

**Torah Study: *Parshat Lech Lecha***  
**Temple Sinai of Atlanta**  
**10.16.21 / 10 Cheshvan 5782**

**Guiding Questions**

- Whose covenant is it?
- Who was in the land and when were they there? Does it matter?
- To what extent do the ends justify the means?
- What can Abram's journey teach us about our own?

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**Genesis 12:6**

**וַיַּעֲבֹר אַבְרָם בְּאֶרֶץ עַד מְקוֹם שְׁכֵם עַד אֵלֹן מוֹרֵה וְהַכְּנַעֲנִי אָז בְּאֶרֶץ:**

Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem, at the terebinth of Moreh. **The Canaanites were then in the land.**

**Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson**

What does the Torah imply when it notes that “*ha-K’naani az ba’aretz*” (“The Canaanites were then in the land”)? It certainly seems to mean that they were in the land *then* (when the tale took place) but not *now* (when the book was being written). The challenge to those who hold that Moses literally wrote each and every word of the Bible is that there were Canaanites in the land during his entire lifetime. So what does the word *then* reveal? (Bradley Artson, *The Everyday Torah*, 18)

**Rashi (11th CE France)**

The word comes to teach us that the Canaanites were in the process of conquering the land from the sons of Shem, who had been given the land lawfully. Because the Canaanites took the land from its rightful owners, it was only proper that descendents of Shem should come and reclaim it from the Canaanites. Thus, for Rashi, the *az/then* is an assertion of the propriety of the Israelite conquest in the time of Joshua

### **Radak (12 CE France)**

He acknowledges Rashi's interpretation, but suggests a very different take. He says that the surprising word is to teach us "how God deals with those whom God loves." In other words, the Canaanites were in the land while Abraham was, and they would have destroyed him if not for the miraculous protection extended to him by God. As Radak notes, the *az/then* signifies that "this was proof that God was with him."

### **Ibn Ezra (11th CE Spain/Italy)**

He agrees with Rashi: "It is possible that the Canaanites seized the land of Canaan from some other tribe at the time" (ie: then, but not prior to this). Then he drops his bombshell: "Should this interpretation be incorrect, then this text has a great secret. Let the one who understands it remain silent (*HaMevin Yavin*)"

What secret would be so great that those who understood its meaning were duty-bound to maintain silence? Could it be that Ibn Ezra understood that Moses could not have written that verse, so that the dogma of attributing the specific words of the entire Torah to Moses could not possibly be true? That insight would certainly shake the foundations of faith, and one can easily imagine a medieval sage counseling silence in its wake.

### **Carl Sandburg**

"Get off this estate."

"What for?"

"Because it's mine."

"Where did you get it?"

"From my father."

"Where did he get it?"

"From his father."

"And where did he get it?"

"He fought for it."

"Well, I'll fight you for it."

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## Genesis 12:10-14

### Rashi

*BEHOLD NOW I KNOW* — The Midrashic explanation is: Until now נא ידעתי he had not perceived her beauty owing to the extreme modesty of both of them; now, however, through this event, he became cognisant of it (Midrash Tanchuma, Lech Lecha 5).

Another explanation: Usually, because of the exertion of travelling a person (becomes uncomely, but she had retained her beauty (Genesis Rabbah 40:4). Still, the real sense of the text is this: Behold, now the time has come when I am anxious because of thy beauty. I have long known that thou art fair of appearance: but now we are travelling among repulsive people who have never been accustomed to see a beautiful woman.

AND IT CAME TO PASS WHEN ABRAM WAS COME INTO EGYPT —It should have said, “when they were come into Egypt”; but the use of the singular teaches us that he hid her in a chest, and when they demanded the custom dues they opened it and discovered her (Genesis Rabbah 40:5).

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## Genesis 13:14

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־אַבְרָם אַחֲרֵי הַפָּרֶדֶת לֹט מֵעֵמוֹ שָׂא נָא עֵינֶיךָ וּרְאֵה מִן־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־אַתָּה שָׂם צַפְנָה וְנִגְבָּה וְקִדְמָה וַיְמֵה:

And the LORD said to Abram, after Lot had parted from him, “Raise your eyes and look out from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west,

### *Kitvei HaBeSh”T* (Ba’al Shem Tov, pg. 98)

We are bound up in our thoughts. Wherever our thoughts are, there we are. We might be standing in the synagogue to pray, but our ideas fly to the ends of the earth, drawn after our affairs. At that moment, it is as if we are present at our business, and not in the synagogue. This is what our verse means: “**look**” – look with a spiritual, soul-infused attention – “**from where you are**” – do not let your thoughts flee to other places, distracting you, scattering your thoughts.

## **Rabbi Jonathan Slater**

This is one of the classical teachings of the Baal Shem Tov. Inasmuch as it is couched in the context of the synagogue, it fits his deep concern with the manner in which we pray. But it is suggestive in many other ways, as well. That is, is it only when we come to pray that our minds wander, that we allow our thoughts to flee to some other place?

Doesn't it sometimes happen when we are in conversation with another person, at work, reading, driving, in meetings? We sometimes allow this to happen so that we might escape situations that are uncomfortable. We sometimes seek to do this to find something more pleasant to enjoy. But, what is the cost?

Consider the interplay between prayer (as attention to God) and interpersonal contact; between focus on God and focus on the image of God. How might learning to concentrate in prayer affect your ability to pay attention to those with whom you are in conversation? How might your learning to concentrate in your relationships with others help you in being present to God?