

*Shiur L'Yom Sh'lishi*¹

[Tuesday's Study]

READINGS: ***Torah Lecha:*** **Genesis 13:1-17**
 Haftarah: **Isaiah 41:1-4**
 B'rit Chadasha: **Romans 4:4-5**

If you go to the left, I'll go to the right.
[Genesis 13:9]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 107:8-9;
This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is *Kadosh*, the Prayer of Holiness

In yesterday's opening aliyah of the Patriarchal Chronicles Avram, at 75 years of age, experienced a paradigm-shattering Divine Visitation. One day he was minding his own business, going about the mundane affairs of ordinary life. And then something wonderful happened that, unbeknownst to him, would change the course of world history forever. Through the life of an ordinary man who seemed to all appearances to be going nowhere and destined to die childless, the next phase of the Grand Redemptive Plan of the Creator of the Universe was revealed.

Avram did not see anything, of course – not yet, anyway. He just heard a Voice – a majestically beautiful Voice, speaking majestically beautiful words that went into his ears and through his soul. And that is when – and how – he received in his spirit the great “*Lech Lecha!*” calling that was destined to change the world forever. Departing his familial estate at Charan of Mesopotamia on a great quest the details and world-changing impact of which he did not and would never fully understand, he simply followed the Voice and the Footsteps of an Invisible Shepherd Who had spoken to him.

I will make of you a great nation . . . the Voice said. But how exactly would that happen, and when?

I will bless you and make your name great . . . the Unseen Speaker promised. But what exactly did that mean in real time?

And you will be a blessing . . . the One Who spoke to Avram prophesied. But in what way, and to whom, and when, and how?

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I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you . . . declared the Divine Visitor. Really? What exactly would it look like – and feel like - to become the critical divining rod the Creator of the Universe would use for determining what people to bless and what people to curse? Is that a responsibility Avram even wanted? Is it something he could live with?

And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed . . . the Beautiful Voice concluded. Wow! What great things was the Holy One going to use Avram – and his progeny – to do on this planet, to bless every single family on the face of the earth?

Thus ended the most Beautiful Words Avram had ever heard – or at least the first volley of them. But thus began the greatest odyssey since the Flood.

Following the Footsteps of the Invisible Shepherd

The Voice fell silent. But in its wake came the sound of Footsteps – the footfalls of the Divine Shepherd Who had just spoken. The Footsteps led southward, so that is where Avram headed. He did not know – and probably did not care - where he was going. He was following Someone more intriguing, and wonderful, and stimulating than anything the physical world – or any piece of geography in it – had to offer. He had been told he was going to be shown “a land”, but he did not have a clue what that land was supposed to look like. He did not know where that land was located, or what he was supposed to do with it when he got there. So be it. Like Noah, Avram was called to embark upon *a journey of complete trust*.

The empowering call Avram received was simply to ‘*Lech Lecha*’ – to go out to find himself. His first assignment was thus purely a matter of identity. Who was he? Who was he to become? And what was unique about him that had resulted in him being chosen and called forth at such a time as this? Issues of mission and destiny would just have to wait. Avram had to first learn to rely solely upon the Great Shepherd Who had breathed new life into him. This was identity-defining test number one. And Avram was all over it. Avram trusted the One Who spoke to Him. And wherever the Voice of the Invisible Shepherd bid him go, he went.

As he followed the Invisible Shepherd’s footsteps southward however Avram’s heart began to develop a great and insatiable longing. He did not know what it was for. He could not express it in words. He did not understand either its essence or its parameters. Only later would his progeny be able to characterize that what that the Holy One was cultivating and nurturing in him – and preparing him to pass on to all his progeny - was a great hunger for a city not built by human hands, whose builder and maker was none other than God.

Avram was not required to make his great pilgrimage of trust alone. As had Noach, Avram traveled with his wife and a few intimate companions. In Avram's case however it was not sons, daughters-in-law, and representative pairs of every species of animals that traveled with him and his beloved wife. In Avram's case the companions on his journey consisted of his nephew Lot, his trusted Syrian manservant Elazar, a few of the other servants Avram had acquired in Mesopotamia according the ways of the times, and an unspecified number of healthy and hardy ewes, nannies, she-asses, heifers of the bovine genus, and cows of the camel species, for milk, for barter, for surrogate approach, and from which he could, if it be the will of the Unseen Shepherd, start great herds and flocks.

Through treacherous terrain and dangerous mountain passes the caravan traveled – all the way from the Paddan Aram of present day Turkey through Syria, and then through the entirety of modern-day Lebanon to the land that would one day be called '*Eretz Yisrael*' [i.e. *Israel*].

