

Potomac Torah Study Center

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NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning more than 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his untimely death.

Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) at www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.

May Hashem protect Israel and Jews everywhere. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world. We celebrate the return of our living hostages and mourn those of our people who perished during the last two years. May we soon retrieve the remaining bodies of our hostages and soldiers who fell in Gaza, and may a new era bring security and rebuilding for both Israel and all others who genuinely seek peace.

After the flood, Noach exits his teva (ark) and copes with the recreated world. Noach does not fit in well with the depopulated world. He plants a vineyard, makes wine, and becomes drunk. The people of the generation after the flood ignore God's command to spread out and repopulate the land. Rather, they settle in the Shinar valley, build a city, focus on technology (such as inventing bricks), and decide to build a tower to heaven to challenge God.

Shinar has one language and culture, because the leaders suppress minority languages and cultures. They force everyone in the area to use the same language and follow the same customs. While one might applaud new efforts to use technology, Shinar uses its innovations to ignore God and His gifts (such as readily available stones ideal for building). The newly created world quickly descends into evil and violence. One may infer that forcing everyone to use the same language and customs requires violence. God reacts by changing the languages of the people of Shinar and making many of them move elsewhere. Even so, the hostility of the people to God challenges what Hashem wants from humans.

Abram is a tikkun for the evils of Shinar. God selects Abram and Sarai to create a new nation to embody His values and bring them to other nations, because He sees that Abram believes in monotheism and Hashem's ethical/moral values. While Shinar embodies violence, forced uniformity, and glorifying the people of their city, Abram represents belief in Hashem, chesed and mishpat (kindness and justice), and informing as many people as possible of proper religious and moral values. God tests Abram numerous times, starting by asking him to go to a place that He will direct him, when Abram is seventy-five years old. Abram immediately obeys Hashem's order to move around – indeed, instead of building a home, Abram builds monuments to Hashem in every location and sets up tents as a dwelling places.

God promises Abram a son. Sarai becomes impatient and tells Abram to take her Egyptian servant Hagar, and make a child from her. When Abram is ninety-nine years old and Sarai is eighty-nine, Hashem comes to them, gives Abram the mitzvah of circumcision, promises them a son, and changes their names to Avraham and Sarah. Hagar and Yishmael (Avraham's son through Hagar) demonstrate evil tendencies, so Sarah demands that Avraham send them away. (God tells Avraham to obey Sarah.)

God selects Avraham for covenants and blessings, because he demonstrates loyalty, proper values for legacy (working to establish a legacy for his deceased brother rather than for himself), and a desire to teach others about God's existence

and values). When Hagar fears that her son Ishmael will die of thirst in the desert, God tells her that he will be a wild man and that his descendants will be bandits and violent oppressors. Hagar praises Hashem for this legacy – one that a moral person would abhor and ask to be changed. Hagar and Ishmael embody the evil values of the pre-flood world, Shinar, and Egypt. No wonder that Sarah does not want Ishmael around during Yitzhak's childhood.

Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander reminds us that while we live in a time with evil nations and anti-Semites challenging us, we Jews must embody chesed and mishpat, the values of Abraham, Moshe, and our prophets. We must maintain these values even in the face of evil from Hamas and anti-Semites around the world. Some brave world leaders are following the lead of Cyrus, the benevolent King of Persia, in accepting and encouraging Israel. The Abraham Accords have brought peace with some of the Moslem countries. The current administration in the United States supports Israel strongly and vigorously fights anti-Semitism. While many countries have regressed and now encourage anti-Semitism (Canada and most of Europe, for example), some additional countries are supporting Israel since seeing the evils of Hamas. Rav Kook reminds us that we have the freedom to choose to do good or evil. God's will in creating the world includes the universe's inner aspiration to perfection. Avraham proclaims Hashem's command of the world, that we should be God's agents in tikkun olam. After going through two plus years of the evil of Hamas and its torture of our hostages, at least the living hostages are now home. The time has come for us to recover from the horrors of the recent past, rebuild, and promote Hashem's and Avraham's values to make the world a better place.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah and Alan

Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at www.alephbeta.org. Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during and since the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlema for Velvel David ben Sarah Rachel; Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Daniel Yitzchak Meir HaLevy ben Ruth; Avram David ben Zeezl Esther, Avraham Dov ben Blimah; Ariah Ben Sarah, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Miriam Bat Leah; Yehudit Leah bas Hannah Feiga; Miriam bat Esha, Chana bat Sarah; Raizel bat Rut; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sharon bat Sarah, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah & Alan

Haftarat Parshat Lech Lecha: Three Engines of Destiny

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander *
President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

Dedicated in loving memory of Fanny Siegel z"l

The connection between this week's haftara and the parsha is not immediately obvious. The haftara, from the Book of Yeshayahu and focused on a prophecy of love and encouragement, does contain one passing mention of the patriarch

Avraham – the parsha's protagonist. Yet the more striking parallel to the parsha's account of the founding of the Jewish people appears not in that verse, but in the cryptic passage that immediately precedes it, at the beginning of chapter 41 (vv. 1–4):

Hush before Me, coastlands and nations; renew your strength, and then come forward, speak, draw close; let us come into judgment. Who roused the one from the east and called victory to his feet? Who herded nations before him, laid their kings low, and made his swords numerous as dust, his bowshots like chaff in the wind? He pursued them and came through in peace on paths that his feet never walked. Who was it who acted and did this, who called forth generations long before? I, the Lord, am the first, and I shall be, I, with the last who will be.

The reference to this mysterious savior “from the east” has fired the imaginations of commentators throughout the ages. Who this figure might be has been intensely debated, and these different suggestions together reveal a valuable lesson: Multiple forces in history can converge to create the necessary conditions for redemption. It is a process that continues to play out before our eyes today, even during the difficult years since the attacks of Oct. 7 and the multifront threats faced by Israel and the Jewish people, not only from neighboring countries, but from antisemitism globally.

The prophet Yeshayahu describes an unnamed individual called from the east by God to achieve victory over numerous nations and bring an era of peace and prosperity to Israel. But is this an event that has already happened? Or one that is yet to come? The original Hebrew text leaves this question open.

Commentators have offered three possible figures for this mighty easterner, each representing a different paradigm of redemption.

According to Rashi *ad loc.*, following Bereshit Rabba 43:3(, the prophet is referring to Avraham Avinu. Rashi explains that the Jewish people's oldest patriarch was called out of the east by God to journey to the land of Canaan in the paramount act of faith. Avraham marked military victories over ancient Levantine kings)see Genesis 14(, but more importantly, he became a spiritual champion for everyone around him, serving as a model of justice and righteousness that inspired an entire civilization and reintroduced God into the world. As the first Jew, Avraham exemplified an authentic version of chosenness, highlighting the responsibilities, rather than the privileges, of being selected by God.

Ibn Ezra, in contrast, suggests that the savior celebrated in our haftara is in actuality King Cyrus of Persia. This great non-Jewish emperor is celebrated in the Scriptures as a deliverer who conquered and punished the Babylonian tyrants responsible for the first destruction of the Kingdom of Judah and the Temple. The text portrays Cyrus, whose empire extended over much of the Near East, as graciously inviting the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild their shattered homeland. In performing these acts of kindness – knowingly or not – Cyrus was advancing God's plan for the Jewish people's sacred destiny.

A third possibility, found in the Midrash *Shir Hashirim Zuta* 2:9(, envisions the mysterious figure as the Messiah. Emerging from the east like the rising sun, the Messianic King will usher in a new dawn for the Jewish people and the world. According to this interpretation, Justice will prevail, and the Jewish people will finally know true peace, spreading the light of God and the Torah to the farthest reaches of the world.

History shows the necessity and utility of all three of these prototypes in furthering the process of redemption. The Jewish people, embodying Avraham's model of moral and spiritual leadership, must choose every day to uphold justice and responsibility. Leaders of other nations around the world, symbolized by Cyrus, can similarly facilitate or hamper God's vision for the world by supporting or opposing the people of Israel in their sacred work. Lastly, the divine hand of God in history, personified by the Mashiach, guides the world, sometimes mysteriously and convolutedly, toward its ultimate purpose.

In our times, we have seen all three paradigms converging marvelously and miraculously in the great and terrible multi-front war that still continues today, even though some relief has been achieved by the recent return of the remaining living

hostages from Gaza. We have seen the Jewish people choose, time and again, the path of justice and morality in war, standing as a beacon of what humanity can be and become even in the most difficult of circumstances. These choices are only the latest in a longstanding tradition of moral, intellectual, and scientific leadership that the Jewish people have shown in the world at large, always in the interest of furthering peace and prosperity.

At the same time, certain world leaders have stepped forward, standing up in the face of overwhelming global hate and antisemitism in support of the State of Israel. To be such a leader in today's world is still to move against the tide, but that makes such individuals' decisions all the more impressive and noteworthy. They are modern Cyrus, choosing to be instruments of God in the world and history, and they will be viewed as such by future generations.

And finally, we have seen the hand of God revealed in the innumerable miracles, occurrences, happenstances, and coincidences that have saved so many lives over the past two years and which have made the Jewish future seem more assured now than at any other time in recent history.

Three thousand years have passed since Avraham first embarked on the Jewish mission. And at every moment since that time, the forces of history – natural and human, seen and unseen – have never ceased to advance that mission toward the state of redemption that we all await. Let us pray that the process of salvation that we have begun to witness comes swiftly to its conclusion, and that we will all merit to witness the fulfillment of God's words of comfort that we hear in the Haftara this week: "*I strengthen you and help you, uphold you with My right hand of righteousness*" (Isaiah 41:10).

* Ohr Torah Stone is a modern Orthodox group of 32 institutions and programs. Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founding Director, and Rabbi Dr. Brander is President and Rosh HaYeshiva. For more information or to support Ohr Torah Stone, contact ohrtorahstone@otsny.org or 212-935-8672. Donations to 49 West 45th Street #701, New York, NY 10036.

Drasha: Parsha Lech-Lecha: Suicide Moms *

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky © 2001

For [many] years, I have patterned this d'var Torah in a standard way. I quote a verse, ask a question and then relate a story. I then conclude by explaining my answer to the Biblical question, hoping that the story I related has some enlightening or plausible connection.

In the topsy-turvy world we live in, I'd like to do something different this week. I'd like to relate a few stories first, ask a question on the almost incomprehensible stories, and then relate a verse from the Torah, with the hope that the Torah's prescience will help us to in some way understand them.

Hussein Nasr was a failed suicide bomber. He plowed an explosive-laden truck into an Israel army post. He wanted to kill himself along with as many Israeli soldiers as possible. He was only partially successful in his mission, as the only one blown to bits by his evil scheme was he himself.

Like proud relatives filming a family simcha (happy occasion), the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) took a video of his truck plowing into the Israeli post. Until Nasr's 71-year-old father, Hassan, heard of his son's actions, he said that he had no idea his son belonged to Hamas. But when he heard about the attack on Israeli radio, he declared, "I am proud of him. The whole world is proud of him. Even the land is proud of him here," he said.

Here's another story, that defines a new level of chutzpah.

The proud mother of Iman Atalalla, who killed Israeli soldiers by detonating a bomb-laden car, submitted forms requesting welfare payments of \$150 a month through the Islamic

Rescue Committee — regarded in Israel as a Hamas fund-raising group. On the welfare application, the bomber's family wrote: "Died: September 12 1993; Place: Gaza; Circumstances of incident: suicide mission in booby-trapped car."

The terrorist was single, aged 20, and came from a family of nine. The family called Atalalla "polite and moral," and said he "fasted Mondays and Thursdays, prayed and read Koran." Describing his attack that killed two Israeli soldiers, the report said: "When 'his prey' approached he switched on the ignition, approached the enemy's vehicle and set off explosives, which sent a male and female soldier to]their deaths, and[the shahid)martyr(went to Paradise."

Finally, from The New York Times this past Sunday, 10/21/2001:

"I named my son Osama, because I want to make him a mujahid. Right now there is war, but he is a child. When he is a young man, there might be war again, and I will prepare him for that war. I will sacrifice my son, and I don't care if he is my most beloved thing. For all of my six sons, I wanted them to be mujahedeen. If they get killed it is nothing. This world is very short."

The question is simple. Where does such moral depravity come from? How is it possible that parents consider their progeny heroes for blowing themselves up while killing others? How is it humanly possible for a mother and a father to be proud parents of monsters?

In this week's portion, Hagar, Avram's maid servant, is driven from his home by Avram's wife, Sara. As Hagar wanders the desert, she is found by an angel who approaches her at a wellspring.

The angel prophesies,

"Behold, you will conceive, and give birth to a son; you shall name him Ishmael, for Hashem has heard your prayer. And he shall be a wild man – his hand against everyone, and everyone's hand against him; and over all his brothers shall he dwell.")Genesis 16:11-12(Powerful words.

Predictions of a fate that dooms Ishmael to a violent life, one that the commentaries interpret as "Ishmael being a highwayman and bandit, everyone will hate him, fear him, and battle him." Yet Hagar's response to this bestowing is as incomprehensibly baffling. She lauds the angel and "she called the Name of Hashem Who spoke to her 'You are the G-d of Vision.'")Genesis 16:13(.

Imagine. Hagar is told that her son will be a wild man who attacks and terrorizes, yet she does not protest nor pray that his fate should be altered. Rather, she responds with praise and exaltation for a "G-d of Vision." It sounds like she is content, even proud, and frankly I just don't get it. And though I'm clueless about Hagar's attitude, perhaps now I know why so many of her descendants don't think much differently.

It is obvious that not all of them do, of course. Everyone controls his or her own destiny. But maybe there is a national predisposition to violence. Maybe these parents are genetically infused with pride, knowing that the promise to their forebear has borne its rotten fruit. The values imparted from a nomadic matriarch have been transmitted like a deadly virus to her grandchildren, and Hagar's satisfaction is now theirs.

So this misplaced pride is not a new story. It's 3000 years old. And if you don't believe me, you can look it up.

Good Shabbos

* I reprint this column every year, because the message is too important not to remember.

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/drasha-5785-lechlecha/>

Should a Father Personally Circumcise His Son? – The Mitzvot of Bris and Milah

By Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2018

QUESTION: I am the father of a newborn beautiful baby boy. The bris is coming up in a few days. Since I have a mitzvah to give my son a bris, and the mohel is just an agent, is it better that I do the bris myself (after the mohel sets everything up, of course)?

ANSWER: Mazal Tov to you, your wife, your new son, and your whole family.

A good way to approach your question is to start by looking at the blessing that the father makes during the bris ceremony, while the mohel is performing the circumcision. *“Blessed are you Lord... who has commanded us to bring him – my son – into the covenant of Avraham our father.”*

The covenant of Avraham that this blessing refers to is, of course, the covenant of circumcision as we read at the end of our parasha:

And God said unto Abraham: Thou shalt keep my covenant, you and thy seed after thee for all generations. This is my covenant, which ye shall keep... every male among you shall be circumcised. (Gen 17:9-10).

The blessing over bringing the child into the covenant that the father makes is distinct from the blessing that the mohel makes, *“... Who has commanded us on the milah.”* The need for, and wording of, these two blessings highlight the two distinct components of every bris milah: the bris – the covenant of which it is a sign, and the milah – the actual circumcision itself.

When we speak about a father’s obligation to circumcise his son, the question that we have to ask is – is this an obligation to perform the circumcision itself, or is it rather an obligation to bring his son into the covenant by ensuring that a circumcision is done by a competent and qualified person?

Rishonim are divided on this point. Ramban, Tosafot, Tosafot Rid, and Maharch Or Zarua all state that it is only the father’s responsibility to see that his son get a bris, not to do it himself.

They infer this from the discussion in the Gemara (Kiddushin 29a) about whether the mother is obligated as well. The Gemara rules that she is not, based on the verse *“as God had commanded him (Avraham)”* (Gen. 21:4). The obligation, says the Gemara, is only on him not on her. These Rishonim question why such a verse is needed, since women are anyway exempt from a time-bound mitzvah. They answer that what is at issue here is not the mother’s obligation to personally circumcise her son; which she is clearly exempt from, as it is a time-bound mitzvah. What is at stake, rather, is whether she is obligated, as the father is, to ensure that the circumcision takes place. This obligation of responsibility, rather than of ritual performance, does not follow the normal rules of time-bounded exemptions (Tosafot Rid elaborates on this by stating that the handling of the arrangements is not limited to any time of the day!).

It emerges that according to these Rishonim, the obligation that rests on the father is that of seeing that the circumcision is performed, not of doing the circumcision himself. As such, Maharch Or Zarua states that even if the father is a mohel, there is no need or value in his doing the bris himself.

Against this, Rema (*Darkhei Moshe*, YD 264:1) quotes a ruling in the name of the Or Zarua (the father of Maharch Or Zarua) that if the father can do it himself, it is forbidden for him to have someone else do the milah. Or Zarua is saying that it is the father’s personal mitzvah to do the circumcision.

This position is supported by Rosh. In a discussion regarding a fine that is levied on someone who steals a mitzvah from another person, he states that if the father was planning to do the milah and someone else did it, he must pay the father this fine. Rema in *Choshen Mishpat* (382) rules likewise. Shakh agrees and states that from this we can conclude that if the father is a mohel, it is forbidden for him to allow someone else to do the circumcision, as this would be giving his mitzvah to someone else.

This latter approach is what informs the practice of the father appointing the mohel as an agent, although poskim seriously question whether this is of any value. If it indeed is the father's mitzvah to do the act of circumcision, he should not be able to have anyone else do it for him, just as he cannot have someone sit in a sukkah or listen to a shofar for him. I tend to agree with this approach, and do not see much halakhic value in appointing the mohel as one's agent, although it does help to ritually concretize the father's responsibility to oversee the process.

The practice that you have asked about – where a mohel sets everything up, and the father does the actual cutting himself, is also based on the poskim who state that it is primarily the father's mitzvah. However, even those poskim were only ruling that the father should do it if he is a mohel, and did not say that this applies to an amateur. Besides concerns for the child's well-being, there is also a question whether someone can be obligated in something if he is unable to do it himself. Moreover, poskim say explicitly that if there is someone better available, then the father should have the more competent person do it.

I am more persuaded, both logically and textually, by those who rule that the father's obligation is only to see that the circumcision takes place. This, as we have seen, is also reflected in the two blessings. The father must bring the child into the covenant, the mohel (or any competent person) must do the circumcision.

The congregation's response also demonstrates this. After the father makes his blessing, the community responds: "*ki'shem she'nikhnas labrit...*," just as he has entered into the covenant, so should he enter into Torah, chuppah, and good deeds. This is not the original wording of this declaration, however. The original version was – "*ki'shem she'hikhnasto la'brit, ken takhni'seihu l'Torah li'chuppah u'li'ma'asim tovim.*" "*Just as you have brought him into the bris, so should you bring him into Torah, chuppah, and good deeds.*" Their response was a blessing to the father to fulfill his other obligations to his son – to teach him Torah, to see that he gets married, and to teach him a trade and make him a responsible member of society. In this context, it is clear that the obligation is to see that the bris be performed, and not that he do it himself, just as it is not his obligation to personally teach him Torah and a trade and to find him a wife, but just to ensure that all of these are done.

In my opinion, the textual evidence and logic all dictate that it is not the father's responsibility to do the circumcision himself. There is an infant and his well-being at stake here, and being "*machmir*" for this approach could be a chumrah at the expense of others and should not be done. At the same time, I respect those mohalim who insist that there is no danger in having the father doing the cutting. And I know some fathers who have said that it was a powerful experience for them to do this. As a matter of halakha, however, I just don't see the point in it, and personally, I wouldn't want to take the risk, no matter how small.

Two final notes:

The reason that the blessing of the community was changed to the passive tense ("*just as he has entered into the covenant, so he shall enter into, etc.*") was because of cases of babies who fathers had died, and thus there was no father to whom to give this blessing. In such cases, the text was changed to refer to the baby and not the father, and so as not to make such families feel different and possibly embarrassed, the revised text was adopted in all cases. This is a very important lesson for all of us regarding the sensitivity that we must have in general, and in particular around lifecycle events.

Whether the mother has an obligation to take care of the bris if the father is not available is debated in the poskim. On the basis of the Gemara in Yevamot (71b), Maharach Or Zarua concludes that the mother does have such an obligation

before the obligation reverts to beit din. Others disagree. An important ramification of this debate is whether, in such a case, the mother could make the brakha “*li’hakniso*.” The current practice in such a case is to have a male relative make the brakha as a representative of the beit din.

[NOTE]: Our son Evan, who is a Board certified internist and nephrologist, performed the bris on both his sons, after the Mohel set up the clamps. Evan, however, had already performed a number of surgical procedures, so his situation differs from the typical one that Rabbi Linzer discusses.

Shabbat Shalom!

From my archives

Anonymous Souls: Thoughts for Parashat Lekh Lekha

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

“And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother’s son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had made in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan...” (Bereishith 12:5).

Abram heeded God’s call to leave his land, his birthplace and his father’s home and to set off for a new land where he would become a great nation. His wife and nephew accompanied him; but so did “*the souls they had made in Haran*.” Who were these “souls?”

Rabbinic tradition has it that Abram and Sarai spread the belief in one God. Abram converted the men, and Sarai converted the women. The “*souls they had made in Haran*” were followers of the teachings of Abram and Sarai. This anonymous group not only adhered to the beliefs of Abram and Sarai, but they chose to make enormous sacrifices to accompany their teachers to the new land. Like their leaders, they too had to leave their homeland and their families. Their devotion to Abram and Sarai — and to One God — was remarkable.

These “souls” were not just spiritual followers; they were willing to risk their lives for their teacher. When Abram’s nephew Lot was captured in a war, “*Abram led forth his trained men, born in his house, three hundred and eighteen of them*” (Bereishith 14:14). Supported by this impressive militia, Abram was victorious in battle. When the spoils of war were offered to him, Abram refused to take anything but insisted that his men receive their fair share in appreciation of their bravery. Just as the souls were loyal to Abram, Abram was loyal to them.

The Torah focuses on the lives of Abram, Sarai and their descendants. It does not tell us what happened to the anonymous souls. Did they retain their faith in One God? Did they pass on the faith of Abram and Sarai to their children and grandchildren?

I think the Torah suggests that these unusually good people continued to impact society positively. They were deeply attached to the ideas and ideals of Abram and Sarai and sacrificed much on behalf of their teachers and their One God. These souls, even though not part of the family of Abram and Sarai, were the representatives of faith and righteousness to society at large. They stood with Abram and Sarai loyally and courageously. They became leaders in general society by spreading the faith and teachings of Abram and Sarai.

These anonymous souls deserve respect and appreciation. They represent the good people of every generation — including our own — who stand faithfully and loyally with the descendants of Abram and Sarai. They are with us in good times and bad; they sacrifice for us and for our shared ideals. The Talmud teaches that the righteous of all nations have a place in the world to come. These anonymous souls are among the righteous who deserve not only a place in the world to come, but our sincere respect and appreciation in this world.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, and rabbi emeritus of the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York City.

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Abraham Wasn't Electable – But He Was Elected! --Thoughts on Parashat Lekh Lekha

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

Abraham must have been a very unpopular man in the society and family in which he was raised. He wouldn't likely have been elected to lead the citizenry of Ur Kasdim. He rejected their worldview, smashed their idols, repudiated their (un)ethical system. Who would vote for Abraham? He was a starry-eyed mystic and philosopher, not interested in pandering to the values and interests of his fellow citizens.

A Midrash tells a story that Terah, Abraham's father, was not only an idolater, but did business manufacturing and selling idols. One night, the young Abraham went into his father's shop and smashed all the idols, except one. In that last idol's hand, Abraham placed a hammer. When Terah went to his shop the next morning, he was shocked to see the idols broken to pieces. He asked Abraham: who could have done such a terrible act of vandalism? Abraham answered: the idol holding the hammer must have smashed the other idols. Terah responded: that's impossible, that idol is made of stone, it can't do anything. Abraham retorted: if you don't believe a stone idol can smash other idols, why do you believe it is a powerful god? It's just a piece of powerless stone!

Children like this story because it shows how Abraham outsmarted his father, thereby demonstrating the foolishness of idolatry. Abraham thus made his preliminary case for the truth of ethical monotheism.

As we grow older, though, this story requires a more sophisticated interpretation. After all, we do not think that idolaters really believe that their idols are gods. Rather, the idols are symbols of gods. Terah certainly would never have imagined that one of his idols could act autonomously. He would have thought that his idols were symbols of gods, or that in some way the gods' spirits rested within the idols. So he would not have been impressed with Abraham's question and seeming refutation of idolatry. By analogy, we pledge allegiance to the flag – but the flag is just a piece of cloth, with little intrinsic value. When someone burns the flag, though, we are outraged – not because a piece of cloth was set ablaze, but because that flag is a powerful symbol to us of our nation and our values. Terah would have been outraged to see his idols shattered, in a similar sense to the outrage we feel when our flag is desecrated.

Perhaps that Midrash was alluding to a deeper idea. It was telling us something important about Abraham that would have convinced God to choose Abraham to be father of a new nation.

Abraham was living in Terah's household. He knew his father worshipped idols and promoted idolatry. What young boy wants to rise up against his father's values and his father's business? It would have been so much easier for Abraham to hold his peace, and wait until he was old enough to live on his own before he espoused his monotheistic views. Moreover, even if Abraham chose to argue with his father about the worthlessness of idols, why would he have vandalized his father's shop, an action that was bound to generate a lot of discussion and anger among the townspeople? Furthermore, why would he make a public mockery of idolatry while living in a society full of idolaters? It would have been so much more convenient for Abraham to remain silent, to keep his ideas to himself, to respect the mores of his father, his birthplace, his society.

The Midrash is teaching us that Abraham was a powerful, courageous individual who was not afraid to dissent from the majority when he knew that the majority was wrong. Abraham was willing to risk his own comfort by defying the perverse ideas and values of his father and of the entire idolatrous society. He did not just speak out against idolatry: he had the gumption to smash idols, to bring matters to a head. He was not "diplomatic" in espousing belief in one God and in rejecting idolatry.

Thus, when God saw that Abraham was absolutely not "electable" by his community, God decided that Abraham was His man. God "elected" Abraham – a man of incredible personal strength and vision – to set out on the journey, to leave his society, his birthplace, his father's home. God elected Abraham to establish a new nation, with a new vision, a new idealism, a new ethical system, a new way of relating to God.

The words "*lekh lekha*" are commonly translated: get thee out. But they can also be translated as: go to yourself. In the latter sense, God was telling Abraham: go to yourself, to your own inner core; don't be misled by your father and his society; don't strive to conform and get along. Stand on your own, be true to yourself. If you "go to yourself" and stay faithful to who you are, you will be the father of a great nation.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. Please share this Angel for Shabbat column with your family and friends, and please visit our website jewishideas.org for many articles that foster an intellectually vibrant, compassionate and inclusive Orthodox Judaism.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/abraham-wasnt-electable-he-was-elected-thoughts-parashat-lekh-lekha-rabbi-marc-d-angel>

Lech Lecha – Spousal Expectations

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

May this Dvar Torah be a Zechus Refuah Shileima for Cholei Yisroel

Ezra and Beverly Grazi sponsor Rabbi Rhine's Dvar Torah this week in loving memory of Eliyahu ben Mazal and Chana Chaya bat Sarah.

The marriage journey of Avraham and Sara was remarkable. Together they stood apart from the pagan world around them. Together they left the place of their birth and traveled to the promised land. Together they hosted thousands of guests and guided many of them to recognize Hashem. In this week's parsha, Sara communicates a complaint to Avraham. She says, "*What was stolen from me — it is your responsibility.*" (16:5)

Rashi explains that after the world war of the four and five kings, Hashem promised Avraham a bright future. Avraham responded, "*But I am childless.*" Hashem promised Avraham that he would have a child. Later, when Sara offered Avraham to marry Hagar, Hagar became pregnant. Sara's complaint was, "*When you stood in front of Hashem and told Him that it bothered you that you were childless, you only asked for yourself. What about me? Had you said that you were bothered that we were childless we would both have been blessed, together. Now you will be having a child (through Hagar), and I am left childless.*"

I have no doubt that when Avraham said to Hashem, "*But I am childless,*" he meant "*We.*" There is no reason to assume that Avraham had any intention to father children from another woman, until Sara initiated that offer (16:2). Yet, Sara felt that because Avraham's wording only specified himself, the breakthrough that was achieved during that audience with Hashem only affected him. Sara objected. "**We are partners in every way,**" she argued. "*How could you have left me out of the prayer and its resulting blessing?*"

What emerges from Sara's complaint is a remarkable insight into the expectations that one spouse can have of the other. Sara considered the omission in Avraham's prayer a level of theft. He omitted something that she was entitled to. *"As your loyal spouse, how could it be that you did not pray for me? It was in your power to help me; how could it be that you left me out?"*

I am reminded of a story I heard many years ago of a man whose wife was in the midst of a life-threatening labor. The man came to the home of the Rebbe to ask the Rebbe to daven for his wife, but the Rebitzen told him that the Rebbe was away. The man asked to speak to the Rebbe's son, a respected community leader in his own right, and the Rebitzen told him that the son was also away. Seeing the pain that the man was in she said, *"Perhaps you should try my grandson. He is playing out in the back now. One day he will be the Rebbe. You should tell him your story. Maybe he can help you."*

The man made his way to the back of the house and found the grandson playing, just as the Rebitzen had described. He was a young man, not yet bar Mitzva, playing with his friends in an age-appropriate way. The man approached the young man and explained his problem. He described how his wife was in a life-threatening situation and that both his wife and the unborn child needed this young man's prayers. The young man stood respectfully before the man and said, *"I am not the Rebbe. I do not really know if I can help you."* The man said, *"I realize you are a young man, and that you are not yet the Rebbe. But your grandmother said I should go to you because your grandfather and father are away."* Then in a low but steady voice the man added. *"If indeed you cannot help me, I bear no grudge against you. But if it is true that you can save the life of my wife and child... I will hold this against you. I will never forgive you, not in this world and not in the next world."*

The young man stood still, thinking and absorbing the man's words. Then, stepping into the task at hand, he said softly in a voice of mature determination, *"Come with me to the Mikva."*

They came to the Mikva, and the young man prepared himself with prayers. He then entered the Mikva and immersed... The man watched from the adjacent room as the young man's head went down into the water and wasn't coming up. He began to panic. He began to fear for the young man's life.

Suddenly, the young man emerged, breathless and totally exhausted from the ordeal he had just initiated. As the young man recovered, the man could see that beneath the physical exhaustion, the young man was beaming.

"She and the child will be fine," the young boy exclaimed. *"Go home now. There is only blessing."*

When the Rebbe returned and heard about the story he nodded gravely, *"He is too young to be extending himself in this way."* But apparently the man's words yielded results. *"If it is not in your power I bear no grudge. But if it is true that it is within your power..."*

As time passed by it became clear that Avraham's prayer was for both him and Sara. Eventually they would be blessed with a son, Yitzchak, together. Yet, at the time Sara felt wronged. Her complaint teaches us something powerful about relationships. **If it is within our power to daven for someone close to us, there is an element of theft, because they are entitled to have us do our best. Davening works: it is in our power to make a difference. Davening for our loved ones isn't an extra. It is laden with Sara's question, "How could it be that you stood in tefilla, and davened for yourself and not for me."** [emphasis added]

With heartfelt blessings for a wonderful Shabbos.

* Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of more than 20 years. Based in Maryland, he provides services internationally via Zoom. He is the Director of TEACH613: Building Torah Communities, One family at a Time, and the founder of CARE Mediation, focused on Marriage/ Shalom Bayis and personal coaching.

To reach Rabbi Rhine, his websites are www.care-mediation.com and www.teach613.org; his email is RMRhine@gmail.com. For information or to join any Torah613 classes, contact Rabbi Rhine.

