



LECH LECHA

JUST DO IT

*Obedience, Not Inspiration, Is the Heart of Judaism*

# PARSHAH OVERVIEW

## *Lech Lecha*

G-d speaks to Abram, commanding him, "Go from your land, from your birthplace, and from your father's house, to the land that I will show you." There, G-d says, he will be made into a great nation. Abram and his wife, Sarai, accompanied by his nephew Lot, journey to the land of Canaan, where Abram builds an altar and continues to spread the message of a single G-d.

A famine forces the first Jew to depart for Egypt, where beautiful Sarai is taken to Pharaoh's palace; Abram escapes death because they present themselves as brother and sister. A plague prevents the Egyptian king from touching her and convinces him to return her to Abram and to compensate the brother-revealed-as-husband with gold, silver, and cattle.

Back in the land of Canaan, Lot separates from Abram and settles in the evil city of Sodom, where he falls captive when the mighty armies of Chedorla'omer and his three allies conquer the five cities of the Sodom Valley. Abram sets out with a small band to rescue his nephew, defeats the four kings, and is blessed by Melchizedek, the king of Salem (Jerusalem).

G-d seals the Covenant between the Parts with Abram, in which the exile and persecution (Galut) of the people of Israel is foretold, and the Holy Land is bequeathed to them as their eternal heritage.

Still childless ten years after their arrival in the Land, Sarai tells Abram to marry her maidservant Hagar. Hagar conceives, becomes insolent toward her mistress, and then flees

when Sarai treats her harshly; an angel convinces her to return and tells her that her son will father a populous nation. Ishmael is born in Abram's eighty-sixth year.

Thirteen years later, G-d changes Abram's name to Abraham ("father of multitudes") and Sarai's to Sarah ("princess") and promises that a son will be born to them; from this child, whom they are to call Isaac ("will laugh"), will stem the great nation with which G-d will establish His special bond. Abraham is commanded to circumcise himself and his descendants as a "sign of the covenant between Me and you." Abraham immediately complies, circumcising himself and all the males of his household.

## QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION

What is the primary aspect of a mitzvah? Is it the tangible action, or the spiritual refinement and the bond with G-d that result from it?





The Torah introduces Avraham at the age of seventy-five, when he was commanded to leave his home.

# TEXT 1

*Genesis 12:1-4*

א. וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל אַבְרָם, לֵךְ לְךָ  
מֵאֶרֶץךָ וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ  
אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֶרְאֶךָ.

ב. וְאֶעֱשֶׂךָ לְגוֹי גָדוֹל וְאַבְרָכְךָ  
וְאֶגְדְּלָה שְׁמֶךָ, וְהָיָה בְרָכָה.

ג. וְאַבְרָכָה מְבָרְכֶיךָ וּמְקַלְלֶיךָ  
אָאֵר, וְנִבְרָכוּ בְּךָ כָּל מְשֻׁפָּחֵת  
הָאָדָמָה.

ד. וַיֵּלֶךְ אַבְרָם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֱלֹהֵי  
ה' וַיֵּלֶךְ אִתּוֹ לוֹט, וְאַבְרָם בֶּן חֲמִישׁ  
שָׁנָיִם וְשִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה בָּצֵאתוֹ מִחָרָן.

1. And G-d said to Abram, "Go forth from your land, your birthplace, and your father's house, to the land that I will show you.

2. "And I will make you into a great nation and increase your name. And may you be for a blessing.

3. "I will bless whom you bless, and those who curse you, I will curse. And all the families of the earth will bless themselves by you."

4. And Abram went as G-d instructed, and [his nephew] Lot accompanied him. And Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Charan.

## TEXT 2

*Rabbi Bachya ben  
Asher ibn Halawa,  
Genesis 12:1*

קודם שיזכיר הכתוב "ויאמר ה' אל אברם", היה ראוי להודיענו מעלותיו ומדותיו כדי שנכיר מי הוא, ואחרי כך יזכיר הדבור, כי כן עשה בנח.

