

Introductory Study for Parsha #3: Lech Lecha¹

<i>Torah:</i>	Genesis 12:1 - 17:27
<i>Haftarah:</i>	Isaiah 40:27 - 41:16
<i>B'rit Chadasha:</i>	Romans 4:1 – 25



Go out for/unto yourself ...
[Genesis 12:1]

Vayomer Adonai el-Avram – Then the Holy One said to Avram ... ***Lech lecha*** – go out for/unto yourself **Genesis 12:1a.**

In the first two parshot of Torah the Great Storyteller established some important foundations for our developing Biblical worldview. First, He used the story lines to draw us into us to the elevated stream of consciousness the western world calls the ‘*Fear of the Holy One*’. The narration of the events of Creation and early earth-life have dazzled us with, and drawn us to, the Beautiful Personality of our Creator. The more we get to know of Him, the more enthralled by Him we become. The more familiar we become with His signature brushstrokes of genius, the more awestruck we are by both His Incomparable Wisdom and His Delightful Artistry. We find ourselves humbled not only by His unrivaled *Power* but also by His uncompromising *Goodness*. We find ourselves inspired by His Passion, impressed by His Patience and Craftsmanship, and captivated by His Mercy, His Kindness, His Covenant Faithfulness, His Gentleness, and His Grace. He is not only our universe’s *Maker*, He is *our Mentor*. He has become everything to us – from *Faithful Father*, to *Esteemed Rabbi*, to *Good Shepherd*, to *Faithful Covenant Partner*, to *Glorious King*, to *Strong Redeemer/Deliverer*, to *Beloved Bridegroom*, to *Closest Ally*, and to *Most trusted, relied-upon Friend*. He is becoming our go-to source for counsel, for guidance, for hope, for joy, and for inspiration. The more

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we appreciate His Creative Methodology, however, the more we are embarrassed and appalled by the recognition of the fallen condition of men. Oh, how far our species has strayed from the purposes for which we were created. We have begun to see that as in its primeval state the earth was initially *tohu v'vohu* [*i.e.* 'without form and void'], and steeped in *choshech* [*i.e.* deep, lifeless darkness] [Genesis 1:2], so is it now with every human being born into this world in our day. Every human being now enters life a veritable prisoner, locked up in a three-story stronghold of the soul. The first floor of this stronghold of the soul is *ra* - *i.e.* *narcissistic selfishness and egocentric self-promotion*. The second floor is *mish'chat* - *i.e.* corruption by unclean and common realm. The third floor is *chamas* - *i.e.* anti-social ideas, ideologies, indoctrinations, and attitudes that lead to vain imaginations, to knee-jerk reactions, to hyper-emotions, to the taking of offense, to the making of accusations and placing of blame, to the embracing of 'moral' outrage, to alignment with mob mentality, to associations with vigilantism, to acts of vengeance, and to patterns of violent oppression. As the Holy One described it: ***the imagination of man's heart is ra*** [*i.e.* narcissistically selfish and egotistically self-promoting] ***from his youth***. Genesis 8:21. Oh, my – how mankind has fallen! We have the sickness, Holy One – send us the cure!

How will the Holy One counteract this? How will He effectuate *tikkun*? How will He release us, individually and collectively, from the dark, dank stronghold of the *unholy progression*? He has a plan - and He is about to activate it. Watch the village of Charan. Watch the lineage of Shem. Watch the house of Avram. Are you ready? Welcome to Phase II of the Holy One's Bold Plan for the Restoration of the Great Ecosystem that He Created.

Introducing Avraham Avinu – also known as 'Abraham our Patriarch' – And the Father of Emunah

This is the sweet season of reconnecting with the rock from which we were all hewn – Avraham. Avraham, son of Terach, brother of Nachor, and uncle of Lot. Avraham, husband of Sarai - the ultimate barren woman. Avraham, the shepherd of many flocks. Avraham, the Wandering Aramean. Avraham, the builder of altars to the Holy One. Avraham, the friend of Elazar the Syrian. Avraham, the father of all people of *emunah*.

Last week in connection with the stories of Noach and his family we learned a lot about the foundational covenantal empowerment of 'grace' [Hebrew, *chen*]. This week the focus will shift to another essential aspect of God-man interface and relationship – *emunah*. The King James translators elected to translate this great Hebrew covenantal empowerment into the English language as '*faith*'. What is '*emunah*' of which the original text speaks, you ask? It is the kind of *inspired*,

empowering reverence for and trust in the Creator that gives rise to a consistent, steadfast, trustworthy lifestyle of devotion, dedication, and selfless service to the Creator and His Grand Plan of Redemption and Restoration for all elements of His Creation. Please do not insult emunah - or Avraham - by calling it 'faith'. Emunah is not a belief system, a creed, or a product of 'systematic theology'. It is not 'positive thinking' or 'positive confession'. It is not 'intellectual assent' to truth. It is not 'ideology'. It is not 'religion'. It is neither found in nor learned from institutions, organizations, or traditions. It is, instead, intimately relational, spiritual, motivational, inspirational, behavioral, and, most importantly, covenantal. It is a spiritual form of surrogate motherhood, as it were – with the child that is carried being none other the Ultimate 'seed of woman', Messiah. Emunah is the natural passionate human response to the Holy One's overtures of love, kindness, forgiveness, redemption, and 'grace'.

