

Building Your Bible IQ - Parshas Lech Lecha - Developing a Jewish Mind:

1. **Pirkei Avos 5,3:** עֲשָׂרָה נִסְיוֹנוֹת נִתְּנָסָה אַבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ עָלָיו הַשְּׁלוֹם וְעַמְד בְּכֻלָּם, לְהוֹדִיעַ כְּמָה חֲבָתוֹ שֶׁל אַבְרָהָם: With ten trials was Abraham, our father (may he rest in peace), tried, and he withstood them all; to make known how great was the love of Abraham, our father (peace be upon him).
2. **Rashi:**
 1. Abraham was forced to hide underground for thirteen years from King Nimrod, who wanted to kill him (see Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer Chapter 26).
 2. Nimrod threw Abraham into a burning furnace because of his beliefs (Rashi 11:28).
 3. Abraham was commanded to leave his family and homeland.
 4. Almost as soon as he arrived in Canaan, he was forced to leave due to a famine in the land.
 5. The Egyptians seize his beloved wife, Sarah, and bring her to Pharaoh.
 6. The kings captured his nephew Lot, and Abraham was forced to go to war to rescue him.
 7. G-d told Abraham at the 'Covenant Between the Parts' that his offspring, the Jewish people, would suffer under four monarchies.
 8. At an advanced age, he was commanded to circumcise himself and his son.
 9. Abraham was commanded to drive away his concubine Hagar and their son Ishmael.
 10. He was commanded to sacrifice his son Isaac.
3. **Rambam:**
 1. Abraham was commanded to leave his family and homeland.
 2. Almost as soon as he arrived in Canaan, he was forced to leave due to a famine in the land.
 3. The Egyptians seize his beloved wife, Sarah, and bring her to Pharaoh.
 4. The kings captured his nephew Lot, and Abraham was forced to go to war to rescue him.
 5. He marries Hagar after not being able to have children with Sarah.
 6. At an advanced age, he was commanded to circumcise himself and his son.
 7. The king of Gerar captures Sarah, intending to take her for himself.
 8. G-d tells him to send Hagar away after having a child with her.
 9. His son, Ishmael, becomes estranged.
 10. G-d tells him to sacrifice his dear son Isaac upon an altar.
4. **Question #1:** What was the purpose of Avraham undergoing 10 tests?
5. **Question #2:** Why don't Yitzchak & Yaakov have to undergo 10 tests ?
6. **Question #3:** Why does Hashem first tell Avraham to sacrifice Yitzchak and then change his mind? Doesn't Hashem usually say what he means ?
7. **Question #4:** Why does the Rambam omit three of the tests that Rashi lists, especially the first two ?
8. **Two approaches to achieve knowledge of Hashem:** 1) Faith (Emunah); 2) Reason (intellectual).
9. **Advantage of Faith** - unquestionable & rises at moments of crisis . **Disadvantage of Faith** - Not exciting.
10. **Advantage of Reason** - Very exciting. **Disadvantage of Reason** - Begins with a question, which may never be answered, and you can never be more than 'tentative.'
11. **Rambam Sefer Hamitzvos:** היא הצווי אשר צונו בהאמנת האלהות, והוא שנאמין שיש שם עלה וסבה הוא. פועל לכל הנמצאים, והוא אמרו אנכי ה' אלהיך. By this injunction we are commanded to **believe** in God; that is, to **believe** that there is a Supreme Cause who is the Creator of everything in existence. It is contained in the words 'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt.'
12. **Rambam Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah:** יסוד היסודות ועמוד החכמות לידע שיש שם מצי ראשון. והוא ממצאם לא נמצאו אלא מאמתת המצאו וכל הנמצאים משמים וארץ ומה שביניהם לא נמצאו אלא מאמתת המצאו: The foundation of foundations and firmest pillar of all wisdom is, To **know** that there is a First Being, that He caused

all beings to be, and that all beings from heaven and earth, and from between them, could not be save for the truth of His Own Being.

