

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

Is character strictly personal -- either you are or aren't calm, courageous, charismatic -- or does culture have a part to play? Does when and where you live make a difference to the kind of person you become?

That was the question posed by three great American-Jewish sociologists, David Reisman, Nathan Glazer and Reuel Denney in their 1950 classic, *The Lonely Crowd*. Their argument was that particular kinds of historical circumstance give rise to particular kinds of people. It makes a difference, they said, whether you lived in a society with a high birth -- and death-rate -- where families had many children but life expectancy was short -- or one on the brink of growth, or one in the early stages of decline. Each gave rise to its own type of character: not that everyone was the same but that you could discern certain traits in the population and culture as a whole.

High birth -- and death-rate societies, such as non-industrialised societies or Europe in the Middle Ages, tend to give rise to tradition-directed people: people who do what they do because that is how things have always been done. In these societies -- often highly hierarchical -- the primary struggle is to stay alive. Order is preserved by ensuring that people stick rigidly to rules and roles. Failure to do so gives rise to shame.

Societies on the brink of growth -- transitional societies, such as Europe during the Renaissance and the Reformation -- produce inner-directed types. Culture is in a state of change. There is high personal mobility. There is a mood of invention and exploration. This means that people have constantly to adapt to new challenges without losing a sense of where they are going and why, which means facing the future while keeping faith with the past. Such societies pay great attention to education. The young internalise the values of the group, which stay with them through life as a way of navigating change without disorientation or dislocation. They carry their inner world with them whatever they do and wherever they go. Failure in such

societies is marked not by shame but by guilt.

Finally come the societies that have already achieved maximal growth and are on the brink of decline. Life expectancy has risen. The birth-rate falls. There is affluence. Much of the burden of care has been taken over by centralised agencies. There is less need for the driven, focused, resilient inner-directed types of an earlier age. The mood is no longer of scarcity but of abundance. The primary problem is not dealing with the material environment; it is getting on with and winning the approval of others. That is when the third character type emerges: the other-directed individual. Such people are more influenced by others in their age group, and by the media, than by their parents. Their source of direction in life is neither tradition nor internalised conscience but instead, contemporary culture. Other-directed people seek not so much to be esteemed but to be loved. When they fail, they feel not shame or guilt but anxiety.

Already by 1950, Reisman and his colleagues believed that this new, third character-type was emerging in the America of their day. By now, thanks to the spread of social media and the collapse of structures of authority, the process has gone far further and has now spread throughout the West. Ours is the age of the Facebook profile, the vivid symbol of other-directedness.

Whether or not this is sustainable is an open question. But this insightful study helps us understand what is at stake in the opening of our parsha, the words that brought the Jewish people into being:

The Lord said to Abram, "Go forth from your land, your birthplace and your father's house to the land that I will show you." (Gen. 12:1)

Abraham was commanded to leave behind the sources of both tradition-directedness ("your father's house") and other-directedness ("your land, your birthplace"). He was about to become the father of an inner-directed people.

His entire life was governed by an inner voice, the voice of God. He did not behave the way he did because that is how people had always acted, nor did he conform to the customs of his age. He had the courage to "be on one side while all the rest of the world was on the other." (Bereishit Rabbah 42:8) His mission, as we read in next's week's parsha, was to "instruct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and

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just" (Gen. 18:19), so that they too would carry with them the inner voice wherever they went. Theirs was a morality of righteousness-and-guilt, not honour-and-shame or conformism-and-anxiety. Hence the centrality of education in Judaism, since Jews would have to hold fast to their values even when they were a minority in a culture whose values were diametrically opposed to their own.

Hence the astonishing resilience of Jews throughout the ages, and their ability to survive change, insecurity, even catastrophe. People whose values are indelibly engraved in their minds and souls can stand firm against the majority and persist in their identity even when others are losing theirs. It was that inner voice that guided the patriarchs and matriarchs throughout the book of Genesis -- long before they had become a nation in their own right, and before the more public miracles of the book of Exodus.

Jewish identity is that inner voice, learned in childhood, reinforced by lifelong study, rehearsed daily in ritual and prayer. That is what gives us a sense of direction in life. It gives us the confidence of knowing that Judaism, virtually alone among the cultures and civilisations of its day, has survived while the rest have been consigned to history. It is what allows us to avoid the false turns and temptations of the present, while availing ourselves of its genuine benefits and blessings.

