



Shabbat Announcements

Parshat Lech Lecha

October 24, 2015 11 Cheshvan, 5776

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks on Parshat Lech Lecha

TORAH
ARTSCROLL 54
HERTZ 45

HAFTORAH
ARTSCROLL 1133
HERTZ 60

In an extraordinary series of observations on this week's parsha, Nahmanides (Ramban, Rabbi Moses ben Nahman Girondi, 1194-1270), delivers harsh criticisms of Abraham and Sarah. The first has to do with Abraham's decision, after arriving at the land of Canaan, to leave and go to Egypt because "there was a famine in the land." On this Nahmanides says: Know that Abraham our father unintentionally committed a great sin by bringing his righteous wife to a stumbling-block of sin on account of his fear for his life. He should have trusted that God would save him and his wife and all his belongings, for God surely has the power to help and to save. His leaving the Land concerning which he had been commanded from the beginning, on account of the famine, was also a sin he committed, for in famine God would redeem him from death. It was because of this deed that the exile in the land of Egypt at the hand of Pharaoh was decreed for his children. According to Ramban, Abraham should have stayed in Canaan and had faith in God that he would sustain him despite the famine. Not only was Abraham wrong

to leave. He also put Sarah in a position of moral hazard because, as a result of going to Egypt, she was forced to tell a lie, that she was Abraham's sister not his wife, and because she was taken into pharaoh's harem where she might have been forced to commit an act of adultery. This is a very harsh judgment, made more so by Ramban's further assertion that it was because of this lack of faith that Abraham's children were sentenced to exile in Egypt centuries later.

Later in the parsha, Ramban criticizes Sarah. Despairing of having a child, she asked Abraham to sleep with her handmaid Hagar in the hope that she might bear him a child. Abraham did so, and Hagar became pregnant. The text then says that Hagar "began to despise her mistress." Sarah complained to Abraham, and then "afflicted Hagar" who fled from her into the desert. On this, Ramban writes: Our mother [Sarah] transgressed by this affliction, as did Abraham by allowing her to do so. So God heard her [Hagar's] affliction and gave her a son who would be a wild ass of a man to afflict the seed of Abraham and Sarah with all kinds of affliction. Here the moral judgment is easier to understand. Sarah's conduct does seem volatile and harsh. The Torah itself says that Sarah "afflicted" Hagar. Yet Ramban seems to be saying that it was this episode in the ancient past that explains Jewish suffering at

the hands of Muslims (descendants of Ishmael) in a much later age.

It is not difficult to defend Abraham and Sarah in these incidents and other commentators did so. Abraham was not to know that God would perform a miracle and save him and Sarah from famine had they stayed in Canaan. Nor was he to know that the Egyptians would endanger his life and place Sarah in a moral dilemma. Neither of them had been to Egypt before. They did not know in advance what to expect. As for Sarah and Hagar, although an angel sent Hagar back, later when Ishmael and Isaac were born, Sarah once again banished Hagar. This time, though Abraham protested, God told him to do what Sarah said. So Ramban's criticisms are easily answered. Why then did he make them? Ramban surely did not make these comments lightly. He was, I believe, driven by another consideration altogether, namely the justice of history. Why did the Israelites suffer exile and slavery in Egypt? Why in Ramban's own age were Jews subject to attack by radical Islamists, the Almohades, who brought to an end the Golden Age of Spain they had enjoyed under the more tolerant rule of the Umayyads. Ramban believed, as we say in our prayers, that "because of our sins we were

Times

Candle Lighting	5:45 pm
Friday Mincha	5:45 pm
Youth Minyan	8:30 am
Parsha Shiur	8:30 am
Main	9:00 am
Beit Midrash	9:15 am
Gemara Shiur	4:35 pm
Mincha	5:35 pm
Shabbat ends	6:51 pm
Sunday, Oct. 25	7:30/8:30am
Mon., Thur.	6:35/7:45 am
Tues., Wed., Fri.	6:45/7:45 pm
Mincha	5:35 pm
Latest Times for Shema/Shemoneh Esrei	
October 24	9:58/10:52 am
October 31	9:58/10:52 am
Next Shabbat Parshat Lech-Lecha	
Candle Lighting	5:35 pm
Mincha	5:35 pm

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NATAN HAMERMAN AND JOE HYMAN.

exiled from our land," but what sins had the Israelites committed in the days of Jacob that merited exile? He also believed that "the acts of the fathers are a sign for the children," and that what happened in the lives of the patriarchs foreshadowed what would happen to their descendants. What had they done to Ishmael to earn the scorn of Muslims? A close reading of the biblical text pointed Ramban in the direction of Sarah's treatment of Hagar. So Ramban's comments make sense within his reading of Jewish history, but this too is not without its difficulties. The Torah states explicitly that God may punish "the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation" but not beyond. The rabbis further restricted this to cases where "the children continue the sins of the parents." Jeremiah and Ezekiel both said that no one would any more say, "The parents have eaten sour grapes and their children's teeth are set on edge." The transfer of sins across the generations is problematic, Jewishly and ethically.

