

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

The most influential man who ever lived, does not appear on any list I have seen of the hundred most influential men who ever lived. He ruled no empire, commanded no army, engaged in no spectacular acts of heroism on the battlefield, performed no miracles, proclaimed no prophecy, led no vast throng of followers, and had no disciples other than his own child. Yet today more than half of the 6 billion people alive on the face of the planet identify themselves as his heirs.

His name, of course, is Abraham, held as the founder of faith by the three great monotheisms, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. He fits no conventional stereotype. He is not, like Noah, described as unique in his generation. The Torah tells us no tales of his childhood as it does in the case of Moses. We know next to nothing about his early life. When G-d calls on him, as He does at the beginning of this week's parsha, to leave his land, his birthplace and his father's house, we have no idea why he was singled out.

Yet never was a promise more richly fulfilled than the words of G-d to him when He changed his name from Abram to Abraham: "For I have made you father of many nations" (Gen. 17:5).

There are today 56 Islamic nations, more than 80 Christian ones, and the Jewish state. Truly Abraham became the father of many nations. But who and what was Abraham? Why was he chosen for this exemplary role?

There are three famous portraits of Abraham. The first is the one we learned as children. Abraham, left alone with his father's idols, breaks them with a hammer, which he leaves in the hand of the biggest of the idols. His father Terach comes in, sees the devastation, asks who has caused it, and the young Abraham replies, "Can you not see? The hammer is in the hands of the largest idol. It must have been him." Terach replies, "But an idol is mere of wood and stone." Abraham replies, "Then, father, how can you worship

them?"¹ This is Abraham the iconoclast, the breaker of images, the man who while still young rebelled against the pagan, polytheistic world of demigods and demons, superstition and magic.

The second is more haunting and is enigmatic. Abraham, says the midrash, is like a man travelling on a journey when he sees a palace in flames.

He wondered, "Is it possible that the palace lacks an owner?" The owner of the palace looked out and said, "I am the owner of the palace." So Abraham our father said, "Is it possible that the world lacks a ruler?" G-d looked out and said to him, "I am the ruler, the Sovereign of the universe."²

This is an extraordinary passage. Abraham sees the order of nature, the elegant design of the universe. It's like a palace. It must have been made by someone for someone. But the palace is on fire. How can this be? Surely the owner should be putting out the flames. You don't leave a palace empty and unguarded. Yet the owner of the palace calls out to him, as G-d called to Abraham, asking him to help fight the fire.

G-d needs us to fight the destructive instinct in the human heart. This is Abraham, the fighter against injustice, the man who sees the beauty of the natural universe being disfigured by the sufferings inflicted by man on man.

Finally comes a third image, this time by Moses Maimonides: After he was weaned, while still an infant, Abraham's mind began to reflect. Day and night, he thought and wondered, "How is it possible that this celestial sphere should continuously be guiding the world and have no one to guide it and cause it to turn, for it cannot be that it turns itself?" He had no teacher, no one to instruct him in anything. He was surrounded, in Ur of the Chaldees, by foolish idolaters. His father and mother and the entire population worshipped idols, and he worshipped with them. But his mind was constantly active and reflective, until he had attained the way of truth, found the correct line of thought, and knew that there is one G-d, He that guides the celestial spheres and created everything, and that among all that exists, there is no G-d beside Him.

This is Abraham the philosopher, anticipating Aristotle, using metaphysical argument to prove the

¹ Midrash Bereishit Rabbah 38:13

² Ibid., 39:1



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existence of G-d.

Three images of Abraham; three versions, perhaps, of what it is to be a Jew. The first sees Jews as iconoclasts, challenging the idols of the age. Even secular Jews who had cut themselves adrift from Judaism were among the most revolutionary modern thinkers, most famously Spinoza, Marx and Freud. Thorstein Veblen said in an essay on “the intellectual pre-eminence of Jews,” that the Jew becomes “a disturber of the intellectual peace . . . a wanderer in the intellectuals’ no-man’s-land, seeking another place to rest, farther along the road, somewhere over the horizon.”

