

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

Twice-repeated tales in the Torah always alert our interpretive, intellectual faculties. In this week's portion, Lech Lecha, famine in the Promised Land forces Abraham and Sarah to head for Egypt. Abraham suddenly understands that Sarah's beauty spells danger. "...Now I know that you're a beautiful woman, and when the Egyptians will see you, they will say this is his wife and they will kill me, and you they will keep alive. Please say you are my sister, that they will be good to me for your sake, and that my soul may live because of you" (Gen. 12:11-12).

Abraham's fears prove correct. Sarah is taken to the royal household, and her 'brother' receives gifts of cattle and slaves. But before she joins the harem, a plague strikes Pharaoh's court, arousing suspicion that this woman must be Abraham's wife, not his sister. Realizing how close he's come to violating another man's wife, Pharaoh sends Abraham away, flocks and all.

The uncanny similarity between the experiences of Abraham and those of his son later in Parshat Toldot (Ch. 26), when Isaac and Rebecca head for Egypt because of famine, illustrates the Torah's exegetical principle that "maasei avot siman lebanim" (the occurrences of the fathers are a sign of what will happen to the sons). But similarities don't end with Abraham and Isaac. We find as many, if not more, parallels between Abraham's Egyptian sojourn and the plight of the Children of Israel in Egypt. Nahmanides (1194-1270) understands that in leaving the land of Israel, Abraham commits a sin: "It is because of this deed that the Exile in the land of Egypt at the hand of Pharaoh was decreed for his children"(Gen. 12:10). I would suggest that an even deeper connection is to be made between Abraham and Sarah in Egypt and the Jewish enslavement by the Egyptians, with major lessons to be learned by us today.

**This issue of Toras Aish is dedicated to
Rabbi Ari & Deena Weiss & family
on the occasion of the birth of
Yonah Elisha!
Mazel Tov!
We're so excited for youze!**

First of all, both Abraham and Jacob leave Israel for Egypt because of a famine. With Abraham, this departure leads to Sarah's "enslavement" in Pharaoh's harem; with Jacob, this departure eventually leads into the enslavement of the Jews.

Next, Abraham fears that the Egyptians will kill him and take Sarah after he's dead. And when Jacob's descendants multiply in Egypt, Pharaoh decrees that all male Jewish babies shall be cast into the Nile, while the female babies will be allowed to live.

Third, Abraham finds a way out of danger through his 'sister' Sarah. And Moses is also saved by his sister Miriam when she hides him among the reeds and the bulrushes. Because of her prophetic vision, it is not an exaggeration to say that the redemption of the Jewish people began with a sister.

Fourth, Pharaoh takes Sarah into his household, his harem, where he intends to enslave her; similarly, Pharaoh takes the Jewish people into his home, Egypt, where he enslaves them.

Fifth, to thwart Pharaoh's plans and make sure that Sarah is not violated, G-d sends plagues, ('ne-gaim gedolim,' 12:17). When G-d wants to put an end to the Egyptian enslavement, He casts Ten Plagues upon Egypt.

Sixth, Pharaoh sends Abraham away just as Pharaoh will later send away Moses. And seventh, when Abraham is packed off, it's with gifts and material wealth, and when Pharaoh finally declares Moses persona non grata, his people don't leave empty-handed, but carry off gold and silver.

Clearly, from a literary-parallel perspective, Abraham in Egypt foreshadows the slavery of the Jews. And if we find a moral message in Abraham's Egyptian sojourn, then this message reaches our ears with a powerful reverberation since it must first pass through our collective memory as slaves. By linking Abraham with slavery in Egypt, the Torah is teaching the generations that Abraham's sins have a significance beyond their seeming innocence.

There are two sins, thus two messages, but they are connected. One: Is it really possible that so soon after entering the Promised Land, the first famine frightens Abraham? We're talking about the man who left his birthplace and his homeland. Has he no faith that G-d will bring rain? Has he not faith that he will be able to "make it" in Israel despite financial hardship? Abraham sinned, and the moral lesson to be learned is:

**TORAS AISH IS A WEEKLY PARSHA
NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTED VIA EMAIL AND THE
WORLD WIDE WEB AT HTTP://AISHDAS.ORG.
FOR MORE INFO EMAIL YITZ@AISHDAS.ORG**

The material presented in this publication was collected from publicly available electronic mail, computer archives and the UseNet. It is being presented with the permission of the respective authors. Toras Aish is an independent publication, and does not necessarily reflect the views of any given synagogue.

