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In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag
Shiurim in Chumash & Navi by Menachem Leibtag

PARSHAT CHAYEI SARA
A WIFE FROM 'TOLDOT TERACH'

'Yichus' [family lineage] has always been an important consideration when selecting one's spouse. Nevertheless, Avraham's insistence that his 'chosen' son marry specifically a descendant of his brother Nachor requires explanation. In this week's shiur, we return to our discussion of the 'toldot' in Sefer Breishit in order to answer this question.

INTRODUCTION

As you surely must have noticed, the phrase "eileh toldot..." appears numerous times in Sefer Breishit. In our shiur on Parshat Noach, we explained how these toldot [genealogies] form the 'backbone' of Sefer Breishit.

In that shiur, we also explained how Sefer Breishit divided into two distinct sections. The first eleven chapters included three units that began with 'toldot', each unit containing a primary story relating to God's dissatisfaction with mankind's behavior:

Adam's sin in Gan Eden (and Cain's sin) / chapters 2-4,

The corruption of dor ha-mabul / the Flood -chps. 5-9

The story of Migdal Bavel & their dispersion / chps 10-11.

After the story of Migdal Bavel, Sefer Breishit introduces its second (and primary) section with "toldot Shem" (see 11:10). From this point and onward, the focus of the Sefer shifts to God's choice of Avraham Avinu to become the forefather of His model nation, followed by numerous stories that explain who is chosen (and who is rejected), as why they are chosen.

Similar to the first section of Sefer Breishit, each unit in this second section is also introduced by the phrase "eileh toldot...", be it 'toldot Yishmael' or 'toldot Yitzchak' etc. - until "eileh toldot Yaakov" (see 37:2) which introduces the concluding with the story, describing how all of Yaakov's offspring are chosen to become God's special nation - and hence the "bechira" process is complete.

A PARALLEL PROGRESSION

Even though this 'linear' progression of "toldot" throughout the Sefer appears to be rather technical; when we consider the two sections of Sefer Breishit (discussed above), a rather amazing 'parallel' progression emerges, as well - which may allude to the underlying theme of the entire book!

To show how, we must chart the "toladot" in the first section of the book, and compare them to the "toladot" of the second section of the book. While doing so, we will also see how the phrase "eileh toldot Terach" becomes rather significant, and how this may explain why it was necessary for Yitzchak and Yaakov to take a wife from Terach's offspring.

CHARTING THE TOLDOT

The following chart records the specific names that are included in the phrase "eileh toldot...". As you study this chart, note the parallel nature of their progression.

SEFER BREISHIT - UNITS OF 'EILEH TOLDOT...'

CHAPTERS 1-11

* ADAM (see 5:1)
ten generations to:
* NOACH (6:9)
3 sons:
Shem, Cham, & Yefet
|
* BNEI NOACH (10:1)
|
|
|
70 nations (10:1-32)

CHAPTERS 11-50

* SHEM (see 11:10)
ten generations to:
* TERACH (11:27)
3 sons:
AVRAHAM, Haran, & Nachor
| *YISHMAEL (25:12 -rejected)
* YITZCHAK (26:1)
| * ESAV (36:1) - rejected
*YAAKOV (37:1-2)
|
70 nefesh become God's Nation

Note also how the "bechira" process includes a "dechiya" [rejection] stage together with each stage of "bechira". Finally, note how each section concludes with seventy! [Additional parallels will be noted as we continue.]

'TEN GENERATIONS' - TWICE!

As the chart shows, each 'section' of Sefer Breishit begins with a detailed listing of 'ten generations'
Section One: - 5:1-32 / from Adam to Noach
Section Two - 11:10-26 / from Shem to Terach
[Technically speaking one may be 9 generations, but it's the overall pattern that is very similar. Note also how the mishna in Pirkei Avot 5:2-3 relates to this structure.]

