

What Kind of Person do You want to be?

This week's reading is from **Parashat Lech Lecha** (*Shemot / Genesis 12:1-17:27*). In this week's Torah portion, the narrative shifts to one man, Abram, whom the Lord calls out from his country, his people, and his fathers house to an unknown land the Lord is going to show him. The Lord says that He will make Abram a great nation and will bless those who bless him and curse those who curse him, and that through him all the nations of the earth will be blessed. (*Bereshit / Genesis 12:1-3*) Abram obeyed God's calling and took Lot with him. (*12:4*) Abram traveled to Shechem and the Lord appears and repeats that He will give this land to his offspring (*12:6-7*), Abram pitched his tent in between Bethel and Ai (*12:8*) and then moved on to the Negev (*12:9*). A famine struck the land and so both Abram and Lot moved to Egypt (*12:10*). Pharaoh saw Sarai, that she was beautiful, and he took her to be his wife; Abram was afraid and had told everyone she was his sister. The Lord afflicted Pharaoh and his household (*12:11-20*) and through this Abram became very wealthy, Pharaoh sent Abram away with much wealth so that he would pray for him and be healed. Abram and Lot returned to the Negev and we are told that the flocks of Abram and Lot could not remain together because they were so great (*13:1-6*). As a result, there was a quarrel between Lot and Abram's herders, so Abram spoke to Lot and set the entire land before him giving Lot his choice and to agree to part ways (*13:7-9*). As a result, Lot looked towards the wealth of the valley Jordan (*13:10-13*), while Abram remained in the hill country to live by faith in the Lord God. (*13:14-18*) It is important to note in *Bereshit / Genesis 14*, Abram needed to rescue Lot. Lot chose wealth and prosperity in the valley of great sin, whereupon he was captured in the war between the surrounding kings. Abram needed to rescue Lot to save him from the invading kingdoms. Notice the spiritual connection here, when seeking material things, leaving the peace and faith in trusting in the Lord, one is placed in danger of being taken further into both sin and war (calamity). In *Bereshit / Genesis 15*, the Lord confirms his covenant with Abram in a vision and speaks to him about the future enslavement of his children in Egypt, whereupon the Lord Himself will descend to rescue His people with a mighty hand and great power. We are left at the end of the Torah portion (*Bereshit / Genesis 17*) with Abram at-

tempting to help God in His promise of children, indicated by his listening to his wife, and trying to have a baby with Hagar, Sarai's Egyptian servant girl. Note the troubles and struggles that follow when making an attempt to trust in self as opposed to trusting in the Lord God in heaven.

The two important topics to discuss this week are related to the Lord's calling on our lives, and the differences between Abram and Lot.

ספר בראשית פרק יב Bereshit / Genesis 12:1-3, 13:10-12

א וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-אַבְרָם לֵךְ-
 לְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית
 אָבִיךָ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֹרְאָה:
 ב וְאֶעֱשֶׂה לְךָ גְּדוֹל וְאֶבְרַךְ-
 כָּךְ וְאֶגְדַּלְתָּה שְׁמֹךְ וְהָיָה בְרָכָה:
 ג וְאַבְרָכָה מְבָרְכֶיךָ וּמְקַלְלֶיךָ
 אָאֵר וְנִבְרַכְוּ כָּךְ כָּל מְשֻׁפָּחַת
 הָאֲדָמָה:

12:1 Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you; 12:2 And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; 12:3 And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.' (NASB)

י וַיִּשָּׂא-לוֹט אֶת-עֵינָיו וַיִּרְא
 אֶת-כָּל-כַּפַּר הַיַּרְדֵּן כִּי כָלָה
 מִשְׁקָה לְפָנָי | שָׁחַת יְהוָה אֶת-
 סֹדֶם וְאֶת-עֲמֹרָה כַּגֵּן-יְהוָה
 כְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּאֶחָה צֵיעַר: יא
 וַיִּבְחַר-לוֹ לוֹט אֶת כָּל-כַּפַּר
 הַיַּרְדֵּן וַיִּסַּע לוֹט מִקְדָּם וַיִּפְרְדּוּ
 אִישׁ מֵעַל אָחִיו: יב אַבְרָם
 יָשַׁב בְּאֶרֶץ-כְּנָעַן וְלוֹט יָשַׁב
 בְּעָרֵי הַכַּפָּר וַיָּאֵהֵל עַד-סֹדֶם:

13:10 Lot lifted up his eyes and saw all the valley of the Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere this was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt as you go to Zoar. 13:11 So Lot chose for himself all the valley of the Jordan, and Lot journeyed eastward. Thus they separated from each other. 13:12 Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled in the cities of the valley, and moved his tents as far as Sodom. (NASB)

The Rabbis have much to say concerning Parashat Lech Lecha. While examining the rabbinic commentaries, it is interesting to note how all of the commentaries on *Bereshit / Genesis 12:7* (וַיִּרְא יְהוָה אֶל-אַבְרָם וַיֹּאמֶר) ז *12:7 The Lord appeared to Abram and said, 'To your descendants I will give this land.'* So

he built an altar there to the Lord who had appeared to him. NASB) refer to Abram giving God a thank offering (Ramban), an offering of incense (Rashbam), and of the sweet fragrance of the gift offerings (Sforno). Let's look at these commentaries.

Ramban on Genesis 12:7

And the reason "to the Lord who had appeared to him" -- that he acknowledged honored God and offered a thanksgiving offering to him when He appeared to him, because until this point God had not appeared to him and had not acknowledged him in an appearance or vision. When it is said to him, "Go for yourself from your land," [this is] in a dream or [through] the holy spirit..... וטעם לה' הנראה אליו כי הודה לשם הנכבד וזבח לו זבח תודה על שנראה אליו כי עד הנה לא נראה אליו השם ולא נתודע אליו במראה ולא במחזה אבל נאמר לו "לך לך מארצך" בחלום הלילה או ברוח הקדש ויתכן שירמוז "הנראה אליו" על סוד הקרבן (עיין רקאנטי כא ב) והמשכיל יבין

Rashbam on Genesis 28:12

מוצב, which had been erected by others. When the Torah later speaks about נצב ה' in verse 13, the meaning is that He supported Himself, had not been placed there, [although the letter נ at the beginning of that word suggested a passive mode. Ed.] We encounter similar formulations with the words מוקטר offered as incense by others, or מוגש, presented by others in Malachi 1:11 whereas the words נגש אל הערפל in Shemot / Exodus 20:21 mean that Moses approached the cloud under his own initiative. Also the expression אשר אתה מראה בהר (with the vowel kametz under the letter א) is also referring to someone else showing Moses the image. (Shemot / Exodus 25:40) On the other hand, the expression נראה in Bereshit / Genesis 12:7 refers to a vision generated by G'd Himself.

Sforno on Numbers 15:3

לעשות ריח ניחוח.....והקריב המקריב

sin of the golden calf, the expression ריח ניחוח had not surfaced as no libations plus gift offerings had been needed in order to make the offerings truly pleasing in the eyes of the Lord. This is why we do not find such an expression in connection with the offering of Hevel (Bereshit / Genesis 4:4 of Noach Genesis 8:21 and of Avraham in Bereshit / Genesis 12:7) Neither do we find it in Shemot / Exodus 24:5 where the burnt offerings and meat offerings offered by the firstborns (before they had been exchanged for the tribe of Levi) were described. As of the sin of the golden calf gift offerings and libations were required to make public offerings pleasing to the Lord, i.e. לריח ניחוח. After the sin of the spies even offerings by private individuals had to be accompanied by such libations and gift offerings, מנחה ונסכים, in order to qualify for the expression ריח ניחוח as proving that the offering had pleased the Lord. לעשות ריח ניחוח... והקריב המקריב. הנה עד העגל היה הקרבן ריח ניחוח בזו"ל מנחה ונסכים כענין בהבל ובנח ובאברהם וכענין וישלח את נערי בני ישראל ויעלו עולות ויזבחו זבחים שלמים לה' פרים לא זולת זה ובחטאם בעגל הצריך מנחה ונסכים לעולת התמיד שהיא קרבן צבור ומאז שחטאו במרגלים הצריך מנחה ונסכים להכשיר גם קרבן יחיד:

Rambam says when the Lord called Abram from his father's house, he was spoken to in a dream, whereas here in *Bereshit / Genesis 12:7*, the Lord actually appeared to him and thus the reason for his building the altar. Based on this interpretation, Abram was very sensitive to the Lord's leading, even to the Lord speaking to him in a dream.

Rashbam studies Abram's encounter in light of the way the Hebrew text is written with regard to the type of offering he brought before the Lord and draws in the context of Jacob's ladder (see *Parashat Toldot*) saying that the Lord created a vision for Abram like he did with Jacob. Understanding Rashbam's perspective may be taken from Midrash Tehillim 78, Part 6, which opens (דיבור המתחיל) saying "*For all this they sinned still, and believed not in His wondrous works (Tehillim / Psalms 78:32).*" The homiletic introduction to the midrash states, "*Rabbi Berechiah, Rab-*

bi Levi, and Rabbi Simeon son of Jose taught in the name of Rabbi Meir that the Holy One blessed be He, let Jacob see a ladder upon which Babylon climbed up seventy rungs and came down, Media climbed up fifty two rungs and came down, Greece climbed up a hundred and eighty rungs and came down. But when Edom climbed higher than these, Jacob saw and was afraid.” What is the purpose of saying these nations climbed the ladder in Jacob’s dream in Parashat Toldot? The rabbis comment upon the psalmist’s words how the people did not believe in the Lord even in the midst of the miracles of God. Notice how this same thing happened in the midst of the people when Yeshua the Messiah performed miracles. The occurrence of a miracle does not necessarily elicit faith in those who are not the children of God. This is what the rabbis are attempting to draw out in their comment upon the children of Israel in the wilderness who believed not in His wondrous works. These nations at one point or another believed in the God of Israel. Look at how he used the king of Babylon; *Daniel 4* states, “*Let King Nebuchadnezzar become wet with the dew of heaven. Let him live like the animals among the plants of the earth.*” Nebuchadnezzar was bragging about himself and the Lord humbled him. Following the number of years the Lord had ordained for his humbling, Nebuchadnezzar gave glory to the Lord God of Israel, and so the rabbis say that Babylon climbed seventy rungs up the ladder. Notice Edom climbed the highest of them all, higher than one hundred and eighty rungs and it says that Jacob was afraid. This is a reference to Esau who is the father of Edom. Esau received all of his father’s (Isaac) wealth, but yet he did not value the covenant of God and he did not value the promises of God.

The rabbis conclude in Midrash Tehillim 78 that Jacob climbed higher than all the other nations, but more than this, the Lord did not require that Jacob to climb back down the ladder. The raising up the ladder and remaining is compared to the Lord showing Jacob the Temple, the sacrificial gifts offered up, and the priests performing their holy service. Drawing in the concept of Jacob’s ladder may imply that Rashbam believes the Lord showed Abram these same things. The ladder signifies the connection between Heaven and earth, in which the rabbis interpret in the midrash as prayers and the smoke of the sacrifices offered in the Holy Temple were the solidifying factors that connected the Lord God in heaven with Israel. Another interpretation may be that the ladder alludes to the giving of the

