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by Rabbi Yaakov Finestone

## MONEY, MONEY, MONEY!

### PARSHAS LECH LECHA

*During World War Two, Rabbi Avraham Aharon Yudelvitz's (known as the Bais Av) family fled their home in Europe and made their way to Vienna. Many other Eastern European refugees also arrived, fleeing the Nazis. When there was a rumor that the S.S. was about to enter Vienna, Rabbi Yudelvitz's father decided to leave, even though it meant leaving everything behind. Many of the other refugees, however, tried to dissuade him. They told him that things would be okay. They urged him not to cause a panic by fleeing again. The Beis Av's father refused to listen to their arguments and was determined to leave, even though it was only with the shirt on his back. He left everything behind in Vienna, but he and his family survived! Those who remained in Vienna were taken away to concentration camps and killed. They lost not only their property, but their lives as well. They did not want to leave their property behind. When faced with the specter of losing either their lives or their life's savings, people sometimes try to convince themselves that everything will turn out well. They use various irrational rationalizations to avoid giving up their property. That is what these people did. (Rabbi Yissocher Frand on [Torah.org](http://Torah.org))*

Hashem told our forefather, Avraham, to leave Charan. Avraham left, together with his wife, his nephew, Lot, and "the people that they had acquired in Haran" (Bereishis 12:4-5). **Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik** zt"l (**Beis Halevi on the Torah**) asks a question on the psukim.

Lot's having accompanying Avraham is mentioned twice in two consecutive psukim. One pasuk (12:4) says that "Lot went with him [Avraham]". The next pasuk says that "Avraham took his wife Sarai and his brother's son Lot". Why the repetition that Lot came along? Furthermore, why does the first pasuk say that Lot "went" while the second pasuk says that Avraham "took" Lot?

The **Bais HaLevi** answers that initially when Lot had asked to join Avraham's entourage, Avraham dealt with him as with any prospective proselyte asking to join the Jewish people. Avraham tried to dissuade him. A person can be a good person, and it would suffice to follow the 7 Noahide laws. Thus, Lot "went" with Avraham, on his own will, and not by Avraham's invitation. When Avraham saw that Lot was firm in his resolve and wanted to join Avraham's beliefs then he "took" Lot with him, welcoming him into the Jewish people.

**Radak** (12:5) also learns that Lot professed the belief in one invisible G-D, the Creator of the universe. **Radak** adds that Lot also shared his religious beliefs with others, actively encouraging others to believe in one G-D.

*"And they [the 4 kings]  
took Lot and his  
possessions, the  
nephew of Avraham"  
(Bereishis 14:12).*

Later, the Torah considers Lot a *rasha*, a wicked person. The **Torah** says (13:14), "Hashem said to Avraham, after Lot had parted from him...". **Rashi** explains that long as the wicked Lot was with Avraham, Hashem did not communicate with Avraham. **Bartenura** concurs with **Rashi** and adds that at an

earlier time, while Lot was with Avraham, Hashem did speak with Avraham. It wasn't until later that Lot became a *rasha*.

What happened in the interval? How did Lot who had initially joined in Avraham's beliefs eventually became a *rasha*? **Rabbi Yissochar Frand** quotes the answer from **Rav Shimon Schwab**. The **Torah** says, "And they [the 4 kings] took Lot and his possessions, the nephew of Avraham" (14:12). **Rav Schwab** zt"l said that this pasuk is written in a convoluted way. It should have said, "And they [the 4 kings] took Lot, the nephew of Avraham, and his possessions." It should have described Lot as Avraham's nephew before speaking about his possessions. This wording hints at the answer to the question. That which separated Lot from Avraham was "his possessions". Lot's desire for money became a wedge which separated him from Avraham in their entire outlooks on life. When the pasuk mentions Lot, it emphasizes, "Lot and his property, the nephew of Avraham." He was first and foremost associated with his money. That is what he was proud of. Only as an afterthought he was also "the nephew of Avraham." That is why the pasuk also ends

by saying, “He had been living in Sodom”. We already know that Lot was in Sodom. Why does the pasuk repeat that? It is to emphasize the point that the reason why he was there in the first place was because he was drawn there by the economy and the opportunity for easy living. That is why he did not leave Sodom, at this point, or even right before it was about to be destroyed, because he did not want to leave his wealth (14:12).

Money can have a very corrosive effect on people. The **Talmud** (Brachos 61B) says that to some individuals, their “money is dearer to them than their lives”.

The desire for money is a daunting challenge. Obviously, we all need money for our various needs. However, we can’t take the desire for money to an extreme. We must put in the necessary effort to earn what we need. However, we cannot overdo our efforts to earn more, and more money. If we do, we may be sacrificing time with our families and/or time that could have been better spent in spiritual pursuits. And we may not even benefit from the extra money that we thought that we made.

That was the lesson of the Mann. After being taken out of Egypt, when the Jews were in the desert, Hashem provided food in a miraculous way. Mann came from heaven. The Jews went to collect the Mann. Some spent less time collecting it. Others spent more time, ostensibly collecting more Mann. When everyone

returned from collecting the Mann, all had equal amounts, a certain amount for each member of the household. Those who spent more time collecting, did NOT return with more Mann. They received the exact same amount that they would have had they spent less time collecting it.

That is the lesson of the Mann. A person cannot make more money than Hashem designates for him on Rosh Hashana. Even if he works extra hard and seems to be earning “extra” money, he will not be able to benefit from that “extra” money. He will be unable to “use” more than Hashem allocated for his use. He may have unexpected bills that may consume his “extra” money. Also, he may not benefit from the “extra” money that he earned. A specific doctor once felt secure knowing that he had a salary of \$300,000. Unfortunately, a malpractice suit was brought against him. His insurance provider said that it was not covered by his insurance. The “extra” money that this doctor thought that he had, disappeared quickly. Another person once invested hundreds of thousands of dollars which he had worked so hard to earn. To his dismay, he was scammed, and all his money was lost. At one point, Howard Hughes was the richest man in the world. He had spent his life as a workaholic, earning a lot of money. Then he became mentally ill. He became obsessively afraid of germs and was no longer able to enjoy the money that he had worked so hard to earn. (Wings of Faith, Rabbi Asher Zelig Rubenstein zt”l on Shaar Habitachon, written by Rabbi Yosef Tropper).

**Let us remember the lesson of the Mann. Hashem decides our yearly salary. If we put in excessive effort, either we won’t make extra money or we won’t benefit from that extra money. Therefore, we should not trade away the pursuit of money in exchange for quality of life. We should spend time with our families and spend time coming closer to Hashem through learning more Torah and doing more mitzvos.**

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*Rabbi Yaakov Finestone is the director of JEP Queens. For almost 50 years JEP Queens has been in the forefront of kiruv. JEP has changed the lives of thousands of Jewish children enrolled in public schools and kiruv schools. Many are shomrei Torah and mitzvos today because of JEP.*

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