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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET
ON **LECH LICHA** - 5771

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[From last year - 5770]

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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 G-d." 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 G-d of Israel, 'Long ago, your fathers lived beyond the river (Euphrates), Terach, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; 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 Terach 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?" Terach asked, "Do idols have understanding?"

"Let your ears hear what your mouth is saying", replied the child. On this reading, Abraham was an iconoclast, a breaker of images, one who rebelled against his father's faith (Bereishith Rabbah 38: 8).

Maimonides, the philosopher, put it somewhat differently. Originally, human beings believed in one G-d. 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 G-d. Later still, they worshipped them as entities - gods - in their own right. It took Abraham, using logic alone, to realize 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 G-d who guides the heavenly bodies, who created everything, and besides whom there is no other god. (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 Terach. Terach fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran fathered Lot . . . Terach 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 Terach were 205 years, and Terach died in Haran. (Gen 11: 31)

The implication seems to be that far from breaking with his father, Abraham was continuing a journey Terach 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 Terach stopped halfway, in Haran. The passage recording Terach'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. Terach 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 G-d") and that of Abraham ("The G-d before whom I have walked", 24: 40). G-d himself says to Abraham "Walk ahead of Me and be perfect" (17: 1). G-d 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 G-d's reaction to that moment, when the law was decided by majority vote rather than 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 G-d (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" (Halakhic Man, p 107).

This idea finds expression in halakhah, 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. (Hilkhot 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 emphasizes discontinuity. Abraham broke with all that went before. The other emphasizes continuity. Terach, 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 half way. 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 realize 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 G-d himself, who left, and continues to leave, space for us, His children, to walk on ahead. "Did you ask a good question today?" The Times - Credo May 1999 Isidore Rabi, winner of a Nobel Prize for physics, was once asked why he became a scientist. He replied: "My mother made me a scientist without ever knowing it. Every other child would come back from school and be asked, 'What did you learn today?' But my mother used to say, 'Izzy, did you ask a good question today?' That made the difference. Asking good questions made me into a scientist."

Judaism is a religion of questions. The greatest prophets asked questions of G-d. The Book of Job, the most searching of all explorations of human suffering, is a book of questions asked by man, to which G-d replies with a string of questions of His own. The earliest sermons usually began with a question asked of the rabbi by a member of the congregation. Most famously, the seder service on Passover begins with four questions asked by the youngest child. So I can identify with Rabi's childhood memories.

When I left university and went to Israel to study in a rabbinical seminary, I was stunned by the sheer intensity with which the students grappled with texts. Once in a while the teacher's face would light up at a comment from the class. "Du fregst a gutte kashe," he would say (you raise a good objection). This was his highest form of praise. Abraham Twerski, an American psychiatrist, tells of how, when he was young, his instructor would relish challenges to his arguments. In his broken English he would say: "You right! You a hundred prozent right! Now I show you where you wrong." Religious faith has suffered hugely in the modern world by being cast as naive, blind, unquestioning.

The scientist asks, the believer just believes. Critical inquiry, so the stereotype runs, is what makes the difference between the pursuit of knowledge and the certainties of faith. One who believes in the fundamentals of a creed is derided as a fundamentalist. The word fundamentalist itself comes to mean a simplistic approach to complex issues. Religious belief is often seen as the suspension of critical intelligence.

As Wilson Mizner once put it: "I respect faith. But doubt is what gets you an education." To me, this is a caricature of faith, not faith itself. What is the asking of a question if not itself a profound expression of faith in the intelligibility of the universe and the meaningfulness of

human life? To ask is to believe that somewhere there is an answer. The fact that throughout history people have devoted their lives to extending the frontiers of knowledge is a moving demonstration of the restlessness of the human spirit and its constant desire to transcend, to climb. Far from faith excluding questions, questions testify to faith - that the world is not random, the universe is not impervious to our understanding, life is not chance. That, I suspect, is why Judaism encourages questions. On the phrase: "Let us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness", Rashi, the 11th-century biblical commentator, says: "This means, with the power to understand and to discern." Critical intelligence is the gift G-d gave humanity. To use it in the cause of human dignity and insight is one of the great ways of serving G-d. When faith suppresses questions, it dies.

When it accepts superficial answers, it withers. Faith is not opposed to doubt. What it is opposed to is the shallow certainty that what we understand is all there is.

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From: **Rabbi Frand on Parshas Lech Lecha** Rabbi Yissocher Frand <ryfrand@torah.org> Thu, Oct 14, 2010 at 2:54 PM Reply-To: ryfrand@torah.org, genesis@torah.org To: ravfrand@torah.org Rabbi Yissocher Frand This week's shiur is dedicated in memory of Icek Kuperberg, Yitzchak ben Avraham, Z"L. To sponsor an edition of the Rabbi Yissocher Frand e-mail list, click here

...
Lech-Lecha #1 or Lech-Lecha #2 - Which is the harder test?