No one they saw along the way bore the facial features or skin tone of Avram's ancestor Shem. No one spoke their language. This indeed was a journey of faith. Hungry predators stalked them all along the way. Strangers watched their every move. They had to navigate around robbers hiding out in the mountains. They had to wade through panhandlers and pickpockets and beggars and prostitutes along the road. Everywhere they went they were met with hostile – or at least highly suspicious - glances. They were in constant danger. And yet they were completely safe.

There was almost no water. There were very few friendly faces. There was no welcome mat. And yet they were provided for and befriended at every encampment.

The Beautiful Land – The Polar Opposite of Shinar and Babel

The caravan of the Unseen Shepherd and his flock apparently passed through the lush, green Galilee region of modern Israel without stopping. Our ancestors did, however, stop at the Kena'ani settlement of Shechem, in the heart of the region North of Jerusalem now popularly called the 'West Bank'. There, near modern day Nablus, the Holy One appeared to Avram and said, "***To your descendants I will give this land.***" Genesis 12:7. It was there at Shechem that Avram put his hands to the work of his new King. It was there that he built the first altar to the Holy One since the infamous one Noach and his sons erected immediately after the Great Flood. Avram Avinu thereby claimed the land around Shechem – the West Bank - for the Holy One and for descendants he had been promised but did not yet have

and absent Divine enablement would/could never sire.

The altar to the Holy One completed, the caravan headed southward again. Avram pitched camp and built another altar to the Holy One about 10 miles north of modern Jerusalem, at a place known to the local as *Luz*, but which would later be called ***Beit-El*** [Bethel]. There, for the first time, Avram did something the Torah describes as ***vayikra b'shem YHVH*** – i.e. ‘*call[ing] upon the name of YHVH*’. **Genesis 12:10**. And then Avram and his caravan were on the road again.

Shechem and Beit-El turned out to be the only two stops Avram’s entourage made in the land on this trip. A famine was in progress, and the Kena’ani were entrenched in the high places and cities, so Avram and his entourage decided to move on. They headed south and west, across the Negev desert and Sinai, to the fertile lands along the Nile River of Egypt.

This little side excursion could have ended in disaster. Miraculously, however, Avram and all that was his not only survived but prospered. Sure, they were expelled from Egypt - but they when they went out they did not go empty-handed. They were sent out loaded down with riches, and servants, and great flocks and herds. This Covenant with the Creator of the Universe lifestyle might be something Avram could get used to after all.

On the Road Again – Back to the Future!

Finally the pyramids of Egypt – and the harem of Pharaoh - are disappearing in Avram’s, Sarai’s, Lot’s, Elazar’s, and now Hagar’s respective rear-view mirrors. And good riddance! Our patriarch and matriarch’s sojourn in the land of the Great Crocodile had, after all, been quite a nerve-wracking experience. It had taken Divine Intervention – in the form of a supernatural plague - and an expulsion decree from a very angry Pharaoh - to bring about their deliverance. Hmmmmn . . . do you think that little detour Avram and Sarai took just might be prophetic of something that might happen in future generations Call it a hunch, but I suspect we just might meet that crusty old Pharaoh – or one or more of his descendants – again somewhere down the road

Introducing the “God of the Patriarchs” Paradigm, and the Prophetic Roadmap Function of Torah

Oh – did I perhaps forget to mention that little detail about the ‘**God of the Patriarchs’ paradigm** when we discussed that in earlier studies this week? Did I forget to mention that the Holy One has ordained that whenever we read in the Torah about the experiences of our patriarchs and matriarchs, we are not merely learning interesting historical information about our family tree, but are actually

viewing a prophetic road map of our own destinies and those of our children?
Well, welcome to the prophetic road map aspect of Torah, Dear Reader.

The stories we are reading are not just interesting narratives of things experienced by Biblical characters in the ancient past – they are windows to your own present and prophecies about your future. The story of the patriarchs is not history. Nor is it literature. It is *YOUR LIFE!*

Getting a Grasp of Blowing It Horribly – and Being Forgiven, Redeemed, and Restored in Accordance With Covenant

While I am being up front with you about the prophetic significance of the patriarchal accounts we are going to be reading in Torah I guess I might as well go ahead and warn you of something else, Beloved. Here it is: **if you believe the Holy One of the “Old Testament” is a God of judgment, and not mercy – if that’s what you have been taught, and if that is what you believe and want to keep on believing - you may not want to read the aliyah of Torah we encounter today.** If you read the passage we will be studying and *really see what it says*, you see, the experience may be *extremely hazardous to your theology*.