The Yehi Ohr/Lech Lecha Connection

Much as, on the first day of Creation, the Creator of the Heavens and the earth saw *tohu v'vohu v'choseh* at work in the earth, and it moved Him to begin an orderly, time-release process of introducing structure, purpose, fruitfulness, and beauty to earth with the beautiful, energy-infused words **Yehi ohr**, so He is about to kick off a correspondingly orderly, time-release process of introducing structure, purpose, fruitfulness, and beauty to humanity with the beautiful, energy-infused words **Lech Lecha** – *i.e. Go out for/unto your real self*. The Holy One's *Lech Lecha* directive involves two injunctions – first, we are called to go *out from* certain things that are limiting both our perspective and our potential, and second, we are called to go *out unto* – *i.e. to seek out, connect with, embrace, and begin to operate in* - our true identity, our real mission, and our stunning, glorious Divinely-ordained destiny. This is, indeed, the great adventure! And for this adventure, we are going to need something very, very special and empowering. We are going to need *emunah*. We will have to learn to walk by *emunah* [KJV 'faith']. Hebraically, that means not by the sight of our eyes, nor the hearing of our ears, nor the logic of our minds, but instead living by *sh'ma*-ing, *sh'mar*-ing, and *asah*-ing the communications, empowerments, and guidance, and staying actively engaged in the Protocols and Plan, of the Holy One. The downdraft of inspiration and revelation that is released from Heaven by His Covenant; the amazing drawing power of His Personal; the pulsing energy of His spoken Words; and the sweetness of His Shalom – these will have to become our compass points. This means we will have to become more tuned in to and familiar with that which is *unseen* than to anything that can be seen with eyes of flesh. It means that we will have to become more motivated by, and drawn to, what is *hoped for* than anything our senses or our intellect might tell us is rational, logical, possible, 'right vs. wrong', 'fair vs. unfair', 'good vs. evil', or empirically 'true vs. false'.

Noach took *emunah* for a test drive; Avraham will become the undisputed master of the craft. He will *aman* – and it will be credited to him as ‘righteousness’.

What Does A Wandering Aramean Have to Do With You and Me?

According to the sages of Israel the man we will get to know this week and next, first as *Avram*, and later as *Avraham*, was tested by the Holy One ten (10) times. Each test was an ox-goad, making Avram move, grow, and get closer to the Divine Plan and to his Divine Destiny. Through Avram’s tremendous series of ever deepening encounters with the God of the Universe, in the midst of trials and tribulations, we learn not only *who our Father in the Faith was*, but also *Who the God of our Fathers is*. Moreover, if we have eyes to see and ears to hear I believe we will learn amazing things about *who we were created to be* and about *what we are being redeemed and empowered to do*. We will learn beyond a shadow of a doubt that the Holy One is *patient with His people*. But we will also learn that the Holy One knows how to, and is not afraid to, *apply an ox-goad to our posterior* when it is in our best interest.

The Holy One does not want us – will not permit us – to ‘camp’ or stagnate. He does not want us to settle just for escaping Babylon² - *i.e.* for merely responding to the call to ***come out of her, My People***³. He wants *so much more* for us. He wants our story not to be primarily about *what horrible things and putrid systems and cultures we came out of*, but primarily about what gloriously kind, joyful, loving, merciful, slow-to-anger, instantly forgiving people He has recreating us to be and about the world-changing mission of redemption, hope, and restoration in which He is calling us to participate. What He wants is for us to come into – and He will be faithful to continually prod us in the direction of – the Divine Purpose and Destiny for which we were created and given the breath of life for such a time as this.

All Mankind is Called to Be Part of This Mishpachah [i.e. ‘Family’]

It should also be noted that the benefits of the *b’rit olam* [everlasting covenant] the Holy One is going to cut with Avraham this week are not by any means going to be limited in scope to those physically descended from him. The Holy One’s covenant with Avraham is also going to be made expressly applicable to *foreigners* who were *servants* of Avraham and of his descendants, and thus became engrafted into Avraham’s ‘household’. By coming into the household of Avraham’s seed

² Although many people speculate one thing or another, it is difficult if not impossible to know for certain if Avram’s early years in the village Torah calls Ur – before Terach moved to Charan - were spent under the domination of the *Babylonian culture*, under the domination of the ancient *Chaldean culture*, or under some combination of the two.

³ See Jeremiah 51:41-50 and Revelation 18:4.

with a servant's heart anyone, of any nation, ethnic background, or culture can participate/share in the *b'rit olam* [everlasting covenant] between the Holy One and Avraham's seed. Foreigners cannot forcefully take the children's place at the table, it is true – but they can eat to their fill of the crumbs the children leave behind.

Avraham's life is *your life*. His identity is *your identity*. His mission is *your mission*. His destiny is *your destiny*. He is truly *Avraham Avinu* - our father Avraham – to all people in Covenant with the Creator of the Universe. And if you doubt the relevance of knowing Avram on this side of the atoning death of Messiah, turn to and read Luke 16:19-34. The first person you will see in the World to Come will be none other than *Avraham avinu* [our father Avraham].

