



# Parsha Encounters

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Parshas Lech Lecha – Rabbi Pesach Gottesman

## Stay Focused

**C** hazal teach us, "A person is obligated to say, when will my deeds reach the deeds of my forefathers, Avrohom, Yitzchok and Yaakov?". On the surface, this is difficult to understand. Is it really expected for every Jew to aim for such seemingly unattainable levels of avodas Hashem? Although a person knows he will not reach the spiritual heights of the Avos, it is nevertheless incumbent upon him to study the actions of Avrohom, Yitzchok and Yaakov and to incorporate aspects of them into his everyday life. Let's study the life of Avrohom Avinu as told to us in this week's sedrah.

For most of his life, Avrohom Avinu is in transit. He never establishes himself in one place, as he is constantly traveling by the word of Hashem. Lech lecha begins with Avrohom leaving his father's home to go to Eretz Canaan and wander in a strange land. Soon afterward, he is forced to go down to Mitzrayim because of the hunger, only to return to Eretz Canaan a short time later. When the shepherds of Lot graze their sheep on the land of others, Avrohom Avinu moves immediately to avoid a *Chillul Hashem* (since Lot and Avrohom Avinu looked similar, people may have come to suspect Avrohom Avinu of stealing). Later, when the cities of Sdom are destroyed, Avrohom Avinu moves once more in order to distance himself from the scandal involving the daughters of Lot. Never is Avrohom able to stay in one place for long.

How was he able to do this? Avrohom Avinu was so focused on his Avodas Hashem that nothing

could shake him. The way of the general world is that although one may work hard to attain a certain spiritual level, when winds of change come his way he may likely falter. A person could have a steady learning partner at night that continues for many months, but comes a change in situation, such as a new baby at home or different job hours, and suddenly the learning partnership suffers. However, one who is totally focused on his Avodas Hashem is able to accommodate any new situation. In fact, not only does this trait of being able to focus allow him to continue what he is doing, but it also shows that the quality of his mitzvos is higher.

Perhaps this is the meaning of the gemara in Brochos, "Anyone who makes a set place for his prayers, the G-d of Avrohom is at his side, and when he passes away people will say 'such a pious man, such an *anav*.'" Many have asked why a person who does this seemingly minor mitzvah merits such great reward! Based on the above lesson, we can understand that he who sets a place for prayer, day in and day out for his entire life, is demonstrating his steadfastness to Tefilla by not allowing any circumstance divert his focus. Therefore, this man deserves to have the G-d of Avrohom at his side as a reward for emulating the ways of Avrohom.

Now at the start of the long winter, let us take the opportunity to accept a mitzvah that we will keep unwavering, with the faith and focus of Avrohom Avinu.

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# Halacha Encounters

## What's In A Name

Rabbi Dovid Greenberg

The accepted custom is to name our newly born sons at their bris. One of the sources for this tradition is found in this week's parsha when Avrohom Avinu receives his newly enhanced name by his bris. We see from his renaming, that a name is not just a device to enable differentiation, but rather the name reflects the essence of it's bearer. Hence, when Avrom reached a higher existence through his covenant with Hashem, he required a new name to reflect that reality. Similarly, we find that when Adam Harishon was looking for his mate, Hashem brought all the animals before him so that he should name them. Adam was able to determine their essence, thereby assessing if they were a fitting match for him. That determination then became their names. For example, the dull pack animal, the donkey, was called "chamor" from the root of "chomer", matter, for it is almost totally devoid of anything spiritual. The emotional and loving dog was called "kelev" a contraction of "kol lev", all heart. Therefore, the Midrash Tanchuma (Haazinu) warns, that a parent should be careful to bestow names on their children that are connected to righteousness, for names can have an effect on the future of their bearers. As is quoted in the name of the Arizal, Hashem takes the name of the child into consideration when developing his characteristics. It is also written in the sefer Maggid Meisharim (Shemos) that one who calls his son Avrohom, establishes in the child a leaning towards kindness and even if he grows up to be wicked, that tendency will still be recognizable. Thus we may conclude that the naming of one's child is a momentous occasion which should be preceded with serious consideration.

