

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**A**nd also to Lot, who was going with Abram, there were sheep and cattle and tents” (Gen. 13:5)

The Biblical reading of Lekh Lekha is filled with a kaleidoscope of fast-moving, intriguing and exciting incidents—from Palace intrigue of attempted rape, to inter-family conflict and separation, to a major war leading to a stunning victory with crucial ramifications for the future of the fertile crescent, to G-d's mysterious covenant with Abraham, and to Abraham's search for continuity. Are these all disparate stories held together merely by a chronological time-line or is there a conceptual scheme cohesively placing these particular incidents within the perspective of our higher Jewish mission?

I believe that an analysis of the division of the seven aliyot (various individuals called upon to make a blessing over a specific portion of the Biblical reading) will provide the uniting theme behind the stories as well as the most important—and often overlooked—role which Israel must play amongst the nations.

Rav Elhanan Samet points out the strange discrepancy between the chapter divisions and the aliyah divisions. Our Biblical portion opens with Chapter 12, which begins with the Divine command to Abram to leave his birthplace for the Land of Israel, includes his advent to the Promised Land, the subsequent famine in Israel, and his sojourn to Egypt, and logically concludes with Pharaoh sending Abram and his family out of Egypt. Chapter 13 opens with Abram's return to Israel, includes his separation from his nephew-adopted son Lot, and ends with G-d's bestowal once again of his special blessing upon Abram and his seed. Chapter 14 deals with Abram's successful war against the four terrorizing Kings of the region, and Chapter 15 details G-d's covenant with Abram. These chapter divisions appear to be most logical, with the Egyptian sojourn merely serving as a passing episode, almost as a momentary foil for the much greater Jewish adventures in Israel.

The "aliyah" divisions, which seem to have much sounder traditional roots, appear at first glance to the far less logical—especially the placement of the second aliyah. Since the Egyptian sojourn begins in the opening aliyah soon after Abram makes his move to

Israel (Gen 12:10), and only extends for ten verses, logic would dictate that the second aliyah should begin where chapter 13 begins: "And Abram came up (to Israel) from Egypt, he and his wife and all that were his, and Lot with him, to the Negev (Southern Israel)" (Gen 13:1).

But no, the second aliyah starts seven verses earlier, when Abram enters Egypt and the Egyptians take captive his beautiful wife Sarai for Pharaoh's harem. And the next (third) aliyah portion opens not with Abram's return to Israel, where Chapter 13 begins, but rather four verses later: "And also to Lot, who was going with Abram, there were sheep and cattle and tents," with that entire aliyah segment dedicated to Lot's separation from Abram. Is Lot's altercation a more significant event than Abram's return to Israel?

I do believe that Lot is a significant—perhaps even the central—personality in the first half of our Biblical reading and continues to appear in various guises throughout the Bible. Our Biblical reading opens with G-d's command to Abram to make aliyah and with G-d's election of Abram: "I shall make you a great nation, I shall bless you, and I shall make your name great; you shall be a blessing. I shall bless those who bless you, and those who curse you, I shall curse; all the families of the earth shall be blessed through you" (Gen 12:2,3).

G-d is promising Abram two things: physical growth and spiritual greatness, the development of a powerful nation-state from his loins which will serve as the source of blessing for the entire world. The Vilna Gaon ingeniously suggests that the Hebrew parallel structure should have mandated the more common verb form for verse 3: "umekallekha akallel;" why does the verse state "a'or"? He responds the "a'or" may mean "I shall curse" (from the Hebrew verb ara), but it may also mean "I shall show the light" (from the Hebrew ohr). Israel must be a light unto the nations, a kingdom of priest-teachers who bring the message of ethical monotheism to the world.

Abram desperately requires progeny for both of these mandates to come to pass: he cannot become a paterfamilias without a family, he cannot become the patriarch of a nation-state without a tube of descendants, and Abram likewise cannot ultimately influence the other nations to accept a G-d of peace, justice and compassion unless he has descendants to whom to hand over the torch of his truth.

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Initially the childless, barren Abram and Sarai place their future hopes on Lot, Abram's deceased brother's son (a kind of yibum in reverse, with the living but childless brother adopting the deceased brother's living son so that the living brother might have a future!) Hence, the Bible records- in the very verse following the blessing and the charge-"And Abram went in accordance with the way the Lord spoke to him, and Lot went with him... And Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot the son (of his brother) and all the wealth they had acquired..." (Gen 12:4,5).

