

The Internal World

Man lives in two worlds: the world of the physical, and the world of philosophy and morality. G-d's influence on Abraham directed him towards truths he could not achieve independently. How much more so must we, lesser individuals, reflect on correcting our psychological and philosophical flaws.

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Weekly Parsha

Lech Lecha

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"Now, say that you are my sister so that I will prosper and I will live on your account." (Beresheit 12:23)

In some instances the Torah's attitude towards women seems somewhat troublesome. Bluntly stated, the

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Lech Lecha

Internal Perfection

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Written by students

Lech Lecha 12/1-2: "Hashem said to Abram, 'Go for yourself from your land, from your birthplace, and from your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation; I will bless you, and I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.'" At first glance all seems well; Abram is to venture forth on a journey that willbring him to a land

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RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Written by students

In Genesis Chapter 11 verses 31 and 32, the Torah recites that Terach took Abraham, Lot and Sarah and moved from Ur Casdim towards the land of Canaan. They ultimately settled in Charan where Terach lived until 205 years old. He thereafter died in Charan. Rashi tells us that Abraham actually was commanded by G-d to leave 60 years prior to Terach's death. However, the Torah does not want to publicize the fact that Abraham left his father when he was an old man, lest he be suspected of disregarding the commandment of honoring his father. This concern is evident because the Torah never portrayed Terach's real identity as an idol worshipper. However, this contributed to the fact that G-d commanded Abraham while his father was still alive, to leave his land, his birthplace and his father's

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Lech Lecha

Internal Perfection



house and go to the land that I (G-d) will show you.

Rashi on verse 1 of Chapter 12 asks a very simplistic but insightful question. G-d is telling Abraham to leave his birthplace. This is puzzling because his birthplace was Ur Casdim, from where Abraham had already left. He had previously departed to Canaan with his father and settled in Charan. Rashi answers that G-d informed Abraham that he should depart further from Charan and leave his fathers home. Furthermore, G-d tells Abraham to move to a land that I will show you. Rashi comments that G-d did not show him the land immediately in order to make the land more beloved in his eyes. Additionally, G-d's command to leave is verbose and seems redundant: leave "your land, birthplace and your father's house". Are all these terms necessary to describe the same place? Rashi explains that G-d wanted to reward him for each and every word that G-d uttered with respect to his departure from Charan.

Upon closer scrutiny, Rashi's explanations raise several questions: Why didn't G-d simply state "leave Charan" and not as Rashi equates it, as a further departure from Ur Casdim. We must also attempt to understand in what manner does G-d's concealing the identity of the land make it more appealing. Additionally, what is Rashi's intent in stating that G-d wanted Abraham to be rewarded for each word uttered? What is the correlation between the numerous elements commanded to Abraham, and the reward and the ethical perfection of Abraham?

Abraham was raised in Terach's home, which was a household that worshipped idols. Despite these influences, Abraham recognized G-d as the source of reality. This attests the strength of Abraham's intellectual conviction. He elevated himself to a higher level of perfection. However, even Abraham was subject to the influences of his father's home. A human being has a certain underlying base, which throughout his life gives him a strong sense of security. This base usually stems from ones childhood. Throughout one's life it provides a sense of comfort and well being which allows the individual to become a functioning member of society.

If one were to analyze man's need for this sense

of security it originates from the same emotion responsible for mans desire for idolatry. Human nature demands certain assurances in order to protect and shield man from his insecurities. The Pagans sought the protection of all different G-ds, to shield them from all impending disasters of the outside world, real or imagined.

G-d, by instructing Abraham to leave Ur Casdim, was teaching Abraham an important concept essential for Abraham's quest for moral perfection. Ur Casdim represented to Abraham his base of security. He originally departed Ur Casdim to go to Canaan, but he stayed in Charan. Charan was not their ultimate destination. Politically he had to depart from Ur Casdim, but Charan was close enough in proximity to offer the security of Ur Casdim, to which Abraham had a strong emotional attachment. It was his home base and gave him psychological security. Abraham had difficulty in abandoning the security of Ur Casdim. Rashi therefore explains, G-d commanded him to leave his birthplace, although he was already in Charan. Charan represented an extension of Ur Casdim. Charan afforded him the same security as Ur Casdim. Therefore Rashi explains that he should depart further from Ur Casdim. A person's home affords a person a strong sense of psychological security. A home is not just a physical phenomenon but also a psychological phenomenon. The All Mighty was telling Abraham to leave behind this security.