Parshas Noach

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer* © 2021

Our parsha begins with G-d instructing Noach to build a large three-story ark to prepare for a flood which G-d will bring in one hundred and twenty years to wipe away humanity. Rash"i asks why Hashem wanted Noach to toil so long and so hard? He explains that G-d's intent was to avert the flood by inspiring the people of Noach's generation to repent. When they would see Noach working on this huge project, they would surely ask what he was doing. This would give Noach plenty of opportunity to explain how humanity had abandoned G-d's intent for the world, and that G-d is planning to bring a flood that will wipe out all life on land. Perhaps, hearing and seeing Noach over the next one hundred and twenty years would be enough inspiration to bring them to change their ways and would avert the pending decree of destruction.)Bereishis 7:14(

Following this thought, the Chizkuni)ibid.(explains that this is why G-d instructs Noach to build the Ark out of gopher wood. The word גַּפֵּר – "gopher" comes from the Hebrew word גַּפְרִית – "gafris" meaning sulfur, and the wood was named for its sulfuric content. Hashem wanted Noach to use the sulfuric wood to visibly show the people of Noach's time the judgement they were worthy of for their immoral and destructive ways. In His infinite love and concern for humanity, G-d offered this added warning while Noach was building the Ark, in the hope that this would lead them to change their ways and would save humanity.

The simple reading of the Chizkuni is a beautiful and powerful thought, and one well worth contemplation. The Chizkuni explains)ibid. 11(that the generation was so deeply entrenched in their thievery and immorality that it was a communal effort. For example, when a person was carrying a basket of produce to sell, each person would take an amount too small to be judged in court. In this way they would collectively take his entire basket without anyone having to pay a cent. Even a generation so openly and collectively committed to evil still held G-d's love and compassion, and G-d made every effort to inspire them to repent.

In addition to this beautiful thought, I believe there is an instructive lesson we can glean for our own growth and inspiration. If we consider the context, it is rather difficult to understand the significance of the sulfuric wood. These people would see Noach building the large Ark for over a century. The entire time, he would be warning of the pending destruction to anyone who asked. If they were to ignore Noach's warnings, what difference would it make that Noach was using sulfuric wood? If they did not take Noach seriously, then the use of sulfuric wood should have appeared as nothing more than Noach's own private joke.

I believe the answer lies in the words of the Chizkuni. He says the purpose of the gopher wood was to "show" the generation of the judgement they deserved. They could easily view Noach's words as the thoughts of a fool, or an alarmist. However, seeing the sulfur could help focus them in on Noach's words. When they saw the sulfuric wood, the physical imagery of sulphur before their eyes could catch their attention and could cause them to stop and consider Noach's words a little more carefully and thereby take Noach more seriously.

We see a similar idea in Rash"i. Rash"i learns that the intended inspiration was not from the sulfuric nature of the wood, but simply from the name of the wood. When they saw the wood, the word "gopher" would slip through their mind. This could lead them to think of "gaphris" – sulfur, because of the similar sound. Hearing the word "sulfur" in their mind could also cause them to pause and consider Noach's words.

Our physical senses are powerful tools we can use to our advantage. In any area of life, engaging our physical senses can deepen our focus and thereby increase our inspiration. Many of the mitzvos involve physical actions which help focus our thoughts and our hearts. A little more inspiration and focus, can potentially lead to significant changes. Sometimes, that added inspiration could even save the world.

* Co-founder of the Rhode Island Torah Network in Providence, RI. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD., and then associated with the Savannah Kollel.

Lech Lecha: Excerpts from Sarai's Diary

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

The Biblical story of the founder of our faith, from the moment he first appears as Abram, to his passing away as Abraham, spans approximately 5,000 words. 450 of these words are Abraham's, but only 38 were said (or thought) by his wife. Abraham is mentioned 192 times in Genesis and 44 times in the rest of Tanakh, while Sarah is mentioned only 55 times in Genesis and only once more in Isaiah. Wouldn't it be nice if we were able to hear the stories of Abraham's travels and trials through the eyes of our Matriarch Sarah (aka Sarai)? Well, fortunately enough, thanks to an amazing discovery of ancient scrolls (and extensive reconstruction, with the help of some commentators), we can present here, for the first time, fragments from Sarai's diary:

Haran, Spring of 367 (after the flood)

Dear diary, in a few hours we will become nomads again, but this time permanently, not just for the trip from here to there. I should have complained and resisted. Born and raised in the greatest metropolis of all, Ur of the Chaldeans, I had to travel to this Haran, a village in comparison. My father-in-law, Terah, decided one day that we should all, only God know why, move to Canaan, and so we went, the old Terah with my husband Abram, his nephew Lot, and myself. Then for some reason the old man decided to settle in this corner of the world. I didn't mind. Not that it would matter. No one cares much about a woman's opinion or interests. But this is difficult. I don't know if I want to leave. I have made friends here, and I like my little house where I have my own room and privacy. I really became attached to this place, weird as it seemed initially. And now I am supposed to be excited about living in tents, on the road, surrounded by flocks searching grazing fields. No houses for nomads, only tents. A tent for Abram, a tent for me (privacy, yay!).

I can already see the announcements by the chroniclers of my husband's life: "Another divine test for the great man!"; "Abram abandons Haran for Canaan"; "Abram is chosen by unknown deity!" And what am I? Chopped hay? Am I not asked to abandon my hometown? Am I not tested? Is a woman nothing more than a dangling participle at the end of her husband's important sentences? Don't get me wrong. I am ready to go because this is the divine commandment. I look up to Abram because I admire his courage and spirit, and I know very well why God chose him. He is an educator, a guide and a master. He walks the path of righteousness and justice and he imparts his beliefs with all those who are willing to listen. So why am I so agitated? I guess it is because deep inside I always hoped that it will be our own child that Abram will educate.

I wanted to believe that the it will be through that product of our union that I will not only realize my potential as a mother but will take active part alongside my husband in the education of our future nation, as God has promised us. And now I am to travel to Canaan, presumably to establish a new nation, with a 65 year-old body which will never carry a child.

But enough ranting! Who knows, maybe moving to Canaan will bring me luck. I heard stories of barren women who were blessed after years of solitude, just because they move to a new place, especially to Canaan)or so they say...(. I guess I should get going and shoulder this new task with my husband. Maybe we WILL be the progenitors of a numerous nation.

Egypt, Summer of 369

Dear Diary, Sarai again. Sorry for not writing for so long. You know, it is a bit hard to write on the road, in tents, riding or walking, drawing water and watching over our flocks and servants. Bethel, Ai, Negev, I cannot keep track of all our stops. But now I have time to write because I am in a palace. Yes, you heard)or read(correctly – a palace. But it was not Abram who built it for me. No sir! I am a prisoner of Pharaoh. Abducted by a tyrant and separated from my husband, I am locked up in this palace. Strangely enough, no one comes near me. It seems as if everyone contracted some kind of disease, except for me, but they keep distance from me as if I were the source of their suffering...

I'm back in my quarters, Abram not far from me, still agitated and upset. Turns out it was me... God plagued them for abducting me... It's heartwarming to know that God cares so much for me, but I should not have been there in the first place. I told Abram: see now, God told you to come to Canaan, so Canaan it is! Why go to Egypt? "Let us stay here and God will take care of us," I said, but he wouldn't listen. I know he wanted to save us from the famine but we ended up in a much greater danger. At least he asked for my opinion, which is something most men would never even think of nowadays.

Plains of Bethel, Winter of 377

Time flies! Can you believe it? Ten years passed since we moved to Canaan. Time crawls! Ten more years of unanswered prayers, tears shed secretly, envy of the careless young mothers and their toddlers. Ten more years of feeling abandoned by God. Is God trying me? Why is He doing this to me? Where are the promises He made to my husband?

I remember so clearly my wedding day? Such joy! Such innocence! I thought it would be only a matter of time before I became a mother, holding a precious baby in my arms. But with every year passing year, cruel reality made the dream seem more remote and unreachable. While everyone was celebrating motherhood and parenthood, sweet voices of children ringing in their homes with joy and happiness, I was left felt alienated and rejected by God and men)or should I say women?(alike. I could feel their furtive glances as I was passing by, as if I was carrying a curse, a terrible disease.

God alone can count the tears I shed, day after day, year after year, praying, yearning for a child who will redeem me from my solitude, from my agony and my shame. When the Divine order came to leave Haran, it was very difficult to go and leave my family behind, but I think that subconsciously I was glad to just go away and leave behind the pity and hypocrisy. Yes, let's go to a place where no one knows me and start all over. Maybe I will get lucky. Maybe the move will bring a change, a blessing. But I guess this is not what God wants.

Abram says I am a righteous woman and that God enjoys my prayers and supplications. I appreciate that, but enough is enough. I don't want to be special and I promise that if God grants me a child I will pray and thank Him even more. I will pray for all barren women, if prayers are what He wants...

Be'er Sheva desert, Spring of 377

I'm so excited! I have a solution! Surrogate mother! I have learned of some respectful families who have gone through this process successfully. All you need is assign one of your maids as a surrogate mother and have your husband marry her. We all sign a contract which clarifies that the baby will be mine and my husband's. I will finally be a mother, and I have the perfect candidate. Hagar, the Egyptian girl. She is so sweet and submissive, and she has tremendous respect for me. I cannot wait to talk to Abram tomorrow...

...that little snake! That tricky, treacherous, no-good maid suddenly thinks she is the lady of the tent just because she is pregnant. She taunts me with subtle comments and quips: I'm tired; I'd love to bring you some water, Mistress Sarai, but I woke up with nausea; My back, sorry I can't pick this for you; I shoot a glance to Abram, furious, but these things pass right over his head. As far as he is concerned, she should get rest and maybe I should tend to her. He doesn't even feel that she harasses me! This is simply not the kind of things a man can understand. Is this my new trial? Am I being tested

again?

I don't know what to do. I love and respect Abram. But why is his quest of justice reserved only for foreigners? If God told him tomorrow that He is destroying Sodom and Gomorrah, I know very well he will stand up and fight for them, arguing with the Almighty in favor of those wicked people. And I am right here in front of him, abused daily by this Hagar. Do I not deserve justice?

Today I blew up. I couldn't take it anymore. "Justice," I told him, "I demand justice! Don't stand idly by while she spills my blood!" And he finally gave me permission. He waived his part in the contract and told me that she is all mine. So, that's it, the gloves are coming off.

Be'er Sheva Desert, Day five of New World Order

Now she knows my wrath. Made her worth her price in labor, and not the labor she was hoping for, no delivery for her. Let her fetch water and tend to the flocks and cook and wash my feet and know that she is the maidservant and I am the mistress. Justice is served!

Be'er Sheva Desert, Day six of New World Order

It's over; she's gone. We don't know where or when, but she has disappeared from Be'er Sheva. I should be happy, I should be celebrating, but I'm not. I feel terrible. I didn't mean it to happen like that. All I wanted was to have a child we could call our own, but things got out of hand. I got carried away on tidal waves of anger and frustration, years of sterility, endless nights of crying and, worst of all, the notion that my husband doesn't understand me. I took it all on her and I am not so sure I did the right thing.

Dear diary, it's the middle of night, but I must write. I am shaking. I just had a terrible nightmare. We both ended up having children who became nations, and now, my descendants were persecuted, tortured, exiled, and killed by her children. And that voice kept echoing in my mind "she is your maidservant. Do whatever you want..."

]Note: Rabbi Ovadia continues Sarah's Diary, but his interpretation of the last part of her life differs in some ways from the traditional interpretation.[

* Judaic faculty, Ramaz High School, New York; also Torah VeAhava. Until recently, Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan (Potomac, MD). Faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school(.

Many Devrei Torah from Rabbi Ovadia this year come from an unpublished draft of his forthcoming book on Tanach, which Rabbi Ovadia has generously shared with our readers. Rabbi Ovadia reserves all copyright protections for this material.

A Bissel of Torah from a Tiny Jewish Community

By Rabbi Natanel Kaszovitz

Auckland, New Zealand Hebrew Congregation *

Until now, the Torah has spoken about the creation of the universe and the story of Noach. But this week, it finally becomes personal, we begin to hear about ourselves: Avraham Avinu and Sarah Imeinu. In this parsha, we encounter a constant, underlying dialogue between Hashem and Avraham about how the new faith should take shape. Should it be carried forward through Avraham's descendants, or only through his teachings?

This week's question for 'Around the Shabbat Table': What is the correct path to achieving the ultimate goal, the knowledge of the Oneness of God? Is it through Avraham's lineage, by birth and conversion, or through a broader, more

cosmopolitan faith open to all?

]Editor's note: If you became Rabbi of the only synagogue in a small, isolated Jewish community, at what level would you direct your Shabbat message? [

AHC is delighted to welcome His Excellency, Mr Alon Roth-Snir, Israeli Ambassador, to the Auckland Hebrew Congregation this Friday for Kabbalat Shabbat. This is a wonderful opportunity to meet the Ambassador, hear his reflections, and enjoy a meaningful Shabbat service together.

Shabbat Shalom.

* Rabbi Kaszovitz, an Israeli ordained at Ohr Torah Stone, previously served as Rabbi in Nairobi, Kenya. He became Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation in September 2025. Rabbi Moshe Rube, whose remarks I previously posted in this space, is in the process of starting a new Rabbinic position in Australia. I plan to use this space to include messages from Rabbi Kaszovitz and Rabbi Rube going forward.

Rav Kook Torah Lech Lecha: The Inner Will of the Universe

Abraham, the Sages noted, was the first person in history to address God as “*My Master*”)Gen. 15:8(. What makes this event so noteworthy?

Completing the Master’s Work

We must first understand the essence of the servant-master relationship. The servant fulfills the wishes of his master by completing the master’s work. The servant is an extension of his master, his shaliach or agent. When the servant acts, it is as if the master has acted.

Before Abraham, people acknowledged the existence of a Prime Mover, an infinite Being Who created the universe. But they could not fathom how a truly perfect Being would be concerned with an imperfect and lowly world such as ours. Why would God, transcendent beyond all things, be involved in the smallest details of the workings of the universe?

They failed to recognize that an integral aspect of creation — its inner core — is that the universe aspires to perfect itself. This underlying aspiration for perfection and the world’s gradual moral progression is by plan and purpose; thus Divine providence governs all moral paths in the world, even the smallest and least significant.

The central conduit for the universe’s pursuit of perfection is mankind’s efforts to elevate its deeds, traits, and thoughts. We

have free will to choose good or evil. And that which leads us to choose good over evil is God’s will stamped in creation, resulting in the universe’s inner aspiration to perfection.

By declaring God as his Master, Abraham publicly proclaimed that God governs the world and desires its moral perfection. God wills that we should be His agents in bringing about the world’s gradual advancement. As we work toward our own personal spiritual growth, we promote the work of our Master — the spiritual elevation of the entire universe.

)Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I, p. 33 on Berachot 7b)I:77(. (

<https://ravkooktorah.org/LECHLECH60.htm>

Lech Lecha: A Palace in Flames (5780)

By Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, Former Chief Rabbi of the U.K.*

Why Abraham? That is the question that haunts us when we read the opening of this week's parsha. Here is the key figure in the story of our faith, the father of our nation, the hero of monotheism, held holy not only by Jews but by Christians and Muslims also. Yet there seems to be nothing in the Torah's description of his early life to give us a hint as to why he was singled out to be the person to whom God said, "*I will make you into a great nation ... and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.*"

This is surpassingly strange. The Torah leaves us in no doubt as to why God chose Noah: "*Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generations; Noah walked with God.*" It also gives us a clear indication as to why God chose Moses. We see him as a young man, both in Egypt and Midian, intervening whenever he saw injustice, whoever perpetrated it and whoever it was perpetrated against. God told the prophet Jeremiah, "*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I set you apart; I have appointed you as a Prophet to the nations.*" These were obviously extraordinary people. There is no such intimation in the case of Abraham. So the Sages, commentators, and philosophers through the ages were forced to speculate, to fill in the glaring gap in the narrative, offering their own suggestions as to what made Abraham different.

There are three primary explanations. The first is Abraham the Iconoclast, the breaker of idols. This is based on a speech by Moses' successor, Joshua, towards the end of the book that bears his name. It is a passage given prominence in the Haggadah on Seder night: "*Long ago your ancestors, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the Euphrates River and worshipped other gods*" (Josh. 24:2). Abraham's father Terah was an idol worshipper. According to the Midrash, he made and sold idols. One day Abraham smashed all the idols and left, leaving the stick with which he did so in the hand of the biggest idol. When his father returned and queried who had broken his gods, Abraham blamed the biggest idol. "*Are you making fun of me?*" demanded his father. "*Idols cannot do anything.*" "*In that case,*" asked the young Abraham, "*why do you worship them?*"

On this view, Abraham was the first person to challenge the idols of the age. There is something profound about this insight. Jews, believers or otherwise, have often been iconoclasts. Some of the most revolutionary thinkers – certainly in the modern age – have been Jews. They had the courage to challenge the received wisdom, think new thoughts and see the world in unprecedented ways, from Einstein in physics to Freud in psychoanalysis to Schoenberg in music, to Marx in economics, and Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman in behavioural economics. It is as if, deep in our cultural intellectual DNA, we had internalised what the Sages said about Abraham ha-Ivri, "*the Hebrew,*" that it meant he was on one side and all the rest of the world on the other.]1[

The second view is set out by Maimonides in the Mishnah Torah: Abraham the Philosopher. In an age when people had lapsed from humanity's original faith in one God into idolatry, one person stood against the trend, the young Abraham, still a child: "*As soon as this mighty man was weaned he began to busy his mind ... He wondered: How is it possible that this planet should continuously be in motion and have no mover? ... He had no teacher, no one to instruct him ... until he attained the way of truth ... and knew that there is One God ... When Abraham was forty years old he recognised his Creator.*"]2[According to this, Abraham was the first Aristotelian, the first metaphysician, the first person to think his way through to God as the force that moves the sun and all the stars.

This is strange, given the fact that there is very little philosophy in Tanach, with the exception of wisdom books like Proverbs, Kohelet and Job. Maimonides' Abraham can sometimes look more like Maimonides than Abraham. Yet of all people, Friedrich Nietzsche, who did not like Judaism very much, wrote the following:

Europe owes the Jews no small thanks for making people think more logically and for establishing cleaner intellectual habits... Wherever Jews have won influence they have taught men to make finer distinctions, more rigorous inferences, and to write in a more luminous and cleanly fashion; their task was ever to bring a people "to listen to reason."]3[

The explanation he gave is fascinating. He said that **only in the arena of reason did Jews face a level playing-field. Everywhere else, they encountered race and class prejudice.** “Nothing,” he wrote, “is more democratic than logic.” So Jews became logicians, and according to Maimonides, it began with Abraham.]emphasis added[

However there is a third view, set out in the Midrash on the opening verse of our parsha:

“The Lord said to Abram: Leave your land, your birthplace and your father’s house . . .” To what may this be compared? To a man who was travelling from place to place when he saw a palace in flames. He wondered, “Is it possible that the palace lacks an owner?” The owner of the palace looked out and said, “I am the owner of the palace.” So Abraham our father said, “Is it possible that the world lacks a Ruler?” The Holy One, blessed be He, looked out and said to him, “I am the Ruler, the Sovereign of the Universe.”

This is an enigmatic Midrash. It is far from obvious what it means. In my book *A Letter in the Scroll* (published in Britain as *Radical Then, Radical Now*) I argued that Abraham was struck by the contradiction between the order of the universe – the palace – and the disorder of humanity – the flames. How, in a world created by a good God, could there be so much evil? If someone takes the trouble to build a palace, do they leave it to the flames? If someone takes the trouble to create a universe, does He leave it to be disfigured by His own creations? On this reading, what moved Abraham was not philosophical harmony but moral discord. For Abraham, faith began in cognitive dissonance. There is only one way of resolving this dissonance: by protesting evil and fighting it.

That is the poignant meaning of the Midrash when it says that the owner of the palace looked out and said, “*I am the owner of the palace.*” It is as if God were saying to Abraham: I need you to help Me to put out the flames.

How could that possibly be so? God is all-powerful. Human beings are all too powerless. How could God be saying to Abraham, I need you to help Me put out the flames?

The answer is that **evil exists because God gave humans the gift of freedom.** Without freedom, we would not disobey God’s laws. But at the same time, we would be no more than robots, programmed to do whatever our Creator designed us to do. Freedom and its misuse are the theme of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, and the generation of the Flood.]emphasis added[

Why did God not intervene? Why did He not stop the first humans eating the forbidden fruit, or prevent Cain from killing Abel? Why did the owner of the palace not put out the flames?

Because, by giving us freedom, He bound Himself from intervening in the human situation. If He stopped us every time we were about to do wrong, we would have no freedom. We would never mature, never learn from our errors, never become God’s image. **We exist as free agents only because of God’s tzimtzum, His self-limitation. That is why, within the terms with which He created humankind, He cannot put out the flames of human evil.**]emphasis added[

He needs our help. That is why He chose Abraham. Abraham was the first person in recorded history to protest the injustice of the world in the name of God, rather than accept it in the name of God. Abraham was the man who said: “*Shall the Judge of all the earth not do justly?*” Where Noah accepted, Abraham did not. Abraham is the man of whom God said, “*I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just.*” Abraham was the father of a nation, a faith, a civilisation, marked throughout the ages by what Albert Einstein called “*an almost fanatical love of justice.*”]emphasis added[

I believe that Abraham is the father of faith, not as acceptance but as protest – protest at the flames that threaten the palace, the evil that threatens God’s gracious world. We fight those flames by acts of justice and compassion that deny evil its victory and bring the world that is a little closer to the world that ought to be.

FOOTNOTES:

]1[*Bereishit Rabbah*)Vilna(, 42:8.

]2[*Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Idolatry, chapter 1.

]3[Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, translated with commentary by Walter Kaufmann, New York, Vintage, 1974, 291.

AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE:

]1[What are the three different approaches given to answer the question, "Why Avraham?" Which of the three do you find most inspiring?

]2[What do the palace and the fire represent in the Midrash quoted? Are they a contradiction to each other?

]3[Who has to put out the fire in today's palace? How?

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/lech-lecha/a-palace-in-flames/> Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Devar. Note: November 7 marks five years since Rabbi Sacks' untimely passing.

Are We as Numerous as the Stars?!

By Yossy Goldman *

Moshe Dayan was driving down a highway in Israel in a big rush, so he floored the accelerator and, much to his chagrin, got stopped by a traffic officer for speeding.

"I know who you are, sir. With your black eye patch, you are famous and unmistakable. You are a renowned war hero of our country," said the officer. *"But I am giving you a ticket anyway. You, of all people, should be setting a better example."*

"Look here," says Moshe Dayan. *"You see I have only one eye. Do you want me to look at the road or the speedometer?"*

We Jews have never looked at the speedometer.

What do I mean?

In Parshat Lech Lecha, God promises Abraham (who was still childless at the time) that he will go on to father a great nation.

*"And He took him outside and said, "Gaze now toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them."*¹

God was promising Abraham that not only would he bear a son, but that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars. Can you count the stars? Of course, as kids we always tried to. But we know it's actually impossible.

Now, Abraham did of course become the founding father of our nation, but are we really as numerous as the stars? It is believed that there are 200,000,000,000,000,000,000 stars in the universe. Just a single galaxy

has some 100 billion stars. Even if you add up every Jew that ever existed in our 3000-year history, we've never even come close to that number! So how did G d make a promise that seems so wildly exaggerated?

Rabbi Meir Shapiro, respected founder of the Yeshivah Chachmei Lublin in Poland, answered this question as follows:

A few verses later,² it becomes clear that the sun only set after this dialogue took place, which means that G d was speaking to Abraham when it was still light outside. No wonder he couldn't see the stars! The radiant sun made it impossible to see a single other star.

In other words, G d's message to Abraham was not that we would be greater than others numerically, but that, like the sun, we would outshine others, regardless of our numbers. All the stars in the universe cannot compete with the great luminary.

To us, quality has always been more important than quantity. We see today quite empirically how smaller is stronger. A little drone can accomplish what a big fighter jet may not be able to do. A smartphone is small enough to fit in your pocket, but it's got an entire office inside.

Here in South Africa, there is an Afrikaans expression, goedkoop is duurkoop, "*cheap is expensive.*" If you buy something cheaply and it doesn't last, you are not getting value for money. In the long run, you will be spending more as you keep replacing the inexpensive item of poor quality and workmanship. But it doesn't only apply to buying a home, or furniture, etc. It is a philosophy of life. Quality counts.

We Jews have never been into numbers. For us, quality is much more valuable than quantity. We represent no more than 1% of the world's population, but when it comes to Nobel Prize winners, we can claim over 22% as our own. Israel is a tiny country but has become a global leader in medical and technological advances, shining brightly in the darkness.

So don't worry about numbers. We're not into numbers. Never feel depressed about being outnumbered. Moshe Dayan didn't look at the speedometer and neither should we)metaphorically, that is(. We have never taken the speedometer of life too seriously. Statistically, we shouldn't even exist at all.

We will continue to march to our own beat as we have since the days of Abraham. May we continue to shine in the heavens and on earth. Please G d, we will stand out and sparkle materially, spiritually, academically, morally, ethically, and Jewishly, an eternal source of pride to G d and to ourselves.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Genesis 15:5

2. Ibid verse 12.

* Life Rabbi Emeritus of the Sydenham Shul, Johannesburg, South Africa; also President of the South African Rabbinical Association.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5678511/jewish/Are-We-as-Numerous-as-the-Stars.htm

Lech Lercha: Infinite and Finite Reward

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky

After these words, G-d's word came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not fear, Abram. I am a shield for you; your reward will be very great.")Gen. 15:1(

According to the logic of strict justice, finite acts of goodness should elicit a commensurately finite reward. G-d, however, bestows upon us infinite reward for our fulfillment of His commandments. This is the meaning of “*Your reward shall be very great.*”

The reason for this is because the Torah’s commandments are both finite and infinite. On the one hand, each commandment refines one particular aspect of our animal nature and is performed in a finite, physical way. On the other hand, each commandment also expresses the will of the infinite G-d, and thus, fulfilling any one commandment connects us with infinity.

We therefore receive both finite and infinite reward, corresponding to the two aforementioned aspects of the commandments.

– From *Daily Wisdom #3*

* An insight by **the Lubavitcher Rebbe** on parashat Noach from our *Daily Wisdom #3* by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky.

May G-d grant continued wisdom, strength, victory and peace in the Holy Land.

Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society

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Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z”l

The Power of Example

So familiar are we with the story of Abraham that we do not always stop to think about what a strange turn it is in the biblical narrative. If we fail to understand this, though, we may fail to understand the very nature of Jewish identity itself.

Here is the problem: Until now the Torah has been concerned with humanity as a whole. Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel are human archetypes. The former represent the tensions between husband and wife, the latter the rivalry between siblings. Both are stories about individuals and both end tragically, the first with paradise lost, the second with bloodshed, fratricide and death.

Then comes another pair of stories – the Flood and the building of Babel – this time about society as a whole. Each is about the tension between freedom and order. The Flood is about a world where freedom (violence, lawlessness, “everyone doing what was right in their own eyes”) destroys order. Babel is about a world where order (the imperialist imposition of a single language on conquered peoples) destroys freedom.

All four narratives are about the human condition as such. Their message is universal and eternal, as befits a book about God who is universal and eternal. God as He appears in the first eleven chapters of Genesis is the God who created the universe, made all humanity in His image, blessed the first humans, and who - after the Flood - made a covenant with all humankind. The God of the universe is the universal God.

Why then does the entire story shift in Genesis 12? From here onward it is no longer about humanity as a whole but about one man (Abraham), one woman (Sarah), and their children, who - by the time of the book of Exodus - have become a large and significant people, but still no more than one nation among many.

By Ahuva and Eli Landy
in memory of the 3rd yahrzeit of
Lisa Landy, z”l,
(Liba Hendel bat Chaim)

Sponsored by David Abrams
in commemoration of
the 12th Yahrzeit of Cynthia Abrams, z”l,
14 MarCheshvan 5786

What is happening here? Does God lose interest in everyone else? That surely cannot be the case. At the end of Genesis, Joseph says to his brothers: “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.” Gen 50:20

It may be that the phrase “many lives” means no more than the lives of his own family (so Targum Yonatan understands it). But the plain sense of the phrase *am rav*, “a great people,” suggests Egypt. Not until Exodus are the Israelites called *am*, a people. Joseph is saying that God sent him not merely to save his family from famine, but also the Egyptian people.

That too is the point of the book of Jonah. Jonah is sent to Nineveh, the Assyrian city, to persuade the people to repent and thus avoid their own destruction. In its closing words God says to the prophet:

“Should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left?” Jonah 4:11 (and see Malbim ad loc.)

God is concerned not only with Israel but with the Assyrians, despite the fact that they would become Israel’s enemies, eventually conquering the northern kingdom of Israel itself.

Amos famously says that God not only brought the Israelites from Egypt, but also the Philistines from Capthor and the Arameans from Kir (Amos 9:7). Isaiah even prophesies a time when the Egyptians will worship God, and He will rescue them from oppression as he once rescued Israel (Isaiah 19:20-21). So it is not that God loses interest in humanity as a whole. He feeds the world. He sustains all life. He is involved in the history of all nations. He is the God of all people. Why then the narrowing of focus from the universal human condition to the story of one family?

The philosopher Avishai Margalit, in his book *The Ethics of Memory*, talks about two ways of thinking: “i.e.” and “e.g.” The former speaks of general principles, the latter of compelling examples. It’s one thing to talk about general principles of leadership, for instance – think

ahead, motivate, set clear goals and so on. It’s another thing altogether to tell the story of actual leaders, the ones who succeeded, the role-models. It is their lives, their careers, their examples, that illustrate the general principles and how they work in practice.

Principles are important. They set the parameters. They define the subject. But without vivid examples, principles are often too vague to instruct and inspire. Try explaining the general principles of Impressionism to someone who knows nothing about art, without showing them an Impressionist painting. They may understand the words you use, but these will mean nothing until you show them an example.

That, it seems, is what the Torah is doing when it shifts focus from humanity as a whole to Abraham in particular. The story of humanity from Adam to Noah tells us that people do not naturally live as God would wish them to live. They eat forbidden fruit and kill one another. So after the Flood, God becomes not only a Creator but also a teacher. He instructs humanity, and does so in two ways: i.e. and e.g. He sets out general rules – the covenant with Noah – and then He chooses an example, Abraham and his family. They are to become role-models, compelling examples, of what it means to live closely and faithfully in the presence of God, not for their sake alone but for the sake of humanity as a whole.

That is why five times in Genesis the patriarchs are told: “Through you all the families, or all the nations, of the earth will be blessed.” Gen. 12:2, Gen. 18:18, Gen. 22:18, Gen. 26:4, Gen. 28:14

And people recognise this. In Genesis, Malkitzedek says about Abraham, “Praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand” (Gen. 14:20). Avimelech, king of Gerar, says about him, “God is with you in everything you do” (Gen. 21:22). The Hittites

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say to him, "You are a prince of God in our midst" (Gen. 23:6). Abraham is recognised as a man of God by his contemporaries, even though they are not a part of his specific covenant.

The same is true of Joseph, the only member of Abraham's family in Genesis whose life among the gentiles is described in detail. He is constantly reminding those with whom he interacts about God.

When Potiphar's wife tries to seduce him he says: "How could I do such a great wrong? It would be a sin before God!" Gen. 39:9

To the butler and baker, whose dreams he is about to explain, Joseph says: "Interpretations belong to God." Gen. 40:8

When he is brought before Pharaoh to interpret his dreams, he says: "God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires." Gen. 41:16

Pharaoh himself says of Joseph: "Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God?" Gen. 41:38

Jews are not called on to be Jews for the sake of Jews alone. They are called on to be a living, vivid, persuasive example of what it is to live by the will of God, so that others too come to recognise God and serve Him, each in their own way, within the parameters of the general principles of the covenant with Noah. The laws of Noah are the "i.e.". The history of the Jews is the "e.g."

Jews are not called on to convert the world to Judaism. There are other ways of serving God. Malkizedek, Abraham's contemporary, is called, "a Priest of God Most High" (Gen. 14:18).

Malachi says a day will come when God's name "will be great among the nations, from where the sun rises to where it sets" (Mal. 1:11). The prophets foresee a day when "God will be King over all the earth" (Zechariah 14:9) without everyone converting to Judaism.

We are not called on to convert humanity but we are called on to inspire humanity by being compelling role-models of what it is to live, humbly, modestly but unshakably in the presence of God, as His servants, His witnesses, His ambassadors – and this, not for our sake but for the sake of humanity as a whole.

