

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

### Taking a Closer Look

Upon realizing that his wife's beauty put his life in danger, Avraham asked Sarah not to tell anyone in Egypt that she was his wife. Instead, he asked her to say that she was his sister (Beraishis 12:13). Although technically true (as she was also his niece, hence a blood relative often referred to as a "brother" or "sister," see Midrash Hagadol on 12:13 and Rashi and Ramban on 20:12), this doesn't explain how Avraham could subject his wife to the possibility of being taken by another man.

Numerous explanations have been given to justify Avraham's plan. The common understanding is that because he was afraid they would kill him in order to take his wife, he was allowed to risk her being with someone else. As far as why this did not qualify as "yehoraig v'al ya'avov," a situation where Avraham should have allowed himself to be killed rather than allowing the sin of adultery, several differences are suggested (see Torah Shelaima 12:145). For one thing, it was not certain that adultery would occur, and this law applies only when the choice is to either be killed or to definitely commit adultery. Secondly, Sarah would not be guilty of such a sin, because if it happened, it would be against her will. Additionally, it was not Avraham that would be committing adultery, and this law refers to the choice faced by the potential violator, not what might happen to someone else. The Chizkuni suggests that by leaving the impression that she was married to someone other than Avraham they would bother with him, and because they were not able to kill her husband (who was not in Egypt) they would leave her alone as well. The Sefornu says that the custom was for potential suitors to negotiate with the girl's father (or caretaker), so Avraham was hoping he could extend the negotiation process long enough to be able to leave the country before anyone tried taking Sarah by force (see also the Ran, quoted by the Abarbanel). Recently, I saw another approach that caught my

attention.

Rabbi Yechiel Michal Feinstein, zt"l, points out that although a "get" (divorce document written according to Jewish law) is necessary to officially end the marriage of a Jewish couple, a non-Jewish marriage is over when either of the spouses declares his or her intention to end it (Rambam, Hilchos Melachim 9:8). Therefore, by stating that Sarah was his "sister," and not his wife, Avraham was effectively ending their marriage, whereby there would no longer be an issue of adultery. What intrigued me about this approach was not just that I didn't recall ever having come across it, but that it doesn't seem to work. First of all, to end a non-Jewish marriage you don't need both spouses to agree to part ways. Yet, even after Avraham refers to her as his "sister" Sarah still tries to warn Paro that she is a married woman, and because he ignores her warnings, he is punished. (Beraishis Rabbah 41:2). Why is Sarah saying she is still married, and why is Paro punished so severely, if Avraham had ended the marriage? Not only that, but when Avraham tells Avimelech that Sarah is his sister (20:2), a claim backed up this time by Sarah (20:5), G-d Himself warns Avimelech to leave her alone, since she is a married woman (20:3 and 20:7). How can G-d say that she is a married woman if calling her "his sister" (and her affirming such) ended their marriage?

Interestingly, Rabbeinu Bachye (20:2) quotes Rabbeinu Chananel saying essentially the same thing (although not based on calling her his sister): "When he arrived at Gerar, he (Avraham) divorced her, because he was afraid that they might kill him if he said she was his wife. And even so, G-d did not allow him to separate from her, and did not leave the righteous woman (Sarah) with the wicked one (Avimelech)." As far as how G-d could call her a married woman after Avraham had divorced her, Rabbeinu Bachye continues by saying that "he only divorced her out of fear, for he had no choice, resulting in their divorce not being a full divorce." I'm not sure what is meant by "not a full divorce," as either they're still married or they're not. Another issue brought up (see Torah Shelaima 20:10) is how Avraham, who was considered a kohain gadol (High Priest, see Vayikra Rabbah 25:6), could remarry Sarah after divorcing her, since kohanim are not allowed to marry divorcees.

Our sages, of blessed memory, tell us (Yuma 28b) that Avraham fulfilled every aspect the Torah.

