

B'S'D' despite Avraham being ninety-nine years old and Sara ninety. On that day, Avraham circumcises himself, Yishmael and all his household.

DIVREI TORAH FROM INTERNET
ON PARSHAS LECH LICHA - 5756

(c/o CShulman@paulweiss.com)

From: "Ohr Somayach <ohr@jer1.co.il>"
To: CSHULMAN , " " Highlights of the Torah weekly
por...
Date: 10/29/95 1:52pm
Subject: Torah Weekly - Lech Lecha

* TORAH WEEKLY *

Highlights of the Weekly Torah Portion
with "Sing, My Soul!" thoughts on Shabbos Zemiros
Parshas Lech Lecha
For the week ending 11 Cheshvan 5756
3 & 4 November 1995
Summary

Ten generations have passed since the time of Noach. Man has descended to lower spiritual depths. In the year 1948 after the Creation, Avram is born. Through observing the world, Avram comes to the inescapable Truth of

Hashem's existence, and thus merits that Hashem reveals Himself to him. At the beginning of this week's Parsha, Hashem tells Avram to leave his land, his relatives and his father's house and travel to an unknown land where Hashem will make him into a great nation. Avram leaves, taking with him his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, their servants, and those who he converted to faith in Hashem. When they reach the land of Canaan, Hashem appears to Avram and tells him that this is the land that He will give to his descendants. A famine ensues and Avram is forced to relocate to Egypt to find food. Realizing that his wife's beauty would cause his death at the hand of the Egyptians, Avram tells her to say that she is his sister.

Sarai is taken to the Pharaoh, but Hashem afflicts the Pharaoh and his court with severe plagues and she is released unmolested. Avram returns to Eretz Yisrael (Canaan) with much wealth given to him by the Egyptians. After a quarrel over grazing rights breaks out between their shepherds, Lot decides to part ways with his uncle Avram. Lot chooses to live in the rich but corrupt city of Sodom in the fertile plain of the Jordan. A war breaks out between the kings of the region, and Sodom is defeated. Lot is taken captive. Together with a handful of his converts, Avram rescues Lot, miraculously overpowering vastly superior forces, but demurs from accepting any of the spoils of the battle. In a prophetic covenant, Hashem reveals to Avram that his offspring will be exiled to a strange land where they will be oppressed for 400 years, after which they will emerge with great wealth and return to Eretz Yisrael, their irrevocable inheritance. Sarai is barren and gives Hagar, her Egyptian hand-maiden, to Avram in the hope that she will provide them with a child. Hagar becomes arrogant when she discovers that she is pregnant. Sarai deals harshly with her and Hagar flees. On the instruction of an angel Hagar returns to Avram and gives birth to Yishmael. The Parsha concludes with Hashem commanding Avram to

circumcise himself and his offspring throughout the generations as a covenant between Hashem and his seed. Hashem changes Avram's name to Avraham, and Sarai's name to Sara. Hashem promises Avraham a son, Yitzhak,

Commentaries

"Go for yourself..." (12:1).

There was a traveler who was journeying from place to place. He came upon a large mansion ablaze with light. He said, "Don't tell me that this mansion has no master!" Suddenly, the owner peeked out and said to him "I am the master of the mansion..." Similarly, because Avraham Avinu looked at the world and said, "Don't tell me that this world has no Master," the Holy One, Blessed be He, `peeked out' and said to him. "I am the Master of the world..."

(Midrash Rabah)

"And Hashem said to Avram `Go for yourself..." (12:1).

The great tzadik, Reb Zushia of Anipoli once said "When I get to the next world, the World of Truth, if they say to me: `Zushia -- why weren't you like the Baal Shem Tov?' That's not going to frighten me one bit -- how can you compare me to the Baal Shem Tov?! And if they say to me `Zushia --

why weren't you like the Magid of Mezrich? That's not going to frighten me either -- Look at me and look at the Magid of Mezrich! What frightens me is when they say to say to me `Zushia! Why weren't you Zushia!? Zushia -- that you could have been, why weren't you even that...?'"

"Go for yourself" can also be translated "Go to yourself..." The mystical sources understand this to mean: "Go to the root of your neshama (soul)."

In the next world, there will be no claims against a person that he failed to live up to the potential of others. However, it is our duty to maximize our talents, to push out to the very limits of our abilities so that we bring the root of our neshamos to flower. It is only in this way that we will be, at least, our own "Zushias."

