



EXTREME OWNERSHIP

Erev Shabbos Parashas Lech-Lecha 5781

Dear Parents,

Contrasting views concerning the seriousness of the Covid-19 pandemic, coupled with the final days of perhaps the most contentious presidential election in memory have filled our consciousness with sounds and scenes of conflict, blaming and fault-finding. It seems as if the citizens of today's default reaction to any difficulty, is to immediately look for who to blame, rather than looking inward to see what they could do better.

We know that is not the Torah way. In this week's *Parsha* we see clearly how our forefather *Avraham* was the exact opposite. Not only did he take responsibility for his own actions, not only did he not blame others for whatever he endured, but he was known in his generation as one who would go to great lengths to help another out of a situation the other brought upon himself. Consider the following: In the war between the four kings and the five kings, the locals in *Eretz Canaan* were roundly defeated. This included *Sodom*, and its citizen *Lot*.

We are familiar with the story. *Lot* was captured. The Torah relates (*Bereishis 14:12-14*) how the "survivor" came to tell *Avraham* that *Lot* was a captive. *Rashi* quotes the *Medrash* that says the "survivor" was *Og*, who came with evil intent – he wanted to take *Sarah* for himself, so sure was he that *Avraham* would go off to try and save *Lot* and undoubtedly not return. By preying on *Avraham's* goodness, he schemed to get *Sarah*. It was apparently well known that *Avraham* was such a righteous, kind and responsible individual, that he would endanger himself to save *Lot*. The same *Lot* who abandoned *Avraham* and *Hashem* and attached himself to the wicked people of *Sodom* (*Rashi 13:11*).

The extent of *Avraham's* attitude and behavior toward others is understood on a whole new level by the *Seforno*. The *Seforno* states (*Pasuk 13*) that *Og* was actually unaware that *Lot* was a relative of *Avraham*. Nevertheless, because they were co-religionists, that was enough to give *Og* the confidence that *Avraham* would be willing to risk his life to save a fellow believer in the teachings of *Ever* (Great grandson of *Shem*, head of the *Yeshiva of Shem and Ever*). Such was *Avraham's* reputation! Who among us would endanger our very life to enter into battle against overwhelming forces to attempt to save someone who turned his back on us, despite everything we had done for him, and is now assimilated into a degenerate community?!

...Avraham personified the extreme sense of responsibility that is so missing from today's world."

Avraham remains a model for us for eternity in all aspects of his greatness. How easy it would have been to rationalize that helping *Lot* in these circumstances was completely not his problem. The reasons to justify inaction in the situation should be obvious. *Lot* was an ingrate, *Lot* took unfair advantage of his relationship with *Avraham*, *Lot* was dishonest, *Lot* went off the 'Derech', *Lot* would not have done the same for *Avraham*. Furthermore, he had no means to fight a war against mighty Kings, chances of saving *Lot* were slim and chances of being killed were great.

Despite all this, *Og*, for one, counted on the fact that *Avraham* would endanger himself on behalf of *Lot*. *Avraham* personified the extreme sense of responsibility that is so missing from today's world. *Avraham* took ownership of problems, *Avraham* confronted a challenge and looked inward for a solution. The blame game was the furthest thing from his mind.

What lessons are our children getting from the current state of affairs? Are they imbibing the teachings of *Avraham Avinu* and taking ownership of their own behavior, or are they being drawn towards the anonymous blogger or the overconfident know-it-all who spew forth the misguided idea that everyone else is to blame for my problems? Are they learning that every challenge is someone else's fault and they are helpless victims, or are we teaching them that every trial and tribulation is sent from *Hashem* to enable us to grow into greater people? In the midst of the current difficulties and uncertainties, angst and anger, are we building up our children's resilience and good *Middos* or are we perhaps failing to protect them from this destructive attitude that so negates the potential greatness that every human possesses.

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There is no doubt, that if we internalize the Torah's perspective that blaming others is diminishing ourselves, we will rise above the foolishness that abounds in today's attitudes and media. We will understand that children of *Avraham Avinu* need to rise above the pettiness and strive for the greatness *Avraham* implanted within all his descendants.

Have a great, ennobling Shabbos