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in memory of  
Rabbi Solomon D. Gopin  
HaRav Shlomo David  
ben Chaim Baruch Mordechai  
from his children**

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Nevertheless, it is unlikely that this gave him the status of a "Yisroel." Rather, he was still considered a non-Jew but kept the Torah anyway because he knew that this was G-d's blueprint for life. He wasn't obligated to do so, and could have refrained from keeping an aspect of the Torah when the need arose. We find that even though Yaakov kept all 613 mitzvot (see Rashi on Beraishis 32:5), he married two sisters (a violation of mitzvah #206, see Chinuch) after determining that he should (because he had to marry the woman Aisav would have married had Yaakov not taken over his role, see [www.aishdas.org/ta/5765/vayeitzei.pdf](http://www.aishdas.org/ta/5765/vayeitzei.pdf)). It would be difficult to say that even though Avraham thought he could divorce Sarah by calling her his sister he was mistaken because he was really a "Yisroel" and needed to give her a "get," (even though the Talmud only mentions Avraham keeping the entire Torah, not all of the forefathers), as Yaakov (and Amram, who married his aunt) didn't keep something when the urgent need arose. Whatever status Avraham had would also apply to them, and if Avraham was a "Yisroel" they would be too, so they wouldn't be able to violate any mitzvah even before the Torah was given. Nevertheless, there may be a way to explain why he thought he was divorcing Sarah by calling her his sister even though he really wasn't.

The Talmud (Shabbos 56a) tells us that during King David's reign, every soldier would give his wife a conditional divorce before going into battle, one that would go into affect retroactively (to the time it was given) if the soldier was missing (see Rashi). (This would allow the wife of a soldier who is MIA to remarry, as if he had somehow survived the remarriage wouldn't be adultery.) Avraham was in a similar situation in the sense that he didn't want to divorce his wife, yet didn't want any relationship (even if it were not of their choosing) to be adultery. It is therefore possible that Avraham gave Sarah a conditional divorce (by saying that she is his sister, or through another means), one that would only take affect if Sarah were ever forced into a relationship. Obviously, they both were hoping it never came to that, and Sarah therefore tried to convince Paro to leave her alone because she is a married woman (which is true if she is successful at keeping him away). Since G-d afflicted Paro, preventing anything from happening, the divorce never took affect

and they remained married. The same thing happened with Avimelech (only this time Sarah didn't tell him that she was married, perhaps because Avraham told her that it may turn out not to be true), and after G-d appeared to Avimelech and told him to leave Sarah alone, the second conditional divorce never took affect either. The bottom line is that Avraham may have referred to Sarah as his sister in order to give her this conditional divorce, but thanks to G-d's intervention, the condition was never met and they remained married the entire time. © 2008 Rabbi D. Kramer

### RABBI BEREL WEIN

## Wein Online

**A**s one who has made major location changes in one lifetime, I can immediately identify with the opinion of the rabbis of the Talmud and Midrash that the movement of Avraham and Sarah from their home in Mesopotamia to the Land of Israel was one of the ten great challenges in the life of Avraham. Leaving one's home, family, and society is always a wrenching experience.

The Torah's description of marriage is the description of leaving one's parents and home to become united with someone "other" to build a new life and family unit. Avraham is searching for communication and instructions from his Creator. He evidently cannot find this in Mesopotamia though the Lord, so to speak, is to be found everywhere and nowhere, depending upon the seeker and the search. Only in the Land of Israel will Avraham find the spiritual satisfaction and role of influence and leadership that will make him the father of all peoples.

Just as his name will later be changed from Avram to Avraham to signify this, so too his journey from Mesopotamia to the Land of Israel will mark a transformation of level and character in his lifetime. Avram in Mesopotamia is not the same person as Avraham in the Land of Israel. Change of location changes all of us in a myriad of ways. It will bring Avraham to greater heights of spirituality and tenacity of leadership. From being the persecuted victim of Nimrod in Mesopotamia, in the Land of Israel he will become the respected prince of God in the midst of a Canaanite and Hittite civilization. In spite of the difficulties of change, he will find the move to be most beneficial.

The Jewish people, in our long millennia of dispersion over the face of this earth, have always attempted to remain a positive and spiritually strong community. But every emigration from one location to another took its toll on us. The early immigrant generation almost always suffered dislocation, nostalgia and oftentimes confusion and difficulty in adjusting to the new society and its challenges. In our times, the immigration of Jews to America and later to the Land of Israel posed and still poses the greatest challenge to successful and meaningful Jewish life.

In both cases there was first a headlong flight from Jewishness and tradition in order to become American or Israeli. The past few decades have noticed a slow but steady change in this attitude. More and more Jews both in America and Israel now wish to incorporate true Jewishness into their lives and values. Both America and Israel currently provide a new opportunity for a stronger more vibrant and value-driven Judaism than did Eastern Europe in its waning decades of the twentieth century.

There are currently great opportunities to convert Avram into Avraham, to expand our religious and spiritual horizons and to build a truly strong and holy society in the land of Israel and even in America as well. The challenge is there for us. May we be worthy of surmounting it successfully. © 2008 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory](http://www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory).