(Adapted from Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin)

"So Avram said to Lot: `Please let there not be strife between me and you...Please separate from me'" (13:5).

A person should always distance himself from partnerships, for they are the source of arguments and lashon hara. Avraham and Lot did not start out fighting -- it was their shepherds who fell out, and inevitably this led to Avraham asking Lot to separate from him!

"And (Hashem) took him outside and said to him `Look up, please, at the Heavens and count the stars, if you can count them' and He said to him `So, too, will be your descendants'" (14:24).

Two great rabbis of the previous generation, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein and Rabbi Yaakov Kaminetzky, were once seen standing beside the chauffeur-driven car which was to take them home, discussing which of them was going to get out of the car first. As Reb Moshe lived nearer, and would thus get out first, he got in the back and Reb Yaakov got in the front. The reason for their discussion was that if Reb Moshe had sat in the front, when he exited, the driver would look like a chauffeur -- and they were concerned for the dignity of the driver.

The Baal Shem Tov explains that the descendants of Avraham are like stars. >From our point of view the stars seem like insignificant specks of light, whereas in the heavens they are in reality whole universes. When you look at another person, realize that he is a star -- not the Hollywood variety! -- but a galactic mirror, reflecting the infinite light of the Creator. He may seem very small to you. He may not have achieved much in your eyes.

But his potential is vaster than the trackless emptiness of space. When you see people in this light, you will behave towards them with great respect, and when you show others respect, they gain respect for themselves, and this in turn can give them the encouragement to fulfill their potential greatness and shine all the more brightly.

(Adapted from Rabbi Zelig Pliskin, Mayana Shel Torah, and a story by Rabbi Nisson Wolpin in The Jewish Observer)

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Haftorah: Yeshayahu 40:27-41:16

"...As much dust as Avraham used, turned into swords..." (41:2).

Nachum Ish Gamzu was a man who's very name expressed his essence -- whatever happened to him he would always say -- "This is also for the good!" He never doubted that what Hashem does is always for the best. Nachum was chosen to travel to the Emperor and present him with a box filled with precious stones as tribute from the Jewish People. On the way, and unknown to Nachum, the jewels were switched with worthless dust. With great ceremony the 'jewels' were presented to the Emperor and slowly the box was opened in front of him... The Emperor's rage knew no bounds at this unbelievable insult from the Jews. Suddenly, the prophet Eliyahu appeared in the guise of one of the Emperor's ministers and said: "Your Imperial Majesty, this must be the special dust that the Jews' forefather Abraham used to defeat the four kings as it says `...As much dust as Avraham used, turned into swords...'. Let us, at least, try the dust and see if it works for us as well." The Emperor agreed and Hashem caused a miracle to happen -- the dust indeed proved to be lethal against the Emperor's enemies. We must remember that even in the darkest moments of exile, when all our jewels look like dust, Hashem will eventually bring the prophet Eliyahu to announce the dawn of redemption. (Based on the Midrash)

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PARASHAT LEKH-LEKHA
SICHA OF HARAV AHARON LICHTENSTEIN SHLIT"A

Summarised by Rav Eliyahu Blumenzweig

MAN OF SPIRIT, MAN OF ACTION

Parashat Lekh-Lekha presents two sides of Avraham Avinu's personality. On the one hand, we discover Avraham the prophet, who merits Divine revelation and the promise of a covenant. On the other hand, Avraham reveals himself as a man of action, the owner of immense wealth, a warrior who battles against kings and prevails.

That aspect of Avraham's personality which finds expression in his life of action undergoes progressive development. Avraham arrives in Kena'an as a stranger, and

wanders in the land with his wife and relatives. We follow his path: Shekhem, Elon Moreh, Beit El, the Negev. But famine strikes the land and Avraham is forced to pack up his belongings and move to Egypt. Later on, we suddenly discover him owning property: "Sheep and cattle, and donkeys and manservants and maidservants, and she-asses and camels" (Bereishit 12:16). He confronts Pharaoh - and prevails. Henceforth his status is elevated: "And Avraham was very wealthy, with cattle and with silver and with gold" (ibid. 13:2). In the conflict with Lot, his nephew, he proves himself Lot's equal: "For we are brothers" (13:4). A further stage is reached when Avraham is revealed to us as master and victor, ruling over four kings.