Before the Torah states that G-d spoke to Abram, it would have made sense to inform us of his greatness and character so we would know who he is. Then, the Torah can tell us that G-d spoke to him. After all, this is what the Torah did for Noah.

## QUESTIONS

1. Why does the Torah skip over Avraham's first seventy-five years and not give any background on what type of person he was?
2. Why was Avraham told to leave his homeland without explanation?
3. Why was Avraham leaving his home important enough to merit unprecedented blessings?

# TEXT 3

*Nachmanides,  
Genesis 12:1*

מה טעם שיאמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא  
עזוב ארצך ואיטיבה עמך, טובה שלא  
היתה כמוהו בעולם, מבלי שיקדים שהיה  
אברהם עובד אלקים או צדיק תמים?

או שיאמר טעם לעזיבת הארץ, שיהיה  
בהליכתו אל ארץ אחרת קרבת אלקים?

ומנהג הכתוב לאמר: התהלך לפני  
ותשמע בקולי ואיטיבה עמך, כאשר  
בדוד ובשלמה. וכענין התורה כולה: "אם  
בחוקותי תלכו" (ויקרא כו, ג), "אם  
שמע תשמע בקול ה' אלקיך" (דברים  
כח, א), וביצחק אמר: "בעבור אברהם  
עבדי" (בראשית כו, כד). אבל להבטיחו  
בעבור יציאת הארץ, אין בו טעם.

Why did G-d tell Abraham to leave his land and receive unprecedented blessings without telling us that he was a devout servant of G-d or that he was utterly righteous?

Also, G-d should have provided a reason for leaving his homeland. Perhaps doing so would draw him closer to G-d?

[A broader question:] The Torah usually promises a reward for walking with G-d and obeying Him. This is what G-d said to King David and King Solomon. This is also a general theme in the Torah. For example, "If you follow my edicts" (Leviticus 26:3) or "If you will hearken to the voice of G-d, your G-d [I will reward you]" (Deuteronomy 28:1).

Concerning Isaac, the Torah states "[You will be blessed] in the merit of my servant Abraham" (Genesis 26:24). Yet, concerning Abraham, the Torah promises unprecedented blessings merely for leaving his land. This makes little sense.

The core of Judaism  
began with G-d drawing  
near and choosing us.



## TEXT 4A

*Maimonides,  
Mishneh Torah, Laws  
of Chametz and  
Matzah 7:4*

שְׁבִתְחִלָּה הָיוּ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ בְיַמֵי תֵרַח וּמִלְפָנָיו כּוֹפְרִים  
וְטוֹעֲיִן אַחַר הַהֶבֶל, וְרוֹדְפֵי אַחַר עֲבוֹדַת אֱלִילִים.  
וּמְסִים בְּדַת הָאֱמֶת, שֶׁקִּרְבָנוּ הַמָּקוֹם לוֹ וְהִבְדִּילָנוּ  
מִהָאֲמוֹת וְקִרְבָנוּ לְיַחֲוֹדוֹ.

In the beginning, in the days of Terah [Abraham's father] and before, our ancestors were pagan, strayed after vanity, and pursued idol worship. The true religion [emerged when] G-d drew us near to Him, chose us from among all nations, and brought us close to His oneness.

## TEXT 4B

*The Rebbe, Rabbi  
Menachem Mendel  
Schneerson, Likutei  
Sichot 25, p. 48*

ביי אלע אנדערע אומות איז זייער קירוב ושייכות צום בורא עולם פארבונדן מיט זייער ידיעה והכרה אין בורא, וואס דורך דעם פארבינדן זיי זיך מיט דעם אויבערשטן און זיינען מקיים מצותיו.

