The mission of **Torah Is Geshmack** is to bring out the richness and enjoyment of Torah for everyone, and in doing so bring them closer to Hashem.

פרשת לך לך תשפ״ז

What אברהם Could Not Count

Beauty and the Limits of Sight

Dovid Kopel

My Rebbe would quote HaRav Ruderman זצ״ל that יופי (*beauty*) can stand very far from אמת (*truth*). A thought does not become true because it is beautiful. In the words אמת ויציב, we find that אמת comes first, while יפה appears only later. יופי can reveal אמת, but it can also tempt us to mistake what is visible for what is real. That tension runs quietly through Parshas לך לך from beginning to end.

Again and again, the פרשה places something striking before the eye: the beauty of שרי, the fertility of סדום, the wealth of מצרים, the abundance of רכוש, and finally the כוכבים themselves. None of these things is false. The danger begins when what can be seen is treated as the whole אמת.

> וַיֵּלֶךְ אַבְרָם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֵלָיו ה׳ וַיֵּלֶךְ אִתּוֹ לוֹט וְאַבְרָם בֶּן חָמֵשׁ שָׁנִים וְשִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה בְּצֵאתוֹ מֵחָרָן (בראשית יב:ד)

And אברם *went as* ה׳ *had spoken to him*

אברם does not begin by looking for what appears best. He goes because הקב״ה speaks. That is the first contrast of the parshah, because לוט will later move according to what his eyes tell him.

> וַיְהִי רָעָב בָּאָרֶץ (בראשית יב:י)

There was a famine in the land

The tension appears immediately. The very land promised to אברם cannot presently sustain him. He is driven toward מצרים, and there the first danger is not famine but sight: the visible beauty of שרי.

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פרעה, שרי, and the Difference Between Taking and Belonging

> הִנֵּה־נָא יָדַעְתִּי כִּי אִשָּׁה יְפַת־מַרְאֶה אָתְּ (בראשית יב:יא)

Behold, now I know that you are a woman of beautiful appearance

אברם speaks openly about the danger to himself. The מצריים may kill him. What will happen to שרי is left almost unspoken. He says only that they will let her live, while the terrible meaning of that survival sits beneath the words. The Torah then says openly what אברם leaves unsaid.

וַיִּרְאוּ אֹתָהּ שָׂרֵי פַרְעֹה וַיְהַלְלוּ אֹתָהּ אֶל־פַּרְעֹה וַתֻּקַּח הָאִשָּׁה בֵּית פַּרְעֹה (בראשית יב:טו)

The princes of פרעה *saw her and praised her to* פרעה*, and the woman was taken into* פרעה*'s house*

There is a remarkable collision in the words themselves. In an unvocalized ספר תורה, the name שָׂרַי and the phrase שָׂרֵי פַרְעֹה are written with the same letters, שרי. The visible שרים possess political power. They see שרי, speak about her, and cause her to be taken. Yet the woman who appears outwardly powerless is herself שָׂרַי, a name that carries the sense of a princess.

At the moment she is taken, even her name disappears. The Torah calls her simply הָאִשָּׁה, and then describes her as being brought into the house of פרעה. Our חז״ל teach the familiar idea ביתו זו אשתו and explain that a man's בית can mean his wife. The words בֵּית פַּרְעֹה הָאִשָּׁה תֻּקַּח therefore carry something deeper. The intention of פרעה is not merely to bring a woman into a palace; he is attempting to take another man's בית into his own.

לָמָּה אָמַרְתְּ אֲחֹתִי הִוא וָאֶקַּח אֹתָהּ לִי לְאִשָּׁה וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה אִשְׁתְּךָ קַח וָלֵךְ (בראשית יב:יט)

I took her for myself as a wife

The word לִי captures פרעה's world. I saw, I wanted, and I took for myself. Yet the act of taking does not create the deepest form of ownership. The Torah restores שרי's true identity when הקב״ה intervenes.

וַיְנַגַּע ה׳ אֶת־פַּרְעֹה נְגָעִים גְּדֹלִים וְאֶת־בֵּיתוֹ עַל־דְּבַר שָׂרַי אֵשֶׁת אַבְרָם (בראשית יב:יז)

ה׳ afflicted פרעה *with great plagues, and his household, because of* שרי*, the wife of* אברם

Her name returns, and the Torah again identifies her as אֵשֶׁת אַבְרָם. Although פרעה can take שרי physically into his house, he cannot make her his. That distinction becomes a model for גלות (*exile*). Nations may seize bodies, land, labor, wealth, and political control, yet they do not acquire the ברית (*covenant*) that defines כלל ישראל as a people.