But then came the famine and the sojourn into the second aliyah highlights Egyptian Exile as fraught with both physical danger (Sarai is seized for the harem) as well as spiritual danger (the materialistic blandishments of Egypt vs the responsibility of the national mission). Abram and Sarai survive the physical danger, Sarai is miraculously returned untouched. But Egypt seems to have had a deleterious affect on Lot, the heir apparent: "And Abram came up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that were his, and Lot next to him..." (Gen 13:1) -- not like what the text had previously stated, at the time of the family's initial journey to Israel before the Egyptian sojourn, when Lot is mentioned right after Abram and Sarai, before their wealth, and where Lot goes with Abram physically and spiritually (ito) and not merely in physical proximity (imo) as now.

At this juncture in the text, however, this change in Lot is merely hinted at; the next aliyah, "And also Lot, going with Abram, had sheep cattle and tents... And the land was not sufficient to carry both of them..." (Gen 13:5,6), leaves no room for doubt. Israel is no longer big enough, Abram's mission is not materialistic enough, to contain Lot's dreams; Lot is not desirous of perfecting the world to G-d's vision of peace and love; Lot is desirous of owning the world! So he leaves Abram's land and Lord in favor of the more Egypt-like, lush and luscious Sodom, to pursue matter rather than spirit, comfort rather than content.

The great message of this week's Torah portion, the election of Abram, goes far beyond land and geography; it is all about nation and universal mission and vision. Hence, the second aliyah concludes with "And Abram called out (to humanity) there with the name of the Lord' (Gen 13:4), and the third aliyah concludes with, "And Abram built there an

altar to the Lord" (Gen 13:18). The fourth aliyah deals with Malki Zedek, the son of Noah, who recognizes the G-d of the world who denounces terror from his throne in Jerusalem. And the rest of the Biblical portion deals with G-d's covenant with Abram. His promise of an heir who will make Abrams progeny bring light to the world like the stars of the heavens.

One thing is clear: Abram's greatness, and the reason that he was elected and not Noah or Shem or Ever, was because only he felt the burning mission to perfect the world (Maimonides, Laws of Idolatry, 1,3, Ravad and Kesef Mishneh). And remember too: Yishmael repents (Gen 25:9), and so eventually does Lot, but for Lot we must wait many generations until the conversion of Ruth (descendant of Moab who was the son born to Lot and his daughter). Apparently G-d has cosmic patience, and so must we have, if we are to be His true emissaries. © 2005 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd he (Avram) believed in G-d, and He considered it righteousness" (Beraishis 15:6). Although the intent of the latter part of the verse can be understood as either G-d considering Avram's believing in Him as an act of righteousness or that Avram considered G-d's promise to give him children charity (i.e. undeserved), Rashi explains it as the former. Which leads to an obvious question: What is so noteworthy about Avram believing G-d when He promised him that he would become a father? He had already shown that he was willing to go to jail rather than denouncing G-d. After 10 years in prison he was given the choice of being thrown into a fire or to denounce G-d, and he chose to be thrown into the fire (where G-d miraculously saved him). And now he is being praised for trusting that G-d will keep His promise? A promise made by G-d directly to him, so there is no question that He was making it? Why does the Torah need to tell us that Avram trusted G-d, and why is it so praiseworthy?

Rashi seems to be answering part of this question when he tells us that Avram's "believing in G-d" refers to his not asking for a "sign" as a further commitment or assurance that the promise will come true. Of course Avram trusts G-d, but he nevertheless asks "how will I know that I will inherit" the land that You promised me, asking for a further guarantee that it would happen. His not asking for one regarding having offspring is what is considered "righteousness," not just believing in G-d.

Which still leaves us wondering why not asking for a "sign" for the first promise (believing G-d even without one) deserves a special mention. It also raises an additional question (asked by many commentators on Rashi, but applicable to the verses themselves as

well): Why didn't Avram ask for a sign regarding the first promise (children) if he felt it necessary to ask for one for the second promise (the land)? (Or, alternatively, why did he ask for one for the second if he felt it was unnecessary for the first.)

The Talmud (Taanis 27b) tells us that Avram's request was based on his fear that his descendants would sin. He knew (from the flood and from the generation that was dispersed after trying to build the Tower in Bavel) that G-d punished sinners severely, and feared that a similar fate could await his descendants if they sinned. How could he be confident that they would survive, let alone be worthy of getting the Promised Land? He therefore asked for a "sign" (either a guarantee that they would get it no matter what, or a reason why he should be confident that they would actually get it).

