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Dear Yeshivat Har Etzion and Migdal Oz Bogrim and Bogrot,

For many of us, the time that we spent learning in our respective institutions formed part, or much, of our identities as Bnei and Bnot Torah. The values on which these institutions are based continue to guide our lives and inspire us to action in many areas. Of these values, harbatsat Torah, concern for and commitment to the Jewish people and the enterprise of individual and unique Torah study, occupy a central place in our worldview.

In recognition of these principles, we would like to announce a new initiative that we hope will further cement our connection to one another, to our Batei Medrash and to the Torah as a whole. This endeavor, entitled Harerei Etzion, is a monthly publication of divrei Torah on the Parsha written by the faculty of Gush and Migdal Oz, as well as college, graduate and post graduate bogrim and bogrot.

The publication will cover all of the Parshiyot for that particular month and we encourage everyone to sign up for a devar Torah. To sign up for a Parsha, please enter your information [here](#).

We hope that Harerei Etzion becomes a source of vibrant, engaging Torah that strengthens our Yeshiva community and by extension, the Jewish nation as a whole.

Best,

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ADAM I, ADAM II, GAN EDEN, KAYIN AND HEVEL: AN EXTENDED TALE OF TWO MISSIONS

RACHEL FRIEDMAN MIGDAL OZ '10-'12

The two distinct accounts of creation presented respectively in Bereshit chapter 1 and Bereshit chapter 2 have long been material for myriads of biblical interpretations and philosophical hypotheses. Most notable among them, perhaps, is the theory that R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik posits in *Lonely Man of Faith*; that Adam in chapter I and Adam in chapter II represent “two fathers of mankind, two types, two representatives of humanity.”¹ A glance at the textual differences between each “Adam” reveals that the dichotomy does not end in the second chapter of Bereshit, but spills over into later narrative in the parasha. Understanding the expulsion from Gan Eden and the conflict of Kayin and Hevel in light of the first two chapters of creation can prove helpful in portraying the thematic unity of Parashat Bereshit.

Two principle differences, as noted by R. Soloveitchik and others, between Adam I and Adam II lie in their methods of creation and their missions. While Adam I is created directly by God with no medium other than God’s image², Adam II is created from the dust of the earth:

אֶת־הָאָדָם עֹפֵר מִן־הָאָדָם אֲלָקִים וַיַּצֵּר יְהוָה

“And Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground...”³

Adam I is commanded to exercise control over all other living creatures:

וַיֹּאמֶר לְהֶם אֱלֹקִים פְרוּ וּרְבוּ וְמַלְא֋וּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ וְכֱבֹשֵׁה וּרְדוּ בְּצִנְתְּ הַיּוֹם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמֶן וּבְכָל־חַיה הַרְמַשְׂתָּעֵל־הָאָרֶץ

“...and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea, the bird of the sky, and every living thing that moves on the earth.”⁴

In contrast, Adam II is charged with the mission of preserving the land of Gan Eden:

וַיַּקְרֵב יְהוָה אֱלֹקִים אֶת־הָאָדָם וַיַּגְּחֵה בְּגַן־עֵדָן לְעָבֶד הַלְּשָׁמֶרֶת

“Lord God took the man and placed him in the Garden of Eden, to work it and to guard it.”⁵

The fall from Gan Eden is apparently initiated by a failure of both missions; easy submission to the snake’s seduction marks a failure in exercising the responsibility invested in Adam I to establish authority over living things, while the obstruction of the physical tree marks a failure in the responsibility invested in Adam II to preserve the Garden. The “punishment” issued seems to be an attempt at reinforcing humanity’s ability to carry out both missions. The snake, the creature that marked the fall of Adam I, is demoted to become the most cursed of animals. Though God promises a future of discord between snakes and human beings, humans are guaranteed the upper hand in the relationship:

1 Soloveitchik, Joseph B. *The Lonely Man of Faith*. Random House Digital, Inc., 2009. page 13

2 *Bereshit* 1:27

3 *Bereshit* 2:7

4 *Bereshit* 1:28

5 *Bereshit* 2:15

וְאִבֵּה אָשִׁית, בֵּין וּבֵין נָאשָׂה, וּבֵין זָרַעַת, וּבֵין זָרַעַת הוּא יִשְׁוֹפֵךְ וְאָשָׂה, וְאַתָּה תִּשְׁוֹפֵנוּ עַקְבָּךְ

"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will pound your head, and you will bite his heel."⁶

In response to the failure of Adam II to preserve the land of paradise over which he was chosen to preside, humanity is charged with the task of preserving the Earth's land; though the land will be cursed and the task will be difficult, Adam is in no way permitted to shy away from this mission. The sole destination and purpose of his expulsion, rather, is the land:

וַיַּשְׁלַח־הָאֱלֹהִים יְהוָה קָרְבָּן לְעָבֵד, אֶת־הָאָדָם, אֲשֶׁר לְקָחָה, מִשְׁם

"And Hashem banished him from the Garden of Eden, to work the soil from which he was taken."⁷

With this background in mind, the narrative of Kayin and Hevel can be read as a tale of two individuals who embody two different missions, and the tragic clash that ensues when one fails to recognize the limits of his task. Kayin is established as an "oved adamah," clearly continuing Adam II's charge to work the land, while Hevel, as a shepherd, takes on Adam I's mission of exercising control over living creatures. Rashi's emphasis on the mediocrity of Kayin's offering in comparison to that of Hevel's⁸ gains additional significance in light of the failure each brother is intended to rectify. Hevel's act of taking the best of his flock is more than simply a gratifying experience for God - it is the ultimate display of fulfilled purpose. Hevel's parents succumbed to the control of another creature, but Hevel's offering demonstrates a rectification of that sin and an internalization of Adam I's original command to control all living things. The rejection of Kayin's offering sparks a raging internal fury. He resorts to killing Hevel in a desperate attempt to establish the control that Hevel exhibited, seeing the ability to eradicate life as the ultimate manifestation of the mission to dominate the living. God's rebuke makes clear that the root of Kayin's flaw lies in his failure to respect the boundaries of his mission and Hevel's. Hevel's blood, God explains to Kayin, is shouting "min ha'adamah," the object you were charged with preserving. Total abandonment of his mission results in increased difficulty in fulfilling his originally intended purpose:

וְעַתָּה אָרוֹר אַתָּה מִן־הָאָדָם הָאֲשֶׁר פָּצַת אֶת־פִּיהָ לְקַמְתָּ אֶת־זְמַנִּי אֲחֵיךְ מִזְבֵּחַ
כִּי תַּعֲבֹד אֶת־הָאָדָם לְאַזְטִסְפָּה תִּתְכַּחַת לְךָ נָעַנְד תְּהִיה בָּאָרֶץ

"Therefore, you are cursed more than the ground, which opened wide its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand.

When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. You shall become a vagrant and a wanderer on earth."⁹

Kayin's mistake cannot be fully rectified. Much like his parents, his initial sin seems to permanently corrupt and warp the mission that was first entrusted to him. These parallels afford the entire parasha of Bereshit a recurring theme and structure.

6 Bereshit 3:15

7 Bereshit 3:23

8 While the *pasuk* is careful to mention that *Hevel* brought from the best of his flock, *Kayin* brought merely "from the fruits of the ground." This seems to be the basis of *Rashi's* insight.

9 Bereshit 4:11-12

KAYIN AND HEVEL: A NEW PERSPECTIVE

TUVY MILLER YESHIVAT HAR ETZION '10-'12

The fourth chapter of Bereshit opens with the familiar story of the birth of Kayin and Hevel, the first major event that occurs in the post-Eden world. The children become adults and Kayin, the farmer, brings a gift of produce to God, while Hevel, the shepherd, offers the choicest of his flock. God looks favorably upon Hevel's gift, while rejecting that of Kayin. As a result of this, Kayin kills Hevel, incurs God's wrath and is sentenced to live life as a wanderer.

This story, which seems relatively straightforward, in actuality abounds with ambiguity and mystery. Upon Kayin's birth, Hava offers an enigmatic explanation for his name, but remains silent after Hevel's birth. Later on, for no apparent reason, the brothers decided to offer sacrifices to God. Furthermore, it remains unclear as to why God favors one offering over the other. Hevel's murder occurs under hazy circumstances and Kayin's motives require analysis. This list serves only as a sampling of the varied literary, thematic and conceptual problems in this episode.