Being taken is not the same as belonging.

There is another layer in the אהל itself. When אברם first reaches the land, the Torah writes וַיֵּט אָהֳלָה, and רש״י notes the spelling כְּתִיב אֹהֱלָה. According to רש״י,first אברם pitches the tent of שרי and only afterward his own. Before the public מזבח stands the private אהל of שרי. The future of אברם begins not only at the מזבח outside but with the בית being formed within.

עַד־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־הָיָה שָׁם אָהֳלֹה בַּתְּחִלָּה (בראשית יג:ג)

To the place where his tent had been at the beginning

The return from מצרים is therefore more than geographical. שרי returns from the house of פרעה to the original אהל, while אברם returns to the מזבח. The palace of פרעה looks permanent while the tent of אברם looks temporary. History reverses them. The house of פרעה eventually disappears, while the אהל of the אבות becomes the beginning of the בית that will belong to כלל ישראל.

This also gives depth to the language of שיר השירים in the phrase גַּן נָעוּל אֲחֹתִי כַלָּה. During the episode in מצרים, we see אברם claiming אֲחֹתִי, while concealing the decisive truth that she is his wife. The phrase אֲחֹתִי כַלָּה reunites the two identities. Although שרי can be seen, she is not available to be taken. She is described as a גַּן נָעוּל, a closed garden whose inner life is protected by ברית.

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Desire, לוט, and סדום

The Torah then gives us the opposite model. אברם moves by the word of הקב״ה, while לוט chooses by what he sees.

> וַיִּשָּׂא־לוֹט אֶת־עֵינָיו וַיַּרְא אֶת־כָּל־כִּכַּר הַיַּרְדֵּן כִּי כֻלָּהּ מַשְׁקֶה (בראשית יג:י)

לוט lifted his eyes and saw the entire plain of the Jordan, that all of it was well watered

The beauty of the land is not imagined. It is genuinely fertile and genuinely well watered. The Torah itself says that it appears כְּגַן ה׳ כְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם, like the garden of ה׳ and like the land of Egypt. Yet in the middle of telling us what לוט sees, the Torah inserts what לוט cannot see.

> לִפְנֵי שִׁחֵת ה׳ אֶת־סְדֹם וְאֶת־עֲמֹרָה (בראשית יג:י)

Before ה׳ destroyed סדום *and* עמורה

לוט sees the present; the Torah quietly inserts the end. That is the limitation of sight. The same question will return when אברם looks at the כוכבים and later asks בַּמָּה אֵדַע concerning the land.

חז״ל go much further and hear לְשׁוֹן עֶרְוָה, the language of sexual immorality, throughout the description of לוט's choice. They connect וַיִּשָּׂא לוֹט אֶת עֵינָיו to sexual looking, כִּכַּר to the language of זנות, and כֻּלָּהּ מַשְׁקֶה to the waters of the סוטה. The גמרא likewise applies לְתַאֲוָה יִבַּקַּשׁ נִפְרָד to לוט. The problem is not that לוט sees badly. It is that תאוה determines how he interprets what he sees.

That pattern reaches back to עץ הדעת. The tree is described as תַּאֲוָה הוּא לָעֵינַיִם, desirable to the eyes, and the next act is וַתִּקַּח she took. The movement is sight, desire, and taking. By שרי, the princes see her and she is taken. By לוט, he sees and then chooses for himself, as the Torah says וַיִּבְחַר־לוֹ, and the same pattern has returned.

What I see, I desire. What I desire, I take. סדום is the social form of that mistake.

The irony is that לוט thinks he is choosing כְּגַן ה׳, something resembling גן עדן, while חז״ל hear עריות beneath the description. A place can look like גן ה׳ while living according to the voice of the נחש. That is the opposite of שרי as a גַּן נָעוּל. One garden is chosen because of what the eye sees. The other is defined by the גבול that protects what lies within.

The Torah also refuses to flatten every foreign society into one category. In the local מצרים episode, the מצריים are not introduced as רָעִים וְחַטָּאִים Rather, פרעה can recognize that taking a married woman is wrong, rebuke אברם, return שרי, and send them away. סדום is introduced differently, with the Torah itself declaring וְאַנְשֵׁי סְדֹם רָעִים וְחַטָּאִים לַה׳ מְאֹד The danger of מצרים can exist inside an ordered society in which the king assumes the right to take. סדום is the later stage in which corruption itself becomes the public value.