Rediscovering The Rock From Which We Have Been Hewn

In the six chapters that make up the very special parsha called *Lech Lecha* we will cover 24 years of Avram's life, from age 75 to age 99. During those 24 years Avram is going to have five different life-changing *encounters* with the Holy One, as well as numerous God-ordained and God-directed *life experiences*. It is through the combination of these God-encounters and Divinely ordained life experiences that the Holy One is going to prepare Avram to become not only His *friend* but His *partner in a covenant that will change the world*.

Take note this week how patiently the Holy One nurtures His relationship with Avram and Sarai. Take note how carefully the Holy One goes about the process of *investing the resources of Heaven into their lives*. Take note how He purposely *delays the gratification of their temporal, earthy desires* in order to *cultivate in them eternal, Heavenly desires*. Note how He indeed gives them the desires of their hearts – but first *changes their hearts to give them the capacity to want only what He desires to give them*. And note how through this nurturing process the Holy One gradually transforms Avram and Sarai into a couple who will, whatever the cost, *sh'ma* the Voice that spoke Creation into existence, will *walk in His ways*, and will *teach their children and the members of their household* - including the Syrian-born servant Elazar and the Egyptian-born handmaid Hagar - *to do the same*.

Avram's encounters with the Creator of the Universe will prove to be spectacular, but we will find out quickly that Avram himself is quite ordinary. He is a man like us, with whom we can readily identify. Indeed if this man who doubted, who pouted, who argued, and who tried to do in his own flesh what God was doing in the Spirit could become a "friend of God" ... well then, *so can we!*⁴ May becoming

⁴ I am aware that Hebrew folk legends depict Avram as exceptional from age 3 onward, and portray him as a righteous crusader against idolatry from an early age. However even if such legends are true the fact

a 'friend of God' like unto our father Avraham become our quest this week!

Changing Paradigms – and Deepening Relationship

One thing that we should all try to constantly keep in mind as we read and study Torah together is that the primary thing that the Holy One our God really wants us to draw from the process is not for us to become scholars, historians, or 'experts in the law' – but is simply for us to develop an *ever-deepening relationship with Him*⁵. How does the Holy One bring about the *ever-deepening relationship* He desires to have with us? First of all, He has designed into our DNA an *insatiable hunger for communion with Him*. He has made it so that – unless we allow our consciences to be seared - we never become satisfied with either *the level of revelation we have of Him* or *the quality of communion we are experiencing with Him*. Beyond that the Holy One goes about the process of building relationship with us the same way human beings go about **building ever-deepening relationships with each other**. By that I mean that **He continues to reveal Himself, His Will, and His Ways to us PROGRESSIVELY over time**.

The Holy One created mankind, and He loves every member of the species with a deep, abiding love that cannot be shaken. He wants only the best for us. He is *not our biggest critic* – He is our *biggest fan*. He is not looking for an excuse to judge us – He is looking for an opportunity to inspire us, to heal us, and to enable us to become all He envisions us to be. He wants every single member of our species to *excel and succeed* – not to *see us fail*. He wants to teach us how to move forward as *overcomers*, not to *surrender to life's challenges and consider ourselves to be either failures or victims*. He wants us to be *witnesses of His goodness, His grace, His power, and His glory* – not *statistics of the Fall*. He wants us to be ambassadors of His Kingdom – not captives of the principalities and powers of this world. For this reason the Holy One is *a passionate, intractable, pursuer of relationship with all men, all women, and all children* – of every race, tribe, tongue, age, gender, and nationality. He wants to talk to – and with - us. He wants to walk with us. He wants to *nurture us, to personally train us, to activate and empower the creativity He designed into us, and to intimately commune with us*. He is a *covenant sculptor*. He is a *rapport builder*. He is the *Ultimate Mentor*, the *Superlative Rabbi*, the *Fundamental Master of Social Liaison*, and the *Exquisite*

that the Holy One purposely chose to have them omitted from the written Torah makes them irrelevant to the present discussion.

⁵ The Creator of Heaven and Earth is not, you will find, particularly impressed with – or particularly close to - scholars, with historians or 'experts in the law'. If you want Biblical proof of that see **I Corinthians 1:19-20, 26-31**. Unfortunately, you see, by and large scholars, historians and 'experts in the law' do not generally tend to do very well at maintaining such things as *purity of heart, contrition of spirit, a childlike approach, or the tenderness of soul that causes one to 'tremble at His Word'*. See **Isaiah 66:2**. Nor unfortunately do such people generally tend to do very well at *acting justly, at loving mercy, and at walking humbly with Him*. See **Micah 5:8**. There are exceptions of course – but they are relatively rare.

Life coach. He chooses the timing, the nature, and the substance – of all the interactions that lead to deepening relationship. He causes both revelation about Him and communion with Him to ebb and flow. He always knows ‘just the right time’ to introduce a new characteristic or aspect of His Divine personality into the relationship AND He knows just the right time to withdraw strategically in such a way as to make the hunger build within us.

The Holy One is never bored. He is constantly engaged in a great *treasure hunt*. The treasure He seeks is the *deep affection of and intimate communion with* the hearts of ordinary men, women, and children like you and me. He is relentless in His pursuit. But He is strategic as well. His pursuit always unfolds in a Divinely designed, pre-ordered pattern of stages, phases, and paradigm shifts.

