

Yeshivat Har Etzion Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash  
(Email address: office@etzion.org.il)

**PARASHAT HASHAVUA**

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**PARASHAT LEKH LEKHA**

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Dedicated by Steven Weiner and Lisa Wise with prayers for Refuah Shelema for all who require healing, comfort and peace – those battling illnesses visibly and invisibly, publicly and privately. May Hashem mercifully grant us strength, courage and compassion.

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In honor of Oma Ina Sondheim, our matriarch, from her children, grandchildren and great - grandchildren, who all love her and are davening for her refuah shelaymah so that she can continue to share her wisdom, insight and wit with all of us.

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**“Let there be no strife, I pray you, between me and you” –  
Avraham’s Separation from Lot<sup>1</sup>**

**By Rav Gal Eldad**

Avraham begins his journey together with his father Terach, travelling from Ur Kasdim in the direction of the land of Canaan. In Charan, his father dies, and Avraham continues his journey in accordance with God's command, accompanied by Lot (12:4-5):

So Avram went, as the Lord had spoken to him; and Lot went with him; and Avram was seventy five years old when he departed out of Charan. And Avram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Charan; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came.

Upon Avraham's arrival in the land of Canaan, God reveals Himself to him and promises the land to Avraham's seed (12:6-7):

And Avram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, to the terebinth of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land. And the Lord appeared to Avram, and said, “To your seed will I give this land;” and he built there an altar to the Lord, who appeared to him.

Afterwards, Avram is forced to go down to Egypt, and when he returns, Scripture informs us that Lot too had gone down

with him, and that the two of them returned with a wealth of possessions. This leads to strife between their herdsmen (13: 1-7):

And Avram went up out of Egypt, he, and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the south. And Avram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold... And Lot also, who went with Avram, had flocks, and herds, and tents. 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. And there was a strife between the herdsmen of Avram's cattle and the herdsmen of Lot's cattle. And the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelt then in the land.

In this situation, Avram comes up with a plan and spells it out to Lot (13:8-9):

And Avram said to Lot, “Let there be no strife, I pray you, between me and you, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we are brothers. Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself, I pray you, from me; if you will take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left.”

Lot accepts this idea, and they part ways. Immediately afterwards, God reveals Himself to Avraham, and once again promises him the land and seed (13:11-15):

So Lot chose for himself all the plain of the Jordan; and Lot journeyed east; and they separated themselves the one from the other. Avram dwelt in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelt in the cities of the Plain, and moved his tent as far as Sedom. Now the men of Sedom were wicked and sinners against the Lord exceedingly. And the Lord said to Avram, after Lot had separated from him, “Lift up now your eyes, and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land which you see, to you will I give it, and to your seed forever.”

**“And Lot also who went with Avram”**

Scripture alludes in several ways that the root of the separation between Avraham and Lot lies in the period that they were in Egypt:

1. At the beginning of Avraham's journey to the land of Canaan, Lot is mentioned together with the rest of the family, and only after his name is mentioned does Scripture note the family's property (12:4):

<sup>1</sup> Unless indicated otherwise, all references are to the book of *Bereishit*. See in this context, R. Elchanan Samet, "*Ha-Nisayon Ha-Kaful*," *Iyyunim Be-Parashat Ha-Shavua* (2<sup>nd</sup> series), pp. 39-58; and R. Prof. Yoni Grossman, *Avraham – Sippuro shel Masa*, pp. 61-70.

And Avram took Sarai his wife, **and Lot his brother's son**, and all their substance that they had gathered.

However, when they return from the land of Egypt, the order changes. Avraham and Sarai are mentioned together, afterwards mention is made of their property, and finally Lot is mentioned separately (13:1):

And Avram went up out of Egypt, he, and his wife, and all that he had, **and Lot with him**, into the South.

2. The verse that describes Lot's property is formulated in a way that connects it to the previous section (13:5):

And Lot also, who went with Avram, **had flocks, and herds, and tents**.

This verse is reminiscent of the verse describing Avraham's property, in light of the presents that he received from Pharaoh when he was in Egypt (12:15-16):

And the princes of Pharaoh saw her, and praised her to Pharaoh; and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. And he dealt well with Avram for her sake; **and he had sheep, and oxen, and he-asses, and men-servants, and maid-servants, and she-asses, and camels**.

3. Before Lot decides in which direction to go following the separation, Scripture reveals his mental musings to us. It would appear that he still carries with him the positive impression engraved in his memory of his stay in Egypt (13:10-11):

And Lot lifted up his eyes and beheld all the plain of the Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere, before the Lord destroyed Sedom and Amora, **like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, as you go to Tzoar**. So Lot chose for himself all the plain of the Jordan; and Lot journeyed east; and they separated themselves the one from the other.