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Famine, רכוש, and Who Really Owns

The same tension appears in wealth. Before מצרים, the famine is כָּבֵד, heavy. After מצרים, the language turns: אברם himself becomes כָּבֵד with livestock, silver, and gold.

כִּי־כָבֵד הָרָעָב בָּאָרֶץ (בראשית יב:י)

For the famine was severe in the land

וְאַבְרָם כָּבֵד מְאֹד בַּמִּקְנֶה בַּכֶּסֶף וּבַזָּהָב (בראשית יג:ב)

And אברם *was very heavy with livestock, silver, and gold*

At first there is too little, and אברם cannot remain in the land. Then there is too much, and אברם and לוט cannot remain together. What solved one displacement becomes the cause of another.

וְלֹא־נָשְׂא אֹתָם הָאָרֶץ לָשֶׁבֶת יַחְדָּו כִּי־הָיָה רְכוּשָׁם רָב (בראשית יג:ו)

The land could not support them dwelling together, because their possessions were great

רכוש runs through לך לך almost like a character of its own. אברם and לוט acquire רכוש. Their רכוש helps separate them. The kings seize the רכוש of סדום, while לוט himself is taken together with his possessions. אברם then goes to war, not because his own wealth was stolen, but because כִּי נִשְׁבָּה אָחִיו, his brother was captured. He rescues both the people and the property, and מלך סדום immediately offers him the רכוש.

תֶּן־לִי הַנֶּפֶשׁ וְהָרְכֻשׁ קַח־לָךְ (בראשית יד:כא)

Give me the people, and take the property for yourself

אברם refuses even a thread or a shoelace. His reason is not simply personal restraint. He does not want מלך סדום to be able to define the source of his wealth.

וְלֹא תֹאמַר אֲנִי הֶעֱשַׁרְתִּי אֶת־אַבְרָם (בראשית יד:כג)

So that you will not say, 'I made אברם *wealthy*'

That sounds different after מצרים. There פרעה had enriched אברם because of שרי, at the very moment אברם's own בית was in danger of being swallowed by בֵּית פַּרְעֹה. Now another king offers wealth, and אברם refuses to let him say אֲנִי הֶעֱשַׁרְתִּי אֶת־אַבְרָם. Immediately beforehand, מלכי צדק has already named the true קוֹנֶה, the true Possessor.

וַיְבָרְכֵהוּ וַיֹּאמֶר בָּרוּךְ אַבְרָם לְאֵל עֶלְיוֹן קֹנֵה שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ (בראשית יד:יט)

Blessed is אברם *to the Supreme God, Possessor of heaven and earth*

The worlds of פרעה, לוט, and סדום keep returning to what can be seen, chosen, taken, and owned. By contrast, אברם is learning something different: the true קוֹנֶה is הקב״ה Himself. His priority is not to reject wealth but to make sure that wealth never owns him. He can possess רכוש without allowing either the רכוש itself, or the person who gave it, to define him.

That makes the promise of ברית בין הבתרים startling. After refusing the wealth offered by the king of סדום in that episode, אברם receives a new promise from הקב״ה: his descendants will one day leave גלות carrying רְכוּשׁ גָּדוֹל, great wealth. רכוש itself is not the problem, just as תאוה itself is not the problem. Both are כוחות that can be directed toward קדושה or toward corruption. כלל ישראל will later struggle with exactly that choice. The gold of מצרים can become the משכן, while the same gold can also be fashioned into the עגל of that generation. Wealth can be brought toward השראת השכינה, or it can be turned toward עבודה זרה instead. אברהם אבינו is already establishing the

יסוד that רכוש must remain subordinate to the אמת and ברית that guide his life. He will not allow wealth to become his identity, and he will not allow another person to claim אֲנִי הֶעֱשַׁרְתִּי אֶת־אַבְרָם as the source of that wealth. Wealth may enter the בית he builds, but it may not define that home.

> וְאַחֲרֵי־כֵן יֵצְאוּ בִּרְכֻשׁ גָּדוֹל (בראשית טו:יד)

Afterward they will leave with great wealth

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The כוכבים: What Can Be Counted and What Cannot Be Measured

After turning away from the wealth offered by the king of סדום in that episode, אברם is approached by הקב״ה Himself. His concern at that point is no longer about רכוש as possession. His concern is the future זרע that has been promised to him.

