

going in deeper: building the tower of babel

part 9

the tower of babel: the archetype of spiritual arrogance

the declaration, "*come, let us build us a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves*" (bereshit / genesis 11:4), is a profound statement of a soul turning away from its purpose. it represents the moment unity is hijacked by pride.

1. the spiritual precedent: unity without submission

the story immediately follows the covenant with noah. the soul has experienced purification (the flood) and has received a promise of grace (the rainbow). it now exists in a state of potential, symbolized by "*the whole earth [having] one language and the same words.*"

this unity (**echad**) is a powerful force. however, the problem is not unity itself, but the *direction* of that unity. true, set-apart unity is described in the **shema**: "*hear, o yashar'el: yhvh our elohiyim, yhvh is one.*" (devarim / deuteronomy 6:4). this is a unity *under* and *for* the divine. the unity of babel is a unity *against* heaven; it is collective energy directed inward for self-glorification.

2. the core sin: "let us make a name for ourselves"

the central failure is the desire to "*make a name*" (**shem**). in the tanakh, a "name" represents essence, legacy, and eternal significance.

- it is **yhvh** who makes a name for the righteous. he made a great name for abraham (nehemiah 9:7), for david (2 samuel 7:9), and for yashar'el (2 samuel 7:23). a true name is a *consequence* of faithfulness and service, not a goal to be seized.
- to seek to "*make a name for ourselves*" is the ultimate expression of pride (**ga'avah**). it is the desire to derive our significance from our own achievements, power, and intellect, to build our own legacy rather than to serve as a vessel for the divine legacy. it is the construction of a spiritual monument to the self.

3. the motivation: fear masquerading as strength

the stated reason is "*lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.*" this reveals a deep spiritual insecurity. the soul, having experienced a previous "scattering" (the confusion of a fallen state), now tries to prevent it through its own power.

this is not faith; it is fear. it is the opposite of the trust exhibited by abraham, who left everything without knowing his destination (lech lecha - "go forth"). the tower is an attempt to create security and immortality through human effort alone, rejecting the need for humble dependence on the creator.

4. nimrod: the personification of the rebellious ego

the figure of **nimrod**, whose name comes from the root **marad** (to rebel), is crucial. the text says he "*was a mighty hunter before yhvh*" (genesis 10:9). the phrase "before yhvh" can be read as "in opposition to yhvh."

- nimrod represents the part of the soul that crowns the ego as king. he is the powerful, driving force of self-will that seeks to conquer and subdue all things, even the spiritual realm, for its own purposes.

- his kingdom, **bavel** (babylon), from the root **balal** (to confuse), becomes the birthplace of all systems that seek to manipulate spiritual forces for selfish gain: astrology, sorcery, divination. these are all expressions of the same desire: to control elohiym rather than to serve him, to storm heaven rather than to pray to it.

5. yhvh's response: the mercy of confusion

yhvh's action is not a petty punishment but a merciful intervention. *"come, let us go down and confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech."* so yhvh scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth. (genesis 11:7-8)

- **confusion (balal):** the confusion of language is an act of grace. it shatters the dangerous, monolithic ego and prevents humanity from completing a project that would have led to its ultimate spiritual enslavement. it is a "reset" that forces a new direction.
- **scattering:** being scattered is the very thing they feared. yet, in the divine plan, it becomes the mechanism of salvation. this scattering plants the seeds for diversity and ultimately for the call of **abraham**, who would be chosen not to build a name for himself, but to be a blessing *"to all the families of the earth"* (genesis 12:3). the solution to babel is not a taller tower, but a faithful journey.

the inner babel:

within each soul, the "tower of babel" is the tendency to use spiritual energy for self-aggrandizement.

- it is the pride that emerges after a breakthrough, the desire to claim ownership of a gift that was given by grace.
- it is the attempt to build a personal legacy of "spirituality" or "knowledge" rather than cultivating humility and becoming a transparent vessel.
- the "confusion of tongues" is the internal disorientation and lack of clarity we feel when our ego-driven projects fail. this confusion, though painful, is a mercy. it saves us from the greater catastrophe of believing we have built our own staircase to heaven. it humbles us and prepares us for true calling.

conclusion:

the tower of babel is the eternal warning against spiritual arrogance. it teaches that:

- **unity without submission to the divine leads to tyranny.**
- **a name built by our own hands is a monument to vanity.**
- **true security is found not in towers of stone, but in trust in the covenant-keeping elohiym.**

the story ends not with a triumphant tower, but with a scattered people and a silent, empty plain. but this ending contains the seed of a new beginning. from the silence of babel's failure, a new voice will soon be heard: the call of abram to leave his country and his father's house, a call to a journey of faith, not a project of pride. the answer to babel is not a better blueprint, but a faithful step into the unknown.

the necessary descent: yeridah tzorech aliyah (a descent for the sake of ascent)

the experience of spiritual descent, where light feels like darkness and certainty gives way to confusion, is not a sign of failure but a marker of impending growth. this principle is woven throughout the narratives of the tanakh.