After all, Avram pretty much “blew it” yesterday - three times by my count! And yet the Holy One still has him and Sarai safely nuzzled in the middle of *a grace bubble of epic proportions*.

What am I talking about, you ask? How did our beloved ancestor ‘blow it’ – and *three times* no less? Well, first, he did not fully follow the Holy One’s instructions to “go out” from his father’s family - he took his nephew Lot (his brother’s son) with him, in direct disobedience of the Divine instruction.

Secondly, when times got a little tough in the land the Holy One showed him (Eretz Yisrael), he bailed out and ran off to Egypt, where the Holy One *never told him to go*.

Thirdly, when he got to Egypt he was not only dishonest but *completely dishonored his wife*, endangered her purity, and subjected her to the depraved lusts of Pharaoh and his harem attendants.

Okay, that means God “pulls the plug” on him, right? He disobeyed “*the law*” and is therefore now under “the curse” of the law, right? *Three strikes and your out – isn’t that the way it works?* Surely God will find someone else – perhaps someone *more spiritual*.

Grace is an Integral Part of the Avrahamic Covenant – Not a “New Testament” Innovation!

The God of the collection of prophetic and wisdom writings many call the “Old Testament” is just as much a God of “grace” as the rabbi from Natzret² about whom the collection of apostolic writings many call the “New Testament” was written.

The perceived dichotomy between “law” and “grace”, you see, is a product of Hellenistic and Western philosophies, not present (as we understand them) in the Hebraic mindset. The issue, from a Hebraic perspective, is not ‘law’ and ‘grace’. The issue is what is necessary to ***keep the covenant relationship vital, alive, and moving forward.***

Contrary to traditional Christian teaching, that attribute of the Holy One that is translated as ‘grace’ in our English Bibles is not definable as “*unmerited favor*”. We have in parsha ***Lech Lecha*** a Hebraic picture of the faithfulness of God to His promises. He will not abandon or revoke His promises – nor anyone to whom His promise extends - no matter how many “strikes” we have against us. That is not because of our merit – it is solely because of HIS FAITHFULNESS.

The Holy One’s type of *grace* is not a mushy sentimentalism, pity, or soft-heartedness. His grace is not a ‘Santa Claus’ type of grace. His type of grace involves a fierce loyalty to His promises, and to the individuals to whom He has made those promises AND TO THEIR PROGENY, and a fierce determination to protect His Honor. His grace is rooted and grounded and permeated by a steely form of determination that says ‘*whatever it takes to keep the relationship on course, that is what I’ll do! And whatever it costs, that is what I’ll spend.*’

Sometimes therefore the Holy One’s grace takes the form of ‘forgiveness’ – because that is what is necessary to keep the relationship on course. Other times, however, His grace takes the form of *strict discipline* – because under the circumstances that is what is necessary to keep the relationship on course.

Similarly, sometimes the Holy One’s grace takes the form of *direct, supernatural*

² The name ‘Jesus’ is not generally used in these studies for two reasons – one, because it is definitely not the name by which the Messiah was known when He walked upon the earth, but merely an English-language perversion of the Hebrew name Y’shua, and two, because in that Westernized form, and its offshoots *Isu* and *Yesu*, many atrocities have been committed against the Jewish people. That does not mean the Messiah will refuse to answer to or honor the name ‘Jesus’ if someone calls out to Him because that is the only name they know. After all, a mother answers to *mmm-mmm*, or even *mmm*, from the lips of her baby or toddler.

intervention on our behalf – because that is what it takes to keep the relationship on course. Other times however His grace takes the frightening form of *hiding His Face from us*, and appearing suddenly aloof and unapproachable towards us – because under the circumstances ***that is what it takes*** to keep the relationship on course.

The Holy One's grace, you see, is *the means by which He insures that His Word will not return to Him void* – i.e. without accomplishing its assigned task. His grace is not an outgrowth of His 'niceness'. It is an outgrowth instead of His *fierceness* and His *power* – and His *unshakeable dedication to see His covenant commitments through to the end*.

The Holy One's Bestows Grace Upon Avram

What does that discussion have to do with today's aliyah, you might wonder? Let's take a look.

