

What's wrong with building a Tower?

Source 1: The Torah narrative in Bereishit Ch. 11

11:1 The entire earth had one language with uniform words.

11:2 When [the people] migrated from the east, they found a valley in the land of Shinar, and they settled there.

11:3 They said to one another, 'Come, let us mold bricks and fire them.' They then had bricks to use as stone, and asphalt for mortar.

11:4 They said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top shall reach the sky. Let us make ourselves a name, so that we will not be scattered all over the face of the earth.'

11:5 God descended to see the city and the tower that the sons of man had built.

11:6 God said, 'They are a single people, all having one language, and this is the first thing they do! Now nothing they plan to do will be unattainable for them!

11:7 Come, let us descend and confuse their speech, so that one person will not understand another's speech.'

11:8 From that place, God scattered them all over the face of the earth, and they stopped building the city.

11:9 He named it Babel, because this was the place where God confused the world's language. It was from there that God dispersed [humanity] over all the face of the earth.

א ויהי כלהארץ שפה אחת
 ודברים אחדים: ב ויהי
 בנסעם מקדם וימצאו בקעה
 בארץ שניער וישבו
 שם: ג ויאמרו איש אלרעהו
 הבה נלבנה לבנים ונשרפה
 לשרפה ותהי להם הלבנה
 לאבן ותחמר היתה להם
 לחמר: ד ויאמרו הבה | נבנה
 לנו עיר ומגדל וראשו בשמים
 ונעשה לנו שם פרונוץ עלפני
 כלהארץ: ה וירד יהוה לראת
 אתהעיר ואתהמגדל אשר בנו
 בני האדם: ו ויאמר יהוה הן
 עם אחד ושפה אחת לכלם וזה
 החלם לעשות ועתה לאיבצר
 מהם כל אשר יזמו
 לעשות: ז הבה נרדה ונבלה
 שם שפתם אשר לא ישמעו
 איש שפת רעהו: ח וילפץ יהוה
 אתם משם עלפני כלהארץ
 ויחדלו לבנת העיר: ט עלפון
 קרא שמה בבבל כישם בבל
 יהוה שפת כלהארץ ומשם
 הפיצם יהוה עלפני כלהארץ:
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Source 2: Select comments by Rashi on this narrative

one language: the Holy Tongue. — [from Tan. Buber, Noach 28]

and uniform words: Heb. דְּבָרִים אֶחָדִים. They came with one scheme and said, “He had no right to select for Himself the upper regions. Let us ascend to the sky and wage war with Him.” Another explanation: [they spoke] against the Sole One of the world. Another explanation of דְּבָרִים אֶחָדִים [other editions read: דְּבָרִים חָדִים, sharp words]: They said, “Once every 1,656 years, the sky totters, as it did in the time of the Flood. Come and let us make supports for it.” - [from Gen. Rabbah 28:6, Tan. Buber Noach 24]

the sons of man: But the sons of whom else [could they have been]? The sons of donkeys and camels? Rather, [this refers to] the sons of the first man, who was ungrateful and said (above 3: 12): “The woman whom You gave [to be] with me.” These, too, were ungrateful in rebelling against the One Who lavished goodness upon them, and saved them from the Flood. — [from Gen. Rabbah 38:9]

Come: Measure for measure. They said, “Come, let us build,” and He meted corresponding [punishment] out to them by countering with, “Come, let us descend.” - [from Tan. Buber, Noach 25]

and from there... scattered them: This teaches [us] that they have no share in the world to come (Mishnah Sanh. 107b). Now which [sins] were worse, those of the Generation of the Flood or those of the Generation of the Dispersion? The former did not stretch forth their hands against God, whereas the latter did stretch forth their hands against God, to wage war against Him. Nevertheless, the former were drowned, while the latter did not perish from the world. That is because the

שפה אחת: לשון הקודש:

ודברים אחדים: באו בעצה אחת ואמרו לא כל הימנו שיבור לו את העליונים, נעלה לרקיע ונעשה עמו מלחמה. דבר אחר על יחידו של עולם. דבר אחר ודברים אחדים, אמרו אחת לאלף ושש מאות חמשים ושש שנים הרקיע מתמוטט כשם שעשה בימי המבול, בואו ונעשה לו סמוכות:

בני האדם: אלא בני מי, שמא בני חמורים וגמלים, אלא בני אדם הראשון שכפר את הטובה ואמר (ג' יב) האשה אשר נתתה עמדי, אף אלו כפרו בטובה למרוד במי שהשפיעם טובה ומלטם מן המבול:

הבה: מדה כנגד מדה, הם אמרו הבה נבנה, והוא כנגדם מדד ואמר הבה נרדה:

ומשם הפיצם: למד שאין להם חלק לעולם הבא. וכי אי זו קשה, של דור המבול או של דור הפלגה, אלו לא פשטו יד בעיקר, ואלו פשטו יד בעיקר כביכול להלחם בו, ואלו נשטפו, ואלו לא נאבדו מן העולם. אלא שדור המבול היו גזלנים והיתה מריבה ביניהם לכך נאבדו, ואלו היו נוהגים אהבה וריעות ביניהם, שנאמר שפה אחת ודברים אחדים. למדת ששנוי המחלוקת וגדול השלום:

Generation of the Flood were robbers and there was strife between them, and therefore they were destroyed. But these behaved with love and friendship among themselves, as it is said (verse 1): "one language and uniform words." Thus you learn that discord is hateful, and that peace is great. — [from Gen. Rabbah 38:6]

Source 3a: Bereishit Rabba, Parshat Noach

ו ר"א ורבי יוחנן, ר"א אומר ודברים אחדים דבורים אחדים, מעשה דור המבול נתפרש, מעשה דור הפלגה לא נתפרש ודברים אחדים שאמרו דברים חדים על ה' אלהינו ה' אחד ועל אחד היה אברהם בארץ אמרו אברהם זה פרדה עקרה הוא אינו מוליד, ועל ה' אלהינו, אמרו לא כל הימנו לבור לו את העליונים וליתן לנו את התחתונים, אלא באו ונעשה לנו מגדל ונעשה עבודת כוכבים בראשו וניתן חרב בידה ותהא נראת כאלו עושה עמו מלחמה, דבר אחר ודברים אחדים ודברים אחודים, מה שביד זה ביד זה ומה שביד זה ביד זה, ... ד"א ודברים אחדים שאמרו דברים חדים, אמרו אחת לאלף ותרניו שנה הרקיע מתמוטט בואו ונעשה סמוכות אחד מן הצפון ואחד מן הדרום, ואחד מן המערב, וזה שכאן סומכו מן המזרח, הה"ד ויהי כל הארץ שפה אחת ודברים אחדים.

(1) R. Eliezer said: "One speech (devarim achadim) - sealed speech (devarim achudim)." The sin of the generation of the flood is explicit, but the sin of the generation of the dispersion is not explicit. "Devarim achadim" - they said sharp (chadim) things about Our God who is one (echad) and about Avraham, who "was one in the land." They said: Avraham is a sterile mule who cannot bear children. And about God they said: Is it right that he has taken the upper worlds for himself and

given us the lower worlds? Come let us make a tower and place an idol on top of it, with a sword in its hand, so that it will appear as though it is making war on Him. (Rashi quotes the last line as: "Let us ascend to the heavens and make war on Him).

(2) Another explanation: One speech - shared speech. What belongs to one belongs to the other, and what belongs to the other belongs to the first. (Note: If you do not believe that the Sages said that the tower was built by communists, please do not rely on me - look it up).

(3) Another explanation: They said: Once every 1656 years the heavens collapse (the great flood took place in the year 1656 after creation). Come let us build supports, one in the north, one in the south, one in the west, and this one here will be in the east.

3b) Abrabanel :

- Either the people of the tower were fools (if they thought they could actually reach the heaven), in which case they deserved no punishment at all, or they were totally corrupt heretics, in which case the punishment was not severe enough.
- Verse 5 seems to indicate that God thought they could accomplish their goal if left undisturbed ("And now, nothing will prevent them from achieving that which they planned to do"), which is ridiculous if they were trying to build support pillars for the sky.