But what about the promise that he would have children? Shouldn't he also have been afraid that his own sins would negate G-d's promise? We know that Yaakov and Dovid were afraid that they wouldn't remain as righteous as they were, thereby losing out on what was either previously earned or previously promised (see Berachos 4a). Why didn't Avram also ask for a guarantee that he would have children, in case he faltered?

The Maharal suggests that there is a fundamental difference between the two promises. Avraham couldn't become a father because he was physically unable to, and once G-d (miraculously) changed that, his becoming a father was no longer (as) dependent on his actions; even if he faltered, he would still be able to have children - just as many non-righteous people have children. Others disagree, saying that the overturning of nature required for Avraham to father children required more righteousness than helping Israel conquer Canaan, as wars are constantly fought and won. If the merits that overturned nature were no longer present, perhaps that change would revert back to its previous state as well. Nonetheless, the Maharal says that Avram didn't ask for a "sign" regarding having children because he wasn't afraid that it could be reneged.

The Ramban also uses the concept of fear of sin negating a promise to differentiate between the two. With one of the promises only his own sins could negate it, while the other was beyond his control. He couldn't make the choices for his descendants, so asked G-d for a "sign" that their sins wouldn't negate the promise made to him about their inheriting the land. Even if he feared that his own sins could affect the promises being fulfilled, that was totally dependant on him; his own actions would determine whether they would remain in effect. He therefore only asked for a "sign" regarding the aspect that was out of his hands - that his descendants' behavior wouldn't undermine his promise.

How do we know that when Avram asked for a "sign" that his descendants would actually get the Promised Land that he wasn't really including both promises? After all, if he has no descendants, they can't live anywhere! When the Torah says, after the first promise, that Avram trusted G-d, and doesn't mention a request for any sign that it will be fulfilled, it is separating the two promises. Rashi doesn't get involved in why Avram asked for a sign for one but not the other. All he is trying to do is explain why we are told that Avram believed G-d, when that seems obvious (and therefore superfluous); whereas he asked for a sign for the second promise, for this one "he believed in G-d" without asking for one.

But was this appropriate? Should he have asked for a sign for this promise too? Should he have been more fearful that his own sins would negate this promise? Or, would it have been inappropriate to ask for a guarantee if he controlled his own destiny. "And he believed in G-d," i.e. without asking for a sign, "and He considered it righteousness." © 2005 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

After G-d tells Avraham that Sarah, his wife, would have a child, Avraham declares "if only Yishmael would live before you." (Genesis 17:18) Yishmael was Avraham's child from Hagar. Bearing in mind that G-d had just promised Avraham a son from Sarah, this is a strange response. Could it be that Avraham at this point in time felt that Yishmael would be the second patriarch?

He may have felt this way because of the Covenant of the Pieces presented previously in Chapter 15. Here, G-d tells Avraham redemption would come only after his children would be strangers (ger), slaves (avadim) who would be afflicted (inui). (Genesis 15:13)

Following this chapter, the Torah tells us of Hagar's relationship with Avraham. She is called Hagar, which may be a play on the word ger (Ha-ger, the stranger). She was also a maid-servant and in that sense the female counterpart of a slave. And the Torah declares she was afflicted by Sarah. (Genesis 16:6) These three factors seem to reflect perfectly those indicated in the Covenant of the Pieces.

Is it possible that Hagar comes to believe that she would be the bearer of Avraham's covenantal seed? Indeed, as she wanders in the desert the angel says to her that she would have a child: "And you shall call his name Yishmael because the Lord has heard your affliction." (Genesis 16:11) The angels words are definitely shared with Avraham for he himself calls the child born to him and Hagar, Yishmael.

Thus, in Chapter 17, when G-d reaffirms the brit (covenant) with Avraham, Avraham must have assumed it would be through Yishmael (Genesis 17:1-

8). It is in this context that G-d tells Avraham that a child would be born to Sarah. (Genesis 17:16) Avraham is understandably confused and cries out, isn't Yishmael that child? It is here that G-d reaffirms the covenant declaring Yishmael would become a great nation, but the covenantal continuity will be through Yitzhak. (Genesis 17:19-21)

Today the Palestinians are claiming to be the true children of Avraham. They insist that they are the ones afflicted. They see themselves as the David fighting the Goliath, Israel. In reality, it is Israel that continues to be in the role of David, physically surrounded by the Goliath of 22 Arab nations.