> הַבֶּט־נָא הַשָּׁמַיְמָה וּסְפֹר הַכּוֹכָבִים אִם־תּוּכַל לִסְפֹּר אֹתָם וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ כֹּה יִהְיֶה זַרְעֶךָ (בראשית טו:ה)

Look now toward the heavens and count the stars, if you are able to count them. And He said to him, 'So shall your offspring be'

We usually read this as a promise of enormous numbers. The גר״א in אדרת אליהו explains that the comparison to the stars can refer to רֹב, overwhelming abundance, rather than literal equality with the number of stars. But the wording remains strange. Why command אברם to count what he cannot count?

The question becomes sharper because the Torah later insists on counting כלל ישראל. The opening of במדבר begins with a census, and רש״י explains the reason with the words מתוך חיבתן לפניו מונה אותם כל שעה. Because they are dear before Him, הקב״ה counts them again and again. כלל ישראל are therefore not simply beyond number. They are counted with remarkable precision.

> שְׂאוּ אֶת־רֹאשׁ כָּל־עֲדַת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתָם לְבֵית אֲבֹתָם בְּמִסְפַּר שֵׁמוֹת כָּל־זָכָר לְגֻלְגְּלֹתָם (במדבר א:ב)

Take a count of the entire congregation of בני ישראל *by their families and their fathers' houses, by the number of names, every male by head*

Why compare the nation that is counted בְּמִסְפַּר שֵׁמוֹת to stars that אברם cannot count? The answer may be contained in another פסוק.

> מוֹנֶה מִסְפָּר לַכּוֹכָבִים לְכֻלָּם שֵׁמוֹת יִקְרָא (תהלים קמז:ד)

He counts the number of the stars; He calls all of them by names

The כוכבים are not truly without number. אברם cannot count them, but הקב״ה can. More than that, He does not merely know the total. לְכֻלָּם שֵׁמוֹת יִקְרָא: every star has a שם before Him. That is strikingly close to בְּמִסְפַּר שֵׁמוֹת by כלל ישראל. A human count asks how many. The count of הקב״ה asks who, because every שם matters.

Even when כלל ישראל can be counted, the number never contains their full measure. A census can tell us how many people stand in the מדבר at one moment. It cannot count every child, every מצוה, every חידוש, every act of מסירות נפש, or the רושם that one generation leaves in the next.

There is also a contemporary way to appreciate the משל without confusing it with the פשט. The light we see from a distant star left that star in the past. In the same way, a generation can disappear from sight while its אור continues to arrive. אברם stands beneath the sky as one man, while הקב״ה sees כלל ישראל across generations.

You can count who stands before you. You cannot count what will come from them.

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Belief, Knowledge, and the Clock of the Land

> וְהֶאֱמִן בַּה׳ וַיַּחְשְׁבֶהָ לּוֹ צְדָקָה (בראשית טו:ו)
>
> *He believed in* ה׳, *and He considered it righteousness for him*

אברם believes the promise of offspring. Then הקב״ה turns to the promise of the land.

> אֲנִי ה׳ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאוּר כַּשְׂדִּים לָתֶת לְךָ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת לְרִשְׁתָּהּ (בראשית טו:ז)
>
> *I am* ה׳ *Who brought you out from* אור כשדים *to give you this land to inherit it*

> וַיֹּאמֶר אֲדֹנָי ה׳ בַּמָּה אֵדַע כִּי אִירָשֶׁנָּה (בראשית טו:ח)
>
> *By what shall I know that I will inherit it*

There are חז״ל who read בַּמָּה אֵדַע critically and connect the question to the decree of גלות. Yet רש״י is clear that אברם has already believed the promise of זרע. His question is attached to the inheritance of the land, and רש״י brings the explanation that אברם is asking through what זכות his descendants will remain there.

The question is therefore not simply whether כלל ישראל will exist. אברם has already accepted the promise of זרע through אמונה (*faith*). בַּמָּה אֵדַע asks something else: how will that זרע become joined to this ארץ in a way that can endure through history?

This makes the next chapter unusually important. שרי has been childless for far longer than ten years, yet the Torah does not simply say that ten years of marriage passed. It counts ten years specifically in ארץ כנען.

> וַתְּהִי שָׂרַי אֵשֶׁת אַבְרָם לֹא יָלְדָה לּוֹ וְלַהֲגָר הַמִּצְרִית שִׁפְחָתָהּ מִקֵּץ עֶשֶׂר שָׁנִים לְשֶׁבֶת אַבְרָם בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וַתִּתֵּן אֹתָהּ הָגָר הַמִּצְרִית שִׁפְחָתָהּ לְאַבְרָם אִישָׁהּ לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה (בראשית טז:ג)
>
> *At the end of ten years of* אברם *dwelling in the land of* כנען

חז״ל derive from here the ten-year rule concerning a childless marriage. But why does the clock begin in ארץ כנען when אברם and שרי were married long before? Their biological reality did not begin when they crossed the border.