The Medrash Rabbah on this week's Parsha states in the name of Rav Levi: There are two times that "Lech Lecha" is written in the Torah and we do not know which is G-d's favorite - the first or the second. The first "Lech Lecha" is obviously the first pasuk of our parsha [Bereshit 12:1]: "Go out from your land, from your birth place, and from your father's house to the land that I will show you." The second "Lech Lecha" is in connection with Akeidas Yitzchok [the Binding of Yitzchak], where Avraham is told "Go out to the Land of Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you." [Bereshit 22:2] Rav Levi concludes that Akeidas Yitzchok was a greater test than the test of Avram leaving his homeland and thus the second instance of "Lech Lecha" is "more precious to G-d".

It is actually strange that Rav Levi was even puzzled by this question. Why would anyone think that the test of leaving one's homeland (particularly in the context of the great reward that HaShem promised to Avram if he complied with this commandment) might be comparable to the test of the Akeida? The Akeida would be most difficult for any parent - particularly such a person as Avraham, who was the paradigm of Chesed [kindness] and who had preached monotheism and the virtues of a Merciful G-d all these years to his many disciples.

A Nesivos Shalom (by the Slonimer Rebbe) at the beginning of the parsha addresses this issue. Certainly, the Akeida was a very difficult nisayon [test], but it was a "one shot affair". Avraham was called upon to ascend the mountain, sacrifice Yitzchak, and then the nisayon would be over. However, the nisayon of Lech Lecha in our parsha is a test of beginning a journey that will affect him and will last the rest of his life.

Everyone has his own personal odyssey in life. We are all charged with the task of bringing completeness (shleimus) to our souls. We have to achieve correction (tikun) of our neshma [soul] in our own personal fashion. That is the charge of Lech LECHA (go in YOUR OWN way). This charge involves a lifetime of work. Many times, this charge requires getting out of the box that is one's environment, one's society, and one's family. We never enter life with a clean slate. We all enter life with baggage - emotional baggage, financial baggage, genetic baggage, family baggage. Sometimes the "baggage" is very good and extremely helpful. Other times the baggage can be a real handicap. The type of

people that we are and the characteristics (middos) that we have are primarily not our own choosing.

When a person is given a mission in life and a goal to accomplish, it may involve the need to rid himself of so much of the baggage that he came with (one's land, one's birthplace, one's family). Such a challenge is not a one shot deal. Rather, it accompanies us day in and day out. Such a constant – lifelong – challenge may indeed be cumulatively a greater test than a test requiring only a momentary rise to the occasion, as difficult as that challenge may be.

This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Lech Lecha are provided below:

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Rabbi Yonason Sacks - Ratzon HaTorah TorahWeb
<torahweb@torahweb.org> Wed, Oct 13, 2010 at 9:27 PM To:
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Rabbi Yonason Sacks Ratzon HaTorah

Although the ethics described in Maseches Avos are incontrovertibly a product of the original Sinaic mesorah, no sefer hamitzvos (works of Rishonim which enumerated the 613 mitzvos) reckons these ethics among the 613 canonical mitzvos of the Torah. This salient omission prompts questions pertaining to the mandate for their obligatory observance.

R' Asher Weiss (Minchas Asher, Bereishis 21, Devarim 14) explains that not every mitzvah which a Jew must fulfill is actually written in the Torah or reckoned among the canonical 613. Beyond the written and canonized mitzvos, every Jew is obligated to fulfill the broader meta-halachic category of "ratzon haTorah - the will of the Torah." Although such mitzvos were never actually written in the Torah, the Torah nonetheless makes clear that it desires certain modes of behavior.

For example, the accepted halacha maintains that tza'ar ba'alei chaim - inflicting pain upon animals - is Biblically prohibited (see Bava Metzia 32a). Interestingly, however, the Gemarah itself never cites a source for this prohibition. The Rishonim suggest various possibilities: Rashi (Shabbos 128b, sv. Tza'ar), for example, identifies the mitzvah of prikah - the obligation to assist in the unloading of a burdened animal - as the source for this prohibition, while the Ra'avad (Shitah Mekubetzes ibid. 32b) cites the prohibition of muzzling a plowing animal. R' Weiss explains that neither Rashi nor the Ra'avad would argue that one who inflicts pain upon an animal actually violates these particular commandments; rather, both of these commandments reflect the Torah's disapproval of mistreating animals, thereby rendering tza'ar ba'alei chaim a bona fide Biblical prohibition, despite the absence of a specific source.

Other mitzvos may fall under the category of ratzon haTorah as well. R' Elchanan Wasserman (Kuntras Divrei Sofrim 22, 23) suggests that all Rabbinic laws fall under the rubric of ratzon haTorah - despite the

absence of a specific source, the Torah wills that every Jew should follow the instructions of the Sages. The Chazon Ish (Yoreh Deah 149:8) adds that perhaps the mitzvah of kibbud av v'eim - honoring one's father and mother - may similarly fall under this category. The Gemarah in Maseches Kiddushin cites specific actions which must be performed for this mitzvah: a child is obligated to provide food and drinks for his parents, along with helping his parents dress themselves. The Chazon Ish, based on a comment of the Rashba, explains that although these specific actions fulfill the positive Biblical precept of kibbud av v'eim, nonetheless, the concept of ratzon haTorah dictates that a child do whatever brings pleasure to a parent, even beyond the Gemarah's specific examples.