The attempt to strip the Jewish people of its Jewish covenantal mission is not new. Yishmael tried to do the same in biblical times. This week's portion declares that while Yishmael may be the loved son of Avraham, Yitzhak is the covenantal son whose descendants are entitled to the land of Israel. © 2005 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Our father Avraham and our mother Sarah are the paradigm Jews. Their lives and the events that occurred to them are symbolic of the story of the Jewish people throughout the ages. This is certainly the meaning of the well known phrase of the rabbis that the behavior of our forebearers are the signs of the future for their descendants. Thus in this weeks parsha we see Avraham and Sarah going into exile in Egypt. This occurs after G-d has promised them that the Land of Israel will be given to them and their descendants. Almost immediately, they are forced to enter Egypt where the incident of Sarah's abduction by the Pharaoh takes place. In spite of all of the troubles, Avraham and Sarah succeed in the Egyptian exile. They become wealthy and accepted, even respected. But Avraham and Sarah return home to the Land of Israel.

Their sojourn there is also one crisis after another. They are devastated by the betrayal of Lot and by the delinquency of Yishmael. The Land of Israel is not an especially hospitable place. They are caught up in a regional war that initially does not concern them but their participation in becomes almost inevitable when Lot foolishly moves to Sdom and is taken captive. Betrayal, heartache, danger and disappointment dog their steps in the Land of Israel. But Avraham and Sarah refuse to give up or to lose faith in G-d's promise to them. The dream of a productive life in the Land of Israel remains real in their hearts and minds.

This is truly a paradigm of our situation today here in the Land of Israel. Even though many of our Israeli brethren arrived here with little choice in the matter, most Jews are here because of their will to be here. We can all leave for success and acceptance in the Egypts that abound in the world today. And even

though Egypt always carries with it the danger of a Pharaoh's behavior towards us, the fact is that most Jews emerge from Egypt with wealth, acceptance and even begrudging respect. Yet, it is obvious that the center of the Jewish world has now shifted to the Land of Israel. The Jewish people are unwilling to relinquish G-d's promise to us to let Him off the hook, so to speak. So we are confronted by betrayals and delinquencies, wars and struggles, disappointments and unforeseen difficulties. Somehow, even Sdom is allowed to flourish in our holy land and it is the followers of Avraham and Sarah who are constantly held up to ridicule and abuse.

Yet, in spite of all of this, the faith of the Jewish people in G-d's promise regarding this land is valid and firm, and it allows us to continue and improve and be of good spirit in the face of all of our troubles. This is an exact imitation of Avraham and Sarah, a reaffirmation of the continuity and tradition of Israel over more than 3700 years of history. It is this spirit that guarantees us, as it did Avraham and Sarah, success, eternal reward and achievement. © 2005 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.

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

Virtual Beit Medrash

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

Adapted by Shaul Barth

Translated by Kaeren Fish

“Avraham's Fear and Our Complacency
"After these things, G-d's word came to Avram, saying, 'Do not fear, Avram: I am your shield; your reward is very great'" (/Bereishit/ 15:1). Our Sages teach that in every instance where G-d reassures someone and tells him not to be afraid, the person concerned is indeed afraid. We find an example of this in the case of Yaakov: after the text tells us, "Yaakov was very afraid and it troubled him" (/Bereishit/ 32:8), an angel comes to reassure him.

It is not clear, in our case, what Avraham fears; therefore, the /midrashim/ attempt to fill in the picture. R. Levi (/Bereishit/ /Rabba/ 44:4) offers two possibilities as to why Avraham would be fearful. The first suggests that Avraham fears that he has committed a sin by killing innocent people in war; the second proposes that he fears that all of the surrounding nations will wage a war of vengeance against him. R. Levi describes the former fear with the words, "Lest among all of those people whom I killed there was a single righteous or G-d-fearing person."

We might have expected G-d's response to assure Avraham that even if he had taken an innocent life, he would have done so by mistake and would not

be held guilty. Such things happen in wartime. But the Midrash puts a different message in G-d's mouth: it compares Avraham to a man who sees a pile of thorns in the king's garden, and goes about removing them. Then he sees that the king has been watching him-and he tries to run away. The king tells him not to run, for had he not removed the thorns, the king would have had to hire someone else to do it; therefore, that man himself should come and receive his reward.

This parable is quite astounding: G-d is telling Avraham that among all the people he killed, there were no righteous ones. However, this implies that if there had been any "righteous or G-d-fearing" victims, Avraham's actions indeed would have been morally problematic, and he was right to fear this possibility.