#### **RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## **Shabbat Shalom**

“**A**nd the Lord said to Abram, go forth to yourself, out from your country, your birthplace and the house of your father, to the land which I shall show you...And I shall make you for a great nation, and all the families of the earth shall be blessed by you.”(Gen12:1-3).

What was the very first commandment given to Abraham, the first Jew? A simple reading of the above quote identifies exactly the nature of that first commandment, but what do these words actually mean? Clearly this Divine declaration is much more than a command; it is a charge, a mission statement, a national calling a vocation.

In the past I have always considered God's first words to the first Hebrew to be a commandment to 'go forth' to Israel, to "make aliyah." Certainly such an interpretation remains applicable because, after all, no verse can be separated from the plain meaning of its words and its context, both of which point to Abram's leaving Ur Kasdim to establish a new residence in Israel.

However, G-d demands of Abram much more than a mere change in venue, a relocation of space. The charge to leave one's country, birth-place and parental home "to yourself, for yourself" (Hebrew lekha) is a charge to be fearlessly independent, to be self-reliant as one's own person, to express one's existential and national uniqueness. What adumbrates within this phrase is Balaam's later characterization of the Jewish people as "a nation which dwells alone, and is not to be counted amongst the nations" (Numbers 23:0), as well as the midrashic interpretation of the Biblical familial name "Hebrew," (Ivri), meaning that "Abram stood on

one side of the world (ever) and everyone else stood on the other side."

Abraham has discovered a new G-d concept, radically different from the gods of the pagan world into which he was born, a G-d of pure spirit devoid of physical form or space, a G-d of unconditional love who nevertheless enjoins ethical and moral conduct, a G-d who created human beings in His image whose lives are to be modeled after His attributes rather than a god created by human beings in their puny and paltry images.

And G-d understands that if the world is to endure, if humanity is to live and positively develop rather than retrogress and self-destruct, this great idea and ideal of ethical monotheism must be disseminated world-wide without the intrusive, invasive, and destructive ideas that could manage to infiltrate from the world he's leaving behind, his country, his birthplace, his parent's home. Abraham must separate himself from the culture he emerges from, must free himself as much as possible from genetics and geography, from nature and nurture, in order to become a blessing for the world, influencing all of humanity in order to fulfill the Divine charge "...through you shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

And indeed, through Abraham's teaching, all the families of the earth have truly been blessed. The family of Abraham, his direct descendants, developed into the children-nation of Israel, and the people of the book-the Torah-literally transformed world civilization as the Bible made its way to every corner of the globe.

Exactly what are these unique ideas of Judaism that have changed the world? I believe they are seven, each of which can certainly apply to every individual, Jew and Gentile alike.

1. The human being, free and responsible, created in the Divine Image.
2. Tzedakah, the obligation to share with the less fortunate.
3. A Sabbath day and a Sabbatical year of rest from physical work and time for family, community, study and spirituality.
4. Freedom: - the Exodus and its prohibition of totalitarian and enslaving governments, its insistence on fundamental human freedom.
5. Herut and ahary'ut: Freedom must be linked to responsibility, Liberation must be accompanied by Ethical and Moral Learning, the Exodus followed by the Ten Commandments.
6. G-d in man, G-d in world: soul and spirituality linked to family, proper sexual expression, meaningful celebration of historical anniversaries, seasonal changes, and life-cycle events.
7. Repentance, Peace and Redemption: the optimistic faith in human ability to change, perfect itself, and redeem the world.

Tragically, most contemporary Jews remain ignorant of their own treasure-trove which has changed the world - and often give up their heritage for even less than the proverbial mess-of-pottage. But I have a dream - and after the great successes of Birthright and the Wexner Heritage Fellows, my dream stands a reasonable chance of being adopted; I believe it's a proposal that can change the face of American Jewry. Consider the following: Our tradition ordains bar and bat mitzvah (son and daughter of commandment) at ages 13 and 12 respectively, when our youth is old enough to parent a child but is hardly capable of understanding much more than "mother-goose" Judaism. Our Talmudic sources, however understands that the individual does not really achieve independence before the age of twenty, when he/she stands responsible before God.