It sometimes seems to me that we are in danger of forgetting this. To many Jews, we are merely one ethnic group among many, Israel is one nation-state among many, and God is something we talk about only among ourselves if at all. There was recently a

television documentary about one British Jewish community. A non-Jewish journalist, reviewing the programme, remarked on what seemed to her a strange fact that the Jews she encountered never seemed to talk about their relationship with God. Instead they talked about their relationship with other Jews. That too is a way of forgetting who we are and why.

To be a Jew is to be one of God's ambassadors to the world, for the sake of being a blessing to the world, and that necessarily means engaging with the world, acting in such a way as to inspire others as Abraham and Joseph inspired their contemporaries. That is the challenge to which Abraham was summoned at the beginning of this week's Parsha. It remains our challenge today.

The Person in the Parsha

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

Persons Not in the Parsha

I try to focus these weekly columns upon individuals who are barely mentioned in the weekly Torah portion. They often have an important, but insufficiently appreciated, role to play.

Thus, for example, last week I chose Nimrod as my person in the parsha. He was a "strong" man in many ways, knowing the Almighty while defying Him. He was autocratic, violent, arrogant, perhaps the first true demagogue on record.

But that was last week's parsha, Noach. His name no longer appears in the Chumash. While he is certainly absent in this week's parsha, Lech Lecha, I will attempt to demonstrate how he still plays a role in this week's Torah episode.

I will also attempt to demonstrate that Avram, later renamed Avraham, albeit surely the dominant figure in this week's parsha, is to some extent "missing" therein.

We already know quite a bit about Avram having read last week's Parshat Noach. There we "met" his father Terach, his brothers Nachor and Haran, and his nephew—Haran's son—Lot. We also learn of Haran's premature demise, although we remain curiously ignorant of the circumstances of his death. We are told about the family's origins in a place called Ur Kasdim, the "fiery furnace of the Chaldeans." We are introduced to Avram's wife, Sarei, and are alerted to her infertility issues.

We then are informed of the plan, seemingly instigated by Terach, to embark upon a fateful journey, leaving Ur Kasdim to reach Canaan, but settling instead in a place called Charan. There, Terach, at age two hundred and fifty, dies.

Likutei Divrei Torah

It is then, in the opening words of this week's Torah portion, that the Lord Himself enters center stage and commands Avram to leave all the above behind except for his wife Sarei and nephew Lot and head for "the land which I will show you," which we soon learn is Canaan. Avram is then a seventy-five-year-old!

What is "missing?" It is my graduate school education in the field of developmental psychology that prompts me to ask this question. Missing are the many intervening years between the young Avram, subordinate to his father's travel plans and struggling sympathetically with his young wife's infertility, and his first direct encounter, nay conversation, with the Master of the Universe.

Missing are the reasons for his family's flight from Ur Kasdim, the circumstances of Haran's death, the significance of Terach's intention to move the family to Canaan, but especially the role of Avram in all this drama.

Most glaringly, what is missing is even the slightest account of Avram's religious development. There is no mention of any relationship whatsoever with the One Above until the Lord's command that he leave behind his land, his birthplace, and his father's domicile.

A critically important segment of Avram's youth, formative years, and maturation is missing. This gap is troublesome, and it is left to our Sages to fill in the "missing link," to tell us the "rest of the story."

And in the process, to expound upon the nature of the conflict between good and evil, in our case between Avram and, yes, Nimrod!

Here, in my free translation from the Aramaic, is the gist of the passage in Bereshit Rabbah 38:19 which addresses some of these questions:

Rabbi Chiya, the son of Rabbi Ada of Jaffa related: Terach was an idolater and dealt in the sale of idols. One day, he left the store in charge of his son Avram in his stead.

Along came a customer eager to purchase an idol. Avram asked him, "How old are you?" To which the customer responded, "Almost sixty!" Avram retorted, "A man almost sixty wishes to worship a day-old idol!?" The customer was ashamed and quickly departed.

Along came another customer, a woman this time. She brought with her a tray filled to the brim with fine flour. She asked Avram to distribute the flour as an offering to one of the idols on her behalf. She departed.

Avram then grasped a sledgehammer and smashed all the idols except for the largest one to smithereens. He then placed the hammer in the hands of the intact largest idol.

Father Terach then returned and exclaimed to Avram, "What is all this wreckage?" To which Avram responded, "You see, dear father, this woman came into the shop with a flour offering for the idols. Immediately each idol protested and demanded the entire offering for itself. So, the largest idol grasped the hammer it is now holding and smashed all the others to bits."

Terach was incredulous. "Stop mocking me, Avram," he retorted. "You darn well know that these idols are dumb, deaf, and powerless!" To which Avram retorted, "May your ears take note of what your mouth just admitted!"

Terach then surrendered Avram to ...
NIMROD!

The Midrash continues to report upon the great theological debate between Nimrod and Avram, during which the former tries to convince the latter to accept his idol, namely a fiery furnace. Avram naturally refuses and is thrown into the furnace. His brother Haran, standing by, is conflicted and hedges his bets. He says to himself, "If Avram is consumed by the flames, I'll side with Nimrod. If Avram emerges unscathed by the flames, I'll side with Avram."

Avram emerges unharmed by the fire. Nimrod then orders Haran to worship the furnace or be tossed into it. Haran, siding now with Avram, refuses and is immediately cast into the furnace but is denied the divine miracle that saved Avram and dies in the fire.

That is the gist of the Midrashic passage, a story which many of us, including myself, first heard from our kindergarten teachers. It took me until the fourth grade, as I recall, before it occurred to me to ask my teacher why such an important narrative, which explains so much about Avram's personal growth, faith, and courage, is omitted from the biblical text—a question for which I've yet to find a satisfactory answer, and challenge you, dear reader, to ask yourselves.

We do take away from this Midrash a number of important conclusions about the development of religious belief and about good versus evil.

We learn that Avram came to the idea of monotheism on his own, in part through careful observation of the folly of idolatry. It is because of his self-initiated search for truth that he drew close enough to the Almighty to gain access to His favor and direction.

We learn again about the extremes of which tyrants are capable, which include the annihilation of those of their constituents who do not comply with their idolatrous demands.

We learn of the futility, exemplified by Haran, of an ambivalent wishy-washy faith commitment, of betting on the "winner" in the contest between belief systems.

As always, we have only just begun our search for the full story of the Nimrods of the world and of our forefather's "missing years" and ultimate transition from Avram to Avraham, the "father of many nations."

Stay tuned, and with the Lord's help we will encounter a fully grown Avraham and a different kind of enemy, in next week's torah portion, Vayera.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand **Chumras and Hidurim Were Luxuries That Avram Could Not Afford in Mitzrayim**

The pasuk says that on his way down to Mitzrayim, Avram realized that Sora was a beautiful woman. He was afraid that she would be desirable as a wife in Mitzrayim, and that he would be killed in order that Sora could be taken as someone else's wife. As we know, Avram said, "...Please say that you are my sister, that it may go well with me for your sake, and that I may live on account of you...." (Bereshis 12:13).

Rashi says on the words "so that it will be good for me" – this means that I will be given presents. Why Avram Avinu would be so interested in presents is itself a question, but a more pressing question is why Avram indeed accepted these presents from the Egyptians and, in fact, became a wealthy man because of them. Yet, shortly thereafter in the parsha, when Avram Avinu saved Lot, and the King of Sodom offered him the spoils of war, Avram refused to take them. "... I have raised my hand to Hashem, G-d, the Most High, Maker of heaven and earth, if so much as a thread or a shoelace, or if I shall take from anything that is yours! So you shall not say 'It is I who made Avram rich'" (Bereshis 14: 22-23). If Avram was worried about people saying that the King of Sodom made him rich, why wasn't he worried about people saying that the King of Mitzrayim made him rich? If Avram took into account the teaching of Shlomo Hamelech "...and the one who despises presents will live" (Mishlei 15:27) regarding Melech Sodom, why did Avram have such a sudden change of heart from his earlier ready acceptance of gifts?

There is an interesting Medrash that explains this contradiction and teaches a very important lesson. On the pasuk, "And he proceeded on

Likutei Divrei Torah

his journeys..." (Bereshis 13:3), the Medrash Tanchuma notes that when Avram returned from Mitzrayim back to Eretz Canaan, he went to all the places that he visited on the way down to Mitzrayim, in order to pay his bills. Apparently, on the way down to Mitzrayim, Avram did not have money and he needed to borrow money to pay for his lodging and expenses. It was only on the way back from Mitzrayim that Avram had money to repay the debts that he had accumulated on the trip to Mitzrayim.

We derive two important lessons from this Medrash:

When people lend you money, pay them back. This may seem like an obvious statement, but unfortunately, this is not always done.

Do not be a tzadik on someone else's account. This means that it is fine to be righteous and have personal chumras (stringencies) and hidurim (ritual beautifications) if these chumras and hidurim only effect you. But if someone wants to practice exceptionally righteous religious behavior (for example, refusing to accept gifts because Shlomo Hamelech taught "the one who hates presents will live,") then he had better be certain that his personal piety is not causing the people to whom he is in debt to go unpaid. A person's fiscal responsibilities come first. Chumras and hidurim can only be built upon that baseline of integrity.

Avram in Mitzrayim had to tell Sarah "...in order that it will be good for me for your sake...". He was in debt at the time and he did not have the luxury of being concerned that people would be able to claim "It is because of me that Avram became rich." Later on in the parsha, Avram had prospered. By then he was "heavy with cattle, with silver and with gold." (Bereshis 13:2). By the time Avram went out to do battle for the King of Sodom, he was a wealthy man. Aha! A wealthy man has the ability and the luxury to be able to say "One who hates presents, he will live."

I can give a couple of examples of this principle of "Don't be a tzadik on someone else's cheshbon":

Rav Dovid Kronglas, zt"l, (1908-1972), the Mashgiach of Yeshivas Ner Israel, had a "chumrah" in shechitah, such that he did not eat beef. He thus had chicken for supper virtually every night. (There are fewer halachic issues with the ritual slaughter of birds than with animals). However, this is not a stringency that he imposed on his wife and children. His family ate meat. He was not going to restrict the members of his family from meatballs, hamburgers, roast, or steak

because he accepted certain halachic stringencies upon himself.

Another example of not imposing personal chumras on others is evident in a story told over by the Tolner Rebbe. A young Kollel student came to Rav Schach, zt”l, and complained to him that his Rosh Kollel told him that he should not learn so late at night. Rav Schach told the young student to have his Rosh Kollel come see him. The Rosh Kollel came to visit Rav Schach, who asked him about the instructions he gave to his young Kollel student.

The Rosh Kollel said, “This young man has recently been looking unhappy – worried and perturbed about something. I asked him what was wrong. He explained that his wife got a new job, for which she needs to leave the house very early. She needs to get up even earlier to make the children’s lunches and get them off to school. She is not getting enough sleep because she needs to get up so early. She is therefore not in a very good mood, and it is affecting their shalom bayis (marital harmony).

The Rosh Kollel asked his student, “So why don’t you get up early and help make the lunches and get the children off to school?” The student gave as an excuse the fact that he stayed up learning late at night. The Rosh Kollel advised him: Don’t learn so late at night, go to sleep earlier, and get up earlier so you can help your wife make the lunches and get the children off to school. That was “the story behind the story.”

Rav Schach then called the young man back in and told him “Your Rosh Kollel is 100% correct. If you want to learn late at night, that is all fine and good. But if that negatively affects your wife, you cannot do that. You are a baal chov (in debt) to her. When you gave your wife her kesuvah, you pledged to support her in the custom of all Jewish men. She is supporting you! For that, she gets a great blessing. But you owe her. You can’t be a tzadik on her cheshbon. If you are learning so late that it prevents you from getting up early to help your wife, then don’t stay up so late! You have a primary obligation, and that primary obligation is to help your wife.

Hashem Said to His World “Enough”

The Beis HaLevi (Rav Yosef Dov Halevi Soloveitchik, (1820-1892)) notes that when Avraham Avinu received the mitzvah of milah in this week’s parsha, it is the first mention of the name Sha-k-ai (Shin, Daled, Yud) of the Almighty in the Torah. HaKadosh Baruch Hu told Avraham, “I am Kel Sha-k-ai, walk before Me and be perfect.” (Bereshis 17:1).

What is the specific connection between the Name Sha-k-ai and the mitzvah of milah? The

Beis Halevi says that the connotation of the name Shin-Daled-Yud is that “I am the One who said to the world ‘Dai (‘Enough’).” This name indicates that the Ribono shel Olam put the brakes, so to speak, on the act of creation.

The Medrash elaborates: Ma’aseh Bereshis (the Story of Creation) was an ongoing process. Had it not been for the fact that at a certain point, Hashem said to the world “Enough” (Dai – Daled, Yud), the process of creation would have continued. As a result, instead of going out into the field to harvest bushels of wheat, a person would go out into the field and harvest loaves of bread. The seed would not only produce the wheat, but creation would continue and the wheat would independently go on to produce bread and other edible products. Likewise, creation would not stop with just flax and linen, but rather suits and ready-made garments of all sizes would be “manufactured”.

The Ribono shel Olam said, “No. That is not the way I want My world to work. I am the One who said to My world ‘Dai – Enough! ’ because I want to leave something for man to do.” This, says the Beis Halevi, is why the mitzvah of milah appears with the Divine Name of Sha-k-ai. As the Medrash relates, the wicked Turnus Rufus asked Rabbi Akiva, “If Hashem wanted man to be circumcised, why was he born with foreskin – why weren’t we all born already circumcised?” The answer to that question is that Hashem wants us to perfect ourselves. We are not born perfect. No one comes into this world as a finished product. Man’s charge in this world is to perfect himself. This is the underlying message of the mitzvah of milah.

When I was once in England, Dayan Chanoch Ehrentreu (Av Beis Din of the London Beis Din (1932-2022)) told me a beautiful thought from his predecessor on the London Beis Din, Dayan Morris Swift (1907-1983):

We put a mezuzah on our door containing the Torah chapters: Shema Yisrael and V’ haya Im Shamoa. However, we do not see those chapters. The parchment is rolled up so it is impossible to see what is written inside. The only part of the mezuzah that we see is the outside of the mezuzah’s parchment where the name Shin Daled Yud is written. Dayan Swift said that the message is “I am the one who said to My world ‘Enough!’” Just as at the time of the original creation, Hashem said, “I am going to create the world but I am going to leave something ‘left over’ for man to complete”, so too, each man’s creation is ‘incomplete’, leaving over the removal of the foreskin as a covenantal task for man to thereby improve himself.

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And in the spirit of havei domeh lo (man ‘imitating G-d’s Actions), man too, in his own “Home Improvement” projects, does not need to complete every last detail, by building the greatest palace in the world. The message of Shin-Daled-Yud is He who said to His world ‘Enough – ‘so too, we need to say to our interior decorator “My ‘world’ is also ‘enough’”.

I told my handyman “We need a new shower rod” (because our old shower rod keeps falling down). He sent me the links to Home Depot shower rods. It is incredible how many different types and prices of shower rods there are. I am not even talking about the shower curtains. I am merely speaking of the shower rods! Chrome, brush nickel, this and that. Enough! There is a boundary.

That is why the part of the mezuzah that is visible is Shin-Daled-Yud: I am the One who said to My world ‘Enough’.

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

When people curse those who bless them... Sometimes people curse those who bless them.

This is a message that emerges from the beginning of Parshat Lech Lecha. Hashem conveys to Avraham the significance of his future generations, saying, “Va’avarechah mevarecheicha” – I will bless those who bless you, “umekallelcha a’or” – I will curse those who curse you, and “venivrechu vecha kol mishpechot ha’adamah” – and all families on earth will be blessed through you.

This prompts a crucial question: if every family on earth is blessed through the existence of the Jewish people, why do some still choose to curse us?

In Sefer Mayana Shel Torah, it is noted that sometimes people are in denial regarding those who bring them blessings. Or, sometimes they recognise it, but out of the hatred that’s burning in their hearts, they only seek our downfall, even though they benefit from us daily.

That is what Hashem is saying to Avraham.

The Jewish people will be a blessing for all civilization, but that won’t stop anti-Jewish sentiment from existing. This phenomenon is not limited to the Jewish people; it also applies to the State of Israel. Israel has given the world remarkable innovations, from advancements in technology to improvements in healthcare.

Israel is a blessing to all of humankind. Yet, even with these contributions, many do not recognise them and some still harbour an anti-Israel bias.

Hashem's message to Avraham is clear: regardless of how our actions are perceived, we must continue to shed the proper light in this world.

Sunshine produces light but can also create shade. In the midst of darkness, the sun continues to shine.

This is Hashem's enduring message to the Jewish people: regardless of the way that people view you, nonetheless, always be true to the mission that I give you to shed light within our fragile world.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

Walk towards your destiny

Keren Epstein

In the portion of Lech Lecha, we encounter Avraham Avinu—the first Jew and father of us all—for the first time. On a personal note, I feel a deep connection to this portion, particularly to the figures of Avraham and his wife, Sarah. They embody immense strength and resilience. What resonates with me most, though, is the opening command from God to Avraham:

"Go forth from your land, from your birthplace, and from your father's house to the land I will show you" (Bereshit 12:1).

This command marked the beginning of Avraham's journey, and also the first of ten trials he would face. He wasn't just instructed to leave his home and family; he was told to leave behind all that was familiar—his friends, city, and his homeland. When you reflect on this Divine command, its complexity and difficulty become even clearer.

This is why Lech Lecha resonates so deeply with me. As a new olah myself, I, too, left behind my home, friends, and country. I know firsthand how challenging such a transition can be—it is anything but easy! What amazes me most about Avraham's story is that, unlike me, who knew where I was headed and why, Avraham didn't receive a clear destination. God simply told him, "go...to the land I will show you," without revealing where or what lay ahead. God didn't promise success or comfort in this new land—He simply asked Avraham to trust Him fully. This kind of blind faith, this unwavering trust without any assurances, is nothing short of extraordinary.

Even after reaching Canaan, Avraham and Sarah's struggles didn't end. A severe famine struck, forcing them to flee to Egypt to survive. Yet despite these hardships, Avraham never questioned God's plan. His steadfast belief that everything ultimately unfolds for the best remains a powerful source of inspiration.

Reflecting on Avraham's story and the origins of our nation, it's impossible not to see parallels with the challenges we face today in the Land of Israel. As the Jewish people endure hardship and war—fighting for our home and the land God promised to Avraham—there is so much to learn from the strength and faith of Avraham and Sarah. From the outset, life in this land was never easy. We came not because God promised comfort, but because He commanded us to do so. Trials, enemies, and even hunger were part of the journey, yet through it all, God remained present, guiding them step by step. Just as He was with Avraham, so He is with us today.

In much the same way that God acted with Avraham Avinu, so too does He act with us now. Despite the challenges we face, we must never forget—even for a moment—that God is always with us, just as He was with Avraham, our forefather, who believed with unwavering faith. Through the storms of uncertainty, our mission is to draw on that same faith, knowing that, like Avraham, we are not alone in this journey.

The Netivot Shalom offers another beautiful interpretation of the command "lech lecha" – "go!" He explains that the phrase means to walk toward one's destiny—the mission and rectification of one's soul in this world. This is what God commanded Avraham—and, by extension, all of Am Yisrael: to fulfill the task assigned to us in this world, thus bringing about the soul's spiritual completion.

Each individual, like Avraham Avinu, must find his or her purpose in this world. We must ask: What does God want of me? What is my role here? Once discovered, he must leave everything behind and pursue that purpose fully.

In our time, Am Yisrael as a nation is moving toward its destiny. We are fighting an existential battle for our home, our holy land, for our future, and for our redemption. Every Jew is part of this story—part of this struggle. Each of us must ask ourselves: What is my role here? What is my purpose? What am I doing to move toward that goal and achieve it?

May we know better days for Am Yisrael, in Eretz Yisrael, with complete faith and trust in God!

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Hershel Schachter

The Hebrews

The Torah refers to Avraham Avinu as "ha'ivri - the Hebrew". Rashi quotes the medrash that the understanding of that expression is that even though the whole world was going in one direction, Avraham Avinu had the courage to

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go in a totally different direction. Throughout the generations, all of the descendants of Avraham Avinu were known as the Hebrews for the same reason.

In Chumash Bamidbar in Parshas Bahaloscha there are two pesukim that are separated from the rest of the Chumash with the letter nun backwards before and after them. The Medrash Yalkut HaReuvaini points out that nun is the Aramaic word for a fish. The backward nun represents a fish that is able to swim against the tide. The Gemorah in Avoda Zara comments that because kosher fish are coated with scales they have a thick skin and are able to swim against the tide. Non-kosher fish which don't have a coat of scales cannot swim against the tide. The two pesukim separated from the rest of Chumash Bamidbar are "Vayehi binsoah ha'aron" and "Uvenucho yomar". The Jewish people travel from country to country, from continent to continent, from generation to generation, and always take the Torah with them. The Jewish people are the Ivrim (Hebrews) who are always counter-cultural wherever they go; the whole world is going in one direction and the Jews are going in an entirely different direction.

In Parshas Chayey Sara when Avraham Avinu speaks to the non-Jewish community of Chevron he says, "ger v'toshav anochi imachem - I am a stranger and a citizen with you". Rashi points out in the name of the medrash that these two descriptions are contradictory; one who is a citizen is not a stranger. Rav Soloveitchik offered a beautiful interpretation of that pasusuk: the Jewish people are toshavim in this world in the sense that we work along with everyone else to solve all the social, economic, and medical problems of world. The Jews are way less than one percent of the world population and have received over twenty percent of the Nobel Prize winners. The committee that chooses these awards is not made up of Jews. In a very strong sense the Jewish nation is a toshav along with all the other nations of the world to improve the world that we live in. But at the same time, we are a ger - we are always counter cultural. Wherever we go we take the Torah with us, and we are like the kosher fish that swim against the tide.

The Kuzari has a famous line. The philosophers of the Middle-Ages used to divide everything in the world into four categories: animal, vegetable, mineral, and human being. R' Yehudah Ha'levi thinks that Klal Yisroel comprises a fifth category, totally separate from the other four. The non-Jewish residents in Chevron had great respect for Avraham Avinu and offered him the most honorable location to bury Sara Imeinu. Avraham Avinu responded that the Jews are born differently, live differently, die

differently, and are buried differently. Avraham found it necessary to designate a separate location (Me'oras Hamachpeilah) as kever Yisroel.

We are all familiar with the emancipation's motto that all men are created equal. The Torah clearly singles out the Jewish people as the Am Hanivchar, i.e. something very different. Rav Soloveitchik once mentioned that he heard from his grandfather - Rav Chaim - that there are different bridges, some are short and some are long. But he thought that it was impossible to build a bridge long enough to bridge the gap between a Jew and a non-Jew.

Every day we recite the beracha, "ozer Yisroel b'gevura", and we have a different beracha ("hanosein la-yoeif koach") where we praise Hashem for giving strength every morning to all human beings. Gevura and koach are not the same as each other. Rav Soloveitchik thought that gevurah refers to heroism; Hashem gives Bnei Yisroel the gevurah to live amongst all the nations and to be an Ivri like Avraham Avinu

Mizrahi Dvar Torah

Lost Along the Way - Rabbi Stewart Weiss

There are any number of heroic figures throughout the Torah: the Avot & Imahot, of course, Moshe, Pinchas, Yehoshua, Caleb & more. There's no shortage of villains, either: Paro, Bilam, Datan & Eisav readily come to mind.

But then we have another category; that of tragic figures. Among them, I suggest, is Terach, father of Avraham.

Terach was in the idol business. But then, influenced by his brash & brilliant son Avram, Terach makes a whole new start. He has an instinct, an impulse as to where he needs to be. So he packs up his family, including Avram, Sari & Lot, & he heads for Eretz Yisrael (A.K.A. Canaan). But, alas, he never makes it to there. He gets only as far as Charan, & then he stops. Why?

Perhaps because he felt safe - there was no Nimrod to worry about there or fiery furnaces to avoid - or since Avram was already 70 years old - and Terach himself was no spring chicken - he sees Charan as a suitable enough place for his clan to settle down for good. But of course, had that been the end of the story, we all would not be here today.

B"''H Avraham isn't content to stay in Haran. He preaches to the masses, refuting idolatry & promoting monotheism, but has an inner drive to move on to Canaan. For 5 years he commutes back & forth between Israel & Canaan, until finally, at age 75, he gets the

definitive directive from the Commander-in-Chief to move to Israel.

Avram, like his father, had an impulse regarding Israel. But unlike his father, Avraham decides to act on that impulse!

This little-known chapter of the Torah is a mighty moral tale for our own generation. Like Terach, many Diaspora Jews know deep down that Israel is our natural habitat, the place where we should be, the place where Hashem wants us to be. We cherish our heritage; we revere & respect the chain of generations who have prayed towards & for Eretz Yisrael throughout the millennia. We know our glory days were once in Jerusalem & now are there again. Some may even start their journey &, like Avram, commute regularly back & forth to the Holy Land on a regular basis. That's to be commended.

But can we be an Avraham & go all the way???

Perhaps this is the essential reason why the word Lecha, you, is tacked on to G-d's command to Avram, "Lech, go," (to Israel) as the title of our Sedra. At the end of the day, you must decide to do what is right, even if it means being an Ivri who stands on the other side of the divide. The buck stops - and the shekel starts - with you!

There is no better feeling than coming home. And it certainly beats getting lost along the way.

The Tower of Babel, Avraham Avinu, and the Beit HaMikdash

Rabbi Menachem Leibtag

Why is it that the Torah tells us absolutely nothing about Avraham's past? The Midrashim are replete with beautiful stories reflecting the special qualities of this unique personality. The verses themselves, however, offer us no clue as to why G-d suddenly designates him as the father of His special nation.

The explanation of this enigma may lie in a transition that occurs in the Biblical narrative towards the end of Parashat Noach. Heretofore, the Chumash tells us about the development of mankind as a whole. For example, in chapter ten the Torah tells us how the seventy nations evolved from the descendants of Noach's three sons. Suddenly, at the end of Parashat Noach (in chapter 11), the Torah becomes far more discriminatory, focusing specifically on the descendants of Shem and then on Avraham, Yitzchak, Ya'akov and his family. What triggered this shift, and wherein lies its significance?

Presumably, the answer should be provided right at the point where this transition occurs:

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in Bereishit chapter 11 – the Tower of Babel narrative. The people of the world gathered to build a city and a tower for the expressed purpose of "making for themselves a name" (11:4). Rather than promoting the awareness of G-d and devoting themselves to the glorification of His Name, the people did just the opposite: they sought to extol their own greatness.

G-d therefore interfered and disrupted the construction, and the ensuing dispersion ultimately led to the formation of multiple nations. However, it is precisely at this point in Chumash that its focus shifts to the story of G-d's choice of Avraham Avinu. In light of the events of Migdal Bavel, G-d designates a single nation – whose destiny will be to redirect mankind towards a theocentric, rather than anthropocentric, mentality. Towards this end, G-d summoned a qualified, righteous personality, Avraham Avinu, and promised him a special nation that would inherit a special land for the purpose of representing Him to the rest of mankind.

Avraham wastes no time getting to work. Although clearly this destiny requires first the formation of a nation living on its land, Avraham sowed the seeds of this destiny by "calling out in the Name of Hashem" – the antithesis of the Tower of Babel – in Bet-El (see 12:8, 13:4). As Ramban explains, Avraham would assemble audiences and teach monotheism.

The ultimate contrast to the Tower, however, will not emerge until Bnei Yisrael will inherit their land and build the Beit HaMikdash, as alluded to in Sefer Devarim. In his farewell speech, Moshe refers to the Temple in numerous instances as "the place G-d will choose to have His NAME dwell therein" (see in particular Devarim 12). In direct contrast with the builders of the Tower, who gathered the entire world to a VALLEY (facing downward) to construct a city with a tower in its midst to exalt mankind – Bnei Yisrael will assemble all the nations to the Temple MOUNT (facing upward) to the city of Jerusalem with the Temple in its midst to exalt G-d.

Yeshayahu (2:1-4) beautifully captures this ultimate purpose of the Beit HaMikdash: "In the days to come, the mountain of Beit Hashem will stand high above the mountains... and all the nations shall gaze on it with joy. Many peoples shall go and say: Come let us go up to the House of G-d, that He may instruct us in His ways and that we may walk in His paths – for TORAH shall come forth from out of Tzion, and the word of G-d from Yerushalayim..."

This universal goal underlies G-d's designation of Avraham Avinu. The Torah tells us nothing of his superior qualities in order to focus instead upon Avraham's response to his mission. This may teach us, his progeny, how we must relate to the chosen destiny of Knesset Yisrael: not as a reward, but rather as a challenge and mission.

Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's Derashot Ledorot

Suffering by Comparison Making comparisons between people is a popular sport, one in which most of us indulge most of the time. Yet we all know that making such comparisons is usually invidious. Cervantes called all comparisons "odious." Shakespeare thought they were "odorous." Both are right. We have no business making such relative decisions.

All of us recognize, for instance, how wrong it is to make comparisons between children. We rightly object when teachers foolishly ask younger siblings or former students if they are as good or as bright or as naughty as their older brothers or sisters. We ourselves sometimes take leave of our reason and make such comparisons, only to sow enmity in our own families. We should have learned from our Father Jacob, who compares Joseph favorably to his other children, only to discover that this comparing led to favoritism and rivalry. The Rabbis put it this way: "Because of two selaim weight of *fine wool* that Jacob gave to Joseph more than to his brothers, the whole story came about whereby our ancestors went down into Egypt" for the long and bitter exile.

I usually warn people about to remarry to make every effort to avoid comparing and contrasting their new with their old spouses. Of course it is impossible to avoid this altogether. But one must try very hard indeed to judge every person on his or her own merits. And whatever one may do mentally, never should one utter a word of comparison, for better or for worse!

It is rather surprising, therefore, to find that the Sages constantly indulge in such comparing and contrasting. When we read the Midrash about the great biblical personalities, we find that the Rabbis are constantly measuring one against the other. Thus (see Deut. R., Berakhah, 11:23) we find the following comparisons: Abraham is greater than Lot. Lot, who was a lesser man, beheld angels and recognized them as angels. Abraham, however, was a greater man, and so to him the angels appeared as merely people.

Noah and Moses are compared. Noah says to Moses, "I am greater than you, because I was saved from the generation of the flood." To this Moses responds, "I am more exalted than you," because you only saved yourself", whereas I saved myself and also the people of my generation.

Noah comes out second best to Abraham too. Abraham, who was of greater spiritual stature, went "before" the Lord, whereas Noah, whose spiritual prowess was weaker, "walked with God."

The most intriguing contest is between Moses and Abraham. The Midrash decides that Moses was greater, because Abraham offered hospitality only in the settled areas, whereas Moses did so even in the desert!

Now, why all these comparisons? Because, I believe, even if one is bound to suffer by comparison, the very act of such comparison yields didactic and educational results. It refines for us the kind of model we ought to set for ourselves. It sharpens our focus onto the kind of person we ought to become and the sort of qualities we ought to strive to attain. It reminds us that, right or wrong, we are always being compared to others, and may often be found wanting. Even God, as it were, judges us in comparison to our peers. (Charlie Brown, the cartoon character whom many regard as the philosopher of the younger generation, once commented that "God marks on a curve"...) Hence, comparisons may be made not for purposes of self-gratulation, not only as a "put-down" of others, not as a way of going on an "ego-trip" – but in order to remind ourselves how much we can yet do, to stimulate and inspire us to growth and self-development. What, then, are some of the non-odious, non-odorous, non invidious comparisons that we ought to make – though we may suffer some discomfort from the process?

First, let us compare Jews and *Goyyim*. I think I am fairly philo-Semitic. Yet, sometimes, I think we suffer by such comparison. Take the specific case of Israel and the United States of America. Permit me to quote to you several sentences in English translation of an article by Shlomo Nakdimon, a writer for Maariv, and not particularly known for his excess of religious zeal. He writes as follows:

"Sometimes one cannot fail to be astonished at the fact that we, the people of the Bible, are estranged from the recognition of the source and roots of our nationhood. This thought arose in my mind when I listened to the inaugural address of Gerald Ford, the 38th President of the USA. At the end of his impressive remarks, he uttered the words, "may God help me."