The point of departure in addressing these challenges will be a piece in Moreh Nevukhim¹ where Rambam discusses the difference between the pre-sin existence and the post-sin existence. Rambam explains that when Adam and Hava were created "Betselem Elokim," God endowed them with a sekhel, an internal and natural wisdom, which allowed them to differentiate between Emet and Sheker. Interestingly, says Rambam, in this state they were not influenced by "mefursamot."² In Rambam's parlance³, this refers to those things that are relative and change depending on their cultural milieu. After the sin, Adam and Hava moved out of that framework and viewed the world through the lens of Tov and Rah. Their decisions, under the pressure of relativity, were not as clear as before.⁴

R. Yaakov Medan⁵ explains Rambam's assertion in terms of the practical nature of Adam and Hava's decision-making abilities. Before the sin, humanity faced one of two choices. To choose Emet meant that people made their decisions based upon what would draw them closer to God. For people who could not bring themselves to live by God's command, they chose Sheker, and therefore made choices that brought them farther away from God. After the sin, Adam and Hava existed in a system of Tov and Rah. The choices that they had to make, which were previously straightforward and clear, instead became more complex and murky. Other factors, such as emotion and circumstance, became relevant and caused the decision making process to become more difficult. It was no longer a clear choice between traveling closer to God and moving farther away from Him.

Rambam's comments, together with R. Medan's addition, serve as an appropriate framework within which to start analyzing the pesukim, beginning with the perek's opening line.

וְהָאָדָם יִדַּע אֲתָּה חֶוֶה אֲשֶׁר־וְפָהָר וְתַלֵּד אֲתָּה קַיִן

And Adam knew his wife, Hava, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Kayin⁶

1 1: 2

2 "Apparent truths". See Guide for the Perplexed, 2nd Ed. 1904, M. Friedlander trans.

3 At least according to R. Kapah's understanding in his notes to the Mossad HaRav Kook edition.

4 The example that R. Kapah brings is that the arayot that are forbidden for the Jewish people are not necessarily viewed in the same way in other cultures and other religions.

5 Rosh Yeshiva at Yeshivat Har Etzion. This explanation of Rambam was presented in a shiur that he gave on Simhat Torah 5772/2011

6 My own translation



Rashi⁷ notes that Adam ‘knew’ his wife in the past tense and he therefore claims that Hava both conceived and gave birth to Kayin in the garden before the episode of the Ets HaDa’at. Logically, it seems that Kayin experienced the idyllic, pastoral existence of the garden and possibly helped Adam fulfill his caretaking responsibilities. Kayin was born into a world of Emet and Sheker, one that he never left. This is based on the simple fact that, unlike his parents, Kayin never ate from the Ets HaDa’at.⁸ What this means is that by eating from the Ets HaDa’at, Adam and Hava moved from an existence of Emet and Sheker to one of Tov and Rah, while Kayin, not having eaten from the tree, remained in the world of Emet and Sheker.

This perspective now casts the story in a different light. From the outset, the perspective clarifies the meanings behind Kayin’s and Hevel’s names. Hava’s explanation behind Kayin’s name is that:

I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord⁹

קָנִיתִי אֶישׁ אֶת יְהוָה

What is the significance of Kayin’s name? Rashi and Ramban differ regarding this question. Rashi¹⁰ understands that Kayin’s name expressed Hava’s pride at having created something. God created during the six days of creation and now in giving birth, she too acted as a creator. Ramban,¹¹ on the other hand, believes that Hava intended to have Kayin serve as the family representative to God even after she and Adam had died. Ramban’s understanding fits nicely with this new understanding of Kayin’s birth and mindset. It would seem that since Kayin still existed on the plane of Emet and Sheker, he was charged with reclaiming the unsullied connection to God that his parents had lost.

For Hevel’s name the Torah gives no explanation. This is because Hevel is born after the banishment from the garden, amidst an atmosphere of despair and hopelessness. He is the child of Adam and Hava once they have shifted into the mode of Tov and Rah and therefore he cannot be the one to bring them back to the pre-sin state. They see no purpose for him and can do nothing more than express the futility of his existence by naming him Hevel.¹²

Immediately thereafter, the Torah mentions the professions that each brother chose to pursue, Kayin as a farmer and Hevel a shepherd. Based on the understanding that Kayin still existed in a state of Emet and Sheker, it makes sense that he chose to be a farmer. Kayin was charged with bringing humanity back to the existence of Emet and Sheker. After having witnessed his parent’s fall and heard God’s curse upon the land, farming was a logical choice. In Kayin’s mind, by submitting himself to God’s will and toiling over the cursed land, he could somehow rectify his parent’s sin and return humanity to its original existence.

Hevel, on the other hand, did not have any of these considerations in mind. As Seforno explains,¹³ Hevel chose shepherding because it was more advanced and was more intellectually taxing than farming. He was interested in utilizing his innate talents and creativity, qualities that only had innate value¹⁴ in a world where humanity was no longer solely focused on moving towards or away from God. Not having experienced the pre-sin life or having witnessed the fall of humanity, Hevel wanted to maximize his personal fulfillment and did not see any reason to interact with the cursed ground.

7 s.v. “veha’adam yadah”. Based, it would seem, on Sanhedrin 38b

8 The Torah records the fact that Adam and Hava ate from the tree, but never mentions that Kayin did so. Since he was there at the time that the sin occurred, the Torah would have mentioned the fact that he too ate from the tree. To elaborate, if Kayin had eaten from the Tree, this would have been a significant event, just as it was for his parents and therefore, the Torah should have recorded it. Kayin’s absence until the beginning of this perek suggests that while he may have been alive, he did nothing of significance. This is in accordance with the opinion of Tosafot, Sanhedrin 38b, s.v. “vayerdu arba’ah”,

9 4:1. JPS translation

10 s.v. “et Hashem”

11 s.v. “et Hashem”

12 Lit. futility, hopelessness

13 Meaning that it would be valuable to exercise these qualities for their own sake, not just to move closer to God.



The moment in the narrative that best exemplifies this dynamic between Kayin and Hevel is when the brothers offer sacrifices to God. At first glance, their respective choice of korban seems to make sense given their professions, but this new approach indicates differently. Kayin, operating in the framework of Emet and Sheker, decided to bring a sacrifice to God for one purpose: to come closer to Him. Kayin did not understand the concept of “good” and “bad” in general and specifically as it related to quality. From his perspective, an object’s quality was determined by its ability to bring one closer to God, not by anything else. For Kayin, there was no difference between the highest-grade produce and the rotten bits and pieces at the bottom of the heap. It was for this reason that he did not bring the ‘best’ of his produce to God. His offering was not a calculated step to avoid giving the best, but rather the result of a completely different understanding of the world.

Having been born into a world of Tov and Rah, Hevel had a different perspective. He understood that when bringing an offering to God, only the highest quality would suffice. Hevel slaughtered the finest of his flock, the choicest firstborn animals. This was because Hevel understood what the “best” was. He understood the inherent difference in quality between “good” and “bad,” independent of its role in bringing one close to God.

Kayin’s reaction to the rejection of his korban is as follows:

וַיֹּרֶא קַיִן מֵאָד נִפְלֹא פָנָיו

The pasuk describes two phenomena: Kayin’s anger and the “falling of his face.” The anger is understandable due to the failure of his attempt to achieve closeness to God. The nefillat panim¹⁴ connotes a sense of disappointment, bewilderment, and confusion. More significant than Kayin’s anger is his confusion. Operating within a framework of Emet and Sheker, he assumed that this was the appropriate way to approach God and after it proved unsuccessful, Kayin was left with significant questions regarding his existence and way of life.