Hence I suggest that every Jewish family be encouraged to register each bar and bat mitzvah in their local Jewish Center, which would provide a two-hour class each week for seven years - each year's study devoted to one of the seven Jewish ideas which have changed the world. Exciting, relevant study texts on each of these Jewish pillars and their implementation in daily life must be developed, including their connection to the more positive aspects of the world's cultures. The two hour sessions ought certainly not be limited to a class-room. Experiencing a Sabbath table with songs of praise to the wife-mother, parents blessing their children, joyous expressions of reverence for all of creation as well as vacation, field trips to help the less fortunate, (which may even mean a summer in a third world country), a Passover Seder together with people of other religions, in order to help understand the other as well as ourselves in greater depth and sensitivity, etc. Each student should receive a significant if modest stipend for attending the class (after all, they could be earning money at that time if they were not studying).

At the conclusion of the seven years, the JCC would sponsor a trip to the Kotel, the western wall of the Holy Temple, in Jerusalem, where each graduate would receive a "Hatan Mitzvah" and "Kallah Mitzvah" (groom and bride of commandment) certificate. In the presence of the President of the State of Israel, and amidst orchestra music and the sounds of the shofar, they would all take an oath to do their best to uphold the traditions of their people, just as so many Israeli soldiers vow fealty to the State of Israel in that very same setting. It goes without saying that the Massa Program could encourage as many as possible to spend that year studying in Israel.

I believe the funding of such a program would be more than cost-effective, especially when we realize that the years between 12 and 20 are precisely when so many teenagers start thinking about their future and begin taking their first steps toward how they will live

their lives, the critical years when proper peer relationships are so crucial for later life directions. Families could also register their children at birth (when and if they move, the registries move with them to the new JCC), and life-cycle gifts can be made by family and friends towards this learning program. Such a plan may just inspire a new generation of Jews to be proud of their heritage and make it a serious and meaningful part of their lives. © 2008 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

**RABBI AVI WEISS**

## Shabbat Forshpeis

**W**hat makes the story of Avraham (Abraham) and Sarah going to Egypt important enough to be included in the Genesis narrative? (Genesis 12:10-20)

Ramban suggests that this is an example of the maxim that what occurred to our patriarchs and matriarchs will one day occur to the Jewish people. Note that Avraham migrates to Egypt because of a famine. There, his wife Sarah is taken hostage; God intervenes by smiting Pharaoh and his people-ultimately Pharaoh ushers Avraham and Sarah out of the country.

This precisely mirrors what happens later on in Bereishit. Jacob comes to Egypt with his family because of a famine. In time, the Jews, like Sarah, are enslaved; God intervenes with plagues and Pharaoh, King of Egypt, insists that the Jews leave. (Ramban, Genesis 12:10)

Another observation. God's covenant with Avraham includes a promise of land and children. Relative to both of these commitments, Avraham is tested. Among all the lands, the one that is promised to Avraham, the land of Canaan, is stricken with famine. Later, God asks that the only child born of Avraham and Sarah, Yitzhak, be taken to Moriah to be slaughtered. (Rashi, Genesis 12:10, 22:12)

These two chapters are strikingly similar. In the Binding of Isaac story God steps in to save the child at the last moment. The covenantal promise of family is secured. Here too, in the Egypt narrative, God steps in, punishing Pharaoh. Avraham returns to Canaan. The covenantal promise of land is sustained.

The upshot: Covenants do not guarantee that the road will be smooth. Sometimes, even after the covenant is proclaimed, there are set-backs. The test of belief is whether one can maintain belief during periods of challenge as did Avraham. This is a central message of the Avraham -Sarah story in Egypt.

One last thought. The importance of this chapter may be the beginning of the covenantal promise to Sarah. Up to this point, only Avraham was promised children. Was Sarah part of this commitment? After all, in this section, Avraham asks Sarah to proclaim she is his sister. Children are not

born from sibling relationships. In fact, in Egypt Avraham is given shefakhot (hand maids). (Genesis 12:16) One of them is probably Hagar whom Avraham ultimately marries. (Genesis 16:1)

In the end, however, the Torah declares that God smites Pharaoh, "concerning Sarah, Avraham's wife." (Genesis 12:17) Here, for the first time God acts on behalf of the relationship between Sarah and Avraham. From Sarah and not from Hagar, would come the child who would be the second patriarch. This commitment from God makes this section extraordinarily important in understanding the unfolding of the Jewish people. © 2008 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

### YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

## Virtual Beit Medrash

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL SHLIT" A

Summarized by Matan Glidai; Translated by Kaeren Fish

“**A**nd God said to Avram, Get you out of your land and your birthplace..." (12:1). A question immediately arises as to the connection between this verse and the one that concluded last week's parasha: "And Terach took Avram... and Lot... and they departed with them from Ur Kasdim to go to the land of Canaan, and they came as far as Charan and they dwelled there" (11:31). Why does God suddenly command Avraham to go to the land of Canaan if Avraham was planning to go there anyway? And if we say that Terach's family had decided to remain permanently in Charan, then what is the significance of the Torah's narration of the original intention of their journey?