This opening 'structural' parallel supports the thematic parallel between these two sections, which we discussed in our shiur on Parshat Breishit. In that shiur, we explained how the second section of Sefer Breishit begins with 'toldot Shem', and hence the story of Avraham's "bechira". As God chose his offspring in order of lead mankind in the direction of God - it becomes significant that this section began with 'Shem', whose name reflects man's purpose - i.e. to call out 'be-'shem Hashem'.

Strikingly, this structural parallel extends beyond the similarity of these two 'ten-generation' units. Note from the above chart how both the middle and concluding sections of each list are also parallel. Most obvious is how we find the number 70 at the conclusion of each unit. But more intriguing is the parallel that emerges in the middle!

Note how:

*Toldot Adam concludes with Noach,
after which we find toldot Noach,
& the story of his 3 sons Shem, Cham, & Yefet.
(See 5:28-32; 6:9)

* Toldot Shem concludes with Terach,
after which we find toldot Terach,
& the story of his 3 sons Avram, Nachor, & Haran.
(See 11:24-26; 11:27)

Furthermore, the three sons of Noach, like the three sons of Terach receive either a special blessing or curse:

* Avraham, like Shem, is blessed with the privilege of representing God.

* Haran's son Lot, like Cham's son Canaan, is involved in a sin relating to incest.

* Nachor's offspring Rivka, Rachel & Leah return to 'dwell within the tent' of the children of Avraham, just as Yefet is destined to dwell within the 'tent of Shem'. [See 9:24-27 / 'yaft Elokim le-Yefet ve-yishkon be-ohalei Shem'.]

Even though the meaning of these parallels requires further elaboration, for our purposes here - the parallel itself calls our attention to the significance of 'toldot Terach'.

TOLDOT TERACH vs. TOLDOT AVRAHAM

In fact, the phrase 'toldot Terach' appears right where we may have expected to find a unit beginning with 'toldot Avraham!' To our surprise, even though we later find units that begin with 'toldot Yitzchak' and 'toldot Yaakov' [and even 'toldot Yishmael' & 'toldot Esav'], we never find a unit that begins with 'toldot Avraham!'

Instead, at the precise spot where we would expect to find a unit beginning with 'toldot Avraham', we find a unit that begins with 'toldot Terach'. This alone already hints to the fact that there must be something special about Terach.

This observation also explains why Sefer Breishit dedicates so much detail to the story of Lot. Since the phrase "toldot Terach" forms the header for parshiot Lech Lecha, Vayera and Chayei Sara, this unit must include not only the story of Avraham, but the story of the children of Nachor and Haran (Lot), as well.

Thus, in addition to the life story of Avraham himself, these 'parshiot' also discuss:

- Lot's decision to leave Avraham Avinu, preferring the 'good life' in Sdom (13:1-18)
- Avraham's rescue of Lot from the four kings (14:1-24)
- God's sparing of Lot from destruction of Sdom (19:1-24)
- The birth of Lot's two sons - Ammon & Moav (19:30-38)
- The 12 children of Nachor (22:20-24) [8 sons from his wife and 4 from his pilegish. (Sounds familiar?)]
- Avraham's marrying off his son to Nachor's granddaughter

Hence, Parshat Chayei Sarah forms a most appropriate conclusion for this unit that began with 'toldot Terach'. Avraham makes a point of selecting a daughter-in-law specifically from the family of his brother, Nachor, thus bringing the history of 'toldot Terach' full circle. As we will show in our shiur, all of Terach's offspring may have potential for bechira. Therefore, if Yitzchak is to be married, his wife should be chosen from the family in which this potential lies.

[This may also explain why Nachor and Avraham themselves married 'within the family' - the daughters of Haran (see 11:29 and Rashi's identification of Yiska as Sara).]

WHY TERACH?

What was so special about Terach that he 'deserves' his own toldot? It is really hard to know since the Torah tells us so little about him.

On the one hand, Sefer Yehoshua introduces Nachor as almost a paradigm for the life of an idolater (see Yehoshua 24:2). Yet, as the end of Parshat Noach teaches us, Terach was the first person to recognize the spiritual importance of Eretz Canaan. He set out to 'make aliya' even **before** God had commanded Avraham to do so (see 11:31 & Seforno's explanation).