The second sees Jewish identity in terms of tzedek u-mishpat, a commitment to the just society. Albert Einstein spoke of the “almost fanatical love of justice” as one of “the features of the Jewish tradition which make me thank my stars that I belong to it.”

The third reminds us that the Greek thinkers Theophrastus and Clearchus, disciples of Aristotle, speak of the Jews as a nation of philosophers.

So these views are all true and profound. They share only one shortcoming. There is no evidence for them whatsoever in the Torah. Joshua speaks of Abraham’s father Terach as an idolater (Josh. 24:2), but this is not mentioned in Bereishit. The story of the palace in flames is perhaps based on Abraham’s challenge to G-d about the proposed destruction of Sodom and the cities of the plain: “Shall the judge of all the earth not do justice?” As for Abraham-as-Aristotle, that is based on an ancient tradition that the Greek philosophers (especially Pythagoras) derived their wisdom from the Jews, but this too is nowhere hinted in the Torah.

What then does the Torah say about Abraham? The answer is unexpected and very moving. Abraham was chosen simply to be a father. The “Av” in Avram/Avraham means “father”. In the only verse in which the Torah explains the choice of Abraham, it says: For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what He has promised him.” (Gen. 18:19)

The great scenes in Abraham’s life – waiting for

a child, the birth of Ishmael, the tension between Sarah and Hagar, the birth of Isaac, and the binding – are all about his role as a father (next week I will write about the troubling episode of the binding).

Judaism, more than any other faith, sees parenthood as the highest challenge of all. On the first day of Rosh Hashanah – the anniversary of creation – we read of two mothers, Sarah and Hannah and the births of their sons, as if to say: Every life is a universe. Therefore if you wish to understand the creation of the universe, think about the birth of a child.

Abraham, the hero of faith, is simply a father. Stephen Hawking famously wrote at the end of A Brief History of Time that if we had a Unified Field Theory, a scientific “theory of everything”, we would “know the mind of G-d.” We believe otherwise. To know the mind of G-d we do not need theoretical physics. We simply need to know what it is to be a parent. The miracle of childbirth is as close as we come to understanding the love-that-brings-new-life-into-the-world that is G-d’s creativity.

There is a fascinating passage in Yossi Klein Halevi’s book on Christians and Muslims in the land of Israel, At the Entrance to the Garden of Eden. Visiting a convent, he is told by a nun, Maria Teresa: “I watch the families who visit here on weekends. How the parents behave toward their children, speaking to them with patience and encouraging them to ask intelligent questions. It’s an example to the whole world. The strength of this people is the love of parents for their children. Not just the mothers but also the fathers. A Jewish child has two mothers.”

Judaism takes what is natural and sanctifies it; what is physical and invests it with spirituality; what is elsewhere considered normal and sees it as a miracle. What Darwin saw as the urge to reproduce, what Richard Dawkins calls “the selfish gene”, is for Judaism high religious art, full of drama and beauty. Abraham the father, and Sarah the mother, are our enduring role models of parenthood as G-d’s gift and our highest vocation. © 2016 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"The Lord said to Abram: ‘Get out of your country, and from your homeland, and from your father’s home, to the land that I will show you.’” (Gen. 12:1) Abraham’s father, Terah, is often perceived as a primitive symbol of an outmoded religion, from whom his iconoclast, revolutionary son broke away to adhere to a new faith that would ultimately redeem the world. “Get out of your father’s home,” says G-d to the newly-penitent Abraham.

But what if there is another way of looking at Terah, more in accord with the actual words of the Torah? What if it was Terah who had discovered G-d first—rendering Abraham less a trailblazer and more a

faithful follower? Perhaps Abraham was not so much a rebellious son as he was a respectful son, who continued and built upon the road laid out for him by his father?

After all, there is every reason to believe that when G-d tells Abraham to go forth from his country, his birthplace, to a land that G-d will reveal, G-d is communicating to a man who was already aware of Him, and of a mind-set that was most probably based on a religious perspective first learned at home.