Rashi explains that G-d told Abraham to leave his "Artzicha", hometown, "Moladit'cha", his birthplace and "Bais Avicha", his father's home in order to give him reward on each aspect of his removal. Each one of these ideas gives a person unique psychological comfort, which the perfected individual must abandon.

"Artzicha", his land represents a certain familiarity with a place, which affords one the security an alien land cannot afford.

"Moladit'cha", his birthplace, one's childhood hometown nourishes a certain special nostalgic feeling in a person, which comforts him throughout his life.

"Bais Avicha", his father's household. An individual's parents provide him with a strong sense of security. This security emanates from

childhood, whereby the parent provided for and took care of all the child's needs.

G-d was telling Abraham to abandon all the psychological and emotional security that he derived from these phenomena. A wise man abandons all his psychological insecurities and takes comfort only in reality. The Creator of the world, G-d, is his security. Therefore Rashi is teaching us that G-d told Abraham; leave behind the emotional security of your childhood, your land, your birthplace and your father's home.

"Throw your bundles to G-d and His will be your portion". A chacham, (wise person) only seeks security in a system of ideas and concepts, with Hashem, G-d, at the source of this system. His security is the halachic system which gives him comfort and guides him though life. His security is solely placed in the fact that he is living a life that is in line with the ultimate reality. Attaining this sense of security demands an abandonment of the psychological and emotional securities that most individuals require. It is an extremely painful and difficult task, but it is essential for a chacham in order to reach true perfection. This perfection demands that Hashem is his sole source of security.

These insights can also explain why G-d did not choose to show Abraham the land immediately. If G-d were to have shown Abraham the land at the time of his departure from Charan, he would merely have attached his need for security, to the new land. He would substitute the security furnished by his hometown with the security of his newly promised land. Thus, G-d did not show him the land yet, as Rashi explains, in order that it should be cherished in his eyes. The love Abraham was ultimately going to have for the land would be based upon the halachic system and his relationship with Hashem as the source of that system. The love was not the love that an ordinary man displays for his homeland, which usually, simply represents his security. It was a qualitatively different type of love whereby Abraham would find his need for security fulfilled in his relationship with G-d. Therefore, G-d did not tell Abraham where he was going because the mind would naturally look for a substitute source of security. Only by Abraham's aspiring to this higher level of perfection, would he find G-d as his source of security. His ultimate love for the land would thus be based upon its special role in the halachic (Torah) system. It could not be based on an emotional sense of chauvinism. Only after reaching this level of perfection could G-d bless Abraham and make him into a great nation "goy gadol." This blessing would therefore not be perceived by Abraham as a means to find security in his posterity, but rather as the ideal for establishing Am Yisroel, the Jewish people. ■

Torahas been accused of blatant chauvinism. However, this criticism is often based upon simplistic interpretations of difficult passages. These passages deserve careful analysis and consideration. A conclusion that these passages reflect a chauvinistic attitude is the result of a remarkably shallow approach to the understanding of these passages. It is not possible to analyze every instance in which the Torah is subject to this superficial criticism. However, there is one instance found in this week's parasha that is instructive. It serves as an excellent example of a difficulty that may be superficially explained as an example of chauvinism but in fact has a completely different and compelling explanation.

Avram follows Hashem's instructions. He travels to the land of Canaan and settles there. Suddenly, a famine strikes the land. Avram is faced with the challenge of saving his family and his flocks. He decides that he has no alternative other than to seek temporary refuge in Egypt. In Egypt there is food and he can retreat there until the famine in Canaan passes.

But establishing himself in Egypt poses its own dangers. The Egyptians are an immoral and lawless people. Avram recognizes that as a stranger in this foreign land he will be prey for all those that covet his possessions. Even his marriage to Sari will not be respected by this lawless and lustful people. Sari is an attractive woman. To the Egyptians, she will be an exotic beauty. She will be coveted and Avram's marriage to Sari will be an obstacle that an Egyptian suitor will want to eliminate in the simplest most expedient manner – through murdering Avram.

Avram is faced with a dilemma. He must escape the famine of Canaan. But Egypt seems even more dangerous!

Avram develops a solution to his dilemma and presents it to Sari. He asks Sari to present herself to the Egyptians as his sister. In other words, she should conceal her marriage to Avram. Avram explains his reasons for this request. He asks her to present herself as his sister so that the Egyptians will treat him well and he will survive the sojourn in this dangerous foreign land.