As we start today's aliyah Avram finds himself 'on the road again' – heading back towards *Eretz Yisrael*. He must have been shaking his head. Quite without any effort or merit of his own, his wife had just been released from Pharaoh's harem untouched, and while he had been rudely evicted from his rather pleasant life of self-imposed exile in Egypt, when he left he found himself and his entire entourage not only *physically unharmed* but absolutely and inexplicably *loaded down with Egypt's wealth*. Hence Torah tells us:

V'Avram kaved me'od b'mikneh b'kesef uv'zahav
And now Abram was very rich, with livestock, silver and gold.

Wow! Avram's absolute lowest moment – selling his wife into another man's harem for food to survive – has been miraculously converted by the Holy One into a triumph over and prophetic despoiling of the most powerful nation – and ruler – on the face of the earth.

Now what was it the Holy One had said to him? Oh yes . . .

. . . v'avarechecha v'agadelah shemecha
And I will bless you and will make your name great.

When the Holy One says He is going to bless someone . . . well ***watch out, world!***

Avram now has a first real taste of what the Holy One's promise of blessing means. But what he has experienced so far is merely a *taste* – an appetizer, as it were. There is much, much, more to come – above all that Avram could ever ask or hope or think.

The Holy One is writing on Avram's heart a 'resume' for Himself. Before He takes His budding relationship with Avram to the **b'rit** [covenant] stage He is *proving Himself to Avram as a worthy and faithful covenant partner*. How is the Holy One doing this? By making good on His promise to bless Avram in ways that Avram knows full well he did nothing to deserve and absolutely could not have accomplished on his own.

Avram *flirted with absolute disaster* – and came out smelling like a rose. And He knew full well He had only the Holy One to thank. And Avram knew as well that it was not mere 'unmerited favor' which the Holy One has shown him - it was the Holy One's *fierce and unshakeable faithfulness to the promise* had made to Avram back in Charan!

'Unmerited favor', you see, can be here one day and gone the next. 'Unmerited favor' can disappear as quickly and capriciously as it appeared. The Holy One's faithfulness to His Word, on the other hand, is as steady and sure and trustworthy as the sunrise. It is *eternal, unshakeable, and non-forfeitable*.

And Avram was **changed by it**. He was appropriately humbled, first of all. And then he was very, very, thankful. Hence he wasted no time rejoicing in his 'freedom'. He was anxious to go '*back to Beit-El*' [a phrase his grandson Ya'akov would make famous a few years later] to give thanks to the Holy One the only way he knew how – on the altar he had built upon arriving in Kena'an for the first time.

V'yelech l'masa'av miNegev v'ad-Beit-El

He continued on his travels, from the Negev toward Bethel,

ad ha-makom asher-hayah sham aholoh b'tchilah

until [he came to] the place where he originally had his tent,

beyn Beit-El uveyn ha-Ai

between Bethel and Ai.

El-mekom ha-mizbe'ach asher-asah sham b'rishonah

the site of the altar that he had built there at first.

vayikra sham Avram b'shem Adonai

And [there] Abram called out in God's name.

Ready for Another Challenging Life Experience?

Fresh from one challenging life experience (a season hiding from famine in Egypt) Avram walked right into another. This time it involved *infighting in his own camp*. Upon returning to Kena'an from Egypt flush with a great increase in livestock to

care for, Lot and his herdsmen quickly began to squabble with Avram and his herdsmen. Since neither of them owned any of the land on which they were trying to graze their animals (verse 7 tells us the *Kena'an'i* and *Peritzi* were then in possession of the land) Avram and Lot found themselves competing for precious pasturage and the best places to set up their burgeoning entourage of tents.

Ah COMPETITION, that's the thing! Mine vs. yours. It hits everyone, doesn't it? OFFENSE - woe to him by whom it comes! PERSONALITY CONFLICT - this town's not big enough for the both of us!

Here is how Torah describes this particular clash:

V'gam le-Lot ha-holech et-Avram hayah tzon uvakar v'ohalim

Lot, who accompanied Abram, also had sheep, cattle and tents.

V'lo-nasa otam ha-aretz l'shevet yachdav ki-hayah

The land could not support them living together;

rechusham rav v'lo yachlu l'shevet yachdav

their wealth was so great that they could not stay together.

Vayehi-riv beyn ro'ei mikneh-Avram uveyn ro'ei mikneh-Lot

Friction developed between the herdsmen of Abram's flocks and those of Lot.

Oh my. Another little piece of Avram's 'comfort zone' is about to be challenged.

We have no reason to believe that Avram and Lot were angry with each other. But we know there was serious friction between their respective herdsmen.

This could not be swept under the rug. Things could not go on like this. Something had to be done. But what? Avram and Lot could follow the human impulse to take up and personalize their herdsmen's offenses, and start arguing over who started it and who was right and wrong – or they could choose a more excellent way.