13. **Derech Hashem:** מציאות ה': כל איש מישראל צריך שיאמין וידע שיש שם מצוי ראשון קדמון ונצחי והוא The Existence of G-d: Every Jew needs to **believe and know** that a First Being exists. [This Being] is without beginning or end. He brought into existence and [constantly] creates everything that is present in existence. This [Being] is G-d.
14. **Chovos Halevavos, Introduction:** regarding acknowledging the Unity of G-d, (the question arises) whether we are under duty to examine this by the light of reason or whether it is sufficient if we accept it by tradition alone, namely, that we declare like the simpleton and the fool that "G-d is One" without argument or proof. Or, if we are under duty to investigate through rational inquiry the distinction between true Unity versus relative unity, so as to distinguish [the Unity of G-d] from other existing unities which we call "one". Of this the believer is not permitted by our religion to remain in ignorance, for the Torah exhorts us on this in saying "Therefore, **know this day and consider within your heart**, that the L-ord is G-d in Heaven above and on the earth below. There is none other" (Deut. 4:39)...I once asked a man who was considered among the Torah Sages concerning some of the topics we mentioned regarding the inner wisdom and he replied that on this and similar things, **the tradition is sufficient to stand in place of rational inquiry**. I said to him: "This applies only to those who lack the ability to inquire due to low powers of perception and weakness of understanding, such as women and children, or feeble minded persons (women used to be much less educated than in our times). **But a man who has sufficient power of intellect and perception to attain certainty on the truth of Tradition, and he neglected to investigate this due to laziness or due to holding in light esteem the commandments of G-d and His Torah - certainly he will be punished for this and he sins for having neglected them**. This matter is similar to [the following illustration]. An officer was charged by the king to receive money from the officials of his kingdom. The king gave him special instructions to count the coins, weigh them, and verify their quality. The officer was sufficiently intelligent and skilled to fulfill all that the king had commanded him. But the royal servants cunningly befriended him with words until he trusted in them. They brought the money to him and assured him that it was correct in amount, weight, and quality. He believed them and was too lazy to verify for himself the truth of their words thereby transgressing the king's orders. When the matter reached the king, he ordered that the money be brought before him. When the king questioned the officer as to the total count and weight of the money, he could not answer. Though the amount of money may have been correct, the king condemned him for having been lax in his command in relying on the words of the servant in something he could have obtained certainty for himself. Only if he was not skilled enough to make an accounting, would he not have been found guilty for relying on the servants.....So too, if you were not capable of grasping this subject with your reasoning faculties, as is the case regarding reasons for received commandments, then your excuse for refraining from this inquiry would be valid. Likewise, if your mind falls short and your perception is too weak to understand it, you would not be punished for your neglect, and you would be considered like children and women, who accept it from the Tradition. But if you are a man of intellect and understanding, who is capable of obtaining certainty on what you have received from the Sages and prophets regarding the roots of the religion and the pivots of the deeds, **you are then commanded to use your intellect until you comprehend the matter so that it will be clear to you from both tradition and Reason**. But if you ignore this and are negligent in it, you will be considered as falling short in your duties to the blessed Creator
15. **Conclusion:** A Jew must be raised with unquestioning faith in Hashem which will never change, yet he has a responsibility to understand Hashem as much as he humanly can. Otherwise, he has counterfeit understanding of Hashem. However, when your understanding is in conflict with Hashem, you must submit to Hashem's understanding.

the Chaldeans among the foolish worshipers of stars, and his father, and his mother, like all the people, worshiped stars, and he, although following them in their worship, **busies his heart and reflects until he attains the path of truth, and, by his correct thinking, he understood when he finally saw the line of righteousness.** He knew that there is One God; He leads the planet; He created everything; and in all that is there is no god save He. **He knew that the whole world was in error,** and that the thing which caused them to err was, that their worshiping the stars and the images brought about the loss of the truth from their consciousness. And, when Abraham was forty years old he recognized his Creator. **After he came to this comprehension and knowledge he started** to confute the sons of Ur of the Chaldeans, and to organize disputations with them, cautioning them, saying: "This is not the true path that you are following", and he destroyed the images, and commenced preaching to the people warning them that it is not right to worship any save the God of the universe, and unto Him alone it is right to bow down, to offer sacrifices, and compound offerings, so that the creatures of the future shall recognize Him.