Although we can understand Avram's fears and we can accept the inevitability of his solution, his explanation of his motives to Sari seems quite bizarre and at the least remarkably insensitive. We would expect Avram to enlist Sari's cooperation by first explaining the danger he will face if he is identified as her husband. He should then ask for her to save him by disguising their relationship. This does not seem to be Avram's approach. He does appeal to Sari to conceal their relationship. He explains to her that this is the only way to save his life. But he also tells Sari that by executing this masquerade he will be treated favorably by the Egyptians. It is hard to imagine a more insensitive or ill-chosen remark. Is

this the way to enlist one's wife's support? How would a normal woman react to this plea? Surely, her response would be anything but sympathetic! She would think, "What kind of person is my husband. He is asking me to willingly allow myself to be abducted by a stranger. And he tells me that I should do this so the Egyptians will treat him favorably! It's one thing for him to ask me to make this sacrifice in order to save his life. But what kind of boorish person would ask for this sacrifice so he can be treated well?" Was Avram so insensitive to Sari that he did not recognize that this would be her likely response?

The shallow response is to conclude that Avram – the first of the forefathers – was a chauvinist and completely incapable of appreciating the Sari's reaction. Furthermore, the fact that the Torah regards Avram as one of humanity's most righteous people clearly indicates that the Torah condones this attitude.

But let's consider whether this is a reasonable explanation of this incident. Even more amazing than Avram's presentation is Sari's response. She accepts Avram's suggestion without any criticism. She allows herself to be taken by Paroh and even after she is miraculously rescued does not confront Avram with even the mildest complaint. Now, one might respond that Sari was completely dominated by Avram. She had no mind of her own or the fortitude to confront her domineering spouse. But it is important to remember that Sari was not a passive individual. She did forcibly confront Avram on other occasions when she felt he was mistaken. When Avram took Hagar – Sari's servant – as a wife, Sari told Avram that she held him personally responsible for Hagar's haughty treatment of her. After the birth of Yitzchak, Sari insisted that Avram send away Yishmael – Avram's other son. It is amazing that Sari never rebuked Avram for this insensitivity!

But the inescapable conclusion is that Sari understood Avram's meaning and did not regard his remarks as insensitive. What was Sari's interpretation?

There is another obvious problem with Avram's presentation. Even if we assume that Avram was insensitive to Sari, we cannot fully explain Avram's behavior. Insensitivity may explain Avram mentioning that he wanted to secure favorable treatment. But insensitivity does not explain the order in which Avram presented his motivations. Even the most insensitive person would first plea for his life and only afterwards mention additional benefits he would accrue through his scheme. If Avram had said, "Say you are my sister so my life will be spared and – by the way – I will even be treated quite well," one might be tempted to explain his remarks as an expression of insensitivity. But Avram did not express his concerns in this order. First, he mentions that he will be treated well and then that he will be saved. This seems more like the

comments of a fool, not those of an insensitive person. Now, to claim that Avram was a fool is clearly preposterous!

This observation leads to a second conclusion. Avram was arguing that if Sari could secure favorable treatment for him, this treatment would lead to his being spared. He was presenting a plan to Sari. "Say you are my sister. This will result in me being treated well. Once I receive this treatment, my life will be spared." Sari fully understood Avram's plan. She had no criticism and she readily accepted it as the most reasonable solution to their problem. But to us – the reader – the plan still requires some explanation.

There is one other important element of Avram's presentation that cannot be overlooked. Avram told Sari that if she followed his plan, he would be spared on her account. How does this follow? It was true that the plan Avram concocted would remove him from immediate danger. But it would not provide him with protection. Yet, Avram argued that his plan would do more than remove a threat. Somehow, it would actually secure his safety. How would this be accomplished through Sari presenting herself as his sister?

Gur Aryeh provides the final details that completely explain Avram's behavior and Sari's response. Avram was entering Egypt as a foreigner. He has no friends or allies. He was a natural target for the Egyptians. His association with Sari placed him in even graver danger. Avram desperately needed a powerful ally and protector. But how could he secure this guardian? Avram realized that Sari could help. Her beauty would bring her to the attention of all elements of Egyptian society. If Sari revealed that Avram was her husband, the lowest strata would not have a second thought about murdering him in order to take Sari. But the nobility of society would not demean itself in this way. Alternatively, if Sari masqueraded as Avram's sister the noblest elements of society would line up to suit her. They would try to secure Avram's support by plying him with presents. Avram would become an important person – the friend and associate of nobility. Avram would have powerful protectors. No lustful commoner would lay a hand on him.

