

Walk through the Parsha

with **Rabbi David Walk**



LECH L'CHA

I've Got a Little Test

In 1959, I remember watching a TV version of Gilbert & Sullivan's operetta, *The Mikado*. I was excited to watch it, because my favorite comedian, Groucho Marx, was to play Koko the Lord High Executioner. His signature song was *I've Got a Little List*. In this very funny song, which has been updated many times, Koko presents his list of annoying members of society whom he can execute without anyone missing them. (They never would be missed!) We Jews have our own 'little list', but ours is inspiring.

Our list is recited every AM by observant Jews when we recite our morning blessings on Torah study. Since we want to learn a bit of Torah immediately after saying the blessings we read three pieces of inspiring Torah content: First, the Kohein's Blessings from the Torah (Bamidbar 6:24-26), then a Mishna describing the five Mitzvot which have no fixed measure (Pe'ah 1:1), and, finally, a quote from the Gemara enumerating the ten glorious Mitzvot whose fruits we eat in this world but whose full reward awaits us in the World to Come (Shabbat 127a).

It's that final list, which I would like to describe. Here's that list: Honoring one's parents; acts of compassion/kindness; early attendance in the study hall; hospitality; visiting the sick; helping a couple marry; escorting the dead; devotion in prayer; making peace between individuals; and Torah study equals them all.

It's sort of cool that our Sages decided to use a business model to make their point about these Mitzvot. Fruits can be understood as 'dividends' and the KEREN KAYEMET (like the organization) seems to mean that the 'principal' or 'investment' continues to exist into the World to Come.

By 'fruit' we seem to mean immediate tangible benefits. Since most of these Mitzvot are interpersonal, it could well mean that by our behavior we create a kind and compassionate society in which to live. That's already a wonderful development.

By KEREN KAYEMET we seem to mean that the spiritual, eternal merit or reward remains fully intact, awaiting our arrival in the World to Come. We generally believe that our true rewards are received only in the World to Come. Even in this case when we receive at least a portion of our reward in the here and now, the essential reward is still only garnered in the World to Come, and it is not

diminished by our benefits here.

So, why exactly are we discussing this marvelous B'raita this week when we read Lech L'cha? To answer I defer to the Maharal MiPrague: All of these concepts were present in Avraham. Honoring one's parents: Avraham did not wish to depart from Terach in Charan until God released him from this obligation. Acts of loving-kindness: No one was to be found who practiced loving-kindness to the extent that Avraham did... Making peace between one person and another: Avraham was called "the father of a multitude of nations" (B'reishit 17:5). For this reason, he unites and makes peace among all created beings... We see, then, that Avraham mended and united the entire world, just as one mends a tear.

To a certain extent, I feel that the real Torah only begins with the introduction of Avraham Avinu. The earlier stories have a certain charm, and we do learn major ideas from them, but, please, forgive me, they feel alien to me. It's with Parshat Lech L'cha that I begin to feel at home. We are connected to Avraham and want to emulate him. These behavior patterns which we recite every AM have our beloved forebear's finger prints all over them. We are describing the behavior of Avraham and his beloved Sara.

When we carefully peruse the list, three anomalies jump out at us. Seven items are clearly about interpersonal relations between people. However, three items seem to be about one's relationship with God. How are we to understand that discrepancy?

The Tiferet Shlomo (Reb Shlomo of Radomsk) was concerned with this question. He points out that praying with devotion is not an anomaly at all. He points out that the Magen Avraham (Reb Avraham Gombiner, 1635-1682) wrote: Before prayer every morning one should accept upon themselves the positive Mitzva: And you should love your fellow like yourself (Introduction to Orach Chayim 56).

Reb Shlomo also points out that 'if a person studies Torah with the intention of bringing goodness to the people of Israel, his Torah study is the equivalent to all the Mitzvot' ... That is, everything he does is done on behalf of the entire people of Israel. He studies Torah together with the community, and prays with the community, his intention, too, is to awaken divine compassion for the Congregation of Israel.

So, these particular Mitzvot have a dual personality: Part for God; Part for Humanity. So, declares the Tiferet Shlomo. But Rav Kook looks at the list differently. He sees reality as an

amalgam of flowing Time and static Eternity.

These ten Mitzvot are the only ones which fully exist within our normally experienced space time continuum and also are completely intact in the unchanging, eternal reality of the World to Come. Rav Kook goes through each of these Mitzvot to explain why we receive benefits from them in the Here and Now as well as the World to Come.

His comment on Torah study is the most illuminating: There is nothing in the world that is so doubled in its value-penetrating all parts of temporal life to beautify and elevate them, while its supreme light encompasses all worlds upon worlds, hugging all eternal values and sublime purities - as the study of Torah... Because of its immense impact on my behavior and reality in both realms. They are among the things that possess both principal and fruits, and life in both the World to Come and this world. For this reason, the study of Torah is equivalent to them all.

We recite these ten items every morning for so many reasons. They inform us of what activities are the most valuable to our lives; they keep us focused on the here and now as well as the wonderful World to Come; and they keep us connected to our beloved forebear, Avraham Avinu. 