... On American coins you will find the words, "in God we trust." However, for us, the Jewish people, who first brought about the enthronement of the Deity, He is almost non-existent. It seems almost as if we are ashamed to indicate that we are linked to Him. The United States is not a theocratic country. Nevertheless it seeks opportunities to stress its relationship between man and its Creator...

In Israel, however, when we open the Knesset, when we swear in a President, a

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Prime Minister, cabinet or Knesset members, we do not relate to the Deity. It was only with great reluctance that the non-religious groups agreed to include the words "Rock of Israel" in the State's Declaration of Independence, as a reference to a Supreme Being. Quite frankly, the comparison hurts.

Next, let us compare Jews with Arabs. This has been a month of a great deal of diplomatic activity and traveling. The American Secretary of State was in Egypt, and the Israeli Prime Minister was in Washington. On October 10th or 11th, Mr. Kissinger went to meet with President Sadat. Sadat kept the Secretary of State of the most powerful country of the world cooling his heels during the daytime, and would not meet with him until after nightfall, because he did not want to violate the Islamic holy day of Ramadan. *But when the Prime Minister of Israel came to America, and was told that the White House would be glad to offer him a kosher meal, he declined it!* What a painful and humiliating comparison! Is this the "national pride" that Zionism promised us as a result of the founding of a Jewish state?

Now, let us compare Jews with Jews. We American Jews are rightly proud of our great charitableness. If nothing else, at least we have made history with our contributions to the UJA. So, let us compare ourselves to another Jewish community, one that is much smaller in size, South Africa. The Yom Kippur War stimulated a campaign by the five million Jews of the United States, who together pledged 750 million dollars, averaging \$150 per capita, for the UJA. In South Africa, 120 thousand Jews, who form the Jewish community there, raised 58 million dollars – an average of \$480 per capita!

Or, compare American Jews with Russian Jews, other than the contrast between our relaxed attitude toward Israel and the obvious heroism of Russian Jews who are defying the might of the Communist empire in order to emigrate to Israel – and most of them do emigrate to Israel and stay there.

In America, several weeks ago, a friend of mine uttered a contemptuous comment about New York Jews who are indecisive enough to carry the lulav and etrog in the street. The remark angered me greatly, because I have just read about Yosef Mendelovitch, interned in slave labor camp in Vladivostok, who, despite the fact that he was ill with high blood pressure, risked extra punishment by refusing to appear without his *kippah*. Some comparison!

The Brit-Milah Board of New York informs us that circumcision is vanishing amongst non-Orthodox Jews in New York, who resort to physicians rather than to *mohalim*, and for whom circumcision has become a surgical procedure rather than a profoundly important religious ceremony. Compare that to Uri

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Wadka, who became religious in the course of agitating for emigration, and who achieved a degree of fame – or notoriety, if you are a Soviet Communist – in the slave labor camp at Perm, when he circumcised himself with crude instruments, and was denied medical attention for his efforts.

The same, above-mentioned Mendelovitch and Wadka, plus a man called Garilius, were together in a Soviet maximum labor camp, and were punished with solitary confinement. The reason was that they decided to finish their back-breaking weekly quota of work in one day less during the week so that they could rest on Shabbat. When it was denied to them, they went on a strike – in a Russian slave-labor camp! I am told that there are even Orthodox Jews, or at least Jews who belong to Orthodox synagogues, who feel that they cannot take off Yom Tov, especially the second day of Yom Tov... What an embarrassment!

Such are the kinds of comparisons that occur to me. I confess that I suffer, we suffer, from them. Yet, such suffering by comparison may be the stimulus we need to rouse us from our complacency, to make us aware of the goals that are within our power to attain. But perhaps more important than comparing oneself to others, is what Walter Scott advised, "comparing what thou art with what thou might have been." That is the true test – measuring our reality against our potential.

Indeed, this is probably the meaning of one particularly striking comparison in the Midrash from which we quoted above. That is the comparison of Adam to Moses. In it, in a magnificent leap over the generations, Adam says to Moses that "I am greater than you are, because I was created in the image of God. Moses responds that no, I am greater because you lost your dignity by sinning, whereas I was given a special glow or halo which I kept to the very end, to the very day of my death.

Here, I believe, we find not the comparison of one against the other, but each man measured against himself. Take Adam. Look at how he began. He had enormous promise; he was created in the very image of God. And yet, he disappointed himself. Compared to what Adam might have been, Adam was a failure.

Moses was born with great potential and he fulfilled it. Compared to what he might have been – that, indeed, he was. He expressed all his talents and his abilities. So, ultimately, the most important comparison, the one that may cause us to suffer most, but the one which is most creative, is each man against himself. Perhaps if we compare what we might have been to what we are, we will assure that in the future we will be more than we would otherwise have become.



BS"D

To: parsha@groups.io
From: Chaim Shulman
<cshulman@gmail.com>

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A "GOOD NAME" FOR KIRUV

Rav Pam on the Parashah

by Rabbi Sholom Smith

אָעַשְׂ לְנֵךְ גָּדוֹל וְאָבְרָךְ וְאָגָדָלָה שְׁמֵךְ וְהִיא בְּרָכָה

I will make of you a great nation; I will bless you, and make your name great, and you shall be a blessing (Bereishis 2:2).

Rashi notes that when Hashem commanded Avraham to leave his country, his birthplace, and his father's house, He gave him three blessings to counteract three detrimental effects of long-distance travel: The diminishment of the possibility of having children, the loss of wealth, and the loss of fame. Hashem blessed him that he would become the father of a great nation, would be blessed with enormous wealth and would gain world-wide renown.

The first two berachos are easy to understand. Avraham longed for a son who would continue his life's work of publicizing the existence of a Creator, and who would in turn produce a great nation of believers in Hashem.

Avraham needed wealth as the means of continuing his remarkable chesed activities his hachnasas orchim and tzedakah. All these things required large sums of money to uphold and expand. But why did Avraham need to have a great name? Can it be that Avraham was hungry for publicity and renown, things that seem to be the very antithesis of all that he stood for?

It must be that until the time when Avraham left his birthplace, his name commanded little respect in the eyes of the populace. If anything, he was considered a radical and revolutionary who wished to overthrow the system of pagan belief that most people held. He had destroyed the idols of his father and had defied the mighty King Nimrod (see Rashi 11:28) who had thrown him alive into the fiery furnace of Ur Kasdim. He was Avram the Ivri

(14:13); the Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 42:8) says that he was called this because the whole world was on one side, while Avraham alone was on the other side. He refused to practice idolatry like everyone else, instead espousing belief in one G-d. Thus, his name was certainly not mentioned with honor or reverence.

However, now that he was moving to a new land and was beginning a new phase of his life, he needed the blessing of a good name to attract followers and bring them under the wings of the Shechinah. No more do we find Avraham destroying idols or boldly defying people like Nimrod. Now, as the Torah recounts in the following parshiyos, Avraham became a N'si Elokim, prince of G-d (23:6) in the eyes of the neighboring people and was treated with great respect and reverence by many of them.

The Chofetz Chaim comments on a Mishnah in Pirkei Avos (4:17) that teaches that the crown of a good name surpasses even the crowns of Torah, Kehunah, and malchus. The crown of a good name was Avraham's most effective tool in his efforts to bring people to a recognition of their Creator. With Avraham's exceptional trait of chesed, his goodness of heart, and his concern for his fellow human beings, coupled with his warm, pleasant, caring personality, he was able to attract many thousands of people to a belief in One G-d.

In our time the same holds true. In order to be effective in kiruv rechokim (outreach efforts), one must have exemplary middos and true ahavas Yisrael. These traits serve as a magnet to attract people to Yiddishkeit, because the seekers see in him what Torah observance makes a person into, and they wish to be close to him and to emulate his lifestyle. This is the value of a "good name" with which Hashem blessed Avraham and which is a necessity in our times to bring fellow Jews back to their roots.

Rabbi Yissocher Frand ryfrand@torah.org Thu, Oct 30, 2025 at 8:09 AM

To: ravfrand@torah.org Rav Frand By Rabbi Yissocher Frand
Parshas Lech Lecha

Avram Was the First to Call the Almighty "Adon Olam"

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: #1354 – Should I Stay in the US to Take Care of My Parents or Make Aliya to Eretz Yisroel? Good Shabbos!

The Gemara says (Brachos 7b) that from the time the world was created, no one used the term "adon" (master) until Avram came along and called the Almighty "Adon," as it is written "And he said, 'Ado-shem' how will I know that I will inherit it?" (Bereshis 15:8). The Maggid of Vilna wrote a Chumash commentary called Ishei Yisrael. The Maggid of Vilna raised the question, why do the morning prayers begin with the recital of "Adon Olam" (Master of the World)? (Many of us only begin the morning prayers with Adon Olam on Rosh Hoshana and Yom Kippur; however, in virtually all siddurim, Adon Olam is printed right at the beginning of every day's morning prayers.)

The Maggid of Vilna answered his question by citing a Gemara in Maseches Tamid (30a): The morning Tamid offering was slaughtered as early as possible. The Gemara says that when the approximate time for slaughtering the Korban Tamid arrived, the person in charge sent a designated individual to check on the status of the sky. When the time arrived, the designated person proclaimed "Bar-ka-ee" (indicating that the time had arrived). At that point, the person in charge asked: "Has the eastern sky lit up all the way to Chevron?" (which is southwest of Yerushalyim, so the sun usually rises later there). If the answer was in the affirmative, the shechting (ritual slaughter) of the Tamid would proceed. Now, if the sun had already risen in Yerushalyim, why was it important that the sky also be illuminated all the way to Chevron? The answer is that as we start the avodas hayom (daily service) in the Beis Hamikdash, we want to invoke the zechus avos (patriarchal merit) of those who are buried in Chevron.

The Maggid of Vilna says that it is for a similar reason that we begin Shacharis with the words "Adon Olam," because it was Avraham who first

called the Ribono shel Olam by the name Adon. Therefore, to invoke his memory, we begin our prayers by invoking the title “Adon Olam”. The ‘Pere Adam’ Is a Worse Adversary than the Four Animals Mentioned in Doniel One of the recurring themes of Sefer Bereshis is that the actions of the Avos foreshadow the actions of their offspring (Ma’asch avos siman l’banim). This is almost a scary idea. In effect, Sefer Bereshis is the blueprint for what is going to happen to the Jewish people throughout the millennia. The incidents we read about that we may think are insignificant or esoteric make a profound difference on all of Jewish history. Parshas Lech Lecha is a prime example of the import and the impact that Sefer Bereshis has on Klal Yisrael.

Rabbeinu Bechaye (1255-1340) was a “Rishon” (an early commentator). In Bereshis 21:14, he states that there is no nation in the world who hates the Children of Israel more than the descendants of Yishmael. Much of the tzores that we suffer today are the result of things that happened in Parshas Lech Lecha. For example, in perek 16 pasuk 5-6, Avram took Hagar as a concubine, she became pregnant, and then became disrespectful towards Sora. Avram, therefore, gave Hagar back to Sora and allowed her to do whatever she wished with the concubine. The pasuk says that Sora oppressed her and Hagar fled from her presence.

The Ramban writes that (on a level that is probably imperceivable to us) our matriarch committed some level of aveira (sin) by this oppression of Hagar. Avram was also guilty for allowing it to happen. Hashem therefore heard the cry of Hagar and gave her a son who became a “perch adam” (wild man), who would torture the children of Avram ad Sora with all types of torture. The suffering that occurred, and continues to occur, at the hands of the Bnei Yishmael began in Parshas Lech Lecha when Sora sent away Hagar, her husband’s concubine. According to the Ramban, the punishment for this aveira was the suffering Hagar’s son caused throughout the generations to the offspring of Avraham and Sora.

This is an example of “Ma’asch avos siman l’banim.” What Avraham and Sora did has an effect to this very day. A second example of this phenomenon appears in perek 17 pasuk 18. The Ribono shel Olam comes to Avraham Avinu and tells him that he would have a son from Sora.

Avraham’s almost immediate response was “Lu Yishmael yichyeh l’fanecha.” Rashi interprets: Halevai that Yishmael should live. In other words, Avraham gave a Bracha to Yishmael that he should live. Those words infused Yishmael with the ‘kochos’ that he has to this very day. Now clearly, Avraham did not mean that Yishmael’s descendants should torment Yitzchak and his descendants until the end of time, but those words, spoken innocently, foreshadowed and to some extent determined the situation we are in today.

Rav Elya Svei, zt”l, quotes Rav Mendel Kaplan, zt”l, who used to often quote a Zohar (Chelek 2 32:1), which explicitly supports this idea that our suffering at the hands of Yishmael is a direct result of Avraham’s prayer “Lu Yishmael yichyeh l’fanecha.”

There is a third incident in Parshas Lech Lecha that has profound influence until this very day. The Ribono shel Olam gave Avraham the mitzvah of milah. Avraham circumcised himself at the age of 99 and he circumcised his son Yishmael when the latter was 13 years old. The Zohar states “Woe to the world that Yishmael was born and that he had bris milah.” This, says the Zohar, is what gives him a “yad” (hand; handle) in Eretz Yisrael. As a result of the combination of these three incidents: Sora sending out Hagar, Avram saying “Lu Yishmael yich-yeh l’fanecha,” and Avram circumcising Yishmael, we are suffering at the hands of the Bnei Yishmael.

But perhaps the scariest of all is what Rav Chaim Vital (1542-1620) writes. Rav Chaim Vital was the premier disciple of the Ari z”l. Rav Chaim Vital writes that because Yishmael was the son of Avraham Avinu and he had been circumcised, he is called a ‘pere adam’. This is contrasted with our other exiles (as enumerated in the book of Doniel) where the nations who ruled over us are all compared to animals. In addition to the Egyptian, Babylonian, Greek, and Roman exiles alluded to in the book of Doniel by their animal representations, there is a fifth exile, the exile of Yishmael, which is the exile we are currently experiencing. The reason why it is the

worst of the exiles is because the world power behind this exile is not compared to an animal, it is compared to a person (‘pere adam’). That makes it much worse!

Rav Chaim Vital continues by interpreting a pasuk in Tehillim – Chapter 124:2 – “If not for the fact that Hashem was with us, b’kum aleinu adam (when an adam rose against us).” Who is this adam? This refers to Yishmael, the ‘pere adam.’ Dovid Hamelech, in much of the Shir HaMa’alos, is referring to the time of the future redemption.

When Dovid says, “If not for the fact that Hashem is with us when an adam rises against us, they would swallow us alive...” this refers to Yishmael, the ‘pere adam’, whose evil intentions and actions we know so well. When we look around the world and look at what has been happening in Eretz Yisrael for the last 75+ years, when we look around the world in general and look at what has been happening with Jihad and Islamic fundamentalism, the great powers of the world are thinking “We will have this peace plan or that peace plan...” However, they are spinning their wheels in vain. What is transpiring is not just the typical disputes between countries, which can be solved with peace proposals. This is an epic battle – a battle until the end. This is a battle that won’t be won until the coming of Moshiach.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com
Edited by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org This week’s write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand’s Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information. Rav Frand © 2023 by Torah.org. Torah.org: The Judaism Site Project Genesis, Inc. 2833 Smith Ave., Suite 225 Baltimore, MD 21209 <http://www.torah.org/> learn@torah.org (410) 602-1350

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subject: **Rabbi Yakov Haber - The Gifts of Eretz Yisrael and Torah: the Mila Connection**

Rabbi Yakov Haber

The Gifts of Eretz Yisrael and Torah: the Mila Connection

I Two covenants are forged between the Creator of everything and our holy grandfather, Avraham Avinu, in our parasha. In the first, the b’ris bein habesarim, Hashem promises the land of Israel to Avraham and his descendants; in the second, the b’ris of mila, the gift of Eretz Yisrael is repeated implying that it is dependent on fulfillment of this commandment. Why does the gift of Eretz Yisrael only come through the mitzvah of mila? Furthermore, the Gemara (Shabbos 130a), commenting on the verse in Tehillim, “שׁשׁ אָנֹכִי עַל אָמְרָתֶךָ כְּמוֹצָא שְׁלֵי רְבִבָּל – I rejoice over your word like one who finds great spoils” (Tehillim 119:162), interprets that this is referring to the mitzvah of mila. Since the Jewish people have accepted it with great joy (שְׁשׁוֹן), it is still celebrated with great joy. What is the basis of the specific association of joy and the mitzvah of mila?

The Midrash Tanchuma (Tazria 5) records the following conversation between R. Akiva and the Roman governor, Turnusrufus (somewhat paraphrased):

Turnusrufus asked R. Akiva, “Whose handiwork is more beautiful, G-d’s or man’s?” He responded: “Man’s are more beautiful!” ... Turnusrufus asked, “Why are you circumcised?” He replied: “I knew you would ask that, and that is why I preempted [you] and said to you that the handiwork of man is more beautiful than that of G-d.” R. Akiva brought ears [of grain] and cakes. He said to him: “These are the handiwork of G-d, and these are the handiwork of man... Are these [the cakes] not more beautiful than the ears?!” Said Turnusrufus to him, “If he wanted circumcision, why doesn’t the baby exit already circumcised from the womb?!” Said R. Akiva to him, “Why does the baby exit with the umbilical cord still connected to its belly, and the mother needs to sever it! That which you asked why isn’t [the baby] already circumcised, it is because G-d gave the mitzvos to Israel to purify them...”

What fundamental theological principles are at the root of this debate between the saintly sage, R. Akiva, and the wicked Turnusrufus? Rav C. Y. Goldwicht zt"l, founding Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavneh, under whom I was privileged to study, elucidates these mysteries as follows:[1] One receiving a free gift never truly owns it in the fullest sense of the term, since his debt of gratitude constantly impinges upon a sense of true ownership. By contrast, one who purchases something, even if – through the beneficence of the seller – pays only a discounted price does acquire a sense of total ownership and the item is truly “theirs.” Similarly, there are two kinds of Divine bestowals: one which is just a gift without any “purchase price” and one which is more similar to a sale whereby the recipient, in order to receive the Divine blessing, “pays” for it through his actions. Only the latter will securely remain in the domain of the recipient eternally, and only with regard to the latter will the recipient be granted a true sense of ownership.[2]

The Midrash (Shemos Rabba 1:1, also see Berachos 5a) teaches: ... this refers to Hakadosh Baruch Hu who loves Israel, as it is written, “I loved you, says Hashem” (Malachi 1:2). [As a result,] He increases their suffering (perhaps: He raises them with suffering). You find that HKB”H gave to Israel three good gifts, and He gave all of them only through suffering: Torah, the Land of Israel and the World to Come.

How is causing suffering an expression of Divine love? Why do these magnificent gifts have to come through suffering? Based on the fundamental concept Rav Goldwicht presented above, he explains that Hashem wishes to transform these gifts into a “purchase” so that they become our eternal heritage, not subject to constant Divine scrutiny whether we are worthy of the gift. The suffering mentioned in this context does not refer to punishment for sins but to soul-wrenching struggles and mesirus nefesh, a demonstration of singular, wholehearted devotion to the study of Torah, to commitment to the land of Israel and to Divine service in general, thus earning our Olam Haba. This form of suffering serves as the “purchase price” through which these gifts truly become ours.

Based on this, Rav Goldwicht addresses the above sources concerning the covenant of mila. Hashem created an imperfect world as proven by R. Akiva to the Roman governor. His goal in doing so was to allow man to partner with Him in the “acquisition” of Divine blessing. Before the soul descends into the world, the Divine radiance it enjoys is incomplete pleasure, referred to by Ramchal as “nahama d’chisufa - the bread of embarrassment.”

Circumcision represents the revelation of the inner sanctity endowed to man by his Creator enabling him, through wholehearted, selfless devotion to His Creator’s will (yissurin) to be worthy of Divine bounty. Only through this effort, does he earn his eternal reward and succeeds in transforming the “bread of embarrassment” into a complete expression of Divine pleasure in the World to Come. R. Akiva demonstrated that even the physical world reflects this truth, namely, that only through hard work is man able to transform the initial Divine gifts into items of greater beauty. Our bodies are created in an imperfect state as evidenced by the need to cut the umbilical cord. On a spiritual plane, the mitzvah of mila represents the need, through hard work, to fully acquire the Divine blessings granted to us.

This is also why the mitzvah of mila specifically is associated with joy since absolute joy only comes with something that is truly acquired through considerable effort . “גִּיעַ כְּפָרָ כִּי תָאֵל, אֲשֶׁרֶיךְ וְתָבֵךְ לְךָ – [when] the toil of your hands you partake of, happy are you, and it is good for you!” (Tehillim 128:2).

II Our era has seen the Divine blessing of the return of millions of Jews to the holy land of Israel. The Divine promise to Avraham Avinu is, with Hashem’s kindness, once again on the road to total fulfillment. The Gaza strip, wholly part of the land of Israel (see Rashi to Bereishis 26:2), has always been a seemingly unconquerable section of the Holy Land. Although often settled, including in our recent era, by Jewish communities, currently it is solely inhabited by the descendants of Yishmael. We hope and pray that these last two years of battle, punctuated by the tremendous mesirus nefesh exhibited by tens of thousands of Jewish soldiers – regular troops and reservists – who have left their families for months on end to fight against a

ruthless, cruel enemy in this area of Eretz Yisrael, over a thousand of whom have given their lives and tens of thousands of whom have lost limbs and are otherwise suffering, should serve as a tremendous merit for the Jewish people to even more greatly acquire one of the three gifts given through suffering and allow us to return and settle this part of the Holy Land as well in the near future.

This Thursday, hundreds of thousands of Jews will gather in Jerusalem in a demonstration of prayer and solidarity with the supreme value of Torah study and loyalty to Torah values. To be sure, the context in which this is being done – the imprisonment of Yeshiva students labeled as “draft-dodgers” by the Israeli military – is fraught with controversy revolving around the proper balance between devotion to Torah study and army service as well as, more fundamentally, how religious segments of Jewry should relate to the currently secular State of Israel.[3] Many, even in the religious world, will not be attending, disturbed by the perception of “shirking of responsibility” they perceive in certain segments of Jewry. Rabbi David Fendel shlit”a, Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Hesder Sderot, the students of which certainly were at the center of the war in Gaza, will be attending. He beautifully explained his decision by stressing the merit of the prayer by so many Jews, the centrality of Torah study which is not fully recognized by so many segments in Israeli society, and the need to find a solution for a proper framework of army service for those not involved in full-time Torah study. Only further strife and division will be caused by continuing arrests of Yeshiva students.

I humbly add to Rav Fendel’s words my fervent wish that regardless of one’s stance on this prayer rally, that it be used as an opportunity to deeply reflect on two out of the three of the tremendous Divine gifts granted to us by our loving Father in Heaven, Torah and Eretz Yisrael, and to recall Rav Goldwicht’s elucidation why both are only acquired through yissurin, wholehearted devotion, without self-centeredness, with a sense of ultimate mission and connection to Klal Yisrael. May we merit to fully devote ourselves to these two central gifts and see the day when the various segments of Jewry will live together in harmony united by the dual values of our holy Torah and the Holy Land, the reblossoming of both of which we have merited to see before our very eyes.

[1] Asufas Ma’arachos, Lech Lecha, “Sasson Hamila”, p. 177 ff. Any errors in conveying the concepts presented by Mori v’Rabi are my own. [2] See the above essay where Rav Golwicht applies this to the study of Torah quoting the midrash concerning Shlomo Hamelech: “ אמר רב אהא: תורה שלמה ב'א'ך, נתקינה ב'זקוניה” (Koheles Rabba 2:9). [3] See the eye-opening article, Obfuscation, by Mori v’Rabi, Rav Mordechai Willig shlit”a.

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from: **Ira Zlotowitz** <Iraz@klalgovoah.org> date: Oct 30, 2025, 7:02 PM
subject: Tidbits • Parshas Lech Lecha 5786 in memory of **Rav Meir Zlotowitz zt"l**

Parshas Lech Lecha • October 31-Nov 1, 2025 • 10 Cheshvan 5786 Reminders

This Motzaei Shabbos, November 2nd, the USA will move the clock back one hour, shifting from Daylight Savings Time to Standard Time. In Eretz Yisrael, Daylight savings time ended this past Motzei Shabbos Parshas Noach, Sunday morning, October 26th at 2am. The final day of BeHaB is this Monday, November 3rd.

The final opportunity for Kiddush Levana is Tuesday night, November 4th. Daf Yomi - Shabbos: Bavli: Zevachim 48 • Yerushalmi: Yoma 9 • Mishnah Yomis: Chulin 3:5-6 • Oraysa (coming week): Chagiga 18b-20b • Kitzur Shulchan Aruch: 10:4-12 Make sure to call your parents, in-laws, grandparents and Rebbi to wish them a good Shabbos. If you didn’t speak to your kids today, make sure to connect with them as well!

Summary

LECH LECHA: Hashem commands Avram to migrate from his homeland, with the destination unclear • Avram, Sarai, and Lot travel to Canaan • Hashem promises the Land to Avram’s children • A famine forces Avram to

go to Egypt • Sarai is taken, Pharaoh and his household are stricken • Sarai's identity is revealed, Avram is showered with riches and banished • Friction between the shepherds of Avram and Lot cause them to separate • Lot settles in Sodom • Avram is commanded to traverse the Promised Land • In battles between the four kings and five kings, Lot is captured by the four kings • Avram defeats the four kings, rescues Lot • Malki Tzedek blesses Avram and Hashem • Avram refuses to take from the spoils • Hashem promises Avram children • The Bris Bein Habesarim • After not bearing Avram a child, Sarai gives Hagar to Avram as a wife; Hagar bears Yishmael • Avram is renamed Avraham • Commandment of Milah • Sarai is renamed Sarah; Hashem promises Sarah a son to be called Yitzchak • Hashem will make a covenant only with Yitzchak • Avraham, Yishmael and all of Avraham's household are circumcised.

Haftarah: Avraham Avinu recognized the Creator and spread the message of faith and belief in Him. In this week's haftarah, Yeshaya Hanavi (Yeshaya 40:27 - 41:16) relays this message of emunah and bitachon with words intended to inspire the nation to persevere in exile.

Taryag Parshas Lech Lecha: 126 Pesukim • 1 Obligation 1) Bris Milah, to circumcise a son on the eighth day of life, and a slave (eved k'naani) on the day of birth or acquisition. The Bris Milah is a physical reminder of the lofty status of a Jew.

For the Shabbos Table

"הַאֲמָרְךָ לְךָ־לְךָ לְאַבְרָם בְּנֵי־אַמְּרָךְ" "Hashem told Avram go for yourself" לְךָ וְלְטַהֲרָךְ - רַשְׁיָה - For your benefit and for your good

Rashi explains that Hashem commanded Avram to leave his homeland - as it would ultimately be good and beneficial. Rav Yitzchak Feigelstock zt"l asks, as Hashem sought to test Avram with this directive, why did he advise him of the outcome? Wouldn't it have been a bigger challenge had he not known this?

The Gemara (Kesubos 33b) tells us that although Chanania, Mishael and Azaria chose to be thrown into fire instead of succumbing to the sin of idol worship, if they had been tortured extensively they would have succumbed. Rav Feigelstock explains that Chazal teach us that every nisayon is carefully measured to the point that man may pass the nisayon. For this reason, Chanania, Mishael and Azaria were not presented with such a challenge. Although life throws a person challenges, these are to serve not as an obstacle, but rather to be an attainable means of growth. Hashem was advising Avram that although his nisayon was challenging, it was tailored to be achievable. Ultimately all nisyonos lead a person to his greater good and benefit.

Ira Zlotowitz - Founder | iraz@gparency.com | 917.597.2197 Ahron Dicker - Editor | adicker@klalgovoah.org | 732.581.5830

from: The **Rabbi Sacks Legacy** <info@rabbisacks.org>

date: Oct 30, 2025, 11:23 AM

subject: Our Children Walk on Ahead (Lech Lecha)

written by Rabbi Sacks in 2012

The call to Abraham, with which Lech Lecha begins, seems to come from nowhere:

"Leave your land, your birthplace, and your father's house, and go to a land which I will show you."

Nothing has prepared us for this radical departure. We have not had a description of Abraham as we had in the case of Noah ("Noah was a righteous man, perfect in his generations; Noah walked with God"). Nor have we been given a series of glimpses into his childhood, as in the case of Moses. It is as if Abraham's call is a sudden break with all that went before. There seems to be no prelude, no context, no background.

Added to this is a curious verse in the last speech delivered by Moses' successor Joshua:

And Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'Long ago, your fathers lived beyond the river (Euphrates), Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nachor; and they served other gods.'

Joshua 24:2

The implication seems to be that Abraham's father was an idolater. Hence the famous midrashic tradition that as a child, Abraham broke his father's idols. When Terah asked him who had done the damage, he replied, "The largest of the idols took a stick and broke the rest".

"Why are you deceiving me?" Terah asked, "Do idols have understanding?"

"Let your ears hear what your mouth is saying," replied the child.

Bereishit Rabbah 38:8

On this reading, Abraham was an iconoclast, a breaker of images, one who rebelled against his father's faith.

Maimonides, the philosopher, put it somewhat differently. Originally, human beings believed in one God. Later, they began to offer sacrifices to the sun, the planets and stars, and other forces of nature, as creations or servants of the one God. Later still, they worshipped them as entities – gods – in their own right. It took Abraham, using logic alone, to realise the incoherence of polytheism:

After he was weaned, while still an infant, his mind began to reflect. Day and night, he thought and wondered, how is it possible that this celestial sphere should be continuously guiding the world, without something to guide it and cause it to revolve? For it cannot move of its own accord. He had no teacher or mentor, because he was immersed in Ur of the Chaldees among foolish idolaters. His father and mother and the entire population worshipped idols, and he worshipped with them. He continued to speculate and reflect until he achieved the way of truth, understanding what was right through his own efforts. It was then that he knew that there is one God who guides the heavenly bodies, who created everything, and besides whom there is no other god.

Maimonides, Laws of Idolatry 1:2

What is common to Maimonides and the Midrash is discontinuity. Abraham represents a radical break with all that went before.

Remarkably however, the previous chapter gives us a quite different perspective:

These are the generations of Terah. Terah fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran fathered Lot . . . Terah took Abram his son and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife, and they went forth together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan, but when they came to Haran, they settled there. The days of Terah were 205 years, and Terah died in Haran.

Gen 11:27-32

The implication seems to be that far from breaking with his father, Abraham was continuing a journey Terah had already begun.

How are we to reconcile these two passages? The simplest way, taken by most commentators, is that they are not in chronological sequence. The call to Abraham (in Gen. 12) happened first. Abraham heard the Divine summons, and communicated it to his father. The family set out together, but Terah stopped halfway, in Haran. The passage recording Terah's death is placed before Abraham's call, though it happened later, to guard Abraham from the accusation that he failed to honour his father by leaving him in his old age (Rashi, Midrash).

Yet there is another obvious possibility. Abraham's spiritual insight did not come from nowhere. Terah had already made the first tentative move toward monotheism. Children complete what their parents begin.

Significantly, both the Bible and rabbinic tradition understood divine parenthood in this way. They contrasted the description of Noah ("Noah walked with God") and that of Abraham ("The God before whom I have walked", Gen. 24:40). God Himself says to Abraham "Walk ahead of Me and be perfect" (Gen. 17:1). God signals the way, then challenges His children to walk on ahead.

In one of the most famous of all Talmudic passages, the Babylonian Talmud (Baba Metzia 59b) describes how the Sages outvoted Rabbi Eliezer despite the fact that his view was supported by a Heavenly Voice. It continues by describing an encounter between Rabbi Natan and the Prophet Elijah. Rabbi Natan asks the Prophet: What was God's reaction to that moment, when the law was decided by majority vote rather than following that Heavenly

Voice? Elijah replies, “He smiled and said, ‘My children have defeated Me! My children have defeated Me!’”

To be a parent in Judaism is to make space within which a child can grow. Astonishingly, this applies even when the parent is God (Avinu, “our Father”) Himself. In the words of Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik:

“The Creator of the world diminished the image and stature of creation in order to leave something for man, the work of His hands, to do, in order to adorn man with the crown of creator and maker.”

