

# אִם-הַשְּׂמֵאל וְאִימָנָה וְאִם-הַיְמִין וְאִשְׁמָאֵלָה

## AVRAHAM, LOTS AND THE ROOTS OF JEWISH MONARCHY

by Yitzchak Etshalom

### I

#### THE NO'ACH-AVRAHAM CONNECTION: AN ALTERNATIVE PAIRING

Conventional wisdom holds that the T'nakh deliberately situates No'ach as an early, less refined prototype of the righteous man - a role ultimately filled capably by Avraham. The frequent comparisons between No'ach and Avraham - found as early as the Midrash Tanhuma at the beginning of Parashat No'ach (cited by Rashi), which notes that No'ach is considered *righteous in his generations* because "had he lived in the generation of Avraham, he wouldn't have been considered anything special". This comparison may be rooted in several literary associations made between the two (e.g. *No'ach was a just man and תמים in his generations*" [6:9] and "When Avram was ninety nine years old, Hashem appeared to Avram, and said to him, I am the Almighty G-d; walk before Me, and be תמים [17:1]), or it may be based on the parallel number of generations which separated Adam from No'ach and No'ach from Avraham (cf. Mishnah Avot 5:2).

In any case, although these two heroes share some noble qualities, the presentation of the T'nakh reveals someone else who is closely paired with No'ach.

Note that until we are introduced to No'ach (5:28), we have gone through a brief recap of the "begats" which link Adam (via Shet) to Lemekh, No'ach's father. In each case, we are told the name of the patriarch, how long he lived before giving birth to his first son, how long he lived after that event and that he had sons and daughters. We are then given his entire lifespan - and then move on to that son's progeny, in like fashion. For instance:

*And Enosh lived ninety years, and fathered Cainan; And Enosh lived after he fathered Cainan eight hundred and fifteen years. and fathered sons and daughters; And all the days of Enosh were nine hundred and five years; and he died. (5:9-11)*

Suddenly, there is a broadening of the information provided:

*And No'ach was five hundred years old; and No'ach fathered Shem, Ham, and Yaphet. (5:32)*

Instead of being told about No'ach's firstborn, we are told about all three of his sons.

At a later point in the text, when we are about to begin the second set of "begats" (linking No'ach to Avraham), we are again introduced to these three sons - with a curious addition:

*And the sons of No'ach, who went out of the ark, were Shem, and Ham, and Yaphet; and Ham is the father of K'na'an. (9:18)*

Why are we told about K'na'an, the son of Ham?

The answer to this is quite clear, once we read further (9:18-29). As the story there evolves, we learn that as a result of either Ham or K'na'an's violation of No'ach, K'na'an was cursed to be a slave to his brothers - so it is important for us to be aware of the relationship between Ham and K'na'an at the outset.

One more anomaly about No'ach - he gives birth to his children at a much more advanced age than his forebears. Following the generations listed in Chapter 5, Adam's first sired a son at age 130 (Kayyin and Hevel are not part of this accounting); Shet was 105; Enosh was 90; Keinan was 70, M'halalel was 65; Yered was 62, Hanoch was 65; Metushelach was 87 and Lemekh was 82.

No'ach was significantly older than any of his ancestors before having children:  
*And No'ach was five hundred years old; and No'ach fathered Shem, Ham, and Yaphet.*

There is one later member of the Noachide family who is presented in curiously similar terms - but it isn't Avraham. Avraham's descendants are not listed within the "begats" list - it ends with his birth. The birth of Yishma'el, the miraculous birth of Yitzhak, the children of his old age (25:1-5); none of these are presented as part of a chain of generations.

Note, however, the unusual introduction of Terach's family - at the end of the second "begats" list:  
*Now these are the generations of Terach; Terach fathered Avram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran fathered Lot. (11:27)*

Why is Lot, the grandson, introduced immediately along with Terach's sons? The next few verses seem to indicate a reason:  
*And Haran died before his father Terach in the land of his birth, in Ur of the Chaldeans. And Avram and Nahor took wives; the name of Avram's wife was Sarai; and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah, and the father of Iscah. But Sarai was barren; she had no child. And Terach took Avram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldeans, to go to the land of K'na'an; and they came to Haran, and lived there. And the days of Terach were two hundred and five years; and Terach died in Haran. (11:27-32)*

Nevertheless, if all we needed to know was why Lot was accompanying his grandfather - and later ended up with Avraham in K'na'an, he could have been introduced in v. 31 (*And Terach took Avram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his grandson...*); subsequent to the news of his father's death (v. 27), we would have understood his participation in the Terachian (and, later Avrahamian) migration. Why did the Torah introduce Lot in this fashion?