Now, Avram's remarks and Sari's reaction make perfect sense. Avram asks Sari to disguise herself as his sister. He explains to her that this will lead the nobility to court him in order to win Sari's hand. Once the members of Egypt's nobility become his guardians he will be safe. He will not long be an unknown foreigner – the target of every jealous criminal. He will be a dignitary – the friend of kings and princes. No one will dare harm him! He will be saved on her account.[1] ■

[1] Rav Yehuda Loew of Prague (Maharal), Gur Aryeh Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 12:13.

where his destiny is to be fulfilled. And indeed the first Rashi in Lech Lecha seems to support this theme. Regarding the words "Go for yourself", Rashi comments: "For your pleasure, and for your benefit. There I will make of you a great nation, whereas here you do not merit children. And furthermore, you will benefit by going, for thereby I will make your name known in the world."

We see in the Torah, however, that Abram's life is far from the dream one might imagine for themselves; Abram is always on the move, never truly settling down, continually journeying while constantly undergoing various trials and tribulations. This is born out from the very command G-d told Abram; namely, what does G-d mean when he tells Abram to go "to the land that I will show you"? Where is Abram to go right now? And so the Ramban comments on the words "to the land that I will show you" that Abram was a wayfaring nomad wandering like a lost sheep. (See also Rashi, 20:13).

Another question arises on closer inspection of the text. There is a factual inconsistency in the pasuk (verse). G-d tells Abram to go from his land, his birthplace, and from his father's house; however, at the end of parshas Noach, Abram already left his birthplace and settled in Haran. Rashi observes the question and offers an answer: "Had he not already left there with his father and come to Haran? But [G-d] said to him as follows: Go yet further from there, and leave the house of your father." Nevertheless, the pasuk should have written the chronological sequence of such events, namely, first to leave his father's house and then his birthplace and his land?

Regarding the land that G-d will show Abram Rashi comments: "He did not reveal the land to him immediately, in order to make it precious in his eyes, and to give him reward for each and every statement..." How does not knowing such information make the land more loving in Abram's eyes? If Abram does not know where he is going, there exists no love-object for Abram to imagine.

If we take a brief look into Abram's spiritual journeys thus far we can better understand the "Lech Lecha" command. Abram's perception of G-d and religious convictions came about, not through emotional religious feelings or perceptions about G-d, but rather, as the Ramban explains, through an intellectual journey of the mind; Abram was truly the first great investigator who established the proper religious methodology for future generations, namely, one arrives at the truth through investigation, knowledge, and understanding, not emotional religious perceptions. The E'tz Yosef in the sidur O'tzer Tephilos explains that the reason why the Amidah specifies the "G-d of Abraham", "G-d of Isaac", and "G-d of Jacob" (joining G-d's name with each patriarch) rather than saying collectively, the "G-d

of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob", is so that one should not think that the reason why Isaac and Jacob believed in G-d was because they were simply following their great father's traditions. Rather, each of them was an investigator (following the methodology of their father) regarding their spiritual life.

Abram's religious investigations led not only to philosophical knowledge regarding G-d but psychological knowledge regarding idolatry. The primitive idolater assumes that his emotions are the baseline of the mind and proceeds from there. Abram said that these feelings, drives, and powerful emotions are no different than phenomena that exist in the external world, except that they exist in the internal world. When one then proceeds to analyze these internal phenomena just as one would use their mind to investigate external phenomena it becomes evident that the primitive religious emotions are not a determinant of reality.

The Lech Lecha command was now an opportunity for Abram to continue his religious journey by undergoing a physical journey. Abram discovered that a person's emotions and what he might believe in so strongly are nothing more than phenomena that can be analyzed and broken down.

In Lech Lecha, G-d tells Abram that there is another group of powerful feelings that now must be analyzed and understood using this same methodology, namely, the emotional sense of security and attachment to Abram's county, birthplace and father's home. Hence, the order of G-d's command was not in terms of the physical events of leaving but rather the psychological. Abram first had to attack the periphery of the emotion, his attachments to his country, his land, and his birthplace and then could proceed to analyze his attachment and sense of security derived from the family, specifically his father.

