

A Taste of Text: Source based learning for Shabbat

*This weekly sheet is brought to you by **Rabbi Dr. Moshe Freedman** of the **New West End United Synagogue** in conjunction with **Shapell's/Darché Noam***

PARSHAT LECH LECHA

DVAR TORAH: LAND OF ORDER

Hashem tells Avraham to leave his birthplace, but leaves the final destination open-ended – “Go ... to the land that I will show you” (Bereishit 12:1). According to Rabbi Levi (quoted in Bereishit Rabbah 39:8), Avraham himself chose the land that would be his, and Hashem agreed.

“Rabbi Levi said: When Avraham was walking through Aram Naharayim and Aram Nachor he saw the people eating and drinking and acting frivolously. He said, ‘I hope I will have no portion of this land.’ When he reached the high place (literally, the ladder) of Tzur (the northern border of the Land of Israel) he saw the people involved in weeding at the appropriate time for weeding, and hoeing at the appropriate time for hoeing; and he said, ‘If only I could have my portion in this land.’ The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him, ‘To your offspring I will give this land’ (Bereishit 12:7).” What was it about the Land of Israel, according to Rabbi Levi, that so attracted Avraham?

It was its order, says Harav Chaim Elazari, זצ"ל (in Mesilot Chaim on Lech Lecha – Rav Elazari was a talmid of the Alter of Slabodka who later served as a Rav in Canton, Ohio). They weeded when it was time to weed and hoed when it was time to hoe. Everything was done in its proper time.

Orderliness, taught Rav Elazari’s great Rebbe, the Alter of Slabodka, זצ"ל, (Harav Nosson Tzvi Finkel, 1849-1927) is a Divine characteristic. Hashem created an orderly world; and the Creation story teaches us that He created it in an orderly fashion. On each of the six days He created what needed to be made on that day. Similarly, a person who strives for G-dliness needs order in his life. He has his סדרי לימוד, his set times for learning. He davens when it is time to daven, does chesed when it is time for chesed, and punctuates his life with daily and periodic mitzvot, each in its proper time.

Harav Shlomo Wolbe, זצ"ל (1915-2005, in Alei Shur Volume II, p. 319), teaches that Hashem’s orderliness reflects His strong Will. As we say in the first blessing of the night-time Shema, “ומסדר את הכוכבים במשמרותיהם” – ברקיע כרצונו – And He orders the stars in their heavenly shifts in the sky according to His Will.” One who truly wills to accomplish a goal will go about it in an orderly fashion.

But why couldn’t Avraham just live his own orderly life in Aram or some other location? Did Avraham consider the character of the Canaanites as better than that of the Arameans? Apparently not, for when he asked his servant to choose a wife for Yitzchak, Avraham made it clear that she should not be a Canaanite.

Rather, says Rav Elazari, the order Avraham saw in the Land of Israel indicated that it was a place of special Divine influence. Avraham wanted to live in the “Land that Hashem seeks out, the Land that Hashem’s eyes constantly watch over from the beginning to the end of the year” (Devarim 11:12). Avraham sensed that the Holy Divine Presence was in the Land when he saw how it reflected the Divine order. He prayed that he would merit to have a portion of the Land of Divine order.

SOURCE GUIDE: TERACH'S JOURNEY

Our Parshah begins with Avraham's journey to the Land of Canaan; but it was Terach, Avraham's father, who took a number of family members and set off for Canaan – as the Torah tells us in the end of Parshat Noach. Why did Terach leave for Canaan? This source guide deals with these questions based on two directions that appear in the writings of the classical commentators.

