

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd the Canaanites were then in the land” (Beraishis 12:6). Rashi tells us that this they were continuing their conquest of the land from the descendants of Shem- to whom the land really belonged, as when Noach divided the world among his sons, the land that would become Israel was given to Shem. However, Shem was still alive (as the “proof” that Rashi brings that the land was given to Shem is from later in our Parsha, when Shem greets Avraham after the war with the kings), so his property would not have been divided yet (among those that would eventually inherit him). Why would the Canaanites be conquering the land from Shem’s descendants, rather than from Shem himself?

Additionally, the implication is that the land did not originally belong to Canaan (but to Shem). Yet, when the Torah describes how the world was re-inhabited after the flood (10:19), the boundaries of the land of “Canaan” are given as where Canaan and his sons settled- implying that it was given to them from the outset! The very fact that it was called “Canaan” indicates that it was rightfully theirs! How could Rashi say that the land really belonged to Shem and not Canaan?

This question becomes even stronger when we consider the numerous places that Rashi himself indicates that the land was Canaan’s. On the very first verse in the Torah, Rashi tells us that the purpose of relating the story of creation is to provide an answer to those accusing the Children of Israel of “stealing” the land from Canaan. If the land never really belonged to Canaan, but to our ancestor (Shem), why would we have to justify taking it back from those that had stolen it from us?

Rashi also tells us (Bamidbar 13:22 and Devarim 11:10, based on Sotah 34b) that Cham built Chevron for his son Canaan. Why would Cham build a city for Canaan on property that didn’t belong to him?

We know that Noach cursed Canaan, Cham’s

fourth son, because of what Cham had done to his father (see Rashi on 9:22). Rashi explains that since Cham prevented Noach from having a fourth son, it was Cham’s fourth son that he cursed. Canaan was to forever be a servant to both his brothers, but specifically to Shem (as it refers to Canaan serving Shem twice- see 9:26). This servitude was not just as an employee, but as a full slave; he and his children were to be considered the property of Shem (and his descendants). This sounds harsh, especially by Western standards. However, if we bear in mind that Cham’s intention was to inherit more of the world- as it could now only be split three ways instead of divided among four or more children- it is fitting that his punishment would limit how much his children would end up with. After all, whatever possessions a slave “owns” really belongs to his master (Pesachim 88b), so the land that would have gone to Canaan now belongs to Shem (Ramban on Beraishis 9:26). This division probably didn’t take place until after Noach died (as is the case with all inheritances), and surely didn’t occur before the incident with Cham (as otherwise the land would have already been divided and there would be no reason to be concerned about more heirs being born).

Even though Canaan could no longer legally own any land (as it would belong to Shem), he, and his descendants, still had to live somewhere. The Torah describes where they lived, but they were put there to serve Shem (who lived there too). Living there (specifically) was a means of serving Shem’s descendants as well, allowing them to conquer/inherit an already built up area (see Devarim 6:10-11, “large and good cities which you did not [have to] build, and houses filled with all good things- which you didn’t [have to] fill, wells which you didn’t [have to] dig, vineyards and olive orchards which you didn’t [have to] plant”). Just as G-d told them that He wouldn’t drive out all of the inhabitants right away “lest the land becomes desolate, overrun by many animals” (Shemos 23:29), He had to place temporary residents there from the get-go. As the Ramban puts it (Beraishis 10:15), “G-d gave it to Canaan when the nations were dispersed- in his role as the servant, to watch it for Israel,” and as the Radak says (ibid), “and they would prepare the land for Israel as a slave does for his master.”

Therefore, when the land was divided, it was in fact given to Shem- by giving it to Canaan. Canaan, though, rebelled against his master’s yoke, and tried to establish himself as the actual owner of the land they

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Jack Newman
in memory of his father
R’ Dovid Yissacher Dov
ben R’ Avraham Eliezer A”H**

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settled in. This was still going on when Avraham got to the land, which is what Rashi is referring to. Cham may have been trying to help his son take it away from Shem, and therefore built Chevron for him. It is also possible, though, that he built it before Noach died and the lands were divided up. Either way, Canaan was trying to illegally take possession of the land, so that in the future Shem's descendants couldn't claim it as their own- which is why Rashi describes the plot as being specifically against them. Shem would still have his home (in Jerusalem), but his descendants would have a hard time reclaiming what was rightfully theirs. And because Canaan would have lived there since Noach's time, and purposely tried to make it seem as if the land really was theirs, G-d had to make sure we could justify our claim that it is really ours.