This question stands at the center of a debate between the Ibn Ezra and the Ramban. The Ibn Ezra, at the beginning of the parasha, writes that the command to "Get you out" was given to Avraham while he was still in Ur Kasdim. Although he was told to leave also his "father's house," God allowed Terach to join him on the journey, since He knew that Terach would continue no further than Charan.

The Ramban (12:1) rejects this explanation for several reasons. The verse, "I am God Who took you out of Ur Kasdim" (15:7), would seem to substantiate Ibn Ezra's view, but the Ramban explains (11:28) that "who took you out" refers to the miracle that God performed in bringing Avraham out alive from the fiery furnace in Ur Kasdim. This, in turn, is problematic in light of a verse in Sefer Nechemia (9:7): "You are God the God who chose Avram and BROUGHT HIM OUT OF UR KASDIM and made his name Avraham" which would seem to suggest that bringing Avraham out of Ur Kasdim was an important and critical stage in his selection.

The command "Get you out" presents a difficulty also from another direction. For twenty generations the Holy One had spoken with no one but Noah. Noah was a righteous man who found favor in God's eyes, and so God spoke to him. All the rest of humanity, it seems, was not sufficiently righteous for them to merit God speaking to them. Who, then, is this Avraham? In what way did he merit God's revelation to him? Why are we told nothing about his character, his history, or his actions?

This question becomes even more disturbing if we look at the content of God's command. The Holy One promises Avraham that He will make him into a great nation, that He will bless him and make his name great, but He demands no action on Avraham's part (other than that he depart for Eretz Canaan)! Are there no commandments that he will be required to observe? Is he receiving such great reward "for free"?

The Maharal answers these questions in his book Netzach Yisrael (chapter 11). He explains that it was at this point that Am Yisrael was chosen from among all other nations: God selected Avraham and his descendants after him. Had we learned that the Holy One selected Avraham because of his righteousness, then we would conclude that the selection of Am Yisrael was based on Avraham's actions. Had the Holy One made His reward to Avraham conditional on the mitzvot that he would have to observe, we would conclude that our connection with God is conditional upon our observance of the mitzvot. The Torah wants to show that this is not the case: the selection of Am Yisrael is not dependent on their actions. Even if there would be a generation of Am Yisrael that did not observe mitzvot at all, their chosen status would not cease. If Am Yisrael wished to cease observing mitzvot and to cut themselves off from God, they would not be able to. God has chosen them and they are forever bonded to Him. The selection of Am Yisrael is of eternal validity and is not dependent on anything.

Let us return to the question with which we began: Didn't Avraham and his family plan to go to Eretz Canaan even before the command? It was God's hand that caused them to wish to go to Eretz Canaan, but they had no idea that it was God who was leading them in that direction. God had chosen Avraham and his descendants after him, and He wanted them to get to Eretz Yisrael and live there, and so He directed events in that direction.

Eretz Yisrael is an important and central element in the selection of Am Yisrael. The verse in Nechemia quoted above continues as follows: "You are God the God Who chose Avram and brought him out of Ur Kasdim... and you forged a covenant with him to give the land of the Canaanite..." We find here two important principles with regard to the selection of Avraham and Am Yisrael:

i. The Holy One took Avraham out of Ur Kasdim without Avraham knowing that it was God Who was leading him.

ii. The Holy One made a covenant with him regarding Eretz Yisrael. In fact, the whole Torah comes to teach us how Am Yisrael settled in Eretz Yisrael and then returned to it following a prolonged exile. Rashi, at the beginning of parashat Vayeshev, writes: "After describing the settlements of Esav and his descendants briefly, [the Torah] describes the settlements of Yaakov and his descendants at length and all their manifold exploits, for these are important to God and so He expands on them."

Thus there are three important fundamentals in the selection of Am Yisrael: (a) The selection is not dependent on Am Yisrael's actions. (b) Eretz Yisrael is an inseparable part of the selection. (c) The hand of God guides Am Yisrael without their knowledge.