In the early days when the two first struck out together from Charan this kind of thing was simply not an issue. There were no separate herds back then. And there were no separate herdsmen. What has happened to change all that?

What On Earth Has Gotten Into Lot?

Even though Avraham and Lot traveled together to and from Egypt the *impact of that visit* on the two of them was profoundly different. Avraham returned to the land of Promise inspired with devotion for the Holy One, heading straight for *Beit-El* to call out in God's Name. In contrast, Lot appears to have been impressed by the 'good life' in Egypt – the bustling commerce, the extravagant wealth, the

inviting tropical climate – and the mighty river that made it all possible. Notice that in the course of the eventual ‘split’ from Avram Lot chose as his ‘portion’ the thriving commercial center of Sodom, on the banks of the Jordan River.

Sounds to me like as close to Egypt as Lot could get³. As Torah puts it:

*"And Lot lifted his eyes and saw the entire Jordan valley,
for it had plenty of water... like the LAND OF EGYPT..."*

[Genesis 13:10]

Symbolically Lot's choice reflects his **preference for a vastly different life-style than Avram's newly found 'faith walk'**. Avraham accepted the challenge of the promised land – where life was dependent on *matar* (rain) and hence - dependent on God (see Devarim 11:13-16!). Lot, it appears, preferred a man-powered, man-focused way of life independent of the Holy One – the way of life epitomized by Sodom.

What ‘got into’ Lot? All the glitz and the glamour and the glory the secular world – be it Egypt or the cities of the plain - had to offer. It was, if you think about it, much the same thing that ‘got into’ Noach's contemporaries - and what later ‘got into’ the men and women on the plain of Shinar who built the city and tower of Bavel. The same thing will ‘get into’ you – and your children - too . . . *if you let it.*

Never forget – or let your children forget – **we were created for something much, much better than anything the secular world has to offer.** Always remember – and constantly remind your children – that we have been created and called forth from all the peoples of the earth to live out a covenant with the Creator of the Universe, becoming His Kingdom's ambassadors on earth, reflecting His Divine light upon the earth . . . at such a time as this.

That is what stirred up the conflict between Lot and Avram. Lot had tasted and wanted to continue to experience all the ‘good life’ the thriving cities of this world had to offer. Avram on the other hand was looking for a city with eternal foundations, a city not built by human hands. And with one eye always on that eternal city, Avram's focus was on becoming – and encouraging everyone else in his household to become - who he was created and called forth to be. Those different worldviews will bring about interpersonal conflict every time. If a

³ **Targum Unkelos** explains that Avraham offered Lot to go either NORTH (left) or SOUTH (right, Hebrew *yamin*). Considering that they were standing in Beit-El, what Avraham was offering Lot was a choice between the hills of Y'HUDA or the hills of SHOMRON [the Galilean area]. Lot rejected both options of Avraham's offer. Instead, he decided to leave the hill country of the Promised land altogether, preferring the perverse but highly profitable cities of the Jordan River Valley.

conflict hasn't been brought to a head by a confrontation between those two worldviews in your life yet, Dear Reader, trust me – IT WILL!

How would Avram respond to the conflict and offense? You see, Dear Reader, this was, for Avram, a “test”.

This Also is a Test

Personality conflicts and offenses are inevitable. As Messiah said: ***“It is impossible that no offenses should come Luke 17:1[a].***

Someone will do something that disturbs your peace and sense of being in control of your world. Someone will appropriate for himself or herself something you want. Someone will say something that hurts your feelings or impugns your integrity. Someone will ignore you – or refuse to listen to what you are trying to say. Someone will insult you, belittle you or disgust you. Someone will call you offensive names, accuse you of embarrassing things, or even threaten you. Perhaps they will even strike you in anger.

This is ***a test***, Beloved! It is not about the provocation or the *provocateur* – it is about you and your walk with the Holy One. So when provocation comes into our lives the critical question is never who is to blame. The critical question for us is how the Holy One would have us respond.

In such situations even good people can quickly find themselves caught up in ‘drama’. Vain imaginations flood through the mind unchecked. Emotions are allowed to run wild. Tears flow. Heated words are exchanged. Hurtful accusations are levied. Blame games and exaggerations cloud reality. *Bitter roots of resentment* start to sprout. Fists may even fly. And suddenly neither the TRUTH nor the years of give and take in the relationship seem to matter; indeed, suddenly all that seems to matter to each party is that ‘his’ side is vindicated.