Inner-directed people tend to be pioneers, exploring the new and unknown even while keeping faith with the old. Consider, for example, the fact that in 2015 Time Magazine identified Jerusalem, one of the world's most ancient religious centres, as one of the world's five fastest-growing centres for hi-tech start-ups. Tradition-directed people live in the past. Other-directed people live in the present. But inner-directed people carry the past into the present, which is how they have the confidence to build the future.

This life-changing idea of inner-directedness -- the courage to be different -- began with the words *Lech lecha*, which could be translated as "Go to yourself." This means: follow the inner voice, as did those who came before you, continuing their journey by bringing timeless values to a rapidly-changing world. *Covenant and Conversation 5777* is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory

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RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"Now I know that you are a beautiful woman, when the Egyptians will see you, they will say, 'This is his wife,' and they will kill me, while you they will keep alive. Please say that you are my sister, so that they will be good to me for your sake and that my soul may live because of you" [Gen. 12:11-13]. The concept of "ma'asei avot, siman la'banim" (the experiences of the parents are an omen for the children), which runs throughout the Book of Genesis, is not limited to one or two generations; the great commentator Nahmanides notes continuous allusions to the events of subsequent Jewish history in the narratives of the Torah.

In the case of Abram and Sarai in Egypt, who left Israel for Egypt because of famine, one sacred text records, "the first Hebrew couple committed a sin, albeit inadvertently," and that it is because of this sin that their descendants had to be enslaved in Egypt [cf. commentary of Nahmanides].

A careful reading of these verses will reveal an even deeper connection between the earlier experiences of Abram and Sarai in Egypt and the eventual Jewish enslavement by the Egyptians, with major lessons for us today.

For example, in Genesis, Pharaoh takes Sarai into his harem, where he intends to enslave her. In Exodus, Pharaoh takes the Jewish people into Egypt, where he enslaves them. To ensure the conclusion of Sarai's enslavement before she is violated, God sends plagues (*negaim gedolim*) on the Egyptians. When God wants to put an end to the Israelite enslavement, he casts ten plagues upon Egypt. In Genesis, Pharaoh sends Abram away with gifts and material wealth; when Pharaoh finally releases the Israelites from Egypt, the former slaves carry o? vessels of gold and silver.

Abram in Egypt certainly foreshadows the slavery of the Jews. If we are to find an ethical teaching in Abram's Egyptian sojourn, then the Egyptian enslavement must provide not only 'measure for measure' punishment, but also a moral message for all subsequent generations.

We have already seen that Nahmanides views Abram's leaving the land of Israel, even for reasons of famine, as an inadvertent transgression. In light of the events that took place in Egypt, it is clear that no matter



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how tantalizing life in exile may appear to be from an economic point of view, a descendant of Abraham and Sarah must never move away from God's holy and promised Land of Israel. If it seems difficult to survive in our own land, it will be much more difficult to make it in a land in which we are strangers! This is a leitmotif that repeats itself throughout the Torah.

As far as Abram's actions vis-a-vis Sarai are concerned, we may justify them by saying that had he said nothing, he would have been killed and Sarai would have ended up in Pharaoh's harem in any case. However, we cannot possibly justify his inelegant language, in which he asks that Sarai claim to be his sister 'so that they may be good to me for your sake.'

Apparently, Abram anticipates that Pharaoh will also give him gifts once the beautiful Sarai is harem-bound. Even if the profit he reaps was only a post facto dividend, his choice of words conveys the notion that Sarai is being used to further Abram's ends. I believe the Torah is teaching us that here, too, Abram sinned inadvertently.

Our interpersonal relationships, especially between husband and wife, must be devoid of any of the subtle ways used in taking advantage of one another, even if done unintentionally. We tend to take advantage of people, or at least to take them for granted – especially those who are closest to us. We tend to forget that each person must be seen as his or her own ultimate reality, an end unto him/herself.

Using someone else as a means to our own ends, merely in order to fulfill our goals, is a subtle form of slavery. Slavery is made possible by dehumanizing a fellow human being, seeing him or her as an object for our purposes rather than a subject in his or her own right. Thus, the parallelism between the Egyptian experience of Abram and Sarai in the Book of Genesis and the Egyptian experience of their descendants in the Book of Exodus conveys two crucial lessons.