רש״י explains that the earlier years do not enter the count because the promise וְאֶעֶשְׂךָ לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל was given in connection with entering the land. The רמב״ן broadens the picture and speaks of the additional years in ארץ ישראל, perhaps through זְכוּת הָאָרֶץ, the merit of the land. Whatever the precise הלכה, the Torah is now measuring the future זרע together with the ארץ.

חז״ל describe ארץ ישראל as אֶרֶץ צְבִי, and say that when כלל ישראל dwell upon it, רווחא, the land expands to hold them. That image belongs naturally beside the כוכבים: both the people and the land exceed what their external measurements suggest.

The זרע exceeds its מספר. The ארץ exceeds its מדה. What הקב״ה is building cannot be limited by what the eye can measure.

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A Powerful ראיה from הגר for the פרשת דרכים Question

Then שרי gives הגר to אברם.

> וַתִּקַּח שָׂרַי אֵשֶׁת־אַבְרָם אֶת־הָגָר הַמִּצְרִית שִׁפְחָתָהּ וַתִּתֵּן אֹתָהּ לְאַבְרָם אִישָׁהּ לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה (בראשית טז:ג)
>
> *שרי, the wife of* אברם, *took* הגר *the Egyptian, her* שפחה *(female slave), and gave her to* אברם, *her husband, as a wife*

בראשית רבה uses this episode as the model that after ten years one may not simply remain מבטל פריה ורביה, neglecting the obligation to build a family. That creates a serious question within the famous חקירה of the פרשת דרכים concerning the status of the אבות before מתן תורה.

The Torah does not merely call הגר a woman. It identifies her specifically as שִׁפְחָתָהּ, the שפחה of שרי. Later, after הגר becomes pregnant, the Torah records אברם telling שרי, 'Behold, your שפחה is in your hand,' with the words הִנֵּה שִׁפְחָתֵךְ בְּיָדֵךְ in the פסוק. On the straightforward reading of the פסוקים, there is no explicit statement that she was freed.

If אברם already possessed the full later דין ישראל, that creates a serious question. Under the later halachic rule, the child of a שפחה follows her and does not possess the ordinary paternal יִחוּס of a Jewish father. If so, how does taking הגר solve a problem of פריה ורביה at all? חז״ל themselves are using the marriage to הגר as the response to the ten-year requirement. That sounds as though producing a child through הגר could meaningfully answer אברם's need for זרע.

The מדרש may itself provide a powerful ראיה toward the later-transition side of the פרשת דרכים question. In דרוש ב׳, the פרשת דרכים develops the possibility that אברהם already had דין ישראל at כה יהיה זרעך, before the הגר episode. Yet immediately afterward, חז״ל treat marriage to a woman whom the פסוקים continue to call a שפחה as the response to פריה ורביה.

This is not an absolute proof. One could distinguish the status of a שפחה before מתן תורה from the later halachic category. Another possibility is that the מדרש teaches only the obligation to make another attempt. Yet on the straightforward reading of the פסוקים, the identity of הגר remains as the שפחה of שרי even after being given to אברם. That leaves the question sharp. As far as I have seen, the פרשת דרכים does not bring this מדרש when developing his question.

The chronology makes the question still more interesting. ישמעאל is born while his father is still אברם and still uncircumcised; שרי is still שרי, and the particular ברית of יצחק has not yet been established. I would not create a formal third halachic category between בן נח and ישראל without a source. But in the unfolding of the parshah, אברם is clearly in motion. He is no ordinary בן נח, while the identity marked by the name אברהם, by מילה, and by the ברית of יצחק has not yet fully appeared. The Torah presents that identity as something being built step by step.

And הגר is not merely a שפחה. The Torah identifies her with the full title הַגָּר הַמִּצְרִית in the פסוק. Although אברם has left מצרים physically, מצרים now enters his own בית. What had been an external danger becomes an internal question about the future זרע that will come from him.

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History, דעת, and the Undivided Bird

The episode of ברית בין הבתרים contains the question that אברם asks with the Hebrew words בַּמָּה אֵדַע to mean, 'By what shall I know?' The answer begins with the same root.