A. Terach's Journey to Canaan

This week's Parshah begins with Avraham's journey, that ends up in the Land of Canaan:

<p>1. Bereishit 12:1, 5 (1) Hashem said to Avram: Go for yourself from your land and from your birthplace and from the house of your father to the Land that I will show you ... (5) And they set out to go to the Land of Canaan; and they came to the Land of Canaan.</p>	<p>בראשית יב:א, ה (א) וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל אַבְרָם לֵךְ לְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ אֶל הָאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲרָאָה ... (ה) וַיֵּצְאוּ לְלֶכֶת אֶרְצָה כְּנָעַן וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶרְצָה כְּנָעַן.</p>
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The end of Parshat Noach tells of Avraham's father Terach's trip to the Land of Canaan:

<p>2. Bereishit 11:31-32 (31) Terach took Avram his son, Lot the son of Haran – his son's son – and Sarai his daughter-in-law; and they left with them from Ur Kasdim to go to the Land of Canaan. And they came to Charan and lived there. (32) The days of Terach were five years and two-hundred years; and Terach died in Charan.</p>	<p>בראשית יא:לא-לב (לא) וַיִּקַּח תְּרַח אֶת אַבְרָם בְּנוֹ וְאֶת לוֹט בְּנוֹ הֶרְן בְּנוֹ בְּנוֹ וְאֶת שָׂרַי כְּלֵתוֹ אִשְׁתּוֹ אַבְרָם בְּנוֹ וַיֵּצְאוּ אֹתָם מֵאוּר כַּשְׂדִּים לְלֶכֶת אֶרְצָה כְּנָעַן וַיָּבֹאוּ עַד חָרָן וַיֵּשְׁבוּ שָׁם. (לב) וַיְהִי יְמֵי תְרַח חֲמֵשׁ שָׁנִים וּמְאֹתָיִם שָׁנָה וַיָּמָת תְּרַח בְּחָרָן.</p>
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Why did Terach set out for the Land of Canaan?

B. Or Hachaim: Striving for a Better Life

According to Harav Chaim Ibn Atar, זצ"ל (1696-1743), author of the Or Hachaim commentary on the Chumash, the answer to our question lies in the verses that precede Terach's journey:

<p>3. Bereishit 11:26-30 (26) Terach lived seventy years; and he begot Avram, Nachor, and Haran. (27) These are the generations of Terach. Terach begot Avram, Nachor, and Haran; and Haran begot Lot. (28) Haran died during Terach's lifetime, in the land of his birthplace, in Ur Kasdim. (29) Avram and Nachor took for themselves wives. The name of Avram's wife was Sarai and the name of Nachor's wife was Milkah, the daughter of Haran, father of Milkah and Yiskah. (30) Sarai was barren; she had no child.</p>	<p>בראשית יא:כו-ל (כו) וַיְחִי תְרַח שִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה וַיֹּלֶד אֶת אַבְרָם אֶת נְחֹר וְאֶת הֶרְן. (כז) וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת תְּרַח תְּרַח הוֹלִיד אֶת אַבְרָם אֶת נְחֹר וְאֶת הֶרְן וְהֶרְן הוֹלִיד אֶת לוֹט. (כח) וַיָּמָת הֶרְן עַל פְּנֵי תְרַח אָבִיו בְּאֶרֶץ מוֹלַדְתּוֹ בְּאוּר כַּשְׂדִּים. (כט) וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָם וְנְחֹר לָהֶם נָשִׁים שֵׁם אִשְׁתּוֹ אַבְרָם שָׂרַי וְשֵׁם אִשְׁתּוֹ נְחֹר מִלְכָּה בַת הֶרְן אָבִי מִלְכָּה וְאָבִי יִסְכָּה. (ל) וַתְּהִי שָׂרַי עֲקָרָה אֵין לָהּ וָלֶד.</p>
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Terach took Avram, Sarai, and Lot with him to Canaan; but he left behind Nachor and Milkah. Why did he take some with him and leave others behind?

