



Abraham reasoned, "Stone and wood idols are created, something else created them. Man is also created and cannot control natural laws. If I go back in time, ultimately, I must arrive at One thing which gave existence to everything else." Abraham reasoned deductively, engaging the very intelligence God wishes man to use in all areas. God endorsed Abraham's intelligent lifestyle by selecting him as the forefather of Judaism.

ESTD
1997

JewishTimes

*Dedicated to Scriptural and Rabbinic Verification
of Jewish Beliefs and Practices*

Volume II, No. 3...Oct. 18, 2002

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Lech Licha

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"And it was when he approached Egypt, he said to Sarai his wife, 'I know that you are a woman of beautiful appearance.'" (Beresheit 12:11)

A famine afflicts the land of Canaan. Avram is forced to leave the land to seek sustenance. He travels to Egypt with his wife, Sarai and his nephew, Lote. Avram recognizes that Sarai is a woman of unusual beauty. He foresees

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Lech Licha The Internal World

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Transcribed 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 will bring him to a land 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 God told Abram; namely, what does God 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

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Abraham leaving his hometown at God's command. Perfection requires detachment from one's false securities.

The Uniqueness of the Nation

RIVKA OLENICK

"And I will take you to Me for a people, I will be to you a God, and ye will get to know that I am 'H your God, Who bringth you out from the burdens of Egypt.'" (Exodus 6:7)

"I am the God Who took you out of Egypt, now I will be a God to you and you will get to know Me as your God, and I will take you to Me as my people" seems to make better logical sense. However, the Torah was not written to satisfy anyone's expectations. What is the importance of first stating: "I will take you to Me for a people?" Li L'am, "My people" you will be to Me. What are we supposed to understand having established first that He "will" take us for a people? We have not yet come to Mt. Sinai. Yet, we are to be His entity of "My people," with no land, nothing that is rightfully ours, just us, a people. Shouldn't we first understand the idea that God took us and brought us out of Egypt? In Egypt we had no freedom, we were treated as aliens, and were oppressed in every way. Harsh laws and taxes were imposed on us. What did we have there besides all of these heavy burdens? What was our existence there?

We, the descendants of Abraham who sunk into the depths of helplessness living in the most pathetic state – as slaves! The slaves of the most corrupt, materialistic and animalistic nation. Total "strangers" we were, and so hated with no one to take up our cause. Doesn't the Torah command us to welcome the stranger, treat them kindly and uphold justice in their favor because we too were strangers - this basic truth that true justice is a prevailing concept of the Torah?

Other nations continue to distort justice and truth and use that against us. But what happened to our free will given to us by our Creator? We became numb in Egypt, we had a "slave mentality" as they say, and couldn't think for ourselves. He heard the

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Lech Licha

RABBI BERNARD FOX

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that the Egyptians will covet her. He fears that someone will kill him in order to take possession of Sarai. Avram is forced to ask Sarai to lie about their relationship. She is to tell the people that Avram is her brother. Avram will not pose a threat to a hopeful suitor. There will be no reason for the Egyptians to kill him. The pasuk quotes Avram's words to Sarai. We have translated the phrase loosely. In the original, the Hebrew word "na" is used. This word often is translated as "now." If we adopt this translation, the passage has a somewhat different meaning. Avram is saying to Sari, "Now, I know you are a woman of beautiful appearance." This translation poses a problem. It implies that Avram had been oblivious to Sarai's physical beauty. Now, as they prepare to enter Egypt, he suddenly realizes that Sarai is stunning. Why is Avram only now aware of Sarai's appearance?

Rashi offers two responses. Both are derived from the midrash. The first is that Avram and Sarai conducted themselves with extreme modesty. Sarai never flaunted her beauty. Avram had not previously carefully studied her appearance. As odd as this seems, the pasuk is to be understood in the strictest literal sense. Only now did Avram recognize her beauty. The second explanation is that the long journey to Egypt had made Avram aware of Sarai's unusual beauty. Normally, a long arduous trip would have a deep impact on a person's appearance. Even a normally attractive woman would appear less glamorous after many days on the road. However, Sarai's appearance was unaffected by the journey. This made Avram realize that Sarai was dazzling. The Egyptians would surely covet her.