Torah as a connection between heaven and earth, God's instructions for His people that has descended from heaven to earth. Note that we are told Abram was giving commands in instructions from God to pass on to His children. (*Bereshit / Genesis 15:6 and 18:19*) In this interpretation, it is also significant that the meaning of the text states the angels ascending and descending, the connection between Heaven and Earth, and the place (mount Moriah) upon which there is a connection to the Lord which is found in the Temple services and prayer, and to Moshe who ascended and descended on Sinai, all of these things draw in the idea that the Lord was present in the vision that was given to Jacob, and Rashbam's interpretation that Abram was given a vision too. Midrash Tehillim 78, Part 6, states specifically, "*Thus the ladder represents the Temple; the top of it reached to heaven alludes to the sacrificial gifts, whose savor, when offered up, reaches heaven; angels of God ascending and descending on it represents the priests, who, as they ascend and descend the ramp, are called angels, as is said, For he the priest is the angel of the Lord of hosts (Malachi 2:7).*" A New Testament interpretation for this may also be found in *Revelation 8:4* which states, *8:1 When the Lamb broke the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. 8:2 And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. 8:3 Another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, so that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar which was before the throne. 8:4 And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand. (NASB)* Here we find the prayers and the Temple service in connection to the prayers of God's people going up before the throne of God in heaven. When we pray the Lord is present, He hears our prayers. This may be how Rashbam also understood Abram having saw the Lord, even in a vision, this would be synonymous to the Lord being present.

Sforno understands the Lord appearing to Abram in light of Parashat Ki Tisa and Chet Haegel, the sin of the golden calf. The concept here is that due to the sin of Chet Haegel, libations plus gift offerings were necessary for the people to become a sweet fragrance (רייה ניהוה) in the eyes of the Lord. Sforno compares Chet Haegel to the sin of the spies and the importance of the libations and gift offerings, saying that this was what Abram was doing in constructing an altar and making an offering unto the

Lord. It is important to note that Abram was in the process of blessing the Lord in his constructing an altar and bringing an offering. This was a voluntary offering since we are not told this was for atonement for sin.

It is also important to note that Lot is not mentioned in the text outside of the fact that he left Haran and was traveling with Abram. There does not appear to be any spiritual aspect to Lot's traveling with Abram outside of the concept that he and Abram were good friends. This conclusion is drawn from the absence in the Torah of Lot being mentioned as having participated in the offerings Abram was bringing before the Lord. All of the encounters with God had been only between Abram and God. Abraham was in the process of connecting with God through prayer and the sacrificial system. Today we connect with our Father in heaven through His Son Yeshua the Messiah. When we pray in His name believing, our Father hears us. So the question is "*do you want to be Lot, or do you want to be Abraham?*" To be like Abraham, place your faith in God's Messiah Yeshua, and start living for Him because in Him is everything we have been discussing thus far, we have the connection to heaven, we have the promises of God, we will be blessed, and we have the sweet fragrance of the atonement Yeshua provided on our behalf in the heavenly holy of holies!

In *Bereshit / Genesis 13:6*, we are told "*And the land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together; for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together.*" וְלֹא־נִשְׂאָ אֶתֶּם הָאָרֶץ לְשָׂבֶת יַחְדָּו כִּי־ הָיָה רְכוּשָׁם רָב וְלֹא יִכְלֹוּ לְשָׂבֶת יַחְדָּו: Here we are given a little more info about Lot. The Lord God had blessed Lot while he remained with Abram. We read that Abram gave Lot his choice to go wherever he wanted to and the narrative in the Torah states the following regarding Lot's choice.

Bereshit / Genesis 13:10-12

13:10 Lot lifted up his eyes and saw all the valley of the Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere this was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt as you go to Zoar.

13:11 So Lot chose for himself all the valley of the Jordan, and Lot journeyed eastward. Thus they separated from each other. 13:12 Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled in the cities of the valley, and moved his

tents as far as Sodom. (NASB)

We are told that Lot traveled with Abram down into Egypt and back, and both of them become very wealthy in cattle. It might be that Abram being generous divided the cattle Pharaoh had given him with Lot because there simply was too much wealth for one man to handle. As a result, the land was unable to sustain them both and they agreed together that they would part ways. Notice how Lot did not consider the blessings the Lord God had given to Abram had passed to him as well while he was joined with Abram. The Torah concept here is in joining ourselves with Israel, we also will take part in the blessings of God. According to *Bereshit / Genesis 13:10-12*, Lot was more interested in wealth and the material things as opposed to faith in the Lord and spiritual things. Remember, there does not appear to be any spiritual aspect to Lot's traveling with Abram outside of the concept that he and Abram were good friends.