**TO DEDICATE THIS NEWSLETTER PLEASE CALL
973-472-0180 OR EMAIL YITZ@AISHDAS.ORG**

never leave Israel. If we seem-ingly can't make it in our own land, won't it be much more difficult to make it in a land in which we are strangers?

Two: It's one thing to save your own life by claiming that your wife is really your sister, but can you risk someone else's life in order to save your own, because there is no question but that Sarah faced a degree of risk inside the harem! But what really compounds Abraham's plan is when he adds, "...they will be good to me for your sake". Apparently Abraham anticipates that Pharaoh will be good to him because Sarah is beautiful and harem-bound. Even if the profit he reaps was not his ab initio choice, nevertheless Sarah is still being used to further Abraham's own ends. Moral lesson: our human and especially familial relationships must be devoid of any of the subtle ways used in taking advantage of another, even if it's done non-intentionally. Even more than this: We often tend to forget that each person is his own ultimate reality, an end unto himself, and that using someone as a means for our ends enslaves them. And this even includes one's spouse and one's children. This is why the experience of slavery has been seared into our deepest Jewish consciousness.

Hence, we must learn from Abraham's experience to live in our homeland even when it is not easy to do so. And that we must be faithful to our loved ones even when it is to our disadvantage. We must always see our friends and family members as subjects in their own right rather than as objects of our will or even as extensions of ourselves. As Martin Buber masterfully taught, we must deal with human beings from the perspective of "I / you" rather than as "I/it". Four thousand years after Abraham, have we learned these lessons? Have we internalized them? © 2007 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BORUCH LEFF

Kol Yaakov

Oftentimes we fail to glean insights and lessons from the less famous Biblical personalities such as Lot. "Lot who?"

Lot is Abraham's nephew and this week's Torah portion describes Lot's steadfast dedication to his Uncle Abraham. "And Lot went with him-Vayelech lto Lot." (Genesis 12:5)

Abraham had followed G-d's directive to leave his comfortable homeland, birthplace, and family and travel to Israel. Lot decides to join Abraham in this difficult task.

Later, when Abraham is forced to leave Israel and go to Egypt in order to survive a bitter famine, Lot once again follows Abraham both in his journey to Egypt as well as in Abraham's return to Israel. The Torah, however, expresses Lot's actions with a slight and subtle difference. This subtlety will prove to be Lot's transformation.

The Torah states: "Abraham went up from Egypt with his wife and all that was with him, and Lot was with him-V'Lot lmo." (Genesis 13:1) In translation, the difference is not even noticed. In English both words mean 'with him.' But in the actual Hebrew, the first verse says 'lto' while the second one uses the word 'lmo.' The Torah never haphazardly chooses words or expressions. Why would two expressions, which seem to mean the same thing, use two different words?

In answering, we must first analyze Lot's personality in general by referring to other places in Lech Lecha where Lot exhibits strange behavior.

Later, Lot becomes wealthy, as does Abraham (Genesis 13:2-12). A dispute arises between Abraham's shepherds and Lot's shepherds over the scarcity of grazing land for their flocks. Abraham tells Lot that they can no longer live together and they must separate in order to provide enough land for both of them. Lot quickly and easily agrees.

Question: Wasn't Lot a close student of Abraham's teachings? Isn't that why Lot left his comfortable homeland and followed Abraham? What would you do if your aged, wise, and respected mentor and elder reported to you of a dispute between your workmen and his? Wouldn't you try to work it out in order to be able to continue to learn and grow from your mentor at all cost? Why didn't Lot? Wouldn't you be embarrassed before your mentor? Why wasn't Lot?

There is another quandary of Lot's puzzling behavior. The entire Chapter 14 describes a large scale World War to which Abraham enters, fights and helps win for his side. Why did Abraham enter this war? Verse 14, tells us directly: Abraham heard that his relative (Lot) was taken captive and he armed his men... and he gave chase as far as the land of Dan.

At the end of the chapter, we find Abraham receiving words of gratitude and the offering of gifts from the various kings that Abraham fought for and helped them win the war. But nowhere do we find any gratitude from Lot! No words of thanks, not even a conversation between Lot and Abraham. Abraham, even without the fact of his being Lot's mentor, just saved Lot from death and Lot can't even bring himself to thank Abraham?

Let us return to the two Hebrew words for "with him"-lmo' vs. 'lto'. Yes, both words mean 'with.' But in

Hebrew, 'ito' has its word root as 'et'. 'The word 'et' is used to precede a subject in order to give emphasis to the subject. In its very essence, then, 'et' is subordinate. When Lot was originally with Abraham he knew his role. Abraham was the wise, talented, teacher and leader. Lot was the faithful, trusted, and able student.

