

Torah Time Primer

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Pidyon shevuyin, or "rescuing the captives," is one of the most important commandments of Judaism: Avram was ready to sacrifice his life in order to save Lot because he believed that saving a life by freeing a victim of oppression was one of the highest forms of serving God.

- Babylonian Talmud Genesis Rabbah 43:2

לך לך
(lekh lekha)



This week's parashah:
(Lekh Lekha) Genesis 12:1-17:27

Avram has left the land of his father, Ur of the Chaldeans, and is residing in Haran with his wife Sarai and his nephew Lot. Avram's brother Haran has passed away so Haran's son Lot is now with Avram and Sarai. While in Haran, God speaks to Avram and instructs him to move to Canaan. God promises Avram that he will be a great nation with a great name; God promises Avram that his name will be a blessing and all families of the earth will bless themselves by Avram's name. Along the way to Canaan, God speaks to Avram again and promises to give the land to Avram's descendants. Avram builds an altar to God at the place where God spoke to him, between Bethel and Ai.

There was a famine on the land so Avram and Sarai decide to go to Egypt for food. However, Avram asks Sarai to pretend to be his sister so that the Egyptians will be kind to Avram. The Pharaoh invites Sarai to his palace, and gives Avram oxen and sheep. God sends plagues to Pharaoh, and Pharaoh discovers that Sarai is Avram's wife, not his sister. Pharaoh sends Sarai back to be with Avram and they leave Egypt with cattle, silver and gold.

Avram's nephew Lot also has cattle, and Avram and Lot have too many animals to live together on the land. So they part and wish each other well, Lot going east toward the plain of Jordan, and Avram staying in the land of Canaan. (continued on page 2)

(Lekh Lekha, continued from first page)

God speaks to Avram again and promises all the land that Avram can see will be for Avram's children. God instructs Avram to walk the breadth and width of the land and Avram settles in Hebron, where he builds an altar to God.

During a fight between several kings, Lot is captured. When Avram hears of his nephew's capture, he goes to rescue Lot and the women and children who were also captured. Avram returns the women and children to their King and does not take any of their wealth.

God speaks to Avram again, telling Abram that his name is being changed to Avraham, and that his wife Sarai's name is being changed to Sarah. God blesses Avraham and Sarah, instructing them to follow God's rules and in return, God makes a covenant and promises to give Avraham and Sarah a son.

Our Objectives:

There are a number of complex themes and topics in Parashat Lekh Lekha. In Torah Time we will focus on Avraham and Sarah's move to Canaan. Two themes that we can extract from this parashah are the significance of names and commitment to family. Avram is an exceptional uncle to Lot, and Sarai is an exceptional wife to Avram. Also, we can discuss the importance of protecting our good name and wearing it like a crown.

Some Hebrew words your children may be exposed to:

English Word	Transliteration	Hebrew
Pharoah	<i>Pharoah</i>	פַּרְעֹה
Covenant	<i>brit</i>	בְּרִית
Egypt	<i>Mitzrayim</i>	מִצְרַיִם
Land	<i>Eretz</i>	אֶרֶץ
Truth	<i>emet</i>	אֱמֶת
Name	<i>shem</i>	שֵׁם
Uncle	<i>dod</i>	דּוֹד

Activities related to Torah Time may include:

* Finding out more about the names of the children in our classrooms

* Learning if any of our children also have names in Hebrew or other languages

These activities will be a natural follow-on to the language portion of the Tower of Babel activities.

Enhancing the Dinner Conversation.....

Trigger Questions can be used to initiate reflective conversation with your child, to help reinforce learning and to help you, the parent, clarify ideas for your child.

1. Who was in today's Torah Time story?
2. Why did Avram and Sarai move?
3. Did God promise something to Avram?
4. How did God change Avram and Sarai's names?

