

And Yeshua Said to them: *Lech-Lechu*

Parashat Lech-Lecha begins with the words: 'Vayomer Adonai el-Avram Lech-Lecha' {¹*Then Adonai said to Abram, "Get going"* (*Gen. 12:1*)}. In the Hebrew of *Matt. 4:19* we read: 'Vayomer Yeshua eleihem lechu' {¹⁹*And He said to them, "Follow Me"*} – an identical construction. Peter and Andrew's response was immediately they 'got themselves out of their boat' and followed Him. *Yeshua* saw Jacob (James) and John, Zebedee's sons working with their father and they also "²²*Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed Him*" (*Matt. 4:22*).

He was not really seeking large crowds; He wanted disciples (*talmidim*): "*His disciples came to him.*" The job of a disciple was to learn everything that his teacher (master) had to teach. They learned the stories and the lessons that the teacher told. They learned to eat the foods that their teacher ate, and the way their teacher ate them. They learned to keep the *Shabbat* the way their teacher kept *Shabbat* and to practice righteousness (*tzedakah*) the way their teacher practiced it. They learned how to keep (*shomer*) *Adonai*'s commands the way their teacher kept them. The disciple's goal was to become like his or her teacher. Thus, it is written for us: "⁴⁰*A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher*" (*Luke 6:40*). When the disciple was fully trained, he eventually became the teacher and passed on the teaching to disciples of his own, which in turn, became teachers and raised more disciples of their own. From the days of Abraham this was the method! *Yeshua* had a goal for his disciples that they would be his witnesses "*to the uttermost parts of the world.*"

Was *Yeshua* a *Torah* keeper (*shomer*)? I believe *Yeshua* was the greatest *Torah shomer* in all of Scripture! Let us view his first disciple teaching session and observe the *shomer* extraordinaire at His best. Unlike the world's perception of Bible teaching in our day, we see *Yeshua* doing the Jewish Rabbi thing, raising disciples, training them in the ways of *Torah* (*derekh HaTorah*), doing *Naase V'Nishma*, and establishing the Kingdom right now (because The King (*HaMelech*) is here), so that the disciples could indeed start receiving the benefits of the Kingdom (*malchut*). Thoroughly Jewish *Yeshua* is not doing an evangelistic thing – He is doing a thoroughly Jewish thing. He is "*commanding His children after Him to keep derech Adonai by doing tzedakah u'mishpat*" – just like our Father Abraham: "¹⁹*For I have made myself known to him so that he will command his sons and his household after him to keep the way of Adonai by doing righteousness and justice, so that Adonai may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him*" (*Gen. 18:19*).

Yeshua calls His disciples the salt of the earth: "¹³*You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt should lose its flavor, how shall it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men.* ¹⁴*You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.* ¹⁵*Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a basket. Instead, they put it on a lampstand so it gives light to all in the house.* ¹⁶*In the same way, let your light shine before men so they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven*" (*Matt. 5:13-16*). Just like salt adds the flavor to food, we are to add the flavor to the earth. A little bit of salt can make an otherwise bitter taste palatable. We are to be the force for good and righteousness that balances the bitterness and ugliness of the world and all that is evil and wrong and wicked. Salt is used as a preservative. We are to be that which preserves the world – that which repairs/heals the world. He also tells us that we are the light of the world. One little lamp can dispel a lot of darkness. Just as a lamp on a stand gives light to the whole room, so too we are to be the force that dispels the darkness from the earth. Could it really be so simple? Our saltiness and our light (that we are in danger of losing/concealing and therefore being worthless to the kingdom) are our good deeds, our *tzedakah u'mishpat* (*righteousness and justice*). In Hebrew thought righteousness (*tzedakah*) is always idiomatic for the commandments of *Torah*. If we keep the *Torah*, we will keep our saltiness and our light will shine before men.