This concept of ratzon haTorah may also underlie a classic ruling of the Ba'al HaMaor. The Gemarah (Shabbos 134b) teaches that in Talmudic times, all babies who underwent bris milah were bathed in hot water before and after the milah to ensure their safety; failure to do so was believed to pose a significant threat to the baby's life. If a milah was to be performed on Shabbos, the hot water would be boiled before Shabbos for subsequent administration on Shabbos itself (although the act of milah itself overrides the Shabbos, the preparations for a milah do not override the Shabbos). Because the preparatory boiling of the water does not override the Shabbos, in a case where all of the boiled water accidentally spilled from the urn on Shabbos, before the milah could be performed, one would not be permitted to boil new water on Shabbos. In such a scenario, all opinions would agree that the milah must be deferred to Sunday.

The Rishonim debate, however, what the halacha would be if only half of the boiled water spilled out before the milah on Shabbos. In such a situation, may one proceed with the milah? The Ramban (cited by Ran, Shabbos 53a in Rif, s.v. V'heicha) rules that the milah may indeed be performed: the remaining hot water which did not spill will suffice to wash the baby before the milah, and after the milah, the principle of pikuach nefesh - saving a life - will permit the boiling of additional water to wash the baby and save its life. The Ba'al HaMaor, however, disagrees. Although the principle of pikuach nefesh certainly overrides the Shabbos, one is not permitted to intentionally orchestrate a situation in which this permit can be used. For example, if, G-d forbid, an individual suffers an unexpected heart attack on Shabbos, he may certainly violate the Shabbos to save his life; however, to deliberately perform a bris milah without sufficient boiled water, knowing that such an action will inevitably create a situation of pikuach nefesh, is absolutely prohibited.

While the Ba'al HaMaor explicitly prohibits the deliberate invocation of the license of pikuach nefesh on Shabbos, the Achronim debate the nature of this prohibition. R' Shlomo Zalman Orbach (Minchas Shlomo 7:2) reasons that the prohibition is merely Rabbinic in nature: no matter a person's intentions, the Torah itself will always permit a person to violate Shabbos in order to save a life. It was the Sages, however, who felt that such deliberate orchestration was improper. R' Asher Weiss, however, argues that perhaps the Ba'al HaMaor's prohibition constitutes a violation of ratzon haTorah: just as the Torah wills that a person fulfill all of its applicable commandments, so too the Torah wills that a person not intentionally create situations which will exempt himself from its commandments. Accordingly, the Ba'al HaMaor's prohibition could indeed be Biblical in origin, despite the absence of an explicit Scriptural source.

In light of the aforementioned examples, perhaps one could similarly suggest that the source for the ethics prescribed in Maseches Avos is the concept of ratzon haTorah. Although the Torah never states these ethics in a particular chapter or verse, the consistent emphasis upon proper conduct and refinement of character through fulfillment of the mitzvos reveals the Torah's ultimate desire that a person uphold oneself in an ethical fashion.

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OU TORAHPERSON IN THE PARSHASponsored in memory of Nathan and Louise Schwartz a”h Rabbi Weinreb’s Torah Column, **Parshas Lech Lecha Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb**

Walking With and Walking Before

When I was still a pulpit rabbi back in Baltimore, I would meet with a group of teenagers from time to time. The agenda was open-ended, and my goal was to encourage the group to share their feelings and attitudes freely. One of the favorite topics chosen by the kids was their school curriculum and what they found wrong with it.

I learned many things from this group of adolescents, whose critique of the curricula of the schools they attended was sharp and accurate. I particularly remember the outburst of one exceptionally creative young man. Let us call him Josh.

He was a student in a very academically oriented high school which put its major emphasis upon textual study. "What am I supposed to do with my creativity", he asked. "Where is there room in the school for me to express my artistic talents?"

I was hard-pressed to come up with an answer for Josh's pained query. All I could say was that he was personally experiencing a tension which pervades the history of our religious faith. It is the tension between conformity to the rules and regulations of our sacred texts versus the natural and powerful human need for creative expression and innovation.

Our religion reveres tradition and continuity. Attempts to question tradition and to stake out new spiritual turf have been typically viewed in our history as heresy and rebellion. Is there no room for creative novelty in our faith?

I think that there is room for such creativity, and I think that it is none other than Abraham himself who is the first example in the Torah of innovative ingenuity, within the context of religious service.

In this week's Torah portion, Lech Lecha, we find God Himself describing Abraham as one who "walks before Me", "hit'halech lefanai..." (Genesis 17:1). Our sages contrast this description of Abraham with an earlier description of Noah, to be found in last week's Torah portion. There we read, "Noah walked with God", "et haElokim" (Genesis 6:9). Noah walked with God, whereas Abraham walked before Him.

Noah walked with God and required Divine support to live his religious life. He was not able to walk before God. He could not take the initiative and strike out on his own. He needed to be certain of God's will before he could act.