1. the pattern of the patriarchs and prophets:

the lives of the key figures in tanakh are defined by descents that precede their greatest ascents.

- **yosef (joseph):** his story is the ultimate archetype. he is thrown into a **pit** by his brothers (descent), sold into **slavery** in egypt (deeper descent), and imprisoned on false charges (deepest descent). yet, each descent was a step toward his ultimate ascent to become the viceroy of egypt, the savior of his family, and the one who could declare, *"you intended to harm me, but elohiyim intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."* (bereshit 50:20). the pit was necessary for the palace.
- **mosheh (moses):** a prince of egypt, he falls to being a fugitive shepherd in the wilderness of **midian** for 40 years. this was a profound descent into obscurity. yet, it was in this barren place, stripped of his egyptian identity, that he encountered the burning bush and received his divine calling to ascend and lead yashar'el to freedom (shemot 3).
- **king david:** anointed as the future king, he immediately descends into years of flight and hiding, pursued by a jealous king saul. he lives in caves and among his enemies (1 samuel 19-27). this period of trial and dependence refined his heart and prepared him to ascend to the throne not as a warrior, but as a man after elohiyim's own heart.

2. the "night" of the soul: a time of concealment for revelation

the feeling that "day becomes night" is a experience of **hester panim**, the hiding of elohiyim's face. this is not abandonment, but a deeper form of instruction.

- the psalmist captures this duality: *"weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning."* (tehillim / psalm 30:5b). the night is a real and painful experience, but it is framed within a promise, it is temporary and purposeful, preceding a dawn of greater joy.
- this is the "dark night" that purifies faith. it forces the soul to move from relying on the *feeling* of elohiyim's presence to relying on the *truth* of elohiyim's covenant. it is the difference between knowing about elohiyim and knowing elohiyim himself.

3. the "new degree": the unveiling of a greater capacity

the "descent" occurs because a "new degree" of spiritual capacity is being prepared. the old vessel must be broken to make way for a new, larger one.

- this is the process of being prepared for a greater responsibility. the "friendly branch manager" is comfortable but has a limited scope of influence. the promotion to "corporate headquarters" is initially terrifying and feels like a loss of peace, but it is, in fact, an expansion of purpose and impact.
- in the spiritual realm, the egoistic force of "nimrod" (rebellious self-reliance) that seems to win is actually the raw material for the next level of conquest. the soul is not fighting a losing battle; it is being introduced to a stronger opponent so that, upon victory, it itself will become stronger. the greater the giant, the greater the glory of the victory.

4. the certainty in the descent: holding onto the promise

the key difference between a descent that destroys and a descent that elevates is **knowledge** and **memory**.

- the righteous, like the described kabbalist, experience the full force of the feeling of abandonment (*"my elohiyim, my elohiyim, why have you forsaken me?"* tehillim 22:1), but they do so with an underlying certainty. this certainty is based on the pattern of the torah and the testimony of the prophets. they remember the pit before the palace, the wilderness before the promised land.
- they hold onto verses like: *"i will never leave you nor forsake you."* (devarim 31:6, joshua 1:5) even when every feeling screams otherwise. this is the essence of **emunah** (faith/trust) clinging to the truth of the covenant during the silence of the night.

conclusion: the spiritual law of ascent

from the perspective of the tanakh, the spiritual path is one of **only ascent**. what we perceive as a "descent" is, in the divine economy, merely the necessary downward motion of a wave that is gathering the force to rise even higher.

the "flood" of noah was a descent that cleansed the world for a new ascent. the "scattering" of babel was a descent that prevented a monolithic tyranny and ultimately prepared the world for the ascent of abraham's call. the "pit" of joseph was a descent that positioned him for an ascent to save nations.

therefore, when the soul experiences the darkness, the confusion, and the feeling of powerlessness before its own "nimrod," it is not falling *away* from the path. it is being led *on* the path. it is being prepared, humbled, and strengthened for the next and greater revelation of the divine purpose.

the command is to **be still** (**harpu** - psalm 46:10), to **trust** (**bittachon**), and to **wait for yhvh** (**kaveh el yhvh** - psalm 27:14). for the dawn is certain, and the morning of joy will come, bringing with it a clarity and a connection deeper than that which was known before the night began. the descent is for the sake of a mighty ascent.

the eternal pattern of babel: when progress becomes idolatry

the story of the tower of babel is the archetype of a civilization, or a soul, that achieves unity and power but directs it toward a elohiyimless, self-glorifying end. the pattern it establishes is timeless, repeating itself throughout history and within each of us.

