



ALIYA BY ALIYA SEDRA SUMMARY

RABBI REUVEN TRADBURKS
RCA Israel Region

LECH LECHA

The parsha introduces the Jewish people. Avraham journeys to the Land of Israel. He 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 again 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, arriving at 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.

Our parsha introduces promises.

G-d makes promises to man. This is a radical notion. That G-d would have demands of man makes sense. But that He would make promises to man? That is radical.

We know nothing of Avraham who gets these unsolicited promises. Though we will come to know Avraham as a great man, the Torah is mum on any background to receiving these promises.

But that is the point. For it is a story of

G-d's desire for a people – it is His reach to us. His reach to man, not man's reach to Him.

Our parsha will be the story of the 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.



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. Avraham journeys to Egypt in a famine, returning to the Land of Israel laden with wealth. The promise of fortune has come to be.

Avraham builds an altar. He will build 4 altars, calling in the name of G-d.



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 Hebron and builds an altar.

The promise that G-d made to Avraham

when He told him to journey to the Land was “I will Bless you”, meaning, you will have success financially. Wow, that happened fast. And no small fortune; Avraham and Lot have vast flocks.

But besides the promises of fame, fortune and family, the promise of the Land of Israel is the big one.

This promise is repeated to Avraham 5 times in the parsha, each time adding something.

The first promise was when he entered the Land and was simple. “This Land is given to your descendants.” This time both those pieces are expanded. This whole Land, as far as you can see, north, south, east, west. And your descendants? As numerous as dust of the earth. Lots of land. And lots of family.



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.

This story of the war of the Kings concludes with the promise of fame achieved. After the heroic rescue of Lot, Avraham finds himself in the company of Kings. Avraham has become famous. That is promise number 2.

And of note is the religious language of Malchizedek, blessing Avraham with G-d's name. Avraham has used his fame to communicate his faith. People speak G-d talk around Avraham.

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 while this story of the war concludes with fame achieved, it also must give Avraham some concern. G-d did not promise a deserted land to Avraham; this pitched battle of 9 kings belies that. He has been promised that 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 like those. Avraham believes Him.

The promise that his children will inherit the Land is expanded again.

In the first of his challenges to G-d, Avraham wonders: how can You Promise the Land to my children when I don't have any? A good point.

G-d reiterates. Don't think that I was waxing eloquent in promising the Land to your children and that I didn't mean your children literally. Avraham, maybe you think I meant your spiritual heirs. You know, not real blood children, but your followers. No. I mean your children, your flesh and blood children. And they will be as the stars.



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.

While Avraham has been assured that his flesh and blood children will inherit the Land, that the promise is to be taken literally, the Brit bein habetarim, this description goes the other way. 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. And then come to the Land.

This information will hang like a cloud over the rest of Breishit. Is 400 years literal or figurative? You know, a long time. Avraham, you will not see your family taking this

Land. It will take exile and return. How long? Who?

Juxtaposed to this deep sleep revelation that My promise that your children will inherit the Land does not mean your children, but rather your distant descendants comes the story of the birth of Yishmael from Hagar.

While we are on the subject of promises now being a little less literal, a little vague, maybe my child is referring to Yishmael. Perhaps he will be my heir.

And maybe this story of Hagar's banishment and return is that very story of exile of my people that I was told in that foggy vision.

Hagar and Yishmael are sent away. Afflicted. Then returns. Is that what the dream meant?

A promise is made to Hagar and Yishmael. Yishmael will be an international force to reckon with. 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.

But that is not the legacy of Avraham. Avraham will be a great nation by virtue of the covenant with G-d.

The Torah is contrasting a nation, Yishmael, unfronted 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

**May the learning
in this week's Torah Tidbits
be לעילוי נשמה our beloved**

**Cantor Martin Horowitz z"l
on his 32nd Yahrtzeit on טז חשון**

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*Mina & Howard Millendorf
Sharon, Shlomo Elinor, Amiad,
and Yagel Rabinowitz*

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 this is Avraham's persistent kindness – he sees good, even greatness in Yishmael.

The heir? It is not to be Yishmael. It is to be Sarah's son, Yitzchak.

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. ■

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