Terah himself was at one time an idolater, but may have turned to the One G-d while Abraham was yet a very young lad, or even before Abraham was born. I suspect that a subtle clue testifying to the correctness of this position is to be found in an enigmatic verse:

“Terah took his son, Abram; his grandson Lot, the son of Haran; and his daughter-in-law, Sarai, the wife of his son Abram; and they set out together from Ur of the Chaldeans for the land of Canaan; but when they had come as far as Haran, they settled there. The days of Terah came to 205 years; and Terah died in Haran.” (Gen. 11:31-32)

Why does Terah set out for Canaan, the very place where Abraham himself ends up at the relatively advanced age of seventy-five at the behest of the call from G-d? Could Abraham have been completing the journey his father had begun decades earlier? And what was special about Canaan? Why would Terah have wished to journey there, and why does the Torah believe the journey significant enough to mention Terah’s effort to arrive at that destination?

Further on in this portion, Abraham (then Abram) wages a successful war against four despotic kings in order to save his nephew Lot, who along with others had been taken captive by them. Malkizedek, the King of Shalem (“Jeru” = city, “Shalem” = peace) and a priest of G-d on High, recognizes the justice of Abram’s battle against tyranny, and greets the victor with bread and wine, offering the benediction:

“Blessed be Abram to G-d on High, Maker of heaven and earth, and blessed be G-d on High, Who delivered your enemies into your hand.” (Gen. 14:19)

Abram then gives Malkizedek, whom he clearly respects, a tribute of one tenth of his spoils. The city of Shalem (Jerusalem) was the capital city of Canaan—and this is the first time it is mentioned in the Bible. Malkizedek literally means “the King of Righteousness”, and Jerusalem is biblically known as the “City of Righteousness.” (Isa. 1:26) From whence did this Malkizedek, apparently older than Abram, hear of G-d on High (El Elyon)?

Nahmanides (on Gen. 14:18) maintains that from the very beginning of the world, the monotheistic traditions of Adam and Noah were preserved in only one place in the world—Jerusalem. Its king, Shem, son of Noah, also known as Malkizedek, was a priest to

G-d-on-High. If this is the case, it is plausible that Terah was someone who had come to believe in this One G-d even in the spiritual wilds of Ur of the Chaldeans—and therefore set out for Canaan, the land of monotheism, where he wished to raise his family.

Terah may even have had personal contact with Malkizedek, who greets the son of his friend with religious words of encouragement to the victor of a religious battle in which right triumphed over might, a victory of the G-d of ethical monotheism. Like so many contemporary Jews who set out for Israel, Terah had to stop half way and didn’t quite make it. But all along G-d was waiting for Terah’s son to embrace the opportunity to continue where his father had left o?.

The common view of Terah has Abraham defying his father’s way of life as he creates his own path, becoming in effect a model for many modern day ba’alei teshuva (penitents) who attempt to radically break away from non-believing parents, rejecting everything from their past.

According to the understanding we have suggested here, however, Abraham is actually following in his father’s footsteps, building on the foundation built by his father, redefining his father’s way of life, and for the first time in history, paving the way for himself and others to move up the spiritual ladder by not only continuing, but also advancing. ©2016 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Our father Avraham is an inveterate wanderer. For a great deal of his life he is a traveller, always an immigrant in a new and alien society. Though he is recognized and respected as being a prince of G-d and a special person, an asset to any society in which he chooses to dwell, he still remains the eternal “outsider.” He constantly hears, reverberating in his mind, G-d’s original instruction to him to go forth, to travel to a destination that is as yet unknown to him.

In spreading the message and idea of monotheism throughout the world, his mission drives him to journey. He is not a nomad in any sense of that word, for he has a purpose and a goal and his journeys are a means to achieve his end. But being a traveller automatically shapes his life and is itself one of the major challenges that he faces in his lifetime.

In this respect, he is the accurate forerunner of the fate that will befall the Jewish people, his beloved descendants, throughout its long and difficult history. The Jewish people have wandered the face of this earth and have brought blessing and enriching achievement to every society it visited and settled in. Yet, again like their father Avraham, the Jews remained “outsiders” even though they were part of a particular society for centuries and felt themselves comfortable and perfectly integrated. In fact, and in inexplicable

irony, the more integrated they were in a society, history shows us, the stronger was the reaction to treat them as “outsiders.” And many times in our history this has ended very badly for all concerned.