The more things change, the more they stay the same. Nations are still pulling all kinds of stunts to claim that the Children of Israel do not belong in the Land of Israel (although they don't think we belong any place else either). As history has shown, the only way we can justify our existence is through the Torah- and by relying on its Divine author. © 2004 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

What makes the story of Avraham (Abraham) and Sarah going to Egypt important enough to be included in the Genesis narrative? (Genesis 12:10-20)

Ramban suggests that this is an example of the maxim that what occurred to our patriarchs and matriarchs will one day occur to the Jewish people. Note that Avraham migrates to Egypt because of a famine. There, his wife Sarah is taken hostage; God intervenes by smiting Pharaoh and his people—ultimately Pharaoh ushers Avraham and Sarah out of the country.

This precisely mirrors what happens later on in Bereishit. Jacob comes to Egypt with his family because of a famine. In time, the Jews, like Sarah, are enslaved; God intervenes with plagues and Pharaoh, King of Egypt, insists that the Jews leave. (Ramban, Genesis 12:10)

Another observation. God's covenant with Avraham includes a promise of land and children. Relative to both of these commitments, Avraham is tested. Among all the lands, the one that is promised to Avraham, the land of Canaan, is stricken with famine. Later, God asks that the only child born of Avraham and Sarah, Yitzhak, be taken to Moriah to be slaughtered. (Rashi, Genesis 12:10, 22:12)

These two chapters are strikingly similar. In the Binding of Isaac story God steps in to save the child at the last moment. The covenantal promise of family is secured. Here too, in the Egypt narrative, God steps in, punishing Pharaoh. Avraham returns to Canaan. The covenantal promise of land is sustained.

The upshot: Covenants do not guarantee that the road will be smooth. Sometimes, even after the covenant is proclaimed, there are set-backs. The test of belief is whether one can maintain belief during periods of challenge as did Avraham. This is a central message of the Avraham –Sarah story in Egypt.

One last thought. The importance of this chapter may be the beginning of the covenantal promise to Sarah. Up to this point, only Avraham was promised children. Was Sarah part of this commitment? After all, in this section, Avraham asks Sarah to proclaim she is his sister. Children are not born from sibling relationships. In fact, in Egypt Avraham is given shefakhot (hand maids). (Genesis 12:16) One of them is probably Hagar whom Avraham ultimately marries. (Genesis 16:1)

In the end, however, the Torah declares that God smites Pharaoh, "concerning Sarah, Avraham's wife." (Genesis 12:17) Here, for the first time God acts on behalf of the relationship between Sarah and Avraham. From Sarah and not from Hagar, would come the child who would be the second patriarch. This commitment from God makes this section extraordinarily important in understanding the unfolding of the Jewish people. © 2004 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

After the quarrel between the shepherds of Avram and Lot, Avram proposes a peaceful solution to the controversy. "Behold, all the land lies before you, separate yourself from me. If you go to the left, I will go to the right, and if you go right I will go left" [Bereishit 13:9]. And Lot indeed accepts the proposal, choosing the part of the land that he prefers. "And Lot

lifted up his eyes and saw that the Jordan Plain was fully irrigated... And Lot chose the entire Jordan Plain." [13:10-11]. Thus, Avram and Lot were separated. At first glance, Avram's suggestion seems indeed to be a good way to achieve peace. Up to this point, all that Avram had been promised was, "I will give your descendents this land" [12:7], without defining the borders. It was therefore reasonable for Avram to assume that he could divide the Land of Canaan between Lot and himself.

However, the reaction of the Almighty shows that there were problems with the approach of dividing the land as a permanent solution. Now Avram is given a renewed and broader promise, with implications for the process that was about to take place: "And G-d said to Avram after Lot went away from him, Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, north, south, east, and west. For I will give you and your descendents all the land that you see... Rise up and go in the land, from length to breadth, for I will give it to you." [13:14-17]. This new promise now explicitly includes "all the land." Thus, the proposal to Lot, "all the land lies before you," is no longer realistic, since it is now clear that "all the land" is not available to Lot but only to Avram and his children. It was not Lot who should have lifted his eyes and chosen which land he wanted, rather Avraham was to lift his eyes to find that the entire land was given to him, for all eternity. The land could not be divided between left and right, it should all remain in the possession of Avraham: north to south, east to west, the entire length and breadth.