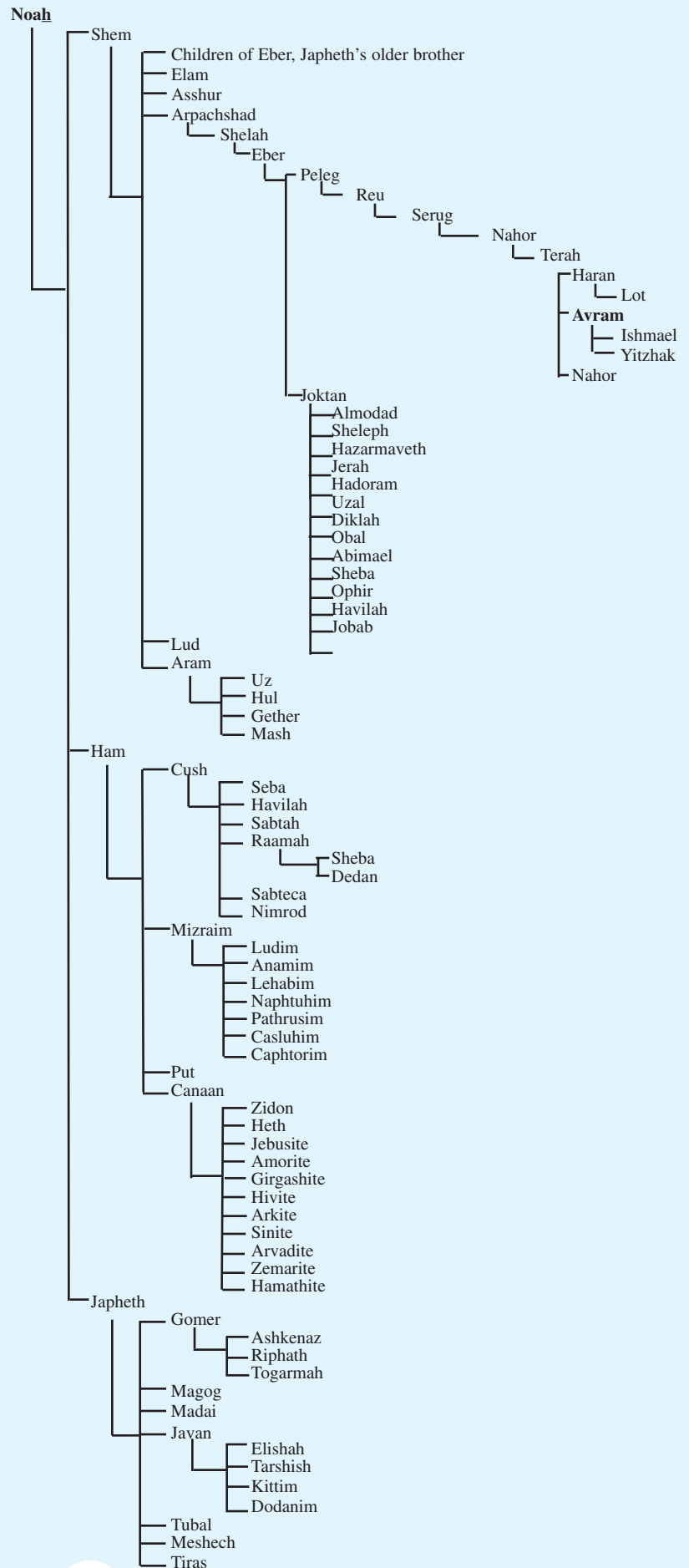
How to Address Questions Your Kids Might Have:

1. Have you ever moved? Were you sad to leave where you lived? Was it hard to live in a new place? What did you bring with you?

Your child may be curious about moving, and will look for reassurance that if you need to move in the future, the family will move together and find ways to stay in touch with friends by phone calls, letters, email, and visits.

2. How did I get my name?

This is a good opportunity to discuss any family members a child may be named after, or the meaning of the name in English or another language.



Questions that You May Have:

1. Should I mention the covenant of circumcision (brit milah)?

It is not developmentally appropriate to discuss circumcision with preschoolers. Therefore we have omitted the details regarding circumcision. However we can still talk about an agreement or covenant that God makes with Avram.

2. Why are there so many instances where Avram builds an altar to God?

In ancient near eastern civilizations, it was customary to make a sacrifice to the pagan gods on altars. The use of altars is a vestige of pagan sacrifice ritual. More importantly the act of sacrifice on altars was an expression of gratitude and also a gesture of intent to fulfill an agreement.

It is important to understand that in ancient near eastern civilizations, when two kingdoms were making a treaty, they would seal the treaty with a covenant. A covenant was marked by the action of cutting of some sort, usually cutting animals (and presumably roasting them for a joint feast.) This is the historical context of the covenant between Avraham and God.

Resources for Parents:

The Jewish Publication Society has posted the Tanakh on-line at www.sacred-texts.com/bib/jps. For the full text of the Creation Story, please visit the website.

Visit <http://www.g-dcast.com/> for the animated retelling of this parashah!!

Berlin, Adele and Marc Zvi Brettler (Ed.) The Jewish Study Bible. New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2004.

Fields, Harvey and Giora Carmi (Illust.) A Torah Commentary for Our Times. New York: URJ Press, 1998.

Kugel, James L. How to Read the Bible. New York: Free Press, 2007

The Rabbinical Assembly of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism. Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary. New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 1999.

Children's Books about Lekh lekha:

Greengard, Alison and Carol Racklin-Siegel (Illus.) Lech Lecha: The Journey of Abraham and Sarah. California: EKS Publishing Co., 2004.

Grode, Phyllis A. Sophie's Name. Minnesota: Lerner Publishing Group, 1990.

Henkes, Kevin. Chrysanthemum. New York: Mulberry Books, 1996.

Williams, Suzanne. Mommy Doesn't Know My Name. Australia: Sandpiper Publications, 1996.