In order to succeed in virtually anything, one has to know his talents and limitations. Imagine an offensive lineman in football who thinks he is the quarterback. Or imagine a gifted auto technician who thinks he is the CEO. Such people will not only fail in their dream positions, they will also fail in the jobs in which they are truly talented.

Lot went from a proper perspective of 'Ito'-subordination-to a disastrous one of 'Imo'. 'Imo' means I am with you as an equal. When Lot returned from Egypt laden with wealth and resources, he became 'Imo'. He no longer viewed himself as subordinate to Abraham.

Like so many in world history, his newfound wealth and power destroyed Lot's proper perspective. He now felt that he would be as important as Abraham. This also explains why he ran away at the first opportunity: he did not want to have to always look to Abraham for guidance. It was time for him to be the one to give others guidance. He wanted to free himself from the shackles of having a mentor.

Even when Abraham puts his life on the line for Lot in the war, Lot refuses to acknowledge that he owes Abraham anything. For by doing so, he would once again have to see himself as subordinate to Abraham and he could not bring himself to admit to that reality.

We are all Lot at times. We can be stubborn in our mindsets and fail to admit the reality that our co-workers or our bosses, our spouses or our friends, are truly more experienced and/or talented in particular areas. It's important to know when to lead, but it is equally important to know when we must subordinate ourselves to others, and be happy about our occasional secondary roles.

After all, what would famous great quarterbacks like Dan Marino or Joe Montana be without good, subordinate, offensive lines? Dead meat.
© 2007 Rabbi B. Leff & aish.com

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Terah, Avraham's (Abraham) father, is often viewed as an evil man and nothing more than an idol worshipper. A review of the text indicates otherwise. First of all, Terah's son, Haran, dies during Terah's lifetime. The Torah's description of his demise - "in the face of his father Terah" - expresses Terah's deep pain. (Genesis 11:28) This is certainly understandable. After all, the way of the world is that children sit shiva for parents, not the reverse.

Second of all, Terah acts with great responsibility toward his family. Rather than leaving Haran's child Lot to be raised by others, Terah takes him in. This is truly a noble deed, especially when considering the pain Terah felt upon losing his own child. Notwithstanding this suffering, Terah has the inner strength to raise his grandchild as his own. (Genesis 11:31)

Third of all, Terah seems to understand the importance of the land of Israel. Years before Avraham is commanded by G-d to go to the Holy Land, Terah decides on his own to do so. He instinctively recognizes the centrality of Israel. (Genesis 11:31)

Finally, Terah must have been a man of considerable spiritual energy. Consider his three children: Avraham, of course, would become the first patriarch. Nahor's granddaughter was Rebecca who would become the second matriarch. And Haran's son, Lot, fathers Moav from whom Ruth and King David were born, and from whom the Messiah will one day emerge.

Of course, Terah was no Avraham. G-d does not speak to him. He sets out to the land of Israel but never arrives. Still, the Torah, as it begins the narrative about Avraham and Sarah, seems to underscore the contribution that Terah makes to the development of the people of Israel.

Unfortunately, it is too often the case that successful children forget the roles their parents played in shaping their personalities and careers. It shouldn't be this way. Children should always be aware of the seeds planted by their parents and grandparents.

Thus, it is important that we appreciate Terah, the father of the Jewish people. He was the foundation from which the patriarchs and matriarchs emerged. Hence his name, Terah -from the word ruach, spirit. Indeed, it was from Terah, whose name begins with the letter tuf, which denotes future, that Am Yisrael would be born. © 2007 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The Torah teaches us that our father Avraham was told to leave his home in Mesopotamia and to travel to an unknown land, which eventually turned out to be the Land of Israel. Midrash points out to us that the entire success of Avraham's mission in life - to spread the idea of monotheism and the universal G-d - was dependent on his living in the Land of Israel.

The question naturally arises why this should have been so. After all, he could have been successful in so doing had he remained in Mesopotamia, which then was the center of human civilization and culture

while the Land of Israel was somewhat of a backward, out of the way place.

There are many possible answers to this question but the one that intrigues me most is as follows. Being successful in spiritual missions and growth always requires sacrifice and some physical discomfort. The prophet castigates those that are complacent and comfortable in Zion.

A person is born to toil and accomplish, to be busy and productive. Without undergoing the arduous and potentially dangerous journey to the Land of Israel, Avraham will never fulfill his spiritual destiny. Avraham is the symbol of challenges in life.