As we wade off into the *Patriarchal Chronicles* section of Torah you should know that one of the most significant pre-ordered paradigm shifts that the Holy One employs to deepen our understanding of and relationship with Him is looming very large before us. As we shift our focus from the *unit of introductions* [consisting of parshot *B’reshit* and *Noach*] to the *unit of the patriarchs* [parshot *Lech Lecha* through *Vayechi*] the Holy One is going to show us a totally new paradigm of Himself. What is the totally new paradigm to which we are to be introduced? I call it the ‘*God of Avraham, of Yitzchak, and of Ya’akov paradigm*’. Others might choose to call it the ‘*God of the Patriarchs paradigm*’. Let me explain what I mean.

The Progression of Revelation

The first 11 chapters of Torah constituted the chronicles of the interactions between the Holy One our God and ‘*the Ancients*’. The era of the Ancients officially covers the period from the formation of Adam to *Terach* (Terah) – *i.e.* the first twenty generations of man. The ancients knew the Holy One as *the Elohim* – *i.e.* the *Creator of the Heavens and the Earth*. That was because the Creator paradigm was the primary lens through which the Holy One chose to reveal Himself to them. This week, however, God-man interactions are going to take a giant leap forward. We will build upon the foundation laid by the Holy One’s dealings with the ‘ancients’ by studying the next phase of progressive revelation – the dealings of the Holy One with the *Avot* [fathers].

Keep in mind that the Holy One caused the things we have been reading about in Genesis to be recorded in the Torah as a preface to the ‘life instructions’ He is going to give us *en masse* on Sinai. The Holy One did not just want to give us a bunch of instructions to live by. He wants us to understand His Divine principles of relationship thoroughly before we embark on a lifestyle of divinely directed conduct. Hence everything we have studied thus far, and everything we will study through Exodus 19, will be designed to teach us ‘*relationship with the Holy One*’.

The dealings of the Holy One with the ancients – Adam through *Terach* (Avram's father) – can be considered 'Relationship with the Creator 101' – the basic, introductory course material on man's relationship to God. We learn from that the basic calling of *b'tzelem Elohim* [man created 'in the image of God'] and the reality that while sinful conduct estranges us from God and therefore must be dealt with it does not sever the relationship or change the Holy One's plan for us, either as a species or individually. Adam and *Chava* [Eve] learned this through a *forbidden fruit, animal skins, and a promise of a 'seed of woman'* to come and rectify the 'sin problem'. *Kayin* [Cain] learned it through a *murder, the outcry of innocent blood, and a 'mark'*. *Noach* [Noah] and his sons learned about it through an *ark, a flood and a bow in the cloud*. Nimrod and the rest of Noach's descendants learned about it through a *tower* and a Divine Decree of *dispersion and confusion of language*. And more recently, *Terach's* time on earth has also come and gone. To everything there is a season. Now, however, there is *a new wind* blowing. So hold onto your seats - it is time for God-man interactions to get *really interesting!*

The Joyous Nature of Parsha Lech Lecha

It is said in the *Tanya*⁶ concerning the inter-relationship of the first three parshot of Torah:

*B'reshit is a cheerful Sedra,
even though its ending is not all that pleasant.*

*Noach has the Flood, but the week ends on a happy note
with the birth of our father Avraham [i.e. Abraham].*

The really joyous week is that of parsha Lech Lecha.

Welcome to the 'really joyous' week! Are you curious what is so 'really joyous' about *Lech Lecha*? Let's explore the idea a little bit.

The dealings of the Holy One with Avraham [Abraham], Yitzchak [Isaac], Ya'akov [Jacob], Y'hudah [Judah], Yosef [Joseph], and family [the *Avot*] will constitute an *intermediate level course on what it means to know and walk with the Holy One*. We might call this intermediate course '*Relationship with the Creator 201*'. All the remainder of Torah – *i.e.* Exodus 20 through the end of Deuteronomy – and for that matter, the writings and the prophets, as well as the writings of the apostles of Y'shua of Natzret (Nazareth) - will do will simply be to build upon, amplify, and 'fill in' where these two courses leave us with open questions. The essential

⁶ Published in 1796, the *Tanya* is a rabbinic sourcebook that still forms a part of the canon of Jewish texts studied in yeshivas. Written by Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, founder of the Chabad-Lubavitch Chassidic Movement, the *Tanya* is crafted to motivate and inspire its readers to embrace a Chassidic way of life.

elements of relationship learned in Courses 101 and 201 will never change. They are eternal elements set forth by the Will and the Word of the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe. They will however develop and mature, and become more and more meaningful. After all, they are elements of relationship, and relationship by its very nature matures with time, with progressive interactions, with expanding revelations, and with more communication.

But back to the question: *What is “joyous” about this?* The Creator of the Universe – the Omnipotent, Omnipresent, Omniscient, All-Powerful God – wants to have much more than an encounter with you. He wants to have a *vibrant, dynamic, interactive, lifelong give-and-take relationship* with the likes of you and me. Our Creator wants to stay in contact with – and involved with – us. Moment by moment, day by day, decade-by-decade, He wants to stay in *communication* with us. He wants to *spend time with us*. He wants to *teach us His Ways*. He wants to *show us His Glory*. He wants to *dispatch angels to protect and defend us*. He wants to *establish protocols for us to have continuous fellowship*. He wants to *do miracles on our behalf*. He wants to make and perpetually renew with and in us an ancient *covenant of shalom* – a covenant through which He intends to redeem mankind – and change the world into a place where the knowledge of the Glory of the Lord permeates and inundates all things – as the waters cover the sea. He wants to offer each of us an important role in His Grand Plan for the Redemption of Mankind and the Restoration of Creation to Edenic bliss. That, Dear One, is joyous indeed!