However, Avraham's progressive material establishment, expressed by his wealth and his social standing, does not compromise his spiritual stature. At each stage of his progress in the physical world, the Torah describes his parallel spiritual development. Avraham builds an altar to God who appeared to him (12:7), returns to it and calls out in the name of God (13:4), builds another altar (13:18) and brings knowledge of God to the priests of other nations (14:19).

Avraham's trait of "chesed" extends to and is expressed in both areas - in the physical world, the world of action, as well as in the spiritual world, the world of service and fear of God. He brings awareness of the Almighty with him wherever he goes.

All of this is achieved through his modest and humble manner of influence, without any expectation of personal gain. As Avraham tells the king of Sodom: "I have raised my hand to the Lord, the most high God, the Possessor of heaven and earth, that I will take nothing from a thread even to a shoelace, and that I will not take anything that is yours, lest you say, 'I have made Avram rich'" (14:22-23).

"Ma'aseh avot siman la-banim" - this characteristic of the patriarch is certainly worthy of being emulated by his progeny.

(From a sicha given at the yeshiva at se'uda shelishit, Shabbat Lekh-Lekha, 5732. Translated by Karen Fish.)

From: "AAKlein@aol.com"
To: CSHULMAN
Date: 11/3/95 1:09am
Subject: Fwd: PARSHAT LECH L'CHA

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To: yhe-parshaljer1.co.il (Chumash shiur focusing on theme and structure by Menachem Leibtag)
Date: 95-11-02 18:13:51 EST

?Note: I am in "miluim" in Chevron this month, so due to the lack of time, several topics which I had hoped to include in the main shiur will be dealt with only as questions in the further iyun section. It also is this week's excuse for the shiur going out late again.

On the positive side, it is a big zchut to think about the topics of this shiur while gazing at the hills of "ir ha'avot".X

PARSHAT LECH L'CHA

The concept of the 'chosen people' is often misunderstood as a type of 'Divine lottery' won by Avraham Avinu, awarding his offspring with extraordinary traits, exclusive mitzvot, and a special land. According to Sefer Breishit, quite the opposite is true! As we explained in last week's shiur, God's choice of Avraham Avinu was NOT in REWARD for his behavior, rather, he was chosen FOR A SPECIAL PURPOSE - to lead all mankind toward a theocentric existence. Therefore, the various promises made to Avraham Avinu in Parshat Lech L'cha should be understood as vehicles towards the fulfillment of that purpose.

Last week's shiur displayed how the overall structure of the "toldot" in Sefer Breishit helped develop this concept of "bchiyra" (being chosen) for a purpose.

In this week's shiur, we will examine each time God spoke to Avraham Avinu concerning his future (in Parshat Lech L'cha) in order to better understand the nature and purpose of his "bchiyra".

THREE PROMISES - TWO COVENANTS - ONE OATH

The various instances in which God spoke to Avraham regarding the future of his offspring display an interesting progression. At first, we find three promises (chaps. 12-13), followed by two covenants, Brit Bein Ha'tarim (chap. 15) & Brit Milah (chap. 17) - which are finalized by an oath (after "akeydat Yitzchak" - chap. 22). In each instance, the concept of a special nation in a special Land ("zera"=nation / "v'aretz"=land) emerges as the primary theme.

THREE PROMISES

Parshat Lech L'cha opens with God's first "hitgalut" (revelation) to Avraham Avinu:

- (1) "Leave your homeland... to the LAND which I will show you, and I will make you a GREAT NATION... and through you, all the nations will be blessed" (12:1-3)

This opening promise highlights the purpose of this "bchiyra" - in order that Avraham's offspring will become a nation which will influence (i.e. be a blessing to) all mankind.

At Shechem, upon Avraham Avinu's actual arrival in Eretz Canaan, God affirmed this promise:

- (2) "I'zar'a'cha e'teyn et ha'aretz ha'zot" (12:6)
?to your OFFSPRING I will give this LAND".X

Finally, this very same promise is re-affirmed at Bet-El, after Lot's departure to live in Sdom:

- (3) "... Lift us your eyes from this location ("ha'Makom"); to the

north, south, east & west; for this LAND which you see, I am giving to you and your OFFSPRING forever..." (13:14-15)
?Note both the repetition of the promise of "zera v'aretz", as well as the emphasis upon the centrality of this location ("look to the north, south, east, and west").X

This re-affirmation takes place specifically at Bet-El since the destiny of this location relates to the very purpose of Avraham's "bchiyra". Bet-El was not only the focal point of Avraham's 'aliyah' to Eretz Canaan from both Mesopotamia and Egypt (12:8 & 13:4), and the site where he built a "mizbayach" and called out 'in the name of God', but it was also destined to become - "haMakom asher yivchar Hashem l'shakeyn SHMO sham" - the site where the Bet HaMikdash would be built. (See Br. 28:10-17 ("bet Elokim...") and Dvarim 12:5-11.)