God’s response to Kayin is critical to understanding the narrative from this different perspective:

הַלֹּא אֵם תִּיטַב שְׁאת וְאֵם לֹא תִּיטַב לְפָתַח חֶטְאת רְבָץ וְאֵלֶיךָ תִּשְׁוֹקֵת וְאַתָּה תִּמְשֵׁל בָּזֶה 15

God’s message to Kayin was that the terms of existence have changed and that Kayin’s previous assumption, that he was living in a world of Emet and Sheker, was incorrect. After Adam and Hava ate from the Ets HaDa’at, God and humankind could no longer relate on the plane of Emet and Sheker. Instead, the relationship shifted to one of Tov and Rah, the mode in which everyone, except Kayin, had already been operating. Since Kayin never ate from the Ets HaDa’at, he continued to view life through the lens of Emet and Sheker, unaware, until now, of the change that had been wrought in the world. This understanding has particularly solid grounding in the second verse:

הַלֹּא אֵם תִּיטַב שְׁאת

If you do **good** then you will be exalted.¹⁶

God is telling Kayin that he must view the world through the lens of Tov and Rah, good and bad, because Emet and Sheker are no longer viable options. The word “תָּאַשׁ” is somewhat difficult to translate, but doing so will show

14 12:4:2, s.v. “vayehi Hevel roeh tson”

Lit. falling of the face

15 4:7

16 4:7



that this reading is indeed correct. While some explain that this refers to teshuva,¹⁷ I would like to suggest a different possibility. In Parashat Vayehi, when Yaakov blesses his sons, Reuven's berakha begins as follows:

ראובן בָּכֶרֶת אַפְתָה פְּחִי וְרָאשִׁית אֹנוֹן יִתֵּר שְׁאת וַיִּתֵּר עַז --

Reuven you are my firstborn, my might and my initial strength,¹⁸ endowed with abundant **s'eit** and might.¹⁹

Ramban,²⁰ in his explanation of the word “שְׁאת” says that it means exaltedness and greatness. Kayin lived with the mission of bringing himself and his family closer to God, nearer to where they once were. His goal was to bring them higher and to a more exalted level of spiritual closeness. God was telling him that this is indeed a noble pursuit, one which finds favor in His eyes, but can now only be accomplished through Tov and Rah.

The continuation of the pasuk presents what will happen if Kayin is unable to follow God's command:

וְאִם לֹא תִּטְבִּיב לְפָתָח חֲטֹאת בְּצָא אַלְיכָ

And if you do not do good, then the sin is crouching at the opening and it is thirsting for you, and you must rule over it.

If Kayin decides not to choose the existence of Tov and Rah, then the sin is crouching and is desirous of devouring him. It makes sense that this is referring to the sin of Adam and Hava. If Kayin does not accept this new framework, he will be consumed by the sin that effected the change in the first place. This was a sin of “תשׁוֹקָה” a sin of desire, of passion. It is this beast of desire that lies in wait to pounce on Kayin if he does not accept Tov and Rah. This decision is so crucial for Kayin's continued existence that God tells him “*וְאַתָּה תִמְשַׁל בָּו*” that you must rule over this sin. Kayin must make the proper choice and must conquer this force of desire in order to continue with his mission.

Kayin was silent following God's exhortation and did not offer a response. The next event recorded is the murder of Hevel. Kayin and Hevel were in the field, presumably because they both worked there. Kayin said something to his brother, but the Torah is silent as to the content of their conversation.²¹ Whatever words passed between the two of them led the situation to quickly spin out of control. One possible explanation for Kayin's anger is as follows. Charged with the task of bringing humanity back to its original relationship with God, Kayin felt this sense of mission very keenly. Additionally, unlike Hevel, Kayin experienced the Garden in its complete splendor. The fact that Hevel's sacrifice was accepted and his was not ignited in Kayin a fierce jealousy. It could very well be that whatever their conversation was touched upon this jealousy and sent Kayin off the edge.

At this point, Kayin, like his parents before him, was faced with a critical choice. He could let violent passion overtake him and dictate his actions or he could control that powerful emotion and stay his hand. This moment was, for Kayin, an “Ets HaDa'at” moment. Now, operating in the realm of Tov and Rah, he had to make the decision between the two in the same way that Adam and Hava had to choose between Emet and Sheker. If Kayin chose Toy, he would reassert his role as the one to bring humanity closer to God, back to what once was. If he decided otherwise, there would once again be an irrevocable and fundamental change in the way that humankind related to God and to the world around them.

17 Radak, s.v. “halo im tetiv se'et”

18 Based on the Artscroll and JPS translations.

19 Bereshit 49:3

20 s.v. “Reuven bekhorati ata”

21 Interestingly, R. Saadya Gaon, Esther 1:18 (cited in Torat Hayim Humash: Bereshit, Mossad HaRav Kook pp. 71, n. 50), comments that whenever the Torah does not divulge details of a conversation, it means that they are not terribly important. Based on this, one could understand that the very fact that Kayin and Hevel were having a conversation is what is important for the story. In a Tov and Rah existence, personal conversation is important in and of itself and it was in this context that Kayin was forced to make his choice.



Pouncing upon Hevel and murdering him, Kayin's choice was quite clear. The world was now set in a mode of Tov and Rah and returning to Emet and Sheker had become infinitely more difficult, if not impossible. Kayin's choice is emphasized in the pesukim later on in the parasha, specifically surrounding the birth of Shet.²² Furthermore, when Lemekh tells his wives about the murder that he perpetrated,²³ Rashi²⁴ comments that the person that Lemekh killed was none other than Kayin.²⁵ Kayin's choice at his "Ets HaDa'at" reverberated many years later and proved fatal for him as well.²⁶

All of this lasted until the birth of Noah. Noah's family expressed²⁷ the fact that he would give them relief from toiling the cursed land. Rashi²⁸ explains that until Noah, no one had farming equipment with which to clear and plow the land. Noah developed implements that made the arduous agricultural process significantly easier. This is a closing of sorts to the Kayin narrative. Kayin worked the land, presumably without any mechanical assistance, in order to bring humanity back to the Emet and Sheker relationship of old. After his failure, the world was plunged into despair. Where were purpose and meaning to be found? How were mortals supposed to grapple with the reality that regaining the original relationship was impossible?

Noah realized that his predecessors had been mistaken. The creative forces contained within the human being needed to be utilized to improve the world and make the human experience richer and better. Additionally, Noah understood that while it might not be possible to return to the pre-sin state relationship with God, humankind still had to strive to come closer to Him. Given that their actions did not naturally tend towards this end, Noach decided to set an example and show people that they had to actively focus themselves on this goal. He used his creativity and ingenuity and directed his abilities towards the land, the one reminder of what had gone wrong. By creating the farming tools, Noah confronted the reality that things really had changed and that the only way for people to come closer to God was for them to utilize their creative forces and improve the world that He had given them.²⁹

22 See Bereshit 4:25. Shet is the new son who will attempt to continue Adam's legacy in a world left desolate by Kayin's decision to murder Hevel.

23 Bereshit 4:23-24

24 4:23, s.v. "shema'an koli"

25 This is especially apparent from "ki shivatayim yukam Kayin" in pasuk 24. This is very similar to the language used in 4:15 when God speaks to Kayin after Hevel's murder.

26 See Bereshit 4:20-22 about Yaval, Yuval and Tuval Kayin. Mired in a world of Tov and Rah, the generations that follow Kayin made some attempts to live within the world that he left them, but no one directly confronted the cursed ground and tried to use their creativity to subdue it.

27 5:29

28 ibid. s.v. "zeh yenahamenu"

29 The fact that Noah charted a new path for the people of his generation might explain why he was charged with remaking the course of history after the Flood had destroyed the entire world. He had already displayed initiative and prowess in his previous endeavor and it is possible that God wanted Noah to utilize his abilities yet again. The irony is that while Noah may have been successful in developing farming implements, his efforts after the Flood did not yield the same fruitful results.

RECONSIDERING CREATION

JONATHAN ZIRING YESHIVAT HAR ETZION '06

Hazal understand the Mabul and Tower of Bavel to have been watershed moments in the cosmic perspective of humanity. As is well known, there is an inherent tension regarding the value of the human being:

מה אָנוֹשׁ כִּי תְזַכֵּנוּ וְבָנָא אָדָם כִּי תִפְקַדֵּנוּ: וְתַחֲסִירָהוּ פָּעֵיט מְלָאָהִים וְכָבוֹד וְהַדָּר תַּעֲטֶרֶהוּ:

"What is man that You have been mindful of him, mortal man that you have taken note of him: That You have made him little less than divine and adorned him with glory and majesty."¹

Human beings could have been fundamentally insignificant, but God elevated them to the level slightly below that of the angels.² As Morenu VeRabbenu R. Aharon Lichtenstein notes:

"One cannot understand the Jewish position [regarding the value of man]... without seeing the entire passage—or rather, without regarding it as a unitary whole; without seeing man both as he might be independently, naked in his natural insignificance, and as he exists through his relation to God, invested with majesty and power. The whole of Halakhah rests upon this vision."³

The chapter as a whole asks us to reflect on the vastness of the cosmos and humanity's insignificance in the big picture.

