

Walk through the Parsha

with **Rabbi David Walk**



LET'S MAKE A DEAL

The iconic TV show Let's Make a Deal, started in 1963, has been aired in numerous countries, and is still running strong. The founder and host was Monty Hall (ne Halparin), who until he died at the age of 96 four years ago, had channeled over a billion dollars into various charities, many of them Jewish. One of his favorite charities was Youth Aliyah. That's cool for so many reasons, but this week the Municipality of Jerusalem, along with other organizations, is honoring Aliya and Olim. Yayyy!! But it's the name of his show, LMAD, which fascinates me this week, because our Torah reading records one of the greatest deals in history.

Chapter 15 of B'reishit contains a remarkable exchange between God and Avraham Avinu. After the truly first World War (4 Kings vs 5 Kings) won by Avraham and his team, he has some insecurities, perhaps because he now has blood on his hands. After Divine promises to always shield him (MAGEN AVRAHAM), God initiates 'negotiations' to further reassure

him. The 'deal' is called BRIT BEIN HaB'TARIM (Covenant Between the Parts). It is, of course, a peek into Jewish destiny. God reveals how difficult the Jewish experience will be: Know well that your offspring shall be strangers in a land not theirs, and they shall be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years (B'reishit 15). Oh, if only Egypt was a unique experience.

I'm more interested in the actual 'offer' God presents to Avraham: On that day the Lord made a covenant (BRIT, covenant or 'deal') with Avram, saying, 'To your offspring I assign this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates' (verse 18). This 'offer' had been made before: I will assign this land to your offspring (12:7), and, For I gave all the land that you see to your children forever (13:15). So, what's so special about this scenario? Why should all this reassure Avraham?

I believe that there are two significant differences in this interaction with God when compared to the two previous exchanges which are game changers. The first is the word L'RISHTA (verse 7), 'to inherit it'. Previously, the Land of Canaan had been called a 'gift'. Gifts are cool and beloved to us all, but an inheritance or legacy is so much more.

Inheritance implies both connection and continuity. The bequest of Eretz Yisrael will be permanent and every heir of Avraham Avinu will discern the relationship and attachment. Israel is in our genes.

The Me'irit Einayim, based on the Shulchan Aruch, adds that the laws of inheritance only apply to genetic ancestors. It is, therefore, noteworthy that this inheritance comes from God, not Avraham's biological father, Terach. A significant aspect of this part of the 'deal' is the declaration that God is our Father. BTW, that may be why Avraham asks, 'How do I know that I will inherit it?', because normally inheritance comes from a parent and never begins as a gift.

The other difference is the introduction of the term BRIT, covenant or permanent arrangement. The Ramban emphasizes that BRIT is significant, because it is totally unconditional and will not be abrogated during those times when the bulk of the Jewish nation is elsewhere. The Vilna Gaon explains that people make a BRIT when they want to assure that a loved one (OHEV K'NAFSHO) will remain connected, even when the two parties can't be physically together. Often a precious physical object will

be given so that the two parties will feel the connection whenever they look upon the item. That's the essence of BRIT: permanent connection in spite of any disruption.

I have, obviously, skipped over the ceremony which accompanied the BRIT, and jumped to the bottom line: eternal ownership of Eretz Yisrael. This is clearly wrong, because the Torah adds no unnecessary details. So, what does the introductory material teach us about our possession of Israel? A very tragic detail: Inheritance, settlement and development of the Land will only occur after bitter exile. Another detail of the ceremony is clearly the splitting (KARET, also the term for consummating a BRIT) of the animals. According to many Midrashim, these beasts represent other, future exiles and persecutions. Clearly, exile and return is a major part of the tale.

All of Jewish history and destiny is about exile (GALUT) and return (ALIYA). Every Jew since, and including, Avraham Avinu has been either an actual OLEH or potential OLEH. Remarkably, many have experienced both. There were exiles from the Babylonian destruction of Yerushalayim who returned to witness SHIVAT TZIYON, the return under Ezra and Nechemia. Ya'akov

Avinu had GALUT, ALIYA, and another GALUT, and that in an age when most people never left their home town.

So, it was wonderful and appropriate that the government of Yerushalayim, IR HaKODESH, should celebrate those of us who have made ALIYA. However, no one should delude themselves, we're all OLIM, regardless of birthplace. The term OLEH, based on our verse in this week's parsha, is synonymous with the word Jew.

May this exciting Age of Aliya, which is witnessing the first time in 2700 years when the majority of Jews live in Eretz Yisrael, be the one which ushers in the final act of this eternal BRIT! And that's the best deal ever made. 