1. the illusion of victory: "nimrod" as a divine instrument

the text states a profound truth: *"there is no other force in the world."* even the force of opposition, the egoistic drive of "nimrod" (from **marad**, rebellion), serves a divine purpose.

- this aligns with the testimony of the tanakh. **yeshayahu (isaiah) 45:7** declares of yhvh: *"i form light and create darkness; i make peace and create evil; i am yhvh, who does all these things."*
- the ego, the "yetzer hara," is not an independent enemy of elohiyim; it is the tool he uses to test, refine, and strengthen us. it is the "adversary" (a meaning of **satan**) that forces choice and growth. as the proverb says, *"iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another."* (mishlei 27:17). nimrod's apparent "victory" is only permitted to create a greater challenge, necessitating a greater ascent.

2. the technology of babel: bricks without stone

the key detail is telling: *"they used brick instead of stone"* (genesis 11:3).

- **stone (even)** in the tanakh often represents something natural, elohiym-given, and enduring. the altar to yhvh was to be built of uncut stone (exodus 20:25). the torah is called a "rock" (devarim 32:4).
- **brick (levenah)** is artificial, man-made, fired in the kiln of human ambition. it represents a system built entirely on human ingenuity, divorced from the divine "stone," the foundational truth.

this is the essence of any ideology, ancient or modern, that seeks to build a utopia without elohiym. it is a system built with the "bricks" of human reason, technology, and political theory, but it lacks the enduring, divine "stone" of eternal truth and moral law. as the text notes, it can seem to multiply and succeed rapidly ("when they laid two, four bricks appeared"), but its foundation is artificial and ultimately fragile.

3. the cost of elohiymless progress: the devaluation of humanity

the most chilling part of the midrash is the fanaticism of the builders: *"when a brick fell, they wept... but when a man fell and died, no one paid attention."*

this is the inevitable result of any system where the *project* (the tower, the state, the economy, the ideology) becomes elohiym. the individual human being, created **b'tzelem elohim** (in the image of elohiym), becomes a disposable resource to serve the machine. this is the ultimate expression of being disconnected from the creator: we lose the ability to see his image in one another.

this pattern has repeated itself in every totalitarian regime of the 20th and 21st centuries, which sacrificed millions on the altars of their ideological "towers." it is also visible in the modern "corporatism" the text describes, where quarterly profits and market growth are prioritized over human well-being, family, and mental health, leading to the "slavery," depression, and breakdown we see today.

4. the emergence of abraham: the voice of the alternative

amidst the clamour of babel, a new voice emerges: **abraham**.

- his name means "father of a multitude," signalling a different kind of unity, not uniformity imposed by force, but a multitude united by a shared covenant with the divine.
- his argument is the core of the conflict: *"you have renounced the creator, who is the tower, and decided to replace him with a tower of bricks."*
 - **yhvh is the true tower.** as king david sang, *"for you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the enemy."* (tehillim 61:3). we are called to find our strength and unity *in him*, not to build a substitute for him.
 - abraham represents the **inner corrective force**, the nascent desire for true connection (**deveikut**) that finally awakens to challenge the ego's total rule. it is the part of the soul that realizes that progress without purpose is noise, and unity without love is tyranny.

5. the collapse: the inevitable end of elohiymless systems

the tower is destined to collapse because it is built on a foundation of **shav** (vanity, falsehood). this is the unwavering testimony of the tanakh's wisdom literature:

- **"unless yhvh builds the house, those who build it labour in vain."** (tehillim 127:1).
- every human empire that sets itself up against the heavens, from egypt to babylon to rome, has crumbled into dust. their towers are now archaeological sites. the pattern is absolute: what is built *for* the human name will fall; what is built *for* the divine name endures.

conclusion: the choice before us

the story of babel presents us with a perpetual choice between two paths:

1. **the path of babel (nimrod):** unity through forced uniformity. progress through human ingenuity alone. purpose found in making a name for ourselves. this path always leads to the devaluation of human life and eventual collapse.
2. **the path of abraham:** unity through a shared covenant with the divine. progress that is guided by divine law and moral purpose. purpose found in becoming a blessing to others. this path leads to a lasting legacy.

the "babylon of today" is any system, external or internal, that seeks to build without the "cornerstone" of divine truth. the call of abraham is the quiet, persistent voice within that urges us to turn away from the crumbling brick towers of ego and toward the enduring strong tower of elohym. the confusion of our modern age is not a punishment; it is a merciful **balal**, a necessary scattering that invites us to stop building and start listening for the call to journey toward a promised land of true purpose.

the choice: the path of babel or the path of abraham

the text presents a stark summation of the human condition: we are builders of babel, living in the ruins of our own egoistic projects. the solution it offers; to "listen to the abraham in you" is the timeless call of the prophets. here is that call, framed by the tanakh.