First, the descendants of Abraham and Sarah must learn that no foreign country will ever provide a political and cultural homeland for the nation of the covenant. Joseph's family settled in Egypt with great expectations of security and respectability, only to be enlisted in Pharaoh's slave-based systematic design that ultimately robbed them of their elementary rights to freedom and life itself.

Second, the descendants of Abraham and Sarah must have seared into their consciousness the fundamental evil which is slavery in any and all of its forms, and to always be mindful of the humanity of every person. "You must love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt," declares the Torah [Deut. 10:19].

Faithfulness to our homeland and respect for every human being as an end in and of him/herself are the principles upon which our nation was formed. Have we learned these lessons? ©2017 Ohr Torah Institutions

& Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

There is much comment and many different interpretations regarding the first two words of the second verse of this week's Torah reading. The second word "lecha" – "for you" seems to be somewhat redundant in the construction of the sentence. Rashi therefore interprets it to mean "for your benefit and good." The Lord instructs Abraham to leave his homeland and family located in Mesopotamia, in order to achieve the greatness that is inherent within him, as the forbearer of nations and the founder of the Jewish people.

There is an alternative interpretation of the use of this second word "lecha" in the verse that has always fascinated me. Travel can be a very broadening and entertaining experience. The travel industry the world over is burgeoning as people crave to visit unseen shores and exotic locations. So why would the travel of Abraham and Sarah from Mesopotamia to the land of Canaan be considered by Jewish tradition to have been such a challenging test of Abraham's faith on the Almighty?

He simply was embarking on a travel experience and was one of many such travelers in his time and world. The answer lies in the fact that the word "lecha" implies permanence. Abraham, you are never going to return home to Mesopotamia again. You are not a visitor, a tourist, a traveler, but you are now a refugee, an alien, and a non-citizen.

And such a status in life is truly challenging and potentially dangerous. So, unlike the interpretation of Rashi, the word "lecha" has a certain ominous characteristic to it. Abraham and Sarah were to be truly challenged by this travel experience. They were not going on vacation.

Abraham's descendants, the Jewish people, have shared this test and challenge with him over our long history. We always were insecure and homeless during the long night of our exile and dispersal. Even countries where Jews resided for centuries, such as Spain, Germany, Poland, etc., eventually no longer would accommodate our presence. We were always a positive part of any national society we found ourselves in but at the same time we were always the odd man out.

But somehow we were able to survive this enormous test and challenge because we always believed and knew that eventually we were going to go home. We prayed for it to happen and we struggled against all odds and enemies to make it happen. And in our time it has happened.

This belief of the return to Zion and Jerusalem sustained us in our darkest hours. It transferred us in our minds, though not in the minds of others, from the

status of tolerated but unwanted aliens into mere visitors and sojourners who have a legitimate and permanent home elsewhere. This is the feeling I have every time I present my Israeli passport for inspection when I travel to a foreign destination. I am no longer a pariah, a refugee but merely a visitor, a tourist, perhaps even an honored guest. The children of Abraham have returned home. ©2017 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

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

At Sarah's insistence, Abraham marries Hagar. Soon after, Hagar becomes pregnant and Sarah then becomes enraged. Here, the Torah uses the word *va-te-a'ne-hah*, which is commonly translated "and she (Sarah) oppressed her (Hagar)." (Genesis 16:6)

Rabbi Aryeh Levin, the late tzaddik of Jerusalem, insists that *va-te-a'ne-hah* cannot literally mean that Sarah oppressed Hagar. Sarah actually treated Hagar no differently than she had treated her up to that time. However, now that Hagar had become pregnant and perceived herself as Abraham's true wife, the simplest request that Sarah made of Hagar was considered by Hagar to be oppressive.

Nachmanides disagrees. For him, *va-te-a'ne-hah* literally means oppression. So outrageous was Sarah's conduct, that her children, until the end of time, would always suffer the consequences of this wrong. In Nachmanides' words, "Our mother Sarah sinned...as a result Hagar's descendants would persecute the children of Abraham and Sarah."

