



LECH L'CHA 5786

The question is an important one: where exactly was Avraham situated when HaShem first appears to him with the command to leave his "land, birthplace and father's house?" (12:1). Ibn Ezra (ad loc) maintains that Avraham was at his birthplace, in Ur Kasdim. Ramban (ad loc) takes strong issue with this view and argues that "if so, it would follow that Avram was the central figure in the journey from his father's house by command of G-d, while Terach, his father, voluntarily went with him. Yet Scripture says, 'And Terach took Avram his son...' (11:31), which teaches us that Avram followed his father, and that it was by Terach's counsel [and not Avraham's] that Avram went forth from Ur of the Chaldees to go to the land of Canaan!"

Ramban therefore argues that HaShem's command to Avraham took place in Charan and not, as Ibn Ezra asserts, in Ur Kasdim. Rav Soloveitchik, however, in an exceptional shiur, comes to the defense of Ibn Ezra, and offers an impressive explanation to counter Ramban's

argument that the verse "And Terach took Avram his son" (11:31) is proof positive that HaShem did not speak to Avraham in Ur Kasdim. The Rav's point of departure is to wonder why Terach chose to leave Ur Kasdim in the first place? After all, Ur Kasdim was then a technologically sophisticated and highly developed society, and moreover, Terach was a greatly respected member of the royal council. Why would he abandon the luxury of his origins and choose to emigrate to Charan, a pastoral, backward town, agriculturally underdeveloped and primitive?

Furthermore, the Rav asks: Rashi (on 15:15), quoting the Midrash (B'reishit Rabba 38:12), states that Terach actually did teshuva and repented his idolatrous ways. But when did Terach make this major spiritual decision, and what motivated him to do so? The Rav argues and believes that it was none other than Avraham who influenced his father and triggered the stirring of repentance that ultimately convinced Terach that all he had previously stood for was absurd and false, and that what his son had been preaching all along was correct and reflected the Divine truth. "Father and son, formally locked in combat, now started together on the march to Canaan."

But if so, why, as Ramban asks, did the Torah attribute the family's

departure from Ur Kasdim to Terach and not Avraham? Did not HaShem issue the LECH L'CHA directive solely to Avraham? The Rav gives this important answer. Apparently, the Torah at this point was more interested in the metamorphosis of Terach than Avraham. Avraham's greatness will soon become evident. What the Torah, however, wished to underscore was how the son was successful - indeed, victorious - in convincing his father to discard and reject his pagan past and embrace the ethical monotheism of his son.

Avraham, ever sensitive to what it must have taken for his father to make this difficult decision, saw in his father, a true hero. And in recognition of this heroic choice, Avraham chooses to remain in the background. "Let my father deserve the credit for taking us out of Ur Kasdim." Therefore, it was recorded in the Torah: "And Terach took Avram his son ... and they went forth from Ur Kasdim to go to the land of Canaan." It was then, at this juncture, that Terach became a ba'al teshuva, choosing to begin his life anew with Avraham, now more than happy to allow his father to take the lead and assume the responsibility for the move to Charan.

From this keen observation, Rav Soloveitchik draws two important lessons. The first: that no matter how

emmeshed a person is in a religiously delinquent way of life, and no matter his age, one can always experience HIRHUREI T'SHUVA and repent, and thus redeem one's life with acts of courage and virtue.

And the second lesson: that a great teacher must be one who can educate and train, not just others, but first and foremost his family to follow his ideals and deeds. For sure, it must have been a monumental task for Avraham, the son, to contend with a father who was clearly hostile to his child's beliefs. In fact, Chazal tell us (B'reishit Rabba 38:28) that Terach, "infused with hatred and insanity", even conspired with Nimrod, the tyrant, to destroy Avraham, both physically and spiritually. And yet, with patience, persistence, and, as the Rav put it, with due honor - KIBUD AV - Avraham succeeded admirably in turning his father around. Often it is the father who bears the responsibility to transmit our sacred heritage to his offsprings. But, as it often occurs, especially in our generation of ba'alei t'shuva, the reverse is also not at all surprising. Many a family has become observant because of a decision by parents to send their child to a yeshiva, and in the course of that child's growth in Torah and mitzvot and joy in becoming religious, the boy ends up influencing his parents to assume a more observant Jewish life-style.

However, with all the credit to Avraham notwithstanding, a final word about Terach is in order. The Midrash states that he merited Olam Haba (B'reishit Rabba 38:12), and amazingly, that it was he who chose the Land of Israel as the family's destination even before Avraham was commanded to set out from Ur Kasdim (Midrash HaGadol, B'reishit 11:27). But even more remarkable is how the Jewish people owe their entire ancestry to Terach's immediate descendants. Terach had two sons besides Avraham: Nachor and Haran (B'reishit 11:26). Haran's daughter was Sara, Avraham's wife. Nachor's son, B'tu'el was the father of both Rivka - later to be wed to Yitzchak, and Lavan whose two daughters, Rachel and Leah, were married to Yaakov. Moreover, Lavan's concubine was the mother of Bilha and Zilpa, the maidservant-wives of Yaakov. In sum then, all the tribes of Israel stemmed from Terach's offspring. Quite something!

The message here cannot be overstated. One should never underestimate the reverberating impact and the percussive benefits, that can accrue to a person, both in his life and beyond, when in response to a critical crossroad, he chooses "the road less traveled". True, the rewards of such a worrisome and nerve-racking choice may not be readily apparent or immediately forthcoming, but by

having enormous patience and believing in the righteousness of the cause and subscribing to its moral teachings, this commitment is enough to guarantee that at some point in the future, perhaps long after the father is gone from this world, his sacrifice and courage will be rewarded when his grateful descendants rightly attribute their religious/ethical virtue to him!

We should live for ourselves, but even more, we must live beyond ourselves!