The Next Step in the Holy One’s Grand Plan of Redemption

Understand therefore that the events about which we will read this week *will not occur haphazardly*. These events were planned before the foundation of the world – and they constitute an integral part of the Divine Plan of the Holy One for His Creation. The events and God-man interactions of this parsha will be an outgrowth of, and will build upon, all that we have read before. And, along with what has happened before, the events and interactions of this parsha will form a critical part of the foundation for all subsequent Creator/Mankind interactions. What we will read about will not just be the story of Avram and Sarai. The dealings of the Holy One with Avram and Sarai will merely be a sub-plot of the greater story of the redemptive plan of the Holy One for His Creation.

The Relationship of the Avram/Sarai Narratives to the Two Over-riding Themes of the Book of Genesis

Let us remember – and keep in mind as we read the details of the Avram/Sarai sub-plot – what we have previously identified in these studies as the *two over-riding themes of the Torah*. There is a *central theme* and there is a *secondary theme*. Do you remember what they are? The *central theme* of the Torah and

indeed all of Scripture is *the rule and reign of God over all created things*. Torah wants us to view God as nothing less than the Sovereign Lord over the entire universe and to accept His will as the ultimate and most powerful as well as most beneficial force therein. The *secondary theme* of the Torah is that *there is a special place of blessing - a garden of delight - ordained by God for occupancy by the descendants of the man Avraham*, the 10th generation descendant (through the lineage of Shem) of Noach (Noah), who was the 10th generation descendant (through the lineage of Seth) of Adam. This special garden is going to be provided as *a stage of sorts* upon which a Divine Passion Play authored by the Creator is to be acted out according to a Script written before the foundation of the world. Through the acting out of this script the will of God – *i.e. that through Avraham and his seed all the nations of the earth will be blessed* - is going to be fulfilled.

In the week of *B'reshit* we focused upon the Compassionate One's creation of the world, and upon the rebellion of mankind against his Creator. In the week of *Noach* we focused upon the Creator's redemptive judgment and renewal of the world. In the week of *Lech Lecha* we will focus upon the Holy One's calling forth from that renewed world unto Himself a people who become clearly distinguishable from others as every aspect of and event in their lives is penetrated by a clear and constant plan of divine government.

Noach vs. Avram – the Differences

For two weeks in a row the first few lines of the parsha of the week introduce us to someone from whom we are to learn important lessons regarding both *how to relate to* and *what to expect from* the Holy One. Last week parsha began with Torah introducing us to *Noach* [Noah]; *Lech Lecha* begins with Torah introducing us to Avram. There is a qualitative difference in the introductions, which we will do well to heed. We were specifically told by Torah what to think of Noach. We were introduced to him *as the Holy One saw him – righteous, blameless in his generation, one who walked with God. Genesis 6:9*. Torah does not tell us any similar thing about Avram [Abram]. Avram is not called righteous. Avram is not declared to be blameless in his generation. And rather than walk with the Holy One the way Noach did, *it appears the Holy One had to prod Avram with an ox-goad to make him move*. I identify best with Avram – how about you!

Before we leave the subject of the differences between our introduction to Noach and our introduction to Avram there is one other thing that should be noted. Noach was introduced to us as fruitful, the father of three strapping sons who walked in his revelation. Avram is different. Avram's wife, Sarai, is barren. Avram is, therefore, the first depository of the promised seed we will encounter who is himself void of seed. Avram is thus introduced to us in *a state of glaring*

incompletion. There is a *large vacuum* in his life. His will be a story crying out for supernatural intervention.

The Foundation Upon Which all God-Man Interaction Is Built – The B’rit

Last week in our study we were introduced to something called a *b’rit*⁷– almost universally translated into English as ‘*covenant*’. The Holy One made a *b’rit* [covenant] with Noach and his descendants. Understanding *b’rit* is essential to understanding Torah – and absolutely critical to having a meaningful relationship with the Creator of the Universe⁸. A *b’rit*, you see, is what not only *binds the Holy One to us, and us to the Holy One, in this world*, but also *secures for us a place in the World-to-Come*. A *b’rit* is both a *downdraft of Divine Energy* and a *download of Heavenly Strategy* to earth.

Adam and *Chava* [Eve] had a close relationship with, and had many, and sometimes very, very high quality, interactions with the Holy One. *Kayin* [Cain] discovered the Holy One’s mercy and grace. *Hanoch* [Enoch] *walked with God*, and God ‘took him’. But strangely enough, Torah does not describe the relationship any of those persons had with the Holy One as a *b’rit*. Those relationships, awesome in implication as they were, were merely preliminary and foundational. Those relationships all merely laid the groundwork, as it were, for the *b’rit*-based relationship the Holy One intended to establish with the crowning jewel of His Creation – the one lovingly formed by His Hand *b’tzelem Elohim* [in the image of God].

