



ALIYA-BY-ALIYA SEDRA SUMMARY

RABBI REUVEN TRADBURKS
RCA ISRAEL REGION

PARSHAT LECH LECHA

The parsha introduces the Jewish people. Avraham journeys to the Land of Israel, is promised the Land, spends time in Egypt due to a famine, separates from Lot due to their great wealth, and rescues Lot when he is taken captive in war. Avraham is promised the Land, though told his descendants will spend 400 years in slavery. Sarah has no child, Hagar bears Yishmael, Avraham is promised that Sarah will bear a child. He is given the mitzvah of mila, circumcision, as a sign of the covenant.



1ST ALIYA (12:1-13)

Avram (while we refer to him as Avraham his name begins as Avram and is only changed later) is told to journey to the Land he will be shown. There he will achieve fame, fortune and family. The family journeys with Shechem as their first stop. G-d appears to Avraham and promises him the Land. He builds an altar. A famine forces the family to seek relief in Egypt.

The Torah is the story of promises. Avraham is given three personal promises and upon entry into the Land, one national one. He is told he will have fame, fortune and family. And his people will inherit the Land.

G-d makes promises to man. Unsolicited, perhaps undeserved. Though we come to know Avraham as a great man, the Torah is mum on any background to receiving these promises. For it is a story of G-d's desire for

a people – it is His reach to us. Unsolicited. Although the Midrash describes Avraham's discovery of G-d, the Torah itself is not interested in that. It is interested in G-d's desire for a people; His reach for man, not man's reach for Him.



2ND ALIYA (12:14-13:4)

The family goes to Egypt fleeing famine. Paro sees Sarah and she is taken to his palace. Avraham is lavished with wealth because of her. Paro sends them away. The family returns to where they began, laden with wealth, to call in the name of G-d.

Avraham's 3 promises, fame, fortune and family, will be fulfilled one by one. First fortune. Promise fulfilled – Avraham returns to the Land from Egypt laden with wealth.

Note the parallel in this story to that of the Exodus from Egypt. Avraham journeys to Egypt because of famine, Paro suffers a plague, he leaves with great wealth; so too the Jewish people journey to Egypt in a famine, suffer plagues and leave with great wealth.

What does it mean that Avraham called in the name of G-d? Ibn Ezra says either he prayed. Or he called people to embrace G-d. Avraham engages the people of the Land in knowledge of one G-d, a pursuit that exposes the people to him, eventually bringing him fame.



3RD ALIYA (13:5-18)

The herds of Avraham and Lot are so numerous that their shepherds quarrel. They need to separate. Avraham allows Lot to choose – you go left, I right.

You go right, I left. Lot chooses the lush area he sees around Sodom and Gemora. Avraham is told by G-d to look over the Land for he will have it all forever. And his children will be as numerous as the sand of the earth. He moves to Hevron and builds an altar.

Avraham and Lot have flocks, a nomadic occupation. Shepherding is not the stuff of nation building; agriculture is stable, concrete and the stuff of nations. So, while wealthy, the wealth is nomadic. But, the promise of fortune has been granted.

And this choice of Lot bodes ill for Lot's inclusion in the legacy of Avraham. After all, at this point, Lot is the only family member. Will the promise to Avraham's family pass to Lot? His choice of an area of lush green but evil people makes his judgement suspect.

The choice of beauty without consideration of principles has been a bit of a problem in the Torah so far. Eve looked at the fruit and it was beautiful. Before the flood, the men looked at the women and chose wives. Lot looks at the Jordan Valley and it looks like the lushness of Egypt.

Looks deceive; for while beautiful, each of these failed to consider principles of commands and ethics. Looking will be replaced for the Jew by hearing, Shema, listening to the Divine Command. Seeing beauty will be usurped by hearing the Command.



4TH ALIYA (14:1-20)

4 Kings make war with 5 Kings. Lot is taken captive. Avraham rescues him, returning all the spoils and captives. The King of Sodom comes out to greet Avraham, as does Malchizedek the King and Priest of Shalem. Malchizedek blesses Avraham to G-d and blesses G-d for protecting Avraham.

The promise of fame has been achieved. After the heroic rescue of Lot, Avraham finds himself in the company of Kings. And of note, is the religious language of Malchizedek, blessing Avraham with G-d's name. Avraham's reputation, his fame, is that of a man of faith, a man of G-d.

2 of the 3 promises Avraham received, those of fame and of fortune have been achieved. The remaining 2 – of children and of inheriting this Land are tougher.

And lest we think that G-d promised a deserted Land to Avraham, this pitched battle of 9 kings belies that. Not only has Avraham been promised that his children will inherit the Land while he has no children, he has been told he will inherit a Land that is hotly contested. While man could, on his own, achieve fortune and fame, a childless elderly couple cannot achieve children and the Land without Divine intervention.



5TH ALIYA (14:21-15:6)

The King of Sodom offers Avraham the spoils; Avraham demurs. G-d promises Avraham that he need not fear, for He will be his shield (magen). Avraham protests – I have no children. G-d promises that his children will inherit his promises. He shows him the stars and promises that his children will be as those. Avraham believes Him.

G-d promises to be Avraham's shield, his "magen"; Malchizedek used the same expression, that G-d was Avraham's "magen". Hence the description we use in tefilla of Magen Avraham.

G-d says to Avraham, "do not fear". Who said Avraham is afraid? What is he afraid of? Rashi comments that Avraham is worried that he has been showered with so much from G-d already that perhaps he does not

deserve to have the remaining promises granted. The remaining 2 promises are big ones; children and the Land of Israel. Perhaps I no longer deserve those. Some promises are conditional – you deserve it, you will get it. Perhaps he has used up all his merit and deserves no more. G-d tells him to not fear for his merit is great.