**"Now the men of Sedom were wicked and sinners"**

Immediately after informing us of Lot's decision, Scripture notes the wicked nature of the people living in Lot's chosen area. It would appear that mentioning this at this point comes to discredit Lot, who did not include this factor in his calculations when choosing the area in which to live. This was already pointed out by Rashi and other commentators.<sup>2</sup> It even seems from Scripture that the separation process benefited Avraham himself (13:14-16):

And the Lord said to Avram, **after Lot was separated from him**, "Lift up now your eyes, and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land which you see, to you will I give it, and to your seed forever. And I will make your seed as the dust of the earth; so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall your seed also be numbered."

Scripture goes out of its way to note that God appeared to Avraham after Lot separated from him. He then repeats the promise regarding seed and the land. Now that Lot has separated from Avraham, it becomes clear that God's promise was directed toward the seed of Avraham himself, he being God's chosen, and not toward the various "family members accompanying him."<sup>3</sup> In this way God confirms the process initiated by Avraham when he separated himself from Lot. From this point on, Lot becomes a marginal character in the biblical narrative. His one remaining credit is his family tie to Avraham. This is what stands for Lot, both when Avraham decides to pursue the five kings in order to free him, as well as when he is saved from the destruction of Sedom.

**"Let there be no strife, I pray you, between me and you"**

Until now we have focused on Lot, on the way that the idea of separation from Avraham sprouted, and on the way that the separation was executed. In practice, however, it was Avraham who suggested the separation. We would like to examine whether Avraham's intention in proposing such a step was identical to that of Lot. Did he wish to send Lot away forever?

Let us preface by saying that we find in the *midrash* criticism of Avraham's initiative to separate from Lot:

R. Yuda said: There was anger towards Avraham when Lot, the son of his brother, separated from him. The Holy One, blessed is He, said: He cleaves to everyone, but to his brother Lot he does not cleave!? R. Nechemya said: The Holy One, blessed is He, was angry with him when Lot went with our Patriarch Avraham. The Holy One, blessed is He, said: I said to him: "To your seed have I given this land," and he clings to Lot the son of his brother, so that he should be his heir. If so, let him go and bring in two soldiers from the street, and make them his heirs, as he wishes to do with the son of his brother. (*Bereishit Rabba, Lekh Lekha* 41:8)

Indeed, it would appear from the words of several commentators that Avraham did not want to permanently

<sup>2</sup> As for the reason that Lot chose Sedom, it is explained in the sources mentioned in note 1 that when Lot was in Egypt, he encountered for the very first time a different way of life, in which one need not wander after sources of water, but can settle in their proximity. This way of life is much easier than the wanderings with which he was familiar until then with Avraham, and therefore already in Egypt he tried to separate himself from Avraham and adopt such a way of life.

<sup>3</sup> See also Rashi on the verse, "After Lot was separated from him:" "So long as the wicked [Lot] was with him, the word of God stayed away from him." As noted above, God revealed Himself to Avraham and promised the land to his seed at the beginning of chapter 12 in the framework of the command to go to the land of Canaan, while Lot still lived with him. Therefore, Rashi's commentators explain that Lot was initially a righteous man, but he deteriorated into depravity in Egypt.

separate from Lot. It is in this spirit that Rashi and Ri Bekhor Shor explain his proposal (13:9):

"If you will take the left hand, then I will go to the right" – Wherever you will settle down, I will not go far from you and I will stand by you as a shield and as a helper. Ultimately, indeed, he [Lot] was really in need of him, as it is stated: "And Avram heard that his brother was taken captive" (14:14).

The truth is that the plain meaning of the verses does not give the impression that Avraham wished to send Lot away from him forever, but just the opposite (13:7-9):

And there was a strife between the herdsmen of Avram's cattle and the herdsmen of Lot's cattle. And the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelt then in the land. And Avram said to Lot, "Let there be no strife, I pray you, between me and you, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we are brothers. Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself, I pray you, from me; if you will take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left."

Avraham speaks in a friendly style. He presents his proposal in order to prevent strife, emphasizing the feeling of brotherhood between him and Lot, which he wishes to preserve. He suggests that they simply separate to two different parts of the land, but the proposal does not specify any conditions whatsoever that would regulate the relations between the two sides, with the objective of maintaining the separation in the future.<sup>4</sup> It stands to reason that Avraham viewed the proposal as good and correct for the time, and he acted accordingly.

If we adopt such a view concerning the initiative, it turns out that Avraham had in mind a much less significant separation than that which was understood by Lot, or perhaps Lot decided to understand the matter as he did in the wake of his experience in Egypt. This suggestion fits in with what is described in the verses. Indeed, Avraham initiated the separation, but it is evident from the verses that he did so because he read Lot's thoughts and understood the direction in which he wished to go. Scripture describes a quarrel between the two sets of herdsmen, whereas Avraham in his proposal notes that he wishes to prevent strife between him and Lot himself. He apparently understood that the quarrel among the herdsmen was merely the opening shot in Lot's attempt to achieve independence, and therefore he went ahead and gave him what he wanted in a friendly manner.