The rabbinic commentary by *Akeidat Yitzchak* has a very interesting perspective concerning these Scriptures (*Bereshit / Genesis 13:10-12*).

Akeidat Yitzchak 34:10-11:

The second aspect of “carry” is that “to carry something,” is the same as “to tolerate something.” We read of Abraham and Lot (Genesis 13,6) that “the land could not carry them anymore to live together.” This means that the land could not support their joint tenure. “Tolerance” of something implies a reciprocal relationship. It means that one puts up with other people’s behavior in some form or other. G’d being the Supreme Being, has a reciprocal relationship with everybody and everything, i.e. He puts up with everybody and everything in some form or other. Again, this is not something physical, but the term “suffer” is used in a moral, spiritual sense.

Notice how *Akeidat Yitzchak* draws out the Hebrew text saying the word נָשָׂא “to bear or to carry” is similar to the phrase “to tolerate something.” (וְלֹא-נָשָׂא אֹתָם הָאָרֶץ לְשָׂבֹת יִתְדּוּ כִּי-הָיָה רְכוּשָׁם רָב וְלֹא יָכְלוּ לְשָׂבֹת יִתְדּוּ:) The parallel here is to the kind of tolerance that the Lord God displays for us due to our sins, this is taken from the same word used in Parashat

Ki Tisa when Moshe asked the Lord to bear or carry the burden of sin for the people (Chet Haegel). Notice how *Akeidat Yitzchak* commentary concludes that this “*tolerance*” is related to the relationship between Abram and Lot, that one was tolerating the behavior of the other in some form or other. In a similar manner, the Lord God in heaven tolerates us in the midst of our sins. He has mercy on us where the Scriptures (*Shemot / Exodus 34*) state that He is “*long suffering.*” *Akeidat Yitzchak* concludes that the Lord tolerates, but it is not in the physical sense. The best way to describe the Lord’s tolerating us is as “*suffer*” in the moral and spiritual sense. Notice how the word נָשָׂא lends itself to our understanding “*to bear or to carry, or to tolerate something*” as it is connected to the sin of idolatry and adultery and the suffering by the reason of sin. This also places these things within the context of the Lord’s efforts on behalf of mankind, to draw us near and to save us, His salvation that is found in the Messiah Yeshua.

The most important point that we may take away from this study, is to consider the previous Torah portions and the theme of the Lord God’s creative process regarding the beginning of His works, to separate the light from the dark, and how this is related to righteousness and unrighteousness; coupled to the idea that Lot desired the material world, and Abram desired the Spiritual world. Notice how there was personal strife between Abram and Lot that is related to their material wealth. In the concept of tolerance, the fact that Lot was not mentioned as having part in spiritual things, and Abram tolerating Lot in which the land could not sustain them both, there is a parallel to the relationship between righteousness and unrighteousness. The *Talmud Bavli Sanhedrin 7* comments on *Mishley / Proverbs 17:14* פוטר מים ראשית מדון, “*Starting a quarrel is like opening a sluice.*” Abraham demonstrated his righteousness by sharing his wealth with Lot and by his saying, “*let there not develop a quarrel between us,*” let us be at peace. The application for us from the Torah Portion is in the sense that Righteousness and Unrighteousness are unable to dwell together. The Lord desires righteousness in our lives and He is working to accomplish that goal. This kind of righteousness may only be achieved by our faith in the Messiah Yeshua, and by His empowering us to live for Him. If you want to be at peace with men and with God, to have a relationship with the Lord God in heaven, and to be in communication with Him, place your faith in Yeshua right now, today! Let’s Pray!

