



Avraham Avinu's Great Mission

Parshas Lech Lecha

Leilui Neshmas Meira Chaya Nechama Bracha A"H

Bat David Mordechai V'Zelda Shaindel Sheychu

With the outbreak of the Coronavirus in China and the rumors about what was happening, I hurried to call my dear grandson, Rabbi Dov Barish Henig, the Rebbe's Chabad emissary in Guangzhou, and asked him to leave the country with his family because of the danger.

Most of the Jewish community of about 350 Jews has already left, and only a few dozen stayed. My grandson tried to say that some members of the community still remained and that he still had a mission in place.

I told my grandson that now it was his duty to take care of his soul and those of his family, I ordered tickets for him and asked him to leave China immediately. He packed his belongings and managed to leave on the last flight departing from the province.

He made his way from China to the US, where he settled for the next nine months.

In recent days, my grandson and his family had decided to return to China, to the home they have nurtured in recent years and which has become the address for every Jew in the region. Too many people rely on them and they bear the responsibility for their spiritual and physical well-being.

They were properly prepared for the long journey, which passed through several countries and lasted several days. On Monday last week they left the US, via Detroit and Korea until their arrival in Shanghai on Wednesday night. A Corona test was performed so they could enter quarantine in the country.

Unfortunately, his little boy had a fever. The Chinese were no longer taking risks and hurried to separate him from the family. The mother shouted that she was not ready to leave him and joined the child.

Authorities in China sent my grandson with his three daughters to an isolated hotel while the son and mother were locked in an isolated room. After hours passed, my grandson called me from the hotel where he was staying and told me that his wife and son had been imprisoned for six hours in a facility with no basic and minimal needs, no toilets and water, and the Chinese would not let them out. The Chinese's tough policy on corona seemed scary.

I knew this was a difficult time for both the Chinese people and the guests who wanted to enter China, but I did not give up. I picked up the phone to the embassy and we made an effort until the boy and his mother were released. They were re-examined and the family was reunited.

From Avraham Avinu we learn the challenge of being on a mission in this world. The great challenge Avraham is faced with appears in our weekly parsha - "Go forth from your land and from your birthplace and from your father's house, to the land that I will show you."¹



The difficulty noted by the commentators is well known. The verse seems to be written backwards – one first leave the house of his father, and then from his homeland?

The commentators explain that the Torah goes from the light to the heavy. It is easier to leave the land, and then the homeland, and the most difficult is to leave the house. The Torah showed Avraham first the easy things and then brought him the great challenge.

It is so in other challenges, like the sacrificing of Yitzchak, where it is said "take your son, your only one, whom you loved, Yitzchak", and as Rashi explains, G-d did so to give more reward to Avraham "to make the mitzvah likeable to him and give him a reward for every word."

The challenge of the mission is doubled and multiplied, first, to leave the familiar house, the natural environment, and in the unnatural place to act and bring souls for God.

A person is willing to do for Yiddishkeit under the window of his house, in places that know him and listen to him. It is twice as difficult for him to act in a place of desolation.

This is exactly the mission that Avraham did for G-d. When leaving for the Land of Israel he takes "the souls they had acquired in Haran." Rashi explains that these those whom he had brought under the wings of the Shechinah. Avraham would convert the men, and Sarah would convert the women."

This is the basis of the mission that the Lubavitcher Rebbe has formulated and his emissaries all over the world are the direct continuation of the spread of the light of the Shechinah, like Avraham Avinu in his time.

The story of my grandson's return to China soon became known, and my grandson's many students came out to help and assist him through these days.

They are now in solitary confinement for 14 days in Shanghai, so that they can return to the members of their congregation, and continue in the works of Torah education and kindness they did until nine months ago, and sanctify heaven there in their conduct and deeds.

This phone call my grandson did not expect. David, one of the hundreds of local Jews, called the hotel and asked to speak with my grandson. He told him that "if the rabbi returns, I take it upon myself to start putting on tefillin." My grandson did not need anymore. He knew it was not for nothing that he had made all this way.

My dear grandchildren, who made their way consciously into the mouth of the Chinese lion, did so out of a clear recognition that they are the messengers of the Blessed One to spread and glorify His name in the world.

This is what guides them and this is what has motivated them in the last five years during which they were making souls for God in that huge country.

When they face such great a challenge, it is clear that they are rewarded for every word, and one can only envy them.

¹ Beresheit 12:1.