



Tiferet
ת פ א ר ת



TIFERET UPDATES

This Week in Tiferet

Tiferet spent this past Shabbat in the holy city of **Tzfat**. We were privileged to take a tour of the city, including the artists' colony, to participate in a "spiritual pottery workshop" and to hear from some of the fascinating personalities living in Tzfat, including **Mrs. Tova Mordechai**, author of *Playing with Fire*. After a Shabbat filled with inspirational davening and ruach, we were treated to a melave malka with **Simply Tzfat**, in the forest outside of the city. It was truly a Shabbat to remember!

תורת תפארת

The Burning Mansion
Mrs. Peshafischer (peshafischer@gmail.com)
Parashat Lech Lecha



"ויאמר ה' אל אברם לך לך מארצך וגו'
ר' יצחק פתח:
(תהלים מה) שמעי בת וראי והטי אזנך ושכחי עמך ובית אביך
אמר רבי יצחק:
משל לאחד, שהיה עובר ממקום למקום וראה בירה אחת דולקת.
אמר: תאמר שהבירה זו בלא מנהיג?
הציץ עליו בעל הבירה. אמר לו: אני הוא בעל הבירה.
כך, לפי שהיה אבינו אברהם אומר: תאמר שהעולם הזה בלא מנהיג?
הציץ עליו הקב"ה ואמר לו: אני הוא בעל העולם".

(שם) ויתאו המלך יפוך כי הוא אדוניך.
ויתאו המלך יפוך, ליפותיך בעולם.
והשתחוו לו, הוי, ויאמר ה' אל אברם:

"God spoke to Avraham: Go you from your land"

R. Yitzchak began: "Listen, O daughter, and look, and incline your ear; and forget your nation and your father's house" (Tehillim 45:11)

R. Yitzchak said: This may be compared to one who was traveling from place to place, and he saw a burning mansion. He said: Is it possible that this mansion is without someone responsible? The owner of the mansion looked out at him and said: I am the owner of the mansion.

So, too, our father Avraham said: Is it possible that the world is without someone responsible? God looked out at him and said: I am the master of the world. (Midrash Rabba 39,1)

So the king shall desire your beauty, for he is your lord... (Ibid 12)
So the king shall desire your beauty – to beautify you in the world.
...and bow to him – that is, "and God spoke to Avraham".

As is typical of Midrashic collections, the Sages read seemingly metaphoric or allegorical descriptions found in the Ketuvim as pertaining directly to earlier narrative elements of the TaNaKh. In this example, the Psalm in question praises a king (ostensibly an earthly one – "therefore God has anointed you – 45:8). It includes a recommendation for a young woman who wins the king's favor to abandon her home and follow the king (45:11-13).

The appearance of those verses about abandoning one's nation and father's home, however, invokes God's commandment to Avraham – "go forth from your land, your birthplace, and your father's house". By reading these two verses in connection with each other (i.e., intertextually), it opens up numerous exegetical possibilities for both original contexts. The Psalm is now read in connection with Avraham (indeed, a few paragraphs later, another reading identifies Avraham with the king in the Psalm), and a wholly new dimension is injected into the Lech Lecha narrative

תורת תפארת (המשך)

Firstly, in light of the verses from Tehillim, our narrative takes on a romantic dimension. God's commandment to Avraham is read as the summons that a king issues to his potential bride, and thus, for the maiden, everything else in the whole world is eclipsed.

It also adds a narrative dimension, as the Midrash reads the beginning of Tehillim 45:11 as part of Avraham's "back story". This closes a glaring narrative gap, as the Torah tells us nothing about why Avraham was chosen. The first part of the verse reads: "Listen, O daughter, and look, and incline your ear..." The Midrash understands this as meaning that in order for the daughter (Avraham) to be able to abandon her home in favor of the king's palace, she must be alert to the possibility of the summons – listening, looking, and inclining her ear. In Bereishit, no mention is made of the back story (the listening and looking), and in Tehillim, no direct mention is made of the actually summons. The Midrash fuses these two elements together by means of a mashal – a narrative rubric within which we can assimilate the exegesis offered by R. Yitzchak. The mashal tells a two-part story: the wanderer who looks around and asks questions (corresponding to the "listening and looking" verse) and the subsequent call from the owner of the mansion ("and God said to Avraham .")...

Regarding the content of the mashal itself, this opens a window into how Chazal understood Avraham's prehistory. One could argue (similar to Rambam Hil. AZ 1:3) that the mashal represents some type of argument from design: just as the mansion must have been constructed, so, too, the world must have been planned and built. This reading would understand "bira doleket" as a "well-lit mansion". Rav Bick understands that it is a moral question: where is the owner of this mansion that he lets it burn? Where is the Master of the World who lets evil triumph?

I would suggest that the Midrash sees Avraham as confused and conflicted: a mansion is aflame. On one hand, the mansion did not build itself. Its very existence indicates a designer and builder. On the other hand, the master of the house seems willing to neglect it and allow it to be destroyed. The dissonance created by this juxtaposition, by Avraham's outrage at God's willingness to let His well-designed world go to pot, also opens the door for Avraham to be addressed by God.

The final segment of the midrash continues the exegesis of the verses in Tehillim as signifying the Avraham narrative. It addresses a problematic idea – the indication that God "desired" Avraham's "beauty" – and rereads it as God's desire to make Avraham's beauty visible in the world. The last line simply re-correlates the verses in Tehillim with those of Bereishit, as is common in midrashim.

MAZAL TOV!

Mazal Tov to Sheera Graber (5766)
on her engagement to Hudi
Moskowitz! May they be zochim to
build a bayit ne'eman b'Yisrael
together!

"Who's The Boss"

Rachel Haft (Tiferet 5773)

In this week's parsha, the Torah explains that because Avraham trusted in Hashem, his offspring would be as many as the stars in the sky. It says, "והאמין בה' ויחשבה לו צדקה" "And he trusted in G-d and he reckoned it to him as righteousness". (טו ו)

Rashi explains this פסוק by saying that Hashem blessed Avraham with righteousness and merit because of the faith and trust he had in Hashem.

However, the Ramban disagrees with this answer. He asks why would it be such a big deal that Avraham trusted in Hashem? He is a prophet - so why would he not believe in Hashem? And furthermore, Avraham is the one who sacrificed his beloved son on the basis of his belief in Hashem so what is unique about the belief Avraham has in this particular situation?

The Ramban explains that Avraham believed that it was only because of Hashem's righteousness that He was giving him this promise. Avraham didn't believe that it was because of his own righteousness and good deeds that he would be deserving of his offspring being so numerous. He knew that it was only because of Hashem's kindness that he would have a son, Yitzchak, and many offspring to continue.

I think this is a huge lesson for all of us. Sometimes we can think about the good deeds we do and question G-d: why don't we have this or why do we have that? Aren't we deserving of anything? We know we're not perfect but we do some great deeds! However, what we don't realize is that we don't deserve anything. Everything we have in our life is because Hashem is giving it to us from HIS kindness! We feel a sense of entitlement for the things we have, but really we shouldn't have any of it.

And once we realize that everything we have in our life is because Hashem gives it to us from His chesed and mercy, then we can start to really appreciate all that we have.