We may see throughout history how God has guided Am Yisrael towards Eretz Yisrael. The story of Lot teaches us that the settlement in Eretz Yisrael will be beset with problems? so it was from the beginning, and so the situation has continued through the ages. But ultimately things will sort themselves out for Am Yisrael, as they did in the past. (*Originally delivered on leil Shabbat Parashat Lekh-Lekha 5756 [1995].*)

**RABBI JONATHAN SACKS**

## Covenant & Conversation

Judaism is supremely a religion of freedom-not freedom in the modern sense, the ability to do what we like, but in the ethical sense of the ability to do what we should, to become co-architects with G-d of a just and gracious social order. The former leads to a culture of rights, the latter to a culture of responsibilities. Judaism is faith as responsibility.

Last week I showed how responsibility, its evasion and abdication, forms the theme of all four dramas of Genesis prior to Abraham. Adam denies personal responsibility. Cain denies moral responsibility. Noah fails the test of collective responsibility. Babel was a rejection of ontological responsibility-the idea that the ethical imperative comes from a source beyond the self.

This is not a small idea. For almost as long as we have documentary evidence, human beings have attributed their misfortunes to factors other than the human will and the "responsible self." They still do today. In the past, men blamed the stars, the fates, the furies, the gods. Today they blame their parents, their environment, their genes, the educational system, the media, the politicians, and when all else fails-the Jews.

There is a Jewish joke that says it better than any philosophical treatise. For a year, Rabbi Cohen has laboured to teach his unruly class the book of Joshua. No one has paid much attention, so he makes the end-of-year exam as easy as possible. He asks Marvin, at

the back of the room, "Who destroyed the walls of Jericho?" Marvin replies: "Please sir, it wasn't me." Scandalised, he reports this to Marvin's parents. Instead of apologising, they indignantly reply, "If Marvin says it wasn't him, then it wasn't him." In despair he goes to the president of the congregation and tells him the story. The president listens, opens his drawer, gets out his chequebook, writes in it and says: "Here's a thousand dollars. Get the walls repaired, and stop complaining."

We live in an age of "Please sir, it wasn't me." In one famous American law case, the attorney defending two young men who murdered their parents claimed that they were innocent on the grounds that their parents had been psychologically abusive. In another, the lawyer argued that his client was not to blame for his violence. What he ate made him excitable. This became known as the "junk food defence." What started life as a joke has become a phenomenon. It is called the victim culture. Nowadays, to win sympathy for your cause, you have to establish your credentials as a victim. This has overwhelming advantages. People empathise with your situation, give you support, and avoid criticising your actions. It has only three drawbacks: it is false, it is corrupting, and it is a denial of humanity. A victim is an object, not a subject; a done-to, not a doer. He or she systematically denies responsibility, and those who wish to help only prolong the denial. They become what is known in addiction therapy as co-dependents. By locating the cause of someone's plight in factors external to the person, the victim culture perpetuates the condition of victimhood. Instead of helping the prisoner out of prison, it locks him in and throws away the key.

The call of G-d to Abraham-"Leave your land, your birthplace and your father's house"-was a summons to chart new and different path, the most fateful and at the same time the most hopeful in the history of mankind. The best description of it is the title of Nelson Mandela's autobiography: *The Long Walk to Freedom*.

Three of the most famous denials of freedom were made by individuals from Jewish backgrounds who rejected Judaism. The first was Spinoza who argued that all human behaviour is explicable by causal laws. Nowadays we would call this genetic determinism. The second was Karl Marx who claimed that history was made by material, specifically economic, factors. The third was Sigmund Freud who contended that actions are the result of unconscious and irrational drives, the chief of which relate to the early years of childhood, especially the Oedipus complex, the conflict between fathers and sons.

Unwittingly they provided the best commentary on the opening verse of today's sedra. Marx said that human behaviour is determined by economic factors such as the ownership of land. Therefore G-d said to

Abraham: Leave your land. Spinoza said that conduct is driven by instincts given at birth. Therefore G-d said to Abraham: Leave your place of birth. Freud said that we are influenced by our relationship with our father. Therefore G-d said to Abraham: Leave your father's house.