Abraham, on the other hand, walked before God. He stepped out on his own and risked acting independently and creatively. He was confident in his own religious judgment and did not require God's prior approval for all of his actions. Indeed, he dared to challenge God's own judgment.

Thus, we never find Noah speaking out in defense of his generation, nor does he pray for their salvation. Abraham, on the contrary, forcefully defends sinful Sodom and Gomorrah and prays even for his adversaries.

Of Moses too, it can be said that he walked before God. He broke the tablets on his own initiative, and, according to our sages, added a day to God's own timetable for giving the Torah. In both cases, we are told that the Lord congratulated him for his bold creative actions.

I remember reading an anecdote about Rav Kook, the first chief Rabbi of the Holy Land, which illustrates his preference for the creative genius over the person who just conforms. Rav Kook once had to decide a halachic issue by resolving a disagreement between two great Talmudic authorities. The dispute was between the author of Darchei Teshuvah, a monumental anthology of halachic dicta, and the Maharsham, who

authored many volumes in response to questions arising from the circumstances of new technological inventions.

Rav Kook decided in favor of the Maharsham over the Darchei Teshuva. He argued that whereas the latter was a gaon me'asef, a genius at recording the opinions of others, the former was a gaon yotzer, an inventive genius. The creative authority trumped the expert anthologist.

One of the areas of psychology which has always fascinated me has been the research on the phenomenon of human creativity. One line of that research suggests that there are two modes of thought of which we are all capable, although some of us are better at one and some are better at the other.

There are those of us who are convergent thinkers. Our ideas connect and ultimately merge with the ideas of our predecessors and peers. Others think divergently, and their ideas veer from earlier norms and carve out new paths and different solutions.

The contrast between Abraham and Noah suggests that although Abraham was the model of ultimate obedience to God's will, he nevertheless was capable of divergent thinking. He was able to walk before God. Noah, however, could only think convergently and, figuratively speaking, needed to hold God's hand.

It is important that we realize that creativity is not at odds with spirituality and with faithful adherence to meticulous religious observance. We must not be afraid of our own powers of creative thinking.

The realization that there is a place for creativity in the worship of the Almighty is especially essential for those who are responsible for the curricula of our educational institutions. They must be on guard never to stifle the wonderful creative impulses which typify youth. They must cultivate those impulses and allow for their expression within our tradition. And we must allow for the development of contemporary Abrahams, and not be satisfied to raise a generation of mere Noahs.

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reply-to tsc@bezeqint.net to Pareg <par-reg@mail.tanach.org> date Thu, Oct 14, 2010 at 5:40 AM subject [Par-reg] for Parshat Lech Lcha - shiur #1

PARSHAT LECH L'CHA - shiur #1
WHY WAS AVRAHAM CHOSEN?

Almost 'out of the blue', at the beginning of Parshat Lech L'cha, God appears to Avraham, commands him to travel to the 'promised land', blesses him and promises him that he will become a great nation. However, the Torah never tells us WHY he was chosen! Although one would expect the Torah itself to provide the answer to such a fundamental question, Sefer Breishit seems to skirt the issue entirely. In contrast to Parshat Noah, which informs us right at the outset of the reason for Noah's distinction - "for he was a righteous man..."(6:9) - Parshat Lech L'cha never reveals the reason why God singled out 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 what this "bechira" [choosing] process is all about.

INTRODUCTION Our approach to the study of Chumash is predicated 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 Noah, we laid the groundwork for this week's shiur by explaining how the first eleven chapters of Sefer Breishit set the thematic background for God's choice of Avraham Avinu in chapter 12. In that shiur, we discussed the pattern that emerged - where each successive story carried an element of 'sin & punishment'. The story of Creation was followed by the stories of man's sin in Gan Eden, followed by Cain killing Hevel,

the corruption of the generation of the Flood, and building of the Tower. In each story, the Torah first described each sin, and then explained their respective punishments. However, towards the end of chapter eleven, a different pattern begins to unfold, as we find the story of how Avraham Avinu was chosen to become the forefather of great nation. From this point on, Sefer Breishit follows the development of this family, until it became that nation. In this sense, the focus of Chumash changes from 'universalistic' to 'particularistic'. If our presumption regarding the flow of parshiot is correct, then it would be safe to assume that the last story of the first section - MIGDAL BAVEL (11:1-9) - may contain (or itself constitute) the REASON for God's very decision to start a special nation! Therefore, we will study the story of MIGDAL BAVEL in search of a thematic connection (and hopefully a textual parallel, as well) to the Torah's presentation of the story 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 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 pay tribute to such an accomplished group of people: * 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, they are punished. God mixes up their languages, causing them to call off the project (11:5-7). What did they do wrong?

Chazal focus their criticism of this generation on their antagonistic attitude towards God (see Rashi 11:1). The final and critical phrase in the Torah's explanation of the tower (11:4) points to an additional source of guilt: "v'naase LANU SHEM - WE shall make a NAME for OURSELVES" [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. God had higher expectations for mankind, hoping they would harness their God-given talents and potential towards loftier pursuits. They instituted an anthropocentric society rather than a theocentric one, and devoted 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 'redirection'. God will now choose Avraham Avinu to serve as a leader to

REDIRECT mankind - to channel those very same qualities of unity and creativity towards a more altruistic end.

