STAM TORAH

PARSHAS LECH LECHA 5778

“ALL THE WAY TO THE TOP”[[1]](#footnote-1)

Last year, on Chol Hamoed Succos, our family went to Liberty Science Center, where we met up with my brother-in-law and sister-in-law and children. The Center has an attraction which allows you to sense what it’s like to be unable to see. You climb through on your hands and knees, keeping your hands affixed to the wall to guide you. Apparently, the real reason our wives convinced us to go in with our children, was so that they could sit on the side and laugh their eyes out while watching the video of us inside, blindly trying to maneuver our way through.

While waiting on line, we struck up a conversation with the fellow behind us who recognized my brother-in-law from years earlier during their yeshiva days. The fellow told us that he had once been in an amusement park and went on a ride through the scary funhouse. However, the lights inside the scary house had inadvertently been left on. So, when anything jumped out at him, it wasn’t scary at all. After the ride ended and he complained, they allowed him to go on again with the lights off. The second time however was no better, because now he knew what to expect. The ride ended up being a boring waste of time.

I thanked the fellow behind us for relating the story, which was unquestionably going to end up in one of my speeches.

On the opening pasuk of parshas Lech Lecha, “Hashem said to Avrom, 'Go for yourself from your land'"[[2]](#footnote-2), the Medrash[[3]](#footnote-3) relates:

*Rabbi Yitzchok said: This may be compared to one who was passing from place to place and saw a (birah dolekes) fortress illuminated/burning. He said, "Will you say this fortress has no governor (manhig)? The master (ba'al) of the fortress peered out (hetziz) at him, and said to him, “I am the master of the fortress.”*

*“Thus, because our father Avraham said, "Can one say this world has no governor?" The Holy One, blessed is He, peeked out at him and said to him, “I am the Master of the world”.”*

Avrohom saw a world with beauty, coherence, order, and stability. Avrohom questioned how it was possible for there to be such perfect precision and stability on its own? Avrohom’s emunah developed from a clear understanding and recognition that reliability, dependability, and order cannot emerge from chaos, without a supreme Power who created it all and directs it all constantly. Once he was convinced that there was a Supreme Power, he was prepared to faithfully follow that Power’s instruction through thick and thin.

Life is full of surprises and challenges, and we can never fully know what to expect. If we had clarity and understood how all was part of the Master Plan, it wouldn’t be as difficult. But the challenge of this world is to faithfully maneuver our way through the vicissitudes and vagaries of life even though the lights are often off.

Last year, when honored with Chosson Torah on Simchas Torah, I had the following thought:

At the end of the final parsha in the Torah, Parshas V’zos Haberacha, the Torah relates that Moshe went up Har Ha’avarim where Hashem showed him the entire panorama of Eretz Yisroel.

Rashi explains that with each place Hashem showed Moshe, He also showed him all future events that would transpire in each of those places.[[4]](#footnote-4) Moshe saw the Bais Hamikdash in its glory, and destruction, the conquering of Eretz Yisroel, and the nation being sent into exile, etc.

It would seem that if Moshe viewed all those events, he was also be able to understand why he was unable to enter the Land. With a clear view of the future and its divine course, it must have become clear to Moshe why everything happened the way it did. His deepest question of why he couldn’t go into Eretz Yisroel was no longer a question; now it was all crystal clear.

It is for this reason that pasuk says that, after Hashem showed Moshe the land, He stated: “This is the Land I promised to Avrohom, Yitzchok, and Yaakov. Now Moshe saw” - not just the physical land, but all its depth, meaning, and destiny. Then Hashem added, “And there you will not cross” – for now Moshe understood why he could not enter the land.

That being true, the only thing left to happen was, what is stated in the next pasuk – “*Vayaman shom Moshe eved Hashem* *–* Moshe, the servant of Hashem, died there.” At that point, Moshe had to leave this world. Once everything was clear to Moshe, he no longer could remain in the world where “*v’tzadik be’emunaso yichyeh –* the righteous, by his faith he shall live”. Moshe no longer needed to have emunah, because it had all become logical and understandable.

The Torah commences with the words, “*Bereishis bara Elokim*”.[[5]](#footnote-5) The Gemara Megilla relates that Ptolemy II Philadelphus[[6]](#footnote-6) forced seventy elders to translate the Torah into Greek.[[7]](#footnote-7) Each sage decided that they had to make certain changes to prevent the Greeks from heretical interpretations and misunderstandings of the text of the Torah. Miraculously, although they were all secluded, every one of them decided to make the exact same changes.

The gemara notes that the first change was, instead of writing “*Bereishis bara Elokim’* which could be misconstrued to sound like “Bereishis (a deity) created G-d”, they wrote *Elokim bara bereishis* – G-d created, in the beginning.

The question is why doesn’t the Torah indeed begin that way – *Elokim bara bereishis* - to prevent heretical understanding of that first pasuk? Why leave the Torah open to misunderstanding?

Rav Shimshon Pinkus zt’l explains that the most fundamental component of our religion is that we must have *emunah peshutah*! That doesn’t mean ‘simple faith’, as much as it means ‘complete faith’. When we perceive things that logically seem to have been created by an all-powerful G-d, we don’t feel the need to constantly and relentlessly question it. It’s not blind faith, as much as it’s logical and well-rooted faith!

Therefore, the Torah does not care to justify itself before those who aren’t concerned with the real truth. The Torah is written for those who have *emunah peshutah*, and for them there is no concern that they will misunderstand the opening pasuk.

In other words, the Torah begins by taking *emunah peshutah* for granted. True faith is essential to properly understand the opening pasuk, and then continues to be essential for understanding every other pasuk in the Torah

When Moshe did not need to have emunah any longer, his life and mission in this world was over. That is how the Torah concludes.

Life isn’t easy, and we have many legitimate questions. The entirety of the Yomim Noraim and Succos was to bring us closer to Hashem and to strengthen our emunah in Him. Now, as we begin the Torah anew we take that perspective with us into the new year, with the hope that our emunah won’t be challenged this year. However, even if, G-d forbid, it is challenged, we will be able to withstand it all by maintaining our faith.

That is how Avrohom Avinu came to recognize Hashem, that is what he taught his disciples and his children, and that is the legacy he continues to bequeath to us.

“The righteous - by his faith he shall live”

*“I am the master of the fortress.”*

*Rabbi Dani Staum, LMSW*

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1. Based on the speech delivered at Kehillat New Hempstead, Shabbos morning, Parshas Bereishis 5777 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Bereishis 12:1 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Bereishis Rabbah 39:1 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. I conceptualize it as being similar to modern-day videos where you are looking at an empty landscape, and suddenly the screen changes displaying scenes of war that took place on that spot. Then, the scene fades again, and another event that took place on that spot thirty years later comes into view, etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. There is a custom to expound upon the connection between the end of the Torah and the beginning of the Torah. Parshas V’zos Habracha is essentially the parsha before Bereishis, because the Torah is a never-ending cycle of learning and growth. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. king of **Ptolemaic** Egypt from 283 to 246 BCE [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. It became known as “Targum Shivim – translation of the 70”, known as the Septuagint. It was the first time the Non-Jewish world had access to the Torah, and was therefore the forerunner of the New Testament. Despite the great miracle that occurred, Chazal viewed the event as being a terrible tragedy, which caused “darkness to descend to the world for 3 days”. The day of the translation was the eighth of Teves. The third day following it is the tenth of Teves, a national fast. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)