Liberty is not a given of the human situation. Like the other distinctive achievements of the spirit-art, literature, music, poetry-it needs training, discipline, apprenticeship, the most demanding routines and the most painstaking attention to detail. No one composed a great novel or symphony without years of preparation. That is why most theories of human behaviour are simply false. They claim that we are either free or not; either we have choice or our behaviour is causally determined. Freedom is not an either/or. It is a process. It begins with dependence and only slowly, gradually, does it become liberty, the ability to stand back from the pressures and influences on you and act in response to educated conscience, judgment, wisdom, moral literacy. It is, in short, a journey: Abraham's journey.

That is the deep meaning of the words *Lech Lekha*. Normally they are translated as, "Go, leave, travel." What they really mean is: journey [lekh] to yourself [lekha]. Leave behind all external influences that turn us into victims of circumstances beyond our control, and travel inward to the self. It is there-only there-that freedom is born, practised and sustained.

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### MACHON ZOMET

## Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Yehoshua Shapira, Rosh Yeshivat Ramat Gan

**A**ccording to the Talmud, the world will exist for six thousand years. One-third of that time goes by during the first two Torah portions, Bereishit and Noach. This era is characterized by several very dramatic events, from the sin of the Tree of Knowledge which took place on the very first day of human existence, and on to the deluge which almost totally eradicated mankind near the year 2,000, leaving behind only a small kernel of humanity for rejuvenation of the race.

Our sages called this first era "two thousand years of chaos," and it ends with the appearance of our Patriarch Avraham, who signifies the start of "two thousand years of Torah." This second era includes the lives of our holy forefathers, the Exodus from Egypt, the giving of the Torah, and the two Temples.

We wrote above that Avraham appeared at the beginning of the era of Torah, but he was really born in the year 1948 after the world was created. And he recognized the Almighty either in 1951 or 1996 (according to different opinions by the sages). We might thus wonder exactly what event in Avraham's life signified the move to the new era of the Torah. According to the sages, this corresponds to the verse,

"the souls they made in Charan" [Bereishit 12:5]. Today this is what is called "outreach." When Avraham established the first Teshuva (repentance) movement in history, the world shook off its chaotic existence and was transformed into a world of Torah.

The Chatam Sofer asks: If Chanoch was greater than Avraham and therefore became an angel, why wasn't he the patriarch of Yisrael? And if Avraham was greater than Chanoch, why did he die like all other people? The answer is: The Almighty has many different angels, and adding a new one by the name of Chanoch is not a very significant move. If he had kept himself apart from the world as Chanoch did, Avraham would have reached even greater spiritual heights than Chanoch. But he was willing to give up his personal development and dedicate himself to repairing the faults of the world. This action is the foundation of the nation of Yisrael, which will turn to all the other nations in the future and show them to call out in G-d's name.

This is not only a good lesson to be learned from Avraham, it is an explicit mitzva in the Torah: "And you shall love your G-d [Devarim 6:5]? Cause Him to be loved by the other people, as is written, 'the souls they made in Charan.'" And the Rambam adds, "That is: Just as Avraham acted out of love, as is written, 'Avraham who loved Me' [Yeshayhu 41:8]... He called out to people to believe in G-d because of his great love. So in the same way you should love Him so much that you call out to other people to come to Him."

Since this mitzva is one of the foundations of the Torah, the Rambam lists it right after the two mitzvot that are connected to faith in G-d. The Torah itself emphasizes its great importance by writing, "And you shall teach them to your sons and you shall speak about them..." [Devarim 6:7].

If the above is true with respect to the other nations, it must clearly be necessary to cause G-d's name to be loved by Yisrael. Let us all dedicate ourselves to the holy labor of returning the hearts of the offspring to their fathers.

### RABBI SHLOMO KATZ

## Hama'ayon

**K**ing Shlomo writes in Mishlei (13:20), "One who walks with the wise will grow wise, but the companion of fools will be broken." Rabbeinu Bachya ben Asher z"l (Spain; early 14th century) writes: King Shlomo is teaching in this verse that one should endeavor to keep company with the wise and not with fools. He wrote "walks with" (in present tense) to indicate that one should follow the wise at all times and should elevate them to be his generals. If one has these traits, there is no doubt that he will become wise. On the other hand, if one becomes the companion of fools, there is no doubt that he will be broken.

R' Bachya continues: When one attaches himself to a wise man, he benefits, while the wise man

loses nothing. This is why Torah is likened to a candle, for when one lights a second candle from an existing candle, the first candle loses nothing. Our Sages also likened this relationship to visiting a perfume or spice shop. Even if one buys nothing, he leaves carrying a better aroma than when he entered. So, too, one's mere proximity to a wise man provides a benefit. Likewise, if one remains close to fools, their influence will rub off on him.