It is from this setting - that God singles out Avraham Avinu and promises to produce from him a special nation: "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, but NOT AS A REWARD, but rather as a means to fulfill that purpose. God seeks a special nation to represent Him, to educate all other nations and spark their spiritual development. Avraham is at this point but a single individual, but he is destined to become the forefather of this nation. [Its development involves 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 (12:7), but they are repeated each time God speaks to the AVOT of their future (see 13:14-15, 15:18, 17:8, 26:3, 28:13, 35:12, etc.).

BET-EL & SHEM HASHEM Although this goal can be fully attained only once this special nation is established, it is significant that Avraham himself exerts himself towards this end. If we trace Avraham's first sojourn through Eretz Canaan as described in the Torah, we find that the town of Bet-El earns a unique place within Avraham's itinerary. After he arrives in Canaan and builds a MIZBAYACH in Shechem, 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. 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 commissioned. Ramban expresses this understanding in his comments 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..."

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) that in the time of Avraham Avinu there existed two great centers of ancient civilization - Egypt and Mesopotamia. 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	-----	-----
-- 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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http://www.yuhsb.org/?page_id=335

Shema Koleinu YUHSB [from previous year]

**A Torah Personality
Rabbi Baruch Pesach Mendelson**

After Avram defeated the four kings, he implored HaKadosh Boruch Hu to help him have children, lest his servant, "Damesek Eliezer," inherit all his belongings. Rashi, quoting the Gemara, explains that Damesek is an acronym of "Doleh u'mashkeh mitoras rabo l'acheirim - he (Eliezer) drew from the Torah of his rebbe and watered others with it." At first blush this seems to be a positive attribute of Eliezer. If this is so, why would Avram use this term when expressing his sadness over having no biological heir?

The Baalei Mussar explain that "Doleh U'Mashkeh" is to be understood very literally. Whatever Eliezer dished in, he dished out, but nothing remained inside him. Eliezer was the ultimate tape recorder; the device can replicate a shiur, but it is not affected by the shiur it records. In short, Eliezer failed to internalize the teachings of Avram and did not allow them to affect the essence of his being. Yitzchak, on the other hand, was a carbon copy of his father Avram. In addition to physically resembling him, Yitzchak also in many ways imitated the travels and acts of his great father. Unlike Eliezer, Yitzchak internalized his father's teachings. They became part of him, drove him and motivated him. Yitzchak was thus the appropriate heir to Avram's fortunes.

The Satmar Rav, Rav Yoel Teitelbaum, once attended a wedding at which a professional joker asked permission to imitate him. The rebbe granted permission and the joker proceeded to shuckle, sway, cry and gesticulate in a perfect imitation of the rebbe's *Shmoneh Esrei*. After a few minutes, the rebbe began to cry. Horrified, the joker quickly stopped and ran to the rebbe to beg for forgiveness. The rebbe explained that the joker had done nothing wrong. In fact, he was crying because of the accuracy of the joker's imitation. If anyone could imitate his *Shmoneh Esrei* so impeccably, he realized, then the rebbe might be imitating himself whenever he davens. It is easy, externally, to act like a big *tzadik*; it is harder to actually be one.

The gemara in Yoma (72b) tells us that any *Talmid Chacham* whose "insides don't match his outsides" is not a *Talmid Chacham*. One must strive to internalize the Torah, and not just pursue external "frumkeit." A story is told about two *talmidim* who came to Rav Issur Zalman Meltzer to tell him their Torah ideas. The first one presented his idea to Rav Issur Zalman, who responded coolly that the student saw this idea in a certain *sefer*. The *talmid* was taken aback, and was shocked when Rav Issur Zalman responded to the second boy's idea with enthusiasm. "He also found his idea in that *sefer*," the first boy protested. "What is the difference between my *D'var Torah* and his?" Rav Issur Zalman responded that the first boy only repeated what the *sefer* said; the second boy internalized it before relating it.

Chazal's formulation of our requirement to imitate HaKadosh Boruch Hu is, "Ma Hu Rachum, Af Atah Rachum - Just as he is mercy, so are you mercy." The Alter of Slabodka points out that *Chazal* do not say, "Just as Hashem is merciful, so should you be merciful." *Chazal*

instead tell us to "be mercy." The Alter explains that *Chazal* want us to change the essence of our being to mercy. This, says the Alter, is the correct approach to improving every middah. The problem is that we do not see Hashem, so it is very difficult for us to imitate the middos of Hashem. How do we do it?

