

כִּי אֲנָשִׁים אַחִים אֲנָחֵנוּ (בראשית י"ג ח')

Because we are **brothers!** (Bereishit 13:8)

What is the relationship between Avram and Lot, and why does Avram risk his life to save Lot from danger?

Let's open Sefer Bereishit to find an answer to this question.

We first meet Avram, Sarai and Lot at the end of Parshat Noach when Avram's father, Terach, takes the three of them on a trek from Ur Kasdim and settles in Haran while on the way to Canaan (11:31).

Some years later, Lot is caught up in a world war – four kings against five – and is taken captive. Avram hurries to save him. How did they reach this state, and what can we learn from it? (14:1-16)

This suggested lesson outline may help your students understand the geography and moral commitments underlying this story.

[You can hear Rav Shuky Reiss explaining the ideas found here in this 3-minute shiur (in Hebrew) -<https://tinyurl.com/Avramand-Lot>].

~~~~~

The background to Avram and Lot's travels together – and then their separation – takes place in stages.

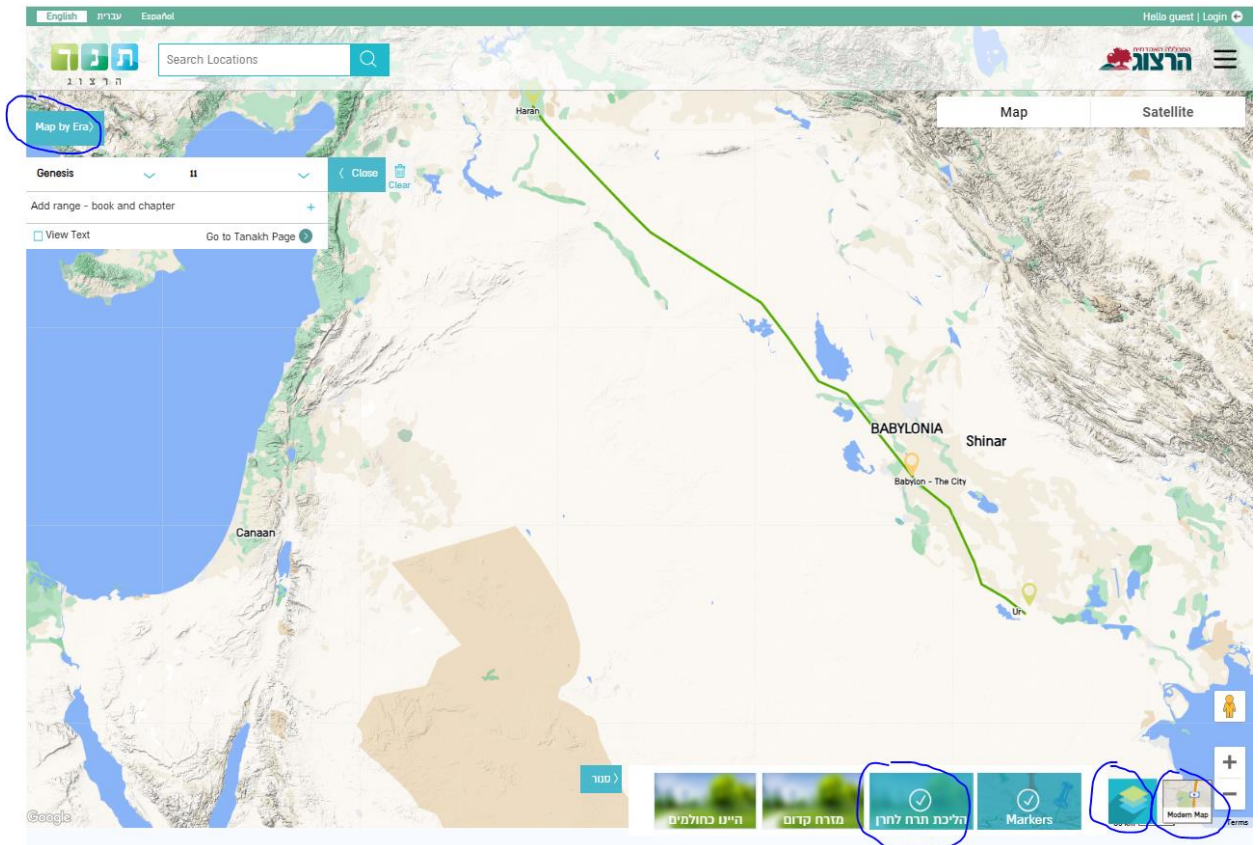
1. Terach takes his son Avram and Avram's wife Sarai, together with his grandson Lot, to Haran (Bereishit 11: 26-32)
2. Avram takes his wife, Sarai, and his nephew, Lot to the Land of Canaan, stopping in Shechem, Elon Moreh, and in the mountains between Bet El and Ai (12:1-9)
3. A famine forces Avram, Sarai and Lot to Egypt (12:10-20)
4. Avram returns to Israel, traveling through the Negev back to Bet El / Ai (13:1-4)

5. Disagreement between their shepherds leads to a separation, with Lot choosing the fertile Jordan valley, settling in Sodom and Avram settling in Hebron (13:5-18)
6. A world war breaks out, and Lot is taken captive (14:1-12)
7. Avram hears of Lot's situation and comes to save him (14:13-16)