To further strengthen the parallel between Terach and No'ach, note the ages when the patriarchs of the second "begats" list (linking No'ach to Avraham) first had children. Shem was 100; Arpach'shad 35; Shelach was 30; Ever was 30; Peleg was 30; R'u was 32; S'rug was 30; Nahor was 29.

*And Terach lived seventy years, and fathered Avram, Nahor, and Haran. (11:26)* With the exception of Shem (who was delayed in establishing a family on account of the flood), Terach waited at least twice as long as any of his (recent) ancestors before having children. When placed against the background of numbers like 35,32,30 and 29, 70 suddenly seems very old, indeed.

In summary, we have noted that although the parallels (and comparisons - some highly unfavorable to No'ach) between No'ach and Avraham are legend, the text-presentation actually aligns No'ach much more closely with Terach. One of the critical points of this comparison is the introduction of Lot, Avraham's nephew. I would like to suggest that the purpose of the No'ach-Terach comparison (especially the unusual presentation of one grandson among the three sons) is designed to teach us about Lot - who he was and the critical role that his progeny will play in the unfolding history and destiny of the B'nei Yisra'el.

Lot is presented in terms reminiscent of K'na'an (the grandson of No'ach). In spite of his close relationship with Avraham, the first real hero in the T'nakh, we already sense that Lot is destined to fail.

We will devote the rest of this shiur to an analysis of Lot and his descendants - with a critical "detour" into the book of Ruth, via a link to B'reshet made by the Midrash.

## **II** **I FOUND MY SERVANT DAVID...**

In relating the story of Lot's fleeing from S'dom, the messenger tells Lot:  
*Arise, take your wife and your two daughters who are found here (הנמצאות)... (19:16)*

This curious turn of a phrase - הנמצאות - leads the Midrash to associate this verse with a (seemingly unrelated) verse in T'hillim about David:

*I have found (מצאתי) David my servant; with my holy oil have I anointed him (T'hillim 89:21).*

The Midrash (B'resheet Rabbah 41:4)states:

R. Yitzhak says: מצאתי David my servant - where did I find him? In S'dom.

What is the connection between David and S'dom? How was David "found" in S'dom? Certainly, the Midrash is not just connecting David to S'dom due to the common root מצא found in reference to both.

In order to answer this question, we have to turn a lot of pages in our T'nakh - from the early parts of Sefer B'resheet to the middle of the Five Megillot. The shortest of those Megillot is Sefer Ruth, chronologically placed during the days of the Judges (1:1). What is the purpose of Sefer Ruth? Why is this story about loyalty included in our T'nakh? (see our more complete treatment of the Megillah in the 8-part series, accessible in the Mikra archives under "Hagim".)

At the end of this short Sefer, we learn of this progeny of Ruth (the protagonist) and Bo'az:

*Now these are the generations of Peretz; Peretz fathered Hetzron, And Hetzron fathered Ram, and Ram fathered Amminadav, and Amminadav fathered Nach'shon, and Nach'shon fathered Salmon, and Salmon fathered Bo'az, and Bo'az fathered Oved, and Oved fathered Yishai, and Yishai fathered David. (4:18-22)*

In other words, the final statement of this Sefer is the *yichus* of David - and, via this story, we learn about his roots. Keep in mind that Ruth was a Moabite woman. (In a related vein of David's line, the mother of Rehav'am, son of Sh'lomoh, was Na'amah ha'Amonit - a woman of Amon.)

Where do these two nations, Ammon and Mo'av, come from?

We turn back to Sefer B'resheet, in the immediate aftermath of the destruction of the cities of S'dom, and learn of their origins...

