

# Parsha Story

Stories and Parables from  
the famed Maggid of Dubno  
by Rabbi Chanan Morrison

## Avraham and the Stars

LECH L'CHA

### The Robbery and the Foolish Messenger

Isaac was a wealthy man living in a small village. His fortune wasn't just in gold but in priceless family heirlooms and fine jewelry – too valuable, he thought, to keep at home. So, he entrusted these treasures to a reliable friend in a nearby town, who rented a safe deposit box at the local bank. Foolproof, they both agreed. What could possibly go wrong?

But, as sometimes happens, even the best-laid plans can go awry. Masked bandits broke into the bank, taking everything they could – Isaac's valuables included.

News of the robbery reached Isaac through a messenger, who arrived at his door panting as though he'd just run a marathon. He relayed the details of the theft, his words tumbling out in a blur of urgency and disaster.

Isaac, a man of action, wasted no time. He immediately organized his

men, issuing orders to patrol the roads in search of the thieves. He would not sit idly by while his possessions slipped away.

As Isaac was mobilizing his troops, the messenger muttered under his breath, "You're wasting your time. The valuables are lost. Why bother chasing after them? It's over."

Isaac stopped and turned to the messenger with a pointed stare. "Tell me – why are you here?"

The messenger blinked in confusion. "What do you mean, why am I here? Your friend sent me to inform you of the robbery!"

"Listen to your own words!" Isaac snapped at him with impatience. "Why did my friend send you to tell me about this calamity in such haste? He must have believed that it is still possible, with immediate action, to recover the stolen goods. The very reason you were sent here contradicts your own ill-advised counsel!"

### Forget Your Astrological Speculations!

Avraham had long since given up hope of having a child with his wife, Sara. He had studied the stars – only to conclude that his future was childless.

But then, when he was ninety-nine years old, God told Avraham to step

outside his tent. "Look at the sky", God commanded, "and count the stars... That's how numerous your descendants will be!" (B'reishit 15:5).

"Stars?" Abraham must have thought, squinting at the sky. "I've already counted them all. I know exactly what's in store for me. No children. Ever."

But, according to the rabbis, God was suggesting a different message altogether: "Forget your star charts and astrology! The very stars you thought foretold your childlessness – those same stars will show you that you will have children!"

The rabbis wanted to teach us a profound lesson: When a prophet is sent to deliver a message, it is not to seal our fate, but to offer us an opportunity to change it. It is a call to action, a prompt to examine the root cause of our situation and correct it.

When the prophet Yishayahu came with a grim warning – that King Chizkiyahu's failure to fulfill the mitzva of procreation would bring about his death – Chizkiyahu, though shaken, did not accept it passively. When Yishayahu insisted, "The decree is already set", Chizkiyahu correctly responded: "Son of Amotz! Stop prophesizing and leave!" Why do you think God sent you, if the matter was already decided? Clearly, God wants me to rectify my actions!

This, too, is the deeper message behind Avraham and his astrological predictions. Avraham had no prophet to guide him, and so he looked to the heavens for answers. Seeing the stars, he read them as a sign – his future would be childless. But what Avraham failed to grasp was that the stars were not a decree – they were a prompt. As the Sages taught, "Why were the matriarchs barren? Because the Holy One desires the prayers of the righteous." The signs in the stars were not a sentence, but a signal: it was time for prayer.

Avraham thought the stars were an immutable decree. And so, God's response was swift and clear: "Forget your astrological speculations!" God was telling Avraham, "You've read the message, but you've misunderstood its purpose. Don't resign yourself to fate. Act! Pray! Your actions, your faith, your prayers – these are what shape the future."

This, in essence, is the heart of all our struggles. The obstacles in our lives – the "brick walls" that seem insurmountable – are not there to defeat us. They are there, as the great educator Randy Pausch wisely said, "to give us a chance to show how badly we want something." They challenge us not to accept things as they are, but to act. To pray. To change.

*Adapted from Mishlei Ya'akov, pp. 29-31*