?We explained in last week's shiur that this 'calling out of God's name' at this site could represent a 'tikun' for the generation of Migdal Bavel with Temple's "va'yikra b'Shem Hashem" coming to oppose the Tower's "na'ase lanu Shem" (11:4).X

TWO BRITOT

As we all know, 'promises can be broken'. A covenant ("brit"), on the other hand, constitutes a much stronger commitment than a promise, and usually includes mutual responsibilities. As Parshat Lech L'cha continues, we find two covenants which formalize the promise of "zera v'aretz" to Avraham:

1) Brit Bein Ha'Btarim (chap. 15), made with Avraham Avinu after his involvement in the war of the five kings against the four (chap. 14).

2) Brit Milah (chap. 17), made with Avraham Avinu after the narrative describing the incident between Hagar and Sarah and the birth of Yishmael (chap. 16).

Although both of these covenants formalize the original promise of "zera v'aretz", their content and context are quite different.

Why are two covenants necessary? To answer this question, we must first analyze each, and then compare them.

? It is highly recommended that you first read 15:1-21 & 17:1-14 before continuing. Take note of Hashem's name in each perek! (This comparison will be critical towards understanding future shiurim regarding the "kedusha" of Eretz Yisrael, the remainder of Sefer Breishit, and "yetziat mitzraim" at the beginning of Sefer Shmot!)X

"YE'RU'SHA" & "ACHUZAH"

Before we begin, we must clarify some biblical terminology relating to two levels of acquiring land:

- a) national level / conquest by a sovereign power.
 - b) individual level / purchase, gift, allocation etc.
- a) Land ownership begins with its conquest by a sovereign power (usually a political entity such as a people or a state). In hebrew, this conquest is known as "kibush" or "yerusha". For example, "I'ho'riysh" or "la'reshet" in Chumash implies land acquisition by military conquest (see Bamidbar 33:52-53, Yehoshua 13:1, 18:3, 23:5).
 - b) That sovereign power can then sell or appropriate that land to anyone it wishes (as long as that entity remains in power). When

an individual acquires land in this manner, it is referred to in Chumash as either "nachala" or "achuzah". This type of ownership can then be sold to others or passed on as an inheritance from father to son. For example, when Avraham Avinu wants to buy a family burial plot, he must PURCHASE an "ACHUZAT kever" from Bnei Chet (who were sovereign over Chevron at that time / see Br. 23:1-20).

To summarize (for the needs of the shiur to follow), "yerusha" relates to military conquest, while "achuza" relates to private acquisition from the sovereign power.

BRIT BEIN HA'BTARIM

Brit Bein Ha'Btarim takes place after Avraham's MILITARY victory over the 'four kings' (see 15:1). From the context of the opening eight psukim, it appears as though God found it necessary to reassure Avraham, even though he was still childless, that a time will come (after some 400 years) when his offspring will inherit, by CONQUEST, the very same land which he had just conquered.

The key word which highlights this point in chapter 15 is "yerusha", mentioned five times in the first eight psukim!

?Hashem said to Avraham..X I am the God who took you out of Ur Cashdim to give you this Land "L'RISHTAH". ?Avraham then askedX "b'meh ay'dah ki IY'RA'SHE'NAH".. (15:7-8)

This introduction to the covenant clearly focuses on the national aspect of the 'chosen people'. Likewise, the primary message of Brit Bein Ha'Btarim, stated in the middle of the covenantal ceremony (15:9-17), also reflects this national aspect:

"Know well that your offspring will be strangers in a land not theirs and they will be enslaved and oppressed, for four hundred years. But I will punish that nation which they will serve and afterward they will go free with great wealth...." (15:13-14)