Furthermore, we can now understand why G-d did not identify to Abram his destination; if Abram knew which land was his final address he would have simply transferred his emotions to that location. Abram had to be a nomadic wanderer to truly appreciate the sense of assurance one derives from a permanent home. And once Abram understood this emotion he could break free from its domain. These emotions, it should be noted, are by no means against the ways of the Torah; the stability of a permanent home and family are important and necessary for most people to grow and mature. But it is important to recognize just how powerful these emotions can be and not to let them interfere with one's spiritual development. For Abram, however, the only security and emotional fulfillment could be from his relationship to G-d.

The Torah, recognizing the powerful and sensitive emotional attachments to family, hid the

fact that when Abram left his father's house Terah was still alive. Rashi comments at the end of parshas Noach that "when Abram left Haran many years of Terah's lifetime still remained at the time of Abram's departure. Why then did Scripture put the death of Terah ahead of the departure of Abram? So that the matter should not be publicized to everyone, so they would say, 'Abram did not fulfill the precept of honoring his father for he abandoned him when aged, and went off.'" But for Abram the only true relationship could be with G-d.

In conclusion, we can now understand why G-d's not revealing the land to Abram would make it precious in his eyes. By removing his emotional security from the idea of country, birthplace and home, Abram could now realize that his true security could only come from that which would bring him closer to G-d, namely, mitzvos ha'aretz, adhering to G-d's commandment to live in Eretz Yisroel. By breaking down the false concepts of a homeland, the true concept of Eretz Yisroel emerges, and hence, this land could now be truly precious in Abram's eyes; Abram's love could now be attached to the true concept of Eretz Yisroel, to the status of a commandment emanating from G-d, the adherence to which would ultimately bring Abram closer to G-d. ■



Abraham's Intelligence

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Genesis 13:5-9 reads:

“And also to Lote who traveled with Abraham, (he) had sheep, and cattle and tents. And the land could not sustain them (Abraham and Lote) to dwell together, for their possessions were great, and they could not dwell together. And there was a dispute between the shepherds of the flocks of Abraham, and between the shepherds of the flocks of Lote, and the Canaanite and the Prizzi then dwelled in the land. And Abraham said to Lote, ‘let there please not be no argument between me and between you, and between my she p h d s and between your shepherds, for men of brotherhood are we. Is not the entire land before you? Separate please from before me; if you move leftwards, I will go to the right, and if you move rightwards, I will go to the left.’”

We are struck with the question as to why G-d deemed this incident worthy of inclusion in His Torah. We must conclude that there are essential lessons we must derive from Abraham's behavior. It is evident that G-d wishes that mankind study Abraham's actions and moral perfections, otherwise, this account would not be included in the Torah. We must also be mindful that Abraham had not Torah from which to exemplify a learned moral code. Abraham acted based solely on his conclusion, the result of his independent thinking. We learn thereby, that man has the innate capacity to arrive at truths – i.e., G-d's desired human morality – by using his mind alone. Abraham displayed such ability. We must also ask why verse 7 states, “and the Canaanite and the Prizzi then dwelled in the land”.

What was the dispute between the two sets of shepherds? Rashi comments as follows:

“For the shepherds of Lote were wicked, and grazed their flocks in other fields (not belonging to them), and Abraham's

shepherds rebuked them for stealing. And they (Lote's shepherds) replied, ‘the land was given to Abraham, and to him, he has no inheritors, and Lote inherits from him, and this is not stealing. (And the verse states that the Canaanite and the Prizzi dwelled in the land, [meaning] Abraham had not yet merited the land as of yet.)”

We learn that Abraham and Lote had far too many animals that the land they dwelled on should provide for all of their flock and herds. Lote's shepherds resolved the problem by grazing in other people's pastures. This compensated for what their own fields lacked. As Rash states at the end of his commentary above, Lote's shepherds justified their act, refuting Abraham's shepherds accusation of stealing, by claiming, “the land is not stolen, but what Abraham is to rightfully inherit by G-d's oath, and Lote rightfully inherits Abraham. Therefore, the land is truly Lote's and we are not stealing.” But Abraham did not yet inherit the land of Canaan, as Rashi states, and as the verse indicates. Thus, Lote's shepherds were in fact robbers. Abraham's shepherds were correct.