Nachmanides explains that these are homiletic interpretations. Neither of these interpretations represents the simple meaning of the passage. He demonstrates that the term "na" does not really mean "now." It means "even until the present." Avram was saying to Sarai that he has realized in the past, and still recognizes her astounding beauty. The passage does not actually imply that Avram was not previously aware of Sarai's beauty. In short, Nachmanides explains that the pasuk has a simple meaning and also a homiletic interpretation. This is true of

many passages in the Torah. For example, in Sefer Shemot, the Torah tells us to "remember the Shabbat day in order to sanctify it." Our Sages derive from this passage the requirement to recite Kiddush at the advent of Shabbat. However, the simple meaning of the passage is that we are to observe Shabbat. In other words, we are not to perform work on this day. The passage has a simple, or literal, meaning and also an additional midrashic interpretation. There is one important difference between our pasuk and the above example. In the above example, the literal meaning and the alternative interpretation are complementary. Shabbat requires sanctification through observance. We are also required to recite the Kiddush.

This is not the case in our passage. In our pasuk, the two interpretations are mutually exclusive. The simple meaning of the pasuk is that Avram was always aware of Sarai's beauty. The Midrash's interpretation asserts that Avram was not previously aware of Sarai's appearance. Only now has he become cognizant of her beauty. This raises a question. How can both the simple interpretation and the midrash be true? It seems that accepting the truth of the midrash requires that we reject the simple meaning of the pasuk. Conversely, accepting the simple interpretation demands that we reject the midrash's comments! Nachmanides answers this question. He explains that the pasuk must be understood according to its manifest meaning. In other words, Avram was previously aware of Sarai's beauty. He was not oblivious! Our Sages do not intend to contradict this meaning. The midrash is not contradicting the simple message of the passage. Instead, the midrash is using the passage as an opportunity to provide an additional lesson. It is teaching us that Avram and Sarai conducted themselves with extreme modesty. This humility even prevailed in their relationship with each other. The Sages seize upon our passage to make this point. They create a homiletic interpretation of the passage in order to relate the lesson to the pasuk. However, they do not intend to suggest that this is the true meaning of the pasuk. And He took him outside and He said, "Look now towards the heavens and count the stars –

if you can count them." And He said, "So will be your descendants." (Beresheit 15:5) Hashem promises Avram that his children will be as numerous as the stars. Just as the stars cannot be counted, so Avram's progeny will be beyond counting. Rabbaynu Nissim – a 14th century scholar – asks an interesting question on this pasuk. The stars can be counted! Astronomers can calculate the number of stars in the sky! Yet, Hashem indicated to Avram that the stars cannot be counted. Rabbaynu Nissim offers two answers. In the first answer, he explains that there are many stars we cannot see. We observe a portion of the stars. Other stars fill the heavens. But, their light does not reach us. Hashem compared Avram's progeny to all the stars. This includes the visible and those we do not observe. We can count the visible stars, but not all of the stars that fill the heavens. In his second answer Rabbaynu Nissim explains that we can calculate the number of visible stars. However, we cannot count them. This is an important distinction. Imagine we wanted to determine the number of kernels of grain in a thirty-gallon container. We would not want to count the kernels. Instead, we would perform a calculation. We would count the number of kernels in a small measure – perhaps an ounce. We would then calculate the number of grains in the container. Astronomers calculate the number of stars in a similar fashion. They do not attempt to count the stars. According to this analysis, it is accurate that the stars cannot be counted.