Source 4: His (Abarbanel's) own interpretation:

...וכן היה חטאת דור הפלגה דומה לחטא אדם וקין ובניו, לפי שבהיות להם ריבוי העניינים הטבעיים ההכרחיים לקיומם מאת ה' מן השמים בהיותם פנויים ממלאכה מכל עמל ומוכנים להתעסק בשלמות נפשם, לא נחה דעתם במה שהכין להם בוראם במתנתו הרחבה הטבעית ויבקשו לשלוח יד ולשים כל מחשבותם למצוא המלאכות בבניית עיר שהוא כוללת המלאכות כולם ומגדל בתוכה, כדי להתחבר שם ולעשות עצמם מדיניים תחת היותם בני שדה, בחשבם שהתכלית המיוחדת להם היה הקיבוץ המדיני להתמשך ביניהם השיתוף והחברה, ושזו המעולה בתכליתיות האנושיות, עם מה שימשך מזה מהם מהשמות והמנויים והממשלות והכבודות הדמיוניות וחמדת אסיפת הקניינים והחמס והגזל ושפיכות דמים הנמשכים, מה שלא היה דבר נמצא מזה בהיותם בשדה, כל אחד בפני עצמו, וכמאמר שלמה) קהלת ז': "(א-לוהים עשה את האדם ישר והמה בקשו חשבונות רבים."

ולהיות כל זה מותר, בלתי טבעי, מונע ומעיק האדם מהשגת שלמותו האמתית הנפשי, לכן נענשו האנשים החטאים האלה בנפשותם כשבבלל השם לשונם והפיצם על פני כל הארץ, כמו שגירש את אדם הראשון מגן עדן וגירש את קין מארץ מושבו ואת בניו גירש מהעולם במי המבול, כי היה פשעם שוה.

This contrasts with Rav Soloveitchik's comments in the Lonely Man of Faith that we saw a couple of months ago: Source 5: The Lonely Man of Faith

JOSEPH B. SOLOVEITCHIK

The brute's existence is an undignified one because it is a helpless existence. Human existence is a dignified one because it is a glorious, majestic, powerful existence. Hence, dignity is unobtainable as long as man has not reclaimed himself from coexistence with nature and has not risen from a non-reflective, degradingly helpless instinctive life to an intelligent, planned, and majestic one. For the sake of clarification of the double equation $\text{humanity} = \text{dignity}$ and $\text{dignity} = \text{glory-majesty}$, it is necessary to add another thought. There is no dignity without responsibility, and one cannot assume responsibility as long as he is not capable of living up to his commitments. Only when man rises to the heights of freedom of action and creativity of mind does he begin to implement the mandate of dignified responsibility entrusted to him by his Maker. Dignity of man expressing itself in the awareness of being responsible and of being capable of discharging his responsibility cannot be realized as long as he has not gained mastery over

his environment. For life in bondage to insensate elemental forces is a non-responsible and hence an undignified affair.*

Man of old who could not fight disease and succumbed in multitudes to yellow fever or any other plague with degrading helplessness could not lay claim to dignity. Only the man who builds hospitals, discovers therapeutic techniques, and saves lives is blessed with dignity. Man of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries who needed several days to travel from Boston to New York was less dignified than modern man who attempts to conquer space, boards a plane at the New York airport at midnight and takes several hours later a leisurely walk along the streets of London.† The brute is helpless, and, therefore, not dignified. Civilized man has gained limited control of nature and has become, in certain respects, her master, and with his mastery he has attained dignity as well. His mastery has made it possible for him to act in accordance with his responsibility.

Source 6: Rav Hayyim Angel: The Tower of Babel: A Case Study in Combining Traditional and Academic Bible Methodologies

Ancient Near Eastern Context

Over the past century, scholarship has progressed significantly with the archaeological discovery of many artifacts and written documents from the ancient Near East. Much of this section summarizes the groundbreaking work of Moshe David (Umberto) Cassuto, and the subsequent discussions of Nahum Sarna and Elhanan Samet.[3] They argue that the Tower of Babel narrative is a polemic against the worldview of the nations, in particular

Babylonia. In every ancient Babylonian city, there were temples, always accompanied with a tower called a ziqqurat. This term derives from the Akkadian zaqaru, “to rise up high,” or “step pyramid.” In Babylonia, the great ziqqurat was the Temple of Marduk—the patron deity of Babylonia. The Temple was called E-sag-ila (“the house with a raised head”), and its tower was called etemen-an-ki (“the house of the foundation of the heavens and earth”). It appears that this temple originally was built in Hammurabi’s time (18th–17th centuries b.c.e.), approximately the same time as Abraham. The Babylonians took such great pride in their temple that they composed myths that attributed its building to the gods:

Marduk, the king of the gods divided all the Anunnaki (=various gods) above and below: **The Anunnaki opened their mouths and said to Marduk, their lord:** “Now, o lord, you who have caused our deliverance, what shall be our homage to you? Let us build a shrine”;...When Marduk heard this, brightly glowed his features, like the day: “Construct Babylon, whose building you have requested, let its brickwork be fashioned...” the Anunnaki applied the implement; for one whole year they molded bricks. When the second year arrived, they raised high the head of Esagila equalling Apsu (=corresponded to the depths of the ocean. Apsu was one of the original two gods in world, according to this myth.)...(Akkadian Creation Epic, Tablet VI, lines 39–62)[4]

The ruins of the Temple of Marduk were found between 1889 and 1917 by German archaeologists. It was gigantic, about 300 feet high, rising from a square base of equal size. There is little question that the Torah is discussing this temple. Archaeologists have unearthed the biblical Tower of Babel and other documents that describe what the Babylonians thought of their prized temple.

A ziqqurat was built as a surrogate mountain, designed as a meeting place between the gods and people. Priests could ascend to

the top on elaborate staircases in order to encounter the gods. Phrases such as “its top in the sky” and “to make a name for oneself” appear regularly on Akkadian building inscriptions.[5] E-sag-ila, the house with a raised head, now appears strikingly similar to the Torah’s quoting the Tower’s builders as wanting “a tower with its top in the sky” (Gen. 11:4).

Additionally, the Babylonian Creation Epic cited above marvels at the brick-making required for the Tower. In this myth, it took the gods one year to make enough bricks to build the Temple of Marduk! The Torah mocks this claim, noting that the Tower and its bricks were built by people. This detail in the Babylonian epic helps explain why the Torah focuses on the brick-making aspect of the project.

God’s “descent” in the Torah narrative also speaks against the idea of a ziqqurat. The physical height of a mountain or structure does not bring anyone closer to God. God descended to thwart the Tower before it was completed.

In this reading of the Torah narrative, Babylonian society was guilty of the ultimate arrogance. They were excessively proud of the Temple of Marduk, and claimed that their gods built it. They also built the Tower to make for themselves a name, usurping a supposedly religious structure for self-aggrandizement.

We now can understand the Torah’s explanation for the city name, Bavel, confusion. The Babylonians called their city Babel, from the Akkadian bab-ilim, “the gate of the god.” They considered their city to be the religious center of the world. The Hebrew etymology, then, is a “midrash” of the Torah to mock the Babylonians. You think you are the gate of the god, but in fact you are completely confused!

To summarize, the sin of the Tower of Babel was supreme arrogance of a polytheistic, idolatrous society. This interpretation also is the

view of the talmudic Sages (Sanhedrin 109a) quoted earlier. Living in Babylonia, the Sages well understood what the Torah was teaching. With our knowledge of the ancient setting, their interpretation is closely wedded to the text of the Torah, and is the most convincing of all the suggestions cited above.

Source 7: Rav Ezra Bick raises the following question about midrashic interpretations vis-à-vis pshat:

There is no question that certain kinds of questions can be answered by introducing facts not mentioned explicitly in the parasha. **These are questions where not knowing the answer does not render the story incomprehensible.** For instance, if you ask why God chose to speak to Avraham in the beginning of next week's parasha, the midrashim about Avraham's early life in Ur Kasdim provide a plausible answer, once we accept that the Torah does not consider it crucial for us to know those stories. In other words, why Avraham is chosen is not an essential part of the Torah's narrative. But it is illegitimate, in my opinion, to use unrelated facts, even if hinted at in the usual midrashic manner, to explain the basic story-line. **If you do not understand what is going on without recourse to a midrash, then the story is incomprehensible on a "pshat" level. Midrash can help us to understand pshat, but cannot substitute for it.**

- *A few words of explanation:
What is the reason for Hashem choosing Avraham in Parshat Lech-Lecha?*
- *Story of breaking his father's idols*
- *Sefat Emet: Hashem was calling out to everyone, and only Avraham tuned in!*

Source 8:

Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin, Netziv, Haémek Davar

<p>ודברים אחדים. לא ביאר הכתוב הדברים אלא ברמז כמבואר במדרשים אבל לא פירשן הכתוב כי אם שהיו דברים אחדים וללמדנו דלא משום הדברים התעורר הקב"ה. כי אם בשביל שהיו אחדים. יהיו מה שיהיו.</p>	<p>ONE SPEECH: The verse did not explicate what they said except through a hint, as is explained in the midrash. But the verse did not explain them, only mentioning that they were "one." This teaches us that God was not aroused by the content of their speech, but because it was "one," irrespective of what they said.</p>
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Rav Bick: The midrash can answer the question, "what did they say," but not the question, "why did God react as He did." The reason is that the first question is not crucial to the flow of the story (apparently - that is precisely the Netziv's point), whereas the second is. You are meant to understand

the point of the story by reading it...Once you understand that, the midrashic information can add a great deal of information.