But what is it that Sarah did wrong? After all, Sarah had unselfishly invited Hagar into her home. Soon after, Hagar denigrates Sarah. Didn't Sarah have the right to retaliate?

Radak points out that Sarah afflicts Hagar by actually striking her. It is here that Sarah stepped beyond the line. Whatever the family dispute, physically striking the other is unacceptable. An important message especially in contemporary times when physical abuse is one of the great horrors challenging family life.

For Nehama Leibowitz, Sarah had made a different mistake. By inviting Hagar in, she doomed herself to failure by "daring to scale unusual heights of selflessness." "When undertaking a mission," says Nehama, one must ask whether one can "maintain those same high standards to the bitter end. Otherwise, one is likely to descend from the pinnacle of selflessness into much deeper depths..." It is laudable to reach beyond ourselves, but to tread where we have no chance to succeed is self-destructive.

Sarah's wrong is compounded when considering the following. While in Egypt with Abraham, Sarah was afflicted by Pharaoh, the master of the land. She barely escapes. (Genesis Chapter 12) Instead of learning from her oppressor never to oppress others, she did the opposite, persecuting Hagar, causing her to flee. Having herself been victimized, Sarah should have been more sensitive. Hence, whatever her rationale, her retaliation was inappropriate. The message is clear. Victims of oppression should reject rather than incorporate their oppressor's ways. Love the stranger, the Torah exhorts over and over, "For you too were strangers in Egypt." (Leviticus 19:34)

But whether one maintains this position or the position of Radak or Leibowitz, underlying this disturbing fact of Sarah's oppression is an extremely important message. In most faiths, leaders or prophets are perfect. They can do no wrong and any criticism of their actions is considered sacrilegious. While strong sentiments within Judaism exist to defend biblical spiritual leaders as perfect, there is, at the same time, an opposite opinion in Jewish thought. It maintains that our greatest biblical personalities, while holy and righteous, were also human and made mistakes. They were real people...not God.

This position makes the biblical narrative much more believable. Moshe, our great leader, sins by hitting the rock instead of speaking to it. The great King David gives into sexual temptation and sins. It is precisely because these holy, inspirational leaders, including Sarah herself, were so human that we are able to look to them and say that maybe, just maybe, we, in all of our flaws and faults, can strive to be great leaders too. ©2017 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 KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The Torah states: "There was quarreling between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and herdsmen of Lot's livestock -- and the Canaanite and Perizzite were then dwelling in the land. So Abram said to Lot, 'Please let there be no strife between me and you... we are brothers'" (Gen. 13:7-8).

Beginning with the Five Books of Moses to the most recent writings of mussar (ethical teachings) we are repeatedly adjured to avoid internecine strife and divisiveness. We are promised unlimited blessings and success if only we are united. There is no worse curse than can befall us, than pitting one Jew against another.

In the above verse, the Torah tells us that the quarrel between Abram's and Lot's herdsmen occurred at a time when "the Canaanite and the Perizzite were

then dwelling in the land." Abram's plea to Lot was, "Please let there be no strife between me and you." Abram was saying, "Here are two different nations, the Canaanite and Perizzite, living side by side in peace. Why do we, who are blood relatives, have to quibble and live in dissension?"

Abraham's plea continues to reverberate in our ears throughout our history. We Jews are children of one ancestor, why must we be at odds? We can give various reasons for our disagreements. I firmly believe that these are nothing but rationalizations.... Inasmuch as senseless divisiveness would be intolerable to rational people, we ingeniously formulate rationalizations to justify why we cannot live in harmony. Rationalizations are logical-sounding reasons that serve as excuses, but they are not the true reason.

We can easily find more reasons why we should be together than why we should be apart. But we can find them only if we so desire! *Dvar Torah from Twerski on Chumash by Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, M.D. ©2017 Rabbi K. Packouz and aish.com*

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

Hatafat Dam Brit

Translated for the Encyclopedia Talmudit by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

What would be the law if a child was circumcised by mistake before the eighth day? Would we need another ceremony? Would we need to perform again "Hatafat Dam Brit"?

