘Look now towards the heavens and count the stars if you can count them So shall your descendants be’” (Gen 15:5).

HASHEM promised Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars, the number of which cannot be counted. And yet, according to the Midrash, Abraham was convinced that he wouldn't have any offspring; he had understood this from reading the stars. HASHEM asked him to detach himself from all his hypotheses: “Abram will not be able to have children, but Abraham will have children. Sarai will not give birth, but Sarah will give birth. I give you new names that will change your destinies.”

The Midrash adds, “HASHEM showed Abraham that the same star which indicated a future devoid of children would from then on reveal that he would become the father of a son.”

The Maggid of Dubno asked how this was possible. How could the same star indicate two contradictory events: Childlessness on one hand, and the possibility of becoming the father of a nation on the other? The Maggid answers this question by citing a parable:

“There, that's the last one,” Naphtali said as he let out a sigh of contented relief, all the while pushing another gold coin into its hiding place. “Everything's there, safe and sound. You can sleep quietly now, my dear brother. In a large town like ours, with its large police force and an efficient police chief, Mr. Tokiff, you have nothing to worry about! In your town, Eckville, a thief has nothing to worry about, but here in Grandville, who would dare to come and steal something?”

The town of Eckville consisted simply of a few houses located at the intersection of two roads. The largest house by far, the “Silver Swan Inn”, belonged to Shlomi. He had built it little by little, adding rooms as needed over the years and hiring ever more personnel. It had become a well-known meeting place on the road to Grandville, and Shlomi had become a wealthy man because of it. He saved up a considerable sum of money over the years, destined in large part for his daughter's dowry.

Shlomi and his wife Raisy weren't easy with the thought of leaving such an amount of money in their inn, since strangers were forever coming and going. They therefore decided to transfer their savings to the house of Naphtali, Shlomi's brother, who lived in Grandville. Naphtali had but two children, and it was obvious that he had complete confidence in them.

And so on the day that Shlomi returned from Grandville and said that all the money had been hidden away, safe and sound in Naphtali's home, Raisy also let out a sigh of relief.

Afterwards, as months passed and life took back its normal course, none of the two brothers gave a thought to the gold hidden in Naphtali's cellar. Finally, autumn arrived.

One day Johan, Naphtali's servant, began riding his horse furiously onto the road leading to the Silver Swan Inn. Even before dismounting he shouted the terrible news: “Thieves! Everything's gone! It was a bunch of bandits! My master sent me to tell you that they've taken everything! It's all gone!”

Without wasting a second, Shlomi rushed to his stable. “Dietrich,” he cried, “saddle the four horses as fast as possible! Head towards the north with Johan while I go towards the south with Frederick. Those thieves couldn't have gone far with such a load. Hurry, we don't have any time to lose!”

“But sir,” Johan protested, “they're already long gone by now. It will be impossible to catch up to them. It's simply too late! My master Naphtali didn't speak of pursuing those good-for-nothings. He simply requested that I tell you of this horrible news. I didn't receive any orders to go find them, I can assure you! And by this time, it's hopeless.”

“Don't be stupid, Johan. There's surely a chance to find them. And my brother thought so too, otherwise why would he have sent you to tell me as soon as possible? He wouldn't have rushed you over here simply to inform me of this catastrophic news. He must certainly know that there's still a chance to catch them and regain the money. The fact that you're standing before me at this very moment proves it. You're very presence contradicts what you're saying. So now let's go!”