Halachic Man, p. 107

This idea finds expression in halachah, Jewish law. Despite the emphasis in the Torah on honouring and revering parents, Maimonides rules:

Although children are commanded to go to great lengths [in honouring parents], a father is forbidden to impose too heavy a yoke on them, or to be too exacting with them in matters relating to his honour, lest he cause them to stumble. He should forgive them and close his eyes, for a father has the right to forgo the honour due to him.

Hilchot Mamrim 6:8

The story of Abraham can be read in two ways, depending on how we reconcile the end of chapter 11 with the beginning of chapter 12. One reading emphasises discontinuity: Abraham broke with all that went before. The other, continuity: Terah, his father, had already begun to wrestle with idolatry. He had set out on the long walk to the land which would eventually become holy, but stopped halfway. Abraham completed the journey his father began.

Perhaps childhood itself has the same ambiguity. There are times, especially in adolescence, when we tell ourselves that we are breaking with our parents, charting a path that is completely new. Only in retrospect, many years later, do we realise how much we owe our parents – how, even at those moments when we felt most strongly that we were setting out on a journey uniquely our own, we were, in fact, living out the ideals and aspirations that we learned from them. And it began with God Himself, who left – and continues to leave – space for us, His children, to walk on ahead.

from: RIETS Kollel Elyon from RIETS Bella and Harry Wexner Kollel Elyon Substack <riets@substack.com>

subject: **Starstruck: What Abraham Saw**

Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman

RIETS Kollel Elyon

Oct 29

Abraham’s request was simple and profound: he wanted a true heir, not only a faithful student. God’s response comes with the words that launched, appropriately, countless inspiring speeches: “go outside, look up to the heavens—and count the stars... koh yihyeh zarekha, so shall be your descendants” (Gen. 15:5).

At first glance, the promise seems purely quantitative: you will be many. That is indeed how Rav Saadiah Gaon understands the point; It is the pure uncountability of the stars that is the message.

But many commentaries insist that the verse is not a census; it’s a charge. Quantity is not the dominant quality of “the smallest of the nations (Deut. 7:7)”. Rather, the stars carry a more profound message. Or, again appropriately, messages:

Diversity. Rabbenu Bachya hears in the heavens not only number but nuance: stars differ, and so will Abraham’s descendants. The nation that emerges will not be a single note, but a symphony: different temperaments, talents, and tasks—each luminously Jewish, each refracting a different facet of the same divine light. Perhaps this is why the extremely loyal Eliezer, admirable as he was, could never be the answer; cloning righteousness is not the same as bequeathing a people. The future is built on variety.

Nitzchiyut—Endurance. R. Schwab reads the sky as a timeline. Stars look near but live far; what we see tonight began long ago and continues long after. So, too, the Jewish People: visible in one generation, rooted in many, and pointed toward an as-yet-unseen horizon. The promise is not only that we will be, but that we will endure. Am Yisrael chai is not just a slogan; God’s message here to Abraham is astronomy translated into history.

Holy audacity. R. Meir Shapiro paints a different picture. God says, “Count,” and Abraham begins: one, two, three. God interrupts: “You cannot.” What lesson hides in that brief exchange? Begin anyway. Do not let “impossible” mean “do not start.” Your descendants, says God, will be the kind who count what cannot be counted, who undertake projects larger than themselves, who refuse to be intimidated by the scale of sacred work. It is difficult not to hear the founder of Daf Yomi in this idea: the daily page is precisely such a star-count—daunting, endless, luminous—and it changed the world because someone started with “one,” when so many others sought the project could not succeed.

Transcendence. R. Chaim Yaakov Goldvicht (Asufat Ma’arakhot, VaYera) emphasized another shade: stars are beyond our grasp; they invite us to look up. So, too, the descendants of Abraham: not earthbound, not confined by the gravity of the present moment. The word “koh”—“so shall be your descendants”—whispers toward the Akeidah: “v’ani v’hanar nelcha ad koh.” (Tanchuma, VaYera 23) The family of Abraham reaches toward “koh,” a life measured by a horizon above the horizon.

A new way of seeing. When Abraham is told to go outside, R. Samson Raphael Hirsch hears the Talmud’s statement (Shabbat 156a, cited in Rashi here): “Tzei mei’itztaginutecha—leave your astrology.” Abraham is told to step outside—not only outside his tent, but outside the frame of causality that governed Chaldea’s sky-gazers. Ein mazal l’Yisrael: not “no nature,” but no tyranny of nature. Jews are tasked with living in a world that has weather—and then carrying an umbrella and a covenant. We look up and see order; we look higher and see Providence. The stars are not our jailers; they are reminders that creation itself is already pointing beyond itself.

The next verse seals the moment: “Vehe’emin b’Hashem—Abraham trusted in Hashem—vayachshevah lo tzedakah.” Rashi reads the credit to Abraham; Nachmanides, strikingly, reads it as credit to God—an act of grace beyond nature. Rav Hirsch notes that tzedakah hovers between tzedek (justice/fitness) and chesed (generosity/excess), and the ambiguity is the point: emunah is both fitting and beyond measure. It is right—and it is a gift.

R. Shmuel Birnbaum sharpens the language: the Torah does not say “vayeda,” that Abraham knew; it says “vehe’emin,” that he believed. Knowledge is information; emunah is transformation. One can hold information at arm’s length; emunah is a choice of the heart.

There is a deeper paradox latent here. We prize effort—lefum tza’ara agra, reward corresponds to struggle. Yet, we also aspire to virtue-as-nature: the Maimonides (in Shemoneh Perakim) urges us to shape ourselves so that at least the mitzvot sichliot, the rationally accessible commandments, become our second nature. R. Yaakov Emden wonders: if struggle pays more, why aspire for effortlessness? The answer, presumably, is that “more points” is not our telos; tzelem Elokim perfected is. Our goal is not to remain forever at war with ourselves, but to be remade by Torah until goodness is as reflexive as breathing.

Read our verse again in that light. Abraham’s emunah may already be who he is; the test is no longer a mountain to scale but a stride along a well-walked path. Does that diminish its value? Vayachshevah lo tzedakah—God, in kindness, counts it as if it were hard, even when love has made it easy.

Divine accounting encourages growth: when you become the kind of person for whom the good is natural, God still calls it heroic.

This harmonizes with a different axis of our service. The Ohr Sameach (Hil. Talmud Torah) and the Eglei Tal teach that delight in learning is not an ulterior motive; it is the essence of lishmah. We are not meant to grimace our way to holiness. The ideal is that Torah becomes makom shelibi chafetz—the place our heart longs for—and mitzvot become our joy. And then sechar mitzvah mitzvah is not a prize but a pathway: each mitzvah refines us into someone readier, roomier, more capacious for the next.

Here again the stars are the perfect parable. They are distant and unattainable, and yet even were one to reach one of them, to be within its grasp, the next star would remain just as distant. And yet, they are glimpsed from Earth.

“Count the stars” is a life directive. It trains the eye to see possibility where math sees limits; it trains the heart to love what is right until right is what we love. It invites a people to be variegated like starlight, enduring across centuries, unafraid of scale, drawn upward, and unbound by deterministic ceilings. The Jewish future is not merely numerous; it is luminous.

There is still one more mystery in these verses. It is not only counting the stars that was a daunting task; it was seeing them in the first place. A close attention to the text reveals that this exchange between God and Abraham happened during the daytime (see 15:12). How, then, did the process even begin?

The vision of Abraham, as God knew, was capable not only of assessing what is too vast to be counted; it was empowered to perceive that which others never notice to begin with, would never think to pay attention to, both in Heaven and on Earth. *Koh yiyeh zar'ekha*. May we be worthy descendants of Abraham—diverse and united, audacious and anchored, timeless and transcendent.

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from: OU Kosher <noreply@ounetwork.org>

date: Oct 30, 2025, 8:03 AM

subject: **Halacha Yomis – Kiddush**

QUESTION: Is Kiddush on Friday night a mitzvah de'oraisa (a mitzvah from the Torah)?

ANSWER: The Rambam (Hilchos Shabbos 29:1,6) writes that there is a mitzvah from the Torah to sanctify Shabbos with words of praise and sanctification (zechiras shevach vekiddush), as stated in the pasuk, “Zachor es yom haShabbos le’kaddesho” (Shemos 20:8 – “Remember the day of Shabbos to sanctify it”). Chazal instituted that these words be recited over a cup of wine.

R. Akiva Eiger (OC 271:1) writes that the implication of some poskim is that reciting Kiddush over a cup of wine (or a loaf of bread) is a Torah obligation (See also Rashi Nazir 4a.) However, most poskim assume that one fulfills the Torah obligation of Kiddush with the beracha “mekadeish haShabbos” in Maariv. R. Akiva Eiger writes that even by saying “good Shabbos” one fulfills the Torah obligation of remembering Shabbos. However, the Beiur Halacha (271:2) argues: According to the Rambam’s definition, the mitzvah of kiddush requires words of praise and sanctification, not merely mentioning Shabbos. If one already davened Maariv (and according to Rabbi Akiva Eiger, if one said “good Shabbos”), reciting Kiddush on Friday night is a mitzvah de’Rabbanan. Nevertheless, the Beiur Halacha (271:13, s.v. shel revi’is) writes that one should use a large revi’is of wine for Kiddush Friday night since this mitzvah is rooted in the Torah.

QUESTION: **How much Kiddush** wine is one required to drink?

ANSWER: The Shulchan Aruch (OC 271:13) writes that the amount of kiddush wine that must be drunk is “melo lugmav” (a cheek full) of wine which, for an average sized person, is the majority of a revi’is. If a large revi’is is about 5 oz., then melo lugmav for an average person will be about 2.5 oz. Mishnah Berurah (271:68) writes that if someone’s cheek is very large, he will have to drink more, but the maximum one is ever required to drink is a revi’is. Mishnah Berurah also writes that even if the cup is very large and holds much more than a revi’is, one is only obligated to drink a melo lugmav, even though it is not the majority of the cup. There is no obligation for any of the other participants to drink the wine, even though they were included in this kiddush. However, it is considered proper for everyone present to take a sip of wine to demonstrate the preciousness of this mitzvah.

Ideally, the one who recites kiddush should drink the melo lugmav himself. However, if he cannot, one of the participants who listened to kiddush can do so. Bedi’eved, if everyone drank a sip of wine and cumulatively a melo lugmav of wine was drunk, it is acceptable. Lechatchila, the wine should be drunk within a timespan of “k’dei shiyas revi’is” (a few seconds).

Bedi’eved, if all the participants together drank the melo lugmav of wine within a timespan of “k’dei achilas pras” (3-4 minutes), it is acceptable.

QUESTION: I often see people make Kiddush on Shabbos day over a **small shot glass of schnapps**. Isn’t this a problem since they are using less than a revi’is (approximately 3.3 oz. – minimum amount for Kiddush)?

ANSWER: The Taz (OC 210:1) writes that if one drinks an entire shot glass of schnapps in one sip, they are required to recite a bracha acharona (Borei Nefashos). Although on other beverages one only recites a bracha acharona if one drinks a full revi’is, Taz maintains that a shot glass of schnapps is equivalent to a revi’is of other drinks. This is because schnapps is strong and most people are unable to drink more than this amount in one sip. The Machatzis HaShekel (272:6) points out that following the logic of the Taz, one should be permitted to recite Kiddush on Shabbos day over a shot glass of schnapps.

However, most poskim disagree with the Taz. The Magen Avrohom (190:4), Chayei Adam (6:18), Mishnah Berurah (190:14), and Aruch Hashulchan (483:3) all require a revi’is of schnapps for Kiddush. If one cannot by themselves drink a m’lo lugmav (most of a revi’is, the mandatory minimum) of schnapps, they may share with others.

Piskei Teshuvos (289, note 88) lists many Chasidische Rebbeim (including the Chozeb from Lublin and the Yid HaKadosh) who held that the halacha follows the Taz. They insisted on making Kiddush on Shabbos morning over a shot glass of schnapps to emphasize this point.

QUESTION: May one use **grape juice** for kiddush?

ANSWER: Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 272:2) writes that one may squeeze a cluster of grapes (before Shabbos) and recite Kiddush on the juice. From here we see that freshly squeezed grape juice is acceptable. However, grape juice will ferment very quickly unless it is cooked. For this reason, with the exception of special runs of frozen grape juice, all grape juice is cooked, even those labeled non-mevushal. The term non-mevushal in this context means that it was not cooked to the high temperature needed to allow a nochri to handle it, but it was pasteurized to the point that the yeast and bacteria were destroyed. Shulchan Aruch (OC 272:8) cites two opinions as to whether one may recite Kiddush on cooked wine. The main opinion is that it is permitted, however there is a minority opinion of the Rambam that does not allow. The Rema writes that the custom is to be lenient. Even still, some individuals are careful to only use non-mevushal wine for Kiddush, as per the ruling of the Rambam. Rabbi Genack said that this was the practice of Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik zt”l. He would only recite Kiddush on non-mevushal wine, however for other kossoos shel beracha, such as the other 3 cups of wine at the seder, he would use grape juice.

Some poskim (e.g., Minchas Shlomo I:4) write that reconstituted grape juice, which is made from grape juice concentrate (about 20%) and is mostly water (80%), may not be used for Kiddush. Rav Belsky zt”l held that even reconstituted grape juice may be used, since it has the same taste as regular grape juice. All OU grape juice with the words “Kosher for Kiddush” printed on the bottle contains at least 51% single strength grape juice. In this case, everyone would agree that its beracha is borei pri hagafen and that it is fit for Kiddush.

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from: **Michal Horowitz** <michalchorowitz@gmail.com>

date: Oct 30, 2025, 8:08 AM

subject: **Lech Lecha 5786: Like Perfume**

In Parshas Lech Lecha, the life and times of Avraham Avinu are narrated in great and rich detail. The parsha begins with Hashem’s command to Avraham to leave his past and journey to “the land that I will show you” (Bereishis 12:1). At the age of seventy-five, he begins his journey, along with Sarah, and Lot, his nephew. They encounter famine in the Promised Land and descend to Egypt to save themselves, whereupon Sarah is described to the Egyptian officials as his “sister,” and is promptly taken to

the Pharaoh's palace. After she is released through Divine intervention, Avraham and Lot part ways (Chapters 12-13).

We then learn of the first "World War" between the Four Kings and the Five Kings. Lot is taken captive and Avraham goes to battle to rescue his nephew (Ch.14). In the Covenant Between the Pieces, Hashem informs Avraham of four hundred years of exile, and then redemption, and Divine Judgement of the nation that will enslave the children of Avraham (Ch.15). After ten years of living in the land without children, Avraham marries Hagar - as per Sarah's advice - and she conceives. She belittles Sarah, who becomes angry at Avraham, and Hagar runs away. Meeting numerous angels at a well of water, she is promised a child who will become a 'wild ass of a man, whose hand will be in all, and the hand of all against him' (may Hashem protect and save us) (Ch.16).

And in the final perek of the parsha, when Avraham is ninety-nine years old, Hashem appears to him and commands him to do bris milah. Hashem promises him a child with Sarah, who will be called Yitzchak, and Avram and Sarai now become Avraham and Sarah (Ch.17).

There is so much to learn from the ways of Avraham, who birthed our nation on the powerful foundations of emunah (faith) and chessed (loving-kindness). He never wavered in either realm, always maintaining his belief in the goodness of Hashem, come what may, and his kindness to - and hope for - mankind. And it is these two pillars - faith in G-d and in doing for fellow man - which have become the bedrocks of our nation, Am Yisrael, throughout our long history, and continue today.

The first Divine command to Avraham are words that echo throughout the generations, and that shaped our nation: "Lech Lecha," journey to yourself, or journey for yourself (12:1).

In his opening words on the parsha, Rashi explains that Lech Lecha means: *לְקַדְּשָׁךְ וְלְטַהֲרָךְ*, that the journey from your land (Haran - Bereishis 11:31), from your place of birth (Ur Kasdim), and from your father's (Terach) home (of idol worship), will be "for your benefit and for your good." In the new land, Hashem promised to make him into a great nation, to bless him and to make his name great (12:2).

Additionally, there are many Midrashic interpretations into the two words that launched a nation. And each interpretation sheds further light into the personality of Avraham, the tafkid of his and Sarah, and the nation that they founded.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks z'l teaches that, "לְקַדְּשָׁךְ - Go - In Hebrew the suggestive phrase is Lekh lekha - literally, 'Go for yourself,' or possibly 'Go to yourself.' A more midrashic interpretation takes the phrase to mean 'Go with yourself' - meaning, by traveling from place to place you will extend your influence not over one land but many."

Rabbi Sacks quotes the following Medrash: "When the Holy One said to Avraham, 'Go - from your land, your birthplace, and your father's house' what did Avraham resemble? A jar of scent with a tight-fitting lid put away in a corner so that its fragrance could not go forth. As soon as it was moved from that place and opened, its fragrance began to spread. So the Holy One said to Avraham, 'Avraham, many good deeds are in you. Travel about from place to place, so that the greatness of your name will go forth in My word' (Bereshit Rabba 39:2).

"Avraham is commanded to leave his place in order to testify to the existence of a G-d not bounded by place - Creator and sovereign of the entire universe. Avraham and Sara are to be like perfume, leaving a trace of their presence wherever they go. Implicit in this midrash is the idea that the fate of the first Jews already prefigured that of their descendants, who would be scattered throughout the world in order to spread knowledge of G-d throughout the world. Unusually, exile is seen here not as a punishment but as a necessary corollary of a faith that sees G-d everywhere. Lekh lekha means 'Go with yourself' - your beliefs, your way of life, your faith" (The Koren Shalem Humash with Rashi and Onkelos, and Commentary of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks z'l, 2025, p.78).

This beautiful Medrash, along with the insight of Rabbi Sacks, is not only a narrative of the life, and works, of Avraham, but should be the beacon of light that guides us all. Every Jew has a responsibility to himself, to Am

Yisrael, Toras Yisrael and Eretz Yisrael, to go "with himself," and to carry his beliefs and way of life along with him always, wherever he may be. Just like perfume leaves a sweet scent in its wake and touches its surroundings, so too, we must ensure that the perfume of Torah, and its beautiful way of life, leaves its mark upon those around us.

This medrash, and Rabbi Sacks' profound words, evoke the life and works of Rabbi Moshe Hauer zt'l. Like perfume, as he went from place to place - from his Shul in Baltimore to his position as EVP of the OU, traveling weekly from his home to the OU offices in NY, from America to Israel, from offices of politicians to meeting with dignitaries, from seeking the advice and counsel of gedolim, to being the one giving advice and counsel, Rabbi Hauer's life mission was to ensure that he would spread the knowledge of G-d - and His Torah of pleasantness - throughout the world.

In connecting positively with everyone he met, in his sage counsel and measured words, with his Torah brilliance understood through the lens of modern times in which we live, yet never wavering from the emes of the mesorah he received from his rabbeim and parents (may his mother, shetichyeh, live and be well), Rabbi Hauer's life was like an open bottle of beautiful perfume that moved from place to place, so that the greatness of his name - always dedicated to the greatness of His Name - became known around the world.

The number of lives that Rabbi Hauer impacted is immeasurable, and we are all indebted to him for his accomplishments at the OU and his work with the klal and the prat, the nigleh and the nistar.

I received the following email from a woman in Baltimore. I share it with you with gracious permission from the sender, who - when I asked permission to share - replied with: "I would be honored, for anything to honor Rabbi Hauer's memory is fine with me."

"Rabbi Hauer was my Rav when I moved to Baltimore a few months before he became EVP of the OU. Someone told me at that time - almost six years ago - it's k'dai to move to Baltimore to have Rabbi Hauer as your Rav. How true that was. I have heard many ba'alei tefila in my eight decades of life. His davening was exceptional and helped me make the connection to HKB" H that is possible through tefila. He davened many times since he [continued to] live here [after his appointment to the OU]. When I heard his voice starting the tefilla, my heart would skip a beat... He davened many tefilos this past Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur; he sounded so strong. I can't believe that I will not ever hear his davening, his sermons or his "good Shabbos" again. We lost an adam gadol. Hashem nosien v'Hashem lokach. In his extremely busy schedule, he would come to see me on Purim and give me shalach manot. He knew I was alone and wanted to make me feel special, and he did... He was there for the klal and the prat. I still cannot stop the tears. Yehi Zichro Baruch."

As children of Avraham Avinu, we are responsible to continue his mission, *אֶל-עַלְמָן קָרְאָה שָׁם בָּשָׁם הָאָלֶן*, and he called there in the Name of Hashem the G-d of the world (Bereishis 21:33). Wherever life may take us, and wherever we may find ourselves, we are the seed that Hashem promised Avraham would become a "goy gadol," a great nation.

In a world utterly devoid of the beautiful scents of "perfume", we must strive to emulate - each of us on our own level - the great life of Rabbi Hauer zt'l, and bring the ne'imus of Torah to our fellow Jews, to our beloved Land, and to our world.

The path blazed by Avraham was heard by Rabbi Hauer every day of his life: *קְרִיכַת דְּרִיכֵי נִזְעָם וְכָל-נִתְבְּוֹתָה שְׁלָוִם* - her ways are ways of pleasantness and all her paths are peace (Mishlei 3:17). We must each ask ourselves: do we hear this call every day of our lives?

May our ears be attentive, may our eyes be perceptive, may our hearts be open and may our souls long, to continue the great mission began by Avraham and bequeathed to us, his children - the great nation of Am Yisrael. May the memory of Rabbi Hauer zt'l be for an everlasting blessing, and may his great life inspire us all. As he lived, so must we strive to do the same. *הַהָּיוּ נִמְּמִים בְּאַמִּים, וְאַמִּים הָאַלְקִים, וְהַשְּׁלָמִים רְעִבָּר, בָּאַרְצָה: לֹא רַעַב לְלַעַת, וְלֹא צְמַע לְפִלְמַד - Behold, days are coming, says Hashem Elokim, and I will*

send famine into the land, not a famine for bread nor a thirst for water, but to hear the word of Hashem (Amos 8:11).
ברכת בשורת טובות ושבת שלום

from: Ohr Torah Stone <ohrtorah@ohrtorahstone.ccsend.com>

date: Oct 30, 2025, 10:48 AM

subject: OTS for YOU: Lech Lecha

Haftarat Parshat Lech Lecha: Three Engines of Destiny

Rabbi Dr. Kenneth Brander - President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

The connection between this week's haftara and the parsha is not immediately obvious. The haftara, from the Book of Yeshayahu and focused on a prophecy of love and encouragement, it does contain one passing mention of the patriarch Avraham – the parsha's protagonist. Yet the more striking parallel to the parsha's account of the founding of the Jewish people appears not in that verse, but in the cryptic passage that immediately precedes it, at the beginning of chapter 41 (vv. 1–4):

Hush before Me, coastlands and nations; renew your strength, and then come forward, speak, draw close; let us come into judgment. Who roused the one from the east and called victory to his feet? Who herded nations before him, laid their kings low, and made his swords numerous as dust, his bowshots like chaff in the wind? He pursued them and came through in peace on paths that his feet never walked. Who was it who acted and did this, who called forth generations long before? I, the Lord, am the first, and I shall be, I, with the last who will be.

The reference to this mysterious savior "from the east" has fired the imaginations of commentators throughout the ages. Who this figure might be has been intensely debated, and these different suggestions together reveal a valuable lesson: Multiple forces in history can converge to create the necessary conditions for redemption. It is a process that continues to play out before our eyes today, even during the difficult years since the attacks of Oct. 7 and the multifront threats faced by Israel and the Jewish people, not only from neighboring countries, but from antisemitism globally.

The prophet Yeshayahu describes an unnamed individual called from the east by God to achieve victory over numerous nations and bring an era of peace and prosperity to Israel. But is this an event that has already happened? Or one that is yet to come? The original Hebrew text leaves this question open.

Commentators have offered three possible figures for this mighty easterner, each representing a different paradigm of redemption.

According to Rashi (ad loc., following Bereshit Rabba 43:3), the prophet is referring to Avraham Avinu. Rashi explains that the Jewish people's oldest patriarch was called out of the east by God to journey to the land of Canaan in the paramount act of faith. Avraham marked military victories over ancient Levantine kings (see Genesis 14), but more importantly, he became a spiritual champion for everyone around him, serving as a model of justice and righteousness that inspired an entire civilization and reintroduced God into the world. As the first Jew, Avraham exemplified an authentic version of chosenness, highlighting the responsibilities, rather than the privileges, of being selected by God.

Ibn Ezra, in contrast, suggests that the savior celebrated in our haftara is in actuality King Cyrus of Persia. This great non-Jewish emperor is celebrated in the Scriptures as a deliverer who conquered and punished the Babylonian tyrants responsible for the first destruction of the Kingdom of Judah and the Temple. The text portrays Cyrus, whose empire extended over much of the Near East, as graciously inviting the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild their shattered homeland. In performing these acts of kindness – knowingly or not – Cyrus was advancing God's plan for the Jewish people's sacred destiny.

A third possibility, found in the Midrash (Shir Hashirim Zuta 2:9), envisions the mysterious figure as the Messiah. Emerging from the east like the rising sun, the Messianic King will usher in a new dawn for the Jewish people and the world. According to this interpretation, Justice will prevail, and the

Jewish people will finally know true peace, spreading the light of God and the Torah to the farthest reaches of the world.

History shows the necessity and utility of all three of these prototypes in furthering the process of redemption. The Jewish people, embodying Avraham's model of moral and spiritual leadership, must choose every day to uphold justice and responsibility. Leaders of other nations around the world, symbolized by Cyrus, can similarly facilitate or hamper God's vision for the world by supporting or opposing the people of Israel in their sacred work. Lastly, the divine hand of God in history, personified by the Mashiach, guides the world, sometimes mysteriously and convolutedly, toward its ultimate purpose.

In our times, we have seen all three paradigms converging marvelously and miraculously in the great and terrible multi-front war that still continues today, even though some relief has been achieved by the recent return of the remaining living hostages from Gaza. We have seen the Jewish people choose, time and again, the path of justice and morality in war, standing as a beacon of what humanity can be and become even in the most difficult of circumstances. These choices are only the latest in a longstanding tradition of moral, intellectual, and scientific leadership that the Jewish people have shown in the world at large, always in the interest of furthering peace and prosperity.

At the same time, certain world leaders have stepped forward, standing up in the face of overwhelming global hate and antisemitism in support of the State of Israel. To be such a leader in today's world is still to move against the tide, but that makes such individuals' decisions all the more impressive and noteworthy. They are modern Cyrus, choosing to be instruments of God in the world and history, and they will be viewed as such by future generations.

And finally, we have seen the hand of God revealed in the innumerable miracles, occurrences, happenstances, and coincidences that have saved so many lives over the past two years and which have made the Jewish future seem more assured now than at any other time in recent history.

Three thousand years have passed since Avraham first embarked on the Jewish mission. And at every moment since that time, the forces of history – natural and human, seen and unseen – have never ceased to advance that mission toward the state of redemption that we all await. Let us pray that the process of salvation that we have begun to witness comes swiftly to its conclusion, and that we will all merit to witness the fulfillment of God's words of comfort that we hear in the Haftara this week: "I strengthen you and help you, uphold you with My right hand of righteousness" (Isaiah 41:10).

from: **Rabbi YY Jacobson** rabbiyy@theyeshiva.net info@theyeshiva.net
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My Sister Or My Wife? What Couples Are Searching For Today

"Tell Them You Are My Sister:" The Timeless Lessons of the Abraham-Sarah Story

Rabbi YY Jacobson

Dedicated by Josef Aronov Itskovich in memory of his beloved grandfather, Yosef ben Leib, a man remembered for his warmth and kindness to all.

A Chassid related the following story:

The loyalty of Russian soldiers to the Czar was legendary. I once saw a Russian soldier being whipped. His crime? While standing watch on a Russian winter night, his feet had frozen to his boots.

"Had you remembered the oath you took to serve the Czar," his commander berated him, "the memory would have kept you warm."

"For 25 years," concluded the Chassid, "this incident inspired my service of G-d[1]."

A Self-Absorbed Husband?

This week's Torah portion, Lech Lecha, relates how a famine breaks out in the Land of Canaan, and Abraham and his wife Sarah head down south to Egypt. As they approach Egypt, Abraham voices his fears to his wife that the Egyptians, notorious for their immorality, might kill him so that they may lay their hands on the most beautiful Sarah.

"Please say that you are my sister," Abraham pleads with his wife, "so that they will give me gifts for your sake and my life will be spared[2]."

This is a difficult story to digest. Abraham, the founder of Judaism, considered one of the most spiritual humans of all time, the person who gave the world the gift of Monotheism and taught humanity the value of kindness, seems to be all-consumed by the fear for his life, and totally unconcerned with the fate of his wife.

What is even more disturbing is Abraham's interest that "they give me gifts for your sake," while his wife would be enduring abuse and humiliation.

No less absurd is the fact that the Torah finds it necessary to begin the biography of the father of the Jewish people with this episode, as though signifying that it contained the fundamentals of Jewish faith and practice...

Two approaches can be found among the commentators. The Ramban (Nachmanides, circa 1194-1270) writes that Abraham performed indeed "a great sin, inadvertently." The Zohar explains (Tazria 52a), that Abraham, who knew Sarah's superior spiritual quality, was certain that no harm would befall her. He was only fearful about his own fate.

Yet, as in every story of the Torah, this narrative contains a profound psychological and spiritual message, articulated by the Chassidic masters.[3].

A Tale of Two Loves

What is the difference between the sibling relationship and the spouse relationship? A spouse you choose; siblings you don't choose. Your connection with your brothers and sisters is natural and innate.

The bond between siblings is constant and immutable. Whether you love your brothers or not, he will always remain your brother; you are eternally connected by genes, culture, and soul connection.

Conversely, the bond with a spouse is subject to change and fluctuation; today you are married, but in ten years from now you may sadly be divorced.

Yet paradoxically, the love of a sibling – even at its best -- is calm and placid; the love of a spouse, on the other hand, is capable of becoming fiery and passionate. Because the love of a sibling is inborn and natural, it can never fully die, but we also don't get too excited about it. It is part of who we are.

The love of a spouse is something created anew as a result of two separate individuals coming together at a later stage in life. The distinctiveness, rather than the sameness, of the two individuals linked in marriage is what gives the relationship its intensity and drama, feelings that cannot be found even between close siblings. Yet this same quality is also the reason some marriages are short-lived. Passion can flourish, but passion can fade away.

And when the marriage does fail, you fall back on the innate bond that exists among family members, who are, hopefully, always there for you.

Tough Times

The story of Abraham and Sarah is also allegorical.

When one is situated in the Holy Land, a term symbolizing a psychological state of serenity and spirituality, he is her husband and she is his wife. They care for each other and look out for each other in a way that only a husband and wife can. Those are the days when you wake up in the morning and say, "Thank you G-d for giving me such a special person in my life."

But then a famine may erupt, starving your heart and dulling your senses, you end up in "Egypt," which in Hebrew means "constraints" and "limitations." You lose your passion for your spouse, barriers between you are constructed, and your love becomes a challenge.

At these moments, one must remember that his wife is, in essence, also a sister and that her husband is also a brother. Even if you don't feel the connection, you remain connected innately; even if you don't experience the romance consciously, you remain linked essentially. Because the shared bond between a wife and her husband is not only the result of a created union at a later point in their lives, rather the spouse relationship is innate and intrinsic, in the words of the Zohar, "two halves of the same soul[4]."

A marriage, in the Jewish perspective, is not only a union of two distinct people; it is a reunion of two souls that were one and then, before birth, separated. In marriage, they are reunited.

The relationship between spouses goes beyond feelings. We crave to always be husbands and wives, but sometimes -- for our marriages to survive and thrive -- we must become brothers and sisters. Whether you feel it or not, your wife is one with you, always[5]. Do not allow the loyalty and trust to wane on both sides.

Even if there are arguments, difficulties, and hardships, maintain loyalty to each other, like healthy and functional siblings.

Abraham and Sarah taught us that when the relationship becomes challenging, you cease to be husband and wife; now you become brother and sister. You fall back on the innate, intrinsic oneness that binds you in an eternal link.

This, in fact, brings an awesome benefit to a husband. When you are there for your wife, even when you're not in the mood for it, an extraordinary energy of love is later returned to you. That's why Abraham told Sarah that by saying that she was his sister, he would not only survive but would also receive special gifts.