ביי עם ישראל אבער באשטייט זייער עיקר קירוב לאלקות און זייער מציאות אלס אידן (ניט אין דעם וואס זיי מצד עצמם דערהויבן זיך צו האבן א הכרה אין דעם בורא עולם און צו פארבינדן זיך מיט אים, נאר) אין דעם, וואס דער אויבערשטער האט זיי אויסגעטיילט.

The relationship between G-d and most people begins with knowing and acknowledging G-d. This bonds them to G-d and inspires them to follow His ways [the Noahide Code].

Our identity as Jews and our bond with G-d are not formed by our ascending spiritually, coming to know G-d, and developing a relationship with Him. Rather, G-d initiated it; He chose us.



G-d gave humanity the Noahide Code to *create* their bond with Him, while He gave the Jews His commandments *because* of our existing bond.

OPTIONAL

We don't become more Jewish with growth or practice; we are fully G-d's people from birth.



OPTIONAL

## TEXT 5

*Rabbi Yehudah Loew,  
Netzach Yisrael, ch. 11*

ההפרש אשר יש בין ישראל לאומות, כי ה' יתברך בחר בישראל בעצם, ולא בשביל מעשיהם הטובים. שלא לומר דוקא כאשר הם עושים רצונו של ה' יתברך אז בחר בהם, ולא כאשר אין עושים רצונו של ה' יתברך.

ולפיכך כתיב "והייתי לכם לאלקים" קודם, ואחר כך "והמה יהיו לי לעם" (ירמיהו לא, לב), כלומר, מה שה' יתברך בחר בישראל הוא קודם. . . אבל באומות כתיב קודם "להיות לי לעם" (שם ל, כב), שכאשר מעשיהם טובים וצדיקים, אז ה' יתברך מקרב אותם.

The difference between Jews and other nations is that G-d chose Jews as they are, not for their good deeds. We should not think G-d chose them after they did His bidding, and that this choice comes undone when they don't do His bidding.

This is why the Torah states first, "I will be your G-d," and then, "they will be My nation" (Jeremiah 31:32). The message is that G-d chose the Jews before [they worshipped Him]. . . . However, for the other nations, the Torah states first, "to be to Me for a nation" [and then, "I will be your G-d"] (Jeremiah 30:22). This implies that G-d draws them close only when their behavior is righteous and good.



Jews have an inherent relationship with G-d, and mitzvot are just the tools to develop it.

# TEXT 6

*The Rebbe, Rabbi  
Menachem Mendel  
Schneerson, Likutei  
Sichot 25, p. 49*

די מצות בני נח איז תוכנן (בעיקר) דער ישוב העולם, דער זיכוך האדם, אז דער מין המדבר זאל זיין כדבעי, די וועלט כדבעי. און די אויסגעאיידילקייט און שלימות פון וועלט (און מין המדבר) ווערט דורך דעם וואס די בני נח זיינען מקיים זייערע מצוות (און דעריבער זיינען די מצות בני נח ענינים וואס מ'קען מקיים זיין אפילו מצד "הכרע הדעת").

מה שאין כן די מצות פון אידן איז ענינן (ניט נאר דער זיכוך האדם והעולם נאר, ועיקר) "צוותא וחיבור" עם הבורא, און דאס איז מהותה פון א מצוה. און וויבאלד אז דאס איז אן ענין פון צוותא וחיבור עם הבורא, וואס נברא און בורא זיינען באין ערוך לגמרי, איז מובן אז . . . זיין עבודה ניט תופס מקום לגביה, און דער וועג ווי די צוותא ווערט אויפגעטאן, איז (ניט דורך דעם זיכוך ועליה פון דעם אדם, דורך זיין ידיעה והכרה אין אלקות, אדער וועלכע עס איז הרגש ועבודה נעלית פון א בן אדם, נאר) דורך דעם וואס דער אויבערשטער האט בוחר געווען און אנגעזאגט, דאס הייסט דורך ציווי ה' וקיומו.