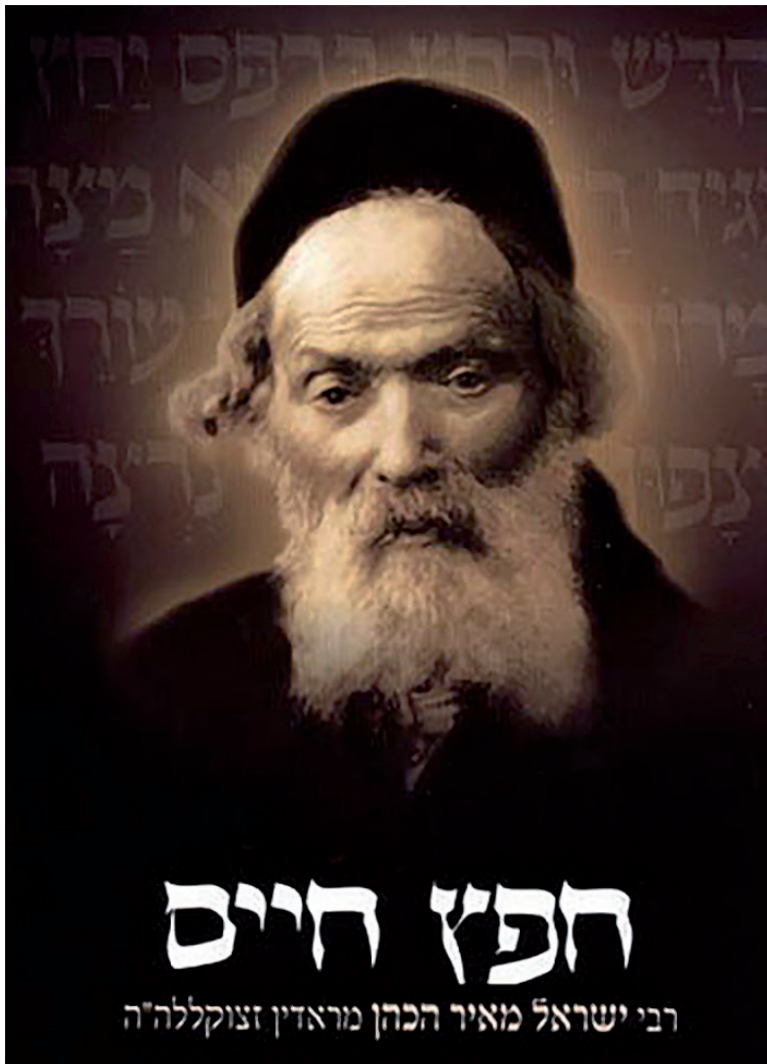
HASHEM uses intermediaries to transmit His messages to us. For example, during the times of the prophets, He made the prophet Jonah responsible for warning people of the imminent destruction of Nineveh if they didn't repent.

Well before that period, in the time of the Abraham Avinu, HASHEM used other means to send His messages. Such was the star that “predicted” (in a way that we don't understand today) that Abraham would not have children. Yet, in praying that HASHEM grant him a son worthy of pursuing his mission of spreading the divine word, Abraham received the merit to be blessed with a son.

HASHEM therefore sent this “messenger” to Abraham, not to tell him this bad news, but in order that Abraham pray with all his might to have a son. How did Abraham understand that HASHEM was asking him to pray? Even though everything seemed to be going alright, Abraham sensed that had to perform even more good deeds to merit the tremendous merit of becoming the father of the Isaac Avinu.

The parable of the Maggid helps us understand the message that HASHEM wanted to communicate through the intermediary of the star. The first thing that Abraham understood was that he would never have children, just as Johan, the servant in our parable, was sure that Shlomi had no chance of regaining his money. In fact, Johan didn't realize that the goal of his frantic journey to the inn was to give Shlomi the opportunity to recover his fortune; it wasn't simply to inform him of this sad event.

It was the same for Abraham Avinu: If there was no chance at all for him to have a son, HASHEM would not have shown him the star. But at the moment that Abraham, in seeing it, understood that he would not have descendants, HASHEM told him, “Forget that message. Raise yourself above your destiny. Pray again and again. Gain ever more merit, and you will then be blessed generation after generation. You will be provided with descendants as numerous as the stars, the number of which cannot be counted.”



Rabbi Israel Meir HaCohen Kagan is commonly known as the “Chafetz Chaim,” the name of his famous work on guarding one’s tongue. Born in Zhetel, Poland on February 6, 1838, he was taught until age 10 by his parents and then moved to Vilna to further his Jewish studies. Refusing the pulpit rabbinate, the Chafetz Chaim settled in Radin (Poland) and subsisted on a small grocery store which his wife managed and he did the “bookkeeping”-watching every penny to make sure that no one was cheated. He spent his days learning Torah and disseminating his knowledge to the common people.