<p>4. Or Hachaim on Bereishit 11:31 "Terach took ..." – The intent of this verse is in line with what our Sages of blessed memory said: "If things are going poorly for a person in one place [and he doesn't leave and go elsewhere, he will pray and not be answered (Rashi – for he is to blame for his problems)]" (Bava Metzia 75b). For a change of place can be effective in improving one's situation. Therefore, the verse said that when Terach saw that Avram his son did not have children, he changed his location and took Avram and Sarai elsewhere. The verse also tells us that Avram was so important in their eyes that the whole family traveled for his sake. That is the meaning of "they (Terach's household) left with them (Avram and Sarai).</p>	<p>אור החיים על בראשית יא:לא ויקח תרח וגו' – הכוונה היא על דרך שאמרו ז"ל (ב"מ עה:): מאן דבייש ליה בהאי מתא וכו', כי שינוי מקום גורם. לזה אמר הכתוב כי כאשר ראה תרח שאברם בנו לא נולדו לו בנינים עשה שינוי מקום ולקח את אברם ושרי להוליכם למקום אחר והודיענו עוד הכתוב בזה שכל כך היה חשוב אברם בעיניהם שבשבילו נסעו כל בית אביו לשנות המקום בשבילו, והוא אומרו ויצאו אתם.</p>
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Terach's journey was his own attempt to better the situation of his family (Avram and Sarai were barren; Lot's father Haran had died young). Something was not working out properly, so Terach tried to remedy it using natural means, through a change in location. This contrasts with Avraham's journey from his father's house to the Land of Israel. Avraham's journey answered a Divine command; whereas Terach's was a natural attempt at bettering his situation. Terach stayed in Charan, never finishing his journey; Avraham, Sarai, accompanied by Lot, went on to finish the journey and received the Divine blessing that it would bring.

C. Ibn Ezra and Chizkuni:

Ibn Ezra (Harav Avraham ibn Ezra, זצ"ל, 1089-1167, Spain), and Chizkuni (Harav Chizkiyahu ben Manoach, זצ"ל, late 13th century France) take a very different view of Terach's journey:

<p>5. Chizkuni on Bereishit 11:31 "They left with them from Ur Kasdim" – following the command of the Holy One, blessed be He. As it is written, "I am Hashem who took you out of Ur Kasdim" (Bereishit 15:7). But Terach was not able to come to the Land of Canaan and he died in Charan.</p>	<p>חזקוני על בראשית יא:לא "ויצאו אתם מאור כשדים" – במצות הקב"ה כדכתיב, "אני ה' אשר הוצאתיך מאור כשדים" (בראשית טו:ז), ולא הספיק תרח לבא בארץ כנען וימת בחרן.</p>
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According to Chizkuni, while Avraham was still in Ur Kasdim, Hashem commanded him to leave – but this command is only referred to later on (in Bereishit 15:7). The Torah speaks of **Terach** taking his family; but the real impetus was the Divine command to **Avraham** that he should leave Ur Kasdim. Later, when they reached Charan, Hashem commanded Avraham to leave his father's household. That second command opens our Parshah, Lech Lecha: "Go for yourself from your land and from your birthplace and from the house of your father to the Land that I will show you."

Ibn Ezra, though agreeing with Chizkuni that Terach left Ur Kasdim because of Hashem's command – differs about **which** command:

<p>6. Ibn Ezra on Bereishit 11:29 What is correct in my eyes is that the "Lech Lecha" passage, when Hashem commanded Avram, preceded this verse, "Terach took [his family and left Ur Kasdim]. Similarly, the Torah first says "On the first of the second month in the second year" (Bamidbar 1:1) and only later, "In the first month of the second year" (Bamidbar 9:1). The proof for this (that Terach's journey was because of Hashem's command to Avram) is the expression "to go to the Land of Canaan." And when Terach came to Charan the place seemed fit in his eyes and he lived and died there. The Torah's narrative does not follow strict chronological order.</p>	<p>אבן עזרא על בראשית יא:כט והנכון בעיני שפרשת לך לך, שאמר השם לאברם קודם זה הפסוק שהוא "ויקח תרח". וכמוהו בתורה "בא' לחדש השני בשנה השנית", ואחר כן "בחדש הראשון בשנה השנית" (במדבר). והעד שאמר הכתוב "ללכת ארצה כנען". וכאשר בא תרח אל חרן ישר המקום בעיניו וישב שם וימת. ואין מוקדם ומאוחר בתורה.</p>
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The Radak (Harav David Kimchi, זצ"ל, 1160-1235, Provence), also in the Ibn Ezra and Chizkuni's camp, says that even though Terach at first joined Avraham's journey, he was not able to bring himself to leave his homeland. He remained in Charan, on the border of Aram and the Land of Canaan, so he could stay close to Avraham. [The Radak says that there are different opinions in midrashim about whether Terach repented.]