Part of the lesson of the life of Avraham is that Jews must at one and the same time be a part – a loyal and contributing part – of the general society where they reside and somehow remain distinct, unique and special. Again, as history has shown us, this is no easy task, not for any individual, let alone for an entire group of people numbering in the millions. Bilaam, the intellectual champion of the non-Jewish world, would wonder in amazement that Israel “dwells alone and is not reckoned with the other nations of the world” and yet it plays such a dominant and disproportionate role in the affairs of the general world society.

In this it mirrors accurately the life and role of Avraham during his long and productive lifetime. To be the “outsider” and yet to be the cog that drives the engine of progress in civilization is one of the greatest achievements of the Jewish people over the ages. The non-Jewish world begrudgingly realizes this but, as in the case of Abraham and his society, this in no way softens their attitude or behavior towards the Jewish society and nation.

Whether there is anything that we can do to improve this situation is a difficult question to answer. But, as in the case of Avraham, our task is to persevere and remain constant to our goals, mission and eventual destination. ©2016 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. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

What 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; G-d 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; G-d intervenes with plagues and Pharaoh, King of Egypt, insists that the Jews leave. (Ramban, Genesis 12:10)

Another observation. G-d'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, G-d 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 G-d steps in to save the child at the last moment. The covenantal promise of family is secured. Here too, in the Egypt narrative, G-d 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 G-d smites Pharaoh, “concerning Sarah, Avraham's wife.” (Genesis 12:17) Here, for the first time G-d 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 G-d makes this section extraordinarily important in understanding the unfolding of the Jewish people. ©2016 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

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

Embedded in this week's Parsha, Lech Lecha, is Avram's asking Hashem (G-d) "how will I know that I will inherit it (the land)?" This seems strange, because Avram was already promised that he would have children, and that his children would be as many as the stars. If he believed G-d about having children (which would be a great miracle at his age), why would he need reassurance about a much less miraculous promise of inheriting the land?

The Sforno explains that Avram had no doubt that he would have children, and that they would inherit the land. What he needed reassurance about what his concern that his children might forfeit their future by faltering, because unlike the stars, they would be living

among temptations and impurities. G-d's response is "you shall surely know" that they will indeed rise above their struggles. How? Rashi (commentary) says because of the Korbanot (sacrifices) that they will bring. The root of the word Korban means "close", which lends great insight into giving: The more we sacrifice to others, the closer we are to them. If we give to each other, despite our surroundings, we are assured of inheriting a prosperous and fulfilling future. ©2016 Rabbi S. Ressler and LeLamed, Inc.

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

Hatafat Dam Brit

*Translated for the Encyclopedia Talmudit
by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss*

What would be the law if a child was circumcised my mistake before the eighth day? Would we need another ceremony? Would we need to perform again "Hatafat Dam Brit"?

The Rashba states that in such an instance no action would be required. He draws the parallel between an infant born already circumcised which in that case there must be at least "Hatafat Dam Brit" because of a special reference in the Torah "Yimol Bisar Orlato" Vayikra 12:3 ("the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised"). However others draw a difference between a child born circumcised and the case cited by the Rashba in that in the former instance usually some flesh of the foreskin is left. However since in our case the full circumcision was already completed, and there is certainly no foreskin left, nothing need be done on the eighth day.

The question however is; In such a case that was cited what do we do with the Mitzva of "Uvayom hashmini yimol bsar orlato" ("On the eighth day you must circumcise the flesh of your foreskin") which would indicate that there is a special Mitzvah to circumcise on the eighth day?