Hazal present a Midrashic vision that offers another angle needed for a full worldview. First, Hazal focus not on the human being's place in nature, but rather on their questionable value as ethical characters. These verses in Tehillim stress the human being's sinfulness on the one hand, and their potential for greatness on the other. Second, Hazal note that these two poles often do not seem to complement each other – but seem like two opposing visions. Exegetically, Hazal present them as the position of the angels versus that of God when humanity was created. The Talmud in Sanhedrin 38b envisions a dispute – the angels challenged God when He decided to make humanity, arguing that they are sinful and therefore worthless. To silence their objections, God had to destroy several groups of angels, until a group decided not to challenge Him. Even when the final group desisted from their challenges, it was on the grounds that "it is Your world, do what You want." In other words, they did not understand or agree with the decision, but they relinquished the idea of changing God's mind.

The Gemara notes, however, that the angels were given fresh ammunition during the generations of the flood and the tower of Bavel. When humanity as a whole sank to the levels of depravity that forced God to restart the world and reinvent civilization, God was forced to face the hard facts, as it were, about human beings' true nature. In the words of the Midrash⁴ – during these times, God said, "I now agree with the words of the angels who said 'what is man that You should be mindful of him?'"

1 *Tehillim* 8:5-6. All translations are from the JPS Tanakh.

2 *Rashi* ad loc., *Radak* ad loc., *Metsudot* ad loc.

3 "'Mah Enosh': Reflections on the Relation between Judaism and Humanism," *Torah u-Madda Journal* 14, 2006-2007, p. 8

4 *Bereshit Rabba* 31:12



Hazal describe this ongoing debate to sharpen the proper perspective we must have of ourselves. God did not simply imbue the human being with a fundamental, inalienable superiority. Instead, He invested human beings with opportunities for greatness, free choice, and an intricate moral and religious system where we can exercise our choice for good or ill. God's defense against the angels was not an affirmation that humanity was intrinsically better than the angels believed, but rather an expression of the belief that the human being could become great. However, when we sin, we, as it were, let God down, violating His trust and dashing His hopes. By not living up to our potential, we frustrate the Divine plan in creation.⁵

The Talmud adds yet another aspect to consider. The Talmudic version of this debate, unlike the Midrashic one, does not end with God acquiescing to the angels. Instead, when a new group of angels asserts that the original angels were vindicated by virtue of humanity's sinfulness, God responds with a verse from Yeshayahu:

ועד זקננה אני הוּא ועַד שִׁיבָה אַנְיָן עֲשֵׂיתִי וְאַנְיָן אָשָׁא וְאַנְיָן אָסְבָל וְאַמְלִיטָן:

"Till you grow old, I will still be the same; when you turn Gray, it is I who will carry; I was the Maker, and I will be the Bearer and I will carry and rescue."⁶

Here God does not give in. He admits that humanity is not perfect. Human beings sin. However, as He created human beings, He mercifully allows them to survive even when they have failed. God admits the human being's ethical-religious frailty, but allows them to continue, hoping that they will eventually reach their potential. Hazal understood that God gave humanity many chances to repent before actually bringing the flood,⁷ hoping that they would actualize the elevated potential in them.

Hazal's depictions of these heavenly conversations highlight how the stories of human failure in the Torah require us to understand our own limits and potential, as well as the graciousness that God has shown us by giving us continual opportunities to reach greatness.

5 Many other Midrashic sources stress this point, but this is not the place for a full exposition.

6 *Yeshayahu* 46:4

7 See, for example, *Bereshit Rabbah* 30.

TERAH'S JOURNEY^{1*}

TERRY NOVETSKY YESHIVAT HAR ETZION '80

Parashat Noah concludes with a brief, enigmatic and oft-ignored narrative.

וַיָּקֹחַ תְּרֵה אֶת־אֶבְרָם בֶּן־וֹ, וְאֶת־לֹוט בֶּן־הָרָן בֶּן־בָּנָו, וְאֶת שְׁרֵי כְּלָתוֹ, אֲשֶׁת אֶבְרָם בֶּן־וֹ; וַיֵּצְאוּ אֲתֶם מִאָרֶץ כָּשָׂדִים, לְלַכֵּת אֶרְצָה כְּנָעָן,
וַיָּבֹאוּ עַד־חָרָן, וַיֵּשְׁבּוּ שָׁם: וַיְהִי יְמִי־תְּרֵה, חִמְשׁ שָׁנִים וּמְאֹתִים שָׁנָה; וַיִּמְתַּחַת פְּרָחָה, בְּחָרָן.
בראשית יא: לא-לב

And Terah took Avram his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his son's son, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Avram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there. And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years; and Terah died in Haran.²

Many commentators were deeply troubled by this prequel of sorts - of the apparent existence of a journey to Canaan independent of and predating the Divine command to Avram, that appears a mere few verses later at the beginning of Chapter 12.³ After all, if Terah truly commenced the 'journey of destiny' does that not diminish the *sui generis* nature of Avram's great passage into Canaan? Further, can it be that the Divine command of Lekh Lekha constituted a mere extension of Terah's prior personal prerogative? Terah, as we know him, is a minor character at best, and is much maligned in the Medrash.⁴ Can we even utter the possibility that the great and fateful journey of Lekh Lekha was the mere fulfillment of Terah's aspirations?

Ibn Ezra is perhaps the most prominent commentator to essentially write Terah's western migration out of the text. Invoking "Ein mukdam ume'uchar baTorah," Ibn Ezra conflates two journeys into one - Terah is advancing no personal agenda - rather, he leaves Ur Casdim only at Avram's urging, and only following Avram's great and fateful prophesy.⁵ While Terah in this reading can perhaps be accorded some level of *de minimis* credit for his acquiescence and cooperation, he is emphatically neither a man of vision, nor of personal initiative. Despite the prominence accorded to Terah in Chapter 11, he remains an insignificant, perhaps even a negative,⁶ character and influence.⁷

1 * To Michali, on the occasion of her Aliyah.

2 Translation from JPS Tanakh

3 (בראשית יב:א) וַיֹּאמֶר הָאֱלֹהִים, לְךָ-לֹן מִצְרָאָה וּמִפְּלִדְתָּה וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ, אֶל-הָאָרֶץ, אֲשֶׁר אָרַאָךְ

4 See, e.g., the following:

וַיִּמְתֵּה הָרָן עַל פְּנֵי תְּרֵה אָבִיו, רַבִּי חַיָּא בֶּן בְּרִיהָ דָרַב אֶדָּא דִיפּוֹ תְּרֵה עֲזָב צְלָמִים הֵיה (בראשית רבה פרשנה פרשה לה:יג)
וַיִּמְתֵּה הָרָן עַל פְּנֵי תְּרֵה אָבִיו. בְּחִי אָבִיו מֵת לְפִי שְׁהַשְׁלִיכוּ אֶת אֶבְרָהָם לְכָבֵשׁ אֶת שָׂלֹום, הַיּוֹ כָּלִם אָוֹמְרִים עַל הָרָן לְפִי שְׁהִיא עֲזָבָה לְאַשׁ לְכָךְ נְשָׂא אֶת
פְּנִים לְאֶבְרָהָם שְׁבָיל אַחֲיו וְלְאַחֲרֵי הָאָוֹר, מֵהָעֲשָׂה הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא הַוֹּצִיא שְׁבֵיב אֲשֶׁר מִן הַכְּבָשׁ וְהַרג את הָרָן: תְּרֵה שְׁהָרְתָה כָּעֵס הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא עַל
עֲזָבָה עַל פְּנֵי תְּרֵה אָבִיו (מדרש אגדה בראשית פרק יא:כח)

זאת חקצת זה שאמר הכתוב (איוב יד) מי יתַּעֲמֹד טָמֵא לְאַחֲד, כַּגּוֹן אֶבְרָהָם מִתְרָח, חִזְקִיהָ מִאָחֹז, יַעֲשֵׂה מִאָמָן, מַרְדְּכִי מִשְׁמָעִי, יִשְׂרָאֵל מִעוּבָדִי כּוֹכְבִּים, הָעוֹלָם
הַבָּא מְעוּלָם הַזֶּה (במדבר רבה פרשנת חקצת פרשנה יט)

5 See his commentary on

בראשית יב:כט:

והנכוּ בעניינו שפרשת לך לך שאמור השם לאברהם קודם זה הפסוק שהוא ויקח תורה....והעד שאמר הכתוב ללקת ארץך וכאשׁר בא תרה אל ח'ר, ישר המקומ בעניינו, וישב שם ומת. ואין מוקדם ומואחר בתורה:

6 For a splendid reading of Terah's complex character, see note 16, below discussing the Rav's presentation in Abraham's Journey (Toras HoRav Foundation, 2008, pages 51-57).