G-d's commandments to Noahides are (primarily) designed to make the world inhabitable by refining the human character. This way, the people and the world will be as they should be. (Since they are designed to influence and refine humanity, they must be rational edicts humans can grasp and relate to.)

The objective of G-d's commandments to Jews is (not just to refine the Jews and the world but also and primarily) to bind us to Him. Since the Creator is infinitely superior to His creations, . . . no degree of human effort can bind us to G-d. This bond is achieved (not by our self-refinement, elevation, devotion, or spiritual enlightenment, no matter how advanced but) by G-d's initiative and instruction. Our role is merely to obey.

Mitzvot give finite humans the opportunity to connect with G-d's infinite reach.



## ANSWER 1

Avraham's earlier acts were self-initiated and, though admirable, did not mark the start of Judaism. The Torah begins his story at seventy-five, when he became the first Jew by obeying G-d's first command.



Judaism makes us G-d's  
because we follow His  
commandments not out of our  
own desire but on His terms.

# TEXT 7A

*Rabbi Don Yitzchak  
Abarbanel, Genesis  
12:1*

שאברהם לא התעורר בראשונה לפרסם ולקיים דעתו בדבר ה', ולא מפאת מעלה נבואית, אלא מכח התפלספותו ואצטגנינותו. וכמה מקדמוני הפלוסופים היו מקיימים דעותיהם וטוענים טענות לקיימם ובטולים לדעת הסותר, ולא נחשב להם לצדקה ולא נכתבו עניניהם בתורה.

אלא דברי נביאי ה' וחסידיו הדבקים בו ממה שעשו בעבודת הקל ובמאמרו, לא מעיונם ושכלם.

Abraham was not moved by Divine prophecy to discover G-d and to spread the word about Him. His theories and astrological examinations moved him. Many ancient philosophers engaged in debates to bolster their views and refute their disputants. Yet, this is not considered a merit, and their words are not recorded in the Torah.

Only the words of G-d's prophets, who were pious people and who cleaved to G-d, and the things they did at G-d's behest, are recorded in the Torah. Their personal thoughts and theories are not included.