Rav Chayim M'brisk explains that though the Mitzvah of Circumcision is on the eighth day, the directive of "Hatafat Dam Brit" is not. Thus if the circumcision was performed before the eighth day one need not do anything,

However both the Shach and the Taz believe that in such a case there must be "Hatafat Dam Brit" just as we would require it of one who was circumcised in the evening and not in the day as required. ©2016 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Wake Up Call

Hashem has different ways in which He reveals Himself to mortal men. The Torah tells us that Moshe was special. Moshe's revelation was termed face-to-face. Others, however saw Hashem in a vision. This week the Torah tells us of Avram's vision. It is more than a vision. In fact, it is very animated. "And

the word of Hashem came to Avram in a vision, "Fear not, Avram and He took Avram outside and said, 'Count the stars, if you are able to count them... This shall be your offspring'" (Genesis 15:1-5). Avram goes outside and tries to count the stars. Then he goes back inside, and the Torah tells us that Avram has another vision. This one, however, takes on another type of medium. "the sun set and a deep sleep fell upon Avram and behold a dark fear descended upon him" (Genesis 15:12).

It is interesting to note the contrast between the two visions. The first seems dynamic and upbeat. The second begins with a sense of doom. Commentaries explain that the first vision engendered the good news about the growth and future prosperity of Avram's descendants. The second vision predicted the doom and exile of the Jewish people in Egypt. That is why Avram trembled. But it seems Avram trembled as a "dark fear descended upon him," even before hearing the news about the Egyptian bondage. In fact, the fear set in as soon as the deep slumber fell upon him. Could the sleep alone have precipitated the premonition of fear? Perhaps the deep slumber set off some impending feeling of despair that caused the great fear. How?

Rabbi Shimshon Zelig Fortman was the Rav of Congregation Knesseth Israel in Far Rockaway during the 1940s. During that period, the naysayers had all but discounted any chance of a rebirth of Orthodox Jewry. They had hardly a voice in Washington, they were disorganized and fragmented, and the destruction of European Jewry was almost the last nail in the alleged coffin of traditional Torah Yiddishkeit. Rabbi Fortman had a young son-in-law, Moshe, who had studied in Yeshiva Ner Israel in Baltimore. He would tell his father in-law how he saw a future for Orthodox Jewry that was filled with honor and power. Their representatives would have direct access to Congress, the Senate, and even the President of the United States. They would influence legislation with their values and fill stadiums and coliseums with Torah assemblies and prayer gatherings!

Rabbi Fortman was very concerned about his young son-in-law's ivory-towered dreams. He felt that he the dreams distracted him and he would never accomplish anything. Rabbi Yosef Kahanamen, the Ponovezer Rav had recently come to America to raise funds for his Yeshiva in Israel and was staying by Rabbi Fortman in Far Rockaway. Surely, Rabbi Fortman thought, Rabbi Kahanamen would terminate Moshe's fantasies and teach him about the realities of accomplishment.

Moshe and Rabbi Kahanamen met for nearly an hour. The Rav listened intently and then told young Moshe, "Dream my son. Continue to dream. In fact you can continue to dream as long as you live. But remember one thing. Never fall asleep."

Young Moshe was eventually known to hundreds of thousands of Jews world-over as the man who may have been one of the most influential personalities in the emergence of Torah Jewry today Rabbi Moshe Sherer, the President of Agudath Israel of America until his passing this past year.

Perhaps, homiletically, Avram began to tremble the moment that sleep set in. He understood that great visions of grandeur might occur in a dream. But nothing good could appear if he fell asleep! Because if the visionary falls asleep then all the dreams are lost in slumber! © 1997 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah teaches us never to despair or feel abandoned. The Prophet Yeshaya opens with sharp words of rebuke to the Jewish people for their shameful attitude regarding Hashem's concern for them. He asks, "Why does Yaakov say, 'My path is concealed from Hashem and my judgment alludes Him?'"

This desperate plea is based on the tight control the nations exercise over the Jewish people during their seemingly endless years of exile. They exclaim in bewilderment, "If Hashem really cares how could He allow the world to continue on its present course!? Where is the Jewish nation's reward for their perseverance throughout the ages? Why doesn't Hashem respond to the nations' cruelty and deliver them their well deserved catastrophic blows?" These emphatic cries reflect the Jewish people's deep-seeded feelings of pain and anguish during their difficult moments in exile.