The formation of every nation is naturally linked with its land. In the normal situation, a common land is the primary factor which causes a certain group of people to form into a national entity. However, in regard to Am Yisrael, the process of becoming a nation develops in the opposite order. First, a common goal and purpose is the motivating reason behind the formation of the nation, while the special land is chosen as the ideal location where that destiny can be best fulfilled. Thus, according to Brit Bein Ha'Btarim, Avraham's offspring will not become a nation in their own land (the natural process). Rather, this special nation will be forged by a common plight of oppression in a foreign land. Afterwards, God will redeem them, ?charge them (at Har Sinai)X, and then lead them to the Promised Land, as seen in the conclusion of this covenant:

"On that day God made a covenant with Avraham saying - to your OFFSPRING I have given this LAND, from the River of Egypt to the great river, the River of Prat; the Kini, the Knizi,...
?10 nationsX. (15:18-21)

This long historical process, as foreseen at Brit Bein Ha'Btarim, would ultimately transform Avraham's offspring into a nation, redeemed by God, that will conquer and inherit the Promised Land in order to accomplish its Divine purpose.

BRIT MILAH

In chap. 17 we find an additional covenant in which the land was promised to Avraham's offspring - Brit Milah. In contrast to Brit Bein Ha'Btarim, Brit Milah focuses on a more personal aspect of our relationship with God.

We will begin our examination from third pasuk, where God, b'shem Elokim (17:3), presents His covenant. ?The first two psukim, in which shem Havaya appears to Avraham and informs him of his special name of "kel-sha-dai", are complicated and will be discussed in the further iyun section.X

God not only assures Avraham that he will have a child (from Sarah), but also re-states Avraham's leadership role among all nations ("av hamon goyim"):

"Behold my covenant is with you, and you will be the father for many nations... Your name shall no longer be Avram, rather Avraham... and you shall be fertile..." (17:4-6)

This assurance is then followed by the primary message of this covenant and its fulfillment in the special Land:

? Note the repetition of the primary message - "Thi'yot lachem l'Elokim", the name of the land which was promised - "eretz canaan", and the word "achuza".X

"And I shall keep my covenant between Me and you, and with your offspring for all generations, an everlasting covenant - "L'HIYOT LA'CHEM L'ELOKIM" ?to be a God for youX" and I have given you and your offspring the land in which you now dwell, the entire LAND OF CANAAN, "l'ACHUZAT olam" ?for an everlasting inheritanceX - "v'HA'YITI LA'CHEM L'ELOKIM". (17:7-8)

This covenant culminates with the commandment of "brit-milah" (circumcision), to be kept by Avraham's offspring for all generations (17:9-14), an eternal symbol of our commitment to that covenant.

In summary, Brit Bein Ha'Btarim focuses on the national aspect of our development into God's nation, while Brit Milah focuses on the special relationship between God and each individual.

The following table will illustrate the contrast between these two covenants:

	BRIT BEIN HA'BTARIM	BRIT MILAH
Hashem's name	Havaya	Elokim
Focus	nation	individual
Message	bondage & redemption	He will be our God
Land (name)	ha'Aretz	eretz canaan
-acquisition	"yerusha"	"achuzah"
borders	Nile to Euphrates	eretz m'gurecha
	the 10 nations	(from Dan to Beer-sheva)
Commemoration	Korban Pesach	Brit-milah

It is beyond the scope of this shiur to explain the reason for each difference (see further iyun section for several examples), however one basic point emerges - our covenant with God exists at both a national and individual level. As we explained earlier, the concept of an entire nation which will represent God to all mankind is a primary theme of Sefer Breishit. Toward the fulfillment of

that goal, it is necessary that this nation be molded under special circumstances ("yetiziat mitzraim") and live in a special land located between the two centers of ancient civilization. Nevertheless, this nation can not fulfill its goal unless this special relationship with God exists at the individual level as well.

As we will explain, iy"h, in our shiurim in Sefer Shmot, the Korban Pesach can be understood as a thanksgiving offering in appreciation for God's fulfillment of Brit Bein Ha'Btarim. This understanding can help explain the unique halacha concerning these two "mitzvot aseiy" (positive commandments), Pesach and Milah, whose punishment is "karet" (being cut-off) should they not be fulfilled. How could it be that one is 'cut off' from Am Yisrael by doing nothing ("b'shav v'al taaseh")! The answer is now clear. Performing brit milah and offering the Korban Pesach are mitzvot through which one re-affirms his entry into the covenant with God. By not performing these mitzvot (when capable of doing so), one demonstrates that he is not interested in entering this covenant, therefore, de-facto, he is 'cut-off'!