In Biblical times, you see, covenants were the building blocks of social interaction and social relations, between individuals, ethnic groups, nations, and kingdoms. The only Biblical relationships not based specifically on covenant were the relationships of father/son, mother/daughter, sibling/sibling - family relationships based upon biology and the animalistic concept of ‘bonding’. Think about it. Any time two people meet, or kingdoms face off against each other, or two sheikdoms or tribes interact, they must do so on one of two levels – they must choose either *warfare* or *diplomacy*. Sometimes, warfare is chosen. Sometimes, however,

⁷ *B’rit* is *beit, resh, yod, tav*, pronounced *buh-reet*. In Hebraic pictographs it depicts the Holy One as a mighty king [*beit*] stepping off of His Throne to become as a man [*resh*], and in that capacity establishing with His own hand [*yod*] a covenant [*tav*] with other men.

⁸ Please note that I am not saying that one has to have an *intellectual* understanding of *b’rit* before one can be in relationship with the Holy One. The Holy One is the initiator of every relationship, and therefore begins relationship at whatever intellectual level we find ourselves when He apprehends us, arrests us, and stirs in us a desire to know and walk with Him. Understanding of *b’rit* is a gift of the Creator, and usually comes to us progressively, as the relationship develops. But for a full ‘partnering-in-Creation’ relationship, such as the Holy One intends for His people to have with Him, to exist, we must understand, and flow in, the *b’rit*.

warfare is not in either side's best interest. In those situations, diplomacy is in the long-term interest of both kingdoms, sheikdoms, or tribes. What is the basis for diplomacy? In human terms, each probably has something the other wants or needs; hence, when Ya'akov and his sons came to Shechem in Genesis, the sons of Shechem invited them to intermarry and intermix – *i.e.* to make a *b'rit*.

A *b'rit* consists not just of promises but *solemn, irrevocable oaths*, confirmed by ceremonial acts and tokens designed to function as 'down payments' on the covenant undertakings of each party. A *b'rit* also involves a formal acknowledging of one party as the 'stronger partner' [the *suzerein*] and the other party as the 'weaker partner' [the *vassal*]. The stronger partner agrees to provide the weaker partner with protection, with counsel, and with training in fulfillment of the covenant objectives; the weaker partner agrees to submit its agenda, its resources, and its undying loyalty to the will of the other, and to *sh'ma* everything the stronger partner says⁹. And the stronger partner [in our context, the Holy One] is recognized as the sole arbitrator of any dispute that might arise and the enforcer of any discipline that may be necessary between the covenant partners.

The Holy One intended His relationship with man to be based upon *b'rit*. His interactions with man were not intended to be haphazard, or 'as necessary'. They were to be based upon something much more substantive and abiding. Hence we are going to find that virtually every dealing recorded in Scripture between the Holy One and man from the Flood forward is going to *be built around*, is going to *occur in the context of*, and is going to *assume the existence and continuance of* the covenants the Holy One has made with men, starting with Noach and his sons, and extending, this week, to a descendant of theirs – a man named Avraham.

The Modern Idea of 'Treaty' or 'Contract' vs. the Hebrew B'rit

The word "covenant" [the closest English equivalent to *b'rit*] is seldom used in our Western Society. Lesser, watered down, terms such as "treaty", "contract", "partnership", "agreement" and "arrangement" have gradually replaced the covenant concept. Only in connection with traditional marriage does our society purport to require parties commence their bond with an oath or vow or 'down payment'. Only in that connection does our society consider God a party and partner to an agreement, such that supernatural consequences of infidelity a part of the "deal". Only in that connection does a relationship between two people involve a ceremonial exchange [usually, rings] of 'down payment' on covenant undertakings,

⁹ Sometimes translated "*he listens*", sometimes "*he hears*", and sometimes "*he obeys*", the Hebrew verb *sh'ma* [*shin, mem, ayin*, Strong's #H8085] describes the proper response of man to the Voice of the Creator. To *sh'ma* means much more than either to listen or to hear. It means to *totally restructure one's life based solely upon what one has heard*, forsaking all other ways besides that way explicitly spoken by he who has spoken.

and a designation/acknowledgement of one party as the ‘stronger partner’ to provide protection and training, and of the other party as the ‘weaker vessel’ to provide submissiveness.

Widespread ignorance in our society about the nature of covenant has led, of course, to the rapid erosion of the traditional marriage relationship in America and other Western nations. Parties who enter into marriage, and live marriage, as a ‘contract’, a ‘partnership’, or an ‘arrangement’ are likely to end up in divorce court, or in an “affair”. Parties who enter into and live marriage as a “covenant”, however, are not likely to end up in either.