Yet, this similar perspective is shared by the mighty powers of the world who perceive themselves in total control. They see Hashem as aloof from His world and incapable-Heaven forbid-of interfering with their vicious hatred towards His devout children. In this week's haftorah, Hashem responds to the Jewish nation's plea and calls the world's mighty powers to task. Hashem engages them in heavy dialogue and invites them to defend their audacious position about Him. Hashem says, "Be silent distant nations and mighty powers recharge yourselves. Draw near and speak; come together for judgment. Who inspired the (dweller) of the east to proclaim My righteousness with his every step; delivered nations into his hands and gave him the control over the kings? Who transformed dirt into his sword and chaff into his bow?... It is I, Hashem, who declares the generations from the beginning. I am the first and will remain with the final ones." (41: 1,2,4)

The Sages explain that the "dweller of the east" here refers to our patriarch Avrohom Avinu. (Breishis Rabba 43:3) In this moving dialogue Yeshaya reveals to us the secret behind Avrohom Avinu's success. In

truth, Hashem was responsible for this total turnabout of an entire world. Hashem inspired this lone soul, Avrohom to reject the universally accepted practice of paganism that had distorted the view of every known human being on earth. Hashem kindled the fire within Avrohom Avinu to educate the entire world about their perversions. Hashem, likewise, protected Avrohom Avinu against every attempt to thwart his sacred undertaking of preaching the unpopular to the masses. And Hashem assisted Avrohom Avinu in his miraculous war against the four mighty kings that resulted in Hashem's universal acceptance by all leading world powers. (See Breishis Rabba 42:3; Rashi Lech Lecha 14:17)

The above words send a powerful message to all regarding Hashem's active concern for the world and its affairs. Historically speaking, Avrohom Avinu's generation could have brought anyone to total despair. The entire world- save a hidden pocket of Shemites- had no clue of Hashem's existence and were engaged in aggressive idolatry. Yet, even during those times, Hashem controlled His world and ministered its spiritual development. In response to this tremendous spiritual decline Hashem designed from the outset for Avrohom Avinu to be born in that dark era. Hashem armed Avrohom Avinu with an incredible mind to oppose an totally misguided generation and launch a single-handed campaign in the belief in the one, true Hashem. In fact, Meiri teaches us that through lectures, writings and personal example Avrohom Avinu convinced most of the world's population to believe in Hashem. (Intro to Avos) This incredible accomplishment, against all odds, displays Hashem's interest and involvement in His world. Hashem secured the world's direction by planting Avrohom Avinu- the greatest of all thinkers- in the generation most needy of him.

This remarkable upheaval serves as perfect testimony to Hashem's ability and involvement. The fact that one lone soul convinced an entire generation to abandon its previous beliefs speaks for itself. The shocking phenomena that Avrohom was not executed for his beliefs but was instead miraculously spared and victorious against the mightiest powers tells the complete story. Obviously, Hashem controls the world and is constantly leading it to its necessary perfection. Consequently one must conclude that even the nations' control over Hashem's people only happens with His permission. With these words Yeshaya addressed the Jewish people and emphatically declared Hashem's concern for them. When Hashem appears to be removed from them this can only result from their wrongdoings.

Ramchal teaches us that, in truth, Hashem is involved at all times in leading the world to perfection. Overtly, Hashem operates the world through the system of reward and punishment allowing for free will, good and bad. This general policy leaves room for one

to perceive that Hashem is not involved in His world. He permits evil to reign in untold proportions and allows His dearest to suffer for their most minute of transgressions. True reward and punishment is reserved for afterlife and only faint traces of Hashem's response can be discerned during one's lifetime. Yet, irrespective of all the above Hashem is secretly leading His world to its fulfillment. Working under cover, Hashem is perpetually involved in directing all world events in preparation for the final day of redemption. (see the Knowing Heart section 48)

Avrohom Avinu's era is a perfect example of this. On the surface, the world was as far away from its purpose as one could fathom. Civilization already experienced partial and total destruction during the days of Enosh and the devastating flood. The world's population was forced to separate and disperse in response to their rebellious attempt to build the tower of Babel. Yet despite all the above humanity did not learn its lesson and was totally absorbed in the ugly practices of idolatry. This was the world's record within the system of free will, good and bad, reward and punishment.