What appears to be their main motivation?

שפה אחת. זה גרם לחטא א'. היינו שיסכימו לשבת כולן בקבוץ אחד. וזהו נגד רצון ה' שאמר שרצו בארץ ורבו בה היינו להתהלך לארכה ולרחבה כי לשבת יצרה:

One language:they agreed to dwell all in one place...

This in itself is not a sin, but it is opposed to God's will and purpose in creating man, to whom was given the blessing of "Peru u-revu u-mil'u et ha-aretz" - to conquer and settle the entire earth.

This view does not understand the dispersion of the people at the end of the story as a punishment. What, then, is the reason for the dispersion?

ונעשה לנו שם. אנשים משגיחים וממונים על הדבר ויהיו שרי צבא להעניש את העובר. דבליז אינו מועיל המגדל. כ"ז היה לחשש. **פן נפוץ על פני כל הארץ.**

Their ultimate plans, unimportant in themselves, required unity, and they knew that if people spread out, they would develop independent ideas which would detract from the fulfillment of the grand project. Furthermore, **in order to maintain this unity, they would need police and strict totalitarian social control...The "name" means people in charge, supervisors.**

What is the outcome of this plan and the obsession with making it work?

Source 9:

The **כבשן האש story of Avraham: (website of Midreshet Moriah)**

Midrash Rabba on Parshat Noach 38:13, quoted in the name of Rabbi Chiya, son of Rav Adda of Yafo discusses this famous incident. The midrash begins in the idol shop of Terach. He takes a short hiatus in his busy day and leaves his son Avraham in charge. The first customer enters the shop, walks out embarrassed when Avraham points out how ridiculous it was that he, a 50 or 60 year old man was worshipping an idol that was made the day before. It is the next customer that walks in that ultimately causes all the trouble. She walks in with a plate of fine flour and asks Avraham to offer this offering in front of the idols. Avraham then takes a stick and destroys the idols. When his father comes home, confused as to why the idols in his shop have been destroyed, Avraham explains that the idols got angry at each other, were jealous of the fine flour offering, and hence attacked each other. Terach, reading between the lines, realizes that it must have been Avraham who destroyed the idols since the idols clearly do not have feelings, do not move and hence could not have attacked each other. Terach, in anger, hands his son over to Nimrod. **After a rather interesting debate, Nimrod decides to throw Avraham into the burning furnace. Interestingly, this particular midrash tells very little to no details of the miraculous saving of Avraham. It is at this point that we need another midrash to fill in the missing details of the miraculous savior. One such midrash can be found in Pesachim 118a. In this aggada, we are privy to a conversation between G-d and the angel Gavriel. Gavriel offers to go down and save the great tzadik, Avraham. G-d responds with a statement that reveals his unbelievable respect for this chosen individual. He says to Gavriel, "I am Unique in My world**

and he is unique in his world...it is only appropriate for a Unique One to go and save a unique one."

Source 10: Netziv

ונשרפה לשרפה וגו'. כל המקרא אין בו ענין שראוי להודיע לענין הספור ומה לי אם היו להם אבנים לבנין או בנו בעץ או עשו שריפת לבנים וכבר לפני המבול כתיב ויהי בנה עיר. ונראה בכאן מרומז קבלת חז"ל דהפילו לא"א לכבשן האש... והודיע זה הכתוב שהיה כבשן לצורך העיר והמגדל. ומזה נבין כמה גדול ועמוק היה הכבשן ומזה הכבשן ניצול א"א. והא שלא פירש המקרא זה הנס באר היטב יבואר להלן י"ב י"ז:

Rav Bick's alternate explanation:

The story is about social unity and pluralism. The people of Bavel are making an attempt to create a unified cohesive society. The tower is, as the Netziv claims, a unifying symbol, a center of gravity, as it were, for all mankind who rally around it. Nothing more (though nothing less either) was the surface intent of the people.