The answer to this can be found in the Rambam, who states in *Hilchos De'os* (6:2) that since it is impossible to directly fulfill the mitzvah of "*uvo tidback*" (clinging to Hashem), one should instead cleave to *talmidei chachamim*. This includes eating and drinking with them and attaching oneself to them in all possible ways. The Rambam states that this is a fulfillment of the commandment of "*uldavka bo*." He then states that the rabbis commanded that one should "cling to the dust of their feet and drink thirstily from their words," – i.e. attend and take seriously their shiurim. Becoming close to *talmidei chachamim* and learning from their ways is called a *Mitzvah Deoraisa* while learning from the shiur is only *D'rabbannan*. We see from this that the essence of a relationship with a rebbe is not the shiur; it is the direct relationship from which one internalizes the Torah way of life. Let us all work on attaching ourselves and drawing close to our rabbeim in our search to internalize their *middos* and *hashkafos* and become true *B'nei Torah*.

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<http://www.theshmuz.com>

Rabbi Shafier

The Parsha opens with HASHEM telling Avram to leave Charan and go to the land of Cannan. When Avram arrives, there is a famine in the land and he is forced to go down to Egypt. Along the way, he notices his wife and says: "Behold, now I know that you are a beautiful woman". Rashi, in the name of the Medrash, explains that up until this point Avrohom Avinu didn't notice his wife's physical appearance. Because they were traveling, the situation caused him to become aware of it, and he now recognized that she was a beautiful woman. This Rashi is difficult to understand since we know that HASHEM gave beauty to women so that they find favor in their husbands' eyes. To allow a couple to bond together as one unit, HASHEM created many features. One of these is a woman's beauty -- a husband notices her appearance, it enters his heart, and increases the love and attraction he feels towards her. In fact, a man is not allowed marry a woman without first seeing her, for "when he sees her, she may be ugly in his eyes." The Torah approach to a successful marriage is not to ignore the physical, but rather to understand that it is a tool to be used for greater devotion and attachment of husband to wife. So how is it that Avrohom wasn't even aware of whether his wife was attractive or not? The answer to this question seems to be that because of the great level of spirituality they were both on, matters of physical beauty were irrelevant. Apparently Avram was on the level of loving his wife Sari, totally and completely for her inner beauty- for who she was as a person. The external wouldn't have helped or hurt. If her physical beauty would have added a dimension to the love and devotion that he felt towards her, we have to assume that he would have used it as such. Rather, it was something that wouldn't have added to his already powerful bond and attraction towards her. What we see from this is an amazing illustration of the great spiritual planes the Avos were on. To Avrohom and Sarah, it wasn't that the physical took a back seat; it was irrelevant; it didn't weigh in at all. They lived on such a pure level that they bonded as a couple with a complete and utter devotion without any need of the physical drives that HASHEM put into mankind to create that bond. A recent example of this concept is from the book, *A Tzaddik in Our Times*. Not long after Reb Aryeh Levin lost his wife, he was seen on Purim day holding a picture of her. Someone commented, "One isn't supposed to be sad on Purim." Reb Aryeh answered, "Holding this picture only brings me joy." And he went on to say, "The

more that time passes, the less I remember what she looked like, yet the more that I remember who she was, and what she did." It is important to remember that in our own lives and marriages, the physical elements are important. A wife should do her best to make herself attractive to her husband, and a husband should do his best to make himself attractive to his wife. These are tools that HASHEM has given us to help create a powerful attachment that withstands time and the travails of life. The end goal isn't the physical, but it is a key element and driving force in a successful marriage and Torah home. For more information about this topic, please listen to Shmuz #99, "Men are From Mars." For more information or to access all the shmuzin for free visit www.TheShmuz.com

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<http://www.anshe.org/parsha.htm#parsha> Parsha Page by Fred Toczek - A Service of Anshe Emes Synagogue (Los Angeles)

LECH LECHA 5757 & 5762

E. Torah Studies (the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, z"tl).

The Parsha of Lech Lecha. We can sum up the Parsha's inner contents by understanding the implications of its name. "Lech Lecha" is usually translated as "get thee out", but it literally means "go to yourself". "Going" has the implication in Torah of getting closing to one's ultimate purpose -- i.e., service of Hashem. 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, to move progressively towards an increasing level of holiness. But, then "there was a famine and Abraham went down to Egypt". Why this sudden reversal of his spiritual journey, especially if the Parsha is to recount Abraham's progress towards the fulfillment of his ultimate purpose. A possible answer is that this was one of the trials that Abraham had to undergo in order to prove himself worthy of his mission. But this doesn't suffice, for his mission wasn't simply a personal one, for his mission was also to spread Hashem's name. We can work towards a resolution of this difficulty by understanding the inner meaning of the famous dictum "the works of the fathers are a sign for the children". This doesn't simply mean that the fate of the fathers is mirrored in the fate of the children, but more strongly that what they do brings about what happens to their children. Their merit gives their children strength to follow their example. In Abraham's wandering, the subsequent history of the Jewish people was rehearsed and made possible. Abraham's journey down to Egypt foreshadowed a future Egyptian exile. Abraham's departure presages the Jews' redemption. And, just as Abraham left Egypt laden with gold and riches, so too did the Jews later leave Egypt. This was indeed the purpose of Abraham's and the Jews' subsequent departure from Egypt -- that G-d's presence should be felt in this intransigent of places. The final ascent was implicit in the descent. So too do the seeming digressions of Jewish history represent not a wandering from the path of destiny, but a way of shining the light of G-d on untouched corners of the world as preparation for and part of their subsequent redemption. Abraham's descent into Egypt was not an interruption, but an integral part of the lesson of Lech Lecha -- to journey towards the self-fulfillment which is the Service of G-d. Our exile, like Abraham's, is a preparation for and part of Redemption which will bring us individually and collectively to a higher state than we could have reached without exile and, as such, is an integral part to our spiritual growth.