However, Hashem conducts His world with a second system of sovereignty wherein He directs the world to its ultimate purpose. According to the time tables of this system the time had arrived for Hashem's truths to illuminate the world. The Sages explain that Hashem's original plan of creation called for six thousand years of existence divided into three equal segments. The first of them allowed the world to remain spiritually void, the second demanded the dissemination of the Torah's truths and the final segment was designated for the years of Mashiach. (see Mesichta Avoda Zara 9a) Prior to Avrohom Avinu, the first segment was drawing to a close with practically no trace of Torah ideals or people to personify Hashem's truths and ethical lessons. The sad reality was that not one person existed who could be entrusted with the sacred task of furthering the world's spiritual development.

Suddenly, out of nowhere emerged the perfect candidate. Avrohom Avinu, born to a family of idolators discovered the truth of Hashem and developed into the pillar of the world. His contagious and uncontrollable love for his newly discovered Creator inspired everyone who came within his midst to sign up to the program. Within a span of fifty years there was not a person in the world who had not heard of Avrohom Avinu and his principles of faith.

In addition to Avrohom's personal lessons Hashem extended these truths through miracles and revelations revolving around Avrohom Avinu. Until this point Hashem's overt involvement in this world was limited to severe punitive responses to mankind's wrongs. Avrohom Avinu, however, merited Hashem's constant protection manifested through open tangible

miracles. These experiences convinced the world of Hashem's existence and involvement and eventually led them to crown Avrohom as the prince of Hashem.

Avrohom Avinu's story is perfect testimony to Hashem's system of sovereignty. During those days one could never have imagined how the world would shape up. Virtually no one was on the proper path or even reflected interest in getting there. Yet, Hashem's system of sovereignty called for the world's accelerated upswing. Immediate action needed to transpire with a relentless commitment to the furtherance of truth. The answer came within the system of free will and the world was privileged to the shining beacon of Avrohom Avinu. Hashem inspired, guided and protected Avrohom Avinu throughout his struggle until the world was eventually pointed in the direction of perfection.

The Prophet Yeshaya reminds the Jewish people that their path is never concealed from Hashem. The world is constantly moving towards its ultimate purpose with the Jewish people playing the lead role in this development. Hashem spares no effort in accomplishing His goal and, as we learn from Avrohom Avinu's era, steps in and guides the entire world towards its necessary spiritual climax.

This timely insight is so apropos for our times. The rapid moral decline in our times coupled with mass rejection of the practice of Judaism are certainly significant factors for despair. The descending direction of the world's population through secularism and immorality projects its ultimate detachment from Hashem. However, Hashem declares that He never loses sight of His world and His people. He secured Avrohom Avinu's appearance in his appropriate time and inspired him to lead his nearly insurmountable campaign. In this same vein Hashem secured the salvation of His world through the eventual arrival of Mashiach. Hashem pledged to send the world an individual of Davidic descent wiser than Shlomo Hamelech blessed with a similar prophetic level to that of Moshe Rabbeinu. Mashiach, like Avrohom Avinu, will totally devote himself to Torah and Mitzvos, educate and inspire all Jewish people in the Torah's ways and fight the wars of Hashem. (see Rambam Hilchos M'lochim 2:4 and Hilchos Tshuva 9"2) Hashem never forsook His world or people and secured their spiritual perfection since the beginning of time. Mashiach's successful campaign, like Avrohom Avinu's, will eventually educate the entire world and bring them to the true recognition of Hashem in its fullest capacity.