#### **"What will You give me, seeing I go hence childless"**

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<sup>4</sup> We find such a separation later in the book between Lavan and Yaakov, and the difference is clearly evident both in the atmosphere and in the agreements between the parties (31:51-53): "And Lavan said to Yaakov, 'Behold this heap, and behold the pillar, which I have set up between me and you. This heap be witness, and the pillar be witness, that I will not pass over this heap to you, and that you shall not pass over this heap and this pillar to me, for harm. The God of Avraham, and the God of Nachor, the God of their father, judge between us.' And Yaakov swore by the fear of his father Yitzchak."

This perspective might help us resolve a certain difficulty that arises later in the narrative. The event that is recorded immediately following the separation between Lot and Avraham is the war between the four kings and the five kings. In the course of this war, Lot is taken captive together with his neighbors, the inhabitants of Sedom. When Avraham hears about this, he rushes to Lot's rescue and succeeds in freeing him, along with other people from Sedom. With the conclusion of the fighting, Scripture describes the welcome received by Avraham in light of his success in battle (14:16-24):

And he brought back all the goods, and also brought back his brother Lot, and his goods, and the women also, and the people. And the king of Sedom went out to meet him, after his return from the slaughter of Chedorlaomer and the kings that were with him... And Malkizedek king of Shalem brought forth bread and wine; and he was priest of God the Most High. And he blessed him, and said, "Blessed be Avram of God Most High, Maker of heaven and earth..." And he gave him a tenth of all. And the king of Sedom said to Avram, "Give me the persons, and take the goods to yourself." And Avram said to the king of Sedom, "I have lifted up my hand to the Lord, God Most High, Maker of heaven and earth, that I will not take a thread nor a shoe-latchet nor anything that is yours... save only that which the young men have eaten, and the portion of the men which went with me, Aner, Eshkol, and Mamre, let them take their portion."

Avraham's standing seems to be soaring. Precisely for this reason, we are surprised to reveal immediately afterwards that his mood is very depressed (15:1-4):

After these things, the word of the Lord came to Avram in a vision, saying, "Fear not, Avram, I am your shield, your reward shall be exceedingly great." And Avram said, "O Lord God, what will You give me, seeing I go hence childless, and he that shall be possessor of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" And Avram said, "Behold, to me You have given no seed, and, lo, one born in my house is to be my heir." And, behold, the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, "This man shall not be your heir; but he that shall come forth out of your own bowels shall be your heir."

This is not the first time that God relates to Avraham's future, promising him a shining destiny. This is, however, the first time that Avraham responds to these predictions with a gloomy tone that casts doubt upon them. The Ramban notes this point (15:2):

You may ask that it was already told to Avraham (above 13:15): "For all the land which you see, to you will I give it, and to your seed forever. And I will

make your seed as the dust of the earth." How then can he say now: "I go hence childless... and, lo, one born in my house is to be my heir"? Why did he not believe the first prophecy the way he believed this one? The answer is that the righteous never believe in themselves, as they might inadvertently sin. And it is written (*Yirmeyahu* 18:9): "And at one instant I may speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; but if it do evil in My sight, that it hearken not to My voice, then I repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit it." Perhaps he was afraid now that he might be punished for the people that he killed, as our Rabbis have said (*Bereishit Rabba* 44:5). Similarly, they said in *Bereishit Rabba* (76: 2): "Then Yaakov was greatly afraid and was distressed" (below 32:8). From here [we learn] that there is no promise to the righteous in this world.

The Ramban explains that Avraham saw that the promise made to him was not yet fulfilled, and he feared that this may be due to inadvertent sins that he had committed. In addition, he entertained the possibility that perhaps because he had killed people in the course of battle, he would be punished for that.

However, after examining the matter more closely, it is difficult to attribute this thinking to Avraham. It should be noted that it was God who turned to Avraham and told him that his reward would be exceedingly great. Were Avraham concerned that the previous promise was no longer valid, God's confirmation should have refuted that fear. Moreover, despite God's words, Avraham questions them. It would seem from what he says that he believes that they will be realized, but he expects that they will come true through Eliezer his servant, and it was precisely for this reason that he was sad. The Ramban's explanation does not explain why it was specifically now that Avraham began to lose hope, despite the fact that the promise made to him had just now been reconfirmed by God.<sup>5</sup>

#### **"To you will I give it, and to your seed forever"**

Furthermore, it seems that Avraham should have expressed his disappointment earlier, and then we would have read about it as follows:

And the Lord said to Avram, **after Lot had separated from him**, "Lift up now your eyes, and look from the place where you are, northward and

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<sup>5</sup> The Abravanel (chap. 15, in answer to question 2) notes the unusual formulation of God's words, "I am your shield, your reward shall be exceedingly great." He explains that Avraham was afraid of the revenge that would be taken by the nations of the kings whom he had routed in battle, and of the punishment that he would suffer for the killing of people in the course of the fighting. The Abravanel's words strengthen our question. God did not intend to relate to the matter of seed and the land that had been promised to Avraham. It was Avraham who opened the discussion. It therefore falls upon to ask what happened in Avraham's life that raised these doubts precisely at this time, when from God's perspective nothing had changed.

southward and eastward and westward; for all the land which you see, to you will I give it, and to your seed forever. And Avram said, "O Lord God, what will You give me, seeing I go hence childless, and he that shall be possessor of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" And Avram said, "Behold, to me You have given no seed, and, lo, one born in my house is to be my heir..."

Why did Avraham wait, and only now reveal his fears?

We can make the following proposal that will connect everything we have shown so far. Avraham wandered to the land of Canaan at the command of God. Since he remained childless, he may have considered the possibility that his nephew Lot, who was accompanying him on his journey, would inherit him. But during the period that Avraham was in Egypt, Lot was exposed to a new way of life that captured his heart. Upon his return, Lot tried to create tension between himself and Avraham that would lead to separation and allow him the possibility of managing his own life. Avraham considered his young nephew's steps and understood his mood. At his advanced age, he preferred to fulfill his young nephew's desire over breaking his relationship with him.<sup>6</sup> Deep in his heart, however, he hoped that over the course of time his nephew would come home, and precisely the warm and sympathetic attitude in which they parted would eventually cause Lot to come to his senses and renew his relationship with his loving uncle.

Following the separation, disaster suddenly overtook Lot and his family, and they were captured in a war in which they had no direct involvement. Avraham, whose heart went out to his beloved nephew, unhesitatingly went out to rescue him, even though the enemy who had taken Lot captive was stronger than he. Against all odds, Avraham succeeded in his mission, and became a shining star in the eyes of the surrounding peoples. The neighboring rulers came to visit him, Malkitzedek blessed him, and the king of Sedom recognized him and negotiated with him. However, Scripture makes no mention of gratitude expressed by the party from whom it would be most expected, the party on behalf of whom Avraham set out on his campaign. Scripture is silent about any expression of gratitude on the part of Lot for the courageous step that his uncle had taken for him.

#### **"Behold, to me You have given no seed, and, lo, one born in my house is to be my heir"**

Avraham's frustration broke his spirit. He had valiantly gone out to battle against kings, and deep within him he had hoped that he would have the opportunity to restore the heart of his nephew toward his uncle. Lot would open his eyes and understand the danger of his independence and the need to return to his uncle's camp, as in former times. However, Lot did not see things in this manner. He may have sufficed with a few short words of thanks, but he returned to Sedom to conduct his life as before. If until now Avraham held on to a glimmer of hope that a scion of his family would continue his work, it now became extinguished. The only possibility that he sees around him is Eliezer, and therefore he begins to question his understanding of

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<sup>6</sup> The *gemara* in *Sanhedrin* (72b) already notes that a father's mercy for his son is greater than a son's mercy for his father. In the same way, Avraham's relationship to Lot is characterized by greater understanding and patience than is Lot's relationship to Avraham.

God's promises.<sup>7</sup> His doubts begin with the promise of seed, but from there they gnaw at the promise concerning the land. Following the great disappointment that he experienced, he seeks proof. In order to clarify to Avraham His promise of seed in a final and absolute manner, God enters into a covenant with him.

From the time that God first appeared to Avraham, He promised him seed and the land. It is not easy for a person approaching the age of a hundred to recognize that he will have seed of his own, and therefore it was easier for Avraham to explain to himself that God's blessing would be realized through a relative, sort of an "adopted son." At this stage, however, after the blow that he suffered from Lot, he is ready to understand that he will experience a miracle that will change his entire life and the life of his family. Now God informs him in unequivocal manner (15:4): "But he that shall come forth out of your own bowels shall be your heir."

(Translated by David Strauss)

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<sup>7</sup> It was mentioned earlier that God's repetition of the promise of seed and the land after Lot's separation from Avraham was intended to sharpen for Avraham the promises that he had already received and to confirm the step that he took when he separated from Lot. However, if we correctly understand Avraham's thinking in his separation from Lot, that it was a temporary measure appropriate for the time, in the future they will reunite, and so the promise of seed could still be fulfilled through him. Only after Lot demonstrated his lack of gratitude to Avraham after the latter had rescued him from captivity did Avraham recognize that indeed the promise relates to his own seed, despite his advanced age.