F. Living Each Week (Rabbi Abraham Twerski).

1. Change Should Be Gradual. "G-d said unto Avrom, 'go forth from your land, and from your birthplace, and from your father's home unto the land that I will show you'". The Malbim asks why the order is reversed - that is, one first leaves the parental home, then the birthplace and finally the land. However, the Malbim answers that while true and physical separation, the purpose of G-d's commandment to Abraham was not so much to achieve physical separation as to cut the ties with his idolatrous environment and develop an entirely new lifestyle. This transformation had to occur in the prescribed order. The most intense behaviors we have are those imprinted in our parental home. Of lesser intensity are those ideas and practices from the community in which we live. Of least intensity are those of the country as a whole. When we change our way of life, we must do so gradually. Radical changes are difficult to absorb, and are likely to be cast away as quickly as they were adopted.

2. Is Perfection Obtainable? G-d appeared to Avrom and said unto him, "I am almighty G-d. Walk before Me and be perfect". How can we be perfect? Isn't imperfection inherent in each of us? The answer lies in the Talmudic statement that if we attempt to do a mitzvah, but are precluded from doing so because of

circumstances beyond our control, G-d considers it as though it had been done (Berachos 6a). In this verse, G-d is thus telling Abraham, "walk before Me and you will be perfect. Conduct your life to comply with My will, and in that way you can achieve perfection in spite of your human limitations."

G. Vedibarta Bam (Rabbi Moshe Bogomilsky).

1. Intention vs. Action. "And I will bless those who bless you and those who curse you, I will curse." Why doesn't the Torah write both in the same order - i.e., "I will bless those who bless and curse those who curse you": the Gemara (Kiddushin 40a) teaches that (as noted above) G-d gives credit to one who plans to perform a mitzvah, even if circumstances prevent the realization of the plan. However, for a transgression, we are punished for plans only when they are carried out.

2. True Dedication. "Avrom was seventy-five years old when he left Choron". Abraham lived a comfortable life in Choron. Picking himself up at the age of seventy-five and moving to a new country was, to say the least, difficult. His willingness to do so, despite the difficulties and his failure to know the true reason or significance for doing so, was a testament to his true dedication to G-d.

3. Individual Light. And G-d said: "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars, if you are able to count them"; and G-d said to him: "so shall your seed be." In what ways are the Jewish people like stars? The stars twinkle in the high heavens. By their light, even one who walks in the darkness of night will not blunder. Every Jew possesses enough moral and spiritual light to influence friends and acquaintances and bring them out of the darkness into G-d's spiritual light.

4. The Greatness Of Each Person. "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars." When you stand on the ground and look up to the sky, the stars appear to be minute specks. In reality, the stars are larger than the earth. As we approach them, we can begin to appreciate their size and beauty. The same is true of each person. Superficially, one may appear to be insignificant; however, as one becomes closer and gets to know more about him or her one can perceive his/her inherent the greatness and beauty.

H. Soul of the Torah: Insights of the Chasidic Masters of the Weekly Torah Portions (Victor Cohen).

Our Potential Growth. As the Lubavitcher Rebbe, zt'l notes, the word "lech" means "proceed," referring to the beginning of a journey. Real spiritual progress requires that we leave our current state behind. We must transcend our ordinary way of thinking, to go to levels beyond our own limits. G-d's statement to Abraham that he should "go the land that I will show you," reinforces that our progress in this area will be guided by G-d and as a result, there are no limits to our potential growth. On the same verse, the Noam Elimelech commented that we should pave our own path, show pride in our performance of the mitzvot and not be dependent on the behavior or our ancestors. "Lech L'chah" also means, according to the S'fas Emes, that we should always go forward to reach greater heights.

I. Torah Gems (Rabbi Aharon Yaakov Greenberg).

1. Every Jew Remains A Jew. In the Parsha of Noach, the Torah begins by praising Noach as a righteous and perfect man. Why doesn't the Torah begin its account of Abraham in the same manner? Had it done so, it would have implied that the reason that Abraham was chosen by G-d was because of that fact. By not mentioning praise of Abraham's righteousness at this point, the Torah teaches us that G-d's choice of him was for His own reasons, and that this choice will never be annulled. Indeed, even if a Jew has sinned, he/she still remains a Jew (Maharal).

2. "Go for Yourself. . ."

a. We must go for ourselves - to ourselves - to our roots, because that is our purpose.

b. We are not required to do more than what we are capable of, but we are required to accomplish that of which we are capable. As Reb Zusha said, "When I come to the Heavens for my judgment, they will not ask me why I was not like Moses, for I am not like Moses, but they will ask me if I achieved what Zusha was capable of." (R'Achen).