Marriages Today

We have been in "Egyptian" exile for a long time. The above-mentioned secret has saved many of us and our marriages during challenging times.

But now, as we prepare to return to our eternal homeland, we are empowered and summoned to cultivate a new posture, one of redemptive consciousness. When the brother and sister can openly embrace each other as husband and wife.

Perhaps it is what is happening now for many couples. Yes, we have mastered the art of intrinsic oneness. But we want something more. We want the openhearted bliss that comes from two people experiencing full trust and safety with each other.

That requires the work of exposing our vulnerabilities, pain, and fears, so we can also discover the internal yearning for authentic connection and attachment with our soulmate.

G-d My Sister, G-d My Wife

"A sound! My beloved knocks! Open your heart to Me, My sister, My wife, My dove, My twin (5)." In these stirring words, King Solomon describes the Jew both as G-d's spouse and as G-d's sibling.

There are times when the Jew is situated in the holy-land, inspired and motivated to live a spiritual and G-dly life. Like in a good marriage, the Jew is excited about G-d, yearning to be close to Him and fulfilled by having a relationship with Him. But then come the days when you enter into a psychological "Egypt," where your inner spirituality is numbed, as you are overtaken by self-centered lusts, beastly cravings, negative impulses, and enslaving addictions. Your marriage with G-d seems all but dead.

The key to survival at those moments is to remember that G-d is not only a spouse but also a sibling. We are sacred and G-dly not just because we feel it and we love it, but because a person is inherently a sacred creature, and G-dliness is intrinsic to the human being's very composition. Whether I'm in the mood for it or not, when I behave in a moral and spiritual way, I am being loyal to my true self.

You are holy not because you feel holy, but because you are essentially holy – this is one of the most fundamental ideas of Judaism, expressed in the first narrative about the first Jew.

When the Russian winter threatens to freeze our souls, it's time to recall the warmth provided by G-d as a member of the family. It's time to remember the intrinsic bond that exists between you and your sibling that will never fail. And just with our earthly marriages, we are ready to leave Egypt, and restore the "husband-wife" connection, in which our relationship with Hashem fills our nervous system with bliss and inner wholeness and serenity.[6].

[1] Once Upon A Chassid, p. 217.

[2] Genesis 12:10-13.

[3] Cf. Likkutei Sichos vol. 20 Lech Lecha. Based on the idea of the Baal Shem Tov (Baal Shem Tov Al Hatorah Lech Lecha), that as a result of descending to Egypt Abraham's relationship with Sarah was compromised, for then he began seeing her beauty as autonomous of the Divine beauty, it is possible to suggest that the explanation in the essay is relevant on some level to the literal story as well.

[4] Vayikra p. 7b.

[5] Song of Songs 5:2.

[6] This essay is based on the writings of the Chabad Chassidic Masters (Or Hatorah Emor, pp. 149-151; Safer Hammamarim 5627, pp. 248-251; Likkutei Sichos vol. 20 Lech, and Tanya chapters 18 and 25).

from: Jewish Media Resources <jonathanbrosenblum@gmail.com>

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Something Powerful is Happening in Israel

by **Jonathan Rosenblum**

Mishpacha Magazine

The most remarkable expression of newfound religious identity comes from the hostages

There is a certain secret to the Jewish People that our enemies have yet to discover, despite over 3,000 years of experience: The more we are beaten, the stronger we become. Already in Egypt the rule was established: "As much as they would afflict it [i.e., the bnei Yisrael] so it would increase and so it would burst

forth..." (Shemos 1:12). When they attack, they drive us into the embrace of HaKadosh Baruch Hu, the source of our endurance and our strength. There is a hisorerus (spiritual arousal) taking place today in Israel, not through the efforts of any kiruv organization — though, of course, those organizations are rising to the occasion — but as a spontaneous surge from the Jews of Israel. I watched an interview in which a well-known public personality, who lives in one of the affluent northern suburbs of Tel Aviv, related how her 15-year-old daughter told her late one night that she was going to Selichos. She joined her daughter and found a room bursting at the seams with teenagers. When the Selichos were over, they went to a shiur given by a charismatic young rebbeztzin. Again, the hall was overflowing.

The mother told the interviewer that there is a great thirst for connection to Hashem among young people. But unlike previous teshuvah waves, today those taking on Shabbos observance, kashrus, etc., mostly continue to define themselves as chiloni (secular) — only now as chilonim who keep Shabbos. There is an entire movement known as "tzitzis without a kippah," that is probably rooted in the tens of thousands of soldiers who put on tzitzis before going into combat. (Even more remarkably, approximately ten thousand soldiers have taken on the mitzvah of tefillin, with tefillin purchased for them by donors from abroad.)

Approximately 15 years ago, Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv ztz"l told Mrs. Tzili Schneider, the founder of Kesher Yehudi, that her task is not to produce baalei teshuvah, but only to strive that Jews should keep the Shulchan Aruch. He meant that the goal of kiruv is not that the chozrim b'teshuvah should move to Bnei Brak and don black hats. Presciently, Rav Elyashiv was speaking about the present moment.

Mrs. Leah Hecht, the educational director of Kesher Yehudi, shared a story with me of how fast things are moving. She has a friend who is the principal of a Torani school in Rechovot. Recently, an 11-year-old girl in the city told her parents, both secular professionals, that she wanted to go to a religious school. They acquiesced and enrolled her in the school.

On Shabbos Shuvah, Kesher Yehudi hosted a shabbaton in Jerusalem for around 200 people who were learning with chavrutas, but were not yet shomer Shabbos. The only thing they had to commit to was keeping that Shabbos k'hilchaso. Rebbeztzin Schneider told Mrs. Hecht to invite this family, even though they did not formally meet the criteria for participation. (The mother did ask for a chavrusa in the course of the Shabbos.)

The next thing Mrs. Hecht heard was that the mother and her two daughters had gone out and purchased modest clothing for Yom Kippur. That led to an invitation to join the second Kesher Yehudi Simchat Torah for Nova survivors, even though, again, the family did not fit into that category.

The currency for bidding on aliyos at these gatherings is mitzvah commitments. Watching from the women's section, the mother and her daughters looked for their husband/father, who had been the least enthusiastic member of the family at the previous shabbaton. They were thrilled to see him holding a sefer Torah, which he had bid upon with a commitment to keep Shabbos.

In addition to the anecdotal evidence, there is quantitative support of this hisorerus as well. Kesher Yehudi, for instance, has added 3,000 pairs of chavrutas over the past two years, and is only one of a number of organizations, including Ayelet HaShachar, involved in creating these partnerships. Kesher Yehudi works with over 30 pre-army-induction academies (mechinot), in which each student has a chavrusa over the course of the year prior to induction and spends at least one Shabbos in a chareidi neighborhood with their chavrusa's family. In the last two years, the number of graduates continuing with their chavrutas even after induction or otherwise involved in mitzvah observance has jumped greatly.

In May, Shuvu, a network of schools combining a religious education with top-level secular studies, conducted a survey of traditional and secular Jewish parents. The results indicated that 70 percent of parents felt a need to strengthen their children's Jewish identity subsequent to the Simchas Torah massacre, with more than a quarter expressing support for an education of equal parts secular and religious studies. The former figure represented a 20 percent jump from a similar survey conducted in 2017.

THE MOST REMARKABLE expression of newfound religious identity comes from the hostages. They had no access to outside sources of information, and their growth wasn't spurred by any external inspiration, though it's fascinating how many of the captives who held fiercely to their Jewish identity and practice in captivity had parents who were on a parallel religious journey.

For the last year, the Israeli public has been bombarded with stories of the sacrifices made by hostages to preserve their Jewish identity. And the impact has been enormous. A guest on Yaron Magal's popular The Patriots show recently described the hottest trend among Israeli youth as becoming shomer Shabbat and attributed that to the stories of the returning hostages: "I'm talking about tens of thousands of teens. What happened is that an entire generation of Israelis has grown up ignorant — the education system failed to provide them with any knowledge of Judaism. And then the October 7 massacre happened. And they saw all the hostages returning and speaking about Hashem. It's affecting everyone!"

Agam Berger, about whom we have written at length, refused to work on Shabbos or eat nonkosher food in captivity, and she inspired three other IDF observers taken captive along with her, to fast on Yom Kippur and not eat chometz on Pesach. At the same time, her parents created a shul in their building in Holon. Her mother, Merav, traveled the country urging Israeli Jews to respond to hostages seized for being Jewish by becoming more Jewish — learning with a study partner, keeping Shabbos, and observing the laws of family purity. Omer Shem-Tov, released at the same time, made Kiddush each Shabbos in captivity with a few drops of grape juice from a small bottle he was given, and would not turn on his flashlight on Shabbos, even when confined in a pitch-black tunnel. He related upon his return how each night he would converse with Hashem, including asking Hashem, kiveyachol, how His day had been. (Avraham Fried has a song where he describes the Baal Shem Tov having similar conversations with Hashem.) Instead of focusing only on his requests from Hashem, Omer took the time to thank Hashem repeatedly for all that he had, even in confinement.

Back in Israel, Omer's mother Shelly was the prime mover from the side of the hostage families in bringing about the multiple Kesher Yehudi shabbatons for the hostage families. She herself took on full Shabbos observance following the first of those shabbatons.

A new spate of stories has now appeared with the release of the last 20 living hostages. Matan Angrest, who received particularly brutal treatment as he was an active soldier at the time of his capture, asked his captors for a siddur, which was eventually provided. A fellow hostage had a full Chumash, and together they recited each parshah together at least 20 times. "Emunah provides a lot of chizuk, (strength)," he explained simply.

Interestingly, his mother has become close friends with Rebbeztzin Tzili Schneider since the first Kesher Yehudi shabbaton for hostage families. They speak daily and even traveled together to America to to meet with important politicians in New York and Washington D.C. in an attempt secure a hostage release.

Bar Kuperstein, another recently returned captive, learned in the Shuvu elementary school in Rishon LeZion, but was not able to continue on to a Shuvu high school, where traditionally the most dramatic religious development takes place, as his father suffered a crippling injury and Bar was forced to go to work to help support the family.

His mother, Julia, became fully observant 14 years ago, during the period Bar was learning in Shuvu. She was shocked when he requested tzitzis upon his return. "He had emunah and was traditional, but not like this," Julia told Army Radio. But when he saw his Arab captors praying and fasting, Bar decided that he, too, wanted to be close to the Borei Olam. He began reciting Shema repeatedly, davened, and recited a chapter of Tehillim he knew by heart every day. A fellow captive, who was released earlier, related that Bar would awaken his fellow captives between Rosh Chodesh Elul and Yom Kippur to recite Selichos.

Rom Braslavski's captors pressured him to convert to Islam with offers of more food and soap to clean himself. But that only strengthened him. "They tortured me only because I'm a Jew, and that gave me strength. A Jew needs to know he's in a lofty place, that he is different. We need to strengthen our Jewish identity so that Am Yisrael will remain strong and united." Upon his return, he kept repeating, "I'm a Jew, a strong Jew."

While still in captivity, Segev Kalfon fasted on Yom Kippur. Upon being forced by his captors to watch his friend Ohad Ben Ami's release, the experience gave rise to a dream that when he was released, he would stand on stage surrounded by Hamas terrorists and shout, "Shema Yisrael, Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem Echad." (Ultimately, Hamas returned the last 20 hostages without these discharge ceremonies.)

Asked by Shai Graucher what message he would like to convey, Segev replied, "Emunah is the basis. Emunah, emunah, emunah — strengthen your emunah.

And Am Yisrael should unite — that's the most important thing." Rather than stressing the bitterness of what he endured, he summarized his experience, "In the darkest place, I succeeded in seeing the light."

Eitan Horn was taken captive along with his brother, who was released earlier. This past Yom Kippur he fasted for the first time. He thought it would lead to his release, and less than two weeks later, it did.

Perhaps as amazing as the efforts of the hostages to build a relationship with Hashem and hold on to their Jewish identity in the most extreme circumstances has been the development of the survivors of the Nova Festival. Two years ago, they were at a rave festival on Shemini Atzeres/Simchas Torah, with a large idol on the premises.

Yet of the survivors who have been participating in Kesher Yehudi events over the past year and a half, 60 have become fully shomer Shabbos, and many others have committed to different aspects of Shabbos observance or learning with chavrusas. Thirty-seven survivors participate in a weekly hilchos Shabbos shiur with Rabbi Yaron Ashkenazi, the chief rabbi of Hadera.

This past Shemini Atzeres/Simchas Torah, for the second year in a row, 150 Nova survivors gathered under the auspices of Kesher Yehudi to dance with sifrei Torah. On Motzaei Yom Tov, they celebrated a hachnassas sefer Torah, with a sefer Torah contributed by Ralph and Leah Shoshana Rieder of Monsey, in honor of their efforts.

When the sefer Torah was initially commissioned, it was meant to be dedicated to the speedy return of the hostages still in captivity and to the memory of friends murdered at the Nova Festival. But by the time of its final letters were written, all the living hostages had returned to their families.

May we continue to witness Hashem's light shine upon His People.

from: **Rabbi Chanan Morrison** <chanan@ravkooktorah.org>

date: Oct 30, 2025, 8:22 AM

subject: **Rav Kook on Lech Lecha: Father of Many Nations**

Notarikon in the Torah

Abbreviations and acronyms are familiar features of rabbinic literature, but they are rare in the Torah itself. Even so, the Sages observed that a few examples of notarikon (Aramaic for 'acronym') are embedded within the Biblical text.

The first and clearest instance appears in the new name that God bestows upon Abram:

"No longer shall you be called Abram. Your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of many nations." (Gen. 17:5)

With this change, God endowed Abram with a new identity and mission. The name Avraham is short for av hamon goyim, "the father of many nations." Yet the Talmud (Shabbat 105a) was not satisfied with this simple explanation. While the Torah presents Avraham as a syllabic abbreviation of av hamon, the Sages expanded it into a full notarikon. Each of the six Hebrew letters of av hamon (אַבָּהָם) reveals a different facet of Abraham's spiritual stature and influence in the world:

Aleph for Av: you are a father to the nations.

Bet for Bachur: you are chosen among the nations.

Hei for Haviv: you are beloved among the nations.

Mem for Melech: you are a king over the nations.

Vav for Vatik: you are exemplary among the nations.

Nun for Ne'eman: you are faithful among the nations.

Of all the names in the Torah, why should Abraham's be an abbreviation? And why did the Sages choose to expand this abbreviation letter by letter?

Abraham's Dual Influence

It would be a mistake to regard a notarikon as merely a homiletic or mnemonic device. It is, rather, a window into levels of meaning in the text. In addition to a literal understanding of the words, there is a wealth of profound ideas contained within the written text. This is similar to the workings of an acronym, where from each letter we extrapolate an entire word.

What is striking is that the Sages chose the name Abraham for such an interpretation. Why this name, of all others?

Abraham's life-mission was to found the Jewish people. All three patriarchs, the Sages taught, are called "Israel" (Breishit Rabbah 63:3). This is because their primary goal was to establish a nation that would be a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

Yet Abraham's influence did not end there. He had a powerful impact on all nations, introducing a world steeped in idolatry to the idea of One God.

The Sages analyzed Abraham's influence, noting that it incorporated six qualities, corresponding to the six letters of av hamon.

Thus, like a notarikon, Abraham's influence was on two planes. His explicit life-goal was to establish a holy nation. But Abraham had an additional level of influence, as he disseminated the ideals of monotheism and morality among all peoples.

Six Dimensions of Abraham's Influence

Each letter of the phrase av hamon reveals a different facet of Abraham's influence on humanity.

He was an Av, a spiritual father and mentor to many people. Abraham was a source and model for true knowledge of God in the world.

His teachings were Bachur — chosen and pure, far removed from the jumble of pagan superstitions and myths. And because truth has a beauty of its own, his faith was Haviv — beloved. Its inner radiance drew hearts toward it; people felt its authenticity and were inspired by its moral grace.

Because of his stature and integrity, Abraham was revered as a Melech, a king. "A prince of God are you among us," his neighbors told him (Gen. 23:6). Like a king on the battlefield, he led the fight for truth in a world shrouded in darkness and ignorance, victorious by virtue of the truth of his vision.

He was also Vatik, respected for his integrity and unwavering principles. His Torah was no abstract philosophy. It was a way of life, refining conduct and character alike, elevating the everyday through holiness, morality, and justice. And finally, Abraham was Ne'eman, a man of steadfast faith. As the Torah records, "He believed in God, and it was counted to him as righteousness" (Gen. 15:6).

Abraham and his revolutionary faith kindled a nascent spark of faith among the nations. This flame of faith continues to illuminate the paths of many nations — a flame that will be elevated in the future into a pure and perfected faith in God. (Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. IV, p. 264)

from: **Ohr Somayach** <ohr@ohr.edu>

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Taamei Hamitzvos - Wholehearted Faith

Reasons behind the Mitzvos

by **Rabbi Shmuel Kraines**

Parashas Lech Lecha traces Avraham's rise to greatness and shows us the path to follow. After passing several critical tests of faith, Hashem promised him enormous reward, to which Avraham said, "But You have not given me any children [to inherit whatever reward I will receive]..." Avraham knew that according to the signs of astrology, he was not destined to bear children. Hashem took him outside and told him that his descendants would be uncountable like these stars (15:1-6). On a deeper level, the verse means that Hashem took Avraham "outside" the astrological influence of the stars and under Hashem's direct influence. According to nature, he could not have children, but for Hashem — who is above nature — anything is possible (Rashi).

Later in this parashah, Hashem commanded Avraham to have wholehearted faith (17:1). This meant that Avraham — and his descendants who strive to continue in his path — should not be overly concerned about astrological signs, and they should not seek stargazers and fortunetellers. Rather, even if the astrological signs forecast doom, they should place their trust in Hashem alone (Ramban there and in Teshuvos HaMeyuchasos §283).

We can illustrate this idea with the well-known story of Rabbi Akiva's daughter: Stargazers predicted that she would die on her wedding night, but she was saved by the merit of an extraordinary act of charity she performed by giving her portion of food to a poor person (Shabbos 156b). As heirs of Avraham's legacy of faith, we can override the influences of astrology and other rules of nature through good deeds, prayer, and finding favor in Hashem's eyes.

Much later in the Torah, Hashem repeats the Mitzvah to have wholehearted faith, this time to the Jewish people. The verse states, "Be whole [in your faith] with Hashem, your God" (Devarim 18:3). Rashi there comments that when our faith in Hashem is whole, we are with Him. This means that the more we internalize that He is the ultimate controller of every aspect of our lives, the more we merit to rise above natural influences and be "with Hashem" alone. Similarly, R' Chaim Volozhiner famously said that when a person meditates on the fact that there is none other than Hashem, he is invulnerable to any harm (Nefesh HaChaim 3:12). This precept is central to Jewish life. If a Jew becomes ill or experiences other types of suffering, he is meant to recognize that Hashem is disciplining him and prodding him to correct his conduct (Berachos 5a). Before taking medication, for

example, he should first pray that it works, recognizing that Hashem is the ultimate Healer (Mishnah Berurah 230:6). Otherwise, there is a concern that he may place his trust at least partly in the doctor and medicine — which is a violation of the Mitzvah to place one's trust entirely in Hashem.

With a short prayer, a person reminds himself of Who is ultimately in control; this recognition alone can be enough to merit relief. One should similarly involve Hashem in all aspects of his life by praying for all of his needs and thanking Him after having received them (see Shaar HaTziyun, *ibid.*, and Berachos 9:5)

from: **Rabbi Yochanan Zweig** <genesis@torah.org>

rabbizweig@torah.org

date: Oct 29, 2025, 3:21 PM

subject: Rabbi Zweig on the Parsha - Environmental Hazard

"And it occurred, as he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai..."(12:11)

As they approached Mitzrayim, Avraham asked Sarah to claim that she was his sister. This was to protect him from the Egyptians who might lust after Sarah, and kill him if they were to know that he was her husband.¹

Why is it necessary for us to know that this discussion transpired as Avraham and Sarah drew close to their destination? Why, in fact, was an issue of such gravity not discussed prior to their departure from Eretz Canaan? The Midrash explains that as they neared their destination, Avraham became aware of Sarah's exceptional beauty.² Why is this the juncture where Avraham becomes aware of his wife's beauty?

Mitzrayim was a country notorious for the immoral and lascivious behavior of its inhabitants.³ Generally, an individual living in such a society would be affected, even if he himself would not indulge in any perverse behavior. Perhaps the Torah is teaching us that although a tzaddik of Avraham's caliber would not be dragged down by the immorality of the society where he lives, the influence of the society does have a subtle effect on him. In Avraham's case, this manifested itself in his becoming aware of his wife's beauty.

1.12:11 2.Tanchuma 5:20:15

It's Not The Thought That Counts

"Then there came the fugitive and told Avram..." (14:13)

Chazal identify the "fugitive" as Og, the king of Bashan, who had escaped the onslaught of the four kings and fled to Avraham to inform him that his nephew Lot had been captured.¹ The Midrash relates that for this deed, Og was blessed with longevity. At the same time, the Midrash reveals that Og's true intentions were malevolent; he hoped that Avraham would pursue Lot's captors and be killed, allowing him to marry Sarah.²

In Parshas Chukas, we find that Hashem reassures Moshe, telling him not to fear, for Bnei Yisroel will successfully defeat Og and his nation.³ The Midrash explains that Moshe feared that the merit of Og's service to Avraham would protect him against Bnei Yisroel.⁴ It is difficult to understand Moshe's fear, in light of the evil intent which was the impetus for Og's actions.

Human nature is such, that we find it difficult to express gratitude for benefits we have received from others. One technique we employ to avoid expressing gratitude, is to focus on the intent of the benefactor. We rationalize that if the intent of the benefactor was a selfish one, then the act was done for his benefit and not ours. Therefore, we are exempt from showing gratitude. Chazal are teaching us that "hakaras hatov" – acknowledging the benefit we have received, is not dependent upon the intent of the benefactor, rather the benefit which has been provided. The lesson can be especially helpful in the relationship between a child and his parents. The child should focus on the benefit he has received from his parents, the gift of life being the ultimate benefit, and not on their motivations.

1.Bereishis Rabbah 42:8 2. Ibid 3.Bamidbar 32:33 4.Tanchuma *ibid.*

Badge Of Honor

"if so much as a thread to a shoe strap; nor shall I take anything of yours! So you shall not say 'It is I who made Avram rich.'"(14:23)

After Avraham defeated the largest army ever amassed and recaptured all the spoils and captives from the four kings,¹ the Torah records a dialogue between Avraham and the king of Sodom in which the king offered to divide the spoils with Avraham; Avraham would take the possessions, while the king of Sodom would receive the freed captives. Avraham rejected this proposal with the statement, "If so much as a thread to a shoe strap; nor shall I take anything of yours! So you shall not say 'It is I who made Avram rich.'² The Talmud teaches that for having refused to accept even a thread or a shoe strap, Avraham's

children merited to receive two precepts, Tzitzis for the thread and Tefillin for the strap.³ Aside from the obvious play on words, how is Avraham's reward commensurate with his actions?

Rashi explains that Avraham's actions were particularly meritorious, for he did not want to benefit from stolen property.⁴ The Maharsha questions the claim that this was stolen property, for halachically the spoils of war are the legal possession of the victor.⁵

Although Avraham was legally entitled to the spoils, it is clear that this was not the king of Sodom's perception. The mere fact that he offered to divide the bounty with Avraham implies that he felt he had rights over these possessions, and that he was making a magnanimous gesture. What the Sages find meritorious in Avraham's actions is the fact that he dealt with the king of Sodom within the context of the king's perception. According to the king's perception, if Avraham were to take everything by force, he would be a gazlan, a thief. As Hashem's representative, Avraham could not allow for the perception that he had either stolen his fortune or that the money had been given to him as a mortal's magnanimous act, for this would detract from Hashem's honor. Avraham showed that in order to protect Hashem's honor, he was willing to deal with people based upon the reality which they had created for themselves, even though the basis for their position was unfounded.

This characteristic is rewarded with Tzitzis and Tefillin for the following reason: The same section in the Talmud that teaches that Avraham was rewarded with the mitzva of Tefillin, explains that when a Jew wears Tefillin, he instills awe in all who see him.⁶ This is not because they fear the person himself, rather they sense the presence of a Higher Authority who is being represented by this individual. We could compare this to a policeman who wears a badge; one does not fear the man himself, rather the institution which he represents. Tefillin are the badge that represents Hashem's presence. It is interesting to note that the Tefillin are worn on areas generally designated for displaying a badge, the sleeve and the cap. Concerning Tzitzis, the Talmud teaches a similar concept. A Jew wearing Tzitzis is akin to a slave who wears the insignia of his master on his garment.⁷ These two mitzvos reflect the Jew's designation as Hashem's representative and facilitate the perception of Hashem's presence in this world.

Avraham showed the ability to accept someone else's perception of reality. Therefore, he was a fitting candidate for the precepts which allow Hashem's presence to be perceived. The reason is as follows: Egocentricity prevents a person from seeing a differing point of view. Avraham displayed a complete lack of egocentricity, which is the cornerstone for the acceptance of Hashem. All too often we require that others live within our reality, especially if we consider their position to be incorrect. Although it meant giving up that which was rightly his, Avraham dealt with the king of Sodom within the king's own reality, in order to preserve Hashem's honor in this world.

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Parshas Lech Lecha: Avraham, Lot and the Roots of Jewish Monarchy

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

I. THE NO'ACH-AVRAHAM CONNECTION: AN ALTERNATIVE PAIRING

Conventional wisdom holds that the T'nakh deliberately situates No'ach as an early, less refined prototype of the righteous man - a role ultimately filled capably by Avraham. The frequent comparisons between No'ach and Avraham - found as early as the Midrash Tanhuma at the beginning of Parashat No'ach (cited by Rashi), which notes that No'ach is considered "righteous in his generations" because "had he lived in the generation of Avraham, he wouldn't have been considered anything special". This comparison may be rooted in several literary associations made between the two (e.g. "No'ach was a just man and *Tamim* [perfect] in his generations" [6:9] and "When Avram was ninety nine years old, Hashem appeared to Avram, and said to him, I am the Almighty God; walk before Me, and be *Tamim* [17:1]), or it may be based on the parallel number of generations which separated Adam from No'ach and No'ach from Avraham (cf. Mishnah Avot 5:2).

In any case, although these two heroes share some noble qualities, the presentation of the T'nakh reveals someone else who is closely paired with No'ach.

Note that until we are introduced to No'ach (5:28), we have gone through a brief recap of the "begats" which link Adam (via Shet) to Lemekh, No'ach's father. In each case, we are told the name of the patriarch, how long he lived before giving birth to his first son, how long he lived after that event and that he had sons and daughters. We are then given his entire lifespan - and then move on to that son's progeny, in like fashion. For instance:

And Enosh lived ninety years, and fathered Cainan; And Enosh lived after he fathered Cainan eight hundred and fifteen years. and fathered sons and daughters; And all the days of Enosh were nine hundred and five years; and he died. (5:9-11)

Suddenly, there is a broadening of the information provided:

And No'ach was five hundred years old; and No'ach fathered Shem, Ham, and Yaphet. (5:32)

Instead of being told about No'ach's firstborn, we are told about all three of his sons.

At a later point in the text, when we are about to begin the second set of "begats" (linking No'ach to Avraham), we are again introduced to these three sons - with a curious addition:

And the sons of No'ach, who went out of the ark, were Shem, and Ham, and Yaphet; and Ham is the father of K'na'an. (9:18)

Why are we told about K'na'an, the son of Ham?

The answer to this is quite clear, once we read further (9:18-29). As the story there evolves, we learn that as a result of either Ham or K'na'an's violation of No'ach, K'na'an was cursed to be a slave to his brothers - so it is important for us to be aware of the relationship between Ham and K'na'an at the outset.

One more anomaly about No'ach - he gives birth to his children at a much more advanced age than his forebears. Following the generations listed in Chapter 5, Adam's first sired a son at age 130 (Kayyin and Hevel are not part of this accounting); Shet was 105; Enosh was 90; Keinan was 70, M'halel was 65; Yered was 62, Hanoch was 65; Metushelach was 87 and Lemekh was 82.

Noa'ch was significantly older than any of his ancestors before having children: "And No'ach was five hundred years old; and No'ach fathered Shem, Ham, and Yaphet."

There is one later member of the Noachide family who is presented in curiously similar terms - but it isn't Avraham. Avraham's descendants are not listed within the "begats" list - it ends with his birth. The birth of Yishma'el, the miraculous birth of Yitzhak, the children of his old age (25:1-5); none of these are presented as part of a chain of generations.

Note, however, the unusual introduction of Terach's family - at the end of the second "begats" list:

Now these are the generations of Terach; Terach fathered Avram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran fathered Lot. (11:27)

Why is Lot, the grandson, introduced immediately along with Terach's sons? The next few verses seem to indicate a reason:

And Haran died before his father Terach in the land of his birth, in Ur of the Chaldeans. And Avram and Nahor took wives; the name of Avram's wife was Sarai; and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah, and the father of Iscah. But Sarai was barren; she had no child. And Terach took Avram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldeans, to go to the land of K'na'an; and they came to Haran, and lived there. And the days of Terach were two hundred and five years; and Terach died in Haran. (11:27-32)

Nevertheless, if all we needed to know was why Lot was accompanying his grandfather - and later ended up with Avraham in K'na'an, he could have been introduced in v. 31 ("And Terach took Avram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his grandson..."); subsequent to the news of his father's death (v. 27), we would have understood his participation in the Terachian (and, later Avrahamian) migration. Why did the Torah introduce Lot in this fashion?

To further strengthen the parallel between Terach and No'ach, note the ages when the patriarchs of the second "begats" list (linking No'ach to Avraham) first had children. Shem was 100; Arpach'shad 35; Shelach was 30; Ever was 30; Peleg was 30; R'u was 32; S'rug was 30; Nahor was 29.

"And Terach lived seventy years, and fathered Avram, Nahor, and Haran." (11:26) With the exception of Shem (who was delayed in establishing a family on account of the flood), Terach waited at least twice as long as any of his (recent) ancestors before having children. When placed against the background of numbers like 35,32,30 and 29, 70 suddenly seems very old, indeed.

In summary, we have noted that although the parallels (and comparisons - some highly unfavorable to No'ach) between No'ach and Avraham are legend, the text-presentation actually aligns No'ach much more closely with Terach. One of the critical points of this comparison is the introduction of Lot, Avraham's nephew. I would like to suggest that the purpose of the No'ach-Terach comparison (especially the unusual presentation of one grandson among the three sons) is designed to teach us about Lot - who he was and the critical role that his progeny will play in the unfolding history and destiny of the B'nei Yisra'el.

Lot is presented in terms reminiscent of K'na'an (the grandson of No'ach). In spite of his close relationship with Avraham, the first real hero in the T'nakh, we already sense that Lot is destined to fail.

We will devote the rest of this shiur to an analysis of Lot and his descendants - with a critical "detour" into the book of Ruth, via a link to B'resheet made by the Midrash.

II. "I FOUND MY SERVANT DAVID..."

In relating the story of Lot's fleeing from S'dom, the messenger tells Lot:

"Arise, take your wife and your two daughters who are found here (*haNimtza'ot*)..." (19:16)

This curious turn of a phrase - *haNimtza'ot* - leads the Midrash to associate this verse with a (seemingly unrelated) verse in T'hillim about David:

"I have found (*Matza'ti*) David my servant; with my holy oil have I anointed him," (T'hillim 89:21).

The Midrash states: "R. Yitzhak says: 'I have found (*Matza'ti*) David my servant' - where did I find him? In S'dom" (B'resheet Rabbah 41:4)

What is the connection between David and S'dom? How was David "found" in S'dom? Certainly, the Midrash is not just connecting David to S'dom due to the common root M*Tz*A found in reference to both.

In order to answer this question, we have to turn a lot of pages in our T'nakh - from the early parts of Sefer B'resheet to the middle of the Five Megillot. The shortest of those Megillot is Sefer Ruth, chronologically placed during the days of the Judges (1:1). What is the purpose of Sefer Ruth? Why is this story about loyalty included in our T'nakh?