It is true that Lot also deserved an inheritance as a reward for joining Avram on his journey to Eretz Yisrael. But the area apportioned to the descendents of Lot is not within the boundaries of Eretz Yisrael as it was promised to Avram. In the beginning of the book of Devarim, Moshe describes what G-d said to him before the arrival at the lands of Moav and Amon, who were the descendents of Lot. "And G-d said to me, do not disturb Moav and do not challenge them to war, for I will not give you a heritage from their land. I have given Eir as a heritage to the children of Lot... And when you approach the children of Amon do not besiege them and do not threaten them, for I will not give any of the land of Amon to you as a heritage, for I have given it to the children of Lot as a heritage." [Devarim 2:9-19]. The descendents of Lot were given land only on the far side of the Jordan River, in the lands of Amon and Moav.

In summary, even if at various times the practical link between the nation of Yisrael and "all the land" might be severed for various reasons, the eternal vow still exists and will continue forever: "For I will give you and your descendents all the land that you see... forever."

Go, For Your Own Good

by Rabbi Aviah Rozen, Director of Torah Mitzion Kollel, Melbourne

Ever since Avraham started out and left his father's home, we are all on a journey that has not yet reached its end. One possibility is to forever maintain our fate as "the wandering Jew". As an alternative, we can look in greater depth at the Divine call, noting that it not only consists of the command "Go!" but also the phrase "for yourself!" The journey must be for our benefit. What sort of journey is this? It is a desirable walk, one that is a privilege and not a burden.

The Midrash notes that Avraham was given the command "Lech Lecha"— go for your benefit—two times (Bereishit Rabba 39:9). The first time was when he left his father's house and the second time was before the binding of Yitzchak. In both cases, the phrase "go to the land" appears. In the events of the binding, it is written, "go... to the Land of Moriah" [Bereishit 22:2], while the command in leaving home is "go... to the land that I will show you" [12:1]. In both cases, Avraham went on a journey to the unknown. For the binding, the goal was "one of the mountains as I will tell you" [22:2], and when he left his home, "to the land that I will show you". In both cases, we are told that G-d was revealed, and both times in the end Avraham offers a sacrifice to the G-d who revealed Himself. In the case of the binding, it is written, "And Avraham called that place 'G-d will see'" [22:14], while when Avraham left his home, he sacrificed "to G-d, who had been revealed to him" [12:7].

Clearly the similarities between the two cases are not just a coincidence. In fact, the main objective of the first case of "go," leaving the home, was to arrive at the second "go," the binding dedicated to G-d, and the Temple Mount, in Eretz Yisrael. However, there is one great difference between the two cases. The first time, the journey takes place "FROM"—from his land, from his birthplace, from his father's house. The point of departure is well defined, but the goal is not clear. It is a land "that I will show you." On the other hand, in the case of the binding, Avraham was commanded "Take your son, your only son... to the Land of Moriah" [Bereishit 22:2]. The journey is towards a fixed goal, to Moriah, to become attached to the Almighty. The goal of the first journey was to sever the links with the previous world.

Life is a great journey. It is possible to navigate this journey as a sequence of events and reactions, but then the path is not a personal one. The cry "Go for yourself!" carries with it the essence of Judaism: There is a goal and a target, and we clearly understand where we came from and where we belong. The journey is dynamic and has an internal consistency of motion. This is not an act of fleeing from something but a journey of creativity. When a man is able to create a new world, "G-d is revealed."

The journey which began when Avraham left a place of idol worship has continued generation after generation, leading to the modern Israeli experience. The ultimate goal is Mount Moriah. It is not enough to

build a state, to establish a society, or to institute a social revolution. The command "Lech Lecha" continues to this very day with the struggle for the Zionistic and moral content of the society of Israel and of the entire nation.

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**A**nd he (Abram) moved on from there to the mountains, from the east to Bet-El; and he pitched his tent with Bet-El to the west and Ai to the East. And he built there an altar to the Lord, and he called it in the name of the Lord" (Genesis 12:8).