3. Our Unique Service of G-d. "And I will make of you a great nation . . ." In the Amidah prayer, why don't we say the G-d of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob", rather than "the G-d of Abraham, the G-d of Isaac, and the G-d of Jacob"? We mention the words "the G-d of" in regard to each of the forefathers separately, because each of them came to an awareness of G-d through his own efforts. Like them, each of us has our own special way to serve G-d. (Baal Shem Tov).

4. Many Blessings. "And I will bless them that bless you, and him that curses you, I will curse. . ." We should try with all our might to have many who like us and few dislike us, because that is how the world can exist in harmony. We see this attribute in Abraham, for it states, "them that bless you" in the plural, "him that curses you" appears in the singular. (Ralbag).

5. Enthusiastic Service of G-d. "So Avrom departed, as the Lord had spoken to him. . ." Generally, our enthusiasm to perform a commandment diminishes as time

passes, but Abraham continued going with the same enthusiasm that he had when G-d spoke to him.

6. Depth In Perception. "And Avrom passed through the land . . ." Rashi comments "he entered into it". What does Rashi tell us here? If he passed through the land, he obviously had to enter into it. Rather, Rashi is telling us that Abraham did not just view the external appearance of the land, but entered into it, looking into its depth, observing its spirituality and thereby found the great good embodied in it. This is an important lesson to all of us in viewing situations and, most importantly, other people.

7. Faith. The Torah does not praise Abraham for anything other than his faith in G-d: "and he believed in the Lord; and He counted it to him for righteousness." This teaches us that the most important of all principles is faith.

8. The Covenant Of The Bris. Through the Bris, the Jew completes his nature and form. G-d wanted this completion to be done by man, rather than having the person born complete, to hint to him that just as his body is completed by him, so to must he complete his soul by his actions (Hinukh).

J. Reflections on the Sedra (Rabbi Zalman I. Posner).

Everlasting Light. Chazal tell us that during all of the generations from Adam until Abraham the world existed in darkness; from Abraham's time there was light. Why was this so, since (among other things) we read that Noach was righteous and perfect? Abraham, however, was the first to proclaim his belief in G-d to others. He was not content with his own virtue, but constantly strove to elevate others. His life made a difference. He left the world better than he found it, thus bringing a light which shined in his generation and continues to shine today.

K. Windows to the Soul (Rabbi Michael Bernstein).

Virtue Is Its Own Reward. After returning victorious over the four kings, Abraham was apparently distraught. G-d comforted and reassured him, saying "do not fear, Abram. I will be a shield for you." What did Abraham fear? According to Rashi, he was concerned that the Divine protection afforded him in battle might have depleted his "deposits of accumulated merit". But, if he deserved reward, why should G-d's past protection deplete his merit? After all, G-d certainly had sufficient resources to continue to protect Abraham. In conceptualizing reward and punishment, the simplistic view is to think of a ledger in which our "scores" are entered - when we do a mitzvah, we get a merit point and when we sin, we get a demerit. At the end of our lives, G-d opens our ledgers and totals up the points; this determines our reward. A more sophisticated view, however, considers the effects of our deeds on our souls. When we do G-d's will, the spirituality of our soul is enhanced. Otherwise, the opposite is true. When we do good deeds and live a righteous life, the temporal successes we enjoy may actually be harmful, for they can dilute our desire to do what is right for its own sake. It is a paradoxical truth that the greatest good we can do for ourselves is to attach our souls firmly to G-d by doing his will for its own sake - and not for ourselves. This, then may have been Abraham's fear -- that the physical protection he received might have insinuated itself into his subconscious as a substitute motivation for living a model spiritual life, thereby weakening his attachment to G-d.

L. Pirkei Torah (Rabbi Mordechai Gifter).

1. The Duality of Spiritual Growth. If Abraham was to "go for [him]self", is it not self-evident that he had to leave his land, relatives and father's house? Why does the Torah mention all of this? Spiritual growth comprises two parts - removing anything negative and increasing anything positive. These two areas, while seemingly independent, are actually interdependent.

2. Spiritual Perfection. Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer 28 teaches that Abraham and Yishmael were circumcised on Yom Kippur. What is the connection? The Bris perfects the human body; similarly, through repentance, Yom Kippur returns us to spiritual perfection.

M. There Shall Be Light (Rabbi Yitzchak Meir Goodman)

A True Blessing. " . . . and I will bless you and make your name great, and you will be a blessing." The conclusion of this verse seems repetitive. Is G-d blessed Abraham, is he not obviously a blessing? When the poor are suddenly blessed with wealth, they often react in one of two ways - they seek to make up for years of want with greed and miserliness or, alternatively, they recognize G-d's loving Hand in their newfound affluence and share their wealth with others. Consequently, after Abraham blessing, G-d adds "be a blessing" - share what you have with others, thereby spreading G-d's love throughout the land. (R' Aharon Levine)