> יָדֹעַ תֵּדַע כִּי־גֵר יִהְיֶה זַרְעֲךָ בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא לָהֶם (בראשית טו:יג)

You shall surely know that your offspring will be strangers in a land that is not theirs

The answer is not merely an explanation. The answer is history. The experience of גלות and slavery, the rise of kingdoms, the מכות,the final יציאת מצרים, and eventually revelation will turn hidden promise into lived דעת (*knowing*). Later, during the מכות in מצרים, the Torah repeatedly uses the language of לְמַעַן תֵּדַע together with וִידַעְתֶּם in those passages. Before אברם can see how the future will unfold, he believes; his descendants will live through the process by which that hidden promise becomes national דעת.

The structure of the ברית itself may carry another hint. רש״י understands the word מְשֻׁלֶּשֶׁת as teaching that there are three heifers, three goats, three rams, and then the birds. The large animals therefore appear in three groups of three, followed by one final category that the Torah gathers using the singular word הַצִּפּוֹר in that verse. It is difficult not to notice a possible 3-3-3-1 shape. There is a familiar arrangement of the ספירות (*Divine attributes*) into three groups of three — חב״ד, חג״ת, and נה״י — followed by מלכות when the count includes דעת rather than כתר in that arrangement. Because the Torah has already emphasized both בַּמָּה אֵדַע and יָדֹעַ תֵּדַע that pattern becomes even harder to ignore.

I do not know the larger picture well enough to claim that each species here corresponds to a particular group of ספירות, and I would not force such a system without a source. But the grouping itself seems too deliberate to pass over: three, three, three, and then one. What is sourced much more clearly is the identity of that final undivided bird. רש״י brings from חז״ל that the divided animals represent the kingdoms that will pass away, while כלל ישראל is represented by the bird that is not divided.

> וְאֶת־הַצִּפּוֹר לֹא בָתָר (בראשית טו:י)

But the bird he did not divide

That raises a further question. Why are the other animals divided while the bird representing כלל ישראל remains whole? Perhaps the division reflects a world in which the גילוי (*revelation*) of הקב״ה appears fractured. Kingdom rises against kingdom. קדושה becomes concealed. The מלכות of הקב״ה is not yet openly recognized throughout the world. Yet that world of פירוד does not break כלל ישראל away from the ברית. Because כלל ישראל remains bound to that ברית, it can carry something whole through history.

There are physically two birds. One is a תור and the other is a גוזל. Yet the Torah uses the singular term הַצִּפּוֹר to gather them together. כלל ישראל contains countless individuals, families, generations, and the many שבטים that make up the nation, yet there remains one ברית. The כוכבים express multiplicity beyond human measure, while the bird expresses a unity that cannot be divided. Perhaps that unity is itself part of the answer to the פירוד around it. By living through our מצוות we continue to reveal the מלכות of הקב״ה even during periods when that מלכות is hidden from view.

The cutting of the animals may then suggest more than destruction. The Torah uses the words וַיִּתֵּן אִישׁ־בִּתְרוֹ לִקְרַאת רֵעֵהוּ to show that each piece is placed opposite its counterpart. The separated sides are arranged toward relationship. There can be פירוד in the גילוי while the pieces themselves still point toward a future תיקון. The divine manifestation then passes בֵּין הַגְּזָרִים through the space between the divided parts. כלל ישראל is not divided with them. Our task is to carry the ברית through that broken history, to serve הקב״ה through מצוות, and ultimately to take part in the תיקון that restores the גילוי of the שכינה and reveals His מלכות in its full glory.

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From אברם to אברהם: What a Name Carries

The future then becomes far more defined. אברם becomes אברהם and שרי becomes שרה, while the future child receives his name before he is even born.

> אֲבָל שָׂרָה אִשְׁתְּךָ יֹלֶדֶת לְךָ בֵּן וְקָרָאתָ אֶת־שְׁמוֹ יִצְחָק (בראשית יז:יט)

But שרה *your wife will bear you a son, and you shall call his name* יצחק

That belongs directly to the image of the כוכבים because אברם cannot count the future, while הקב״ה can already name it. The future is not an anonymous mass before Him. Every כוכב has a שם of its own, and now one particular child is named before he has even entered history.

חז״ל speak of exceptional people whose names were given before birth. One tradition lists יצחק together with שלמה and יאשיהו among the צדיקים named before they were born, while a broader list also includes ישמעאל together with משה and מלך המשיח. The point here is not simply that the names were known early. A שם can express what a person carries. Before יצחק is born, the child through whom the ברית will continue already has his name.