This also explains the halacha that one who has not performed brit milah can not participate in the Korban Pesach (see Shmot 12:43-50). Usually, not performing one mitzvah is not a reason to forbid one to perform another mitzvah. ?For example, if one did not perform brit milah, he can still fulfill the mitzvah of sukah and lulav!X Korban Pesach, however, is different. One who was not willing to affirm his commitment to the covenant as an individual (not performing brit-milah) can not participate in the national covenant!

? Even to this very day, brit milah (circumcision) and korban Pesach ("leil ha'Seder") remain as the two most basic mitzvot which almost every Jew, even the non religious, keep and identify with.X

ONE OATH

At Akeydat Yitzchak, these promises and covenants are finalized by an oath (22:16). Iy"h, we will explain this in next week's shiur.

TODAY

According to Sefer Breishit, our inheritance of the Land of Israel should not be understood as a reward, rather as a tool for the fulfillment of our national goal. Similarly, our return to the Promised Land in this generation, although an act of Divine mercy, should not be understood as a Divine gift, rather as a historic opportunity to fulfill our destiny. This challenge can be met if our commitment to God at both the national and individual levels becomes an integral part of our character.

shabbat shalom
menachem

FOR FURTHER IYUN

This week, this section will deal with topics related to, but not discussed, in the above shiur.

A. Two Kdushot of Eretz Yisrael

The Rambam, in Hilchot Trumot & Maasrot, explains that the kedusha of erez yisrael which obligates us in trumot and maasrot is only present if the Land is conquered by Melech Yisrael, or a leader with the support of a navi or the majority of Am Yisrael. (See Hilchot Trumot uMaasrot I:1-5)

1. Is this Kedusha based on Brit Bein ha'Btarim or Brit Milah? Relate this to the concept of "yerusha".

2. Does the land have any kedusha when it under sovereignty other than Jewish? If so, how does that kedusha manifest itself? Can you relate this to Brit Milah?

3. K'dusha rishonah, according to chazal, was "m'shum kibush", and therefore nullified at the time of the churban. Ezra instituted "kdusha shniya - m'shum chazaka". Explains Ezra's takana based on the above shiur.

Relate this to the above Rambam (read carefully!)

Relate this to Nechemia 9:1-11:3 (especially 10:33-38!)

4. Which kedusha would you consider intrinsic?

B. Two borders of the land of Israel

The borders of the Land of Israel is a very popular topic nowadays.

1. According to the above shiur, are Israel's biblical borders from Dan to Beer Sheva or from the Nile to the Euphrates?

2. Look in the Rambam quoted above (in A.) for his explanation of this complex sugyah!

Explain his usage of "Bavel & Mitzrayim"!

What is the Rambam referring to by "eretz sh'huvtach l'Avraham Avinu"? (according to which Brit?)

C. Milah on the eight day

Note that brit Milah was given b'shem Elokim, the same perspective of Hashem which created all nature in seven days (perek aleph in Breishit).

Recall that in those seven days of creation we found a progression from inanimate objects, to vegetation, to animals, culminating with the creation of Man - the highest level of creation. At that point, the creation process 'halted'.

One could suggest that the next level after Man is Yisrael, which is a human existence with a special relationship with God. Based on this 'suggestion', explain why brit milah should be performed specifically on the eighth day!

Relate this to Hashem's name in Brit Milah and perek aleph.

Relate this also to other key words in Brit Milah.

Compare also to Noach, "v'hakimoti et briti", given b'shem Elokim to Noach, once before the Mabul, and once afterwards!

D. Afar Ha'aretz

Note that at Bet El, the bracha of "v'haya zaracha k'afar ha'aretz" appears, both by Avraham Avinu in perek 13 and by Yaakov in the beginning of Vayetze. Using the connection between Bet El and the Mikdash, use this to explain two midrashim of chazal which connects the "afar" that man was created from (see Br. 2:7) with "afar" at the site of the Mikdash.

See also Rashi on 2:7! Note the midrash concerning "afar" from all four corners ... - relate to 'four directions' in psukim at Bet-El.