We learn that Abraham had a great effect on his shepherds; they too followed in Abraham's moral perfections and understood that stealing is a crime. Abraham's shepherds also understood that one must rebuke another who acts immorally. Conversely, Lote's shepherds were not Abraham's adherents, and sought financial gain illegally, justifying their robbery with their faulty argument. Lote too was attracted to Sodom, a city of immorality: “The apple falls not far from the tree.” Although dwelling together, and although a close relative and neighbor of Abraham, Lote and his shepherds both failed to adhere to Abraham's teachings. They were moved more by emotional desires, than by rational thought and moral dictates.

Abraham was not simply a great thinker, abandoning idolatry and rising to such perfection that G-d communicated with him, but Abraham's perfection permeated his entire being; all of his

actions were an expression of the refined and perfected truths he learned on his own. What exactly was the problem in Abraham's mind, and how did Abraham decide to resolve the problem?

Abraham did not take the approach of his shepherds. This already proved futile. Abraham made two statements: 1) we must not contend with each other as we are brothers, and 2) “you choose your desired land first, and I will, take what is left.” What was Abraham's wisdom, and perfection? Why did Abraham feel this specific argument would appeal to Lote?

What do we know about Lote, that we may appreciate Abraham's plan? We know that Lote's shepherds were under Lote's directives. Thus, Lote must have permitted his shepherds to graze in alien fields. Abraham knew this too. Therefore, he directed his arguments to Lote, and not only the shepherds.

Perhaps Abraham's plan was to appeal to the very financial desire that Lote expressed by directing his shepherds to graze elsewhere. Allowing Lote the “choice”, appealed to Lote's desire for financial gain and freedom. Had Abraham selected a land first, this would infringe on Lote's ‘free expression’ of his desire. Additionally, Lote might be suspect that Abraham took the better portion; defeating the purpose Abraham set out to achieve. Being able to select his choice land, Lote was positioned, by Abraham's ingenuity, to satisfy his desire for monetary gain, and without any emotional compromise. Abraham gave Lote free expression of his financial drive, an offer Abraham knew Lote could not refuse (while also eliminating Lote's continued robbery).

But Abraham did not wish to have his rebuke remain focused on Lote, for this might cause Lote to dismiss Abraham's words. To allow Lote some latitude, and substantiating his words in reality, Abraham then said, “and there shall also be no argument between my shepherds and yours.” Abraham successfully penetrated Lote with his rebuke of “Lote's” immorality without being overly harsh. Amazingly, our Torah follows Abraham's morality, and states, “Certainly rebuke your people, and do not carry on it a sin.” (Lev. 19:17) Rabbi Reuven Mann once expounded, “the Torah demands rebuke, but that it should be performed in a manner where one does not outlet his ego in doing so. When rebuking another, one may fall prey to his egotistical drives, as he is now the “superior” in this dialogue. But not only in the area of ego is there a chance to fall prey, but also in the area of the success of one's goal. Here, Abraham was careful to allow Lote the necessary latitude so his arguments would be heeded, that Lote would allow Abraham's words to resonate within himself, without a defensive dismissal.

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My friend David Bakash suggested, Abraham allowed Lote to select his choice land first, as this accomplished two more goals; 1) Abraham performed an act of generosity, and 2) he gave face to Lote. "Following" the Sinai dictate stated by Rabbi Mann, Abraham did not follow any instinctual drives, but he also gave respect to Lote. He allowed Lote to exit the rebuke with self-respect, offering Lote the first choice

Lastly, why would an argument favoring "brotherhood" appeal to Lote? Why was such an argument necessary at all, if Abraham subsequently offered Lote advice, which appealed to his financial concerns? Wouldn't this latter, financial suggestion suffice, without Abraham making recourse to a "brotherhood" argument?

To begin, why does Abraham say there should be no argument between 'him and Lote', and only afterwards, "between both of their shepherds"? The argument was in fact, only among the shepherds! But we see that Abraham was indicating to Lote that he knew from whom the shepherds' immorality originated: it was from Lote. Therefore, Abraham addresses Lote first, and not the shepherds: there should be no argument between the two of them. (The shepherds' argument was only an expression of their masters' morality differences.) Abraham makes it clear to Lote that he knew that Lote was at fault. Merely allowing Lote the opportunity to remove his hands from theft by offering another parcel of land was not Abraham's objective. That would only address the practicality of stealing, but not Lote's imperfection. Abraham wished to elevate Lote's internal perfection, not simply addressing external practicality.