"Your name should no longer be called Avram. And your name should be Avraham – for I have appointed you as the father of a multitude of nations." (Beresheit 17:5)

Hashem appears to Avram. He commands Avram to observe the mitzvah of circumcision. The Almighty also changes Avram's name. Hashem bestows the name of Avraham upon him. The Talmud in Tractate Berachot discusses the practical implications of this name change. Bar Kefra comments that referring to Avraham as Avram violates a positive command. This command is found in our pasuk. The Torah explicitly states that the proper name is Avraham. Rebbe Eliezer



violated. This command is also expressed in our pasuk. The Torah states that Avraham should no longer be referred to by this previous name. Most authorities do not accept this restriction as an actual law. Instead, they view this text as a homily.

The Sages are teaching us a lesson of moral, or theological importance. However, Magen Avraham disagrees. He maintains that the text establishes a legal prohibition. We are not permitted to refer to Avraham by his previous name. The Sages are disputing the legal formulation of the prohibition. The position of Magen Avraham presents a problem. It is difficult to assume that this prohibition is actually derived from the pasuk. Why? Let us begin through carefully analyzing Magen Avraham's position. If the restriction is a Torah mitzvah, it should be counted among the six hundred thirteen mitzvot. It will be a positive commandment according to Bar Kefra and a negative mitzvah according to Rebbe Eliezer. Yet, no authority includes such a commandment among Taryag Mitzvot. It is more likely that Magen Avraham regarded the restrictions as a Rabbinical injunction. This creates a serious problem. The restriction is Rabbinical. There is no actual source in the Torah. What, then, is the dispute between Bar Kefra and Rebbe Eliezer? What message are they communicating through disputing the passage legislating the new name? No actual Torah command – positive or negative – exists! The injunction is Rabbinic! In order to answer this question, we need to better understand

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Lech Licha - The Internal World

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Transcribed by Students

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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. God 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 [God] 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 God 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 God and religious convictions came about not through emotional religious feelings or perceptions about God but rather, as the Rambam, 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 "God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob" rather than saying the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, is so that one should not think that the reason why Isaac and Jacob believed in God 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

God 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, God 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 God'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 God 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 God.

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 if 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 aged and went off..... But for Abram the only true relationship could be with God."

In conclusion, we can now understand why God'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 God, namely, mitzvos ha'aretz, adhering to God'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 God, the adherence to which would ultimately bring Abram closer to God. □

Lech Licha

RABBI FOX

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the reason Hashem changed Avraham's name and the meaning of these names.

The Talmud explains that the name, Avram, is a contraction of av leAram – father of Aram. Aram was Avraham's homeland. His original name indicates that he was a father to the people of Aram. He influenced this nation and showed the people the truth of monotheism. The name Avraham is a contraction of the phrase av hamon goyim – father of a multitude of nations. The Talmud explains that this name means that Avraham will be the father of all the nations of the earth. Avraham's influence will extend beyond his homeland. All peoples will be affected by his teachings. The bestowal of the name Avraham

implied that the Almighty will help Avraham communicate his message to all civilization. With the granting of this name, the previous name, Avram, became inappropriate. The old name represents a limitation to Avraham's influence. The Almighty will remove this limitation. This is reflected in the name change. In short, the name change had two effects. A new message was communicated. An outdated message was removed. We can now understand the disagreement between Bar Kafa and Rebbe Eliezer. Both understand that the prohibition against using the name Avram is Rabbinical. However, they dispute the reason for this restriction. According to Bar Kafa, the name Avraham was created to communicate a message. A new role for Avraham had emerged. Bar Kafa maintains that the Sages insisted we use this name to confirm the new role Hashem assigned to our first forefather. The Sages felt that use of the old name implies denial of Avraham's true effect on humanity. Bar Kafa expresses this formulation by describing the requirement as a positive command. This expression and the pasuk, Bar Kafa quotes aptly describe the nature of the Rabbinical law. Rebbe Eliezer maintains that the Sages were not instituting a requirement to affirm Avraham's new position. However, they prohibited use of the old appellation. This name implies denial of our forefather's influence upon all humankind. We employ this name to avoid the implication of the old name Avram. Rebbe Eliezer appropriately describes this formulation as a negative command. We can now appreciate the position of Magen Avraham. He does not maintain that the restriction against using the name Avram is from the Torah. He understands that Bar Kafa and Rebbe Eliezer are relating a Rabbinic prohibition to a pasuk in the Torah. They dispute the portion of the pasuk which is relevant to the prohibition. Each picks the portion that reflects his unique understanding of the prohibition. □

Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 12:11. [Sefer Shemot 20:8. [Mesechet Pesachim 106a. [Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 12:11. [Rabbaynu Nissim ben Reuven Gerondi (Ran), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 15:1-7. [Mesechet Berachot 13a. [Rav Avraham Avlee, Magen Avraham Commentary on Shulchan Aruch, Orech Chayim 156:1, note 1.]

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FREE WILL

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Man is the sole cause of his own actions. When he does good, it is he that receives the reward, and when he does evil, it is he again who is the cause, and he who receives the corrective measure. To nothing other than man himself do we attribute the cause of man's actions.

The Talmud states, "everything is in the hands of God except for the fear of God". This means that God controls the universe, except for the area of man's approaching God, or man's distancing himself from God. Man is given complete control over his actions.

There are many people who feel that every action is determined by God. Meaning, every falling leaf, every droplet of rain which descends, etc. To a certain extent this is true, meaning that without God's creation these events would not take place. But saying that God "wills" each leaf to fall, denies the existence of what we call 'natural laws'. Proponents of this view assume that God did not create a system by which the Earth operates, and therefore He has to control every object at all times. In praise of God we say that He has the wisdom to create a system through which nature operates, by which the seas flow, the moon waxes and wanes, and leaves fall from trees. Maimonides agrees with this latter view. A Rabbi once asked, "which painter is more of a genius, one who takes a year to create a masterpiece stroke by stroke, or one who arranges all the drops of paint on a roller, and with one roll, creates the very same painting?" The latter of course is much more ingenious.

The same applies to God. He need not paint every stroke on the canvas of Earth daily. Rather, He, in His infinite wisdom, arranged everything during creation so it would consistently operate this way. The Medrash (metaphoric Rabbinical statement) states that certain miracles would occur later in time were created on the seventh day prior to sunset, backs up this view. The Earth was designed with a built-in system.

Returning to the question, we see that the Torah states, "and choose life". Again in Deuteronomy, 24:16: "Fathers are not killed on their sons, nor sons on their fathers,...a man in his

own sin shall be killed". According to these passages in the Torah, a person is the sole cause of his actions, and is therefore culpable for his actions. How many times are we warned by the Torah to do what is right? If we are not the cause of our actions, why does God instruct and command us? It must be that we alone are responsible for our actions. The entire justice system was built on the fact that man guides his own actions.

There are two questions some pose:

1) "If God knows everything, how can we have free will? God knows what I am going to do, so I cannot select an alternative choice."

2) "God knows what will happen. To say differently is to say that God isn't all knowing and powerful."

Maimonides addresses the first, free will question and teaches that God's wisdom is not like our wisdom. "Because My thoughts are not as your thoughts, and your ways are not as Mine, so says God." (Isaiah 55:8) Our wisdom is based on cause and effect. We cannot project our method of knowledge onto God. How God knows something is not how man knows, and therefore, His knowledge does not preclude us from free choice. As an example: a weatherman may say that it will snow, and he knows this 100%, and then it snows. But he is not the cause. He did not make nature produce snow. He merely studied nature, saw all the causes involved, and determined that since a few factors are ripe, it will definitely snow in a certain region. Again, he was not the cause of the snow. This is somewhat analogous to how God is also not the cause of our actions, although he knows what we will choose. However, God does not need to rely on cause and effect to know man's action. He has a completely different method, unknown to man, and which does not interfere with our free will.