## TEXT 7B

*Rabbi Yehudah Loew,  
Netzach Yisrael,  
chapter 11*

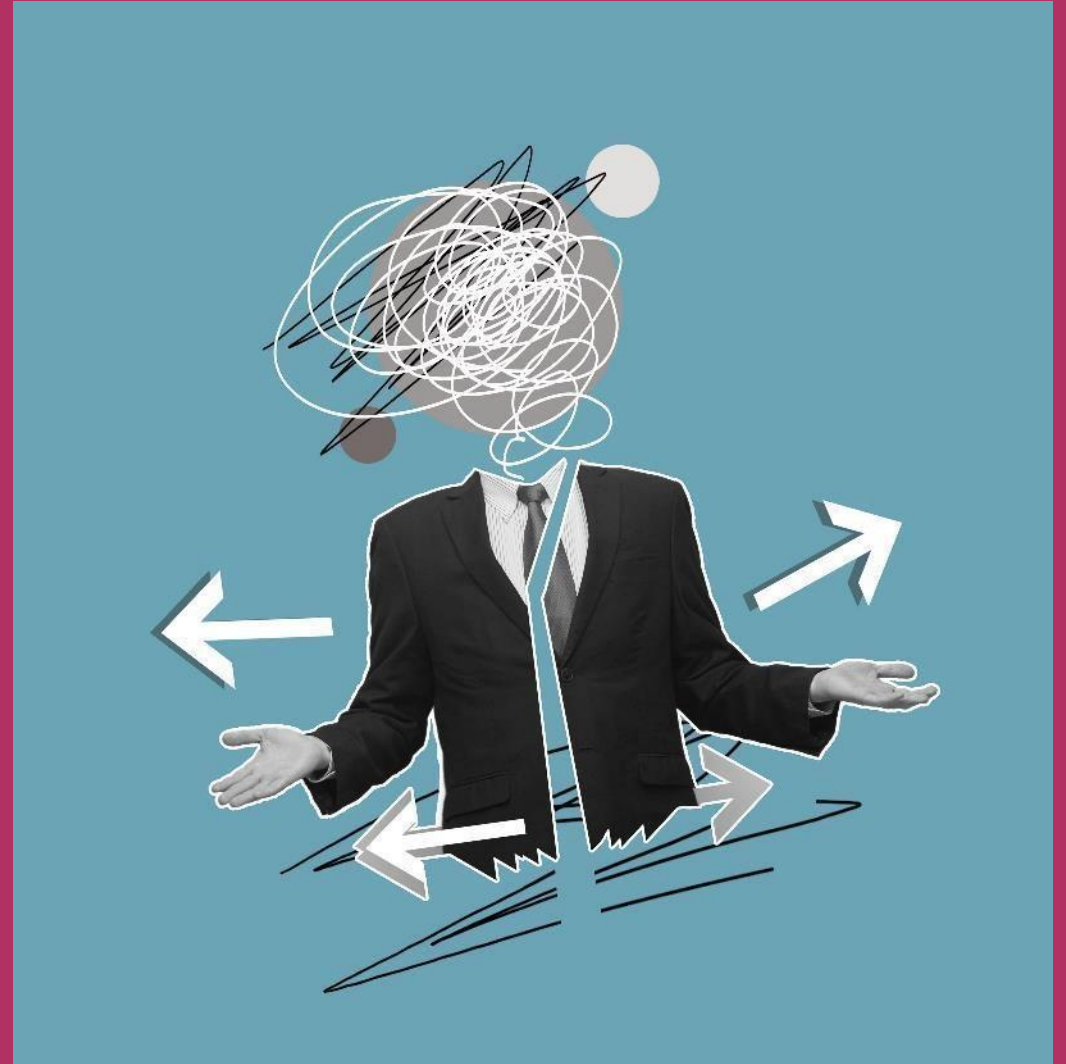
ולכך יתורץ השאלה, שלא הזכיר הכתוב צדקת אברהם קודם שנגלה עליו השכינה ואמר לו "לך לך מארצך וממולדתך וגו'" (בראשית יב, א). שאם כך היה משמע שלכך נגלה עליו הקדוש ברוך הוא ואמר לו "לך לך מארצך", בשביל זכותו שהזכיר . . .

וכיון שלא נזכר צדקת אברהם קודם שאמר לו "לך לך מארצך", לא היה זה בשביל צדקת אברהם.

This explains why there is no mention in the Torah about Abraham's piety before G-d revealed Himself to him and said, "Go forth from your land [and] birthplace" (Genesis 12:1). Had his earlier life story been told, it would imply that G-d showed Himself to Abraham and instructed him to leave his homeland because he was a pious person. . . .

By not mentioning a word about Abraham's piety, the Torah informs us that G-d did not single him out on account of his piety.

True connection doesn't come from understanding or desire but from doing what G-d commands.



# TEXT 8

*Talmud, Kidushin  
40b*

וכבר היה רבי טרפון וזקנים  
מסובין בעלית בית נתזה בלוד.

נשאלה שאילה זו בפניהם,  
תלמוד גדול או מעשה גדול?

נענה רבי טרפון ואמר: מעשה  
גדול.

נענה רבי עקיבא ואמר: תלמוד  
גדול.

נענו כולם ואמרו: תלמוד גדול,  
שהתלמוד מביא לידי מעשה.

Rabbi Tarfon and the sages once assembled  
in the upper floor of the Nitzah family's  
house in Lod.

A question was presented to them: Which is  
primary, Torah study or mitzvah observance?

Rabbi Tarfon replied, "The deed is  
paramount."

Rabbi Akiva replied, "Torah study is  
paramount."

They reached a unanimous consensus and  
proclaimed, "Torah study is greater because  
study leads to action."



