Lech-Lecha: Covenant

Concrete Concept:

1. God loves Avraham, and therefore Avraham's descendants
2. God chooses to express that love in a limiting covenant
3. (God 'loving' is a metaphor.)

Bnei Akiva Svivot 5782: Madrichim Pack

Dear Madrichim,

Welcome to your first letter to a choveret! Three consecutive weeks of firsts actually – Bereishit was the first choveret, Noach was my first choveret and this week is my first opening letter. At this rate, next week we'll have the videos back up and running too!

This week is 'lecho lecho el Ninveh' (click here at your peril…) and we're talking about God, Avraham and Covenant. This is quite a complex idea, and at times a little abstract for younger chanichim. Try and convey that God loved Avraham, and therefore loves us too. That's why God will never destroy the Jewish people, because he promised to be in a relationship with us. For older chanichim, you can open up the topic of Negative Theology, or the fact that nothing we say about God can actually convey any meaningful information about God, because all our ideas and terms are limited to human experience.

Remember also to have fun! I get a bit carried away with exciting philosophical topics sometimes but don't bore your chans with them if they're not interested. I won't mind.

Remember we're here to support you in whatever way we can! Rafi can be contacted at svivot@bauk.org or 0208 209 1319 ext. 4, and I'm available at chinuch@bauk.org or 0208 209 1319 ext. 5.

B'Virkat Chaveirim L'Torah Va'Avodah,

Ben Rothstein
Chinuch Worker

Week 3: Covenant

Why Avraham?

When we started learning Chumash in Year 1, we started at Lech Lecha, probably because Bereishit and Noach are quite difficult and complex for children to comprehend. But starting Lech Lecha, you feel plunged into the middle of a story – suddenly, out of nowhere, God appears to Abraham! And not only that, but God comes on a bit strong too: 'Follow me to the land that I will show you,' 'Whoever blesses you I will bless, and whoever curses you I will curse' (AKA all of your friends are now my friends), 'I'm going to give you plenty of cash and property,' etc. What's going on?!

Actually, God's behaviour makes perfect sense – we just aren't used to considering God as a Being that could possibly be falling in love with someone, which is what he's doing with Avraham. God loves Avraham, and indeed Avraham is the only individual described that way:

"וְאַתָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל עַבְדִּי יַעֲקֹב אֲשֶׁר בְּחַרְתִּיךָ זֶרַע אַבְרָהָם אֹהֲבִי"

'But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen – the offspring of Avraham my lover' – Isaiah 41:8

As this pasuk also relates to us, since God loves Avraham, God also loves Avraham's children. Not for any of their deeds or their mitzva observance, but simply because we are the descendants of the person whom Hashem loved, and when you truly love someone, you love their children as well.

The Gemara teaches that אע״פ שחטא ישראל הוא, even though a Jew may sin, he or she will always remain a Jew.

VERY IMPORTANT side point:

God does not have emotions. God does not experience anything we do or anything even close to any human experience.

But God needs to interact with us in a way that we'll understand, and so God chooses to act in ways that are consistent, on the whole, with human experience.
For example, the Torah says that God gets angry, or that God rejoices – all of these are metaphors, not literal depictions of God.

Therefore, once we accept that God behaves towards humans in a way that can be interpreted by said humans as a human way of behaving, then not only does God 'love' and 'hate', but he can also fall in love – which is what he does with Avraham.

Discussion Point 1: Where in our lives do we interact with non-literal things in a literal way, so as to make them meaningful? How about in the digital world?

Avraham's Journey:

So this is where Chazal (Rabbis in the Gemara and Mishna) step in with the famous midrashim about the fiery furnace et al. They're as perplexed as we are: what would make God fall in love with someone? The stories of Avraham smashing the idols and debating people about the philosophy of idolatry are intended by Chazal to try and fill in the gaps as to what may have prompted God to fall in love with Avraham. But at the end of the day, it's a spontaneous, intense, ultimately inexplicable emotion. Like Madonna's relationship with bagels.

> I fell in love with some bagels

According to Rambam, Avraham did not discover God immediately at age 3 – rather, it was a process of gradual development that began when he was 3 and kept going until he was 40!

And only when he reaches the age of 70/75 (an interesting discussion that we don't have time for now) does God appear to him! The first command we see Avraham being given is 'Go for yourself' – as Rashi points out, this has to be **for yourself**; not going for God or anyone else. Avraham's life is the life of Chesed, of kindness, of giving of himself to others. Now God commands him that he must do this **for himself** (not for God!) in order to develop his own sense of identity and self, so that he can have a self to be in love with God.