### Naming After Relatives

The Medrash (Bereishis 37:7) writes, that our forefathers who were endowed with Ruach Hakodesh were able to name their children based on their understanding of occurrences or events that would/did affect their offspring. However, we, who are not so endowed, name after our forefathers. This is the origin of the custom to name after our ancestors and Rabbis. The Sefer Bris Avos states that although we are not fully capable of forming new names, one may use a previously formed name that ties into a current occurrence. For example, one might call their son who was born after a war "Shalom". Also, it is a common custom to name a child based on the date of his birth, i.e. the name Simcha for one born around Purim time. Many seforim discuss the concept of how naming after a particular person forms a connection between the baby and the former name bearer, which affects both of them. Therefore, one should attempt to name their child only after a tzaddik and certainly not after a wicked person. If the name has been used by both tzaddikim and reshaim i.e. Menashe, the sefer Haflaah rules (Kesubos 104b) that one may use that name, provided that his intent is to name after the tzaddik. Hence, if one would like to name a child with an irreligious relative's name, one should have intent that the baby is really being named after a tzaddik who bore that name. One may name a male after a female and vice versa, and the regular affects of the connection apply. However

one should change the name slightly to make it comply with that gender, i.e. one might name his daughter Chaya after someone named Chaim. (Bris Avos 8:31)

### Naming After Two People

The minhag is that one may give two names to a child, wherein each name commemorates a different person. However, there was an incident where a child so named once experienced strange voices emanating from his stomach. After consulting with doctors to no avail, the parents approached R' Chaim Kanievsky Shlita. Upon hearing that the boy was named after his two grandfathers who were known to have had an unresolved quarrel, he instructed the parents to go to their graves and plead that they should make peace for the sake of the child. Soon afterwards, those strange noises ended. (Heard from Rabbi Z. Leff). It is quoted in the sefer Peer Hador that the Chazon Ish viewed such a hybrid name as a totally new name unconnected to either of the original name holders.

### Bad Mazal

There is an argument amongst the halachic authorities as to whether there is any danger in naming a child after someone who had a bad mazal i.e. died young or through an unnatural death. (Beis Shmuel Shemos Anashim 10) R' Moshe Feinstein Zatzal paskens that if the deceased died young but after having children and through natural means, it is unclear if that is considered bad mazal. Therefore, in such a case one may rely on the opinion that it's alright to name after them. Indeed, we see that many people are named Shmuel and Shlomo, after Shmuel Hanavi and Shlomo Hamelech, despite the fact that they died at the early age of 52. However, if the deceased clearly had a bad mazal, one should not use their name unless one changes it slightly i.e. Yeshayahu to Yeshaya, or adds an additional name. Naming after those people that perished in the Holocaust is permissible. Because that was a national tragedy, no individual is considered to have had bad mazal. (See IGM. Y.D. vol 2 S. 122)

### Secular Names

The history of how secular names entered into Jewish families has a few beginnings. In some places, it was an attempt to keep the Hebrew name holy by using it only during religious ceremonies, and using a secular name at other times. In other places it was forced upon the Jews by governmental decrees. Regardless of its source, once a name has been associated with the Jewish people for an extended period, it has gained the status of a Jewish name, and it is acceptable to be passed on i.e. Gittel, Raizel. (See IGM O.C. vol. 4 s.66)

The custom among Ashkenazic Jewry is that the wife has the right to name the first child. The source for this tradition may be as a sign of appreciation to the wife for enduring the pregnancy and labor, or to her family for commonly (in the olden days) supplying financial support to the young couple. One must be careful not to cause any rift in the family due to one's decision to name the child, for this might endanger the child. (Bris Avos 8:23)

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