*And it came to pass, when G-d destroyed the cities of the plain, that G-d remembered Avraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in which Lot lived. And Lot went up out of Tzo'ar, and lived in the mountain, and his two daughters with him; for he feared to live in Tzo'ar; and he lived in a cave, he and his two daughters. And the firstborn said to the younger, Our father is old, and there is not a man on earth to come in to us after the manner of all the earth; Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve seed of our father. And they made their father drink wine that night; and the firstborn went in, and lay with her father; and he perceived not when she lay down, nor when she arose. And it came to pass on the next day, that the firstborn said to the younger, Behold, I lay last night with my father; let us make him drink wine this night also; and you go in, and lie with him, that we may preserve seed of our father. And they made their father drink wine that night also; and the younger arose, and lay with him; and he perceived not when she lay down, nor when she arose. Thus were both the daughters of Lot with child by their father. And the firstborn bore a son, and called his name Mo'av; the same is the father of the Mo'avites to this day. And the younger, she also bore a son, and called his name Benammi; the same is the father of the Ammonites to this day. (19:29-38)*

In other words, these two daughters, who were נמצאות in S'dom, conspired to bring two nations into the world, one of whom would provide an extraordinary woman who would help develop David - who G-d מצא (found).

So far, we have explained why the Midrash made this connection - the unusual phrase relating to Lot's two daughters shows up again in reference to David, and these two daughters and their misunderstanding about the destruction of S'dom and their subsequent raising of two nations, one of which led to the birth of David.

Let's ask a more fundamental question here: Why does the T'nakh establish a Lot-Ruth-David connection, if only by word-association? In other words, is the T'nakh merely trying to stress the fact that David is descended from Lot? I would like to suggest that the development of Jewish monarchy through the seed of Lot, through Ruth, was a very deliberate and necessary process.

In order to understand this, we'll need to address the central issue in this week's Parashah - the selection of Avraham and his role in the world. First, a brief summary of the first two Parashiot, as regards the development of Avraham.

### III CHAPTERS 1-11: A BRIEF RECAP

When G-d created mankind, He called him "Adam" - since he was from the "Adamah" (earth - note the last phrase in B'resheet 2:5). Indeed, man was so much "of the earth" that his failures caused the earth to be cursed (3:17). This tie was further severed when his son committed the first murder. Not only was he *cursed from the ground that opened its mouth to receive the blood of your brother*, but he was uprooted and made to wander (4:11-12).

When humanity continued to descend into a storm of moral depravity and violence, G-d decided to wipe them out (6:7) - and to begin the process anew with Noach (note the similarities between the charge given to Noach upon his exit from the Ark in Chapter 9 and those given to Adam in Chapter 1).

Just as the name "Adam" implies a symbiotic relationship with the earth, implying a static harmony with nature, similarly the name "Noach" denotes a type of respite and calm amid the storm of corruption around him. The Torah provides this explanation for his name, crediting his father, Lemekh, with this prayer/prophesy (6:29). Noach was to be "at rest" (a close literal translation of his name) and, indeed, that is how he behaved. While the storm of corruption - and, later, the storm of Divine justice - swirled around him, he was calm and at rest. From the Divine perspective, there was every reason to utilize this method of "starting over"; since not only every corrupted being was wiped off the face of the earth, but even the memories of their sinful behavior were eradicated. There was every possibility for a "fresh start". The worldview behind this perspective is that if man is created with goodness, then, if he remains "at rest", (status quo), he will continue to be good and upright.

This approach, as we know, did not succeed. No'ach, who was to be the "second chance" for mankind, did not live up to his potential exhibited earlier, when he was described as a *righteous and perfect*.

Almost immediately after coming out of the Ark, No'ach descended into becoming a *man of the earth* (9:20; the intent is clearly pejorative - see B'resheet Rabbah ad loc.) After his drunken interaction with Ham (or K'na'an) and the subsequent curse, his progeny continued to behave in an unworthy manner - culminating with the scene at the Tower of Shin'ar, when Mankind was dispersed throughout the world.

### IV THE TOWER AT SHIN'AR: THE BACKDROP AGAINST WHICH TO VIEW AVRAHAM

At the beginning of Ch. 11, we meet the builders of the great tower at Shin'ar. We know that their behavior was considered sinful - for why else would G-d disrupt it - but what was their terrible sin?