~~~~~

Students can follow their travels using the map feature at <https://www.hatanakh.com/en/map>

1. Choose the "Map by Chapter" option on the top left and insert "Genesis Chapter 11" and then choose the "layers" icon that appears on the bottom right-hand of the map. Clicking on the הליכת טרח לחרן box presents a map showing the path most likely taken by Terach and his family. [Note that clicking on the "Modern Map" box next to the "layers" icon will allow students to see that Ur Kasdim is in modern-day Iraq and that Haran is in modern day Turkey.]



2-3. Using this same methodology, students can insert “Genesis Chapter 12” in the search box and find three new “layers.” They are:

- הליכת אברהם לארץ כנען
- ירידה מהארץ
- מסעות אברהם בארץ

Each of these adds to the route taken by Avram and his family [Note that boxes can be “unclicked” to see individual routes, and that the “Modern Map” icon adds a contemporary perspective].



4-5. Inserting “Genesis Chapter 13” allows us to understand the distance between Avram (in Mamre) and Lot (on the Plains of the Jordan / Sodom).

6-7. Inserting “Genesis Chapter 14 offers a new “layer” מלחמת ארבעת המלכים (War of the Four Kings), which helps us understand how this war was fought by kings from modern-day Iraq and Iran.

~~~~~

Now that we understand the geography, we can return to our original questions. Throughout their travels Avram and Lot go through trials and tribulations together. The distances are huge, they found themselves threatened by famine and Sarai was taken hostage in Egypt. Yet throughout, their commitment to each other persevered. It was only when they were successful and wealthy that disagreements arose.

Even then, rather than fight, Avram reminds Lot that “we are brothers,” and suggests that they go their separate ways. Lot chooses to settle in Sodom, whose reputation precedes it (see 13:13). It would appear that their relationship had ended.

Yet Avram, with 318 of his men, goes on a rescue mission. But why?

What brings Avram to risk his life and the lives of hundreds of his men to go to war with little chance of success, to give his life for someone who has already chosen to separate from him?

Let's focus on two verses - 14:13-14:

וַיְבֹא הַפְּלִיט וַיַּגֵּד לְאַבְרָם הָעֵבֶרִי וְהוּא שָׁכַן בְּאֵלֶיךָ מִמְּרָא הָאֱמֹרִי אָחִי אֲשֶׁלְּךָ וְאַחִי עֵנֶר וְהֵם בְּעַלֵי בְרִית־  
אַבְרָם:

*A fugitive brought the news to Abram the Hebrew, who was dwelling at the terebinths of Mamre the Amorite, kinsman of Eshkol and Aner, these being Abram's allies.*

וַיִּשְׁמַע אַבְרָם כִּי נִשְׁבָּה אָחִיו וַיִּרְקַח אֶת־חַנִּיכָיו יְלִידֵי בֵיתוֹ שְׁמֹנֶה עָשָׂר וּשְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת וַיִּרְדֹּף עַד־דָּן:

*When Abram heard that his kinsman's [household] had been taken captive, he mustered his retainers, born into his household, numbering three hundred and eighteen, and went in pursuit as far as Dan.*

A fugitive from the fighting come and tells Avram...something. It is not clear what he said to him. No doubt he described the battle, how the foreign kings had vanquished the local leaders who fell into the pits or ran for the mountains. But this is just information.

What Avram's heart heard - what his soul heard - was that his **brother** was taken captive - וַיִּשְׁמַע אַבְרָם כִּי נִשְׁבָּה אָחִיו.

He felt complete solidarity towards someone who, despite having separated from him, he feels is his brother.

What Abram heard, and the way he acted, is something he bequeathed to future generations to this very day.

Concept: Rabbi Dr. Shuky Reiss, Herzog College

Adapted by: Rabbi Dr. Shalom Berger, Herzog Global