A *b’rit* with God, you see, means we do not have to guess at or wonder about where our relationship with Him stands. A *b’rit* with the Holy One means that we do not have to speculate about what His thoughts toward us are, what He expects from us, or what His purpose is in giving us life and daily bread. A *b’rit* with the Holy One means we have the strongest possible ‘*covenant partner*’ – the Creator of the Universe Himself. A *b’rit* with the Holy One means that the Almighty One has *bound Himself to protect and defend us against every opponent, to communicate His will and His counsel to us, and to teach/train us, even disciplining us as necessary*, in order that we might become flesh and blood representatives of His Kingdom on earth. A *b’rit* with the Holy One means He gets a people who will merely *sh’ma* His voice, *sh’mar* and *asah* His words, and do only what they see Him doing, rather than a people who do great works they think will impress Him, earn His favor and curry His blessing. A *b’rit* with the Holy One means He Who is most qualified gets to be the ‘stronger partner’, and gets His Will accomplished ‘*on earth as it is in Heaven*’, in such a way as to bring to Him - not to His agents - honor, glory, and praise from the peoples and nations of the earth. All that being said, perhaps we should take a look at the man through whom this kind of *b’rit* is going to be most wonderfully introduced.

Eavesdropping on Avram’s Divine Apprehension

At the close of parsha *Noach* (last week’s parsha) near the end of the genealogy of Noach, we were briefly introduced to a man named *Avram* One of Shem’s descendants, *Avram*’s name means [*alef, beit/veit, resh, mem sofit*, pronounced *Aww-rawm*] “*exalted father*”, but he had no children nor prospect of having any. He was born a pagan among pagans, into a pagan family, in a pagan land - Ur of the Chaldees. His father, Terach, began a journey to Kena’an, but somehow never made it. Halfway there – out of Babylon, but still not home – he settled in Charan. And so it is not in Ur of the Chaldees but in Charan that we find the subject of our study, *Avram*, as our *parsha ha-shavua* begins.

Keep in mind that God does not start out the relationship by making *b'rit* with Avram. Avram is not yet ready. The Holy One is going to lead Avram *gently* in the direction of *b'rit*. The first step is to captivate Avram with His Majesty, Beauty, and Passion. Then He will go teach Avram in the essential craft of *emunah*. Only then will Avram be ready to receive, embrace, and walk in the pulsing energy of the Heavenly downdraft that will become known as *Ha-B'rit*.

Torah does not introduce us to Avram – other than mentioning his name - until he is already 75 years old, married, and, to that point in his life at least, childless. How this ordinary man encountered the Most High God, was over many years humbled and transformed by Him, to the extent that he became not only the “*exalted father*” [in Hebrew, Avram] of the Hebrew peoples, but the “*Father of Many Nations*” [in Hebrew, Avraham] is one of the most critical theological lessons anyone seeking to truly know the Holy One must understand.

We meet Avram just as everything in his life is about to change dramatically. In this, the third parsha of the Torah, the Holy One calls Avram and his wife, Sarai, to “*go out*” of everything they knew, in search of their destiny. In Hebrew, the words our English Bibles translate as ‘Go out’ are *Lech* [*lamed, kaf*] *Lecha* [*lamed, kaf sofit*]. Literally, they mean *go unto yourself* – find the person you really are!

The Hebraic word picture of the phrase *lech lecha* is fascinating. The first letter, the *lamed*, as we have previously discussed, is a Hebraic picture of an ox-goad – that which makes an ox move, or changes his direction. The second letter, the *kaf*, is a Hebraic picture of the cupped wings of a bird or angelic creature in descent. The words *lech lecha* thus form a Hebraic mural in which the Holy One *goads* Avram – and makes Avram *move and light*. Since this is repeated, it pictures a process – with a goal – namely the *kaf sofit* – the ultimate destination the Holy One has prepared for us.

This mural is descriptive of the events in Avram’s life about which we will read, but it is also much, much more. It is, I believe, prophetic of what will happen in the lives of Avram’s descendants forever. Yitzchak (Isaac) and Ya’akov (Jacob) and Yosef (Joseph) – and B’nei Yisrael under Moshe (Moses) and Y’hoshua (Joshua) - would each experience it. And I believe it is also what the Holy One is doing in YOUR life and MINE *this week* – at *this strategic point in time*.

The Lech Lecha Call is For Us All

From what elements of your comfort zone could the Creator be calling you to GO

OUT in this appointed *emunah-building season*? Take a few moments right now and *ask Him*. Put everything in your life on the altar – things like your house, neighborhood, your job or other revenue source, and your hometown; things like your family relationships, your *group associations*, your *institutional loyalties*; and your *sense of national, ethnic, and cultural identity*; things like your lifestyle choices, your *behavior patterns*, and your *education, entertainment, and socialization protocols*; things such as your *bodily urges and appetites*; your *matrix of likes and dislikes, affections, and addictions*; things like your attitudes, your predispositions, your beliefs, your opinions, your areas of sensitivity and sentimentality, your insecurities, your paranoias, your soul-ties, your coping mechanisms – everything that defines who you presently are or think yourself to be! Let the One Who knows you best and Who loves you most tell you what you need to keep - and what you need, for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven and the Grand Redemptive Plan, to *leave behind*.

The God of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov loves you far too much - and has far too glorious a plan for you - to leave you in the comfort zone of your present status quo. He is ready to move forward with His Plan - and He is calling all who will sh'ma to arise and come away with Him. Each of us will have to make a choice - will we cling to the past - or are we prepared, at the prompting of His Beautiful Voice, to move on to the future?