The ten tests that he undergoes shape him and mold him into the father of our people and the symbol of human civilization and monotheistic progress. Only by leaving his comfortable and familiar surroundings can he achieve greatness. It is therefore imperative for him to leave and to wander, to be a stranger and an alien in foreign society in order to grow into his great spiritual role of influence and leadership.

But why the Land of Israel as the desired destination for Avraham? Jewish history provides us with this insight. It is in the Land of Israel that a Jew can truly achieve spiritual elevation and development. The Land of Israel provides greater challenges to Jewish development than any other location on the face of this earth.

Throughout Jewish history, the Land of Israel has posed the greatest challenge to Jewish communal living. It is no surprise therefore that we who live in Israel find it to be a daily struggle in our lives. Nevertheless, it is the place for the greatest Jewish accomplishments and achievements. And therefore it is the destination for Avraham in his quest for spiritual growth and attainment.

He will find it to be a difficult place to live in. But as he struggles with his tests in life and rises to each challenge and occasion the Lord promises him that the Land of Israel will be his place on earth for all of his generations.

The challenge of living in the Land of Israel has never waned but G-d's promise to the Jewish people has always remained in force as well. It seems obvious that the ultimate fulfillment of Jewish life can only be realized in the Land of Israel. The problems faced there sometimes seem overwhelming. But the rabbis stated that according to the pain and difficulty so is the reward. As the children of Avraham and Sarah we are bidden to rise and overcome all of our tests and challenges as well. © 2007 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.

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

When Hagar flees from Sarai into the desert, she meets an angel of G-d. The words of the angel can be viewed as three separate declarations.

The first two are, "And the angel of G-d said to her, go back to your mistress and suffer under her control. And the angel of G-d said to her, I will increase your offspring, so much that it will not be possible to count them." [Bereishit 16:9-10]. The fact these two declarations appear together is surprising, since they are completely opposite as far as Hagar is concerned. First the angel said to her to return home, to the harsh conditions that prevailed there. In the second declaration, on the other hand, she is promised a great reward, similar to what was promised to Avraham ("I will bless you, and I will increase your offspring" [22:17]) and to Yaacov ("And I will give you offspring like the sand of the sea, so much that they cannot be counted" [32:13]). What is the meaning of these two declarations with respect to Hagar?

Evidently this explains why the third declaration is needed, to act as a deciding factor between the first two. "And the angel of G-d said to her, behold you are pregnant and you will give birth to a son. And you will call him Yishmael, because G-d heard of your suffering. And he will be a wild man, his hand against everything, and everybody's hand against his." [16:11-12]. Once again there are two opposite approaches, but in this case a reason is given for one side: Hagar will give birth, because G-d has heard her suffering. As noted by RADAK, the simple meaning of the word suffering refers in this case to crying out and praying, but it is clear that the use of this word is also a hint of the circumstances which brought about the cry -- "And Sarai made her suffer, so she fled from her" [16:6]. Hagar's prayer to G-d stands out in comparison to the lack of prayer by Sarai. When she felt distress over being barren, not only didn't she turn to G-d, what she did was to be harsh to Hagar (see Ramban, RADAK, and others). Because of this, Hagar was given a promise of offspring and that she would have a son Yishmael.

However, we cannot ignore what led to Sarai's treatment of Hagar. "And when she saw that she was pregnant her mistress became unimportant in her eyes." [16:4]. The positive side of Hagar's character is related to suffering (the root ayin-nun-heh), while the negative side is linked to the eyes (ayin-yud-heh). When Sarai lost her status in Hagar's eyes, Avram said to Sarai, "Do with her as you see fit in your eyes" [16:6]. Hagar is forced to flee into the desert, where she meets the angel, "at the spring (Ein Hamayim) in the desert, at the spring (ayin) on the path to Shur" [16:7]. As punishment for her attitude towards Sarai, the son that

will be born to her will not be a normal child but rather a wild man, with his hand against everyone and everybody's hand against him. This explains the first declaration by the angel, telling Hagar to return and suffer under Sarai's hand, thereby paying a price for the way she had reacted to her mistress.

Much later, Hagar's limited vision is seen in another story, where it becomes clear that she does not understand that she is responsible for saving her son Yishmael. In the end it was because of Yishmael's credit, when G-d heard his voice, that led to the event where "G-d opened up her eyes, and she saw a well, so she went and filled the gourd with water and gave the youth to drink" [21:19].

