



Parshat HaShavuah

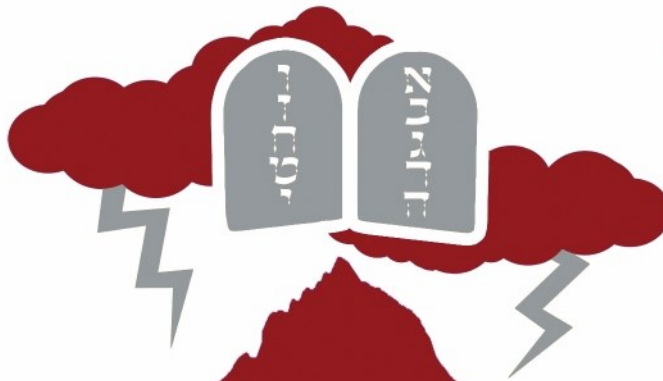
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LECH LECHA

ח' חשון תשע"ה

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חלקינו מה טוב

Candle Lighting

6:21

S"Z Kriat Shema

10:16

Sunset

6:38

Motzei

Shabbat

7:14



Enriching and Enhancing Your Study of the Weekly Torah Portion

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## CUTTING A DEAL RABBI JONATHAN KROLL

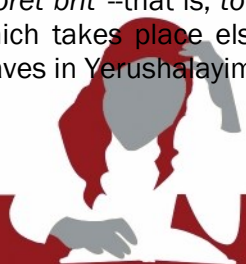
When two parties agree to terms of a financial contract they are said to “cut a deal.” The origin of this American idiom has its roots in a peculiar episode found in this week’s parsha. God assures Avram that his children will inherit the Land of Israel, and Avram asks “במה אדע כי אירשנה-How do I know that it will happen?” In response to Avram’s question, God asks Avram to perform an odd ceremony, known as the *Brit Bein Habetarim*, the Covenant Between the Pieces.

God instructs Avram (15:9) to select a three-year-old cow, a three-year-old goat, a three-year-old ram, and two different birds. Avram then cuts the large animals in half, places each half in parallel lines facing each other, and sets the birds free. At this point, God informs Avram that his children will indeed inherit the Land of Israel, but only after suffering through years of slavery and oppression. The ceremony ends when “a smoking oven and a flaming torch” pass between the pieces of the animal carcasses, hence the name *Brit Bein Habetarim—the Covenant Between the Pieces*. What is the meaning of this unusual covenant?

The Radak approaches the covenant as a symbol of the future of the Jewish people through the end of days. According to the Radak, when Avram asks God: “How do I know that I will inherit the land?”, he means, “How is it going to happen?” He isn’t questioning **whether** God will fulfill His promise but **how** Avram’s descendants will ultimately inherit the Land of Israel. To this question, God responds with a detailed symbolic description of Jewish history. Through this elaborate set of symbols, God shows Avram the future of the Jewish nation that will descend from him.

Rashi also develops a symbolic approach toward understanding the *Brit Bein Habetarim*, but he draws our attention to what he feels is the *pshat* of the story. Rashi explains that when a covenant was created between two parties during Biblical times, they would affirm the deal by cutting an animal in two and walking between the two parts. This is the source for the idiom “cutting a deal” and it’s also why the Hebrew phrase associated with making a covenant is “*koret brit*”—that is, *to cut* a covenant. Rashi directs our attention to another covenant between pieces of an animal which takes place elsewhere in Tanach. In Sefer Yirmiyahu (Perek 34), King Tzidkiyahu declares freedom for all slaves in Yerushalayim as the city suffers through a Babylonian siege.

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## TO THE UNKNOWN

BRANDON ORLINSKY ('16)

*And Hashem said to Avram, "Go for yourself, from your land, and from your birthplace, and from your father's house to the place that I will show you" (Bereishit 12:1).*

Based on this verse, a substantial question can be asked: Why did God not immediately tell Avram where he was going?

Rabbi Label Lam tells the story of himself and his son in Israel. They went to a shiur given by Rabbi Nosson Tzvi Finkel, zt"l, the Rosh Yeshiva of Mir, on Parshat Lech Lecha. Rabbi Lam recalls that after Rabbi Finkel translated pasuk aleph of Lech Lecha (above) he remarked, "It's not easy not knowing where you are going!"

This is precisely why Hashem did not tell Avram where he was going. Sometimes, in order to truly understand the significance of an event or the holiness of a place, such as Eretz Yisrael, one must experience it or see it first. There are some things that simply are too great to be described by words.

For example, when you invite a non-Shabbat observer over for Shabbat, you try your best to describe the Shabbat experience beforehand. We describe it as, "Fish! Songs! Soup! Challah! Sleep!". But this doesn't do it justice. The person that is experiencing Shabbat for the first time can't fathom the experience until they taste that soup or sing those songs.

As Rabbi Nosson Tzvi Finkel said, "it's not easy not knowing where you are going", but sometimes the experience that awaits us is even more meaningful when we don't try to limit it or capture it with words. Sometimes it's best to just let ourselves have a wonderful experience, to let it wash over us, and be amazed by what we have felt and discovered. In the famous words of the Heinz ketchup company, "the best things come to those who wait."

Source: <http://www.torah.org/learning/dvartorah/5767/lechlecha.html>

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## FIND YOURSELF

Yael Attias ('16)  
MONTHLY WRITER

It is no coincidence that Parshiyot Noach and Lech Lecha are placed right next to each other. In Parshat Noach, we learn about two types of teshuva. The first is apologizing for your sins and promising to never do them again, thereby gaining a clean slate. The second and greater level is having remorse, which can lead to recognizing your potential and using it to do something you never knew you were capable of.