The *vsh* reading of the text reveals only one crime:

*Come, let us build a tower with its spire in the heavens and make a name for ourselves, lest we be spread throughout the land.* (11:4)

G-d had commanded Noach and his children (in the same manner as He had commanded Adam) to *be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth...spread throughout the earth and multiply in it* (9:1,7). The Divine purpose would be met by mankind's populating the earth, settling the many lands and creating many diverse civilizations. These sons of Noach chose to do the exact opposite -and the build a tower that would support their ill-fated unity.

As is well know, however, the Rabbis read much worse intentions into their behavior - understanding that they desired to compete with G-d, to fight against Him etc. Where are these ideas in the text? (not that they need be; but it is always more impactful to identify textual allusions which support Midrashic threads). Truth to tell, we can only identify these textual allusions after our introduction to Avraham, as we shall see.

It was onto this particular stage of humanity, a species which desired nothing but to avoid spreading out and preferred to “sit still”, that this great hero, Avraham Avinu, made his powerful entrance. In a world where everyone was satisfied to stay put, Avraham unquestionably and immediately accepted G-d's call to: *Leave your land, your birthplace and your father's house*. Not only did he leave - he continued his wanderings long after reaching *the place that I will show you*. Everywhere he went, he built an altar and called out in G-d's Name (whatever that may mean; prayer, education, declaration). He was clearly a “mover and shaker” in the most literal sense of the phrase: He moved from place to place in order to shake the people from their spiritual and intellectual complacency. Note how S'forno (12:8-9) explains Avraham's route (north and south, between Beit-El and Ha'Ai) -

“between these two large cities, in order that many people would come to hear him call out in G-d's Name... when he traveled from place to place as is the custom of the shepherds, he didn't go from east to west, in order not to abandon either one of these cities where some of the people were already drawn to him.”

We now understand Avraham's greatness which earned him (and we, his progeny) the great blessings promised throughout his life: When G-d told him to wander, he took it upon himself to go against the lifestyle in which he grew up, to fight the complacency and “status quo” of the world around him - and to tirelessly bring the word of G-d to those around him.

## V

### OLAM HESED YIBANEH

How was Avraham going to fulfill his mission, to restore humanity to its former nobility and to help Mankind actualize the “image of G-d” in which it was created?

“*And he called there on the name of Hashem, the Everlasting G-d*. Resh Lakish said: Read not *and he called* rather *and he made to call*, thereby teaching that our father Avraham caused the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, to be uttered by the mouth of every passer-by. How was this? After [travelers] had eaten and drunk, they stood up to bless him; but, said he to them, ‘Did you eat of mine? You ate of that which belongs to the G-d of the Universe. Thank, praise and bless Him who spoke and the world came into being.’ (BT Sotah 10a-b)

It was through his unending kindness, opening his tent to all passersby and demonstrating deep and passionate concern for everyone (including entire communities devoted to decidedly un-Avrahamic behavior), that Avraham was successful in influencing people. His constant movement, from north to south, east to west, attracted adherents because he personified the attribute of lovingkindness - חסד.

There are several types of חסד - altruistic, self-serving, parochial, universal etc. For our purposes, let's note that there is Hessed which obliterates valuable boundaries and blurs the truth. Often, people will, in the name of love, ignore harsh realities and embrace and even encourage immoral, unethical and even felonious behavior. Although motivated by noble instincts, this sort of Hessed is often self-destructive as well as counterproductive.

Avraham's brand of Hessed, on the other hand, was חסד של אמת - lovingkindness which doesn't compromise truth (note how these two concepts “balance” each other in Mikah 6:8, Zekharyah 8:18 and Esther 9:30). An example of this is related in Parashat Vayera:

*And Avraham reproved Avimelech because of a well of water, which Avimelech's servants had violently taken away (21:25)*

Note the Midrash's inference from this verse: “Any love without reproving is not [genuine] love”.

In short, Avraham's mission - to be a source of blessing for all of humanity (B'resheet 12:3) by teaching them and bringing them close to the way of G-d - was to be accomplished by synthesizing impassioned Hessed with uncompromising Emet.