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah teaches us never to despair or feel abandoned. The Prophet Yeshaya opens with sharp words of rebuke to the Jewish people for their shameful attitude regarding Hashem's concern for them. He asks, "Why does Yaakov say, 'My path is concealed from Hashem and my judgment alludes Him?'"

This desperate plea is based on the tight control the nations exercise over the Jewish people during their seemingly endless years of exile. They exclaim in bewilderment, "If Hashem really cares how could He allow the world to continue on its present course!? Where is the Jewish nation's reward for their perseverance throughout the ages? Why doesn't Hashem respond to the nations' cruelty and deliver them their well deserved catastrophic blows?" These emphatic cries reflect the Jewish people's deep-seeded feelings of pain and anguish during their difficult moments in exile.

Yet, this similar perspective is shared by the mighty powers of the world who perceive themselves in total control. They see Hashem as aloof from His world and incapable-Heaven forbid-of interfering with their vicious hatred towards His devout children. In this week's haftorah, Hashem responds to the Jewish nation's plea and calls the world's mighty powers to task. Hashem engages them in heavy dialogue and invites them to defend their audacious position about Him. Hashem says, "Be silent distant nations and mighty powers recharge yourselves. Draw near and speak; come together for judgment. Who inspired the (dweller) of the east to proclaim My righteousness with his every step; delivered nations into his hands and gave him the control over the kings? Who transformed dirt into his sword and chaff into his bow?... It is I, Hashem, who declares the generations from the beginning. I am the first and will remain with the final ones." (41: 1,2,4)

The Sages explain that the "dweller of the east" here refers to our patriarch Avrohom Avinu. (Breishis

Rabba 43:3) In this moving dialogue Yeshaya reveals to us the secret behind Avrohom Avinu's success. In truth, Hashem was responsible for this total turnabout of an entire world. Hashem inspired this lone soul, Avrohom to reject the universally accepted practice of paganism that had distorted the view of every known human being on earth. Hashem kindled the fire within Avrohom Avinu to educate the entire world about their perversions. Hashem, likewise, protected Avrohom Avinu against every attempt to thwart his sacred undertaking of preaching the unpopular to the masses. And Hashem assisted Avrohom Avinu in his miraculous war against the four mighty kings that resulted in Hashem's universal acceptance by all leading world powers. (See Breishis Rabba 42:3; Rashi Lech Lecha 14:17)

The above words send a powerful message to all regarding Hashem's active concern for the world and its affairs. Historically speaking, Avrohom Avinu's generation could have brought anyone to total despair. The entire world- save a hidden pocket of Shemites- had no clue of Hashem's existence and were engaged in aggressive idolatry. Yet, even during those times, Hashem controlled His world and ministered its spiritual development. In response to this tremendous spiritual decline Hashem designed from the outset for Avrohom Avinu to be born in that dark era. Hashem armed Avrohom Avinu with an incredible mind to oppose an totally misguided generation and launch a single-handed campaign in the belief in the one, true Hashem. In fact, Meiri teaches us that through lectures, writings and personal example Avrohom Avinu convinced most of the world's population to believe in Hashem. (Intro to Avos) This incredible accomplishment, against all odds, displays Hashem's interest and involvement in His world. Hashem secured the world's direction by planting Avrohom Avinu-the greatest of all thinkers-in the generation most needy of him.

This remarkable upheaval serves as perfect testimony to Hashem's ability and involvement. The fact that one lone soul convinced an entire generation to abandon its previous beliefs speaks for itself. The shocking phenomena that Avrohom was not executed for his beliefs but was instead miraculously spared and victorious against the mightiest powers tells the complete story. Obviously, Hashem controls the world and is constantly leading it to its necessary perfection. Consequently one must conclude that even the nations' control over Hashem's people only happens with His permission. With these words Yeshaya addressed the Jewish people and emphatically declared Hashem's concern for them. When Hashem appears to be removed from them this can only result from their wrongdoings.

Ramchal teaches us that, in truth, Hashem is involved at all times in leading the world to perfection. Overtly, Hashem operates the world through the

system of reward and punishment allowing for free will, good and bad. This general policy leaves room for one to perceive that Hashem is not involved in His world. He permits evil to reign in untold proportions and allows His dearest to suffer for their most minute of transgressions. True reward and punishment is reserved for afterlife and only faint traces of Hashem's response can be discerned during one's lifetime. Yet, irrespective of all the above Hashem is secretly leading His world to its fulfillment. Working under cover, Hashem is perpetually involved in directing all world events in preparation for the final day of redemption. (see the Knowing Heart section 48)

Avrohom Avinu's era is a perfect example of this. On the surface, the world was as far away from its purpose as one could fathom. Civilization already experienced partial and total destruction during the days of Enosh and the devastating flood. The world's population was forced to separate and disperse in response to their rebellious attempt to build the tower of Babel. Yet despite all the above humanity did not learn its lesson and was totally absorbed in the ugly practices of idolatry. This was the world's record within the system of free will, good and bad, reward and punishment.