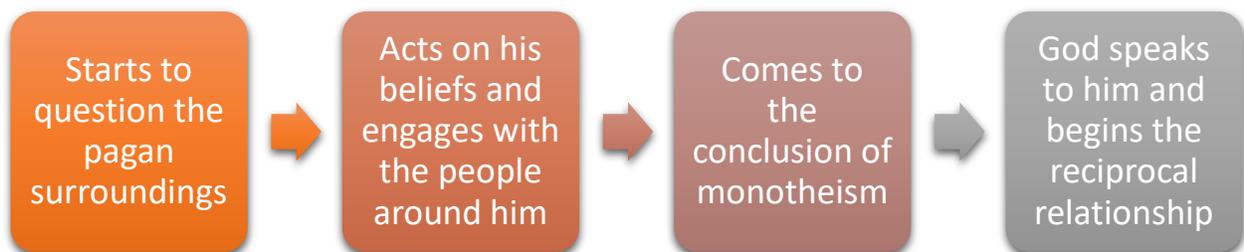In other words, God loves Avraham and therefore wants him to develop into the best Avraham he can.

| Starts to question the pagan surroundings | → | Acts on his beliefs and engages with the people around him | → | Comes to the conclusion of monotheism | → | God speaks to him and begins the reciprocal relationship |

Figure 1: Part 1 of Avraham's Journey of Self-Discovery

Discussion Point 2: This is a long process! The journey only begins when Avraham is 70 years old, having spent 33 years just trying to apprehend God and then another 30 years spreading this message, with no communication from God. What things have replaced God/truth as the 'idol' that people are willing to invest their lives in?

Discussion Point 3: What peulot could you run that would get that point over to chanichim? How could you teach them that worthwhile things take a LONG time?

It's gonna take time, a whole lotta precious time.

Covenant:

So how does the berit (or covenant) fit into this?

There is a statement in the Midrash that before this world, Hashem was בּוֹרֵא עוֹלָמוֹת וּמַחֲרִיבָן, 'he would create worlds and destroy them.' God did whatever he wanted as and when he pleased. In philosophical terms, God is **utterly free**, no external agent can effect any change or force upon God.

Which makes covenant a crazy idea – God decides to lock himself into a set of rules! He promises Avraham certain things in the future, thus limiting God to abide by those promises! It's like the age-old question of 'Can make a rock that's too heavy for Him to lift?' Well the answer, according to this idea of covenant, is that God can choose not to lift the rock. Which is a **monumental** idea, but possibly a bit too philosophical for the little kinderlach.

God's love for Avraham, and thus the Jewish people, means that he chooses to obey a certain set of rules, so that he can have a relationship with us.

Discussion Point 4: Has this perspective on God and His relationship with us changed the way you view your relationship with God?

Peula Ideas

Games to do with Hashem loving us:

- **Smile if you love me baby –** Yes I know it *seems* tenuous, but wait till I tell you the twist! You have chanichim sit in a circle and one chanich/a goes around saying 'Smile if you love me baby', attempting to make the other chanich/a smile. But, instead of the intended lover saying 'I love you baby but I just can't smile,' they have to say 'I love you baby but I just can't enter into covenant with you.' Ta da! Concrete concept right there 😊

- **The song game –** OK this one is not exactly going to get across a heavily concretised concept, but the choveret this week is anyway quite deep, so it balances out. Choose 'love' as the subject of the song game, and in two teams the chanichim have to go back and forth singing songs with the word 'love' in. Remember that in order to win, if the first team are stuck, the second team must give *another* song, otherwise it's a tie. It used to annoy me when the other team won but they were just as stuck as us, we just happened to go first. (Plus no one else knew any of my metal songs so they were discounted 🙁.)

Games to do with Hashem choosing to lock into covenant:

- **7/11 –** Chanichim sit in a circle and go around counting up to 20, except that 7 is 11 and 11 is seven. The next person has to add a rule – it can literally be any rule – and then the counting repeats with these two rules. Go around in succession adding new rules every person. If someone forgets a rule and makes a mistake, they're out.
  This game has a deeper message as well, which is that the rules that God is adhering to make sense to us – but from God's perspective, they are arbitrary, like the rules in 7/11 which may make sense to some but not to others.

Games to do with Negative Theology:

- **Sausage and Mash:** Print off a famous speech, or famous song lyrics and have the chanichim take it in turns to read it out/sing the song. Every time they come to a word that begins with the letter 's' they must substitute the word for 'sausage' and every time they come to a word beginning with the letter 'm' they must substitute the word for 'mash'. If they make a mistake they're out, or they pass the paper on to the next person.
  Use this to explain that we don't have any words that we can actually use to describe God, we just use other words to help us understand.

- **Charades:** Another game in which words aren't used. This can be used to show how we are only vaguely gesturing at what God is, not that we are actually describing God in real terms.

Random Games Corner

Over here each you'll find random games that we've compiled from the days of old. The titles are a bit weird and they're mostly just for fun but you never know when they might connect to an educational message!