Abraham knew the argument of the shepherds, and suspected these were in fact the words of Lote: Lote justified robbery. Therefore, an abstract argument against robbery would again fail. What did Abraham achieve by mentioning brotherhood? What new facet of Lote's personality was to be reached?

Brotherhood means there exists some similarity between brothers. I would suggest that Abraham was pitting himself against Lote, in Lote's mind. By referring to "brothers", Abraham hoped that Lote would create a comparison in his mind between himself and Abraham. Perhaps such a comparison would highlight to Lote, the stark contrast and differences which existed between himself and Abraham, although brothers. Such a comparison may cause Lote to feel inadequate, as he will invariably sense that Abraham was morally superior by not grazing in other peoples' lands. Perhaps Abraham's plan was not to approach Lote with abstract morals, but to impose on him a feeling of inadequacy, humbling his ego, and awakening in Lote a desire to compensate his



Teaching abstract truths is the choicest method for helping one become more perfected. For in this fashion, man's highest element – his intellect – is what is affected. But if a person cannot be reached through his mind, alternate methods must be used. Hopefully, by appealing to one's emotions, he is now placed back on the track can lead him to ultimately realize truths, living based on

l'shma", "if one does not come to Torah truths out of a sincere desire for them, he will eventuate there." Based on this principle, we may initially harness emotional methods to help people eventually arrive at a true desire for Torah study and performance. Moses too used this method when enticing Yisro to remain with the Jews, as he offered him a leadership role. ■

Do Animals Have Rights?

Reader: I love the site. I have a question. I am taking a philosophy class and the topic is animal's rights. I was wondering if there is a way to prove that animals do not have rights, without using the Torah or G-d in the proof.

Thank you, Rafi.

Mesora: You must first define the term "rights". "Rights" means "objective rules". The question: who possesses the authority to mandate such rights on mankind? It cannot be man, as one man will oppose the rules of the other, thus, no objectivity. More primarily, that which imposes demands on man, cannot itself be man. Additionally, that which created the animal possesses the exclusive rights and rules governing animals, and this is G-d. So no, you cannot answer this, or any other area of objective laws, rights, morals, etc., without referral to G-d's words. As He is the sole cause of all existence, He remains to sole authority in all areas.

Reader2: I am a student in a philosophy class. I was wondering what the best objection to this argument involving animals having rights is. Here is the argument. Thank you!

1. If having the capacity for reason is necessary for having rights, then certain humans (infants, individuals with cognitive defects etc.) do not have rights.

2. But it is false that such humans fail to have rights.

3. Therefore, it is false that having the capacity for reason is necessary for having rights.

Mesora: The error in this argument is that 'possession of reason' guarantees rights to the possessor. But as we stated above, "rights" stem from G-d's words, the Creator of mankind, and He demands that even children must be treated as Torah laws specify. Thereby, your two following positions are refuted, as they are based on the error in number 1. □

Facing East

Reader: Why do many Jews face east when praying?

Mesora: I thank my friend Yaakove for pointing to this quote from Maimonides "Guide for the Perplexed", Book III, Chapter XLV. I initially explained that Abraham faced the East to oppose the idolaters, however, the opposite is true:

"The precepts of the tenth class are those enumerated in the laws on the Temple (Hilkot bet ha-behirah), the laws on the vessels of the temple and on the ministers in the temple [Hilkot kele ha-mikdash veba-ovedim bo]. The use of these precepts we have stated in general terms. It is known that idolaters selected the highest possible places on high mountains where to build their temples and to place their images. Therefore Abraham, our father, chose Mount Moriah, being the highest mount in that country, and proclaimed there the Unity of G-d. He selected the west of the mount as the place toward which he turned during his prayers, because [he thought that] the most holy place was in the West; this is the meaning of the saving of our Sages, "The 'Shekinah' (the Glory of G-d) is in the West" (J. T. Baba B 25a); and it is distinctly stated in the Talmud Yoma that our father Abraham chose the west side, the place where the Most Holy was built. I believe that he did so because it was then a general rite to worship the sun as a deity. Undoubtedly all people turned then to the East [worshipping the Sun]. Abraham turned therefore on Mount Moriah to the West, that is, the site of the Sanctuary, and turned his back toward the sun; and the Israelites, when they abandoned their G-d and