This, Dear Reader, is ***lo tov*** [not good]. It is ***tumah*** - uncleanness - at its apex. Arguments and bitter controversy turn the day the Holy One has made into a Serpent’s Holiday. The fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil inside us immediately begins to assess blame – on the other person, of course. Drama is not the way a child of Avraham responds to provocation.

Watch Avram. Learn from him. And compare the way of Avram in this circumstance with the way of Lot.

All our personality conflicts are tests. That is, in fact, what all offenses of every

nature are. What **kind** of test do these things present, you ask? Let's talk about that.

The Real Test Presented by Discord In Relationships

The kind of test personality conflicts like that which occurred between Avram and Lot are intended to present may surprise you. Most of us think the main issue when personality conflicts start to surface is **how we can salvage the relationship with the person by whom we have been offended** (and/or who is offended by us).

As important as that is, however, *that is not the main issue*. So what is the 'main issue', you ask? The main issue is not whether we will salvage the relationship, but is ***whether we will submit the relationship to the Holy One*** (as Avram had apparently never done up to that point) - ***or whether we will continue to elevate the relationship with the other person (or group of people) over the revelation we have received from the Holy One.***

Some relationships you see - those not based upon TRUTH - are more damaging than they are beneficial - to *both parties*. They may be comfortable, like an old shoe. They may have extensive **blood, sweat and tear investments** and **emotional memories** by the score. But the truth of the matter is this: *no relationship that is not founded in – and submitted to - the will of the Holy One is worth saving.*

How do you know if a relationship⁴ is – or is not – founded in and submitted to the will of the Holy One? Here is a good rule of thumb: *The better a relationship makes your flesh and ego feel, or the more guilt a relationship makes you feel, the more dangerous it is*, and the less likely it is the Holy One's will for either of you.

Co-Dependency – an Ancient Problem

Avram and Lot's relationship appears to be tainted by a hint of what we in today's terminology might call "codependence". Part of this I am sure stemmed from the fact that Lot was fatherless. As we have discussed, Lot's dad, Avram's brother Charan, had died before the family ever left Ur of the Chaldees. Avram appears to have stepped into the void left in Lot's life by his father's death. And while this was much needed in Lot's early years, it seems to have *gone way too far, lasted way too long, and become a familiar and comfortable crutch* to both Lot and to Avram.

⁴ Please note that none of the comments here about relationships apply to marriage. A marriage is more than a relationship – it is a covenant. A covenant, founded upon a vow and oath, once made, is not to be discarded even if it later becomes obvious that the marriage was not God's highest and best will.

For Lot Avram's presence kept him tucked away in the shadows where he had not needed to – and therefore had not learned how to – make his own decisions in life and develop his own relationship with the Almighty. And for Avram Lot's 'tagging along' apparently met his perceived need to feel important and 'fatherly' by "watching out for" his deceased brother's son - so much so that Avram actually appears to have elevated that relationship and the feeling of self-importance it gave him over the words of the Holy One.

Avram, who himself was childless, probably believed Lot was to be his heir. He knew Lot had suffered tragedy, being bereaved of his father. He probably thought Lot 'needed' him. And at one time at least Lot probably did. But dependence by one human being upon another human being is *abnormal* and is supposed to be a temporary situation only. Much more on that later in Torah. The Holy One wants those who are needed to serve as *encouragers* - not *enablers*.

It no doubt made Avram feel good about himself to do something 'nice' for Lot. And Lot on the other hand came to rely upon Avram - rather than on the Holy One. And therefore Avram held onto Lot even when the Holy One was telling him to let him go.

So the Holy One stood by silently and allowed the relationship between the two of them to grow "sour" on its own and to bear fruit consistent with its essence (rebellion and self-will). Has that ever happened to any of your relationships? Is it happening right now?

Cutting It Off - Mercifully

In this instance Avram had to finally yield this codependent relationship to the Holy One. If he never saw Lot again, well . . . so be it. He had to be faithful to the Holy One. He would not antagonize or be cruel to Lot - but he would make it clear:

***"Let's part company. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right;
if you go to the right, I'll go to the left."
[Genesis 13:9]***

These are painful words indeed. But they are Divinely inspired words. Man's ways are not the Holy One's ways. When the Holy One says "go out", He means it. Trying to be a "friend" to Lot was *man's* way.

The Holy One had said: ***"Leave your country, your people, and your father's household, and go"*** A co-dependent relationship with Lot was **not** supposed to be part of the deal.

Why Did the Relationship Have to Seemingly End, Rather Than Be ‘Restored’?