But, the midrashim are clarifying for us the CONSEQUENCES (rather than the causes of) the unitary state. The psychological need for unity, the social pressure involved, the strength and power that result from this unity, all will result in the monolithically totalitarian state, which will result in both civil repression (as in the furnace of Avraham) and spiritual hubris (as in the idolatry reaching up to heaven with a sword). The Torah describes the following progression:

1. Cultural unity - one language and one speech (verse 1);
2. Social cohesiveness - living together (verse 2);
3. Industrial advance - the brick factory (verse 3);

4. What does one do with one's newfound power - monumental construction (verse 4), leading to centralization, pride and rebellion, and totalitarianism.

The midrashim describe in detail various potential developments of the centralized totalitarian state based on technological man - the expulsion of God, ideological dictatorship, social repression. Organized idolatry, ascribed by the midrash to Nimrod king of Bavel, is a means of ideological control, giving everyone a central figure of authority easily manipulated by the ruling class. Perhaps this is due, as the Ran suggests, to the fact that the moral basis of the society is weak. But I think that the Torah is saying that this is inevitable if everyone must be included in the unitary society. The basis of total unitary society for all mankind will of necessity tend towards physical symbols, a tower, or an idol, and will of necessity be intolerant and compulsive. Because there is no other basis for unitary society other than the shared industrial projects, there will always be a need to invent new projects and force every part of society to take part in order to provide the strength and power inherent in organized mass society. In this context, the midrash (no. 2 above) that adds shared property to the norms of Bavel is unusually prescient. The goal is a unified mass, dedicated to building central institutions which will perpetuate the unity. A logical eventual form of such a society may well be the Stalinist state.

This explains why this story is here, in this location in the Torah. We are perched on the verge of the creation of the Jewish people. Avraham will be asked shortly to separate himself from his father's house, his country, his birthplace, and create an individual unit of spiritual perfection. The question is why, why is the truth of the Torah not offered to all of humanity? Is not Judaism and its message a universal one? Why is Judaism a national religion? Why is the Torah given in a way that makes it incomprehensible to most of mankind? The Torah explains to us that even though the universal mass society of Bavel included pious individuals (Shem, Ever, even Noach are still alive), the service of God cannot arise out of such a society. It is too repressive, too dedicated to maintaining its own existence. Man must be dispersed in order to develop individually. There is a

real spiritual basis for the need for cultural pluralism, including different and somewhat mutually incomprehensible languages. In this context, one nation can arise slowly, over a long period of education, trial, and redemption, which will carry on God's message for humanity. Within Nimrod's Bavel, Judaism is impossible. Within any world order, world empire, Judaism cannot arise. Mankind is dispersed to develop individual character, cultural diversity. In one corner, without having to worry about the destiny of all mankind, a small family will build the kingdom of God. Cross-cultural dissonance is the price that must be paid for spiritual development. In Avraham's case, that dissonance will be even more extreme. Only through lonely separation can true spiritual greatness be achieved. The unity of the Jewish people will be achieved through that spiritual development, slowly over many generations, with the Torah and Eretz Yisrael at its center. Having broken up the totalitarian unitary state, the Torah is ready to embark on the adventure of Avraham Ha-Ivri, the man from across the river, a stranger in a strange land.

Source 11: Rav Yosef Weinstock: Fearing Diversity

Avraham stood for unity, not uniformity. Avraham preaches a message of monotheism to all who would listen, and even to those who were just interested in his hospitality. Yet Avraham's goal was not to make everyone exactly like him. In fact, when Avraham begins his journey next week he leaves with Hanefesh Asher Asu B'Charan- those whom he had influenced while in Charan. And that's the last time we hear of them. They went on to live their lives very different than Avraham- there was no uniformity. But Avraham had accomplished his goal- a unity of disparate people that all acknowledge and respect Hashem.

Avraham celebrated commonality. Not conformity. Hashem promises Avraham that he will be an *Av Hamon Goyim*- the father of a multitude of nations- NOT the father of one huge single nation. He had two sons that he loved even though they were quite different.

He is referred to as the *Av Hamon Goyim*. He is promised that through him all the families of the land will be blessed- they will maintain their uniqueness yet identify with one land, just like it was Avraham's hope that they would identify with one God.

Avraham valued belonging, but he was not interested in necessarily "fitting in". He feels tremendous responsibility towards all other human beings; that's why he prays so hard for Sedom, that's why he fights so hard on behalf of the 5 kings. He belongs to the human race and takes that role seriously and with responsibility. Yet Avraham remains *Halvri*- the other, different and unlike anyone else in his generation. He feels no need to succumb to peer pressure, even as he takes the responsibility of belonging very seriously.