The Rashba states that in such an instance no action would be required. He draws the parallel between an infant born already circumcised which in that case there must be at least "Hatafat Dam Brit" because of a special reference in the Torah "Yimol Bisar Orlato" Vayikra 12:3 ("the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised"). However others draw a difference between a child born circumcised and the case cited by the Rashba in that in the former instance usually some flesh of the foreskin is left. However since in our case the full circumcision was already completed, and there is certainly no foreskin left, nothing need be done on the eighth day.

The question however is; In such a case that was cited what do we do with the Mitzva of "Uvayom hashmini yimol bsar orlato" ("On the eighth day you must circumcise the flesh of your foreskin") which would indicate that there is a special Mitzvah to circumcise on the eighth day?

Rav Chayim M'brisk explains that though the Mitzvah of Circumcision is on the eighth day, the directive of "Hatafat Dam Brit" is not. Thus if the circumcision was performed before the eighth day one need not do anything,

However both the Shach and the Taz believe that in such a case there must be "Hatafat Dam Brit" just as we would require it of one who was circumcised

in the evening and not in the day as required. ©2016 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

In Parshat Lech Lecha, among the blessings that Avraham was to receive for leaving all that he had was the blessing that he himself should be a blessing (12:2). How does one become a blessing? Furthermore, Rashi comments that G-d promised Avraham that although he would be identified with Yitzchak and Yakov, any such blessings would end with Avraham's name at its conclusion. If the sages are correct that Yitzchak and Yakov reached higher levels than Avraham, what made him so special that any blessing would end with him?

Rav Moshe Feinstein explains that Avraham merited greater distinction because he was the first to establish faith in Hashem (G-d). Although those after him reached greater heights, Avraham's accomplishments were more worthy. Maybe this can explain how Avraham himself became the blessing: Taking initiative and starting something you believe is important for society is a blessing on its own, because it lays the framework for others to build on it! G-d promised Avraham, and in turn promised us, that, if we become leaders and initiators, our efforts will never be forgotten and we will always be remembered as a blessing. ©2017 Rabbi S. Ressler and LeLamed, Inc.

RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON

Perceptions

“And Avram went, as the Lord had spoken to him, and Lot went with him." (Bereishis 12:4) Who is the happy person? Someone who is satisfied with his lot in life. How true it is. But what if your lot in life is a nephew named "Lot," a tag along who is not quite on the same spiritual page as you? It's like trying to fly with a weight attached to your foot. Pretty frustrating, a real test of patience.

Just to give us an idea of who Lot was, the Torah tells us that he became rich when Pharaoh paid off Avraham Avinu to leave. In what merit? He didn't snitch on his uncle and spill the beans to Pharaoh, that Sarah was really Avraham's wife and not his sister.

Really? You mean, he COULD HAVE done that? what kind of nephew was he then?

After that, upon returning from Egypt wealthy people, Lot chose to split from Avraham. Understandable. He didn't have to live right next to Avraham, though it was a great merit to do so. Maybe he also realized he really didn't belong there, and decided to move on.

But to Sdom? Granted Sdom was a developed city, but a morally bankrupt one as well. Leave the tzaddik, but don't move in with the evil people!

He did anyhow. Nevertheless, it did not work

out for Lot exactly as planned. In the end, Lot never quite fit into Sdom. He married a woman from there, and they had children together, but he still remained somewhat of a spiritual outsider. This is evident in next week's parsha when he tries to keep the townspeople from abusing his guests.

Even his wife accused him of introducing strange practices in her native town, like giving salt to guests. She felt "insalted." Therefore, measure-for-measure, as Rashi says, she was in-salted when she looked back at the destruction of Sdom. Josephus wrote that she, or at least the pillar of salt she became, was still visible in his time.

As Lot fled Sdom with his remaining two daughters in tow, his problems were far from over. In fact, a scandal awaited him, one of the worst in Biblical history. So bad, in fact, that it forced Avraham to distance himself from his nephew once word got out that Lot fathered two sons, Moav and Ammon, from his own daughters. What good could ever come from THAT?

You mean, BESIDES Moshiach?

After all, Dovid HaMelech, the ancestor of Moshiach, descended from Boaz and Rus, and Rus descended from Moav. Incredibly, one of the unholy relationships in the history of mankind gave rise to one of the holiest individuals in all of history. Not what one might have expected.