7 The "Single Journey" approach is presented in an even more stark form by Radak, who similarly sees no decision-making role for Terah in this journey. Terah is a mere tag along who receives prominence at the end of Chapter 11 for a wholly unrelated and extrinsic motivation - Kibud Av.

וַיִּקְחַת תְּרֵה - אחר שאמר האל לאברהם לך לך, ואמר אברהם לרתרה אביו בשם האל, כי האל צווהו לצאת מן הארץ נתרצה לדבר בנו ויצא עמו ואחר שנתרצה לצאת תלה עיקר המעשה בו כי הוא האב והיצאים בנים לו... ויצאו אתם - כאן תלה היציאה באברהם כי הוא היה עיקר כי לו היה הציווי (ובאמת אשתו עמו) ויצאו

Consistent with the minor and inconsequential nature of the Terah narrative advanced by this perspective, Terah joins Avram only on the first leg of Avram's Journey from Ur Casdim, and no further. Practically, but more so, thematically, Terah's journey ends in Haran - aspirations notwithstanding, he never enters Canaan.

This "Single Journey" approach admittedly resolves the issues raised earlier, preserving the unique and auspicious calling to Avram in the beginning of Lekh Lekha by eliminating any independent initiative arising from Terah's departure. The cost of this approach, however, is equally if not more troubling.

First and foremost, the "Single Journey" approach does great violence to the simple meaning of the text. The Torah presents not one, but two very separate journeys; two journeys that share neither starting points nor end points. Further the Torah presents Terah and Avram with wholly distinct motivations, and their experiences yield starkly opposite results: Terah acts on his own with a clear objective that remains unsatisfied. Avram, by stark contrast, acts by Divine command, and while his objective is shrouded in mystery, his search ultimately achieves nothing short of a cataclysmic change to human history: the very commencement of the relationship of our People to its Land. A simple reading of the text can hardly combine these narratives as one and the same.

Further, the "Single Journey" approach inadvertently places Avram vulnerable to significant criticism. After all, if Avram was commanded to find the Divinely chosen land in Ur Casdim, how could he justify an interruption of the Divinely commanded journey - for many decades - in Haran? And Haran is no inconsequential rest stop on the ancient east-west Turnpike - it is Avram's self-described homeland. When Avram seeks a wife for his son, he sends his servant "to my homeland, my birthplace"⁸ - and as we discover a mere few verses later that his reference is to Aram Naharim.⁹ Ur Casdim is the location of Avram's early years¹⁰ - the beginning of his journey undeniably starts there.¹¹ But home for Avram is undoubtedly Haran. In fact, reading Chapter 24 for our specific context, one can easily infer that Avram links the location of his initial revelation in Chapter 12 with the direction to his servant to return to Haran.¹²

For many and perhaps all of these reasons, many commentators, and specifically Ramban, rejected the "Single Narrative" approach.¹³ Ramban posited that Terah, from the family of Shem, originated from Haran and moved to Ur Casdim, ostensibly for economic opportunity. The move unfortunately turned into a series of familial calamities; sons dead, daughters barren.¹⁴ Terah's turn westward from Ur Casdim was in fact a return to his abandoned homeland.

Utilizing Ramban's perspective as a starting point, I would like to suggest a very plain reading of the text that provides a most compelling understanding that neither trivializes Terah's choice nor challenges the unique and singular nature of Avram's great historical journey.

Indeed, Terah moves his family from the awful cauldron of Ur Casdim. But why Canaan?¹⁵ After all, God did not speak to Terah - he was not fulfilling a Divine mission and the paucity of the text leaves us only with conjecture as to his motive.

(בראשית כד:ד) כי אל-ארצִי וְאל-מוֹלֵדֶת, תָּלֵן; וְלֹקַחְתָּ אֲשֶׁר, לְבָנִי לִיצְחָק

8

בראשית כד:

9

. For our purposes, I have assumed (consistent with Ramban here and elsewhere) a single identity for Haran, Aram Naharim and Padan Aram. While Haran may refer to a city and Aram Naharaim to a region, that is not germane to this presentation.

10 The location of Avram's birth is subject to dispute among the commentaries. While one might presume that it is Ur Casdim; Ramban, for one, thinks not. See, note 12, below.

בראשית טו:ז.

11

בראשית סו:ז.

12

בראשית יא:ח ר מב"ע על התורה,

13

ל-בראשית יא:כ.

14

15 Admittedly, one could argue that the citation of Canaan is an insignificant directional reference, not the specified place. This is not the approach favored by the commentators, and for good reason. Canaan is a consequential term in Bereshit. When the Torah wishes to refer to the westerly direction, it is more likely to utilize the proper term

See בראשית יג:יד; בראשית כח:יד. מה



I suggest that we understand Terah as a man filled with inspiration and sincere religious motivation - nothing even remotely approaching the revelation and Divine command experienced by Avram a mere few verses later, but meaningful and earnest all the same.¹⁶ Canaan for Terah also represented a spiritual objective, albeit ephemeral and ill defined. Perhaps the Land was always understood to have this unique quality,¹⁷ perhaps Terah perceived Canaan as the "not Ur Casdim" - a land physically and philosophically as far as he could travel before entering Egyptian territory.¹⁸ So Terah abandoned Ur Casdim in search of this higher ideal.

Alas, inspiration by its nature, while fierce in its clarity, is fragile and often fleeting. Ultimately, human frailty intervenes and Terah fails to fulfill his dreams. He establishes a new life for his family in Haran, one that barely resembles Ur Casdim.¹⁹ But, inspirations of the past notwithstanding, Terah never takes that final step. And thus ends the Terah journey narrative.

As the Ribono Shel Olam's command of Lekh Lekha follows, we yet again confront Ibn Ezra's question - was Avram merely continuing a path commenced by his father? At the most fundamental level, our response must be unequivocal and in the negative. The Divine imperative tolerates no ulterior motives - there simply cannot exist any notion of a transition between the 11th and 12th Chapters. Avram's journey indeed was *sui generis* - it begins and ends with the command of the Ribono Shel Olam to go - and Avram leaves without hesitation. Terah's prior aspirations are of absolutely no consequence in the face of Tsivui Hashem.

At another level, however, based on the textual challenges we have confronted earlier, our reading can and must be more complex. While neither mitigating nor denying the *sui generis* nature of Avram's journey, Avram also embarks on a second journey, the journey of a dutiful son fulfilling the dreams of his father. Avram's two journeys exist side-by-side - simultaneously fulfilled, but neither informing the other.

We thus can embrace and emphasize both the independence of Chapter 12, while also recognizing and valuing the transition from Chapter 11 to Chapter 12. By adopting a reading of two independent journeys, we preserve the integrity of both: The unique, Divine command of Lekh Lekha as well as Terah's personal and previously incomplete inspiration, in each case, fulfilled by Avram, Terah's son.

Much of classic literature concerns fathers and sons²⁰ and particularly the inherent tension in the father-son relationship. As a father faces his mortality, he painfully acknowledges his incapacity, or simple lack of will, to fulfill his own dreams except, he fervently hopes (and oft-times demands), through his son's reach beyond. At the same time, a son develops his independence as he arrives at the inevitable recognition of his father's shortcomings. Independence and progress, a son often perceives, requires breaking the shackles of his father's antiquated notions, shattering his worthless delusions. But, a fortunate son comes to recognize as a gift his opportunity to continue and build upon the path of his father's dreams to the point where they may have been taken, and to adopt, adapt and modify that path and

16 Of course, I am not suggesting that Terah's religious personality compares in any way to Avraham Avinu! Were we confined to only these limited journey narratives, one finds very significant distinctions between Terah and Avram. Terah is joined by only three individual family members while, in dramatic contrast, Avram takes in addition to Sarai and Lot

“אתה-הנְּפָשָׁת, אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂו בְּחֶרֶב-בראשית יב:י”

17 This, of course, is a common theme in Ramban. I express this as only a possible reading given that some have interpreted Ramban as articulating a kedushat Eretz Yisrael that is independent of, and consequently having primacy over, kedushat Am Yisrael. This raises troubling theological challenges often raised and articulated by Morenu R. Amital zt”l See, generally, Commitment and Complexity (Ktav 2008, at pages 22-30). See also Navon, Eretz Yisrael in Tanakh and Jewish Thought at <http://www.vbm-torah.org/yyerush/atz72-cn.htm>.