ישמעאל himself is also named before birth, which sharpens the distinction rather than weakening it. הקב״ה knows ישמעאל and hears him. Yet regarding יצחק, the Torah adds something different.

> וַהֲקִמֹתִי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אִתּוֹ לִבְרִית עוֹלָם לְזַרְעוֹ אַחֲרָיו (בראשית יז:יט)

I will establish My covenant with him as an eternal covenant for his offspring after him

The issue is no longer whether אברהם can have a child. ישמעאל already exists. The question is which זרע carries the ברית. The future of כלל ישראל is not merely biological continuation. It is זרע בתוך ברית, offspring carried inside the ברית.

Here the names of the אבות themselves become important. אברהם begins as אברם, but once הקב״ה gives him the name אברהם, the earlier name is displaced, as חז״ל teach. He changes and does not go back. The גר״א in אמרי נועם makes a דיוק in the precise wording of the two name changes. By

אברהם the Torah uses the words וְהָיָה שִׁמְךָ אַבְרָהָם in that order. By יעקב the wording appears as יִשְׂרָאֵל יִהְיֶה שְׁמֶךָ instead. The order itself changes because the two changes are not the same.

יצחק stands between them and is different from both. He is the only one of the אבות whose name never changes. His name is given before birth, and he remains יצחק from beginning to end. That is fitting for יצחק as the בן because he receives what comes before him and carries it forward with extraordinary firmness in his מדה. The identity of אברהם requires a transformation from the earlier name אברם. By contrast, the name of יצחק is given before he enters the world and remains fixed throughout his life.

יעקב is different again. He becomes ישראל, yet he never stops being יעקב as an individual. The two names remain because two בחינות continue together. In his more private identity, as the individual person, he remains יעקב throughout his life. In the public identity that extends beyond himself into his children and their future, the name ישראל becomes dominant. His children are called בני ישראל as a people. We become כלל ישראל across the generations. The land itself is called ארץ ישראל in the same national language. יעקב remains the man, while ישראל becomes the name of the heritage he carries into history.

The image of the כוכבים brings the point back into focus because אברהם stands beneath a future he cannot count, while הקב״ה already knows not only how many there will be but who they will become. The change from אברם to אברהם is permanent and never reverses. The identity of יצחק is received and remains firm. In the case of יעקב, both the private name יעקב and the public name ישראל remain throughout his life. The future cannot yet be measured by אברהם, but before it arrives הקב״ה already knows every name within it.

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The End of the Parshah: ברית in the Flesh

The parshah cannot end with another promise alone. It ends with the promise becoming physical.

> הִמָּול יִמֹּול יֶלֶיד בֵּיתְךָ וּמִקְנַת כַּסְפֶּךָ וְהָיְתָה בְרִיתִי בִּבְשַׂרְכֶם לִבְרִית עוֹלָם (בראשית יז:יג)

My covenant shall be in your flesh as an eternal covenant

The ברית is much larger than the act of מילה. It includes the promise expressed in the words לִהְיוֹת לְךָ לֵאלֹקִים וּלְזַרְעֲךָ אַחֲרֶיךָ, which defines how אברהם and his זרע stand in an enduring relationship with הקב״ה. It includes the land as an אֲחֻזַּת עוֹלָם, an eternal possession. The physical אות of that entire reality is ברית מילה.

At the beginning of לך לך, the land, the זרע, the nation, and the גלות all stand outside אברם as promises he cannot yet fully see. By the end, the ברית is no longer only spoken to him. It is written into his גוף.

That is also the תיקון of the תאוה running beneath the parshah. חז״ל read לוט and סדום through עריות, while מצרים sees the beauty of שרי and tries to take her. The אות of the ברית is placed precisely upon the part of the body through which זרע enters the world. The Torah does not destroy that כוח. It places the כוח itself within ברית.

סדום represents תאוה without גבול, while ברית מילה places a גבול of קדושה upon the very כוח that carries the next generation.

This is מידת יסוד (the attribute of יסוד), the point of transmission through which קדושה can pass forward without being corrupted by תאוה. Later, יוסף הצדיק will embody that תיקון inside מצרים itself.