At the end of this short Sefer, we learn of this progeny of Ruth (the protagonist) and Bo'az:

"Now these are the generations of Peretz; Peretz fathered Hetzron, And Hetzron fathered Ram, and Ram fathered Amminadav, and Amminadav fathered Nach'shon, and Nach'shon fathered Salmon, and Salmon fathered Bo'az, and Bo'az fathered Oved, and Oved fathered Yishai, and Yishai fathered David." (4:18-22)

In other words, the final statement of this Sefer is the "yichus" of David - and, via this story, we learn about his roots (pun intended). Keep in mind that Ruth was a Moabite woman.

Where does Mo'av come from?

We turn back to Sefer B'resheet, in the immediate aftermath of the destruction of the cities of S'dom, and learn of their origins...

"And it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God remembered Avraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in which Lot lived. And Lot went up out of Tzo'ar, and lived in the mountain, and his two daughters with him; for he feared to live in Tzo'ar; and he lived in a cave, he and his two daughters. And the firstborn said to the younger, Our father is old, and there is not a man on earth to come in to us after the manner of all the earth; Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve seed of our father. And they made their father drink wine that night; and the firstborn went in, and lay with her father; and he perceived not when she lay down, nor when she arose. And it came to pass on the next day, that the firstborn said to the younger, Behold, I lay last night with my father; let us make him drink wine this night also; and you go in, and lie with him, that we may preserve seed of our father. And they made their father drink wine that night also; and the younger arose, and lay with him; and he perceived not when she lay down, nor when she arose. Thus were both the daughters of Lot with child by their father. And the firstborn bore a son, and called his name Mo'av; the same is the father of the Mo'avites to this day. And the younger, she also bore a son, and called his name Benammi; the same is the father of the Ammonites to this day." (19:29-38)

In other words, these two daughters, who were *Nimtz'a'ot* in S'dom, conspired to bring two nations into the world, one of whom would provide an extraordinary woman who would help develop David - who God *Matza* (found). (The other would provide him a daughter-in-law, as Shlomo's wife Na'amah, mother of the next king Rehav'am, was an Ammonite)

So far, we have explained why the Midrash made this connection - the unusual phrase relating to Lot's two daughters shows up again in reference to David, and these two daughters and their misunderstanding about the destruction of S'dom and their subsequent raising of two nations which led to the birth of David.

Let's ask a more fundamental question here: Why does the T'nakh establish a Lot-Ruth-David connection, if only by word-association? In other words, is the T'nakh merely trying to stress the fact that David is descended from Lot? I would like to suggest that the development of Jewish monarchy through the seed of Lot, through Ruth, was a very deliberate and necessary process.

In order to understand this, we'll need to address the central issue in this week's Parashah - the selection of Avraham and his role in the world. First, a brief summary of the first two Parashiot, as regards the development of Avraham.

III. CHAPTERS 1-11: A BRIEF RECAP

When God created mankind, He called him "Adam" - since he was from the "Adamah" (earth - note the last phrase in B'resheet 2:5). Indeed, man was so much "of the earth" that his failures caused the earth to be cursed (3:17). This tie was further severed when his son committed the first murder. Not only was he "cursed from the ground that opened its mouth to receive the blood of your brother", but he was uprooted and made to wander (4:11-12).

When humanity continued to descend into a storm of moral depravity and violence, God decided to wipe them out (6:7) - and to begin the process anew with Noach (note the similarities between the charge given to Noach upon his exit from the

Ark in Chapter 9 and those given to Adam in Chapter 1).

Just as the name "Adam" implies a symbiotic relationship with the earth, implying a static harmony with nature, similarly the name "Noach" implies a type of respite and calm amid the storm of corruption around him. The Torah provides this explanation for his name, crediting his father, Lemekh, with this prayer/prophecy (6:29). Noach was to be "at rest" (a close literal translation of his name) and, indeed, that is how he behaved. While the storm of corruption - and, later, the storm of Divine justice - swirled around him, he was calm and at rest. From the Divine perspective, there was every reason to utilize this method of "starting over"; since not only every corrupted being was wiped off the face of the earth, but even the memories of their sinful behavior were eradicated. There was every possibility for a "fresh start". The worldview behind this perspective is that if man is created with goodness, then, if he remains "at rest", (status quo), he will continue to be good and upright.

This approach, as we know, did not succeed. No'ach, who was to be the "second chance" for mankind, did not live up to his potential exhibited earlier, when he was described as a "righteous and perfect."

Almost immediately after coming out of the Ark, No'ach descended into becoming a "man of the earth" (9:20; the intent is clearly pejorative - see B'resheet Rabbah ad loc.) After his drunken interaction with Ham (or K'na'an) and the subsequent curse, his progeny continued to behave in an unworthy manner - culminating with the scene at the Tower of Shin'ar, when Mankind was dispersed throughout the world.

IV. THE TOWER AT SHIN'AR: THE BACKDROP AGAINST WHICH TO VIEW AVRAHAM

At the beginning of Ch. 11, we meet the builders of the great tower at Shin'ar. We know that their behavior was considered sinful - for why else would God disrupt it - but what was their terrible sin?

The "P'shat" (straightforward) reading of the text reveals only one crime:

"Come, let us build a tower with its spire in the heavens and make a name for ourselves, lest we be spread throughout the land." (11:4)

God had commanded Noach and his children (in the same manner as He had commanded Adam) to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth...spread throughout the earth and multiply in it" (9:1,7). The Divine purpose would be met by mankind's populating the earth, settling the many lands and creating many diverse civilizations. These sons of Noach chose to do the exact opposite - and the build a tower that would support their ill-fated unity.

As is well known, however, the Rabbis read much worse intentions into their behavior - understanding that they desired to compete with God, to fight against Him etc. Where are these ideas in the text? (not that they need be; but it is always more impactful to identify textual allusions which support Midrashic threads). Truth to tell, we can only identify these textual allusions after our introduction to Avraham, as we shall see.

It was onto this particular stage of humanity, a species which desired nothing but to avoid spreading out and preferred to "sit still", that this great hero, Avraham Avinu, made his powerful entrance. In a world where everyone was satisfied to stay put, Avraham unquestionably and immediately accepted God's call to: "Leave your land, your birthplace and your father's house." Not only did he leave - he continued his wanderings long after reaching "the place that I will show you." Everywhere he went, he built an altar and called out in God's Name (whatever that may mean; prayer, education, declaration). He was clearly a "mover and shaker" in the most literal sense of the phrase: He moved from place to place in order to shake the people from their spiritual and intellectual complacency. Note how S'forno (12:8-9) explains Avraham's route (north and south, between Beit-El and Ha'Ai) - "between these two large cities, in order that many people would come to hear him call out in God's Name... when he traveled from place to place as is the custom of the shepherds, he didn't go from east to west, in order not to abandon either one of these cities where some of the people were already drawn to him."

We now understand Avraham's greatness which earned him (and we, his progeny) the great blessings promised throughout his life: When God told him to wander, he took it upon himself to go against the lifestyle in which he grew up, to fight the complacency and "status quo" of the world around him - and to tirelessly bring the word of God to those around him.

V. OLAM HESED YIBANEH

How was Avraham going to fulfill his mission, to restore humanity to its former nobility and to help Mankind actualize the "image of God" in which it was created?

" 'And he called there on the name of Hashem, the Everlasting God'. Resh Lakish said: Read not 'and he called' but 'and he made to call', thereby teaching that our father Avraham caused the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, to be uttered by the mouth of every passer-by. How was this? After [travelers] had eaten and drunk, they stood up to bless him; but, said he to them, 'Did you eat of mine? You ate of that which belongs to the God of the Universe. Thank, praise and bless Him who spoke and the world came into being.' (BT Sotah 10a-b)

It was through his unending kindness, opening his tent to all passersby and demonstrating deep and passionate concern for everyone (including entire communities devoted to decidedly un-Avrahamic behavior), that Avraham was successful in influencing people. His constant movement, from north to south, east to west, attracted many adherents because he personified the attribute of lovingkindness - *Hessed*.

There are several types of Hessed - altruistic, self-serving, parochial, universal etc. For our purposes, let's note that there is Hessed which obliterates valuable boundaries and blurs the truth. Often, people will, in the name of love, ignore harsh realities and embrace and even encourage immoral, unethical and even felonious behavior. Although motivated by noble instincts, this sort of Hessed is often self-destructive as well as counterproductive.

Avraham's brand of Hessed, on the other hand, was "Hessed shel Emet" - lovingkindness which doesn't compromise truth (note how these two concepts "balance" each other in Mikhah 6:8, Zekharyah 8:18 and Esther 9:30). An example of this is related in Parashat Vayera:

And Avraham reproved Avimelech because of a well of water, which Avimelech's servants had violently taken away. (21:25)

Note the Midrash's inference from this verse: "Any love without reproving is not [genuine] love".

In short, Avraham's mission - to be a source of blessing for all of humanity (B'resheet 12:3) by teaching them and bringing them close to the way of God - was to be accomplished by synthesizing impassioned Hessed with uncompromising Emet.

VI. AND THEY SEPARATED...

This model of Hessed and Emet, so inspiring to myriad followers, was not entirely successful in actualizing it within his own family. After the near-tragedy in Egypt, Lot accompanied Avraham and Sarah back to K'na'an - and both nephew and uncle were "very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold". Unfortunately, that very wealth led to disputes between their shepherds (see the Rishonim at 13:7 for various explanations as to the nature of those disputes) - and Lot and Avraham separated. Avraham offered Lot his choice of land, and Lot chose the (then-) fertile valley of S'dom.

Lot's choice of S'dom is odd. The closest relative and protege of Avraham, the man of Hessed, chooses a city whose very name reeks of selfishness:

"Behold, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom...she did not strengthen the hand of the poor and needy." (Yehezqe'el 16:49)

Lot's emigration to S'dom, away from Avraham, was, at the very least, a serious obstacle in the path of the Avrahamic mission. How could he use Hessed to teach the world when his own nephew opted to live in the "anti-Hessed" city?

Something about the loving-kindness of Avraham remained incomplete as a result of this separation.

In the meantime, we find that the uncompromising characteristic of Emet was "diluted" in the generations following Avraham. Although we will address this topic at length in a few weeks, I'd like to briefly point out that there are a number of episodes involving deceit in the Ya'akov and Yehudah (and Yoseph) narratives (e.g. Lavan's deceit of Ya'akov, the brothers' deceit of their father with Yoseph's tunic).

In other words, by the time we encounter the third generation of the Avrahamic tribe, both Hessed and Emet, the crowning characteristics of father Avraham, have been taken down at least a few pegs and are in need of restoration.

Curiously, each of these losses resulted in the birth of two boys: As a result of Lot's separation, he ended up in that cave with his two "found" daughters - and that's where Ammon and Mo'av came into the world.

Yehudah's deception in the Tamar episode (Ch. 38) is clearly linked to the earlier episodes of deceit (more on that in a later shiur) documented in B'resheet. As a result of this interaction, Peretz and Zerach are born to Yehudah.

VII. BACK TO MEGILLAT RUTH...

What was Ruth's crowning characteristic? We'll let the Midrash tell us:

"R. Ze'ira says: This Scroll [of Ruth] has no [laws of] impurity and purity, prohibition and permission - so why was it written? To teach you how great is the reward of *Gom'lei Hassadim* (people who perform acts of lovingkindness).

Ruth's Hessed is legendary (see Ruth 1:8); her devotion to her mother-in-law is one of the most inspirational stories in all of our literature.

The fidelity, honesty and guilelessness (Emet) which typify both Bo'az and Ruth throughout the story are surely indicative of a reversal of the disruptive developments in Sefer B'resheet.

Now, let's take a quick look back at the genealogy of David at the end of Megillat Ruth:

"Now these are the generations of Peretz; Peretz fathered Hetzron, And Hetzron fathered Ram, and Ram fathered Amminadav, and Amminadav fathered Nach'shon, and Nach'shon fathered Salmon, and Salmon fathered Bo'az, and Bo'az fathered Oved, and Oved fathered Yishai, and Yishai fathered David." (4:18-22)

VIII. ...AND BACK TO LOT

Near the beginning of the shiur, I proposed that the presentation of Terach in parallel form to the presentation of No'ach was aimed at setting up Lot as a latter-day K'na'an. I also proposed that it was necessary for David to be a descendant of Lot - that the foundation of Jewish monarchy had to come from that wayward nephew of Avraham.

By noting the effects of Lot's separation from Avraham on his mission - and the later diminution of uncompromising Emet in Avraham's family - we understand how the Avrahamic task could not be completed until they were properly returned to the fold. It was in the person of David, the product of that union of Emet and Hessed (Bo'az and Ruth), that these were restored to the B'nei Yisra'el. This king was the person most appropriate to continue the Avrahamic task - to be a blessing for all families of the earth.

Bo'az is a direct descendant of Peretz, the product of deceit; Ruth is the child of Mo'av, the product of rejection. Together, they give birth to the seeds of Jewish monarchy and, ultimately, the Mashiach.

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Parshat Lech Lecha: Trust in Training

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

PARASHAT LEKH LEKA

Creating humanity was Hashem's experiment: could a limited being, the human, reflect the divine ("tzelem Elokim")? By the end of Parashat Bereishit, Hashem has decided that the answer is no: just before He brings the Flood to wipe out life on Earth, Hashem concludes (sadly) that humanity is basically evil. Even after the Flood, when only the righteous Noah is left, Hashem maintains the same belief in humanity's basic evil inclination, despite having destroyed those humans whose evil behavior led to the Flood. But there is a critical difference between how Hashem characterizes humanity before and after the Flood; before the Flood, Hashem says, "All of the inclinations of the thoughts of Man's heart are PURELY evil ALL DAY"; after the Flood, He says, "The inclinations of the heart of Man are evil FROM HIS YOUTH." What is Hashem really "thinking"?

AVOID DISAPPOINTMENT: LOWER YOUR EXPECTATIONS!

Over the course of Parashat Noah, Hashem dramatically lowers His expectations of humanity: before the Flood, He had decided to destroy the world because the people were "purely evil all day" -- since they had chosen evil, they deserved to be destroyed. But after the Flood, Hashem asserts that humans are "evil from their youth" -- He 'realizes' that the evil inclination is built in, a part of them "from their youth." Since Man must constantly struggle with his powerful evil inclination, he deserves some slack when he fails. While he is still held responsible for his actions, those actions will never lead to another worldwide destruction. Hashem no longer links the continued existence of the world to Man's goodness. [Hashem continues to be ready to punish people for doing evil, as we see when he destroys Sodom and Amora.]

A FEW GOOD MEN:

Originally, Hashem's plan had been to establish a close relationship with all humans. That plan met with disappointment and was rejected. The theme of the rest of Sefer Bereishit is Hashem's search for "a few good men": our parasha begins the process by which Hashem will identify the individuals to found an elect group, the one nation which will maintain a close relationship with Him. This is the meaning of the term "am segula" which we find later in the Torah: we have a special, intimate relationship with Hashem which implies both privileges and responsibilities.

Not only is this a turning point in the grand divine plan, it's also a turning point for the Torah from a literary perspective. Until now, we've heard a lot about the universal: the creation of the entire cosmos, the sins of all of humanity, the destruction of the whole world. But from here on, the rest of Sefer Bereishit is filled with stories about individual people. The topic remains the development of a relationship between Hashem and humanity, but Hashem has decided to establish a special relationship with a select group. The stories of Sefer Bereishit explain how Hashem comes to choose this particular group of people.

AVRAHAM: THE FIRST TO PASS:

The first person to come along with the right combination of characteristics to found Hashem's elite group is Avraham. The Torah does not tell us whether Hashem tested other people before Avraham to see if they could fill the role, but it is possible that there were other candidates before Avraham. If so, the reason we hear about only Avraham is because he is the only one to pass all the tests and succeed! [I have heard that the Hiddushei HaRim says that Hashem did indeed make attempts to get others to go to Cana'an before attempting with Avraham, but none of them listened. I was unable to find this myself in the Hiddushei HaRim.]

Avraham's first reported act in our parasha is "Lekh lekha" -- he abandons his life in Ur Kasdim, following the command of Hashem to leave everything behind and move to Cana'an. [Actually, the end of Parashat Noah seems to imply that Terah, Avraham's father, led the family out of Ur Kasdim towards Cana'an, but the family stops for an undetermined time at Haran, where Terah dies. Hazal and the mefarshim suggest various solutions to resolve this account with the beginning of Parashat Lekh Lekha.] But our discussion will focus on something perhaps less well-understood: two very important agreements which Hashem makes with Avraham in our parasha.

We start with the "Berit bein ha-betarim," the "Covenant Between the Split Parts":

BEREISHIT 15:1-18 --

After these matters, the word of Hashem came to Avram in a vision, saying, "Do not fear, Avram, I shall protect you; your reward is truly great."

Avram said, "Hashem, Lord, what can You give to me? For I am childless, and the master of provisions of my house is Eliezer of Damascus!" Avram said, "You have not given me children; the son of my household [i.e., my servant] shall inherit me!"

The word of Hashem came to him, saying, "He shall not inherit you; instead, he who comes from your body, he shall inherit you." He

brought him outside and said, "Look at the sky and count the stars, if you can count them!" He told him: "So [many] shall be your children." He believed Hashem, and thought it just ["tzedaka"].

He said to him, "I am Hashem, who brought you out of Ur Kasdim to give you this land as an inheritance."

He said, "Lord Hashem, by what sign will I know that I shall inherit it?" He said to him, "Take for Me a 3-year-old calf, a 3-year-old goat, a 3-year-old ram, and a turtledove, and a young dove." He brought all these to Him and split them down the middle, and put each piece opposite the other; but he did not split the bird The sun was about to set, and a deep sleep fell upon Avram, and then a black, terrible fear fell upon him. He said to Avram, "Know that your children shall be foreigners in a land not their own, and they shall enslave them and abuse them for four hundred years. But also the nation whom they serve, judge I shall; then they shall leave with great wealth. But you shall come to your fathers in peace -- you shall be buried at a good old age. And the fourth generation will return here, because the sins of the Emori will not be complete until then." The sun had set, and it was twilight, and [there appeared] a smoking oven, with a flaming fire, which passed between the pieces.

On that day, Hashem made a covenant with Avram, saying, "To your children I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great Euphrates River"

Now that we have read through the passage, we can start with some questions:

- 1) The first thing Hashem says to Avraham is, "Don't be afraid." What is Avraham afraid of, that he needs Hashem's reassurance?
- 2) Next, Hashem tells Avraham that he will be rewarded well -- but for what?
- 3) Taking Hashem's entire statement together, why does He connect two things which seem totally unrelated: a) Avraham's fear of something, from which he needs protection and b) the fact that he will be rewarded?
- 4) Avraham's doubting Hashem's assurance of reward seems shocking: is he questioning the promise he has already received about his having children?
- 5) Hashem shows Avraham the stars and promises that his descendants will be similarly numerous. But then, just a moment or two later, Hashem seems to interrupt the conversation to introduce Himself again: "I am Hashem, who brought you out of Ur Kasdim" Doesn't Avraham know Whom he has been talking with?
- 6) In response to Hashem's mentioning that this land will be Avraham's inheritance, Avraham seems to ask for some sort of guarantee. Is he questioning the promises he has already received about his inheriting the land?
- 7) A related question: what does the slavery in Egypt have to do with Avraham's question?

NOW FOR SOME ANSWERS:

- 1) On the issue of what Avraham is afraid of, several interpretations are offered by the mefarshim (commentators) :
 - a) Avraham is afraid he has used up his stored-up merit, that he has been rewarded for all of his good deeds with the success Hashem has granted him in the war he and his men have just won. He fears that he has consumed what should have been stored up for him as his portion in the afterlife. (The weakness of this alternative is that there is no evidence for it at all in the text.)
 - b) He is afraid that during the war he killed a righteous person. (Again, no evidence for this in the text.)
 - c) He is afraid that the supporters of the kings he has beaten will hunt him down. (Support for this possibility: Hashem's reassurance comes immediately after Avraham's victory in the war.)

In any event, what is clear here is that Hashem is doing is reassuring him.

- 2) What is the reward is for? Again, suggestions from the mefarshim:
 - a) The reward is his place in the world to come, a reward for all the good deeds of his life: he is being told that he did not use up all of his merit. (Again, no textual support at all.)
 - b) The reward is for saving Lot, his nephew, which is what he has just done in the previous section and for which he has just refused the reward offered by the king of Sodom. Hashem is reassuring him that despite his refusal of the king of Sodom's reward (Avraham did not want to be enriched by an evil person), he will be rewarded.
- 3) Why does Hashem connect the seemingly unrelated issues of Avraham's fear and the reward he will get?

The most plausible connection is that both concerns flow directly from the section preceding the one above. Avraham is afraid of reprisals from the defeated kings, so Hashem reassures him of divine protection; Avraham has refused the reward offered by the king of Sodom, so Hashem assures him that He will reward Avraham Himself.

Hashem is especially interested in reassuring Avraham about the reward not because he wants Avraham to know he will be rewarded *per se*, but because this promise of reward provokes Avraham into revealing his anxiety about having no children to whom to pass whatever Hashem might give him. Hashem means to provoke this expression of insecurity so that He can reconfirm the promise and strengthen Avraham's faith in it. If you don't agree yet with this reading, in a moment we'll see more evidence for it.

4) That moves us to the next question: is Avraham questioning Hashem's promise of children?

a) Most mefarshim suggest that Avraham is not doubting Hashem's promise, but he is afraid that the promise has been revoked because he did something wrong. There is no textual evidence for this approach; the commentators are motivated to suggest this alternative primarily because the other alternative is to say that Avraham did indeed doubt Hashem's promise.

b) A plain reading of the text indicates exactly that: Avraham's faith in the promise is weakening. He has grown old, yet he remains childless. He believed the promise before, but he is beginning to worry, and he wants reassurance.

This alternative may seem controversial, but it is explicitly supported by the next pasuk (verse), which makes the strange comment that Avraham "believed the promise." In other words, only after Hashem's reassurance is Avraham confident that Hashem will indeed give him a child. Perhaps our image of Avraham makes it hard for us to believe that he could doubt anything Hashem said, but the Torah itself tells us here that only after this reassurance do Avraham's doubts go away. We will return to this issue as we continue.

5) Why does Hashem interrupt the conversation to introduce Himself once again?

This is really not an interruption in the middle of the conversation. It's the Torah's way of telling us that these are two totally separate conversations! Hashem introduces Himself again because He is indeed introducing Himself at the beginning of a separate conversation which took place at a different time. The reason why the Torah places the two conversations side by side is part of the answer to our next question.

6) Is Avraham questioning the promise about the land? Possibilities:

a) He is worried that the promise has been revoked because he did something wrong. (Again, no evidence for this.)

b) Avraham is getting old, and the land is still quite occupied by Cana'anite nations. He sees nothing happening to advance the process of his inheriting the land. He wants confirmation of the promise.

As mentioned above, there are really two totally separate episodes here. The first episode concerns the promise of children; this section ends when the Torah tells us that Avraham believes the promise. Then comes another story, which begins with Hashem introducing Himself and mentioning, seemingly out of nowhere, that He is the God who took Avraham out of Ur Kasdim in order to give the land of Cana'an to him as an inheritance. What Hashem is trying to do is to provoke Avraham into revealing his anxiety about this issue as well - if he is indeed to inherit the land, when is that going to happen? He has been promised that he will inherit it, but the years are passing by and there is no sign that the divine plan is becoming reality.

It should be clear by now that the reason the Torah puts these two stories together is because of their common theme. In both, Hashem provokes Avraham into revealing his doubts about the promises he has received. This gives Hashem the opportunity to reassure him.

7) Our last question was why Hashem tells Avraham all about the enslavement in Egypt at this point, and how this relates to his question about inheriting the land.

Avraham's question was whether he would inherit the land, and if so, when. Hashem responds that Avraham misunderstood the promise: the land would never actually be his personally -- it would belong to his descendants. Hashem tells him that before they inherit the land, two other processes will have to run their course: the enslavement in Egypt and the moral degradation of the current Cana'anite inhabitants of the land to the point where they deserve to lose their claim to it.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER:

We are used to thinking of Avraham as appearing on the scene of the Humash with his faith in Hashem already perfect; we are used to thinking of him as having **already** been selected by Hashem. I am suggesting that he has not yet passed all the tests (a thought confirmed resoundingly by Hazal). At this point, Hashem is both training him and reassuring him, on the one hand, as well as testing him, on the other hand. The command to leave his homeland is one of the tests, which, as we know, he passes. This earns him the right to the promises recorded earlier in the parasha -- the promises of children and land. In the section we looked at above, Hashem relates to

Avraham not as a tester, challenging Avraham's faith, but as a trainer and reassurer of Avraham's faith. Avraham is afraid, so Hashem tells him not to be afraid, that He will protect him; Avraham is worried about the promise of children, so Hashem provokes him into revealing his doubt and then reassures him; Avraham is worried about the promise of the land, so Hashem provokes him into revealing his doubt and then reassures him by making a covenant with him.

Doubt is part of the process of growing in faith. Hashem understands that we often need reassurance, even about things we have already been told. Hashem knows that we are not born with perfect faith, and does not expect that we will never falter in that faith. In these two stories, Hashem shows tremendous patience with Avraham's doubts and a deep willingness to train Avraham to strengthen his faith. We usually miss this critical message of the Torah because we simply assume that Avraham could never have doubted anything. We are therefore forced to deny the plain sense of the Torah.

Our parasha presents a process by which Hashem both strengthens Avraham and tests his strength; if Avraham harbored doubts and needed strengthening, it is certainly acceptable for us to have doubts and to need strengthening. Not only is it legitimate to have doubts, it is also legitimate to come to Hashem Himself with these doubts and share them with Him.

THE CIRCUMCISION COVENANT:

The next section we will look at is one in which Avraham receives the command of Berit Mila -- the covenant of circumcision. Because of time and space concerns, we will look at this section only briefly.

BEREISHIT 17:1-14 --

Avram was 99 years old, and Hashem appeared to Avram and said to him, "I am E-I Shad-dai, walk before Me and be perfect. I hereby place My covenant between Me and you, and I shall greatly, greatly increase you."

Avram fell upon his face, and Hashem spoke with him, saying: "I hereby make a covenant with you: you shall be the father of MANY NATIONS. You shall no longer be called 'Avram', but 'Avraham', because I have made you the father of MANY NATIONS ["av hamon goyyim"]. I shall make you very, very fruitful -- into NATIONS -- and kings shall come from you. I will uphold My covenant between Me and you, and with YOUR CHILDREN AFTER YOU, in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be your God and YOUR CHILDREN'S AFTER YOU. I will give to you and YOUR CHILDREN AFTER YOU the land in which you live, all of the Land of Cana'an, as a permanent possession, and I will be their God."

Hashem said to Avraham, "You shall keep My covenant, you and YOUR CHILDREN AFTER YOU, in their generations. This is My covenant which you should keep between Me and you, and with YOUR CHILDREN AFTER YOU: circumcise every male. You should circumcise the flesh of your foreskin, as a sign of the covenant between Me and you. An uncircumcised male, who does not circumcise the flesh of his foreskin -- that soul will be cut off from its nation; he has annulled My covenant."

How is this covenant different from the Berit bein HaBetarim, the Covenant Between the Pieces, which we looked at above? One way to pinpoint differences between apparently similar pieces of the Torah is to look for the key words of each section and compare them to each other. In the section we have just read, the following words and phrases are key:

- 1) "Many nations": there is a particular emphasis on Avraham's development into "nations" or "many nations."
- 2) "Your children after you": the most significant phrase we find here is "your children after you," which appears 5 times within 4 pesukim (verses) -- twice in verse 7, and once each in 8, 9, and 10.

In other words, while the previous berit (covenant) focused powerfully on Avraham personally and individually, this covenant focuses very much on the relationship between Hashem and the *descendants* of Avraham. This is not just a promise of children and land for Avraham qua righteous individual, not just reassurance and strengthening for Avraham qua man of growing faith, it is the establishment of a covenant between a leader and all generations of his descendants.

- 3) "An everlasting covenant": one other indication of the everlasting nature of this covenant is that the pesukim come right out and tell us -- twice -- that this covenant is permanent, in pesukim 7 and 8.

The content of the covenant itself is contained in pesukim 7 and 8, and it is two-fold:

- a) Hashem will be the God of this nation forever. This is an unprecedented phrase in the Torah: never before has Hashem said a word about being the God of any one particular people. Until now, He has been the God of all nations equally. Now, He focuses on one nation. This nation will be the select group with the special relationship with Hashem, and they will possess the Land of Cana'an forever.

The physical symbol of this covenant also indicates that the covenant does not focus on Avraham, the individual, and instead focuses on all of the future individuals of the nation he will produce. That symbol is the mila, circumcision. Avraham is the first person to enter this covenant, the first to perform the act of cutting which is traditionally part of a covenant (as in the case of the Covenant Between the "Cut Pieces" which we discussed above). But unlike the previous covenant, which was sealed by Avraham and his action, this covenant, the

covenant of circumcision, must be repeated in every generation, by every male individual who wishes to be a part of it. Unlike the Covenant Between the Cut Pieces, where Avraham played a central role, here he is only the first in a line of millions of Jews who will enter the same covenant with Hashem. By keeping the covenant, each generation affirms its relationship with Hashem and with Eretz Yisrael. Of course, one cannot help pondering this everlasting covenant's implications in light of recent developments in Israel: finding the correct balance between our responsibility to our and future generations' connection to Eretz Yisrael, and our responsibility to our and future generations' safety and security and peace, can only be a wrenching process. May Hashem guide us and our leaders.

Shabbat Shalom

PARSHAT LECH L'CHA

Almost 'out of the blue', at the beginning of Parshat Lech L'cha, God appears unto Avraham, commanding him to travel to the 'promised land', while blessing him that he will become a great nation. However, contrary to what we would expect, the Torah never tells us WHY he was chosen; nor does it tell us why HE was chosen!

In contrast to Parshat Noach, where the Torah informs us at the outset both why NOACH was chosen [i.e. "for he was a righteous man..." (see 6:9)]; as well as WHY he was chosen [i.e. for the purpose of re-creation (see 6:5-8); in Parshat Lech L'cha, the Torah never informs us concerning WHY God chose Avraham Avinu.

Did Avraham Avinu simply win a 'Divine lottery'?

In this week's shiur, we discuss the Torah's presentation of God's choice of Avraham Avinu, in an attempt to understand the literary method that the Torah employs to explain why Avraham was chosen, and its thematic significance.

INTRODUCTION

Our series of shiurim on Chumash is based on the assumption that each book of the Bible carries a unique theme; and to identify that theme, one must study the progression of its primary topics.

In our shiur on Parshat Noach, we discussed the progression of topics in the first eleven chapters of Sefer Breishit, showing how each successive story discussed a story relating to 'sin & punishment' (i.e. God's disappointment with the behavior of each successive generation, and how He punished them).

This included the story of man's sin in Gan Eden, Cain's murder of Hevel, the corruption of the generation of the Flood, and finally the building of the Tower of Bavel.

That pattern of stories relating to 'sin & punishment' abruptly changes at the beginning of Parshat Lech Lcha, as the focus of Sefer Breishit now changes to God's choice of Avraham Avinu to become the forefather of His special nation. This change of focus in Sefer Breishit from 'universalistic' to 'particularistic' must relate in some manner to the reason for God's need for choosing a special nation.

As the MIGDAL BAVEL incident (see 11:1-9) was the last story recorded in Sefer Breishit prior to God's choice of Avraham Avinu, and hence forms the segue between these two sections - our shiur begins with a careful study of that narrative in search of a thematic connection (and/or a textual parallel) between this story and God's choice of Avraham Avinu.