What is deeply interesting about Ramban's approach to Abraham and Sarah is his willingness to point out flaws in their behavior. This answers a fundamental question as far as our understanding of the narratives of Genesis is concerned. How are we to judge the patriarchs when their behavior seems problematic: Jacob taking Esau's blessing in disguise, for example, or Shimon and Levi's brutality in the course of rescuing their sister Dina? The stories of Genesis are often morally perplexing. Rarely does the Torah pass an explicit, unequivocal verdict on people's conduct. This means that it is sometimes difficult to teach these narratives as a guide to how to behave. This led to their systematic reinterpretation by rabbinic midrash so that black and white take the place of subtle shades of grey. So, for example, the words "Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian ... mocking," were understood by the sages to mean that the thirteen-year-old Ishmael was guilty of idolatry, illicit sex or murder. This is clearly not the plain sense of the verse. It is, instead, an interpretation that would justify Sarah's insistence that Ishmael be sent away. Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Chajes explained that the entire tendency of midrash to make the heroes seem perfect and the villains completely evil is for educational reasons. The word Torah means "teaching" or

"instruction," and it is difficult to teach ethics through stories whose characters are fraught with complexity and ambiguity. Yet the Torah does paint its characters in shades of grey. Why so? For three reasons: The first is that the moral life is not something we understand in depth all at once. As children we hear stories of heroes and villains. We learn basic distinctions: right and wrong, good and bad, permitted and forbidden. As we grow, though, we begin to realize how difficult some decisions are. Do I go to Egypt? Do I stay in Canaan? Do I show compassion to my servant's child at the risk that he may be a bad influence on my child who has been chosen by God for a sacred mission? Anyone who thinks such decisions are easy is not yet morally mature. So the best way of teaching ethics is to do so by way of stories that can be read at different levels at different times in our life.

Second, not only are decisions difficult. People are also complex. No one in the Torah is portrayed as perfect. Noah, the only person in Tanakh to be called righteous, ends drunk and disheveled. Moses, Aaron and Miriam are all punished for their sins. So is King David. Solomon, wisest of men, ends his life as a deeply compromised leader. Many of the prophets suffered dark nights of despair. "There is none so righteous on earth," says Kohelet, "as to do only good and never sin." No religious literature was ever further from hagiography, idealization and hero-worship. In the opposite direction, even the non-heroes have their saving graces. Esau is a loving son, and when he meets his brother Jacob after a long estrangement, they kiss, embrace and go their separate ways. Levi, condemned by Jacob for his violence, counts Moses, Aaron and Miriam among his grandchildren. Even Pharaoh, the man who enslaved the Israelites, had a moral heroine for a daughter. The descendants of Korach sang psalms in the Temple of Solomon. This too is moral maturity, light-years removed from the dualism adopted by many religions, including some Jewish sects (like the Qumran sect of the Dead Sea Scrolls), that divides humanity into children of light and children of darkness. Lastly and most important, more than any other religious literature, the Torah makes an absolute distinction between earth and heaven, God and human beings. Because God is God, there is space for humans to be human. In Judaism the line dividing them is never blurred. How rare this is was pointed out by Walter Kaufmann: In India, the Jina and the Buddha, founders of two new religions in the sixth century BCE, came to be worshipped later by their followers. In China, Confucius and Lao-tze came to be deified. To the non-Christian, Jesus seems to represent a parallel case. In Greece, the heroes of the past were held to have been sired by a god or to have been born of goddesses, and the dividing line between gods and men became fluid. In Egypt, the Pharaoh was considered divine. In Israel, says Kaufmann, "no man was ever worshipped or accorded even semi-divine status. This is one of the most extraordinary facts about the religion of the Old Testament." There never was a cult of Moses or any other biblical figure. That is why "no man knows Moses' burial place to this day," so that it could never become a place of pilgrimage.

No religion has held a higher view of humanity than the book that tells us we are each in the image and likeness of God. Yet none has been more honest about the failings of even the greatest. God does not ask us to be perfect. He asks us, instead, to take risks in pursuit of the right and the good, and to acknowledge the mistakes we will inevitably make. In Judaism the moral life is about learning and growing, knowing that even the greatest have failings and even the worst have saving graces. It calls for humility about ourselves and generosity toward others. This unique blend of idealism and realism is morality at its most demanding and mature.



GNS Yoetzet Halacha Lisa Septimus
 Welcomes your questions about mikvah, observance of taharat mishpacha (halacha relating to married life) and women's health, as it connects to Jewish law. Reach out to her at:
 Phone: 516.415.1111
 Email: gnsyoetzet@gmail.com.
 All conversations and emails are kept confidential.



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PLEASE NOTE THIS IS NOT A YOUTH EVENT

Great Neck
Synagogue Men's
Club Presents



Thomas Furst
discussing his new bestseller

"TORAH MYSTERIES
ILLUMINATED"

Sunday, October 25

10 am

Breakfast served



ANNOUNCEMENTS

RABBI POLAKOFF'S SHABBOS DRASHA THROUGH 5776, IS DEDICATED IN MEMORY OF PINCHAS BEN YOSEPH FOR OTHER SUCH OPPORTUNITIES PLEASE CONTACT HOWARD WOLF [212-686-9800](tel:212-686-9800)

IF YOU KNOW OF SOMEONE WHO IS MOVING INTO THE GREAT NECK AREA PLEASE LET THE OFFICE KNOW.

