

## Torah Talk – מאמרי תורה



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Parashat Lech Lecha  
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פרשת לך לך  
ח' בחשוון תשע"ח

Torah Reading: *Bereshit* (Genesis) 12:1-17:27

In this *parasha*, Avram and Sarai follow Hashem's call to journey to Cana'an, where the covenant between Hashem and Avraham is affirmed. Avram, renamed Avraham, has a son with Hagar, Sarai's maid, and Hashem promises that Sarai, renamed Sarah, will bear a son as well.

One adventure described in this *parasha* is Avram's involvement in the war of the four kings versus the five kings. He becomes entangled in this conflict to save his nephew Lot, who has been taken captive. In the course of this adventure, Avram meets Malkitzedek, the king of Shalem (14:18-20):

יח ומלְכִי-צָדֵק מֶלֶךְ שָׁלֵם, הוֹצִיא לֶחֶם וְיַיִן; וְהוּא כֹהֵן, לְאֵל עֵלְיוֹן. יט  
וַיְבָרְכֵהוּ, וַיֹּאמֶר: בָּרוּךְ אַבְרָם לְאֵל עֵלְיוֹן, קִנְהַ שָׁמַיִם וְאָרֶץ. כ וַיְבָרֶךְ אֵל  
עֵלְיוֹן, אֱשֶׁר-מָגֹן צָרֶיךָ בְּיָדֶךָ; וַיִּתֶּן-לוֹ מֵעֵשֶׂר, מִכָּל.

**18** And Malkitzedek king of Shalem brought forth bread and wine; and he was priest to *El Elyon* (God the Most High). **19** And he blessed him, and said: 'Blessed be Avram to *El Elyon*, Maker of heaven and earth; **20** and blessed be *El Elyon*, who has delivered your enemies into your hand.' And he gave him a tenth of all.

Who was this Malkitzedek and did he believe in Hashem? If so, how did his theology differ from the ideas that Avram promoted? If their beliefs were the same, then what theological revelation did Avram actually make?

According to some medieval commentators, Malkitzedek was Shem, the son of Noah, and a direct antecedent to Avram. But that is *drash* (creative explanation). The *pshat* (the author or Author's original intent and plain meaning of the text)

becomes clear when we look two verses further on, and when we draw on ancient Canaanite texts:

In 14:22, Avram says the following to the king of S'dom:

כב ויאמר אברם, אל-מלך סדם : הרמתני ידי אל-ה' א-ל עליון, קנה שמים  
וארץ.

**22** And Avram said to the king of Sodom: 'I have lifted up my hand to Hashem, *E-I Elyon* (God Most High), Maker of heaven and earth...'

It sounds like Avram is parroting what Malkitzedek said. But, looking closer, we see that he is not. Avram has added the ineffable Name of Hashem before using the appellation "*E-I Elyon* (God Most High), Maker of heaven and earth."

We know today from various archaeological discoveries around Israel that the head god of the Canaanite pantheon was known as "*El*." This is probably who Malkitzedek has in mind when he blesses Avram in the name of *El*. Avram, when speaking to the king of S'dom, conveys his belief that Hashem is the one true Maker of the earth, and encompasses any and all deities that one might wrongly worship, including *El Elyon*. Malkitzedek uses *El Elyon* as a noun; Avram uses it as a modifier to describe the one true Hashem. Avram spoke in the manner to which the people were accustomed, while simultaneously subtly transitioning the nomenclature to refer to Hashem.

Perhaps this is one reason why Avram experienced so much success in getting out the message about one Hashem – he knew how to speak the language of the people, while at the same time promoting the belief in the one true God.

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- How many different names can you think of for Hashem?
- Are they really Hashem's names or are they descriptions of Hashem?
- Is "God" one of Hashem's names? If not, why do we call Hashem "God"?