However, Hashem conducts His world with a second system of sovereignty wherein He directs the world to its ultimate purpose. According to the time tables of this system the time had arrived for Hashem's truths to illuminate the world. The Sages explain that Hashem's original plan of creation called for six thousand years of existence divided into three equal segments. The first of them allowed the world to remain spiritually void, the second demanded the dissemination of the Torah's truths and the final segment was designated for the years of Mashiach. (see Mesichta Avoda Zara 9a) Prior to Avrohom Avinu, the first segment was drawing to a close with practically no trace of Torah ideals or people to personify Hashem's truths and ethical lessons. The sad reality was that not one person existed who could be entrusted with the sacred task of furthering the world's spiritual development.

Suddenly, out of nowhere emerged the perfect candidate. Avrohom Avinu, born to a family of idolators discovered the truth of Hashem and developed into the pillar of the world. His contagious and uncontrollable love for his newly discovered Creator inspired everyone who came within his midst to sign up to the program. Within a span of fifty years there was not a person in the world who had not heard of Avrohom Avinu and his principles of faith.

In addition to Avrohom's personal lessons Hashem extended these truths through miracles and revelations revolving around Avrohom Avinu. Until this point Hashem's overt involvement in this world was limited to severe punitive responses to mankind's

wrongs. Avrohom Avinu, however, merited Hashem's constant protection manifested through open tangible miracles. These experiences convinced the world of Hashem's existence and involvement and eventually led them to crown Avrohom as the prince of Hashem.

Avrohom Avinu's story is perfect testimony to Hashem's system of sovereignty. During those days one could never have imagined how the world would shape up. Virtually no one was on the proper path or even reflected interest in getting there. Yet, Hashem's system of sovereignty called for the world's accelerated upswing. Immediate action needed to transpire with a relentless commitment to the furtherance of truth. The answer came within the system of free will and the world was privileged to the shining beacon of Avrohom Avinu. Hashem inspired, guided and protected Avrohom Avinu throughout his struggle until the world was eventually pointed in the direction of perfection.

The Prophet Yeshaya reminds the Jewish people that their path is never concealed from Hashem. The world is constantly moving towards its ultimate purpose with the Jewish people playing the lead role in this development. Hashem spares no effort in accomplishing His goal and, as we learn from Avrohom Avinu's era, steps in and guides the entire world towards its necessary spiritual climax.

This timely insight is so apropos for our times. The rapid moral decline in our times coupled with mass rejection of the practice of Judaism are certainly significant factors for despair. The descending direction of the world's population through secularism and immorality projects its ultimate detachment from Hashem. However, Hashem declares that He never loses sight of His world and His people. He secured Avrohom Avinu's appearance in his appropriate time and inspired him to lead his nearly insurmountable campaign. In this same vein Hashem secured the salvation of His world through the eventual arrival of Mashiach. Hashem pledged to send the world an individual of Davidic descent wiser than Shlomo Hamelech blessed with a similar prophetic level to that of Moshe Rabbeinu. Mashiach, like Avrohom Avinu, will totally devote himself to Torah and Mitzvos, educate and inspire all Jewish people in the Torah's ways and fight the wars of Hashem. (see Rambam Hilchos M'lochim 2:4 and Hilchos Tshuva 9"2) Hashem never forsook His world or people and secured their spiritual perfection since the beginning of time. Mashiach's successful campaign, like Avrohom Avinu's, will eventually educate the entire world and bring them to the true recognition of Hashem in its fullest capacity.

May we merit to witness this speedily in our days. © 2007 Rabbi D. Siegel & Project Genesis, Inc.