The cornerstone of the Ramban's (Nahmanides') Biblical interpretation is that "the actions which were done by the ancestors serve as sign-posts for the future of their descendants." The first altar to G-d which Abram builds upon his entry into the Promised Land is in Shekhem - Elon Moreh (Genesis 12:6,7), the city which the Israelites are destined to enter when they cross the River Jordan under Joshua. Shekhem is likewise the City of sibling rivalry, the place where Shimon and Levi killed the newly circumcised inhabitants who had remained silent while Dinah was captured and raped, despite their agreement with the othersons of Jacob; it is also the site of Joseph's grave, and the locus from where David and Solomon's United Kingdom was split into two separate kingdoms.

Abram built his third altar to G-d in the oaks of Mamre which was in Hebron (Genesis 13:18), where our matriarchs and patriarchs are buried and where Biblical history really began. And Abraham built his fourth altar to G-d on Mount Moriah, the place of the binding of Isaac, "the (Temple) Mount from which the "Lord will be seen" (Genesis 22:14) by the whole world when all nations will ultimately accept a G-d of peace.

But the altar which seems to the least significant, the one which is not even identified with a specific city but which is merely situated between Bet El and Ai, is the second one in our Torah reading (Genesis 12:8); and it is specifically to this place that Abraham returns after his Egyptian sojourn and where he builds yet another altar (Genesis 13:3,4)! What is to be the future significance of this area in the desert only identified as being between Bet El and Ai?

Rav Mordechai Allon, the great Torah teacher of Jerusalem, gives a most insightful explanation, to which I would add what I believe to be an important theological reflection. Bet El is the place of Father Jacob's Israel - defining dream of "a ladder rooted on earth with its top reaching to the heavens; angels of G-d are ascending and descending on it" (Genesis 28:12). It is Jacob's vision immediately before going into exile, and it is the place to which he will return as Israel and build an altar to the Lord. The message is clearly one of uniting heaven and earth, positing a sacred partnership between the earthly powers from below who are

ascending to G-d and the Divine powers from above who are descending to the province of human beings.

Let us now move on to Ai. First we must remember that the first great conquest of Joshua and the Israelites was the city of Jericho, whose walls "came tumbling down" when the Israelites - amidst the blowing of ram's horns and in the presence of the Ark of the Lord - surrounded the city for six days once each day and seven times on the seventh day. Jericho fell, its inhabitants perished, and all its wealth was declared forbidden for human use and holy to G-d. "And the Lord was with Joshua, whose fame spread throughout the land" (Joshua 6:27).

Unfortunately, there were many - under the influence of Akhan the son of Karmi of the leading tribe of Judah - who betrayed Joshua's declaration sanctifying the booty to G-d and looted the wealth of Jericho for themselves. The Israelites then went on to attempt the capture of the City of Ai. Joshua sent out spies, who returned with the Intelligence report that two or three thousand Israelite soldiers would be sufficient to take the city; three thousand soldiers were dispatched, the soldiers of Ai killed 36 of them and chased the Israelites away, "causing the hearts of the Israelites to dissolve and turn to water" (Joshua 7:1-5). Joshua rends his garments and prays all day before the Ark of the Lord.

At G-d's behest, he routs out those who looted the sacred booty and has Akhan and family punished with death. The entire nation then goes out to war against Ai. Joshua sends out 30,000 of his men for an ambush, "and they lay in wait between Bet El and Ai to the west of Ai" (Joshua 8:9). The Israelite army succeeds in demolishing Ai.

What actually happened? In modern terms, there was a gross failure in the Israeli Intelligence information, similar to the Intelligence failure at the time of the Yom Kippur War. Despite the massive deployment of enemy troops from Egypt and Syria - and warnings from Jordan - Prime Minister Golda Meir refused to call up the reserves and strengthen the Bar Lev line. What caused such a gross error? Apparently, after the lightning victory of the Six Day War, the "powers that were" believed Israel to be invincible, that no Arab army would dare go to war against us. And indeed, the car stickers after the Six Day War cried out, "All glory to the Israeli Defense Forces," deleting any reference to Divine miracle!

Such was the brazen arrogance of Akhan and his cohorts who took of the booty, refusing to recognize that the spoils belonged to G-d. "Our strength and the force of our hands wrought the victory," they declared, and so they felt that the wealth of Ai legitimately belonged to them. And because they had become almost drunk with power and self-importance, they egregiously underestimate the power of Ai.