6TH ALIYA (15:7-17:6)

After promising Avraham that he will have children, G-d again promises to him that He will give him the Land of Israel. Avraham queries as to how he will know this for certain. In a dramatic ceremony of cut birds and a deep sleep, Avraham is told his children will be strangers and afflicted in a foreign land for 400 years, leaving with great wealth. Avraham will die in peace. G-d makes a covenant to give the Land to Avraham's offspring. Sarah has no child. She gives Hagar to Avraham and Hagar becomes pregnant. Sarah sends Hagar away. An angel tells her that her offspring will be many. Her child will be cantankerous but powerful. Avraham is 86 when Yishmael is born. At age 99 Avraham is told to walk before G-d. His name is changed to Avraham.

For the first time, Avraham is told that the promise of the Land will not be fulfilled in his time. His children will be slaves, afflicted, and leave with wealth after many years.

In a fascinating parallel, the story of Hagar is that same story. Hagar is a servant, as the

Jews will be slaves. She is sent away, as the Jews will be slaves in a foreign land. Hagar is told she will have a son who will be a great nation, engaging with many. Just as the Jewish people will leave Egypt with wealth.

The promise to Hagar is that Yishmael will be an international force to reckon with, just as the Jewish people will leave and conquer the land with great wealth.

This parallel story, to my mind, is not to point out the similarities but to point out the glaring difference. Yishmael will be a great nation in this rough and tumble world of ours, where people struggle and prosper. He will be good at that. Avraham's children will be a great nation by virtue of their covenant with G-d.

The Torah is contrasting a nation, Yishmael, unchallenged by G-d, living in this world, down here on earth, void of the mystery of the spiritual world, the world of the Divine. Avraham's nation is to be guided by the Divine Hand, engaging with Him, achieving its greatness in the elevated world of mystery and spirit, the Divine world.

We will see this exact same parallel in the journey of Hagar and Yishmael and Avraham and Yitzchak at the Akeida. An earthly story paralleling an elevated story.



7TH ALIYA (17:7-27)

Avraham is told to circumcise his family as a sign of the covenant between him and G-d. He is startled at the promise that Sarah will have a child at age 90, he 99. He suggests that Yishmael could be the next generation of the Jewish people. No, while Yishmael will be great, Yitzchak will be the next generation.

Avraham is reluctant to give up on Yishmael as the heir to the Jewish people. Perhaps

**Condolences to
Meyer Goodstein and family
on the passing of his brother**

MILTY Z'VI

המקום ינחם אתכם בתוך שאר אבלי ציון וירושלים

this is Avraham's persistent kindness – he sees good, even greatness in Yishmael. But that type of greatness is not sufficient: greatness comes in different shapes and sizes. Yishmael is great in his way, the ways of this world. Yitzchak will be great in a different way, in the world of the spirit, of the Divine, of ethics. There is greatness amongst the nations of the world: but Jewish greatness is different.

HAFTORAH

YESHAYAHU 40:27- 41:16

The prophet Yeshayahu reminds Israel of the Almighty's power. Hashem has the ability to "renew the vigor" of those who put their faith in Him.

Highlighting the theme of strength and fortitude, the prophet turns his attention to the idolatrous nations of the world and offers the following message. He emphasizes the greatness of Avraham, after arriving in Canaan, pursuing and defeating four mighty kings. "The islands saw and feared: the ends of the earth quaked."

There is a message to be heeded by the people of the world when witnessing the

power of Israel. Seeing the remarkable power of God and his people should inspire nations to abandon their sinful idolatrous ways.

The prophet also spotlights the eternal promise that the Jewish nation will be rewarded for their loyalty to God. "Do not fear for I am with you; be not dismayed for I am your God...Behold all those incensed against you shall be ashamed and confounded; those who quarreled with you shall be as naught and be lost." ■



STATS

3rd sedra of 54; 3rd of 12 in Bereishit.

Written on 208 lines, ranks 23.

7 Parshiyot; 3 open, 4 closed.

126 p'sukim - ranks 13th.

1686 words - ranks 18th.

6336 letters - ranks 19th.



MITZVOT

1 positive mitzvah: Brit Milah.

A total of 5 sedras have only one mitzvah (another 17 have none and six have 2 or 3 - that accounts for 28 sedras, over half of the Torah's 54).

A SHORT VORT

BY RABBI CHANOCH YERES
RAV, BEIT KNESSET BEIT YISRAEL, YEMIN MOSHE

שא נא עיניך וראה כי את כל הארץ אשר אתה רואה לך אתננה ולזרעך (יגיד, טו)

"Lift up now your eyes and look...for all the Land which you see, to you will I give and to your seed" (13:14-15)

What is the need for G-d to instruct Avram to "see" the Land? G-d's promise to give over the Land to Avram and his family is not enough?

The Meshech Chochma (Rabbi Meir Simcha Hacoheh of Dvinsk 1843-1926) answers that when G-d promised the Land of Israel to Avram, it was occupied by the Canaanites (13:7). Avraham even must purchase the Cave of the Patriarchs, when Sarah passes, at an exorbitant price. Although, it seems very clear that Avraham lacks any ownership of this Land, Avraham understood that the holiness of this Land was intact and G-d's presence dwelt here. It is for this reason that G-d urges Avraham to "look" at the Land. G-d is instructing Avraham that even though all the signs you see on this Land seem to show no clear indication that the Land is being given to you, yet I beseech you to "lift up your eyes" and see beyond that. By raising your view to a lofty more spiritual plateau, you will be able to recognize the ways of G-d are carried out. You will then perceive how the Land of Israel is sanctified and being given to you and your descendants, even when all signs are the contrary. The Land of Israel is more holy than all other lands, which its holiness never dissipates.

Shabbat Shalom