R. Levi thus presents Avraham's first concern as being for the morality of his actions, and his second concern as being for his own physical safety and that of his household.

To our sorrow, we currently find ourselves in the midst of an armed struggle with our neighbors. It is possible that during the course of this struggle, we may come to forget the message that Avraham symbolizes. From time to time, we hear of mistakes made during the course of I.D.F. operations against terrorists, in which Palestinian civilians are killed. We certainly make no accusation against the soldiers for their dedicated defense of Israeli lives. However, we must ask ourselves whether we devote sufficient thought and concern to the possibility that we have accidentally taken the lives of innocent people, or whether we have convinced ourselves that all those who have died are indeed "thorns." I direct my words not mainly at the commanders of the I.D.F., who generally tend to be cautious about civilian casualties, but rather at our own religious community.

An absurd situation has been created whereby anti-religious secularists present themselves, and are seen by others, as the country's moral compass and conscience, while Rabbis and Torah scholars fail to take a stand on the country's burning moral issues. There are numerous reasons for this: the religious community tends to be more nationalist than other sectors of Israeli society; the religious community understands that the battle is not only about land, but stems from something deeper; the religious community feels more closely bound to the land and is less accepting of any questioning of our control of it. But none of these facts can explain the phenomenon of ignoring the moral questions and issues that arise from the situation in which we find ourselves.

It is clear that our battle is just and that terrorists must be fought with all our might. We reject out of hand the approach of the foreign governments that want to portray us as colonialist conquerors and our presence as immoral. We are certain of the morality of the war that we are in the midst of, but at the same

time we must ask ourselves why the concerns that so disturb Avraham do not disturb us. [*This sicha was delivered at seuda shelishit, Shabbat parashat Lekh Lekha 5763 (2002).*]

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

The Torah discusses the war of the four kings against five others at length (Bereishit 14:1-10).

We might wonder not only about the number of verses of this discussion but about several aspects of the story itself. First of all, in spite of the fact that there are four kings who fight against five, it is clear that the numerical advantage of five versus four is not relevant. The four kings rule over a very large area, including Shinar (that is, Babylon, as noted in Bereishit 11:2) and Eilam ("And on that day, G-d will send His hand a second time to take possession of the rest of His nation, remaining in Ashur, Egypt, Patros, Kush, Eilam, and Shinar" [Yeshayahu 11:11]). The five kings, on the other hand, control a few cities in the small area of Sedom and Amorah. It is therefore not surprising that the five kings served the four kings for twelve years. The question is what led them to rebel in the thirteenth year?

In addition, while the war is taking place, the description surprisingly moves away from the five kings and mentions other completely foreign nations. "And in the fourteenth year, Kedarlaomer and the kings with him came and struck the Rafaim and Ashtarot Karna'im, the Zuzim in Ham, the Aimim in Shaveh Kiryata'im, and the Chori in their mountain, Sei'ir" [14:5-6]. What does this have to do with the war between the four and the five kings?

Evidently, there is one answer to both of these questions. The nations mentioned at the later stage-Rafa'im, Zuzim, Aimim, Chori-lived on the eastern bank of the Jordan River, and evidently the kings of the area of Sedom had a treaty with them to protect them from the kings living further to the east. This treaty was based on the great strength of these nations, as can be seen from their names. However, the treaty was not enough to protect Sedom, and the eastern kings conquered the nations of the eastern Jordan area.

This then leads us to the reason for the telling of this story, Avraham's victory over the kings of the east. The victory gave Avraham control over their newly acquired territory, which included the eastern side of the Jordan River. From that point in time, the eastern side of the Jordan became Avraham's property (even though it was not part of the Land of Canaan, as outlined in Bamidbar Chapter 24). Eventually, the nations that had some link to Avraham would receive parts of this heritage. Amon and Moav, the sons of Avraham's nephew Lot, received the lands of Eimim and Refa'im: "For I have given Ar as an inheritance to

Lot. The Aimim lived there beforehand, a great and powerful nation, large giants. Rafa'im were also considered giants, and the Moavites considered them Aimim." [Devarim 2:11]. The same is true of the land of the Zuzim. "For I have given it to Lot as a heritage. It was also considered the land of the Refa'im. Refa'im lived there beforehand, and the Amonites called them Zamzumim, a great and powerful nation, strong as giants." [2:19-21]. The children of Eisav, Avraham's grandson, inherited the land of the Chori. "And in Sa'ir, the Chorim lived there beforehand, and the children of Eisav conquered them and destroyed them, and replaced them." [20:12]. Other sections of this area, which were ruled by Og, King of Bashan, were in the end given to the tribes of Reuven and Gad, and half the tribe of Menasheh, since this is also part of the property belonging to Avraham-"All of the Bashan, which is called the land of the Refa'im" [Devarim 3:13].