DOUBLE CHASE
TYPE: Active Play in a circle The players are seated in a circle, and are divided into groups of two. One group is chosen and they begin to run around the circle. Whenever they want, they can tag another group, who must get up and run around the circle in the opposite direction. The first group to make it back to the two vacated seats wins. The group that doesn't get seats then repeats the game, etc.

DROP THE HANDKERCHIEF (Variation of Duck--Duck--Goose)
TYPE: Active Play in a circle All of the players but one are seated. That player (player A) walks around the outside of the circle holding a handkerchief behind his back. At any time he chooses, he drops the handkerchief behind any player. That player (player B) gets up, picks up the handkerchief, and runs after player A trying to tag him. If he succeeds before player A gets back to player B's seat (by running around the circle), player A must once again go around the circle. But, if player A makes it to player B's seat without being tagged, player B must go around with the handkerchief and the game starts all over again.

DEFINITION DRAMATICS
TYPE: Moderate A list of words is needed The players are divided into groups. Each group is given a list of words that they must incorporate into an original skit. The best skit wins. Hint: Have the lists on separate sheets of paper so that each group can have their own list. Variation: For more fun, insert some nonsensical words into each of the lists (i.e. Raputchnik, left handed, smoke shifter, etc.). Variation: Instead of making a skit, the players may compose a song or tell a story using the words.

DETECTIVE
TYPE: Moderate Play in a circle and one to three objects are needed One player is chosen to leave the room. He is the "thief." The objects are placed in the center of the circle. Another player is chosen to be the "detective." The thief reenters and must remove the objects from the circle without being tagged by the detective. But, the thief does not know who the detective is. The detective may not leave his chair until the thief has touched the objects. If the thief escapes from the circle he wins; if he doesn't escape the detective wins. Variation: For Shtick, the last time don't pick a detective and see how long the thief takes until he removes the objects.

AMNESIA
TYPE: Quiet Two players are selected and sent out of the room. The remaining players then select two famous personalities for the two players to be. The two players reenter the room and each is secretly told who the other player is supposed to be. To discover who they are supposed to be, they must enter into a conversation with each other. Example: If one player wants to find out if he/she lived in Israel, s/he might ask: "How do you like my house, here in Israel?" And the other player may just answer, "You don't have a house in Israel; you never lived there!" The first player to guess who he/she is, wins. Variation: Instead of entering into a conversation, each player takes turns at asking the other questions (you may want to limit the questions to "yes" or "no" questions).

ASSOCIATION
TYPE: Quiet Play in a circle The first player whispers the first thing that comes into his mind to the player seated next to him. The second player then says the first thing that comes into his mind to the player seated next to him. The play continues until everyone has had a turn. Then go around the circle

again. This time each player says out loud exactly what he had said before. Hint: For the most fun, make sure the play moves quickly.

NAMES AND STUNTS
TYPE: Mixer Play in a circle; a variety of different objects are needed Divide into groups of six or seven players; each mini-group sits in a circle and gets one of each of the objects. The first player stands, says his first name, and does a simple stunt with any object. The second player must repeat the first player's name and stunt, and then adds his own name and stunt. This continues around the circle. The second time around each player says his first and last name, and does his old stunt plus a new stunt.

NASI--NASI #3
TYPE: Mixer Play in a circle A two count beat is started by the players: 1) Slap hands on lap 2) Clap hands On the clapping beat, the first player says his name. Then on the next clapping beat the second player repeats the first player's name and then on the third clapping beat he says his own name, and so on with each player repeating all the previous player's names and then adding his own (see diagram). If a player skips a name or is out of beat he is eliminated.

CHAIR RELAY
TYPE: Relay Play with each team in a line; one chair per team is needed Each team stands in a line. The first player in each team is given a chair. He must sit down, raise his legs, get up, and pass the chair to the next player in line. The first team to finish wins.

FEATHER RACE
TYPE: Relay Play with each team in its own line; a paper plate and a feather are needed The group is divided into teams. Each team then lines up, each team in its own line. The first player from each team is given a feather on a plate. He must run to the other side and back without the feather falling off the plate. If it falls off, the player must stop and pick it up. (Hands may not be used to keep the feather on the plate.) When the first player finishes, the second player starts, etc. The first team to finish wins.

CUT UP STORIES
TYPE: Shtick A story that has been divided and cut into different pieces is needed; play in a circle Distribute the pieces of the story to all of the players and the player with the opening reads his part (out loud). As the first part is being read everyone should check to see if they think their part should follow. Whoever thinks so should begin reading without hesitation as the first part finishes. As the story continues, you will notice that some parts actually don't seem to fit in, but this just adds to the fun. After all of the players have read their parts compare it to the original.

DEVIL'S ADVOCATE
TYPE: Shtick Play in a circle One player is chosen. He must then try to make someone laugh by making funny motions. As soon as someone laughs he must help the first player make others laugh. The next person who laughs then helps those two, etc. The last person not laughing wins