Even though this may sound a bit too 'zionistic', considering that this is the **only** detail we find in the Torah concerning Terach - one could suggest that Terach's merit lay simply in his having been the first person to move his family towards Eretz Canaan.

[In the 'spirit' of 'ma'aseh avot siman la-banim' - Terach could actually be considered the first 'Zionist' (in a modern day sense). Like any good Zionist, Terach plans to 'make aliya' and even encourages his family to do so, but he himself never makes it there.]

We may suggest, however, a more thematically significant approach. Terach and his offspring may represent a certain aspect of the bechira process - wherein there lies a potential to be chosen - but only if worthy. Terach's initiative in this regard may have granted the possibility of becoming part of 'chosen family' to any of his offspring who prove themselves deserving of this distinction.

Avraham Avinu not only follows his father's lead and continues to Eretz Canaan, but also becomes a faithful follower of God's will. He then becomes the progenitor of God's special

nation. Nachor, however, stays behind. Lot (Haran's son) had the opportunity to remain with Avraham, but detaches himself by choosing the 'good life' in Kikar Ha-yarden (see shiur on Parshat Lech Lecha). However, Nachor's granddaughter, Rivka, and great-granddaughters, Rachel & Leah, prove themselves worthy of joining the distinctive nation, and work their way back into the family of Avraham.

In fact, this may explain the reason for the Torah's minute detail of Rivka's hospitality - in the story of how she was chosen to become the wife for Yitzchak.

Even though the bechira process at times may appear random and indiscriminate, the framework of 'toldot Terach' may reflect the importance of personal commitment in earning that bechira. These observations can serve as a 'reminder' that our nation was not chosen simply for the purpose that we are to receive divine privilege, but rather towards the purpose that we understand and internalize the eternal responsibility of our destiny.

shabbat shalom
menachem

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FOR FURTHER IYUN

1. See Ramban on 15:18 where he beautifully reviews each of God's promises to Avraham Avinu in Parshat Lech Lecha, and the nature of their progression, and most important - how each additional promise reflected some type of reward to Avraham for his idealistic behavior. Relate the underlying concept behind this Ramban to the main points of the above shiur. See also Seforno on 26:5 in relation to God's promise to Yitzchak, and the need of the Avot to 'prove' that they were worthy of their bechira.

2. 'Ten' generations - in our shiur, we noted that there were ten generations from Adam to Noach, and ten as well from Shem to Terach. To be more precise, there are really ten from Noach to Avraham (as Pirkei Avot mentions) and only eight from Shem to Terach, but we used the 'phrase' ten generations to reflect the common pattern of continuous list of a succession of toldot from one generation to the next beginning with one statement of 'eileh toldot' and ending with a final statement of 'eileh toldot'. The parallel remains the same; for the sake of uniformity, we simply refer to this pattern as 'ten' generations.

3. TOLDOT AVRAHAM

We saw earlier that every chosen individual in Sefer Breishit receives his own 'eileh toldot' **except** Avraham! If indeed the header toldot reflects this bechira process, then certainly Avraham himself deserves one. Yet, for some reason, the Torah includes the story of Avraham's bechira within the category of toldot Terach. This enigma may suggest something unique about either Avraham's own bechira or his ability to have children (or both). In other words, Avraham's lack of toldot [remember: literally, offspring] may relate to his infertility. He and Sarah have a child only after a long and exasperating process.

Avraham and Sarah's names must be changed and a miracle must be performed simply for the child to be born. Even then, the process has yet to be completed - the child must return to Hashem at the Akeida. Thus, the lack of any mention of 'toldot Avraham' could reflect the difficult travails Avraham must endure in order to father and raise his child. [This may also explain why 'Avraham **holid** et Yitzchak' is added to 'eileh toldot Yitzchak'.]

Nonetheless, the question still remains stronger than the answer.