E. Why was Avraham chosen, and not someone else.

Our explanation that Avraham was chosen for a purpose and not

for a reward is supported by the fact that Chumash offers no apparent reason for the specific choice of Avraham. Had Avraham's "bchiyra" been in reward, then the Torah should have first explained what he did to deserve this reward. Instead, the Torah presents Avraham Avinu's "bchiyra" in the wake of the Migdal Bavel narrative, thus emphasizing the Divine purpose of this process.

The lack of any biblical narrative explaining Avraham's special behavior prior to his "bchiyra" does not imply that there was nothing special about him. His unique traits, such as his self-discovery of God and his battle against the idol worship in Ur Cashdim, as detailed in various Midrashim, explains why he, specifically, was chosen. Nonetheless, the fact the Chumash presents Avraham Avinu without conveying these stories, emphasizes the nature and purpose of his "bchiyra".

This is a classic example of how "Torah sh'bktav" (Chumash) and "Torah sh'baal peh" (the Midrash) complement each other by transmitting a 'double message'. Chumash, by not making any mention of Avraham's special character, emphasizes the primary theme - that Avraham was chosen for a purpose (not as a reward). The Midrash explains a secondary theme, that there was something special about Avraham himself, that prompted Hashem to choose him specifically.

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From: "listserv@lubavitch.chabad.org (W-2 LIST Chabad-Lubavitch)"
To: CSHULMAN
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B"H
Torah Studies
Adaptation of Likutei Sichos
by
Rabbi Dr. Jonathan Sacks
Chief Rabbi of Great Britain

Based on the teachings and talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe
Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson on the weekly Torah Portion

Lech Lecha

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LECH LECHA

There appears to be a contradiction between the name of this Sidra and its content. For "Lech Lecha," as the Sicha will explain, means "Go to yourself" - Abraham's movement towards the fulfillment of his task. But the Sidra describes a series of events which happened to Abraham, seeming to deflect him from his mission.

The Sicha resolves the contradiction by going in depth into the meaning of fulfillment, or "ascent," for the Jew.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Names are not accidents in Torah.

We find in many places that the name of a person or a thing tells us about its nature. And the same is true of the Sidrot. The names they bear are a cue to their content, even though on the face of it they are simply taken from the first words of the Sidra and are there, as it were, by chance.

However there is no such thing as pure chance in events, since everything happens by Divine Providence; certainly in matters of Torah.

We might think that the names of the Sidrot are a relatively late convention, since we are not certain that they are mentioned in the Talmud, while the names of the books of the Torah and of the divisions of the Mishnah are all detailed there.

But there is a law relating to legal documents, that a name mentioned in one becomes a name recognized by Torah law if it has stood unchallenged for 30 days.

A fortiori, since the names of the Sidrot have stood unchallenged for more than 1,000 years, and are mentioned by the Sages (Rashi, for example), they are recognized as such by Torah.

So we can sum up the inner content of the whole of this week's Sidra by understanding the implications of its name: Lech Lecha.

Lech Lecha: Go To Yourself

This is usually translated as "Get thee out (from your country and your birthplace and your father's house. . .)" But it literally means, "Go to yourself."

"Going" has the connotation in Torah of moving towards one's ultimate purpose - of service towards one's Creator. And this is strongly hinted at by the phrase, "Go to yourself" - meaning, towards your

soul's essence and your ultimate purpose, that for which you were created.

This was the command given to Abraham, and the first part of the narrative bears this out. For he was told to leave his heathen background and go to Israel. And within Israel he was "going and journeying to the South," that is, towards Jerusalem.

He was moving progressively towards an ever increasing degree of holiness. But then we suddenly find: "And there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt."

Why this sudden reversal of his spiritual journey, especially as the whole Sidra (as testified by its name) is supposed to contain an account of Abraham's continual progress towards his fulfillment?

ASCENT OR DESCENT?

That it was a reversal seems clear.

To go to Egypt was itself a spiritual descent - as the verse explicitly says, "And Abram went down to Egypt." And the cause of his journey - "and there was a famine in the land" - also seems like the deliberate concealment of G-d's blessing.

The more so as G-d promised Abraham, "And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great." Is it not strange that when he reached the land that G-d had shown him, a famine forced him to leave?

A possible answer is that this was one of the trials which Abraham had to face to prove himself worthy of his mission (and the Midrash tells us when faced with this inexplicable hardship Abraham "was not angry and did not complain").