After the Yom Kippur War - which we ultimately won with even greater miracles than in the Six Day War

- much of Israel learned its lesson. After this war, the car stickers read, "Israel depends on the Lord." But the real truth is the message of Jacob's dream: there is a ladder connecting heaven and earth, humans must work together with G-d in effectuating His Divine will; we must do whatever is in our power to do and understand that ultimate victory depends on G-d's intervention as well. Only if we understand the message of that partnership will we do our very best, but without falling into the pitfall of complacency which comes from the arrogance of believing that we did it alone. This was the crucial message which should have been learned by the Israelites in the fateful battle between Bet El and Ai!

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YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

Virtual Beit Medrash

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA HARAV AHARON LICHTENSTEIN SHLIT"A

Adapted by Dov Karoll

“**A**nd He Called out in the Name of God” There is a phrase that appears several times in our parasha with one connotation, but when the same phrase appears elsewhere, it has a totally different connotation. Twice in Parashat Lekh Lekha and once in Parashat Vayera, the Torah describes Avraham as calling out (vayikra) in the name of God: "And Avram moved on to the mountains east of Beit El... he built there an altar and called out in the name of God." (12:8) "And he went on his journeys... to the place of the altar which he had made there at first, and Avram called out there in the name of God." (13:3-4) "And he planted a tamarisk tree in Be'er Sheva, and he called out there in the name of God, Lord of the universe." (21:32)

The same phrase appears in Parashat Ki Tisa: "And God descended in the cloud and stood with him [Moshe] there, and [H/he] called out in the Name of God." (Shemot 34:5)

There is a fundamental difference between these two groups, reflected by the punctuation (as expressed by the cantillation marks). In the verse from Ki Tisa, the cantillation marks connect the words "vayikra, and [H/he] called out" and "ve-shem, in the Name," separating the latter word from the final word, "Hashem, God." To utilize our punctuation system, it would be broken up as follows: "and he called out in the Name, of God." The proclamation described here is "calling out in the Name," and the Name is the Name of God.

There is a dispute among the commentators as to who is calling out. According to Ibn Ezra (Peirush Arokh s.v. va-yikra) and Rashbam (s.v. va-yikra), God is calling out, in fulfillment of the verse earlier in the parasha, where God tells Moshe: "I will proclaim (ve-karati) the Name of God before you" (33:19).

Rashi (s.v. va-yikra) quotes the translation of Onkelos, "And he called out in the name of God." According to the Siftei Chakhamim supercommentary (letter reish, s.v. de-mukhach), Rashi means to explain that it is Moshe who is calling out to God. If we adopt this approach, Moshe's calling out in the Name is meant as an attempt to raise his own level. Moshe Rabbeinu has, of course, reached a very high level before this, but the Divine Revelation involved in this incident elevates him to new heights. Rav Soloveitchik quoted the Rambam as having said that before this incident, Avraham Avinu was on a higher spiritual level than Moshe Rabbeinu, and from this point and on, Moshe Rabbeinu had attained a higher spiritual level.

Let us analyze the difference between Moshe's "calling" (according to Rashi's understanding) and Avraham's. Moshe is not calling out to other people; he is in a cloud, so to speak, with God. He is "calling out in the Name," striving to come even closer to God. Moshe here calls out in the Name, with a level of clarity that even he had not attained earlier.

The calling out in the name of God in Avraham's case is entirely different. Here the punctuation differs: "Vayikra, and he called out" is one clause, and the words "be-Shem Hashem, in the Name of God" are connected as a single phrase. What is described here is a calling out, which is in the name of God. Avraham is calling out to those around him, proclaiming his message in the name of God. As the Rambam (Hilkhot Avodat Kokhavim 1:3) describes, based on the verse cited above ("And he called out there in the name of God, Lord of the universe," 21:32), Avraham would go from city to city proclaiming his message of truth, of the unity of God. Avraham's calling out in the name of God denotes the transmission to others of the message of God's dominion and oneness.

What is the difference between the two references in this week's parasha to calling out in God's name? The first incident (12:8) comes right after Avraham arrived to the land, whereupon he immediately called out in the name of God. As the Ramban (s.v. vayikra) explains, Avraham, as a stranger in the land, takes on the challenge of trying to influence those around him.

He is not yet rooted in the land, and he tries to impact upon the residents as an outsider. According to the Rambam (Avodat Kokhavim 1:3), Avraham at this point already has quite a following, and is leading a triumphant march of many followers, successfully spreading the word of God. The Ramban, on the other hand, emphasizes that Avraham was a wanderer until he reached the land of Israel. While he must grant that Avraham and Sara had "all the property they had attained," as well as "the people they had gathered while in Charan" (12:5), that group was, as a whole, in a state of wandering.