1. the diagnosis: the law of love vs. the law of self

the text identifies a "single law" of nature: absolute altruism and love. this is not a mystical concept but the very character of yhvh as revealed in the torah.

- **vayikra (leviticus) 19:18** commands: *"you shall love your neighbour as yourself."*
- **devarim (deuteronomy) 6:5** commands: *"you shall love yhvh your elohym with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."*
- **micah 6:8** summarizes the law: *"he has told you, o man, what is good; and what does yhvh require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your elohym?"*

the "tower of babel" is any system, national, corporate, or personal; that is built on the opposite principle: self-interest above all else. this is the path of **pharaoh** and **nimrod**, who said, *"who is yhvh, that i should obey his voice?"* (exodus 5:2).

2. the crisis: the ruin of the tower

the text states that the ruin of the tower is happening before our eyes. this is the prophetic recognition that systems built on sand cannot stand.

- **yeshayahu (isaiah) 24:5-6** describes the result of breaking the "everlasting covenant": *"the earth lies defiled under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant. therefore, a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt."*
- the confusion, the inability to communicate, the violence, these are the symptoms of a world that has chosen the path of babel. it is the natural consequence of living contrary to the foundational law of love and connection.

3. the call: "listen to the abraham in you"

this is the essential command. "abraham" represents the awakened desire for a covenant relationship with the divine and with others.

- **abraham's journey (lech lecha):** the call to abraham was *"go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that i will show you."* (genesis 12:1). this is the internal command to leave the familiar territory of your ego ("your father's house") and journey toward a promise you cannot yet fully see, guided only by faith.
- **abraham's argument:** his challenge to the builders, *"you have renounced the creator, who is the tower"* is the soul's realization that true strength and unity are found **in** elohiym, not in replacement **of** elohiym.

4. the path: the tanakh's prescription

what does it mean to choose the path of abraham? the tanakh is not silent on this. it is a path of concrete action:

- **teshuvah (return):** this is the first step. it is a conscious turning away from the path of self-destruction and toward the creator. *"return to me, says yhwh of hosts, and i will return to you."* (zechariah 1:3). it begins with the humble admission: "i have been building a tower of bricks. i want to learn to build with stone."
- **shema (listen):** cultivate a listening heart. *"shema yisrael..."* is the command to hear, to internalize, and to unify our being under the sovereignty of the one elohiym. this is the act of quieting the noise of the ego to hear the "kol demamah dakah" the still, small voice of truth.
- **chesed (loving-kindness):** actively engage in deeds of love and justice. this is how we "unite with nature's law." we practice the divine attribute of kindness. *"he has told you, o man, what is good... to love kindness."* (micah 6:8). this is the antidote to the babel mentality that sees people as bricks for its project.
- **brit (covenant):** enter into a conscious relationship. the abrahamic path is one of covenant, a mutual commitment between the soul and elohiym, and between people. it is to live by the terms of that relationship: faithfulness, trust, and obedience to the divine instruction (torah).

5. the promise: from scattering to blessing

the story of babel ends in scattering. the story of abraham begins with a promise that reverses babel's curse:

- **to abraham:** *"i will make of you a great nation, and i will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing... and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."* (genesis 12:2-3).
- the path of abraham does not lead to a monolithic, forced uniformity. it leads to a blessed multitude, a diversity of peoples and gifts, united by a shared covenant and purpose. it is the answer to the confusion of tongues: not a return to one language, but the gift of translation and understanding through shared love.

conclusion: the choice before you

you stand, as every generation has, between two towers:

- **the tower of babel:** built by human hands for human glory. its materials are the bricks of ego, technology, and ideology. its end is confusion, scattering, and ruin.

- **the strong tower of elohiym:** a refuge granted by grace. *"the name of yhvh is a strong tower; the righteous man runs into it and is safe."* (proverbs 18:10). its foundation is the enduring stone of divine truth and covenant.

the call is to turn away from the first and run into the second. this is not a retreat from the world, but the only way to truly engage with it. it is to become, like abraham, a source of blessing in a world that is desperately thirsty for the living water that the towers of brick can never hold.

the wisdom has been revealed. the choice is yours. **choose life.**