18 Either way, I posit that Terah's choice of destination was a deliberate one.

19 R. Soloveitchik's Abraham's Journey (Toras HoRav Foundation, 2008 at pages 51-57), identifies many of the concerns reflected above, with particular reference to Ramban's commentary, and provides a wonderful reading, but does not speak directly to the topic of my note. The Rav's focus is Terah's religious metamorphosis from an idol worshiper to a believer:

“The greatest story of a ba'al teshuva is told in the verse “And Terah took” - the spontaneous decision to abandon everything he had loved and defended, the change from an idolater into a member of Abraham's fellowship” (Abraham's Journey at p. 55).

The title of this note is in tribute to the Rav's presentation.

20 I utilize the phrase “fathers and sons” here with great reservation and for the sole purpose of evoking the many literary references and allusions that it carries. The far more appropriate phrase for our generation (and for me personally) is “parents and children.”



make it his own. We all know of these transitions fulfilled, and transitions failed.

In this light and upon reflection, we come to recognize Terah's experience as far from unique - it is after all, not merely the stuff of literature, but a most familiar theme in Tanakh, and repeated throughout generations of Jewish experience.

This is the essential narrative of fathers and sons; fathers who dream, and sons whose clarity of vision exceeds that of their fathers. The narrative of the fathers who commence the path towards a vision in earnest and with much resolve, but fall short, and the sons who, in their ultimate act of devotion, bring fulfillment to the dreams of their fathers.

Terah's journey is not the Journey of Destiny, but it is a journey of the human experience. It is the transition from generation to generation, in all of its too familiar frailties and shortcomings, as well as in its ultimate triumph and majesty.

HEARING THE CALL OF GOD IN LEKH LEKHA

RACHEL WEBER LESHAW MIGDAL OZ '09-'11

The opening pesukim of Parshat Lekh Lekha are some of the most exciting in the Torah. After two weeks of “introductory parshiyot” and long lists of genealogy, God tells Avraham to pick up and move to a new land. It is at this point that the reader has a sense that the real story is beginning. Since the times of Adam and Noach, whose stories ended on a slightly disappointing note, Avraham is seemingly the first person with whom God chooses to build a relationship. But why does he choose Avraham? Upon what is the relationship based?

When God spoke to Adam it was pretty clear as to why He chose him – there were no other humans on Earth. When it comes to Noach, the Torah explicitly explains to us why he was chosen. “Noach ish tzadik, tamim hayah bedorotav, et ha-Elokim hithalech Noach - Noach was a righteous man, perfect in his generation, Noach walked with God.”¹ If God only had Adam as a potential address for His message, and if Noach was so clearly exceptional among those of his generation, what was it that made Avraham special? What prompted God to choose Avraham? The Torah provides his lineage, but nothing else stands out or makes him unique before the command of “Lekh Lekha”.

This question has been asked many times, and is quoted in the name of Ramban by Sefat Emet. In his comments from Taf Reish Lamed Bet, Sefat Emet writes “Ramban hikshah shene’emar lekh lekha bli shenizkar mikodem hibato – Ramban found difficult that it says Lekh Lekha without previously mentioning God’s affection for Avraham.”² What did Avraham do to deserve this divine command? Is there anything that the Torah chose not to mention?

The answer, according to Sefat Emet is nothing; the Torah didn’t leave anything out, and Avraham did nothing special to deserve the command of “Lekh Lekha.” While this obviously seems counterintuitive, Sefat Emet provides a solution that not only answers the question, but also provides us with a challenge for our own lives. “Ki zeh atzmo ha-shevah she-shama zeh ha-ma’amar lekh lekha she-ne’emar me-Hashem yitbarach le-chol ha-anashim tamid.” The reason Avraham was special was only because he heard the command of “Lekh Lekha,” which God had been saying constantly to everyone in the world. According to this answer, everyone had the opportunity to be Avraham and to answer God’s call, but what made Avraham special was that he was the first to hear it.

This perspective is different from the traditional midrashim which tell stories of Avraham’s greatness from his youth. Instead, this answer asks the reader to assume that someone without any special background³ could be the founder of the Jewish people. What does that mean for us? It means that the call of God is out there, and we need to try and hear it. But how does one accomplish that goal?

A famous midrash about Avraham’s discovery of God may help provide some assistance. As mentioned above, the Torah does not provide the reader with any special information about Avraham’s background before “Lekh Lekha.” This means that the reader does not know how Avraham came to believe in God so wholeheartedly that he would leave his family behind to travel to an unknown land.⁴ The midrash in Bereshit Rabbah 39:1 provides a parable of

1 This is my own translation.

2 This is my own translation.

3 This answer assumes that before the command of *Lekh Lekha*, Avraham had no special qualities or background.

4 My father, Eli Weber, has suggested that the Torah didn’t describe this process because it wanted every person to imagine it however they need to. Various *midrashim* say that Avraham discovered God when he was three, or forty, or other ages. If he discovered God at the age of three, that implies that it was an innate and emotional process, as opposed to a more intellectual discovery at a later age. The Torah does not want to ruin the moment for the reader by telling us how it happened, because that would limit it. Instead it allows every person to imagine how it happened in a way that they can connect to.



a man who was travelling and came upon a bira doleket, a palace either illuminated or aflame. The man asks “Is it possible that this palace has no master?” The master of the palace then peers out of the window and responds that he is the master of the palace. Similarly, Avraham asked “Is it possible that this world has no master?” And God responded that He was the master.

This midrash ascribes Avraham’s discovery of God to recognizing that there must be someone in charge of the world. But what is the lesson of the parable? The key phrase seems to be “birah doleket,” a phrase with an ambiguous translation. It can either mean that the traveler saw a palace on fire or a palace all lit up. In my opinion, these two possibilities describe different paths towards the discovery of God. In one version we imagine the traveler coming across a palace on fire and being horrified – how could this palace be burning without anyone taking responsibility for it? Similarly, Avraham looked at the world and was disturbed by what he saw – the pain and suffering that constantly afflict humanity. He needed to believe that there was someone looking down on this world and taking responsibility for it, which is what prompted him to ask, “Who is in charge of this world?” However, the other translation leads to a completely different story. The traveler sees a beautiful palace, lit up in every window, and wants to know how it could be that this beauty exists without anyone in charge. Similarly, Avraham saw the beauty and wonder in nature, and knew that it could not just be by chance, but there must be a master, a God in heaven.

In *A Passion for Truth*,⁵ Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel acknowledges these two perspectives: “One may look upon the world with enthusiasm and absorb its wonder and radiant glory; one may also see and be shocked by its ugliness and evil.” In my opinion, the two readings of the midrash reflect the different dimensions people may see in the world, and one is not better than the other; both can lead people to God.

We began with the question of how Avraham heard the call of “Lekh Lekha” with no prior background, and answered that he heard it because he looked at the world. Through looking at the world, he knew that there must be a God. But we, who tend to look at the world every day, can ask: how do we use that perspective to become closer to God in our own lives?

The parable in Bereshit Rabbah does not say that a regular man saw the palace, but rather it says that he was a traveler. It is a traveler who sees new things and questions them. Avraham knew to look at the world as a traveler, as someone who has never seen the sights before, without any cynicism and preconceived notions. It was because of this unique “traveler” perspective that he was able to arrive at his conclusion.

When we walk through New York City and are confronted by homelessness, we often ignore it, because we see it every day. But how would a traveler perceive it? What would a traveler think? Personally, when I walk through Central Park in the spring, I often take it for granted, because I can visit it whenever I want. But what if it were the first time I saw tulips in bloom? Would it cause me to reflect on the beauty in God’s world? Would I hear the call of “Lekh Lekha”?

As I write this, it is Erev Shabbat, and on Saturday night we will begin saying selihot. We will cry out to God and sing, “Shema Hashem, koli ekra - Hear me God, as my voice calls out!”⁶ But as we ask God to hear our voice, we are striving to hear His. In this new year, we might all try to view the world as travelers, to see both its beauty and its unattractiveness, because when we notice these, we are one step closer to finding the Master of the Palace and to hearing His call.