28. **Observation:** Avraham intellectually came to the understanding of the existence of Hashem.
29. **Question:** How does Avraham move from fulfilling the Mitzvah of "knowing" to "believing" in Hashem?
30. **Challenge:** Avraham is developing his Chochma, Bina, and Da'as (3 higher level Sefiros) of Hashem, but he needs to develop these qualities in a Divine way....to emulate his Creator. Only then will he be able to develop the Divine 7 lower levels of Sefiros.
31. **Question:** What Beis Din existed to convert Avram to being a Jew?
32. **POINT:** The 10 tests enables Avraham to make the leap from the man of reason to the man of faith.
33. **Common Denominator of All 10 Tests:** A man of reason would reject all of the tests since they are not rationally sound to human understanding:
- Why should Avraham leave Ur Kazdim and close down his successful outreach just to go to an undisclosed location?
 - That undisclosed location is not inhabitable due to the famine!
 - Egypt is the only place to go, which is the most dangerous place for him to be in!
 - Why bother saving Lot who was not worthy of it?
 - Why should he marry a woman like Hagar who is far from suited to him?
 - Why circumcise yourself thereby disenfranchising yourself from impacting on the world?
 - The only reason he suffers from avimelech is because he is trying to do the will of Hashem and reach out to more people.
 - It is very cruel to throw out Hagar.
 - It is very cruel to throw out his son Yishmael.
 - It is very cruel to murder his son Yitzchak.
34. **POINT:** Yitzchak and Yaakov did not need these types of tests, because they were born into a faith family.
35. **Pirkei Avos 3.9:** כָּל שִׁמְעָשׂוּי מְרַבֵּין מְחֻמָּתוֹ, חֻמָּתוֹ מְתַקְּיָמָת. וְכָל שֶׁחֻמָּתוֹ מְרַבָּה מִמַּעֲשָׂיו, אֵין חֻמָּתוֹ מְתַקְּיָמָת: anyone whose deeds exceed his wisdom, his wisdom is enduring, but anyone whose wisdom exceeds his deeds, his wisdom is not enduring.
36. **Rabbeinu Yonah:** As it comes out that his desire for wisdom is less than his wisdom, and it will come out that his wisdom will continually lessen. So did the early scholars, may their memory be blessed, explain. However one should ask, **how is it possible for his actions to be greater than his wisdom. If he doesn't know the Torah and the commandments; when he needs to do these actions, upon what [basis] will he do them?** Rather this mishnah was speaking according to a fit, good and accepted advice for the one who doesn't know - so that he not destroy his soul. [That advice is] that **he accept upon himself to do all of the things that the sages tell him to do, and not to veer from them to the right or to the left when he knows them.** And he should act according to the Torah that they instruct him and according to the law that they tell him.

And **immediately when he accepts upon himself this acceptance with a full heart and a desiring soul, he brings [himself] reward**, as if he [did] all of the commandments. And according to this approach, they said, "Anyone whose actions are more plentiful than his wisdom," [as] even for the one who does not know and does not do, they are called actions - since he has reward for them as if he did them, on account of [his] acceptance. And so is it explained in The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan 22:1, as we learned there, "Anyone whose actions are more plentiful than his wisdom, his wisdom endures, as it is stated (Exodus 24:7), '**we shall do and we shall understand**.'" As Israel had doing precede understanding, [whereas] they should have said, "we will understand and we will do" - as before one can do an action, they need to understand what to do. However they accepted upon themselves first to do all that He would command them and [that] they would understand; and they received reward from it immediately as if they had done them. "And anyone whose wisdom is more plentiful than his actions, etc." - that he should not say, "I will study this law and [then] I will practice it, I will study the whole Talmud and [then] I will practice it." If he says like this, his wisdom will not endure - as one needs to perfect the traits first and then his wisdom will endure.