Regarding the second statement: we do say God is all knowing and all powerful. However, one must understand that God cannot do everything - He has limits. "Limits?" you say. This may sound strange, and even sacrilegious to some. But think clearly. Is 'limitation' a negative, or a positive? Well, it depends on the case. If a runner is limited to a speed of 5 mph because he has short legs, yes, this is a negative limitation, in as much as running is considered a good. But conversely, we say (accurately) God

cannot punish one without sin, and God cannot do that which is unfair. Are these limitations 'defects' in God, or His attributes? If there were a judge who could never judge wrongly, would that be a defect? Of course not. The fact that God is 100% just, and cannot hurt the innocent is a limitation of His perfection. Just as a judge who never makes a mistake is a positive, being limited to making only correct decisions, this limitation is actually his very perfection, so too with regard to God.

When God gave man free will, He removed Himself from controlling man's decisions. This is part of the perfection of God's plan, that we have free will, and that God will not interfere with man's doings. God wishes man and woman to be the sole cause of their actions, thereby earning reward.

People say, "God can do anything". This must also include making mistakes. We readily see the great flaw in this position. The infantile "Superman" notion of God does not make sense after a little investigation.

It is of the greatest importance that we view God rationally, and abandon any ignorant notions dating back to our youth. We must consistently update our opinions as we increase our learning. Errors in judgment about God is the worst mistake we can make. Above all, we must have an accurate understanding of God as far as man is capable.

"Talmud Torah knegged kulam", "Learning Torah outweighs all other commands". Knowledge of reality is our goal. Since all knowledge aims at an appreciation of God, all our knowledge is a waste if our view of God is incorrect. □

The Uniqueness of the Nation

RIVKA OLENICK

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"groaning of the Children of Israel." What was the "groaning"? Why couldn't we speak out to God, call out to God Who hears those Who call to Him sincerely? What happened to us? Even Moshe could not talk to us, and we could not hear him or even think about the possibility of freedom. We lost the ability to use our free will. Even the right of our use of free will was taken from us due to the inhumanity of our situation.

Who "bringeth you out from the burdens of Egypt." According to the Ramban: "He assured them that He will take them out from the land of the Egyptians and that they will no longer

suffer from their heavy burden." So God asserted His judgements against the Egyptians and He remembered His covenant with the patriarchs. He freed us from the bondage and the other nations witnessed this! The Ibn Ezra states: "When I will redeem you with an outstretched arm visible to all nations, you shall know that it is I the Eternal Who performs new signs and wonders in the world, and that I am your God and for your sake I had so acted, for you are the Portions of the Eternal." "You are the first and You are the last and other than You we have no King, redeemer or savior. True from Egypt You redeemed us, Hashem our God and from the house of slavery You liberated us." (The Shema). God then brought us out and uplifted us as His people. "And I will take you to Me for a people."

Li L'am, to Me God, to be a people of Mine. God would form us as a nation at Mt. Sinai, there we would accept our nationhood to live our lives according to His Torah. We were formed as the Jewish nation unto itself before we were given the land. Possession of land is not what constitutes us as a nation, God's will and being bound to it does.

Others believe the "nation" is illegitimate even though they know God chose the "nation" and "took" us out of Egypt. Nevertheless, they claim that our scriptures were falsified. Yet it is their religious ideology and warped doctrines that are false and not founded on absolute and divine truth. We were formed separately and uniquely with a different task and a different way to exist. "And I will take you to Me" not by way of a temple, or congregation, or land, but as a nation, an "am," only as an "am." The "nation" is to live out its purpose according to truths that are inherent in this "nation," that was founded and established on these truths alone. Based on these truths there is a recognized relationship that exists. It is between one another who share One common God, the One and Only God Who is the true Master of His people. The other nations witnessed this and will again witness this.

"I will be a God to you and you will get to know that I am Hashem your God." Through service and truth individually, as an eved Hashem, a servant of God and together as a nation through His commandments "you will get to know that I am Hashem your God." You will get to know the purpose of your existence, the reason you were created and the reasons I formed you as a "nation." The bond we have to each other is that we share one common God, nothing else. Whether we live in gulus or as we await the time the Messiah assists us to return to Israel, our bond as a "nation" and as a people is to and through God.