But this will not suffice. For Abraham's mission was not simply a personal one - it was his task to spread G-d's name and gather adherents to His faith.

The Midrash compares his many journeyings to the way a spice box must be shaken about, to spread its aroma to all corners of a room. So an explanation of his descent in terms of a personal pilgrimage will not do justice to the difficulty. Especially since its immediate effect was to endanger Abraham's mission. It could not help the work of spreading G-d's name for the arrival of a man of G-d to be followed by a bad omen of a national famine.

Worse is to follow, for when Abraham entered Egypt, Sarah, his wife, was taken by Pharaoh by force. And even though he did not so much as touch her, it was an evident descent from the spiritual course that seemed to be outlined for them.

And even before this, when they first approached Egypt, Abraham said to Sarah, "Now I know you are a woman of beautiful appearance." Thereby he had already begun to see (though only relative to his own exalted standard) with "Egyptian" eyes; for previously he had not noticed this because of the spirituality of their modest relationship.

So how, in the face of so many contrary indications, can it be that

the whole story of Lech Lecha is - as its name would seem to imply - one of Abraham's continual ascent towards his destiny?

History Foreshadowed

We can work towards a resolution of these difficulties by understanding the inner meaning of the famous dictum, "The works of the Fathers are a sign for the children."

This does not mean simply that the fate of the Fathers is mirrored in the fate of their children. But more strongly, that what they do brings about what happens to their children.

Their merit gives their children the strength to follow their example. And in Abraham's wanderings, the subsequent history of the children of Israel was rehearsed and made possible.

Abraham's journey down to Egypt foreshadows the future Egyptian Exile. "And Abram went up out of Egypt" presages the Israelites' redemption. And just as Abraham left, "weighed down with cattle, silver and gold," so too did the Israelites leave Egypt "with great wealth."

Even that merit for which the Israelites were saved they owed to Sarah; for just as their women kept themselves from sinning with the Egyptians, so had Sarah protected herself from Pharaoh's advances.

The End is Implicit in the Beginning

Understood in this light, we can see the end of Abraham's journey to Egypt foreshadowed in its beginning. For its purpose was his eventual departure "weighed down with cattle, silver and gold," expressing the way in which he was to transform the most secular and heathen things and press them into the service of G-d.

This was indeed the purpose of the Israelites' exile into Egypt, that G-d's presence should be felt in this most intransigent of places.

The final ascent was implicit in the descent.

There is, in Jewish learning, an image which captures this oblique directedness.

The Babylonian Talmud, unlike the Jerusalem Talmud, never reaches its decisions directly but arrives at them through digressions and dialectics which shed, in their apparent meandering, more light than a direct path could. Indeed, when the two books are in disagreement, the Babylonian verdict is always followed.

So too do the seeming digressions of Jewish history represent not a wandering from the path of destiny but a way of shedding the light of G-d on untouched corners of the world, as preparation for, and part of, their subsequent redemption.

Abraham's removal to Egypt was not an interruption but an integral part of the command of "Lech Lecha" - to journey towards that self-fulfillment which is the service of G-d.

And as Abraham's destiny was the later destiny of the children of Israel, so it is ours.

Our exile, like his, is a preparation for (and therefore part of) redemption. And the redemption which follows brings us to a higher state than that which we could have reached without exile.

As it says: "Greater will be the glory of this latter house (i.e., the Temple of the Messianic Age) than that of the former (the first Temple)."

Exile, then, is an integral part of spiritual progress; it allows us to sanctify the whole world by our actions, and not simply a small corner of it.

Perhaps one will say: Where is this progress apparent? The world does not appear to be growing more holy: Precisely the opposite seems to be the case.

But this is a superficial judgment. The world does not move of its own accord. It is fashioned by Divine Providence.

What appears on the surface to be a decline is, however hidden, part of the continuous process of transformation which we work on the world whenever we dedicate our actions to Torah and G-d's will. In other words, the world constantly becomes more elevated and refined. Nothing could illustrate this more clearly than the story of Abraham's journeyings, seen first on the surface, and then in their true perspective.

Whatever a Jew's situation, when he turns towards his true self-fulfillment in the injunction of Lech Lecha, he places his life and his actions in the perspective of Torah, and takes his proper place in the bringing of the future redemption.

(Source: Likkutei Sichot, Vol. V pp. 57-67)

End of text - Torah Studies - Lech Lecha