

RED ALERT!

LECH L'CHA

*by Rabbi Eddie Davis (RED)
of the Young Israel of Hollywood -
Ft. Lauderdale (Florida)*

DIVREI TORAH

- Our Patriarch Avraham was destined for greatness from a very early age. In the Midrash, the Rabbis try to figure out at what point in Avraham's life he was aware of the Almighty, Creator of the Universe. Whether it was very early, or as an adult, he still stands alone in the world at that time. He was required to live a nomadic life, a life that would take him from Ur Kasdim (possibly Iraq) to Charan (possibly on the Syrian-Turkish border), a distance of over 600 miles, and then to travel south from there to Canaan, a distance of about 450 miles. This trip took him through different lands with different cultures, customs, language, climate, and character traits of people. The majority of his life he was totally distant from the original family which settled in the Charan area. A lot of this trip took him through hostile populations. The nomadic life was seemingly to separate him from existing peoples who rejected him as an outcast and a strong-willed personality. Just being told by Hashem to leave his family and home was in and of itself a mandate that would form a style of

life. He was not permitted to settle in any one region for any length of time.

- When he reached Canaan, he was still living a nomadic life. The Midrash describes this lifestyle to be divinely mandated to spread the beautiful perfume in the region. What good is perfume if it cannot be spread so that people can enjoy the aroma? This was a test for Avraham, one that was needed to display what he was and what he developed, and his ideas to the outside world. Avraham's nomadic life did attract spiritual followers who were certainly enamored by Avraham and Sara's open hospitality and elevated way of life. What happened to these people is not known. It could be that their attraction to Avraham was based more on his personality and the home that Avraham and Sara conducted rather than the spiritual teachings of both of them.

- After the generation of the Tower of Babel the division among the people also caused strife to exist between these nations who could not communicate well with each other. The strife led to a war mentality that spread throughout the region. The civilized world as it was back then became a world of hand-to-hand combat. Four thousand years ago the Hittites, who were settled in the area of Turkey, invaded the south through Canaan and had a major military encounter with Egypt. These battles

between formidable foes were primarily located in Syria and in Canaan. It was this backdrop which makes the story of the war between the Four Kings and the Five Kings simple to accept; it was part of the reality of life in ancient times. When the Torah introduced us to Nimrod in last week's parsha of No'ach, it designates Nimrod as a warrior and set the tone for the warlike life that people had yet from his day onward. The Midrash puts Avraham in Nimrod's clutches. It was Nimrod who cast Avraham into a fiery furnace according to the Midrash. That Midrash is so accepted that most commentators feel that the encounter between Avraham and Nimrod is one of the ten tests that Avraham had to endure. The fact that he survived such an encounter is proof of Hashem's protection of Avraham. The military and warlike conditions of the time overwhelmed the entire land of Canaan during Avraham's nomadic life in the region.

- In this story of Avraham, Hashem is the one who commanded him to make ALIYA, to leave his father and the family back in Charan and to live in the spiritually elevated area of Canaan, the Promised Land. The divine mandate to make aliya is discussed in the Midrash at the end of Parshat No'ach, where it states that Terach had died. If Terach was actually still alive then the question

was raised about a son defying the parent's wishes to make aliya. This is something raised in the Midrash which we see in America to be a topical issue. The other form of aliya that the Rabbis offer as a model is the mandate that Avimelech later gives to Yitzchak to kick him out of the P'lishtim lands and live elsewhere in Canaan. This raises two models of the modern day aliya experience. One is when the host country in exile is no longer a welcoming site for Jewish living. Discrimination in a hostile environment is the Avimelech motivation for Jews of that country to make aliya. The Avraham model of aliya is more like a Nefesh B'Nefesh type of message that we see in North America. This has enveloped thousands of Jewish people in North America who have heard their own form of Lech L'cha, deciding to make aliya because of the spirit of a divine message of Avraham, and not because they are running from a hostile environment.

- The Brit Bein HaB'tarim, the Covenant Between the Pieces, was the second covenant that Hashem made with mankind according to the writings of Rabbi Dovid Tzvi Hoffman. The first was the covenant after the Flood in which Hashem promised not to wipe out humanity again through flood. The second covenant on the other hand was to establish the Chosen People on earth through

Avraham's descendants. The people would be purified first by the terrible oppressive slavery in the "iron furnace" of Egypt. Then they would exit Egypt with much wealth and return to the Promised Land. Hashem was telling Avraham at this time not only that he would inherit the land, but also about the nature of that inheritance, that the land had tremendous quality, spiritually and materialistically. Avraham displayed tremendous faith in Hashem and consequently Hashem rewards him for that Emunah, that faith. That would enable the descendants of Avraham to eternally live as spiritual guides for the rest of mankind throughout history. We are supposed to become the kingdom of kohanim and a holy nation. This was what Hashem meant when He told Avraham "your reward will be very great." (15:1)

- When Hashem tells Avraham to circumcise himself and his son Yishmael and the other males of his household, Avraham consults with his three comrades and dear friends, Aner, Eshkol, and Mamre. According to the Midrash the three friends were approached separately and each had different opinions that they offered to Avraham. Aner told him that it was a bad idea because Avraham would end up incapacitating himself. The relatives and the kings that Avraham had slain would come and kill him.