Thus, in summary, the war of four kings against five is the basis of Avraham's possession of the land to the east of the Jordan River, for all generations to come.

"Rise Up and Tour the Land"

by Rabbi Elyakim Levanon, Rabbi of Eilon Moreh

Avraham took many journeys in Eretz Yisrael. "And Avram passed through the land until the site of Shechem, until Eilon Moreh... And he moved from there towards the mountains, east of Beit El... And Avram descended to Egypt... And Avram pitched his tents, and he came and sat in Eilon Moreh, in the area of Chevron." In the Talmud, there is a disagreement between the Chachamim and Rabbi Eliezer about the purpose of the Divine command to Avraham, "Rise up and tour the land" [Bereishit 13:17] (Bava Batra 100a). Rabbi Eliezer derives from this event a law that possession of land can be formally obtained by walking on it, and he explains that after this walk the land belonged to Avraham. The Chachamim feel that Avraham walked in the land because he liked it so much, and in order that his descendents would find it easy to conquer. The common denominator for both sides is that Avraham set the tone of the link between Bnei Yisrael and the land for all generations to come.

One important event is the war of five kings against four, which ended with Avraham's nephew Lot being captured. We are told that Avraham gathered his disciples and pursued the kings that had captured Lot, until he reached Dan, in the area of Chova, to the left of Damascus. We know that the passage describing this event was written by Moshe at Mount Sinai, many years after Avraham's actions. This must be so, since Dan was born after Avraham had died, and it is Moshe who described the battle, naming the sites in terms of what was known in his own time.

But even so, the passage is problematic. How did Moshe know what Dan's heritage would be, wasn't

the land divided among the tribes by Yehoshua when Bnei Yisrael entered the land? I heard an explanation of this puzzle from the late master of Tanach, Prof. Yehuda Elitzur. In his opinion, it was not only Avraham who toured the length and breadth of the land, the children of Yaacov continued this tradition too. As is written, the activities of the fathers are a sign for the descendents. Eretz Yisrael is unique in its variety, no one place is the same as any other, and every area has its own traits that are different from those of every other one.

Our forefathers, and the tribes themselves, became familiar with the spiritual properties of every site in the land. Whenever one of Yaacov's sons felt that a specific area was appropriate for him, he established that his children would receive their heritage in that area. This tradition of which area most matched the traits of every tribe was passed on to Moshe. He was therefore able to identify the place where Avraham's pursuit led him as "Dan." When Yehoshua divided the land among the tribes, Dan in fact received a portion in the center of the land, between Tzor'a and Eshtaol, but later on the tribe of Dan increased their area by capturing the area of Layish, in the north, which was the original area that matched their inherent traits (see Sho'tim 18:2).

In modern times it is also possible to see differences in the attitudes of people depending on where in the land they live. People of the plains are different with respect to their links to Eretz Yisrael than people of the mountains. With respect to any proposal to withdraw from areas within Eretz Yisrael, some people respond as on a plain, with restraint and in a calm way. This is symbolic of their links to the land. Others react with strong opposition, like stones exposed on a mountain, representing the way they relate to the land. Both of these approaches are the words of the Living G-d. It is possible to become attached to Eretz Yisrael in every reasonable way—plains or mountains, deep within the boundaries or on the coastline.

The "garin"-closely knit group—that founded Eilon Moreh was the spearhead which opened up the possibility of settling the mountains, using tools that match the spirit of the place. Let us hope and pray that our various strengths will be used appropriately throughout our land, so that in the end "The Tabernacle will become one" [Shemot 26:6].

The Activities of the Garin:

"And Avram passed through the land to the site of Shechem, to Eilon Moreh. And the Canaanite was in the land then." [Bereishit 12:6]. In line with the activities of our forefather Avraham, the people of the garin of Eilon Moreh-

Shechem—took on the task of conquering the land by their activity, while it was still occupied by the Gentiles. The garin was organized in 5733 (1973),

when it began its attempts to establish a settlement in the area of Shechem. The government prevented the establishment of a settlement seven times, and then, after the eighth try, an agreement was reached that opened the way for settling the Shomron region. Seven years later, the first permanent houses of Eilon Moreh were erected at the present site, Mount Kavir. The site of the settlement is in the heart of the Shomron, near the city of Shechem. It provides a view of both Mount Gerizim and Mount Eival, which stand one on each side of the town.