In this week's parsha, Parshat Lech Lecha, Hashem tells Avram: "Go for yourself from your land, from your birthplace, and from your father's house to the land that I will show you" (Bereishit 12:1). Although this phrase is commonly translated as "go for yourself", its literal translation is "go to yourself". What is Hashem implying by telling Avram to "go to himself"?

Hashem asks Avram to leave everything behind: to forget his home and family and go to an unknown place. When Hashem says, "go to yourself", He is telling Avram to look deeper than ever before and realize this is what he should do despite how difficult it may be.

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*Attias continued*

This is something extremely difficult to ask of a person; however, Avram does not possess the typical qualities of most people. One of the greatest things that Avram teaches us is the quality of alacrity—readiness. Not only does Avram listen to Hashem in reaching beyond his comfort zone, but he is also quick to act upon it.

This can be seen in Parshat Vayeira, when Avraham, formerly Avram, responds to Hashem by saying “Hineini” – “I am here”. I am ready to do whatever You tell me to do.” By doing this, Avraham is able to achieve the greater level of teshuva and use his undiscovered potential to surpass his heights and goals.

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## MITZVAH MESSAGE

**JOLIE DAVIES ('16)**

**MONTHLY WRITER**

This week's parsha, Lech Lecha, contains one of Avram's greatest tests. Although he is best known for chesed, Avram has another strong attribute—emunah. Hashem tells Avram to "get up and go to the place that I will show you." Although Hashem is telling him to just pick up his life and leave his family and city to go to a place that has not even been named yet, Avram has full emunah in Hashem and decides to go.

Rashi asks, why does Hashem not tell Avram where he will be going? Hashem is making the decision to follow Him much harder than necessary.

The answer is found in the next parsha with Akeidat Yitzchak where Hashem makes it even harder for Avraham, formerly Avram, to sacrifice Yitzchak by describing how much Avraham loves his son. Nevertheless, Avraham is willing to do it. Why does Hashem do this?

The reason is that Hashem knows that anything that makes it harder for Avraham gives Avraham another mitzvah. Similarly, in this week's parsha, Hashem omits where Avram is going not only to test Avram's emunah, but also make the mitzvah greater when Avram succeeds.

In life, Hashem only gives us what we can handle. At times the tests seem overwhelming; however, we have to remember that the harder the mitzvah is, the greater the mitzvah. Keeping that in mind will help us overcome the difficulty that may be involved with doing that mitzvah. We should strive to have Avram's emunah in life because we do not know Hashem's master plan.

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## A CUT ABOVE THE REST

**COREY REICHENBERG ('16)**

Chazal say that by the age of three, Avraham, formerly Avram, already kept the entire Torah including the rabbinic laws. Interestingly though, he only got around to performing the mitzvah of brit milah when he was 99 years old. Why the hesitation?

The Midrash explains that when Hashem commanded Avram to circumcise himself, Avram sought the guidance of his gentile friend, Mamre. Avram felt conflicted about whether or not he should publicize his brit milah because he felt it would ruin his ability to do *kiruv*. Since an important aspect of *kiruv* is being able to relate to the other person, Avram abstained from giving himself a brit because a permanent marking on his body would forever differentiate himself from the gentiles he was trying to relate to.

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Later on however, the king and his princes revoke the emancipation proclamation and Yirmiyahu responds angrily, echoing God's words: "I will make the men who violated my covenant...which they made before Me, like the calf which they cut in two so as to pass between the halves...they shall be handed over to their enemies to those who seek to kill them. Their carcasses shall become food for the birds of the sky and beasts of the earth" (34:18-20). These pesukim in Yirmiyahu clearly demonstrate that the nobility of Yerushalayim engaged in a similar type of *Brit Bein Habetarim*; the symbolism of the dead animals is also clear. As the nobility walked between the animal halves they were in effect saying: "We guarantee that we will free our slaves and if we do not keep our word may we suffer the same fate as these dead animals."

In fact, archaeologists have discovered that this type of covenantal ceremony was very common during the Biblical period. They cite, among others, records found of a treaty between Ashurnari V of Assyria and Matti'ilu of Arpad which states: "This spring lamb was not brought from its flock to be sacrificed...It was brought to sanction the treaty between Ashurnari and Matti'ilu...This is not the head of a lamb, it is the head of Matti'ilu...Just as this lamb's head is cut off... so may be the head of Matti'ilu...." The common practice of "cutting" a deal in Biblical times is not only seen in Sefer Yirmiyahu but is attested to in numerous non-Torah sources from that time period.

Dr. Nahum Sarna explains that what emerges from this interpretation is quite fascinating. What passes between the pieces in our parsha? The "smoking oven and flaming torch," which the Ramban suggests are a symbolic reference to God Himself! In other words, when Avram asks God, "How will I know," he means: "How do I know that this will definitely happen? How do I know that my descendants will definitely inherit the land of Israel?" God then responds, "I guarantee it, as I pass through the pieces, much in the same way that men make covenants with each other. I, God, am providing you with this contract which is unconditional and irrevocable." This interpretation presents the *Brit Bein Habetarim* as a profound demonstration of God's commitment to His people and a powerful response to Avram's concern.

Reichenberg continued

So if this is the case, what changed when Avram became 99 years old? Was *kiruv* not important anymore at that age? One possible answer is that at this age, Avram was told by Hashem about his soon-to-be-son and future leader of the Jewish people: Yitzchak. Avram decided that it was of the utmost importance to be a great role model for his son and to have a brit milah, even though it would curb his ability to do *kiruv*. Avram now had a new role that replaced his previous one – he now had to be the best teacher to his son, who would become a Patriarch of the Jewish people.

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