Why did the Avram/Lot relationship have to end⁵? Mark it well, Dear Reader: from the Holy One’s perspective **Lot** (a man who consciously chose Sodom as his life environment) **could have no part in raising and training up the seed of promise who was to come – Yitzchak** [Isaac]. And Lot’s wife, whose fatalistic attraction to Sodom would later result in her becoming a pillar of salt, could have no access to or influence upon the child of Avram and Sarai.

If you want to see how confused and how dangerous to children and legitimate family values Lot really was, read ahead to Genesis 19 – where Lot wound up offering his own virgin daughters to the perverted men of Sodom, saying ‘*you can do what you like with them*’. **Genesis 19:8**.

If Lot would [all in the course of trying to sound very pious] *surrender his own daughters to the perverse world in which he chose to live*, think what he would have done to the chosen seed, a mere cousin. And if you want to see what Lot’s wife’s priorities were, well, just look at what happens in Genesis 19:16 and 19:26. These two were – though they looked good on the outside – in some ways *very dangerous people*, especially where the welfare of children was involved. Their danger was well concealed - hidden from view – to everyone except the Holy One. But let’s explore their situation a little more closely.

Taking A Closer Look at Lot – And the Prophetic Role He is To Play In the Great Redemptive Plan

The name **Lot**⁶ is a name taken from a Hebrew verb root meaning to *veil*, to *cover*, and thereby to *hide*. Secretly, under a *veil*, or *false showing*, of attachment and commitment to Avram, Lot had been long been hiding *resentment* toward Avram. Now, the voice of discontent and resentment was coming through the veil. It became clear, that though Avram meant Lot only good, Lot **wanted his own life and did not have the commitment to the Holy One, and could not handle the intimate walk with the Holy One that Avram was beginning to develop**. Lot just did not want to be wrapped up in Avram’s life – or to have any part in Avram’s ever-deepening walk with the Holy One - any more.

⁵ Even though Avram would rush to rescue Lot in chapter 14, and intercede [indirectly] for him and his family in Genesis 19, the relationship was effectively over the moment Lot took off for Sodom. There was never a reconciliation or restoration. Lot never went ‘Avram’s way’ again.

⁶ Lot is Hebrew *lamed, vav, tet*. Strong’s Hebrew word #3876, it is pronounced *lote*, with a long “o” sound.

And when after a high time in Egypt Lot finally began to show his true priorities, the Holy One took steps to make any further living together unbearable. Lot began to gather around him “herdsmen” [Hebrew *resh, ayin hey*, Strong’s Hebrew word #7462, transliterated *ra`ah*, and pronounced *raw-aw’*, from the root word which means to *watch*, or to *oversee*]. This word is often translated *shepherds*.

Lot looked at the fruitful plain of the Jordan and said “if that’s the way you want it, have fun in the desert, Abe! I’m headed for the land of wealth, commerce, and palm trees!” [*Rabbi’s son* paraphrase].

I suspect Lot’s wife and daughters laughed all the way to S’dom and G’morrah.

Please note that when he left Lot *took the “herdsmen”/shepherds with them*. And note as well that those “herdsmen”/shepherds followed Lot’s lead - right to *captivity* [Genesis 14)], right to *depravity* [Genesis 18], and, ultimately, right to their own *destruction* [Genesis 19]. Such is the fruit of listening to Lot and his wife.

But Didn’t the Holy One Love Lot and His Wife, Too?

Do not misunderstand me, Dear Reader. The Holy One did not by any means hate or reject Lot. And neither did Avram. Both just determined that it was best to *let Lot have what he thought he wanted*.

Lot made his own choice. People are always free to do that. Sometimes the choices men make do not turn out well for them. Stepping outside of Covenant is just like that.

Remember what the Unseen Shepherd’s Voice told Avram – ***“I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse those who curse you . . .”*** Lot chose the second option. And he will not by any means be the last one to do so. So you are free to pity Lot – and those of all generations who make a ‘Lot’s choice’ - if you so desire. But do not for one second consider Lot – or those like him – to be a victim of anything done by Avram, or by those walking in the same Covenant in which he walked.

If such a person is a victim, he is a victim of *his own bad choices*. And alas, *aren’t we all?*

The Richest Blessing of Avram Truly Begins with Lot’s Departure

And what of Avram? Now he’s *really* blown it, right? In the eyes of men, yes he has - except for one thing – the unbreakable power of the COVENANT.