Today about 250 families live in Eilon Moreh. The town is an outstanding place. Among the central elements of the social structure of the place are the institutions of the Beit Midrash, under the leadership of the rabbi of the town, Rabbi Elyakim Levanon. These include a Hesder Yeshiva, a large Kollel, a high school for immigrants from the former Soviet Union, and a yeshiva high school that was established last year.

At a time when many settlements are limited in the number of new families they can accept because of a lack of suitable housing, Eilon Moreh has had the privilege of welcoming dozens of new families, settling them in new homes that were prepared in advance.

RABBI SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

In this week's parashah, we begin to read about the activities and experiences of the Patriarch Avraham. The Mishnah in Pirkei Avot (chapter 5) teaches: "Avraham Avinu was tested ten times, and he withstood them all." Many commentaries ask: Why is Avraham referred to as "Avinu" / "our father" in this mishnah, whereas he is not given that title in the previous mishnah which also mentions his name?

R' Chaim Sanzer z"l (18th century Poland; not to be confused with the chassidic rebbe R' Chaim Halberstam z"l of Sanz) explains: When Adam, the father of all of mankind, was created be'tzelem Elokim / in "G-d's image," he was meant to emulate the ten attributes (middot) of Hashem. When he sinned, he failed in his mission.

Not until the Patriarchs did anyone begin to correct the resulting spiritual damage. Specifically, Avraham's passing ten tests somehow rectified Adam's failure to emulate G-d's ten attributes.

Adam's sin did not damage his soul alone. Adam's soul included within it the souls of all of his future descendants. Likewise, Avraham's spiritual accomplishments did not benefit himself alone. Rather, as Ramban writes, "Ma'asei Avot siman la'banim" / "The experiences of the Patriarchs foreshadow the experiences of their descendants." This is why specifically when we are told that Avraham withstood ten tests, he is called "Avinu" / "our father." (Ne'edar Ba'kodesh)

"You shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you," (12:2-3) R' Joseph B. Soloveitchik z"l (1903-1993) comments: The Torah says that man was created male and female and was commanded to procreate. This refers not only to physical activity, but to intellectual and spiritual growth as well. In the language of kabbalah, "male" refers to a giver and "female" refers to a recipient. A person who aspires to spiritual growth must be both male and female, able to impart to others whatever spiritual gifts he or she has to offer, and able to receive from others what they can contribute towards his or her (i.e., the recipient's) growth.

This was the blessing to Avraham recorded in our verses: You shall be a blessing to others, because you will give to them. And, those who bless you, shall be blessed, indicating that Avraham will also receive from others. (Yemei Zikaron p.32)

"Avram was seventy-five years old when he left Charan." (12:4) R' Mordechai Shulman z"l (rosh yeshiva of the Slobodka Yeshiva in Bnei Brak) observed: The entire saga of Avraham Avinu's spiritual elevation, the means by which he succeeded in transforming his body into a spiritual entity, is not recorded in the Torah. The ultimate test at Ur Kasdim [when young Avram was thrown into the furnace] is only hinted at.

Nevertheless, one who does not ponder the events which preceded Ur Kasdim and how Avraham reached the level where he could withstand that test, one who does not analyze the beliefs of that errant generation and see how strongly those beliefs influenced people's behavior, has no way of appreciating the power and greatness of Avraham's emunah / faith and the intensity of his closeness to G-d at a time when he was isolated from the whole world. One against everyone—a different path, a different faith-crying out against an indifferent world for many years, without any obvious support from Above, waging a tireless battle and continuing the fight in the face of the flames of Ur Kasdim.

One who does not evaluate all this properly does not understand the spiritual heritage we have received from Avraham. He cannot possibly fathom the power of actions performed out of such deep conviction that they can influence children and grandchildren for generations to come until the end of time—to the extent that these descendants are willing to sacrifice their lives for kiddush Hashem / the sanctification of G-d's Name [as Avraham was ready to do at Ur Kasdim]. Without pondering this, one cannot even begin to understand the basics of the concept of ma'asei Avot / the experiences of the forefathers, and he certainly has no idea how these actions form a siman la'banim / foreshadowing for their descendants, and how we benefit to this very day from our Patriarchs' deeds.

A person may say: What difference does it make if I don't understand the true significance of Abraham's recognizing his creator at the age of three?