It is forbidden to even think that *Yeshua* came to abolish the *Torah*: "¹⁷*Do not think that I came to abolish the Torah or the Prophets! I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill.* ¹⁸*Amen, I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or serif (Lit. one iota or one horn/projection/hook; in Hebrew, one yod or one crown an ornament/stroke) shall ever pass away from the Torah until all things come to pass.* ¹⁹*Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But*

whoever keeps and teaches them, this one shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:17-19). How much more so to teach it as a theological pillar of doctrine! His words are absolutely clear and they require no further explanation. The *Torah* is unalterable and remains in force until the end of time. To illustrate His point He alludes to a famous *Midrash* (legend) in which King Solomon tries to justify his penchant for women by editing the text of Deuteronomy. He erases a single letter of the *Torah* in order to change the commandment forbidding him to multiply wives:

*When God gave the Torah to Israel, He inserted therein positive and negative commands and gave some commandments for a king, as it says: '[The King] shall not multiply horses to himself. Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away...' But Solomon arose and studied the reason of God's decree, saying: 'Why did God command, He shall not multiply wives to himself? Is it not 'That his heart turn not away? Well, I will multiply wives and still my heart will not turn away.' At that time, the yud of the word *yarbeh* went up on high and prostrated itself before God and said: 'Master of the Universe! Has thou not said that no letter shall ever be abolished from the Torah? Behold, Solomon has now arisen and abolished one. Who knows? Today he has abolished one letter, tomorrow he will abolish another until the whole Torah will be nullified!' God replied: 'Solomon and a thousand like him will pass away, but the smallest tittle will not be erased from thee.'* (Ex. Rab. 6:11)

The Master virtually quotes this tradition. The meaning of *Yeshua*'s Words is perfectly clear: The *Torah* is in no way to be regarded as abrogated. All the commandments are important and are to be observed by His disciples, the least of the commandments (Deut. 22:6) along with the greatest of the commandments (Deut. 6:4).

Yeshua continues His discussion of Torah observance by saying: "²⁰For I tell you that unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisees and Torah scholars, you shall never enter the kingdom of heaven!" (Matthew 5:20) What does this mean? Can it really mean the way it sounds? The Pharisees and the Teachers of the *Torah* were scrupulous in their observance of the commandments. They were extremely zealous for the *Torah*. They hungered and thirsted for righteousness. They were far more careful in their attention to the details of the letter of the *Torah* than the disciples could ever be. How then, does the Master ask the disciples (and us) to reach a level of righteousness higher than theirs? When the disciples heard this, their hearts must have sunk. Hard words! But the Master did not leave them hanging there. He went on to explain exactly what He meant by giving several examples in the next passages. In these passages He takes a well-known commandment (*mitzvah*) such as '*do not murder*' or '*do not commit adultery*' and he writes them in their heart. *Yeshua* is not saying that His disciples need to be *more righteous* than the Pharisees but He implies that the disciple's standard of righteousness must be higher than that of the Pharisees. In other words, *Yeshua*'s disciples must have stronger protection of the commandments than the Pharisees had – He calls His disciples to do business at the very heart of the matter. The protection He advocates is at the core values of God's law (His *Torah*).

He gives specific examples by protecting (a sort of fence) the prohibition of murder with a prohibition against anger, slander and insult. He fences the prohibition against adultery with a prohibition against lust. He fences the sanctity of marriage with a prohibition of divorce for the sake of remarriage. He fences the prohibition of taking God's name in vain by prohibiting oaths. Each of these fences around original commandments raises the standard of righteous living higher. *Yeshua*'s words expose the internal deviancy of the heart of man. He cuts past external appearances and erects a spiritual fence around *Torah* deep in the heart of man. We must concede that these are high fences – a higher standard of righteousness! It is not that we do not become angry with our brother or that we do not speak insulting words like you fool. Unfortunately, we do, and the Master knows that we do. But He calls us to a higher standard of righteousness. As disciples we must reach higher.

We have a high calling in our life and we are more than able (conquerors) to attain it with His grace, His Spirit and His love. Let us join Rabbi Paul as we declare with him: "¹³Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself as having taken hold of this. But this one thing I do: forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal for the reward of the upward calling of God in Messiah *Yeshua*" (Phil. 3:13-14). Today's *Parashah* is *Lech Lecha*, so let us *Lechi Lach* (you go!) and follow Him, all the way!