> וַיְהִי יוֹסֵף יְפֵה־תֹאַר וְיִפֵּה מַרְאֶה (בראשית לט:ו)
>
> יוסף *was handsome in form and handsome in appearance*
>
> וַתִּשָּׂא אֵשֶׁת־אֲדֹנָיו אֶת־עֵינֶיהָ אֶל־יוֹסֵף (בראשית לט:ז)
>
> *His master's wife lifted her eyes toward* יוסף

The same מצרים returns with the same יופי, the same eyes, and the same תאוה. This time, however, the chain breaks because יוסף refuses and becomes the great model of שמירת הברית. The של״ה explicitly describes the תיקון as occurring through יוסף in מצרים and calls him ברית קודש, one who guarded ברית הקודש amid a society steeped in זמה. The figure of יוסף is bound to יסוד and to the description צדיק יסוד עולם. The answer to false יופי is not ugliness, and the answer to תאוה is not to destroy desire. It is to place desire inside אמת, inside גבול, and inside ברית.

That is where לך לך leaves אברהם. The future is still larger than anything he can see or count, but the ברית is no longer outside him. It has entered his own flesh.

From that point onward, a Jewish male enters בריתו של אברהם אבינו through מילה. The act does not create his Jewish identity in the technical halachic sense; it marks his body as a bearer of the covenant first written into אברהם.

The promise has become ברית, and the ברית has become בשר. What אברהם could never count can now be carried from one generation into the next.

May we be זוכה to recognize the difference between אמת and יופי, and never allow what is beautiful or visible to obscure what is true. May we preserve the ברית of אברהם אבינו and be worthy of carrying that ברית forward as part of כלל ישראל.

May we look toward the כוכבים above us and remember that what we can see is never the full measure of what הקב״ה is building. May each of us live in a way that makes our own שם worthy of being known before Him, through a life filled with תורה, מצוות, and עבודת ה׳.

And through that עבודת ה׳, may we be זוכה to restore the גילוי of His מלכות in this world, to bring the שכינה back to its full glory, and to see the day when the אמת that has so often remained hidden will finally be revealed for all to see.

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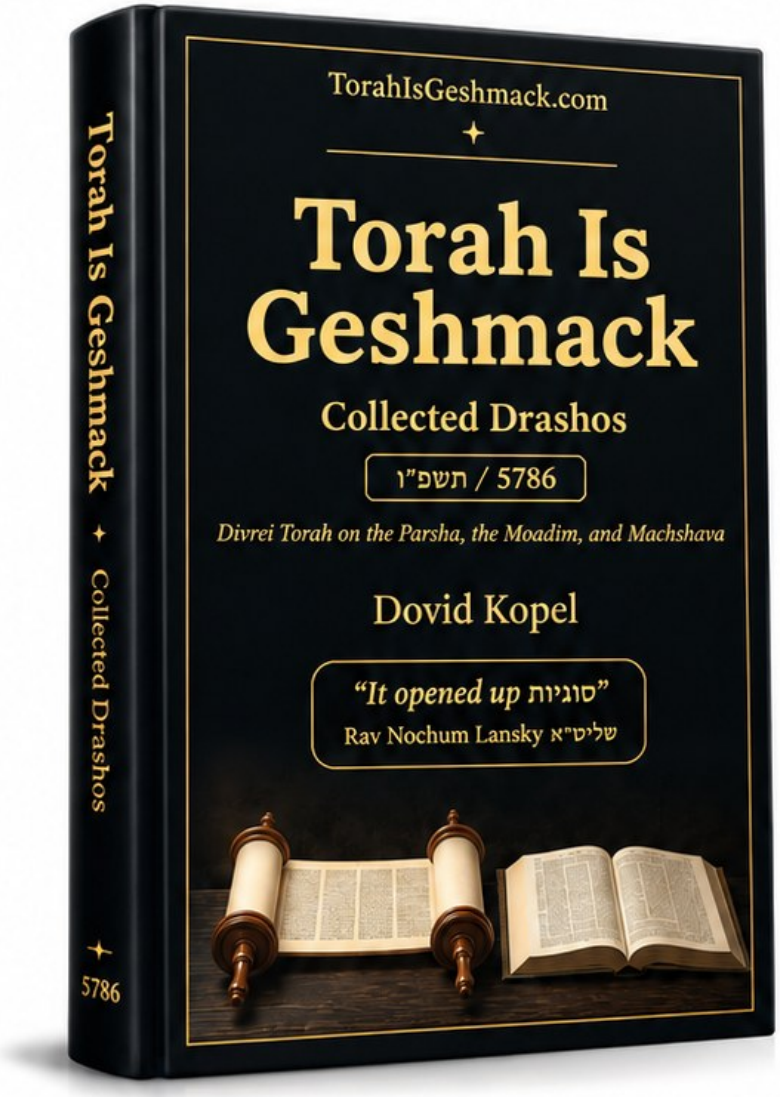
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