After settling in the Land of Israel, Avraham was forced to descend to Egypt due to famine. When

Avraham finally returned from Egypt, the Torah describes him as "very rich, with livestock, silver and gold" (13:1), as well as property and slaves. Whatever his status had been earlier, by this point Avraham had become a wealthy man, and conceivably could have been bogged down in dealing with his wealth. Yet, at least according to the second explanation in Rashi (s.v. asher), the Torah emphasizes that he once again called out in the name of God, in the same place he had done so earlier.

According to the Rambam, Avraham was now even wealthier than he had been upon his initial arrival in Canaan, but this was merely a quantitative change. According to the Ramban, on the other hand, this difference is qualitative: Avraham has gone from leader of a small, wandering clan, to the leader of a powerful, significant estate. Nonetheless, his priority remains calling out in the name of God, as it had been before.

Let us return to the Rambam's description of Avraham's development.

"He had no teacher, nor was there anyone to inform him.... However, his heart was exploring and gaining understanding. Ultimately, he appreciated the way of truth and understood the path of righteousness through his accurate comprehension...."

"When he came to Charan, he began to call out in a loud voice to all people and inform them that there is one God in the entire world and it is proper to serve Him.... When the people would gather around him and ask him about his statements, he would explain them to each person according to his understanding, until they turned to the path of truth. Ultimately, thousands and myriads gathered around him. These are "The men of the house of Avraham"...."

Note that the "calling out in the name of God" to others comes only at the second stage of Avraham's development. At first, Avraham engaged in his own search for God, and only afterward did he spread that message to others.

This two-step process is comparable, in certain ways, to the years one spends in the Yeshiva and the years that follow. While in Yeshiva, a person should engage in a "calling out in the Name of God" of Moshe's type, which is comparable to the first stage of Avraham's life. You should try to build up your own relationship with God, calling out to Him and asking Him to bring you closer. You strive to raise your learning, and your level of Divine service generally.

After you leave the Yeshiva, you must not, of course, abort progress on this first plane, and you must constantly strive to grow in your worship of God. However, the emphasis switches to spreading the messages you have gained, to calling out in the name of God in the sense that Avraham Avinu did, helping others recognize the truth you have been privileged to know. After setting a solid foundation for yourself, you then have both the opportunity and the responsibility to help others to gain from those same lessons. [This

sicha was delivered at seuda shelishit of Parashat Lekh Lekha, 5762 (2001).]

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The first two parshiyot of the Torah, Bereshit and Noach, span two thousand years of human life and events. The Torah records these two millennia in an almost fast forward mode, stopping to dwell on a few instances of historical importance - the stories of Gan Eden, Kayin, Noach, the Flood and the Tower of Babel. But basically the Torah is very sparse in detail regarding the lives and events of this long period of time. In this week's portion of Lech Lecha, the Torah slows down appreciably, barely covering a century in relating to us the life of our father, Avraham. It is as though the Torah in the two previous parshiyot was in a hurry to get to Avraham and his life and tell us the achievements and struggles. The Midrash indicates that this is in fact a true analysis of the Torah's intent when in the beginning of Bereshit it clearly indicates that the entire process of creation was enacted for the purpose of Avraham's coming on the world scene. Avraham is the pivotal figure in human history. He is the one who raises the banner of monotheism in a fashion that can be understood and followed by millions of humans. He is also the father of goodness and kindness, compassion and sensitivity towards others as a way of life, a value system, and not merely as isolated acts of momentary compassion. And perhaps most importantly, he alone emerges as the symbol of human resiliency - able to withstand "tests," and to not only overcome adversity but to grow from the experience. In this he is the true ancestor of the Jewish people, the most optimistic and productive of all nations.

The Torah purposely dwells on the details of Avraham's life, almost in slow motion, as it were, in order to impress upon us what one human being can accomplish in a lifetime. The Torah champions the individual over the state, the human being over seemingly inexorable rules of economics and social science. The world is still reeling from the ideologies that destroyed over one hundred million human beings in the last century. All those ideologies were based on the priority of the state and ideology over the life of an individual human being. The prophet Yeshayahu praises Avraham by calling him "one," a single unique individual. It is this one individual who turned human civilization away from barbarism and paganism and gave humankind a vision of what a good person and a good world can and should look like. The Talmud stresses therefore that Jews do not call themselves "the children of Noach," though biologically we certainly are Noach's descendants. Rather, we call ourselves the children of Avraham and Sarah, for it is their vision that lights our life and guides all of Jewish life and history. The Rabbis taught us to constantly ask ourselves "when

will my actions and behavior be in line with that of Avraham?" Avraham remains the measuring stick of human accomplishment and spiritual behavior. There can be no greater title that a human being can bear than being called a child of Avraham. © 2004 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory.