MEN'S CLUB EVENTS

Book Club Discussion: Sunday, Oct. 25th: 10:00 am
Come and hear our gabbai and author **Tommy Furst** discuss his recently published acclaimed new book, "*Torah Mysteries Illuminated*". All welcome, breakfast available.

GNS Men's Club Blood Drive: Sunday, Nov. 1st

To register, go to www.nybloodcenter.org click on "Schedule Donation" under "Have a group code?" enter: 03872. Click on "Great Neck Synagogue" and then select your appointment time or email reind@sullcrom.com to request an appointment time.

OHEL SHABBATON

The OHEL Shabbaton will be **Shabbat Oct. 30-31**. There will be Friday night dinner at GNS and Shabbat lunch at hosts homes. If you are interested in sponsoring the Shabbaton (\$36) or hosting OHEL clients for the Shabbaton, please call the synagogue office or email ilichter@gns.org.

MONTHLY CHESED COORDINATORS NEEDED

October - Winter Coats Chesed Collection; November - Games and Toys Chesed Collection. Please volunteer your home for a Chesed Collection. Contact Mark Twersky 516-487-6100 or Sharon Goldwyn [917-287-7334](tel:917-287-7334).

SHABBOS PROJECT CHALLAH BAKE

Join us Thursday evening, October 22nd at Temple Israel of Great Neck at 7:00 pm. Please register online at greatneckshabbatproject.com/challah-bake-2015.

MITZVAH OPPORTUNITY

If you like to bake, please VOLUNTEER to bake pies for Thanksgiving for us to sell to raise money for sharsheret, an organization to help young Jewish women facing ovarian and breast cancer. Contact marla.lemonik@gmail.com.

STUDENT CLASSES

Parsha'n Pizza starts **Wed. Oct. 28th** from 7:00-7:30 pm.
Jr. High Class & Dinner, starts **Tues. Oct. 20th** at 7:00 pm.
High School Class & Dinner Thurs. nights from 6:45-7:30 pm.

UPCOMING EVENTS AT GREAT NECK SYNAGOGUE

October 24: Shabbat Scholar: Dr. Deena Zimmerman
October 25: Tom Furst: Men's Club (Book)
October 25: Sunday Conversations: Ido Aharoni
October 31: Col. Allen West
November 1: Men's Club Blood Drive
November 7: Men's Club & Sisterhood Dinner and Live Concert
November 8: New Members Event
November 14: U.S. Senator Lindsey Graham

MAZAL TOVS & COMMUNITY NEWS

Mazal Tov to Yaffa & Ebrahim Gabbazadeh on the birth of twin granddaughters born to their children **Ariel & Fabian Gabbai**.

Mazal Tov to Judy & Abe Soleimani on the birth of a granddaughter born to their children **Ilana & David Aminoff**.

Mazal Tov to Sheila Bachman on the Bar Mitzvah of her grandson **Alec** son of **Carrie & Marc Bachman**.

Mazal Tov to Dr. Paul & Drora Brody on being honored at the "*Rachel's Children Reclamation Foundation*" dinner.

NSHA OPEN HOUSE

Please join us at the North Shore Hebrew Academy Open House on Wednesday, November 4th at 7:00pm at the Cherry Lane Campus. Learn more about what makes NSHA the warm and wonderful educational experience for so many of our children. Meet with parents, teachers and administrators at a fun and informative event.

HAR TORAH OPEN HOUSE

Please join us at Yeshiva Har Torah's Open House on Tuesday, November 10th at 7:00 pm. Experience first-hand what makes our school, award-winning faculty, and administration so unique. Nursery transportation options are available. To find out more information about the admissions process, please call us at (718) 343-2533.

THANKSGIVING CHESED

This year for Thanksgiving, you can really give thanks and be giving! Buy a Thanksgiving Dinner for a resident at Arrandale Senior Housing and make your parents proud of you. \$18 can sponsor a dinner in honor of/in memory of your parents. Email lisslev@verizon.net or fill out form on gns.org to sign up. See flyer for more details.

Y A H R Z E I T

Saturday, 11 Cheshvan

Steven Blumner for Dov ben Chaim
Charles Mandelbaum for Jack Mandelbaum
Evelyn Henis for Harry Noah

Sunday, 12 Cheshvan

Roslyn Dicker for Miriam Gottlieb
Sydelle Knepper for Rosalie Marin
Tricia Moslin for Nycha Solomon

Monday, 13 Cheshvan

David Benrimon for Jacob Benrimon
Eva Bachrach for Joseph Grunfarb
Elana Jochimek for Susan Jochimek
Abigail Epstein for Howard Ostrin

Tuesday, 14 Cheshvan

Ellen Siegel for Shirley Crair

Wednesday, 15 Cheshvan

Ira Lubin for Nathan Lubin
Brian Smith for Francine Smith

Friday, 17 Cheshvan

Perry Schneider for Sandra Schneider