(What is meant by "fools" in this context? R' Bachya explains that it refers to people with bad character traits whose main pursuits are this-worldly matters and who denigrate intellectual pursuits.)

King Shlomo's lesson is evident in the opening to our parashah, writes R' Bachya. Our Patriarch Avraham wished to keep the Torah, but his original environment was not conducive to such observance. This is why Hashem directed him to establish a new home in a new land-Eretz Yisrael.

"After these events, the word of Hashem came to Avram in a vision saying, 'Fear not, Avram, I am a shield for you; your reward is very great.'" (15:1)

The midrash Devarim Rabbah contains a parable regarding an orphan who was taken in as an apprentice by a tradesman. The apprentice thought that the food that he was given was his pay. "No," said the tradesman. "Your sustenance is a reward for pouring a drink of water for me. However, the reward for the work you performed is being safeguarded for you for the future." R' Shlomo Kluger z"l (1785-1869; rabbi of Brody, Galicia) explains: G-d preserves man's reward for performing the mitzvot of the Torah for the future. However, G-d rewards us in this world for the "extras" that we do, including the fact that we have created new mitzvot d'rabbanan / rabbinically-ordained commandments [e.g., Chanukah, Purim and washing hands before a meal].

After defeating the four kings, Avraham was afraid that he had used up his reward. Hashem said that was not so. Rather, all the success that Avraham had in this world was only for the "extras" that he did. (Our Sages say that Avraham kept the Torah before it was given, including the mitzvot d'rabbanan.) This is the meaning of our verse: "I am a shield for you"-because of what you have done on your own. However; "your reward is very great"-it is preserved for the future. (Imrei Shefer)

"And he trusted in Hashem..." (15:6)

The Gemara (Eruvin 19a) states that Avraham Avinu sits at the gate of Gehinom and rescues the wicked from there, with the exception of someone who has married an Aramite (i.e., non-Jewish) wife. Such a person conceals his circumcision; therefore, Avraham does not recognize him as being circumcised.

R' Yitzchak Isaac Chaver z"l (1789-1852; rabbi in several Lithuanian towns; author of important halachic and kabbalistic works) asks: What does the Gemara mean that Avraham does not recognize these sinners? After all, the deceased are not in Gehinom with their bodies! He explains: An oft-repeated theme in Book of Mishlei is that the Torah is the "wife" of the Jewish People. Thus, a "foreign wife" is a metaphor for wisdoms other than the Torah. Those wisdoms have the potential to sever the bonds of faith that connect a Jew to the Torah and to the Covenant. (R' Chaver cites the testimony of the 15th century Spanish sage, R' Yosef Ya'avetz z"l, that the Jews who had studied philosophy were the first to give-in to the Inquisition, while the "simpler" Jews by and large remained strong in their faith.) In the Torah, one who strays from the Covenant is referred to as having an "uncircumcised heart."

As our verse indicates, Avraham Avinu is the paradigm of a Jew with strong faith. Therefore, he rescues from Gehinom any Jew whose faith is solid, no matter what other sins that Jew may have committed. However, if someone has abandoned his faith and married himself to wisdoms other than the Torah-thus, his circumcision is concealed because his heart is uncircumcised-Avraham does not rescue him. (Magen V'tzinah Ch.2)

"On that day Hashem made a covenant with Avram, saying, 'To your descendants have I given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates River.'" (15:18)

Rashi z"l comments: "The Euphrates is in fact shorter than other great rivers, e.g., the Nile. However, it is called the 'great river' because it borders Eretz Yisrael."

The story is told that when R' Avraham Weinberg z"l (1884-1933; the Slonimer Rebbe) returned to Poland from a visit to Eretz Yisrael, he brought with him a small challah. Due to the length of the journey, the challah was rock hard by the time R' Weinberg reached home.

On Shabbat, R' Weinberg directed that the small, stale challah from Eretz Yisrael be paired for lechem mishneh with the very large challah that was usually distributed among the chassidim. However, this caused a dilemma for R' Weinberg: which challah was more fitting to have the berachah recited over it-the large, fresh challah, or the small challah from Eretz Yisrael?

R' Weinberg consulted one of the senior chassidim, who advised that the answer could be found in our Rashi: Even that which is smaller is called greater when it is associated with Eretz Yisrael. (Quoted in Otzrot Tzaddikei U'geonei Ha'dorot) © 2008 Rabbi S. Katz & torah.org