When the Temple is rebuilt it will be to sanctify God's name only. The Temple will demonstrate to all people our true "bondage", which is only to God. There are no other gods, no other possible intermediaries or things, or structures or any "tower" that can take the "am" away from true devotion to the One God. As the Shema states: Hear, O Israel: "Hashem is our God, Hashem, the One and Only."

"And ye shall remain holy unto Me, for I, God, Am holy and I have separated you from the nations to be Mine." Leviticus 20:26. □

THE TREATY OF ABRAHAM

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Transcribed by Mendy Feder

The commandment of circumcision, or "bris", is an essential mitzvah which was transmitted by G-d to our forefather Abraham. Maimonides in his Mishna Torah in the laws of Circumcision the third chapter law 8 teaches us that this commandment is extremely important. The Rambam tells us that Abraham was not called "shalame", complete, or perfect, until he was circumcised. The Rambam quotes Genesis chapter 17 verse 1, which states, "...Walk before me and be perfect." We therefore can infer that prior to Abraham's circumcision he was in a state where he evidently was lacking perfection. The Rambam additionally states in law 9 that the commandment of a bris is extremely important because Abraham's bris is mentioned 13 times in the Torah, whereas the entire commandments of the Torah were only undertaken by three covenants.

A review of this Rambam raises several important questions. What is so essential about the commandment of circumcision that the Torah seems to view it as a more significant covenant than the covenant respecting the entire Torah? Furthermore, in what way was Abraham lacking perfection prior to his bris and what does circumcision accomplish? We must attempt to understand the concept of a "tamim", completeness, especially in view of G-d's commandment to Abraham to have a bris and "walk before Me and be tamim", complete.

Upon examining some of the halachik aspects of the act of the mitzva, the positive action of circumcision, we can gain some insights. There are two blessings made when performing the act of circumcision. The first blessing is made right before the action and it is the blessing of al hamilah. This is the blessing of the action of circumcision and like all blessings on an action, the blessing precedes the action and qualifies it. However, there is a second blessing which the mohel makes. This is the blessing of "lehachnisu bivriso shel Avraham avinu", "to enter the child into the covenant of Abraham our father". There is a question amongst the Rabbis as to the nature of this blessing. If it is a blessing on the action, then it must precede the circumcision, like the first blessing. If it is a blessing of shevach, of praise, then it follows the circumcision, which is the basis for our praising G-d. The Rabbeinu Tam in Tosafos in Pesachim 7a states that it is considered a blessing of praise and thus recited afterwards. He states that the blessing is a praise to G-d for granting us the commandment of circumcision. We

must also articulate that the circumcision is being done for the sake of G-d our creator and not for the sake of idolatry.

This Tosafos raises several problems. Why must we express that this commandment of circumcision is being done for G-d? Why is the commandment of circumcision the only Mitzvah that demands that we specifically mention that it is not done for idolatry? There is a law that the halachik action of slaughtering cannot be performed by a gentile because we are concerned that he will be performing the action for idolatry. It would seem that the blessing for slaughtering would be a more appropriate action for the pronouncement that it is not being done for idolatry. What is so unique about the commandment of circumcision?

To comprehend the significance of circumcision we must explain the concept of tamim. The Rambam in his Mishna Torah in the Laws of Idolatry, at the end of chapter 11 discusses the positive commandment in the Torah of "tamim t'heeyeh im Hashem Elokecha". The Rambam teaches us that sorcery; witchcraft and divination are all false and nonsensical practices. These are primitive practices whereby man predicates his daily actions based upon some irrelevant external events. They are usually superstitious practices which appeal to man's instinctual insecurities. Amongst these practices are the individuals who state that "since my stick fell out of my hand, I cannot travel in that direction". A different example of a prohibited action is if someone says that said date is a good day for performing certain actions. If a person consults a charlatan who pretends to speak to the dead or pretends to predict the future, these are also forbidden practices. These practices appeal to the dark side of man's nature, the part that wishes to deny reality and satisfy instinctual urges by positing authenticity to these inane activities which are attractive to the instincts. They appeal to man's fantasy and create an illusion of great satisfaction. It would be foolish for modern man to deny the force of these emotions and posit that this type of behavior is only symptomatic of primitive man. One need only look at the appeal of horoscopes to dispel such a notion. A recent leader of the free world, the most powerful man in a supposedly sophisticated society, based his schedules on this nonsense. Maimonides advised us that all these activities are categorized as emptiness and vanity. The Rambam further admonishes against these practices and states that if anyone believes that these actions are true or