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

Although the Torah says that "Avram was 75 years old when he left Charan" (Beraishis 12:4), the overwhelming majority of commentators (and Midrashim) tell us that this was not his first time in Canaan. This is based on the fact that the Torah gives two different lengths of time for the Children of Israel's stay in Egypt, 400 years (15:13) and 430 years (Shemos 12:40), as the exodus occurred 400 years after Yitzchok was born and 430 years after the Bris Bain Habesarim ("Covenant Between the Pieces"). Since Avraham was 100 years old when Yitzchok was born (Beraishis 21:5), Avraham must have been 70 by the Bris Bain Habesarim. At that Bris, Avraham was promised that his descendents would inherit "this land" (15:7), so he must have already been in Canaan when he was 70! Yet the Torah tells us that he didn't leave Charan until he was 75, leading almost everyone to conclude that Avraham was in Canaan when he was 70, but then returned to Charan for five years, at which point he left permanently to settle in Canaan.

But why would Avraham have left Canaan to return to Charan? Five years is an awfully long time to "visit" family, and if Avraham had just been promised the land, why would he leave it shortly thereafter for such so long? This is especially problematic according to the many commentators that say that the commandment of "lech lecha," to leave his land, birthplace and father's house (12:1) happened before his return trip to Charan. How could he go back to Charan if G-d had commanded him to leave it and go to Canaan? [Because of this question, the Abarbanel says that the exodus actually occurred 425 years after the Bris Bain Habesarim, and the Torah merely rounded the number up to 430. Avraham was therefore 75 when told of the exile at the Bris, the same year he was commanded to leave Charan and arrived in Canaan (for the first and only time). Obviously, the myriad of sources that say that Avraham was only 70 at the Bris Bain Habesarim do not agree.] Alternatively, what was Avraham doing in Canaan when he was 70 if he only "left" Charan when he was 75?

In Beraishis Rabba (39:8), Rabbi Yehuda and Rabbi Nechemya both say that the double wording of "lech lecha" indicate that Avraham "went" twice, implying that there were two separate commandments to "go." According to Rabbi Yehuda, the first one refers to "going" from "Aram Naharayim" and the second to "going" from "Aram Nachor," whereas according to Rabbi Nechemya the first refers to "going" from both "Aram Naharayim" and from "Aram Nachor" while the second refers to his going back to Charan after the Bris Bain Habesarim. The commentators have been puzzled by the names "Aram Naharayim" and "Aram

Nachor." Aren't they the same place? Why is it given two different names?

The Mizrachi (12:2), as well as Moshe Aryeh Mirkin (in his commentary on the Yavneh edition of Midrash Rabba), understands "Aram Naharayim" as referring to the entire region, including Ur Kasdim. Therefore, according to Rabbi Yehuda, "lech lecha" refers to Avraham first leaving Ur Kasdim (Aram Naharayim) and then leaving Charan (Aram Nachor), while according to Rabbi Nechemya, his trip to Charan from Ur Kasdim and then from Charan to Canaan are considered the same trip. However, it is awkward to use a name for the entire region to if that region includes Aram Nachor as well (see 24:10). If the Midrash is really referring to Ur Kasdim, it should say so; why name the region rather than the specific city if the second trip also originated from within that same region? Most commentators do not consider Ur Kasdim to be part of Aram Naharayim, and it seems difficult to associate the two.

Others (see Eitz Yosef) say that Aram Naharayim was a separate city just across the river from Aram Nachor; Avraham lived in one while keeping his possessions in the other, and he was commanded to leave both cities. However, if Avraham was commanded to go elsewhere, how could he have thought that he could stay in either one? Why was there a separate commandment for each city? And why would it be considered two separate trips if he was leaving just once (even if he was vacating both locations simultaneously)? Additionally, the Torah says explicitly (24:10) that Aram Naharayim was where Nachor lived, so how could it be a different place than "Aram Nachor?"

The Me'am Loez says that there were actually three commandments; one to leave "his land, his birthplace and his father's house" (i.e. Charan) three years after he got there from Ur Kasdim, the second, when he was 70, to return to Charan to visit his father and family, and the third, five years later, to "leave his father, his land and his birthplace." The wording indicates that the commandment of "lech lecha" occurred twice, both times in Charan, but years apart. This may be consistent with Rabbi Yehuda's position, although we still need to explain why Charan is called different names for each trip. Rabbi Nechemya may consider both trips from Charan part of the same commandment (i.e. the second being a reinstatement of the first), may not be counting the first trip from Charan as being part of the command, or may differ from the Me'am Loez's assertion that there were three trips. In any case, if there was a commandment to return to Charan we may know why he did, but not why he was commanded to. We also don't know why he waited five years before returning to Canaan (or why the commandment to return to Canaan came five years later). A possible source for the Me'am Loez is the

Sefer Hayasher (quoted as its source elsewhere), which provides additional details. Here is a synopsis of how it is described in Sefer Hayashar:

When Avraham arrived in Charan he impressed the people there, and taught them G-d's advice ("mussar") and His ways. Three years after arriving in Charan, when Avraham was 55 years old, G-d appeared to him and said that He is G-d, who took him out of Ur Kasdim and saved him from his enemies. G-d continued by telling Avraham, "if you listen to My voice and keep my commandments statutes and teachings, I will cause your enemies to fall before you. I will increase your descendents like the stars of the heaven and I will send My blessing onto everything you do and you will not lack anything. Arise, take your wife and all that is yours and go ("lech lecha") to the Land of Canaan and settle there, and I will be your G-d there and I will bless you." So Avraham went (with his wife and all of his belongings), while his brother (Nachor), father (Terach) and nephew (Lot) stayed in Charan. Fifteen years later, when Avraham was 70, the Bris Bain Habesarim occurred, at which point he went back to Charan to visit his father and family, bringing everything he had back with him. Again, many of the locals followed Avraham, and he "taught them G-d's advice and His ways and he taught them to know G-d." After five years (when he was 75) G-d appeared to Avraham (in Charan) and said to him, "behold I spoke to you 20 years ago, and said to go out ("lech lecha") from your land and from your birthplace and from your father's house to the land that I have shown you, to give it to you and your children. For there, in that land, I will bless you and there I will make you into a great nation and I will make your name great and through you will all the families of the earth be blessed. Now, arise and leave this place, you and your wife and all that is yours. And also all those born in your house and all the souls you [brought close to Me] in Charan take with you and return to Canaan." And he did, bringing everybody and everything with him. And Lot went too.

The first time, only Avraham and Sara left Charan; those that they converted stayed behind, as did Lot. The second time, everybody came with them. This may be the key to unlocking our previous questions. When Avraham first got to Charan, he created a community of followers that gave up idol worship and followed G-d. However, there was much that Avraham needed to accomplish in the holy Land (perhaps personal growth that was being held back in Charan), so G-d told him to go there. With a community of believers still in Charan, Lot felt that he could stay in Charan. After 15 years, without Avraham's leadership, that community fell apart. They couldn't survive (spiritually) without him, so G-d sent him back to bring them back to Him, and then bring them all back to the Holy Land. After five years they were ready (or perhaps earlier, necessitating a reminder of the original

commandment to leave Charan), so G-d told him to return-with everybody. Lot realized that he wanted to be with such a community, and would be left with only idol worshippers if he didn't join Avraham, so he went too.

When Avraham left the first time, since there was a community of believers still in Charan, it is referred to as Aram Naharayim, it's generic name. When Avraham left the second time, even though it was the same place, with only idol worshippers left it was a not the same type of place. It was therefore referred to as "Aram Nachor," since Nachor is often the symbol of our idol-worshipping ancestors (see 31:53). According to Rabbi Yehuda, these are the two trips referred to by the double-wording of "lech lecha," one when Avraham was 55 and there was a community that followed G-d still there and the other when he was 75 and only idol-worshippers remained there. Rabbi Nechemya, on the other hand, views the second trip as a continuation of the first commandment, so considers the second "lech" to be the commandment to return to Charan to bring back his (and therefore His) followers.

© 2007 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

A well-known midrash relates how Avraham's father Terach left his young son in charge of his (Terach's) idol store one day. When Terach returned, all but one of the idols were smashed to bits; the largest idol, standing in the center of the store, was holding a large ax. Terach was not impressed by young Avraham's explanation that the idols had begun to fight and, not surprisingly, the largest one had won. Rather, Terach had Avraham arrested for this blasphemy.

Hearing this story as children, says R' Moshe Eisemann shlita we probably laughed at Terach. If he knew that the idols were powerless against each other, why did he believe in them? The key to this story is the difference between Avraham's world-view and that of an idol-worshiper such a Terach. In a word, it is "freedom."

Polytheism recognizes many G-ds, each bound by nature and limited in potency to the confines of a particular realm. Such a belief does not recognize the omnipotence, the freedom, of a unique G-d, Creator of all. A Terach is not disturbed by the inability of one idol to destroy another, for each is limited to its own province. If the G-ds are not free, then certainly man is not. According to this view, man is an impotent midget, powerless against the forces which surround him. Only with this analysis can we understand the full import of Avraham's rebellion: he discovered that not only G-d, but man, has freedom. This means, however, that man has accountability; if man controls his deeds, then he must take responsibility for them. This was a blow to the entire society in which Terach lived. (Lailah Kayom Yair p. 87) © 2007 Rabbi S. Katz