Eshkol told Avraham that he was an old man, the surgery would cause much blood loss, and he would end up dying. Mamre was the only one who gave positive advice, stating that God already saved him from a fiery furnace and had created many miracles to protect him, He would protect Avraham in this situation too (Tanchuma). The real question I ask: Why does Avraham consult with these people? Did he consult with them following the other tests that God had given Avraham? From what we know of Avraham the entire Midrashic line of thought here is challenging and perplexing. Avraham listened and obeyed every command that he heard from Hashem. Was there any question in doing it? Maybe Avraham was not consulting them; maybe he just wanted to know what these friends would think of him in doing something that in their minds made no sense whatsoever. Perhaps Avraham was not asking his comrades for advice about what to do, but rather to hear them so that he would feel that they would not be rejecting him when Avraham would perform the divine commandment. The Midrash in turn would symbolize the non-Jewish reaction to the commandments that the Jewish people have embraced. I do think that when the founders of Christianity wanted to appeal to the pagan world with their new religion, repealing the mitzva of circumcision was a pivotal decision made by those original

Christians in order to make their new religion palatable to the pagan world.

Questions by RED

From the text

1. How old was Avraham when he left Charan to go to Canaan? (12:4)
2. During the famine in Canaan, where did Avraham go? (12:10)
3. Who was winning the war between the Four Kings and the Five Kings? (Ch. 14)
4. Who were the three non-Jewish allies of Avraham? (11:24)
5. How many times is the word BRIT mentioned in the chapter in which Hashem tells Avraham to circumcise himself?

From Rashi

6. What three things does one suffer when he travels? (12:2)
7. What happened to Lot's father, Haran? (11:28)
8. What did the shepherds of Lot and the shepherds of Avraham argue about? (12:7)
9. Who was Amrafel, the king of Shinar (Babylonia)? (14:1)
10. The "refugee" came from the war of the Four and Five Kings to tell Avraham that his nephew Lot, was taken captive (14:13). Rashi says the refugee was Og. How could Rashi

state that this is not a Midrash, but the literal meaning of the verse "refugee"?

From the Rabbis

11. Why did Avraham accept Pharaoh's gifts while later he would reject the gifts offered him by the king of S'dom? (Abravanel)
12. What is Hashem's message to Avraham when Hashem compares Avraham's descendants to the stars in Heaven? (Megila 16a)
13. What transpired to cause Hagar not to feel that she was Sara's servant anymore? (Radak)

Midrash

14. Hashem told Avraham that his descendants would desire Eretz Yisrael because of all the sacrifices offered in the Holy Temple. What was Hashem's answer to Avraham's question "what will happen when the Holy Temple is destroyed?" (Megila 31b)

Haftara - Yishayahu

15. The choice of the Haftara is based on two words. What are they? (40:8)

Relationships

- a) Avraham - Lot (two answers)
- b) Sara - Yiska
- c) Yishmael - Par'o
- d) Avraham - Midyan
- e) No'ach - Canaan

ANSWERS

1. 75.
2. To Egypt.
3. The Four Kings.
4. Aner, Eshkol, and Mamre.
5. Thirteen
6. The ability to bear children, one's wealth is diminished, and travel harms one's reputation.
7. He died in the fiery furnace in Ur Kasdim.
8. Lot's shepherds allowed their animals to graze from others' fields, arguing that the Land was given to Avraham, and Lot was currently Avraham's heir.
9. Nimrod
10. Rashi quotes a verse in D'varim (3:11), that states that Og was the refugee from Refa'im.
11. Had Avraham rejected Pharaoh's gifts, he would have aroused Pharaoh's suspicions about his wife being his sister.
12. Bnei Yisrael will be above all the others.
13. Once Hagar gave birth to Avraham's son, she no longer felt like Sara's servant.
14. Hashem will accept our reciting the sacrifices in our prayers.
15. "Avraham, who loved Me."

Relationships

- a) Nephew; and according to the Midrash, Brothers-in-Law
- b) Same person
- c) According to the Midrash, Hagar was Pharaoh's daughter, therefore Grandson & Grandfather
- d) Father & Son
- e) Grandfather & Grandson