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Daf HaShavua

by Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, Finchley Synagogue

For blessings over the performance of precepts there are two forms. We either say al (upon) e.g. al netilat yadayim, al biur chametz, al mikra megilla, or we say le (to do) e.g. leishev basukkah, la'asok bedivrei Torah. Why this difference?

This very question was asked in a tragic setting. In 1941 the Jews of Kovno were herded into a forest where they were to be brutally killed by the Nazis. Among them was the revered Rabbi Ephraim Margolies, who was approached by a man who asked this sha'ala: "Just before I am killed, what beracha should I recite:...lekadesh et Hashem (to sanctify Hashem) or..al kiddush Hashem (upon the sanctification of Hashem)?"

Rabbi Margolies replied "We recite 'le' for precepts that others can do on our behalf (e.g. shofar, Shabbat candles, affixing a mezuzah). We say 'al' for those precepts that we must perform for ourselves (e.g. washing hands, counting the Omer, eating matzah). When it comes to dying in sanctification of Hashem's name, no one can do it for you. Therefore you must recite 'al kiddush Hashem."

This discussion reveals the remarkable depth of faith of both the questioner and the Rabbi, who carved out for themselves an elevated majestic destiny in the midst of their unbearable fate.

Yet, Rabbi Margolies' answer does not fit for all cases. Others give the following explanation (which is also not foolproof): We recite 'al' for precepts which are completed immediately after the blessing (e.g. eating matzah and maror, washing hands, counting the Omer), while we say 'le' when we commence a process that will take time to complete (e.g. studying Torah, dwelling in a sukkah, lighting the Chanukah candles, which must burn for at least half an hour).

In today's Sidra we are presented with the mitzva to circumcise our sons. During a Brit ceremony, two blessings are recited. The mohel says "...al hamilah" (upon the performance of circumcision) while the father says "...lehachniso bivrito shel Avraham Avinu" (to bring the baby into the covenant of our father Abraham). We can now understand the difference between the two: the mohel says 'al' because his task will be completed immediately. The parents, however,

are only starting a process whereby they will raise their child to be a good Jew. Therefore, the father says 'le'. Indeed, Jewish education is an ongoing process from which you never graduate. © 2004 Produced by the Rabbinical Council of the United Synagogue - London (O) Editor Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, emailed by Rafael Salasnik

DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK

What's Bothering Rashi?

This parsha tells us of the origins of Am Yisrael—their experiences and travails of Avram and Sarai, the founding parents of Nation Israel. We will digress from our customary analysis of Rashi and focus this week on the Ramban (1195-1270) (Nahmanidies). The Ramban commentary is a classic and frequently focuses on Rashi, for whom the Ramban held great respect. He offers many original insights into p'shat interpretation. The Ramban comment that I have chosen has particular relevance to these very days in we are living.

When Sarai saw that God had prevented her from becoming pregnant, she suggested to Avram that he take their maidservant, Hagar the Egyptian, as his wife. He did so. Then Hagar became pregnant and looked down upon her mistress, Sarai, and began acting haughty towards her.

"Sarai then said in anger to her husband, Abram: 'May God judge between you and me...' and Sarai abused her and she (Hagar) fled from before her." (Genesis 16:6)

On this the Ramban comments: "A great sin our Mother (Sarah) committed with this abusing (of Hagar). Likewise Avraham (sinned) by allowing her to act this way. And God listened to (Hagar's) outcry and gave her a son who was a "pereh odom" ("a wild man") who would eventually afflict and abuse the offspring of Avraham (the Jews) with all means of abuse."

A Question: The Ramban has made quite an amazing comment. He says that both Sarai and Avram committed a sin by their actions (Avram's inaction) towards Hagar. What is surprising is that nowhere in the Torah do we find that they were reprimanded by God for this act. On what basis, then, does the Ramban make his statement?