R' Shulman answers: Our Sages (Tanna D'vei Eliyahu chapter 25) obligate a person to say, "When will my actions equal those of my forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov?" Careful analysis of this obligation reveals that a person must understand how and why the Avot merited their great reward. Without this understanding, a person may, G-d forbid, arrive at mistaken ideas concerning reward and punishment—a form of denial of G-d.

R' Shulman concludes: In our days, there are people who say, "I live by simple faith." They imagine that they are following in the ways of Avraham Avinu. However, there is a vast difference between these people and Avraham. Avraham walked in simple faith because he saw the light. These people walk simply without realizing they are walking in darkness. (Quoted in Legacy of Slabodka p.106)

"But also the nation that they shall serve, I shall judge, and afterwards they shall leave with great wealth." (15:13-14) Why should the nation that would oppress Avraham's descendants be judged when they would merely be fulfilling G-d's decree? asks R' Eliezer David Gruenwald z"l (leading Hungarian rabbi and rosh yeshiva; died 1928). He explains: Rambam z"l states that the Egyptians were punished for oppressing Bnei Yisrael more than G-d intended, so-to-speak, along the lines of the verse (Zechariah 1:15), "I became slightly wrathful and they augmented the evil." However, says R' Gruenwald, we do not see this in our verses. Hashem did not say to Avraham, "If the nation that they serve augments the decree with additional oppression then I will judge them!"

Rather, writes R' Gruenwald, the expression "I shall judge [them]" should be understood differently. R' Yosef Albo z"l writes in Sefer Ha'ikkarim that there are two kinds of love. One type of love is based on the absolute qualities of the person or thing that is loved. The second type is based on the relative value of the subject. This explains the meaning of the prophecy of Malachi (1:2), "'I loved you,' said Hashem, and you said, 'How have You loved us?' Was not Esav a brother of Yaakov—the words of Hashem—yet I loved Yaakov." In other words, even when we do not merit Hashem's love because of our own (absolute) qualities, we still merit His love because of our (relative) qualities compared to Esav's descendants.

So said Hashem to Avraham: When your descendants are oppressed for 400 years, they will lose those qualities that make them special. But don't worry, for I shall judge the nation that oppresses them and find Bnei Yisrael to be special in comparison to that nation. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Chasdei David) © 2005 Rabbi S. Katz and torah.org

DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK

What's Bothering Rashi?

“**A**nd he believed in Hashem and He considered it for him as righteousness.” (Genesis 15:6)

"And he believed in Hashem"—RASHI: "He didn't ask for a sign to [confirm] this. But regarding the promise to inherit the land he did ask for a sign and asked 'How shall I know [that I will inherit the land]?"

Why has Rashi added the matter of asking for a sign, which is nowhere evident in the verse?

An Answer: The statement that Abraham 'believed' Hashem is quite strange. Stranger yet is the statement that G-d considered this 'believing' an act of righteousness.

Of course Abraham believed G-d! Why not? G-d had spoken to him personally. If Abraham doubted that he experienced a true prophetic event, then why should he believe in his hallucination? But certainly the prophetic event was of the kind that brings with it a sense of certainty. So again we ask: Why shouldn't Abraham believe G-d's word? And why was such believing considered righteousness?

These are the questions that Rashi is dealing with. How does his comment deal with them?

An Answer: Rashi takes for granted that Abraham believed G-d's words, for the reason we said above. Instead, Rashi interprets the words "he believed" to mean he did not even ask for a sign, as he did in the promise of inheriting the land. It was not an issue of believing or not believing. It was rather an issue of asking or not asking for a sign.

But now we can ask: Why then did Abraham ask for a sign about the inheritance of the land? Didn't he have sufficient faith in that promise?

Can you think of an answer?

An Answer: Rashi is certainly consistent. In his next comment, he says that Abraham did not ask for a sign to validate G-d's promise. Rather, he asked to understand by what merit he would be given such a gift as the Land of Israel. The answer was, as Rashi says, by the merit of the sacrifices that the Children of Israel would offer to G-d in the land.

We can continue to ask: Why didn't Abraham ask on what basis G-d would fulfill His promise about offspring, as he asked in the case of inheriting the land?

An Answer: I would say that the promise to have children needn't be based on special merit. Most people in the world have children. Abraham and Sarah were deprived of children up until that point. Having children would have made them equal to other people. Although having children is most certainly a special privilege, yet since most people merit it, Abraham had no need to ask for a sign of that merit. © 2005 Dr. A. Bonchek & aish.org