37. **POINT:** Hashem did not lie about the Akeidas Yitzchok, as "the main children of a person are his good deeds." (this is my 'brainchild.' These things perpetuate our existence.) Avraham had to sacrifice his Brainchild idea of ethical monotheism.
38. **Bereishis 6, 9-10:** אֱלֹהִים תּוֹלְדוֹתָם נֹחַ וְנֹחַ אִישׁ צַדִּיק תְּמִים הָיָה בְּדַרְתָּיו אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים הִתְהַלֵּךְ־נֹחַ: וַיֻּלְדוּ לֵנֹחַ שְׁלֹשָׁה בְנָיו: This is the line of Noah.—Noah was a righteous man; he was blameless in his age; Noah walked with God. Noah begot three sons: Shem, Cham, and Yefes
39. **Rashi:** לְמַדְרָךְ שֶׁעָקַר תּוֹלְדוֹתֵיהֶם שֶׁל צַדִּיקִים מְעֻשִׂים טוֹבִים: Scripture thereby teaches you that the real progeny of righteous people are their good deeds (Genesis Rabbah 30:6).
40. **POINT:** The Rambam only lists tests that move him from being the man of reason to the man of faith. And all those are written in the Torah - not in the Midrash.
41. **POINT:** The 3 events that the Rambam omits are all prior to test #1 of Lech Lecha.
42. Even a man of reason is willing to die for a cause he believes in. Therefore the Rambam omits the first two events that Rashi listed, as it was rationally sound for a person to do that.
43. The Rashi omits the covenant between the parts as. A test, as well, because it is understandable to Avram that his descendants would suffer at the hands of people who would disagree with the message of ethical monotheism, which he discovered.
44. **Bereishis 12,1:** וְאֶל־הָאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֶרְאֶה לְךָ: to the land that I will show you.
45. **Talmud Shabbos 31a:** There was another incident involving one gentile who came before Shammai and said to Shammai: Convert me on condition that you teach me the entire Torah while I am standing on one foot. Shammai pushed him away with the builder's cubit in his hand. The same gentile came before Hillel. He converted him and said to him: That which is hateful to you do not do to another; that is the entire Torah, and the rest is its interpretation. Go study.
46. **Pirkei Avos 1,15:** שְׁמַאי אוֹמֵר, עֲשֵׂה תוֹרַתְךָ קְבֵעַ. אֵימָר מְעַט וְעֲשֵׂה הַרְבֵּה, וְהָיִי מְקַבֵּל אֶת כָּל הָאָדָם בְּסֹבֵר פְּנִים: Shammai used to say: make your [study of the] Torah a fixed practice; speak little, but do much; and **receive all men with a pleasant countenance**.
47. **Question #1:** Why would Shammai push away the non-Jew if he teaches to receive all men with a pleasant countenance ?
48. **Question #2:** We have no records of Shammi being a builder who would require a builder's cubit?
49. **Question #3:** Why mention with what object Shammai pushed away the non-Jew?
50. **Question #4:** Why does Hillel respond, "That which is hateful to you do not do to another" - which implies that the non-Jew was capable of doing hateful things !
51. **Question #5:** How can you learn anything while standing on one foot ?
52. **Answer:** Judaism stands on two legs: faith & reason.
53. The convert wanted to convert to Judaism only on the leg of reason.

54. Shammai responded that this approach is unbalanced & not level - so it is not possible !
55. **2003:** In a shocking if little-noticed revelation, Schlessinger — who very publicly converted to Judaism five years ago — opened “The Dr. Laura Schlessinger Program” on August 5 with the confession that she will no longer practice Judaism. Although Schlessinger said she still “considers” herself Jewish, “My identifying with this entity and my fulfilling the rituals, etc., of the entity — that has ended.”...Laura Schlessinger began her August 5 program by noting that, prior to each broadcast, she spends an hour reading faxes from fans and listeners. “By and large the faxes from Christians have been very loving, very supportive,” she said. “From my own religion, I have either gotten nothing, which is 99% of it, or two of the nastiest letters I have gotten in a long time. I guess that’s my point — I don’t get much back. Not much warmth coming back.”
56. **Rabbi Benjamin Hecht:** She was the evaluator. One can contrast her attitude with that of Ovadiah the Ger, to whom Rambam wrote in one of the most important letters in Jewish history. Ovadiah approached Torah with humility; his objective was to learn God's Wisdom and apply it within his life. Dr. Laura, in contrast, always seemed to have the answer; she did not perceive herself to be the student. When she thought that Judaism met her standards, she decided to embrace it. Her movement away from Judaism followed the same yardstick; when Judaism did not meet her standard, she rejected it. The bottom line is that she did not turn to Torah for insight into life, morality and ethics. She had her opinions. When she thought Torah shared these opinions, she was all for it. When she now feels that Torah does not connect with her views, she rejects it.
57. Hillel responded that with this approach, a person is liable to justify the worst behaviour in the name of intellect and reason.
58. **Historical example:** Social Darwinism justified Germany’s ethnic cleansing of Jews and other undesirables.
59. **POINT:** Once a person learns not to trust his own intellect, and all decisions of intellect are tested on the basis of Torah., then you can become a Jew. All the rest of Torah will naturally fall into place.
60. **Talmud Bava Kama 38a:** גדול המצווה ועושה יותר ממי שאינו מצווה ועושה: One who is commanded and performs a mitzva is greater than one who is not commanded and performs it.
61. **Question:** I would think the opposite is true?
62. **Answer:** The one who is not commanded does the Mitzvah because of his intellectual decision, while the one who is commanded does the Mitzvah out of faith, bending his own mind before Hashem.