Perhaps that is why Rus had to become a convert. To spiritually shake off all connection to her sordid ancestral past, she had to be "born again." Conversion to Judaism does that. After converting she had a fresh spiritual start, and that was when it became time for the spark of Moshiach, which she inherited from Lot and which she carried within her, to finally be put into play.

If it seems convoluted, it is. We've discussed in the past why it has to be that way. The Sitra Achra is anti-Moshiach, for obvious reasons. Therefore, the building of redemption has to look like just the opposite if the process is to continue unabated, or at least with a minimum amount of obstacles. Lot moving to Sdom and raising a family there, did not look as if it had anything to do with the Messianic process.

It didn't end there either. It turns out that Lot, as bad as he was, reincarnated into... Yehudah, and then later into Boaz! As if that weren't wild enough, the daughter who gave Lot the wine in the first place to make him drunk also reincarnated into... Tamar, and later into Rus herself!!

There were two murky sources of Moshiach. The first was Lot and his daughter, from whom Moav was born. Eventually Rus was born and she later converted and became the ancestress of Dovid HaMelech and Moshiach. That was Lot's contribution to the Messianic process.

The other story occurred later in history, and

was that of Yehudah and Tamar. Tamar duped her father-in-law, Yehudah, into having a child through her. Peretz was born from the relationship, and that eventually produced Boaz, who did yibum with Rus to create the line of Dovid HaMelech. Now it turns out that Lot and his daughter contributed to that side of the Messianic lineage as well!

It doesn't get much more bizarre than this, especially given Lot's profile in the Torah. He wasn't even a descendant of Avraham, just of Avraham's family line. By the time Lot reincarnated into Yehudah, that problem was fixed as well, being a great grandson of Avraham Avinu.

Still, the question is, was so special about Lot? THAT answer can only be found in one source:

"Know that Lot, the son of Haran was from the level of the right thumb limb of Adam HaRishon, which comes from the sod of Binah... On this level it is said that Lot, the son of Haran, was from the root of Hevel, but in truth he is not [from Hevel] but from the bohen of Adam that became mixed into Hevel. Therefore, Hevel is hinted to by the initials of, 'with Lot, son of Haran' (Bereishis 11:31). Since Lot was then blemished and [the Klipos] latched on [to him]... Therefore Avraham said to him, 'Please separate from me' (Bereishis 13:9), even though Avraham Avinu and Lot were both from the root of Adam HaRishon himself. Nevertheless, [he told Lot], since you are separated from Adam and mixed into the evil klipos of Hevel and still not rectified, please separate from me now. This is what it writes, 'for, we are brothers' (Bereishis 13:8), that is the two of them were from the root of Adam himself. Within Lot were two soul sparks, [two] good 'doves,' Rus and Na'ama, and the two of them were mixed into Hevel, as mentioned. After that they left him and became blessed and rectified." (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Introduction 36)

And he seemed like such a simple fellow, Lot, a real commoner. He was, on the outside at least. On the inside, he had a powerful soul, albeit a blemished one. Maybe history is not as convoluted as it seems, just our view of it. We may only see "outsides," but history teaches that we have learn to see "insides" as well. ©2017 Rabbi P. Winston and torah.org

RABBI DAVID S. LEVIN

Avra(ha)m and Lot

One of the most active peripheral characters of the Torah is first introduced only by name in the last section of Parashat No'ach, appears again in this week's parasha as a catalyst for a series of events, and in next week's parasha, Parashat Vayeira, has a leading role and makes a significant impact on the future of the Jewish People. Lot is a difficult character to comprehend as he consistently proves that he is inconsistent. It is almost as if he cannot decide whether to be a Tzaddik or a Rasha. With this in mind,

it is somewhat difficult to understand why the Torah spends so much time and effort on Lot even though Lot is related to Avram.

In Parashat No'ach, we learn that Lot is the son of Haran, Avram's brother. Haran was one of three sons born to Terach and the Torah tells us that he died while Terach was still alive. We are left with the explanation of the Midrash for the circumstances of Haran's death. When King Nimrod threw Avram into the fiery furnace for not bowing to him, Avram survived by the hand of Hashem. Haran was then given the opportunity to bow or be killed in the furnace. Haran wrongfully assumed that Hashem would save him as He did Avram even though he was not committed to serving Hashem alone. Haran died and his son, Lot, was left as an orphan. Avram must have felt some responsibility for Lot as he took him with Avram's family when they left every other member of the family back in Charan upon Hashem's request to leave at the beginning of Parashat Lech L'cha.