[A footnote to the Mosad Harav Kook edition of the Radak on Chumash cites a passage in the Zohar on Lech Lecha. The Zohar highlights the contrast between Avraham's journey, following Hashem's word, and Terach's journey, motivated by fear of retribution by enemies after Avraham was saved from Nimrod's fiery furnace.]

THREE JOURNEYS BY RABBI YISROEL CHOLEVA

Already at the end of last week's Parshah, we read about Terach and his family departing from their homeland Ur-Kasdim and travelling to Charan. This week's Parshah opens with the continuing of Avraham's journey to the Land of Israel. Hashem commands Avraham to leave Charan and he travels along with his family through the Land of Israel. Avraham continues to the hill country and decides to dwell between Beit-El and Ai (Bereishit 12:8).

Harav Shimshon Rafael Hirsch, זצ"ל (1808-1888), points out that "וַיַּעֲתֵק," the word used to indicate that Avraham got up and headed for the hill country, has the connotation of overcoming a difficulty. Previously they were camped in Alon Moreh, a much more habitable area. Yet Avraham chose to uproot the camp and continue to the more hostile hills.

The Gemara teaches us: "Avraham called it (the location of the Beit Hamikdash) a mountain, Yitzchak a field, and Yaakov a house" (Pesachim 88a). Rav Hirsch interprets these three expressions as reflecting the differences between the journeys each of our Patriarchs took in their search for Hashem. Avraham is associated with a mountain, in that he desired isolation from mankind, a place where one could focus on connection with the Divine. To do this, he ventured into the hills, uninhabited places where he could found a society built upon the ideals which he felt would best develop people's spiritual strengths.

Yitzchak is associated with a field. A field represents man controlling nature. He plants his crops in the land and from there sprouts forth his sustenance. This is a further stage where man, no longer forced to escape society to seek out Hashem, recognizes Hashem's influence in nature, in the land, and the agricultural cycle.

The last stage is that of Yaakov, the home. Yaakov is able to perceive Hashem within his home. He sees in even the mundane activities of life ways to connect to the Creator. Yaakov is the ultimate patriarch, the father of the Twelve Tribes of Israel. Yaakov connected to Hashem through family life, by raising children and teaching them to follow in his footsteps.

In our lives as well, we often need to go on a journey to better integrate our awareness of Hashem with our own experiences. Detaching ourselves, even for just a short time, and putting ourselves in an environment focused on building up one's spirituality can give us the boost that we require to direct our lives towards a spiritual future.

Yet it does not end there. We must strive to recognize Hashem in all of our dealings, both those which are overtly spiritual and those whose spiritual element is more subtle. As Hashem is everywhere, we are instructed to make ourselves open to seeing Him everywhere. As we follow through the parshiot of Bereishit, we should keep in mind the paths our forefathers took and see how their struggles and successes can be translated into our lives as well.

שבת שלום ומבורך

*This publication is compiled by the staff and Rabbonim at **Shapells/Yeshivat Darché Noam** for men and **Midreshet Rachel v'Chaya Seminary** for women in Jerusalem. Find out more about the **married couples' programme** and the **Pathways Israel** and **Pathways Plus** programmes offered at www.darchenoam.org +972-2-651-1178, 5 Beit Hakerem Street, Jerusalem.*

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