In the midst of Avram’s being humbled and slapped around, you see, the Holy One speaks to him again—the deepest encounter yet. And the words the Holy One speaks to Avram in this situation are nothing like what Avram might have cause to expect nor what the wagging self-righteous tongues around him were most likely “prophesying”. Instead of “*you blew it; now face the music*”, Avram, the relationship-breaker, hears this affirmation:

Me'imo sa na eynecha ure'eh min ha-makom asher-atah sham

'Raise your eyes, and, from the place where you are now [standing],

tzafonah v'negbah v'kedmah vayamah

look to the north, to the south, to the east, and to the west.

Ki et-kol ha-aretz asher-atah ro'eh

For all the land that you see,

lecha etenenah ul'zar'acha ad-olam

I will give to you and to your offspring forever.

Vesamti et-zar'acha ka'afar ha-aretz

I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth

asher im-yuchal ish limenot et-afar ha-aretz

if a man will be able to count [all] the grains of dust in the world

gam-zar'acha yimaneh

then your offspring also will be countable.

Kum hithalech b'aretz l'orkah ul'rochbah

Rise, walk the land, through its length and breadth,

ki lecha etenenah

for I will give it [all] to you.'

[Genesis 13:14-17]

And as we later are told, Avram – finally freed of Lot’s negative, destructive, subversive influence – could, as the Holy One intended:

“teach his children and his household after him

to keep the way of the Holy One, by doing what is right and just”

[Genesis 18:19]

Questions For Today’s Study

1. Find the Negev, Bethel, Ai and S’dom [Sodom] on maps in your Bible Atlas.
2. In verses 2-9 we see what happens when the Holy One begins to unravel a co-dependent relationship.

[A] What circumstances did the Holy One arrange to bring the strife between Avram and Lot out in the open?

[B] Do you think there was something deeper that was going on? If so, what?

3. What land did Lot choose and why?

4. Probably while Avram was still at or near Bethel, after Lot leaves Avram has his third encounter with the Holy One [13:14-17]:

The Holy One said to Avram, after Lot was separated from him, "Now, lift up your eyes, and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward, for all the land that you see, I will give to you and to your offspring forever.

I will make your offspring as the dust of the eretz, so that if a man can number the dust of the eretz, then your seed may also be numbered.

Arise, walk through the land, in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it to you."

[A] How was this third encounter with the Holy One deeper and different than the first encounter [Genesis 12:1-3]?

[B] How was this third encounter with the Holy One deeper and different than the second encounter [Genesis 12:7]?

[C] Why do you think the split with Lot had to occur before this third, deeper encounter with the Holy One, could take place? What was it about Avram's relationship with Lot that prevented this from taking place?

5. Today's haftarah is taken from the 41st chapter of *Yeshayahu* [Isaiah]. This reading informs us that the events of human history (and interpersonal relationships, like Avram's and Lot's, for that matter) are being orchestrated by the Holy One, not by ha-Satan. In Isaiah 41:1-4 we read:

*Keep silence before me, **iyim** [islands/coastal lands]; and let the peoples renew their strength: let them come near; then let them speak; let us come near together to judgment.*

Who has raised up one from the east, whom he calls in righteousness to his foot?

He gives nations before him, and makes him rule over kings; he gives them as the dust to his sword as the driven stubble to his bow.

He pursues them, and passes on safely, even by a way that he had not gone with his feet.

Who has worked and done it, calling the generations from the beginning?

Ani Adonai rishon

I, the Holy One, am the first,

v'et-acharonim ani hu

And unto the last, I am He.

- [A] List the things the Holy One is going to do for this “one from the East.”
- [B] List the things the “one from the East” is going to do.
- [C] Read Psalm 2 and discuss how it relates to these verses.
- [D] What do you think the Holy One is talking about in Isaiah 41:4?

6. In today’s Brit Chadasha reading we learn more about the difference between Avram’s **sh'ma** lifestyle and the way of the world. Shaul of Tarsus says:

*Now to him who works the reward is not counted as **grace**, but as **debt**.*

*But to him who doesn't work,
but believes in [sh'ma's and therefore aman's] him who justifies the ungodly,
his faith is accounted for righteousness.*

[A] What passage of the TaNaKh (Old Testament) does Shaul of Tarsus quote?

[B] What according to the quoted verses are the two situations that make a man blessed?

*May the Holy One lead you in all your relationships,
and deal with you according to His Covenant.*

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study

Psalm 107:8-9

*Let them praise the Holy One for His lovingkindness,
For his wonderful works to the children of men!
For He satisfies the longing soul.
He fills the hungry soul with good.*