Can you see any basis for the Ramban's comment?

An Answer: We see that Hagar had the unusual privilege of being spoken to by an angel of God, (according to Rashi, by several angels). This alone is quite a testimony to the justice of her case. The content of the angel's message also supports the idea that Hagar had been wronged. God promised her a son, a son whose name would be Yishmael—which means "God will listen to him."

Our answer explains why the Ramban thought that Sarai and Avram did wrong when they abused their maidservant, but from whence does the Ramban determine that eventually Yishmael's offspring will

"afflict and abuse the offspring of Avraham (the Jews) with all means of abuse"? Is this too hinted at in the verse?

An Answer: Hagar's son was to be named "Yishmael" which means "He (God) will listen"—in the future tense. This indicates that some time in the future when Yishmael asks for God's help, God will listen to his plea and help him. This might be when he successfully persecutes his cousins—the Jews.

This "measure for measure" consequence may seem a bit unfair. But we are hereby made aware of the Torah's strict standards for justice. Generations later, millenia later—today we may be suffering as a consequence of our forefather's actions, which did not find favor in God's eyes. How can this be so? We come to realize that God has an ultra-fine sensitivity to every human's suffering (in this case, Hagar's suffering) and the high standard by which the forefathers were judged. King Solomon says in Kohelet 3:15:

"God seeks the pursued to protect him." A surprising statement by the Midrash adds clarification: "Even when a righteous person pursues an evil person"!!!

Afflicting another, abusing another is never in place. Reproof, yes, rightful retribution, yes. But affliction, never.

The Ramban's sensitivity to the subtleties of the Torah's words made us aware of this important lesson.

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RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND

Rav Frand

Transcribed by David Twersky

Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman

The parsha contains an 'awkwardly written' verse: "They took Lot and his property, the nephew of Avram, and they went and Lot was living at this time in Sodom" [Bereshis 14:12]. A grammar teacher would have a field day, because the sentence contains a misplaced modifier. The 'correct' way to write this sentence would seem to be "They took Lot, the nephew of Avram, and his property..." What is the Torah trying to convey by constructing the sentence in this seemingly awkward fashion?

The Beis Av cites an interesting incident in order to explain the pasuk [verse]. During World War Two, his family fled their home in Europe, and made their way to Vienna. Many other Eastern European refugees also arrived, fleeing the Nazis. Later, there was a rumor that the S.S. was about to enter Vienna. The Beis Av's father decided to leave, even though it meant leaving everything behind. Many of the other refugees, however, tried to dissuade him, telling him that things would be alright and urging him not to cause a panic by fleeing again. The Beis Av's father refused to listen to their arguments and was determined to leave, even if it was only with the shirt on his back.

Their family left everything behind in Vienna, and survived. Those who remained in Vienna, as history proved, were taken away to concentration camps and killed. They lost not only their property, but their lives as well. What prevented the other people from leaving? They did not leave because they would have had to leave their property behind. When faced with the specter of losing either their lives or their life's savings, people sometimes try to convince themselves that everything will turn out well. They use various irrational rationalizations to avoid giving up their property.

As strange as this may seem, the Talmud says that to some individuals, their "money is more dear to them than their lives" [Brachos 61b]. This is the reason for the awkward sentence structure—to teach us that Lot was such an individual.

In order to strengthen this interpretation, we may ask further: Why does this pasuk add "and Lot was living in Sodom"? We already knew that Lot was living in Sodom! The answer is related to the reason why Lot was in Sodom in the first place. There were opportunities in Sodom. One could make a good living in Sodom. "It was fertile" [Bereshis 13:10]. Lot wanted to have a nice living. He wanted to make money. This was perhaps the defining aspect of his character—this verse is telling us what Lot was all about. So when the pasuk mentions Lot, it emphasizes: "Lot and his property, the nephew of Avram." He was first and foremost associated with his money. That, in his mind, was his 'yichus' (lineage). That is what he was proud of. Only as an afterthought was he also "the nephew of Avram." The pasuk adds, "...he was living in Sodom"—in order to emphasize the point that the reason why he was there in the first place was because he was drawn there by the economy and the opportunity for easy living.

As hard as people may work for their money, they must keep things in perspective. There are priorities in life. Unfortunately in the worst of circumstances people sometimes mix up those priorities. Thousands of people have paid the ultimate price for that mistake. © 2002 Rabbi Y. Frand & www.torah.org

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