



Lech Lecha – Pruning and Plowing

Rabbi Shmuel Silber

Rabbi Levi said, when Avraham was travelling in Aram Naharaim, he saw people eating, drinking and engaging in a hedonistic lifestyle. Avraham said, "I do not want a portion in this land." When he came to the mountains of Tzur (and peered into the Land of Israel) he saw people pruning and plowing. He said, "I truly hope I receive a portion in this land." God then said to Avraham, "I have given this land to your offspring." (Midrash Rabbah 39:8)

Rav Kalonymos Kalman haLevi Epstein (1751-1823), in his work titled *Maor V'Shemesh*, provides an incredible insight into this *midrash*. Avraham was wandering the world looking for meaning. He was looking for answers to the questions which filled his soul. *How do I find greatness? What is my purpose?* He looked around and saw people focused on momentary, fleeting pleasures. Eating good food and drinking fine wine is wonderful as long as it doesn't become the centerpiece of existence. And so, he traveled on, looking for meaning. Avraham came to the Land of Israel. When he gazed upon the land from the surrounding mountains, he saw farmers pruning and planting. In this moment, Avraham had the life epiphany he had been waiting for. Man is like the field. A field needs to be plowed for beautiful vegetation to grow. So too, man must plow his personalistic field with *Torah, mitzvos, chesed* and dynamic spiritual activity in order to create the beautiful fruit of holy identity. Meaningful living requires us to engage in constant and consistent plowing. But you can only plant if the weeds are first removed from the field.

There are two dimensions to the weeds of life. The weeds represent the negative traits, behaviors and aspects of our life-style. We can ignore the weeds, but they won't go away. We can try to look away, but they will just grow taller. To really engage in meaningful and dynamic spiritual plowing we must first remove the weeds that stand in our way. It is difficult and often unpleasant to remove the weeds of life but failure to do so renders the field of potential accomplishment un-useable.

There is another dynamic as well. Sometimes, the things we plant don't "grow" as we had expected. Although, I used the right seed, provided water, sunlight and nutrients, the plant just didn't take. It is in those moments that I must prune and uproot the non-viable plant in order to clear the field for something better. There are times in life when we "plant" an initiative, idea or course of action and it just doesn't take root. Don't be afraid to start again. Don't be afraid to pull out the plant despite having spent so much time and energy in planting it. Pruning is an indispensable part of personal growth. There are some things we will do that will work and others that will fail. Don't let the failed attempts sit and wither in your field. Bend down, prune, pull out the failed plant and start again. Starting again can be frightening and fraught with anxiety but if we want to maximize the productivity of our field, it is a necessity.

We must remove the weeds that hold us back and remove the growths which have failed to mature and materialize. It is only when we clear the field of the failed growth and weeds that we can plant something beautiful.

Avraham wandered looking for meaning and answers. The answers he found are the ones which guide us to this very day. Life is all about pruning and planting. God has given each of us beautiful fields of potential and it is our privilege to farm them properly.