Jewish Tribune – Lech Lecha

**Mission Impossible**

In 1939 George Dantzig, in his first year of post-graduate studies in the University of Berkely, arrived late to a class – to find two maths problems on the board. He copied them down and quickly set about solving this homework, working hard for a few days and then handing his assignment in to his professor. A few weeks later he received an excited knock on his door from Professor Neyman. It turned out that this was not homework – these were two of the most famous unsolved statistics problems. Nobody could solve them because they were ‘impossible,’ yet George was simply unaware that they were impossible and thus was freely able to solve them.

Sometimes in life it is our own constraints and limitations on ourselves that can be suffocating to the point of non-achievement. It takes greatness to dream, think big and aim for the impossible.

This concept finds its roots in this week’s parsha.

HKBH tells Avraham Avinu to look to the heavens and count the stars, promising him that his progeny will be as numerous.

Have you ever been to in the countryside on a clear night? Unspoilt by city lights, the sky is illuminated with thousands of stars. Ever tried counting them? Somewhat of a futile exercise.

How would we react if asked to something seemingly impossible? Would we even bother?

Yet Avrohom Avinu does just that. He begins counting. This is the Jewish way. We aim high and try to achieve the impossible.

Rav Meir Shapiro, the famous Rosh Yeshiva of Chachmei Lublin and originator of Daf Yomi, beautifully explains that this is indeed Hashem’s response. “Koh yihiyeh zarecha”. Not that we will always be as numerous as the stars but rather this is how your descendants will be. Aiming high and trying to achieve the impossible.

When the Ponevezher Rov escaped Europe and re-built his life in Eretz Yisroel, he didn’t just rebuild his own life, he tried to re-build Klal Yisroel and re-create the greatness of the pre-war yeshiva world.

Famously, when he was walking in the then barren fields of Bnei Brak, he described a vast Ponevezh Yeshiva which would house hundreds of boys. Those with him were incredulous. The Yeshiva world had been shattered. There was just a handful of bochurim to talk about. Why build a Beis Hamedrash to house hundreds!?

But that is the Jewish way - koh yihiyeh zarecha. Aim high and achieve the impossible.

In recent years, in the pre-Covid world, my wife and I were honoured to host several Friday night Shabbos meals as one of the dozens of locations of the “Shabbat UK project”. This was all part of the international Project Shabbos which was a phenomenal world-wide success. Running in 340 cities, some report that about one million extra Jews kept Shabbos that week. One million! Who knows what ripple effects that gave rise to?

Where did it start? With one man - South Africa’s Chief Rabbi, Rav Warren Goldstein

Chief Rabbi Goldstein came to Hasmonean in 2014 and shared his dream when he spoke in Beis. But that’s all it was – a dream. It took the hard work of hundreds of members of Klal Yisroel to pull it off. But its success should not have surprised us. After all, that is the message of this week’s parsha – aim high and try to achieve the impossible.

**Rabbi Golker is the Menahel of Hasmonean High School. To listen to his shiurim, go to TorahAnytime.com or JewishPodcasts.Org**