Action is the ultimate priority,  
and everything else is important  
only because it helps enrich our  
performance of mitzvot.

## TEXT 9

*Rabbi Shneur  
Zalman of Liadi,  
Likutei Amarim,  
Tanya, chapter 41*

בָּרַם, צָרִיךְ לְהִיּוֹת לְזִכְרוֹן תָּמִיד רֵאשִׁית הָעֲבוּדָה וְעִיקָרָה  
וְשִׁרְשָׁה . . . שְׁלֹא לְמָרוֹד בְּמֶלֶךְ מַלְכֵי הַמְּלָכִים הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ  
הוּא . . . וְהוּא גַם הוּא מְקַבֵּל עָלָיו מַלְכוּתוֹ, לְהִיּוֹת מֶלֶךְ עָלָיו,  
וְלְעַבְדוֹ וְלַעֲשׂוֹת רְצוֹנוֹ בְּכָל מִינֵי עֲבוּדַת עֶבֶד.

We must never forget that the beginning, core, and root of Divine service . . . is to not rebel against G-d . . . to accept the yoke of G-d's kingship and appoint Him as our king, to serve Him and do His bidding in all manner of servile work.

Introducing someone to a mitzvah for the first time, allows them to perform it purely out of obedience.



How should Abraham leave his home?

לך לך

*Lech lecha*  
Go forth



**Go to yourself**

## TEXT 10

*Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak  
Schneerson, Sefer  
Hamaamarim 5705,  
p. 95*

וזהו תוכן ענין הידיעה שהודיע הקדוש ברוך הוא לאברהם אבינו באמירה זו  
"לך לך", דאתה אברהם . . . ו"לך לך" לשרש נשמתך. ותצא "מארצך",  
שהוא עוצם הרצון . . . "מולדתך", שהן המדות טובות . . . "ומבית אביך",  
הם ההשכלות וההשגות בביאורים והסבר עניני אלקות.

הנה מכל זה תצא, ותבוא "אל הארץ" . . . אשר אראך" . . . שיעלה ויגיע  
לשרש עצם הנשמה, וימשיך אור עצם הנשמה בהארץ הנשמה.

When G-d told Abraham to go to himself, He said, "You, Abraham. . . go to the core of your soul. With this, you will leave your homeland—your most intense desires. . . your birthplace—your emotional attributes. . . and the house of your father—your understanding of G-dliness."

G-d said, "Leave all these behind and go to the land . . . that I will show you. . . . Ascend to the core of your soul and tap into the light of your essence."

G-d told Avraham to leave...

בֵּית אָבִיךָ

*Beit avicha*  
The house of your father



**Intelligence**

מֹלַדְתְּךָ

*Moladetecha*  
Your birthplace



**Emotions**

אַרְצְךָ

*Artzecha*  
Your homeland



**Desires**

## ANSWER 2

Avraham was told to leave his homeland without explanation so that he would have the chance to act purely on G-d's command.

## ANSWER 3

Avraham had to give up everything for G-d and that's why he was rewarded with so many blessings.



Judaism is defined not by understanding or inspiration but by doing what G-d commands simply because He commands it.

## KEY POINTS

1. The Noahide Code is designed to refine those who observe it. Judaism is designed to attach the Jew to G-d.
2. Therefore, the Noahide Laws are rational codes that humans can understand and relate to. The Jewish commandments should be observed purely because they are G-d's wishes.
3. Abraham achieved many wonderful things before G-d gave him his first instruction at seventy-five. These don't appear in the Torah because G-d did not initiate them.
4. Abraham became the first Jew when he received and obeyed a commandment initiated by G-d. That is when the Torah begins Abraham's story.
5. G-d instructed Abraham to obey this instruction simply because it was G-d's wish, not because he wanted to or he understood its benefits. This was a huge feat, and Abraham was rewarded with many remarkable blessings for it.