returned to the early bad principles, stood "with their backs toward the Temple of the Lord and their faces toward the East, and they worshipped the sun toward the East." (Ezek. viii.16). Note this strange fact. I do not doubt that the spot which Abraham chose in his prophetic spirit, was known to Moses our Teacher, and to others: for Abraham commanded his children that on this place a house of worship should be built. Thus the Targum says distinctly, "And Abraham worshipped and prayed there in that place, and said before G-d, 'Here shall coming generations worship the Lord'." (Gen. xxii. 14). For three practical reasons the name of the place is not distinctly stated in the Law, but indicated in the phrase, "To the place which the Lord will choose" (Deut.xii. 11, etc.). First, if the nations had learnt that this place was to be the centre of the highest religious truths, they would occupy it, or fight about it most perseveringly. Secondly, those who were then in possession of it might destroy and ruin the place with all their might. Thirdly, and chiefly, every one of the twelve tribes would desire to have this place in its borders and under its control; this would lead to divisions and discord, such as were caused by the desire for the priesthood. Therefore it was commanded that the Temple should not be built before the election of a king who would order its erection, and thus remove the cause of discord. We have explained this in the Section on judges (ch. xli.)."

As Abraham dwelled in the East, he faced west towards the Temple. Therefore, those who reside in the West face east to also face the Temple. □

Taken from "Getting It Straight" Practical Ideas for a Life of Clarity

Hookey

DOUG TAYLOR & RABBI MORTON MOSKOWITZ

"So what's wrong with playing hookey? We all need a break now and then, don't we?"

I paused to stab an oversize bite of the bagel, lox, and cream cheese floating on my plate amid a sea of shredded lettuce. I was having lunch with my friend, the King of Rational Thought, at a local restaurant. We were talking about responsibility.

"There's nothing wrong with taking a break," he said. "But you have to be sure of your motivation."

Before he could continue, a newscast from the television in the nearby bar grabbed our attention. The announcer was talking about the President's latest overseas trip. He would be gone for three weeks and planned to visit six countries. Foreign dignitaries were lining up their red carpets.

The King of Rational Thought looked at me thoughtfully and said, "Now there's a case in point."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"When a child has a certain responsibility, and he doesn't want to do it, what does he do?"

"He just doesn't do it," I said.

"That's one possibility," he said. "The other possibility is that he feels guilty, so he covers up his guilt by doing something else. Take school, for instance. For some kids, school is hard. Rather than work through it, as they know they should, some kids drop out and then cover their guilt by getting a job to make some quick money. True?"

"True," I replied. "But so what?"

"Now tell me," he said, "Was the President elected on a platform of solving domestic problems?"

"Absolutely."

"And has he done it?"

"Not in my opinion."

"So if that's true, why is he spending so much time on foreign matters?"

He paused, then went on. "It's simple. Solving domestic problems is hard, like school. And it's virtually guaranteed to make one or more

constituency groups mad. So it's easier for presidents - and this one is by no means the first - to travel and focus on foreign matters where they can look successful, just like the school dropout who makes a few bucks at his new job."

I pondered all this while skewering another gargantuan piece of the freshly baked bagel. "But we all do that sort of thing," I said. "Apart from the obvious - kids drop out of school and presidents don't solve domestic problems - what difference does it make?"

"Let's look at how this emotion, this playing hookey, affects your thinking process," said the King of Rational Thought as he rested his fork on his plate. "Consider this. When you look at something, there's usually an essential part and an unessential part. Take a car, for example. The essential part of the car is that it gets you from one place to another. But most people don't buy cars for that reason. They buy them for the image they project. So they lift a non-essential thing - the image - to the level of an essential.

"That's the same thing presidents do with foreign policy and school dropouts do around getting jobs," he said. "Each one is training his mind to lift the non-essential to the level of the essential.

"That," he concluded, "destroys your ability to think."



I laid my fork down and said, "So that's what you meant about being sure of your motivation when you take a break."

"Right," he said. "Just look at the implications of the word 'hookey.' It doesn't mean taking an appropriate, well-earned break. It means skipping out on doing what you should be doing."

I was silent for a long time.

Finally, I asked quietly, "If this kind of behavior is practiced by everyone from school kids to presidents, what does that say about our collective ability as a society to think clearly and solve problems?"

"I think you know the answer to that," he said.

I did. I just didn't like it. ■