5 Taken from the beginning of the section entitled *Isaiah and Job*. *A Passion for Truth* parallels and compares the thought of Reb Menachem Mendel of Kotzk and Danish theologian Soren Kierkegaard.

6 My own translation.

YITZCHAK AND SHIMSHON: EXPLORING THE PARALLELS

SARAH ROBINSON MIGDAL OZ '11-'12

Parashat Vayera opens with three traveling angels who relay news of Yitzchak's forthcoming birth. This information is not superfluous; occasionally the Tanakh relays the circumstances of a character's conception.¹ Strikingly, Yitzchak's conception story twins with that of Shimshon's – thus inviting the reader to compare and contrast the two.² This devar torah will explore the parallel.

Most obviously, the two stories share identical plotlines. Both Yitzchak's and Shimshon's parents suffered from childlessness. Angels informed both sets of parents of their child's forthcoming birth. Considering that Shimshon was to be a "Nazerite from birth" and Yitzchak was the medium to actualize God's promise of nationhood, both Shimshon and Yitzchak were born to be religious figures.

Their parents shared near-identical reactions upon hearing that they would conceive. Sarah laughed at the possibility of motherhood because she was too old to bear children.³ Like Sarah, Manoah was antagonistic and interrogated the angel.⁴ Unlike their spouses, Avraham and Eishet Manoah were silent throughout their encounters with the angel.

There is one key difference in Yitzchak's and Shimshon's conception stories: the stories differ in their chronologies. In Genesis 18, Avraham leaped at the opportunity to greet guests⁵ and to pamper them. Even in a drought, Avraham washed their feet⁶ and delegated Sarah and the na'ar to prepare a feast of delicacies. Even though Avraham was 99,⁷ he nonetheless rushed to prepare the food.⁸ Only after all this, angels announced that Sarah would give birth.⁹

However in Judges 13, the angel encountered Eishet Manoah and immediately told her the news. She did not greet the angel; she entertained his monologue in silence. Only after the angel returned and reiterated the message, Manoah offered food to the angel.

This difference in chronology indicates the opposing rationales for offering hachnasat orchim. Avraham and Sarah's impulsive kindness was indicative of their altruism, whereas Manoah waited to provide food because he was unsure of the angel's credence.¹⁰

1 Moshe in Exodus 2, Shemuel in Samuel I 1, etc.

2 I thank R. Jesse Horn who gave me the idea to compare these personalities. For more, listen to R' Horn's shiur "*Who is Shimshon and why does he have such a central role in Sefer Shoftim?*" on yutorah.com.

3 Genesis 18:12

4 Incidentally, in the interrogation, the angel commanded Manoah: "everything I commanded the woman – keep." This is nearly identical to "everything which Sarah commanded – listen to her." Both Avraham and Manoah were commanded to listen to their wives – which is quite uncommon in Tanach.

5 Genesis 18:2

6 Da'at Mikra on Genesis 18:2

7 Genesis 17:23

8 See "vayimaher" in Gen. 6, 7 and "vayikah" in Gen. 7, 8

9 Genesis 18:9

10 Judges 13:15. Note that when Eishet Manoah retrieves her husband, the verb is "vatimaher" (v.10), parallel to Avraham's "vayimaher" in Gen. 6 and 7. Note the usage of the word 'ish ha'elokim.' Also, the pasuk is explicit in saying that if Manoah believed that the person was an angel, he would not have offered food.



Strikingly, Yitzchak's and Shimshon's similarities extend beyond their conception stories. They suffered similar life-challenges and shared similar midot.

Both were bound and lost their eyesight. Yitzchak was bound at the akeda¹¹ and lost his eyesight in old age.¹² Shimshon was bound several times – by the people of Judah, Delilah, and the Pelishtim.¹³ In expressing their victory¹⁴ over Shimshon, the Pelishtim debilitated him further by blinding him.¹⁵

Both individuals were manipulated by the people who they loved most. Rivka took advantage of Yitzchak's blindness in order to secure the bechora blessing for Yaakov.¹⁶¹⁷ Shimshon's wife coaxed him into revealing the answer to the lion-honey riddle¹⁷ and Delilah coaxed Shimshon into sharing the secret source of his strength.¹⁸

Both are epitomized by their heroic strength – though Yitzchak's was internal while Shimshon's was external. Yitzchak refused his emotional impulses. Yitzchak remained in prayer as Rivka arrived¹⁹ (instead of greeting her) and merely “trembled” upon realizing that he misappropriated the bechora blessing to Yaakov²⁰ (instead of crying out). Shimshon had physical prowess. He singlehandedly killed a lion, killed a thousand men with a donkey's jawbone, carried the city-gate doors, and toppled a Pelishti temple.²¹ However, Shimshon lacked the emotional strength that Yitzchak had. The best example of this is when he told Delilah the secret source of his super-human strength. By the time she tried taking his power away three times, Shimshon must have known that she would make a fourth attempt. The toxic combination of Delilah's coaxing and Shimshon's weak emotional guard brought him to a state of self-destruction.

Shimshon and Yitzchak's personalities differed in another way: Yitzchak was an imprint of his father's life whereas Shimshon reinvented his position.²²

Yitzchak was successful because he accepted the Abrahamic tradition and lived a quiet life. Unlike his iconoclastic father who introduced monotheism, Yitzchak's purpose was to successfully transmit monotheism to the coming generation. And that's exactly what he did. Nearly everything he did echoed his father's actions.²³ Thus Yitzchak was a bridge, not a revolutionary.

Shimshon intentionally veered away from the mold. Shimshon understood that generation after generation of religio-military shoftim leaders did not end the battery of enemy attacks and therefore sought a new, more effective strategy to fend off the Pelishti enemy. He chose to work alone, hoping that terrorizing the Pelishtim by himself would be more effective than leading a formal war.

11 Genesis 22:9

12 Genesis 27:1

13 Judges 15:13, 16:8,12,21

14 Incidentally, when Shimshon was presented at the victory-party, the Pelishtim asked for him to “*L'sahek Lanu*” and he was “*VaYitzachech Lifneihem*” (Judges 16:25). It is not mere coincidence that the pasuk changes its lashon to Yitzchak's name when describing Shimshon's actions!

15 Judges 16:21

16 Genesis 27:8-10

17 Judges 14:17

18 Judges 16:15-16

19 Genesis 24:63, *Berakhot* 26b

20 Genesis 27:33

21 Judges 14:6, 15:15, 16:3, 16:30

22 Shimshon's failure to secure Am Yisrael's religious and political safety motivated a Machloket Rishonim regarding whether Shimshon was a shofet or not. Radak held that Shimshon was a shofet, albeit an unsuccessful one. Ralbag held that Shimshon was an officer, but not a shofet at all. See Radak on Judges 15:20 and Ralbag on Samuel I 4:9.

23 See Nachmanides on Genesis 12:6, “maaseh avot siman l'banim”



The strategy ultimately backfired and Shimshon was responsible for political-religious instability. Thus Shimshon's legacy is Pesel Mikha and Pilegesh BeGivah – two of Tanakh's darkest stories of Avodah Zarah, rape, murder, and war.

Shimshon was unable to motivate Am Yisrael to teshuva because Shimshon sought what was “good” in his “eyes.”²⁴ This is especially ironic considering that Shimshon’s life-long nezirut should have marked him as a religious icon.

These parallels are not mere coincidence. Why is this so? What does the Tanakh intend to teach through these incredible similarities?

These inextricably linked characters indicate what Shimshon could have become; instead of being remembered as a failure, his legacy could have been grand like Yitzchak our forefather. Shimshon did not seek inspiration from his forefather and forged his own path – thereby setting the stage for his own downfall. Just like Yitzchak was the bridge that solidified the Abrahamic tradition, Shimshon needed to secure political-religious safety in an era that begged for stability. Shimshon’s eventual demise, a horrible solitary death, symbolized his life of rugged determination to chart his own course coupled with failure due to the absence of an anchoring tradition.