May we merit to witness this speedily in our days. © 2005 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

Because Avram and Sarai (as they were then known) did not have any children, she gave him her maidservant, Hagar, so that he could father a

child with her. When Hagar became pregnant, she lost respect for Sarai, at which point Sarai became upset with Avram (Beraishis 16:1-5). Most commentaries, as well as the first opinion presented in Beraishis Rabbah (45:6), explain that Sarai was upset that Avram did not stand up for her when Hagar began belittling her. Rashi, though, gives this as his second explanation. The first reason he gives for Sarai being upset with Avram (which is the second opinion in BR) is that he didn't include her when he asked G-d for children. Instead of saying that "we (meaning he and Sarai) are childless," Avram had told G-d that "I am childless" (15:2). Sarai felt that had Avram incorporated her in the prayer, she would be the one carrying his child.

It seems strange that, after giving Hagar over to Avram with the express purpose of allowing him to father a child with her, when Hagar does become pregnant, Sarai gets upset with Avram. If the issue was his not defending her, the anger is justified. But Sarai appeared to come to terms with not having a child and Hagar bearing Avram a child, which is why she convinced him to take Hagar as his second wife in the first place. Why is she upset with him about it now?

The Shiras Dovid asks a similar question, saying that that the verses imply that it was Hagar's disrespect that caused Sarai to get upset with Avram, not his prayer. The non-inclusion was a valid issue to raise even if Hagar had not belittled Sarai, so why is she bringing it up now?

However, the fact that Avram's prayer could be answered without Sarai being the mother of his child is not irrelevant to Hagar's belittling. After all, it was the fact that Hagar was able to get pregnant so quickly, while Sarai remained childless (despite many years of marriage) that caused Hagar to lose respect for her mistress. In essence, it was (or at least Sarai thought it was) Avram's not including her in his prayer that allowed the situation to develop to the point that Hagar put her down.

Sarai may very well have brought up Avram's prayer with him previously, in the context of her not having children. But she realized that what was done was done, and she had to deal with the situation as it was, as productively as possible. This meant finding another means for Avram to father a child, even if she wouldn't be the mother. And while she expected Hagar to bear this child, she never expected to be derided about it afterwards. It was this unforeseen consequence of Avram's not including her in his prayer that Sarai brought up at this point.

This would also explain why Rashi mentions the prayer issue first, and then adds that she was also upset because Avram didn't defend her (despite Beraishis Rabbah having the opposite order). There were two reasons why Sarai was upset with Avram: He allowed the situation to develop in the first place, and took no corrective measures after it had occurred.

Rashi is relating to us both reasons, in chronological order.

It is not uncommon for a setback (even a minor one) to thwart one's pursuit of a goal, or for the inability to accomplish things in the best way possible, to lead to not trying to achieve them at all. Sarai felt that Avram could have had children with her even without marrying Hagar first, had he only included her in his prayer. Yet this did not prevent her from making every effort to help Avram have children, even if it meant giving her maidservant to him as a second wife.

May G-d give us the strength to persevere in all of our endeavors, despite any obstacles that may hinder their completion. ©2002 Rabbi D. Kramer

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

"**H**e said to Avram, 'Know with certainty that your offspring will be aliens in a land not their own... for four hundred years.'" (15:13)

Our Sages teach that our ancestors were not in Egypt for 400 years; rather, they were there for only 210 years. How then was the promise that Avraham's descendants would be aliens for 400 years fulfilled? One answer given is that the 400 years began with the birth of Yitzchak, who himself lived as an alien among the Canaanites and Plishtim (Philistines).

In this light, R' Yekutiel Yehuda Halberstam z"l (1905-1994; Klausenberger Rebbe) suggests a novel interpretation of our verse. Earlier in the parashah (13:17), we read that Hashem said to Avram (Avraham), "Arise, walk about the land through its length and breadth! For to you I will give it." The Aramaic translation Targum Yonatan explains that this walking was a kinyan chazakah / an act of legal acquisition by which Avraham acquired the Land (see also Bava Batra 100a).

Accordingly, Eretz Yisrael already belonged to Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, and it was the Canaanites and the Plishtim who were the true aliens in the Land. Even so, Avraham later (23:4) refers to himself as an "alien" in the Land. Thus, our verse can be read, "Know with certainty that your offspring will [live as if they are] aliens in a land not their own," i.e., not belonging to the people who will exercise control over it. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Halichot Chaim p.217) ©2012 S. Katz and torah.org