This is, you see, our week to gloriously reconnect with the *Wandering Aramean in us all*. If we do not understand our connection to Avraham, and his calling, we will never truly understand the purpose or the depth of our connection with the Holy One. My prayer for you, Dear Reader, is that you emerge from this larger-than-life journey of rediscovery nestling comfortably alongside Lazarus in Avraham's bosom! **Luke 16:23**. Are you ready to get started on the *great journey of patriarchal discovery*?

It is Time for the Moving of Tents

This week – the week when the theme for our lives is ‘*lech lecha*’ – has the spiritual potential to be a week of *moving our tents* in response to the Holy One’s intervention in our lives. What does this mean? Does it mean we will all move to Israel? Perhaps. Perhaps not. But what it will involve for all us, as it involved for Avram and Sarai, is likely to be *saying goodbye to something familiar and comfortable*. It may well also mean *leaving relationships and associations we had assumed would always be a part of our lives*, in order to make progress on a journey toward *our ultimate dwelling place [kaf sofit]* in the Holy One’s Divine Will.

Be prepared to feel *restless* this week. Be prepared to sense something eternal and

supercharged with destiny entering your life this week. Destiny awaits. Mission calls. Everything that hinders or holds us back from following our Bridegroom-King wherever He leads will begin to feel heavy, oppressive, and intolerable. And some things – and perhaps some people and situations – the season for which has expired will soon be disappearing in our rear-view mirror. Are you feeling the Holy One’s ox-goad yet?

The Haftarah for Lech Lecha

Isaiah 40:27 - 41:16

In the Haftarah for *Lech Lecha* Yeshayahu [Isaiah] speaks to the descendants of Avram at a time when they, like Avram and Sarai, were physically unable to do anything to obtain, and were about to give up on, the Holy One’s promises. Yeshayahu speaks words of comfort and encouragement, but clearly declares that the promises of the Holy One are for *a remnant* who like Avram will *hear* and *heed*, and “*wait upon the Lord.*”

The haftarah will begin with the familiar likening of those who ‘wait upon the Lord’ to eagles who rise up on wings.

Veyi'afu ne'arim veyiga'u

Even youths faint and become weary,

uv'churim kashol yikasheilu

and young men utterly fall:

V'kovei Adonai yachalifu choach

... but those who wait for the Holy One will renew their strength;

ya'alu ever kan'sharim

they will mount up with wings as eagles;

yarutzu v'lo yiga'u yeleichu v'lo yi'afu

they will run, and not be weary; they will walk, and not faint.

[Isaiah 40:30-31]

May the *Ruach HaChodesh* [Holy Spirit] empower you both to wait upon the Holy One and to rise up with wings as eagles! But there is more. Before the week is over we will glean from the writings of the prophet Yeshayahu a little more about what the Holy One’s *b'rit* with Avraham is all about. For Yeshayahu will say on behalf of the Holy One:

***But you, Yisra'el, my servant; Ya`akov whom I have chosen,
the seed of Avraham my friend,***

Don't you be afraid, for I am with you; don't be dismayed, for I am your God;

I will strengthen you; yes, I will help you;

yes, I will uphold you with the right hand of my righteousness.

Behold, I have made you [to be] a new sharp threshing instrument having teeth;

*you will thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and will make the hills as chaff.
You shall winnow them, and the wind shall carry them away,
and the whirlwind will scatter them;
and you will rejoice in the Holy One, you will glory in the Holy One of Yisra'el.*

Rejoice in these prophetic declarations, Dear Reader. They are your heritage ... and your destiny. It is *the outworking of the B'RIT*.

This Week's Reading from the Apostolic Scriptures

Romans 4:1 – 25

In the text I have selected from the writings of Yeshua's talmidim to correspond with parsha *Lech Lecha*, Shaul [Saul of Tarsus] extracts object lessons from the life experiences of Avraham. Shaul declares Avraham to be "*the father of all who believe,*" and of all who "*walk in the footsteps of the faith*" that Avraham had. Shaul will point out that ... *Avraham ... is the father of us all. As it is written, I have made you a father of many nations/peoples.* Romans 4:16. And Shaul will conclude this aliyah by describing to us the secret of Avraham's relationship with God, reminding us that Avraham *in hope believed against hope, to the end that he might become a father of many nations/peoples, according to that which had been spoken* Romans 4:18.

Conclusion

Beloved, this week learn *the ways of the Holy One* by watching Him interact with our father Avram/Avraham. Let the words of the Holy One to Avram/Avraham transcend the centuries. Let them penetrate to your very souls. The Holy One's call to Avraham is, you see, also His call to you and me. Much of walking with God is *leaving things behind and allowing the Holy One to change our priorities, philosophies, and theologies* as we go.

Do you have a *covenant with Your Creator*? Have you asked Him to engraft you into the covenant He made with Avraham? If you have not done it before I encourage you to *do it now*.

Lech Lecha, Dear Reader! [Go from what you presently appear to be, and self-identify as, to whom you *really are* – *i.e.* who you were really created to be!].

The Rabbi's son

Amidah Prayer Focus For Week #3

K'dosh - The Prayer of His Holiness

Atah Kadosh v'shemeicha kadosh

You are Holy and Your Name is Holy

u'k'doshim b'chol yom y'hal'leicha selah

Seekers and holy ones join in the worship of You this day and every day

Baruch Atah Adonai, ha-El ha-kadosh

Blessed are You, O Holy One, for You are a holy God