²⁴ Judges 14:3, 7. This lashon is intentionally parallel to the language of “ein melech b’yisrael v’ish hayashar b’einav yaaseh.” Both Shimshon and Am Yisrael did what they thought was right, irrespective of Torah commandments. See Judges 17:6, 21:25

YERUSHALAYIM AND SEDOM

R. DR. JUDAH GOLDBERG YESHIVAT HAR ETZION '96-'98, '00-'01, '03-'05, '11-PRESENT

Parashat Vayera records the first stages of the transfer of power in the ancient land of Kena'an from the descendants of Ham to those of Shem, anticipated long before by their father, Noah.¹ The height of flourishing in Kena'an, represented by Sedom and its surrounding cities, is about to abruptly end, while the experience of the Akeda will introduce the first traces of an eternal Divine presence to Yerushalayim, anticipating the future spiritual capital that will be built around the Shekhina.²

The dichotomy between Sedom and Yerushalayim is not simply political, but spiritual as well. These two cities represent two competing ideologies of human civilization--two competing responses to the failed world of the Flood generation. Sedom, the descendants of Ham, looked at the lawlessness and utter chaos that led to the Flood and committed themselves zealously to the absolute, unyielding rule of civil law. Though Sedom has been immortalized in popular culture as a den of hedonic excess, an alternate reading describes the people of Sedom as rigid to a fault, to the point where no room for altruism or generosity exists. In Torah she-bi-khtav, the people of Sedom seethe at Lot for daring to extend his home to helpless travelers. And in Torah she-ba'al peh, our Sages label the attitude of "What's mine is mine and what's yours is yours"³ as "middat Sedom,"⁴ the mode of Sedom, for no place on Earth ever held more tightly or more inflexibly to that position.⁵

Yerushalayim, on the other hand, from its very founding offered humanity something different. As my friend and fellow boger yeshiva Professor David Shyovitz once pointed out, the juxtaposition of Sedom and Yerushalayim does not start in Parashat Vayera. Rather it can be traced back to Parashat Lekh Lekha, when the respective kings of Sedom and the city of "Shalem" greet Avraham upon his return from war. The king of Sedom, ever preoccupied with property rights, tells Avraham to keep all of the recovered booty, as he is technically entitled to it through his conquests, an attitude which Avraham flatly rejects.⁶ "Malki-Tsedek," on the other hand, whose name is literally translated as "king of righteousness" and is identified by our Sages as Shem, the son of Noah, spontaneously extends his blessings to Avraham and provides him and his men with food.⁷ Malki-Tsedek and his kingdom bring "tsedaka" to the world. From the perspective of Shem and his descendants, the Flood struck not so much because of an unlawful society, but rather because of a lack of compassion between humans. Indeed, the law is compassionate inasmuch as it protects the vulnerable, but it is intended as a floor, not as a ceiling, for how humans ought to interact with each other. Just as Shem responded to Noah's nakedness with empathy and sensitivity, in contrast to Ham's callousness,⁸ so too he continues to distance himself from Ham's children, creating an island of "tsedek" within their harsh landscape.

Avraham, a descendant of Shem, not only accepts his gifts but carries his legacy forward. Avraham's giving is boundless and uncontainable. On a scorching day, Avraham sits at his door, literally searching for someone for

1 See Rashi and Ramban to Bereshit 9:26

2 See Divrei ha-Yamim II 3:1 and Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Beit Ha-Behirah 2:1

3 All translations used are my own

4 Avot 5:10

5 See Ramban to Bereshit 18:5

6 Bereshit 14:21-22

7 ibid. 14:18-19

8 ibid. 9:22-23



whom he can provide.⁹ So deep is Avraham's need to give that it takes precedence over his own relationship with the Almighty, as Avraham interrupts a conversation with God in order to pursue three lonely desert travelers.¹⁰ Indeed, from Avraham we learn that it is better to imitate God, the ultimate source of beneficence, than to commune with Him.¹¹

When these same guests then head towards Sodom, God cannot hide his intentions for that city from Avraham precisely because, "I have chosen him in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they may keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice."¹² In other words, Avraham has been selected as the father of a new nation precisely because he represents the opposite of all that Sodom celebrates. Avraham will substitute "tsedek u-mishpat," justice blended with generosity, for Sodom's stark and bleak outlook. Yet, in total irony, Avraham prays for Sodom, asking for mercy for those who cannot even acknowledge such a possibility. Finally, Parashat Vayera closes with the marriage of Avraham's theological vision to the ethical legacy of Malki-Tsedek. Thus this capital of God is known forever after as "Yerushalayim," a conjunction of the name "Hashem Yireh" of the Akeda with Malki-Tsedek's "Shalem."¹³

Parashat Vayera (and Lekh Lekha before it), though, tells the story of a third character, who is caught between these two poles of Sodom and Yerushalayim. Lot, Avraham's nephew, lives among the people of Sodom but not quite with them. His values, a reflection of his uncle's, are an enigma to his neighbors, and yet he does not so easily separate himself from them either. It takes significant prodding on the part of the angels to convince Lot to evacuate, and when they instruct him to climb to the central mountain ridge of Israel, where Avraham and Malki-Tsedek reside, he negotiates a compromise that allows him to remain half-way, so-to-speak, between Sodom and Yerushalayim.¹⁴

But one cannot sit on a fence forever. While Lot never resolves his ambivalence, his children ultimately betray the values of Avraham and are therefore excluded from participating in the nation he founds:

"An Amoni or a Mo'avi shall not enter into the congregation of God ... because they met you not with bread and with water on the way, when you came forth out of Egypt; and because they hired Bil'am ben Be'or from Petor Aram Naharayim to curse you"¹⁵

As Ramban¹⁶ notes, these moral failings do not exist in a vacuum, but rather are judged against the specific backdrop of Lekh Lekha and Vayera:

"It seems to me that Scripture distanced these two brothers, who were the recipients of hessed from Avraham, as he had saved their father and mother from slaughter and captivity and in his merit God extracted them from the upheaval [of Sodom]. They should have reciprocated kindness to the Jews, but instead they responded with malice."

9 ibid. 18:1

10 ibid. 18:3

11 See *Shabbat* 127a

12 *Bereshit* 18:19; see also *Ramban* ibid.

13 See *Tosafot Ta'anit* 16a s.v. *har*

14 *Bereshit* 19:17-22

15 *Devarim* 23:4-5

16 ibid.



We can further note that the behavior of the nations of Amon and Mo'av reflects not only a lack of gratitude, but also constitutes a direct rebuttal of the practices of Malki-Tsedek and Avraham. While Malki-Tsedek and Avraham each offered both food and prayers to strangers, Amon and Moav denied refreshments to a weary nation and coordinated their gratuitous cursing. When we consider the decision of Amon and Mo'av in light of the dichotomy of Parashat Vayera, we understand well the association in Tsefaniah 2:9: "Mo'av shall be as Sodom, and the children of Amon as Amorah."

The story of Sodom and Yerushalayim does not end here but continues, multi-dimensionally, throughout Tanakh. On the one hand, Lot finds redemption through his descendant Ruth, who, by displaying hessed, the trait associated with Avraham, returns to her forbearer's roots and restores his lost potential. In contrast, Yeshayahu chillingly describes how Yerushalayim in his day had betrayed its identity—"How has the faithful city become a harlot! She that was full of justice, righteousness lodged in her, but now murderers!"¹⁷ —to the point where the competing capitals of Parashat Vayera were indistinguishable: "We were like Sodom; we were comparable to Amorah."¹⁸ To Yeshayahu's horror, Yerushalayim was turning into Sodom rather than replacing it, completely upending the very process that Avraham had initiated. Worse, Avraham's fusion of the ritual and the ethical, represented by the bookends of Parashat Vayera, had unraveled, leaving God to wonder, "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices" if the people did not simultaneously seek justice.

The final chapter on Yerushalayim, of course, is still unwritten. In a certain sense, it is entirely predictable, as proclaimed by Yeshayahu himself: "Zion shall be redeemed with justice, and her returnees with righteousness!"¹⁹ But the question remains—when and by whom? Will we eradicate "middat Sodom" from our hearts and our practices? Will we sanction gratuitous selfishness--legally and metaphorically, personally and communally—as our Sages instructed, "kofin al middat Sodom?"²⁰ Or will we continue to vacillate, like the progeny of Lot, between a spirit of generosity and an attitude of callousness? To paraphrase Lieutenant General Motta Gur's famous words, Yerushalayim is, once again, "in our hands." What will we make of it this time?

17 *Yeshayahu* 1:21

18 *ibid.* 1:9

19 *ibid.* 1:27

20 *Bava Batra* 12b



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