contain wisdom, they are ignorant and lack knowledge. However, if someone has been fortunate to obtain wisdom he will know that these actions are false and are attractive only to foolish people whose minds are lacking intellectual clarity. The Rambam concludes that all these practices are contrary to the Torah's commandment of "tamim t'heeyeh im Hashem Elokecha", "Perfect shall you be with Hashem your God".

There are two parts to human nature. One part is the reality-based part of the human mind. It is man's crowning glory, his divine image, and the part of man that can perceive wisdom and knowledge. The other part of man's nature is the primitive part of the mind which appeals to man's fantasy. It demands suspension of the critical faculty. In Judaism there is no room for this part of man's nature to guide his actions. We are commanded to love G-d. This means, as we recite in the Shema, to teach our sons and to know Torah. The only part of man that can relate to G-d and learn Torah is the tzelem Elokim, man's intellect. The prophets repeatedly have counseled the children of Israel to have knowledge of G-d. This can only be accomplished by a long searching process which begins with the part of man that perceives G-d's knowledge.

Therefore the concept of tamim means that man should guide his life based upon the part of man which can perceive G-d's knowledge. This part of the human personality must always retain control and exercise its force on the person's actions. One can only be tamim, complete, when the soul of man is not affected by the instinctual part of his nature. The ruling part of his soul must be the part of man that can recognize G-d. The state of tamim is only achieved when there is only one ruling principle in the soul, namely the tzelem Elokim. Nothing else can affect the person who is tamim.

Maimonides in his Guide to the Perplexed states that an uncircumcised person is more perfect physically. Since he is born that way he is more physically perfect. G-d created man uncircumcised, which must be a physically more perfect state respecting his physical existence. Circumcision reduces man's instinctual drive. It makes us less perfect physically but demonstrates that we must perfect ourselves spiritually. Milah signifies man's conquest over the instinctual part of his nature. Circumcision represents an institution in man which demonstrates a reduction of his

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THE TREATY OF ABRAHAM

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

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instinctual drive. The instinctual part of man's nature is the source of his superstitious tendencies. Man's instinctual nature detracts from his being tamim. Therefore milah is the establishment of an institution in man, which installs in man the ruling element of his soul. This is the part of the soul which can recognize G-d. Therefore milah is the institution which signifies that man must guide his actions by chochma, wisdom, not the instinctual, and that one strives to be tamim, perfect.

Circumcision is mentioned thirteen times in the Torah, compared to the covenant of the very acceptance of the Torah, which is only mentioned three times. Circumcision is the institution which reflects that an individual's actions must be guided by the tzelem Elokim, intelligence. Acceptance of the Torah is only possible if there are individuals who are capable of dedicating their lives to its intellectual precepts. Therefore, milah is essential because it creates individuals who are tamim, complete and whose ruling part of their soul is the intellect. Only then is the system of Torah capable of being perpetuated.

The commandment of milah was given over specifically to Abraham. Abraham had the intellectual conviction to reject the primitive and pagan beliefs that pervaded his society. He had the intellectual courage to recognize G-d as the source of reality and deny the idolaters of his day. Therefore he was blessed with the institution of milah. The personality of Abraham was deserving of this institution. However, Abraham was not shalame, not complete, until he performed the Mitzvah of milah. He had to demonstrate through this commandment, that the ruling part of his soul was the intellectual. Through the performance of this mitzvah he rendered himself an adam hashalame, complete. Abraham demonstrated that all parts of his personality were subdued except the part of his soul

which recognized and related to the creator. He thus became tamim and was able to walk before G-d.