## VI **AND THEY SEPARATED...**

This model of **חסד** and **אמת**, so inspiring to myriad followers, was not entirely successful in actualizing it within his own family. After the near-tragedy in Egypt, Lot accompanied Avraham and Sarah back to K'na'an - and both nephew and uncle were "very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold". Unfortunately, that very wealth led to disputes between their shepherds (see the Rishonim at 13:7 for various explanations as to the nature of those disputes) - and Lot and Avraham separated. Avraham offered Lot his choice of land, and Lot chose the (then-) fertile valley of S'dom.

Lot's choice of S'dom is odd. The closest relative and protege of Avraham, the man of Hessed, chooses a city whose very name reeks of selfishness:

*Behold, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom...she did not strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. (Yehezqel 16:49)*

Lot's emigration to S'dom, away from Avraham, was, at the very least, a serious obstacle in the path of the Avrahamic mission. How could he use Hessed to teach the world when his own nephew opted to live in the "anti-**חסד**" city?

Something about the lovingkindness of Avraham remained incomplete as a result of this separation.

In the meantime, we find that the uncompromising characteristic of Emet was "diluted" in the generations following Avraham. Although we will address this topic at length in a few weeks, I'd like to briefly point out that there are a number of episodes involving deceit in the Ya'akov and Yehudah (and Yoseph) narratives (e.g. Lavan's deceit of Ya'akov, the brothers' deceit of their father with Yoseph's tunic).

In other words, by the time we encounter the third generation of the Avrahamic tribe, both **חסד** and **אמת** the crowning characteristics of father Avraham, have been taken down at least a few pegs and are in need of restoration.

Curiously, each of these losses resulted in the birth of two boys: As a result of Lot's separation, he ended up in that cave with his two "found" daughters - and that's where Ammon and Mo'av came into the world.

Yehudah's deception in the Tamar episode (Ch. 38) is clearly linked to the earlier episodes of deceit (more on that in a later shiur) documented in B'reshet. As a result of this interaction, Peretz and Zerach are born to Yehudah.

## VII **BACK TO MEGILLAT RUTH...**

What was Ruth's crowning characteristic? We'll let the Midrash tell us:

"R. Ze'ira says: This Scroll [of Ruth] has no [laws of] impurity and purity, prohibition and permission - so why was it written? To teach you how great is the reward of **גומלי חסדים** (people who perform acts of lovingkindness).

Ruth's Hessed is legendary (see Ruth 1:8); her devotion to her mother-in-law is one of the most inspirational stories in all of our literature.

The fidelity, honesty and guilelessness (Emet) which typify both Bo'az and Ruth throughout the story are surely indicative of a reversal of the disruptive developments in Sefer B'reshet.

Now, let's take a quick look back at the genealogy of David at the end of Megillat Ruth:

*Now these are the generations of Peretz; Peretz fathered Hetzron, And Hetzron fathered Ram, and Ram fathered Amminadav, and Amminadav fathered Nach'shon, and Nach'shon fathered Salmon, and Salmon fathered Bo'az, and Bo'az fathered Oved, and Oved fathered Yishai, and Yishai fathered David. (4:18-22)*

## **VIII**

### **...AND BACK TO LOT**

Near the beginning of the shiur, I proposed that the presentation of Terach in parallel form to the presentation of No'ach was aimed at setting up Lot as a latter-day K'na'an. I also proposed that it was necessary for David to be a descendant of Lot - that the foundation of Jewish monarchy had to come from that wayward nephew of Avraham.

By noting the effects of Lot's separation from Avraham on his mission - and the later diminution of uncompromising Emet in Avraham's family - we understand how the Avrahamic task could not be completed until they were properly returned to the fold. It was in the person of David, the product of that union of Emet and Hessed (Bo'az and Ruth), that these were restored to the B'nei Yisra'el. This king was the person most appropriate to continue the Avrahamic task - to be a blessing for all families of the earth.

Bo'az is a direct descendant of Peretz, the product of deceit; Ruth is the child of Mo'av, the product of rejection. Together, they give birth to the seeds of Jewish monarchy and, ultimately, the Mashiach.