THE SIN OF "DOR HA'PLAGAH"

In our introduction, we assumed that the building of the Tower constituted a sin. However, at first glance, that assumption is not so clear, for it is difficult to find a specific sin in the Torah's description of their actions. In contrast to the Torah's introduction of the generation of the Flood, which explicitly brands the population as wicked and corrupt (6:5,10-13), the opening psukim of the Migdal Bavel narrative leave hardly a clue to any specific sin:

"Everyone on earth had the same language and the same words. And as they traveled from the east, they came upon a valley in the land of Shinar and settled there. They said to one another: Come, LET US make bricks and burn them hard. Brick became their stone, and bitumen their mortar. And they said, Come LET US build US a city and a tower with its top in the sky, AND WE WILL MAKE A NAME FOR OURSELVES, lest WE shall be scattered all over the world." (11:1-4)

Not only don't we find a transgression, one may even be tempted to applaud their accomplishments. After all:

- * Is not achieving unity a positive goal? (11:1)
- * Does not the use of human ingenuity to develop man-made building materials, such as bricks to replace stone, indicate the positive advancement of society? (11:3)
- [The very first 'industrial revolution!']
- * What could possibly be wrong with building a city or tower?
- Is urbanization a crime? (11:4)
- * Is there anything wrong about traveling towards the east or setting up a city within a valley? (see 11:2)

Nevertheless, God punishes them by mixing their languages, causing them to abandon their joint project (11:5-7).

So what did they do that angered God?

Chazal focus their criticism of this generation on their antagonistic attitude towards God (see Rashi 11:1). However, the final and critical phrase in the Torah's description of their deeds points to an additional reason:

"v'naase LANU SHEM - WE shall make a NAME for OURSELVES" (see 11:4 / See also Sanhedrin 109a]

The use of the first person plural - not only in this pasuk, but also in the ALL of the first four psukim (11:1-4) - reflects the egocentric nature and attitude of this generation. [Note also the repeated use of the Hebrew word "hava" (let US).]

Rather than devoting their endeavors to the glorification of the NAME OF GOD, this generation excludes God from their goals and aspirations, emphasizing instead man's dominion and prowess.

Although this generation is undoubtedly more refined and cultured than the corrupt, depraved generation of the Flood, they unite for the unholy purpose of venerating the 'name of man', rather than that of the Almighty.

Apparently, God had higher expectations for mankind, hoping they would harness their God-given talents and potential towards loftier pursuits. Instead, they established an anthropocentric society, devoting their energies towards MAKING A NAME for THEMSELVES.

God could not allow this project to continue. But in contrast to the corrupt generation of the Flood, the builders of the Tower did not deserve destruction, rather they required 're-direction'. Towards this goal, God will now choose Avraham Avinu to establish a nation whose purpose will be to REDIRECT mankind - to channel those very same qualities of unity and creativity towards a more altruistic end.

The aftermath of the Tower of Bavel incident provides the thematic setting for God's startling challenge to Avraham Avinu:

"And I will make you a GREAT NATION.... and through you ALL the families of the earth will be blessed." (12:1-3)

Avraham Avinu is CHOSEN FOR A PURPOSE: to direct mankind back in the proper direction. Towards this goal, He is also promised a special land, not as a REWARD, but rather as a VEHICLE to fulfill that purpose. God sets aside a special location, and then designates a special nation to represent Him, and to become a model nation that will inspire nations and spark their spiritual development.

Even though Avraham at this point is only an individual, God promises him that he is destined to become the forefather of this nation - whose development will involve a complex process, which will take some four hundred years (see 15:13-20).]

To become this nation, Avraham's offspring must multiply (ZERA) and then establish their nation in a special land (ARETZ). These two prerequisites not only appear in God's opening statement to Avraham upon his arrival in Eretz Canaan (see 12:7), but they are also repeated each time God speaks to the AVOT in regard to their future (see 13:14-15, 15:18, 17:8, 26:3, 28:13, 35:12, etc.).

The seeds of this nation are 'planted' in Sefer Breishit, as detailed by the story of the Avot.

BET-EL & SHEM HASHEM

Although this goal can only be fully attained once this nation is established, it is significant that Avraham's own life will now foreshadow that ultimate goal.

For example, if we trace Avraham's first journey through Eretz Canaan as described in the Torah, we find that the site of Bet-El earns a unique place within Avraham's itinerary.

After he arrives in Canaan and builds a MIZBAYACH in Shchem, Avraham continues to Bet-El, the climax of his "aliyah": "From there he moved up the mountain range to BET-EL... and he built a MIZBAYACH there and called out b'SHEM HaSHEM - in God's NAME! (12:8).

Then, in the next chapter, Avraham returns to Eretz Canaan after his stay in Egypt and comes specifically to this very same MIZBAYACH in Bet-El. There, he once again calls out b'SHEM HaSHEM (13:1-4)!

Wherein lies the significance of Avraham's MIZBAYACH in Bet-El and his calling out in God's Name?

Avraham's calling out in God's NAME in Bet-El signifies a contrasting parallel to the Migdal Bavel fiasco. There, mankind's focus on their own prominence is reflected in their statement of: "v'naaseh LANU SHEM." Now Avraham must correct that cardinal mistake; he calls out in GOD'S NAME - "va'yikra b'SHEM HASHEM!" It is for this very purpose that Avraham was chosen.

Ramban expresses this understanding in his commentary to this pasuk (12:8):

"... and Avraham would call out there in front of the Mizbayach and make known God's existence to all mankind..." (see Rabman on Breishit 12:8)

A 'STRATEGIC' LOCATION

This thematic background may help us understand why God chose specifically the land of Israel to become the 'homeland' of this nation. Recall (from your study of world history) how Egypt and Mesopotamia emerged as the two great cradles of ancient civilization. One could suggest that the land of Israel, located in between these two centers of civilization (and along the main highway that connects them), provides a 'strategic' location for the accomplishment of their national goal.

This idea may be reflected in events that transpire in chapter 12. Note how Avraham is first commanded to leave his own homeland in **Mesopotamia** and travel to Eretz Canaan (see 12:1). At the highlight of that "aliyah", he builds his "mizbayach" in Bet-el and 'calls out in God's Name' (12:7-8). Then, the next story in Chumash informs us how he traveled to **Egypt** and encounters an incident of corruption (see 12:10-20). Upon his return from that center of civilization, once again Avraham goes to Bet-el and builds a mizbayach and calls out in His Name (see 13:1-4). Finally, note as well how Avraham calls out, once again, in God's Name - after he establishes a covenant of mutual trust with Avimelech (see 21:33). [See also Ramban on 12:8 in its entirety (and the TSC shiur on Parshat Va'yetze).]

A BIBLICAL THEME

This concept, that Am Yisrael is chosen to bring God's Name to mankind, emerges as a central theme not only in Sefer Breishit, but throughout Tanach, as well.

In Sefer Devarim, Bnei Yisrael are commanded to establish a national religious center "ba'makom asher yivchar Hashem l'shakeyn SHMO sham" - in the place which God will choose for His NAME to dwell therein (Devarim 12:5,11). As we explained in our shiurim on Sefer Devarim, this phrase, repeated numerous times in the sefer, describes the BET HA'MIKDASH - which is to become the institution through which God's prominence will be recognized by all mankind.

Some four hundred years later, when the MIKDASH is finally built, this same theme is reflected in Shlomo's prayer at its dedication ceremony:

"If a foreigner comes from a distant land for the SAKE OF YOUR NAME, for they shall hear about YOUR GREAT NAME... when he comes to pray at this House... grant him what he asks. Thus ALL THE PEOPLES OF THE EARTH

will KNOW YOUR NAME and revere You, as do Bnei Yisrael, and they will recognize that YOUR NAME is attached to this House which I have built." (Melachim I 8:43 /see also Shmuel II 7:22-27)

In fact, Malkat Sheva [the Queen of Sheeba], reaches this very conclusion upon her visit to the Bet Ha'Mikdash, as described in Melachim 10:1-9!

IN MESSIANIC TIMES

The famous messianic prophecy of Yeshayahu (chapter 2) not only reflects this same theme, but also creates an intriguing parallel to the Migdal Bavel narrative:

"In the days to come, the MOUNTAIN of BET HA'SHEM (the Temple Mount) will stand high above the mountains... and ALL THE NATIONS shall gaze on it with joy. Then MANY PEOPLES shall go and say: Come let us go up to the House of God, that He may instruct us in His ways and we may walk in His paths - for TORAH shall come forth from Tzion, and the word of God from Yerushalayim..." (2:1-4)

Note the contrasting parallel between this 'hope' and the events at Migdal Bavel. In both events all mankind unites for a joint purpose. However, in Yeshayahu they gather to a MOUNTAIN top (man looking up) rather than in a VALLEY (man looking down); and to the CITY of Yerushalayim and its TOWER - the Bet HaMikdash, rather than their own city and tower. Mankind has now united to hear the word of God, as transmitted and taught by His people.

In diametric opposition to Migdal Bavel, the Mikdash becomes the symbol of the goals of a theocentric society - the ultimate goal of mankind.

The following table reviews this contrasting parallel:

MIGDAL BAVEL	BET HA'MIKDASH
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Unity for man	Unity for God
Valley	Mountain
a city	the city of Jerusalem
a tower	the Temple
Man's prominence	God's prominence ("shem Hashem")

Another parallel to the Migdal Bavel narrative appears in the prophecies of Zefania, in his depiction of the messianic era:

"For then I will make the peoples pure of speech - SAFA BRURA - so that they will all call out b'SHEM HASHEM, and worship Him with one accord." (3:9)

Once again, the prophet depicts the unification of mankind for the purpose of calling out in God's Name. An additional parallel to the Migdal Bavel incident is suggested by the use of the word "safa" (=language).

REWARD OR PURPOSE

In light of our discussion, we can now reexamine our original question. We have shown that Avraham Avinu was chosen to fulfill a SPECIFIC MISSION - to become the forefather of a nation that will lead all others to a theocentric existence and refocus mankind's energies in the proper direction.

Thus, Avraham Avinu's distinction came not as a REWARD for any specific deed, but rather for a SPECIFIC PURPOSE. Undoubtedly, as reflected in numerous Midrashim, Avraham must have been a man of extraordinary character and stature who possessed the necessary potential to fulfill this goal. However, the Torah prefers to omit any explicit reference to these qualities, focusing not on his past accomplishments but rather on the mission that lies ahead, thus stressing the primacy of Avraham's designated task.

This same principle applies in all generations. God's choice of Am Yisrael is not a REWARD, but the means by which they can and must fulfill the mission with which He has entrusted them. As this mission is eternal, so too is God's choice of the Jewish Nation.

This Biblical theme stresses our need to focus not on the exclusive PRIVILEGES of being God's special Nation, but rather on its unique RESPONSIBILITIES.

shabbat shalom,
menachem

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FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. One could suggest that the events at Migdal Bavel represent the natural course of the history of nations. People with a common goal join together for a common purpose and build a society. Sooner or later, splinter groups with other ideals and goals form, often challenging the authority of the first group. Over the course of time, these smaller groups may eventually break off and start their own nation.

When people cannot agree upon a common goal, they are often unable to communicate with each other, even if they do speak the same language. [Israel's "knesset" is classic example.]

One could suggest that when God decides to stop this building project, he does so by sundering the people's unity, by causing them to fight over their goals. Their inability to communicate with each other, to understand each other's language, stems from the breakdown of the unity of mission that had brought them together in the first place.

Based on this suggestion, offer an alternate interpretation of the term "safa" (language) in the Migdal Bavel narrative.

See Ibn Ezra (11:1 - "dvarim achadim") and - if you have time - the Abarbanel on this sugya. Relate their comments to the above discussion.

B. Note that in the entire Migdal Bavel narrative, Hashem's name is exclusively *shem "havaya"*. Relate this to last week's shiur.

C. This connection between Migdal Bavel and the "bechira" of Avraham Avinu is supported by the Midrash's comment (on Breishit 26:5) that Avraham was 48 years old when he recognized God for the first time. By calculating the genealogies in chapters 5 and 11, it can be established that Avraham Avinu reached age 48 on the same year that Peleg died, which, according to Chazal, corresponds to the precise year of Migdal Bavel!

PARSHAT LECH L'CHA -Part Two

How many times must God repeat the SAME promise to Avraham Avinu? In Parshat Lech L'cha alone, God tells Avraham FOUR times that his offspring ("zera") will become a nation in a special land ("aretz")! Would not have one divine promise been sufficient?

In the following shiur, we attempt to explain the reason for each of these promises and their relation to the events that transpire in the interim.

INTRODUCTION

To clarify our opening question, the following table charts the progression of events in Parshat Lech L'cha by providing a short title for each of its seven 'parshiot', while noting in brackets where that 'parshia' includes a "hitgalut" [revelation] to Avraham in regard to the future of his offspring.

PARSHIA	TOPIC
12:1-9	Avraham's "aliyah" to Eretz Canaan [*12:1-3,7]
12:10-13:18	Lot leaving Avraham [*13:14-17]
14:1-24	Avraham's victory in the war between the kings
15:1-20	Brit Bein ha'Btarim [*15:13-19]
16:1-16	The birth of Yishmael
17:1-14	Brit Milah [*17:7-8]
17:15-27	The promise of the birth of Yitzchak [*17:19]

As you review this chart, read those psukim (quoted in the brackets) - noting how often God promises Avraham Avinu that his "zera" (offspring) will inherit the "aretz" (land). In our shiur, we attempt to explain how and why each "hitgalut" is unique, and how it relates to the events that transpire in Parshat Lech L'cha.

THE FIRST HITGALUT - BECOMING GOD'S NATION

The opening "hitgalut" is the simplest to understand, for in this initial encounter, God must first explain to Avraham the primary purpose for why he has been chosen:

"I will make **you** a GREAT NATION... and through you all the Nations of the world will be blessed..." (see 12:1-3)

As we explained in earlier shiurim, God initiates this special relationship with Avraham Avinu to become the 'forefather' of a 'model nation' that will direct mankind toward a more Theo-centric existence.

This backdrop explains God's next "hitgalut" to Avraham (in that very same 'parshia') upon his arrival in that land:

"To your **ZERA** [offspring] I shall give this **ARETZ** [land]" (see 12:7)

To develop from an 'individual' into a 'nation', it will be necessary for:

Avraham's family will need to multiply -
hence the blessing of "ZERA";

A territory is necessary to establish this nation -
hence the promise of "ARETZ".

Pay careful attention to these two key words: "zera" & "aretz", for they will be repeated quite often in Sefer Breishit, especially when God speaks to the forefathers in regard to the future of their offspring.

Theoretically speaking, these two promises could have sufficed. After all, once Avraham had arrived in the land, he simply needs to give birth to many children, settle the land, and establish this special nation. And if Chumash was a 'fairy tale', that may have been a most likely scenario. However, in Chumash, this "bechira" [choosing] process - to become God's special nation - will unfold instead in a rather complex manner. To appreciate that process, we must now consider the thematic significance of each additional "hitgalut" to Avraham Avinu.

THE FIRST 'SPLIT'

The next 'parshia' (12:9-13:18) describes Avraham's journey to Egypt and upon his return - his quarrel with Lot. Let's examine the next "hitgalut" which takes place immediately after Lot left Avraham:

"And God spoke to Avram after Lot had left him: Lift up your eyes from this place and see... for this entire ARETZ that you see I am giving to you and your ZERA forever..." (see 13:14-18)

This promise, although a bit more 'poetic' than the first, appears to be more or less a repeat of God's original promise of "zera v'aretz". To understand its purpose, we must consider what transpired in those events.

Review 12:10 thru 13:18, noting how this unit discusses two totally different stories, even though they are both included in the same 'parshia':

- 1) Avraham's journey to Egypt and his subsequent return (12:10-13:4)
- 2) The quarrel between Lot and Avraham (13:5-18)

Indeed, there is loose connection between these two stories, as it was their wealth (which they accumulated during their journey to Egypt /see 12:16-20) that sparked their quarrel (see 13:5-9). Nevertheless, it would have been more logical for each of these stories to form their own 'parshia', as reflected in the chapter division.

However, the fact that the Torah records both of these stories in the same 'parshia' - suggests that a deeper thematic connection may exist between these two stories.

Let's explore that possibility.

LIKE NEPHEW LIKE SON

Note once again the opening phrase (in 13:14) which introduces God's second promise:

"And God spoke to Avram **after Lot had left him...**"

This short introduction certainly points to a direct connection between Lot's departure and the need for this additional promise.

One could suggest that God's promise comes to 'cheer up' Avraham Avinu after this tragic separation from his nephew Lot, whom he treated as his own son. Let's explain why.

Recall that at this time, Avraham has no children of his own, while his nephew Lot has no father. For this reason, it seems as though Avraham had practically 'adopted' Lot, treating him like his own son. In fact, from the moment we meet Avraham in Parshat Noach, Lot faithfully follows Avraham everywhere. [See 11:27-31, 12:4-5, and 13:1-2,5!]

[Recall as well that Haran (Avraham's brother) left three children: Lot, Milka, and Yiskah / see 11:27-29. Nachor (Avraham's other brother) took care of Milka - by marrying her, while Avraham took care of Lot, by treating him like a son. This also explains why Chazal identify Sarah as Yiskah (see 20:12 & Rashi on 11:29).]

As he had no children of his own, Avraham may have understood that God's promise of "zera" would be fulfilled through Lot! [See Radak 13:14!] Furthermore, even if God would one-day bless him with his own son, Avraham could still have hoped to include Lot as an integral member of his 'chosen' family.

Therefore, Lot's decision to leave (see 13:9-13) could be considered as a personal tragedy for Avraham, and hence the necessity for God to reassure him that His promise of "zera" will still be fulfilled.

With this in mind, let's consider a deeper connection between these two stories in this 'parshia', relating to a more fundamental theme of Sefer Breishit.

LEAVING AVRAHAM OR LEAVING GOD?

In Sefer Breishit, Lot is the first example of a family member who is 'rejected from Avraham's 'chosen' family. Many similar stories (such as the rejection of Yishmael & Esav) will follow.

As this "dechiya" [rejection] process will become a pattern within the "behcira" [choosing] process, we should expect that the Torah's description of these events (in the first section of this 'parshia') will at least allude to WHY Lot is rejected from the 'chosen family'.

Even though both Avraham and Lot travel together to and from Egypt, the impact of that visit on each is profoundly different. Avraham, as reflected in the incident with Pharaoh and Sarah, saw corruption in Egypt. He returns to Eretz Canaan inspired with the resolve to preach against such corrupt behavior - to teach morality. Therefore, Avraham returns immediately to Bet-el, where he once again calls out in God's Name. [See Ramban 12:8 and Rambam Hilchot Avodah Zara 1:2-3!]

In contrast, Lot was impressed by the 'good life' in Egypt; not only by its wealth, but also by its climate - and especially its mighty river. Let's explain how we reach this conclusion.

In an attempt to stop the quarrel between their herdsmen, Avraham had suggested a 'split' with Lot, i.e. one of them would travel to the right, the other to the left (see 13:7-9). Even though the words 'right' and 'left' are often understood as 'east' and 'west', Targum Unkelos explains that Avraham offered Lot to go either NORTH (left / see Breishit 14:15) or SOUTH (right, "ymin" as in Yemen/ see Devarim 3:27). Considering that they were standing in Bet-el (see 12:4), Avraham offered Lot to choose between the hills of YEHUDA (to the south / i.e. to the right) or SHOMRON (to the north, i.e. to the left), i.e. not a complete separation - only a far enough distance to avoid quarrels.

Lot did not accept Avraham's offer. Instead, Lot opted to leave the mountain range of Eretz Canaan altogether, preferring the Jordan Valley

"And Lot lifted his eyes and saw the entire JORDAN valley, for it had plenty of water... **like the LAND OF EGYPT...**" (see 13:10).

Lot's logic was quite reasonable. The Jordan Valley had a river, and hence a constant supply of water - in contrast to the mountain range whose water supply was dependent on the rainfall

However, Lot's choice carried spiritual ramifications as well. As Parshat Ekev explains:

"For the land which you are coming to inherit [i.e. Eretz Canaan] is NOT like Eretz Mitzraim [which has the Nile River as a constant water supply]... instead it is a land of hills and valleys - which needs RAIN for water. [Therefore] it is a land which God looks after..." (Devarim 11:10-12)

Symbolically, Lot's choice reflects his preference for a different life-style. Avraham accepts the challenge of Eretz Canaan - a life dependent on MATAR (rain) and hence - dependent on God (see Devarim 11:13-16!). Lot prefers the 'easy-life' in Sdom. This understanding is reflected in the Midrash:

"va'yisa Lot m'KEDEM" - Midrash Agada - "hi'si'ah atzmo m'KADMONO shel olam - Lot lifted himself AWAY from God, saying, I can no longer remain with Avraham - nor with his God." (quoted by Rashi on 13:11)

[Sdom is really to the east, therefore the pasuk should say "kedem" and not "m'kedem". The Midrash picks up on this to show its deeper meaning. See also the use of "m'kedem" to show a direction away from God, as in 3:24 (leaving Gan Eden), 4:16 and 11:2.]

Lot's total divorce from Avraham is indeed tragic for he has lost not only a 'son' but also a disciple. Therefore, God must now not only console Avraham, but also reassure him that despite Lot's departure (13:14/ "acharei hi'pared Lot") His promise of "zera v'retz" remains.

Indeed, Avraham will yet have a child - a son who will follow in his footsteps as well.

BRIT BEIN HA'BATARIM - THE FIRST COVENANT

The next time God speaks to Avraham is in chapter 15 - better known as "brit bein ha'batarim". There again, God promises "zera v'retz" (see 15:18), however in this promise, for the first time, we find the framework of a "brit" - a covenant. To appreciate the significance of this covenant and its 'dialogue', we must take note of the events that precede it in chapter 14.

The battle of the four kings against the five kings in chapter 14 constitutes Avraham's first military victory in Land. Yet, it is this military victory that leads us directly into the topic of "brit bein ha'batarim". Note how chapter 15 opens as a direct continuation of that victory:

"achar ha'dvarim ha'eyleh - After THESE events, God spoke to Avram in a vision saying: Do not fearful... I will shield you, your reward is very great..." (see 15:1-2)

Now there are numerous opinions among the commentators explaining why Avraham was fearful (which are not mutually exclusive). However, there is one point that Avraham raises over and over again in his ensuing conversation that definitely relates to his military conquest, as well as his lack of a son:

"...Since you have given me no offspring - v'hinei ben beiti YORASH oti - behold my house servant [i.e. Eliezer] he will be my heir..." (see 15:3)

Avraham becomes upset as he realizes that without a son, everything that he has just acquired in this battle will be taken over by his servant Eliezer.

Considering that to become a nation, his offspring would sooner or later have to secure military conquest of the land (what

we call 'sovereignty'). Avraham's military victory at this time could have achieved this goal. But realizing that he has no children of his own at this time, Avraham gave everything away (see 14:16-24). Hence, this military victory only heightened Avraham's awareness that God's promises remained unfulfilled. For a very good reason, Avraham is now worried that maybe he is no longer worthy of God's original promise. (see Rashi 15:1)

To support this interpretation, let's note the Torah's use of the verb "yorash" [which is usually understood simply as to 'inherit'] in the above pasuk, and in the psukim that follow:

"And God answered: That one [Eliezer] will not YO'RASH you, rather your very own son (yet to be born) - he will YO'RASH you... & then He said to him: I am the Lord who brought you out of Ur Kasdim to give you this land I'RISHTAH... Then Avraham asked - b'mah ay'dah ki i'RASHENAH..." (15:4-8)

There is no doubt that "yerusha" is a key word in this conversation, but what does it mean?

Throughout Chumash, "YERUSHA" usually implies some sort of conquest (usually military, as in securing sovereignty over land). For example, in Parshat Masei God commandment for Bnei Yisrael to conquer the land is worded as follows:

"v'HORSHTEM et ha'ARETZ... - You shall conquer the land and live in it, for I have given you the land - L'RESHET otah... (see Bamidbar 33:50-53, see also Breishit 22:17!)

[Note as well the word "morasha" in this context in Shmot 6:5-8. Note also the special context of "morasha" in Devarim 33:4 - implying that Torah also requires a certain type of 'conquest' / see Maharam.]

This background can help us understand the ensuing conversation between God and Avraham.

First of all, God calms Avraham, promising him once again that the time will come and indeed he will have "zera" - as numerous as the stars in the heavens - that they will one day YORESH (conquer) the land (see 15:4-5). And indeed, Avraham is assured by this promise (see 15:6 "v'he'emin b'Hashem").

Then, God initiates yet another conversation with the powerful statement of:

"I am the God who took you out of Ur Kaskim, to give you this land L'RISHTA - to inherit by conquest!" (see 15:7)

[Note similarity to Shmot 20:2 (first line of the Dibrot).]

In reaction, Avraham asks a rather puzzling question: "b'mah ay'dah ki i'RASHENAH!" (see 15:8), which includes once again the word "yerusha"!

What is the meaning of this question?

It would not make sense that Avraham is asking for divine proof of God's promise of "zera"? First of all, the previous pasuk just stated that Avraham believed in God's promise (see 15:6). Furthermore, God does not answer this question with a proof! So what is Avraham's question?

To answer this, we must 'cheat' a little by looking at God's answer.

Recall once again Avraham's question is: "b'mah ay'dah ki i'RASHENAH" in response to God's promise that He has taken him out of Ur Kasdim in order that he YORASH the land (see 15:7-8).

God's response to this question begins by instructing Avraham to perform a certain ceremony (see 15:9-12), however the actual answer to Avraham's question doesn't begin until 15:13. To understand why, carefully how God's statement of "y'DOAH TAYDAH..." in 15:13 - forms a direct response to Avraham's question of "b'MAH AYDAH..." in 15:8!

[The ceremony in 15:9-12 forms the preparation for the covenant that will be defined in 15:18.]

NOT IN YOUR LIFETIME!

God's answer to Avraham's question continues from 15:13 thru 15:16. Note how it describes WHEN and HOW the YERUSHA of the Land will ultimately take place:

"Surely you should KNOW that your offspring will be strangers in a foreign land, where they will be afflicted and enslaved; **four hundred years**. But that nation that will enslave will [ultimately] be punished - afterward they [your offspring] will leave [that land] with great wealth. But you [Avraham] will die in peace... [i.e. before this difficult process begins]; **only the fourth generation will return here** [to inherit/ conquer this land] - for the sin of Emorites will not be complete until that time." (see 15:13-16)

To Avraham's total surprise, God's promise of "yerusha" (see 15:7) - sovereignty over the land, and the establishment of a nation - won't take place in his own lifetime, or in his son's lifetime! Instead, before his offspring will attain YERUSHA of the land, they must first undergo some 'basic training' in someone else's land - a process that will include slavery and affliction in 'a foreign land'. Only after some four hundred years will they attain this YERUSHA. [This 'news' comes as such a 'shock' to Avraham Avinu that Avraham must be first 'sedated' - see 15:12 & 15:17!]

In answer to Avraham's question of "b'mah eydah" - God informs Avraham that in essence, he is only on a 'pilot trip' to Israel. It may be symbolic that he himself just conquered the land, and that he himself had already made God's Name known by calling out in His Name - for these events foreshadow what his offspring will do (as a nation) in the future ("maase Avot, siman l'banim"). However, the ultimate fulfillment of God's original promise that Avraham will establish great sovereign nation will only be fulfilled after many generations of important preparation.

Hence, Avraham's question of "b'mah ay'dah ki i'RASHENAH" is a request to know WHEN (and possibly HOW) this YERUSHA will ultimately take place. [Recall that the Hebrew word "ki" can also mean 'when'.]

A PROOF FROM VA'EYRA

To prove that this is God's answer to Avraham's question, we simply need to read the famous psukim in Parshat Va'eyra (see Shmot 6:2-8), when God informs Moshe that the time has come to fulfill this covenant:

"And I have heard the cries of bondage of Bnei Yisrael... and I have remembered my COVENANT [i.e. "brit bein ha'btarim"], therefore, tell Bnei Yisrael I am God, and I will take you out of your suffering in Egypt... [the 'four cups' psukim] and I will bring you to the land THAT I lifted up My hand to give to Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, and I will then give it to you as a **MORASHA** [= "yerusha"]!" (see Shmot 6:5-8)

Only after the Exodus, will God give the land to Bnei Yisrael as a MORASHA, as He promised to Avraham Avinu at brit bein ha'btarim.

The implications of this promise are so far reaching that they require an official covenant between God and Avraham, as described in final psukim of this 'parshia', i.e. in 15:18-20.

This explains not only the thematic connection between chapters 14 and 15, but also the necessity of this additional promise of "zera v'aretz" in the form of a covenant. Brit bein ha'btraim includes not only the promise of becoming a nation, but also explains the long historical process of how Avraham's offspring will one day become that nation.

LAND - FOR A PURPOSE

This order of events that unfolds in Brit bein ha'btarim, explaining HOW Bnei Yisrael will become a nation, is quite significant for it highlights the special nature of our relationship with the land.

The histories of all other nations of the world begin in a very different manner. Usually a nation begins when a group of people living in a common land sharing common resources and needs join together for the sake of common interest and form a nation. In other words, FIRST we have people living on a common land,

and then those people become a nation. In contrast, Am Yisrael becomes a nation in a very different manner. We don't begin with a common land, rather we begin with a common goal (or destiny), i.e. to become God's model nation. In fact, the Torah emphasizes that we will become a nation in "land that is not ours" [see 15:13]. Technically speaking, our initial bonding is caused by a common plight and suffering in a FOREIGN land. Only AFTER we become a nation, and only after we receive the Torah at Har Sinai (the laws that teach us how we are to achieve our goal), only then do we conquer the Land that God has designated for us.

In other words, we are not a nation because we have a common land, rather we are a nation because we share a common goal and destiny. The land serves as a vehicle to help our nation achieve that goal. [See first Rashi on Chumash, and read it carefully, noting how he explains a very similar theme.]

THE BIRTH OF YISHMAEL

The next 'parshia' in Parshat Lech L'cha describes the events that lead to the birth of Yishmael (see 16:1-16). God promises that he too will become a mighty nation, but a rather wild one (see 16:12). For some divine reason, God's intention is that Avraham's only chosen will be born to Sarah, but only after her lifelong struggle with barrenness.

However, before Avram and Sarai can give birth to this special child, God must change their names to Avraham and SarAH and enter into yet another covenant - better known as "brit milah".

BRIT MILAH

The next 'parshia', describing the covenant of BRIT MILAH (see 17:1-11), contains the fourth and final promise of "zera v'retza" in Parshat Lech L'cha. As this brit includes the very FIRST MITZVA that Avraham must keep and pass on to his children, its details are very important. In fact they are so important that their thematic significance has already been discussed in three earlier shiurim.

1) The significance of "brit milah" on the 'eighth day' was discussed at length in our shiur for Shmini Atzeret (sent out a few weeks ago/ see TSC archive for Parshat Tazria).

2) The thematic connection between "brit milah" and "brit bein ha'btarim" was discussed in our shiur for Chag ha'MATZOT and on Parshat Bo and on MAGID.

3) The meaning the borders of the Land of Israel as detailed in "brit milah" (and "brit bein ha'btarim") was discussed in our shiur on Parshat Masei (see archive).

Therefore, we will not discuss "brit milah" in detail in this week's shiur. Instead, we simply note how this "brit" serves as the introduction to the birth of Yitzchak, and the prerequisite for his conception.

The final 'parshia' in Parshat Lech L'cha (see 17:15-27) details how Avraham fulfills this commandment. Yet, at the same time, God informs him that the "bechira" process will continue ONLY thru Yitzchak, who will soon be born (see 17:15-21); and NOT with Yishmael, even though he also fulfilled the mitzva of "brit milah" (see 17:20-24).

[Be sure to note the textual parallel between 17:7-8,19 and God's covenant with Noach in 6:18 and 9:8-17; "v'akmal".]

We have shown how God's original choice of Avraham Avinu was not in REWARD for his merits, but rather IN ORDER that he fulfill God's mission - to become His nation. As this mission is eternal, so too is God's choice of the Jewish Nation. As we concluded in our first shiur on Parshat Lech L'cha, we find once again a Biblical theme that stresses our need to focus more so on our RESPONSIBILITY to act as God's special nation, and less so on those PRIVILEGES that it includes.

shabbat shalom,
menachem

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FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. Note Yeshayahu 42:5-6 and its context. Relate this pasuk to our shiurim thus far on Sefer Breishit. [Note that this is the opening pasuk of the Haftara for Parshat Breishit (& not by chance!).]

Compare with Devarim 4:5-8. Explain what Yeshayahu refers to when he mentions "brit am" and "or goyim".