We can now appreciate the Rabbeinu Tam's concept of the second blessing made at the circumcision. It is a blessing of praise which uniquely articulates that its objective is for the sake of G-d. Circumcision is the only commandment which, by its very performance, subordinates the instinctual forces in man. The very essence of its objective is the demonstration that we aspire to guide our own lives based upon the part of man that can perceive reality and relate to G-d. Therefore, we express our intentions that we are performing this unique commandment for the sake of G-d and not for idolatry, which appeals to the lower part of man's nature.

The importance of milah is also attested to by the fact that if one does not perform the mitzvah, he receives the punishment of excision, Kares. Similarly, if one fails to partake of the korban Pesach he is similarly punished. These are the only two positive commandments that if one fails to perform, makes him subject to kares. Circumcision is essential because it signifies that the individual, is one who is capable of living a life of Torah. The korban Pesach was commemorative of the exodus of Egypt and the birth of a nation dedicated to the principles of the Torah. Thus, both these mitzvos are essential components for the Torah system, milah insofar as the individual is concerned, and korban Pesach with respect to the nation. □

Facing East

Reader: Why do many Jews face east when praying?

Mesora: Abraham initiated this practice so as to oppose the belief that the Sun (as it sets in the west) was a god. Facing east - as all others faced

west - opposes idolatry, the opposition of which is at the very core of our Torah's system.

Additionally, this is the direction of the Temple mount. Concentrating on the relationship we have with God is essential to prayer. □

40 Days Divinely Intended Mates

Reader: I connection with your opinion on free will, the Talmud teaches (Talmud, Sota 2a) "...forty days before the creation of a child, a heavenly voice calls forth and proclaims; 'So and so's daughter for so and so's son bride and groom'....", in this mystic tradition, are predestined for each other. There is a yiddish word to describe a future mate, "bashert" Your bashert is your intended, the one already announced as your bride or groom forty days before you were born. I ask, where is the free will here?

Mesora: What the Talmud teaches here is a "Medrash", a lesson constructed by the Rabbis which teaches a deeper idea. But the Medrash is not to be taken literally. Maimonides' son Abraham, as well as many other Torah scholars, have taught that Medrash is non-literal. It is also essential to know that true Judaism does not partake of what people commonly refer to today as mysticism. The exact converse is true.

Judaism is bereft of all mystical forces and supernatural phenomena imagined and pursued by today's insecure world.

God gave man intelligence. Why? So man may determine what is truth, and what is false. Just as we determine science and math through this intellect, so too are we bidden by God's grant of this gift, to use intelligence in the most important of all areas - the study of philosophy and God. Assuming mystical forces is contrary to the Torah truth of only One Creator responsible for all that we see on Earth, and in the heavens. Assuming other forces is idolatry.

There is no heavenly voice making useless statements, 40 days before man's creation. What purpose is there for a voice to call forth with such a message? There are no recipients of such a message, so the voice is useless. What do we understand this "voice calling out" to mean? It teaches that the genetic and psychological forces within man's makeup contribute to his selection of a mate, and are being formed 40 days before the embryo. Through this Medrash, the Rabbis teach us this insight.

But this section in the Talmud doesn't end here. We are further taught that this "voice" (metaphorically alluding to genetic and psychological causes) applies to the first marriage only. Why? Because this first experience of marriage is where the emotions emerge uncensored. Here, man is yet naive. One's initial excitement at finding a partner is not sobered by previous romantic letdowns affording greater knowledge, and a more tempered optimism. But in connection with a second marriage, we are taught that man's selection is based not on this "voice", but on his character traits. Meaning, the second time around, men and women are wiser, and do not select based on inner emotional workings alone. By this latter section in the Talmud, we see clearly that a finer point is to be learned, not in line with a cursory reading of the Rabbi's words. □

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