

The Torah's presentation of the lineage of Shem, son of Noach, seems mysterious.

After recording the lineage of Shem's brothers, Yefes and Cham (Bereshis 10:1-20), the Torah records the lineage of Shem in like manner (ibid. v. 21-30), spanning five generations. The Torah then narrates the story of Migdal Bavel (the Tower of Babel – ibid 11:1-9), which occurred at the time of the fifth generation after Shem – and we are then again presented by the Torah with the lineage of Shem, but this time in a more formal manner and spanning ten generations, from Shem through Avram (Avrohom) and his clan, with data about the lifespan of each person and his age upon the birth of the subsequent generation that is listed. (ibid. v. 10-32)

Why does the Torah present the lineage of Shem twice, with the story of Migdal Bavel between the two narrations of Shem's lineage?

If one reads the text of Bereshis carefully and consults the basic Meforshim (Commentators), one comes away with the clear sense that, unlike the rest of society, the progeny of Shem – at least those direct descendants of Shem that connected him to Avrohom – were not subject to the Great Dispersion that occurred as the punishment for Migdal Bavel. Whereas the balance of mankind was spread far and wide and no longer spoke Hebrew/*L'shon Ha-Kodesh* (the Holy Tongue – v. Rashi on Bereshis 11:1, from Midrash Tanchuma), we know that Avrohom and his progeny, and clearly their ancestors, retained Hebrew as their native language, and that Shem's lineage, through Avrohom, dwelled in the same location both before and after Migdal Bavel. (V. Bereshis 10:21, with Rashi and Ramban.) Avrohom and his direct ancestors, straight back to Shem, appear to have been unimpacted by the aftermath of Migdal Bavel.

This can explain why the progeny of Shem appears both before and after the narrative of Migdal Bavel, to proclaim that Shem and his offspring were the same before and after Migdal Bavel; they were not dispersed from their land, and they continued to speak *L'shon Ha-Kodesh*, in contrast with the rest of the world.

This scenario conveys an extremely important message about the Jewish People. Although Avrohom Avinu (Avrohom, our forefather) on his own discovered Hashem as the One God and courageously proclaimed Hashem's existence and Oneness throughout society, it was essential that Avrohom's mission not be something novel and detached from history. Rather, it was the task of Avrohom and his progeny to pick up where Adam and Noach did not succeed and to lead the world back to Hashem via a restoration of the pristine state of affairs under which the world was created. It was thus necessary for Avrohom and his offspring to be native speakers of *L'shon Ha-Kodesh*, and to be connected directly back to Noach and Adam, rather than being disconnected from them as a result of the Great Dispersion. Avrohom and his family were the holy remnant of mankind before society's downward spiral and catastrophic upheavals.

As the descendants of Avrohom, let us continue in this holy mission and do our utmost, through Torah and Mitzvos, to restore the world to its original vision of kedushah (holiness).