In the beginning of their journeys, Lot plays a totally subordinate role as is evidenced by the Hebrew word "et" which here means "with" but in a dependent position. Lot had no wealth of his own and depended on Avram for everything. Lot is not even mentioned again through Avram's travels within Canaan nor when Avram takes his family to Egypt during the famine. Until the second chapter of the parasha, we are unaware that Lot actually accompanied Avram to Egypt. In perek yud gimel (Chapter 13) we learn that Lot had now become a wealthy man with large numbers of tents, sheep and shepherds who worked for him. The Torah uses the word "im" here to mean "with", but here the use of "im" indicates independence and an equal footing. The Torah does not explain where this wealth originated so our Rabbis look for clues within the previous chapter. Lot was silent when Avram said that Sarai was his sister instead of his wife when his life was in danger. Lot could have told the truth but chose to protect Avram instead. For this reason, Lot was rewarded by Avram. Avram must have shared the animals that he received from Par'oh in exchange for curing Par'oh's household of boils which had been a punishment from Hashem for seizing Sarai. Avram felt indebted to Lot for saving his life.

Lot's new wealth became a problem which eventually caused Avram to allow Lot to choose whichever portion of land he wanted and separate from Avram. HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch asks why the Torah used the words "hipared mei'imo, had parted from (with) him" when it could have said "mei'alav, from (near) him". He explains that this was not a mere departure from Avram physically but also a spiritual departure as well. Avram had hoped that Lot would follow Avram's spiritual example of devotion to Hashem and spread His Truth throughout the land. Lot abandoned this spiritual form of life for material gains. HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin, the

Aznayim L'Torah, writes that all the time that Lot lived with Avram because he had no possessions of his own, he was willing to follow a straight path and support Avram in his endeavors. When Lot finally had flocks of his own, his new wealth enticed him to seek more and abandon his dependence on Avram for physical or spiritual needs. This further explains the use of the word mei'imo, from (with) him. Here we find again the word "im", an indication of Lot's newfound independence.

What was Lot's sin and what lessons do we learn from his difficult life? There are two areas that must be balanced in our lives: (1) the spiritual, and (2) the physical. Avram's life was dedicated to the spiritual so Hashem blessed him with the physical "livelihood" through his encounters with those around him. Par'oh was forced to depend on Avraham to save his household so he rewarded Avram with a large number of flocks and cattle. Lot depended on Avram only until he had enough wealth of his own. Lot abandoned the spiritual world and concentrated only on the material gains he could have in Sodom. The Mei'am Lo'eiz explains Lot's mistake. When the Torah introduces Lot's wealth he is described as "ha'holeich et Avram, the one who walked with Avram." Only when he was dependent on Avram and followed both his material and spiritual guidance was he rewarded with material gain of his own. He should have realized that his gain was only from his spiritual connection.

Still the Torah rewarded Lot when his daughters tricked him into becoming the sire of two important leaders of the Jewish people. From the elder daughter he became the father of the Moabites which led eventually to Ruth and from there to King David and the Messiah. From the second daughter he became the father of the Ammonites which led to Naomi and from there led to King Solomon and Rechovam, the King of Judah. Our Rabbis tell us that these rewards were primarily due to the two good deeds which Lot had performed (saving Avram and protecting the Angels), both of which indicated that Lot had learned some good qualities from the time he was with Avram.

We learn from Lot that our spiritual life and our material life must remain balanced with a slightly greater influence of our spiritual life on our material one. We must find the time to study Torah and perform mitzvot every day. When we dedicate our lives to these goals, we also realize that whatever material life we have is sufficient. We are wealthy, not from our material life but from the meaning that our life has when it is also spiritual. May Hashem help us to seek the spiritual within our daily existence. ©2017 Rabbi D.S. Levin

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Long Distance Call

Good deeds deserve good dividends, but there is one deed mentioned in this week's portion that is

veiled in anonymity. However, its dividends lasted so forcefully that the impact was realized almost 500 years later.