As his reputation grew, students from all over Europe flocked to him and by 1869 his house became known as the Radin Yeshiva. In addition to his Yeshiva, the Chafetz Chaim was very active in Jewish causes. He traveled extensively (even in his 90s!) to encourage the observance of Mitzvos amongst Jews. One of the founders of Agudas Yisrael, the religious Jewish organization of Europe and later the world, the Chafetz Chaim was very involved in Jewish affairs and helped many yeshivos survive the financial problems of the interwar period. Exemplifying the verses in Psalms 34:13-14, “Who is the man who desires life...? Guard your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit,” the Chafetz Chaim passed away in 1933 at the ripe age of 95.

The Chafetz Chaim’s greatest legacy is the 21 sefarim (holy books) which he published. His first work, Sefer Chafetz Chaim (1873), is the first attempt to to organize and clarify the laws regarding evil talk and

gossip. He later wrote other works, including Shmirat HaLashon, which emphasized the importance of guarding one’s tongue by quoting our Sages. The Mishnah Brurah (1894-1907), his commentary on the Daily Laws of a Jew (his first series in the Shulchan Aruch), is found in many Jewish homes and is accepted universally to decide Halacha.

Firmly believing that he was living right before the time of Moshiach and the rebuilding of the Holy Temple, the Chafetz Chaim wrote a work that stressed the learning of laws concerning sacrifices, the Holy Temple, and related topics. He also published seforim to strengthen certain aspects of Jewish life including kashrus, family purity, and Torah study.

Considering Teshuvah as the Koshering of Body and Soul

Let us begin with the following excerpt from sichot (accounts of) Teshuvah:

Teshuvah resembles the preparations of Shabbat. First, we must purify ourselves from our impurities, and only then can we draw upon ourselves kedusha (holiness). Just as on Fridays, when we begin by washing ourselves before putting on our clothes for Shabbat, in the same way we cannot be imbued with holiness before ridding ourselves of tumah (impurity).

It is written, “This is the law of the Torah that the L-RD has commanded: ...but the gold and the silver, as well as the leather and the metal...” Interpreting the word “but”, our Sages say that to render a vessel kosher, one must first wash it thoroughly and remove all rust if any exists. After this, one must kosher each vessel according to its function. Those that are placed over fire must be heated white-hot, and those in which boiling water is used must be scalded.

It is in the same spirit that one must explain the verse concerning the person who comes to purify himself and perform Teshuvah. First of all, he must get himself out of the mud and kosher himself by repenting. The first component of this last item, repentance, consists of the following: Regrets for past misdeeds and resolutions for good in the future. What follows next is the second component of repentance: To take action upon himself in the same manner as he sinned. If he sinned through fire (in other words, if he sinned with the flaming desire for the pleasures of this world), his repentance should as well resemble a sacred fire. As the Sages have said, he should repent in the area in which he sinned: “If you have committed piles of averot (sins), replace them with piles of mitzvot, actions in accordance with the commandments of the Torah.”

The “koshering” of a Jew is essentially done through the medium of Torah study, for this has a purifying effect on all. Rabbeinu Yona said, “If he was accustomed to studying one page a day, let him study two.”

How do we do Teshuvah? To this question the Chofetz Chaim answers as follows: “First of all, one should resolve to do good in the future, and this only after having voiced one’s regrets for past misdeeds by elaborating through words one’s sins and regrets, and by imposing on oneself some strictures. A doctor, noting that one of his patients has weakened his body by poorly and sparingly feeding himself, begins by warning him against pursuing such harmful practices. He then persuades him to replace those foods that do harm to his body by those which are healthy, and later he prescribes some medication that will heal his damaged organs. It is the same for the soul.

The Chofetz Chaim was thus referring to the verse where G-d, addressing Himself to Cain, said, “Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? Is it not so? If you do well, you will elevate yourself.” This verse, he explains, means the following: “Stop doing bad from now on. Only afterwards, grieve over the sins you have committed.”

The Hilloula of the Chofetz Chaim is Elul 24.