

## PARSHAS LECH LECHO – GERSHON HEPNER

*“Avrom took Sorai his wife, and Lot his brother’s son, and all their wealth that they had amassed, and the souls they had made in Choron, and they embarked for the land of Canaan...” (12:5)*

The possuk relates us how Avrom travelled from Choron, together with his wife Sorai, his nephew Lot and all their worldly possessions. Without a murmur, Avrom accepted Hashem’s command and set out on this mystery journey to an as yet unspecified destination.

A group of individuals went with them – a group whose identity is not absolutely clear. The Torah describes them as  
*“Ve’Es HaNefesh Asher Osu VeChoron” - “and the souls they had made in Choron”.*

Who were these people, who ‘made’ them, and how were they ‘made’?

**Rashi** gives a simple explanation that these were household servants, who accompanied their master on the migratory journey. The word ‘HaNefesh’ – ‘the souls’ - is used as a generic term for ‘people’ and is straightforward enough, however the phrase ‘Asher Osu’ – ‘they had made’ – is difficult to understand. **Rashi** quotes a couple of other pessukim where similar expressions refer to amassed wealth. These retainers were considered part of the family fortune, and the wording ‘Asher Osu’ is wholly appropriate.

The **Radak** comments that according to this explanation, the subjects of the verb ‘Asher Osu’ – ‘they had made’ – are Avrom and Lot. We are referring to the (human) ‘wealth’ amassed by the family breadwinners, and the ones who ‘made’ this wealth were Avrom and Lot.

**Rashi** brings a different clarification of the words ‘Asher Osu’ – ‘they had made’. This group of fellow migrants who travelled with Avrom and Sorai were their talmidim. Avrom and Sorai had made it their life’s project to spread the news of Hashem’s existence to the world, and these were their students whom they had converted to nascent Judaism.

The source of this **Rashi** is **Medrash Bereishis Rabbo** (39:14), where **Rabbi Elozor ben Zimra** asked a simple question on our possuk. If all inhabitants of the world were to combine their skills and intelligence, they would still be incapable of creating even a fly and imbuing it with a *neshama*, so how can the possuk state that they ‘made souls’? The answer is that we the possuk is referring to the people whom Avrom and Sorai had converted. Avrohom taught and converted the men, while Sorai did similarly for the women. The **Medrash** continues that anyone who brings a gentile closer to Hashem, is considered as though he created him.

We now have a different understanding of the phrase ‘Asher Osu’ – ‘they had made’. We are referring to Avrom and Sorai who ‘made’ their talmidim, by bringing them closer to the ways of HaKdosh Boruch Hu. The **Targum Onkeles** echoes this sentiment by translating the expression as ‘*Deshabidu Le’Oraysoh*’ – ‘those whom they brought to being committed to the Torah’.

In Sanhedrin (99b) **Reish Lokish** quotes this possuk as a source for his dictum that whoever teaches Torah to another, it is as though he had fathered him. **Rashi** quotes the **Targum** that Avrom and Sorai ‘made’ their students by teaching them Torah. The **Maharsha** adds that without Torah knowledge, Man is on a par with the animal kingdom. Only once a person has learnt Torah, does he begin to fulfil his purpose in life, and only then can he be considered to have been ‘made’.

I had always been under the impression that Avrom and Sorai had nurtured hundreds or maybe thousands of talmidim, so I was surprised to discover that the **Sefer HaYashar** (13:21) puts the number at “around seventy two men”. I don’t know whether this number includes the talmidos of Sorai or not.

**Rabbi Cooper zt”l** once drew my attention to the mysterious disappearance of these talmidim. They were clearly sufficiently devoted to Avrom and Sorai to accompany them on the journey from Choron, yet they disappear off the Torah’s radar, and we never hear of them again! What became of them?

**Rabbi Cooper zt”l** explained that despite their absolute allegiance to the philosophies of Avrom and Sorai, they were totally dependent upon Avrom and Sorai as magnetic personalities. Once their mentors had passed away, these dedicated talmidim felt unable or unwilling to adopt Yitzchok and Rivka as their pedagogic successors. This tragic attitude caused them to “drop out”, and they were excluded from becoming part of Bnei Yisroel.

This tragedy is no more stark than in the case of Eliezer – the unswervingly faithful servant of Avrohom. **Rabbi Cooper zt”l** directed me to an enigmatic Medrash in **Pirkei d’Rebbi Eliezer** (perek 16) that in later life, Eliezer became none other than Og Melech HaBashan! Here lies a simple lesson – without the benefit of a spiritual mentor, the most devout and devoted talmid can plummet in madreigoh to becoming the arch nemesis of Klal Yisroel.

*Le’Iluy nishmas my father in law, Reb Yaakov Chaim ben Reb Menachem HaLevi, whose Yahrzeit falls on 9<sup>th</sup> Cheshvan.*