The Torah tells us about a war that took place. Avram's nephew Lot was captured. The Torah tells us "Then there came the fugitive and told Abram, the Ivri, who dwelt in the plains of Mamre..." (Genesis 14:13) It obscures the name of the refugee and does not even directly state his message. The next verse, in a seemingly disjointed manner, tells us, "and Abram heard that his kinsman was taken captive, he armed his disciples who had been born in his house -- three hundred and eighteen -- and he pursued them as far as Dan" (ibid v.14). The Medrash tells us that the refugee was Og, a giant of a man who escaped an attack on his fellow giants. He informed Avram that his nephew was alive, albeit taken prisoner with malevolent intent. He figured that Avram would try to liberate Lot and be killed in battle. Og would then marry Sora. (Perhaps that is the reason that the Torah seems to separate what Avram heard from what the refugee told.) For this piece of disguised information, Og receives a seemingly disproportionate reward. He is granted not only longevity, as he lived until the final days of the Jews' sojourn through the desert, but also the impact of his deed was so potent that Moshe was afraid to attack him before entering the Land of Canaan! Imagine. Og lived for 470 years after the deed, and then Moshe had to be reassured that he need not fear his merits!

Rabbi Berel Zisman, one of the few remaining from his illustrious family of prominent Lubavitch Chasidim spent a portion of World War II in a concentration camp in Munich. After the war, he was allowed entry to the United States, but had to wait in the town of Bremerhaven for six weeks. During that time he decided to travel to Bergen-Belsen the notorious concentration camp which was transformed to a displaced person camp to visit a cousin who was there. Dozens of inmates came over to him with names of loved ones scattered across the free plains of the USA. They wanted to get them messages. Berel took their messages. To Sam Finkel from Abraham Gorecki: "I am alive and recuperating. Please try to guarantee employment to allow me to enter the US." And so on. One card was for Jacob Kamenecki from a niece from Minsk. "Please be aware that I survived the war and will be going back to Minsk."

Armed with lists of names and some addresses, Berel arrived in the US where he became a student in the Lubavitch Yeshiva in Crown Heights. Knowing no English, upon his arrival he asked a cousin to address postcards. Each had a message written in Yiddish "My name is Berel Zisman. I have just arrived from Europe -- and have regards from..." He filled in the blanks and ended the brief note on each card with, "for further information, I can be contacted at the Lubavitch Yeshiva, corner Bedford and Dean in Crown Heights."

Rabbi Zisman does not really now how many people received his cards, but one person who lived in a basement apartment on Hewes Street definitely did. When Rabbi Jacob Kamenecki, one of the United States' leading sages, came to the Lubavitch yeshiva looking for Berel Zisman, a war refugee who had arrived at the yeshiva only a week ago, no one knew why.

Berel was called out of the study hall and met the elderly man, filled him in on all the particulars about the status of his relative, and returned to his place. When the young man returned to his seat, he was shocked at the celebrity treatment he once again received. "You mean you don't know who that Rabbi was? He is the Rosh Yeshiva of Torah Voda'ath!" Berel shuddered, feeling terrible that he made the revered scholar visit him. A while later, he met the Rosh Yeshiva and approached him. "Rebbe, please forgive me, I had no intention to make you come to me to get regards. Had I known who you were I would surely have gone to your home and given the information to you in person!"

Reb Yaakov was astounded. He refused to accept the apology. "Heaven forbid! Do you realize what kind of solace I have hearing about the survival of my relative. I came to you, not only to hear the news, but to thank you, in person, for delivering it!"

Imagine. Avram was nearly 80 years old, he had no descendants, and the only link to the house of his father's family -- at least documented as a disciple of Avram's philosophies -- was Lot. Now even the whereabouts and future of that man were unknown. And when Og delivered the news of his whereabouts, perhaps Avram's hope for the future was rekindled. Perhaps his gratitude toward Og abounded. And though Og spoke one thing, and Avram heard another, the reward for the impact on Avram's peace of mind was amazingly powerful.

We often make light of actions and ramifications. The Torah tells us this week, in a saga that ends five books and some four hundred years later, that small tidings travel a very long distance. © 2013 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org



"Just imagine, our posterity will be as numerous as the stars -- and I'm going to put you in charge of remembering birthdays!"