

# JewishTimes

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## PARSHA

### Abram's Perfections

God's clues in the text

### Abram's Religion

Rabbi Reuven Mann

### Lech Licha

Rabbi Israel Chait

### Who to Trust

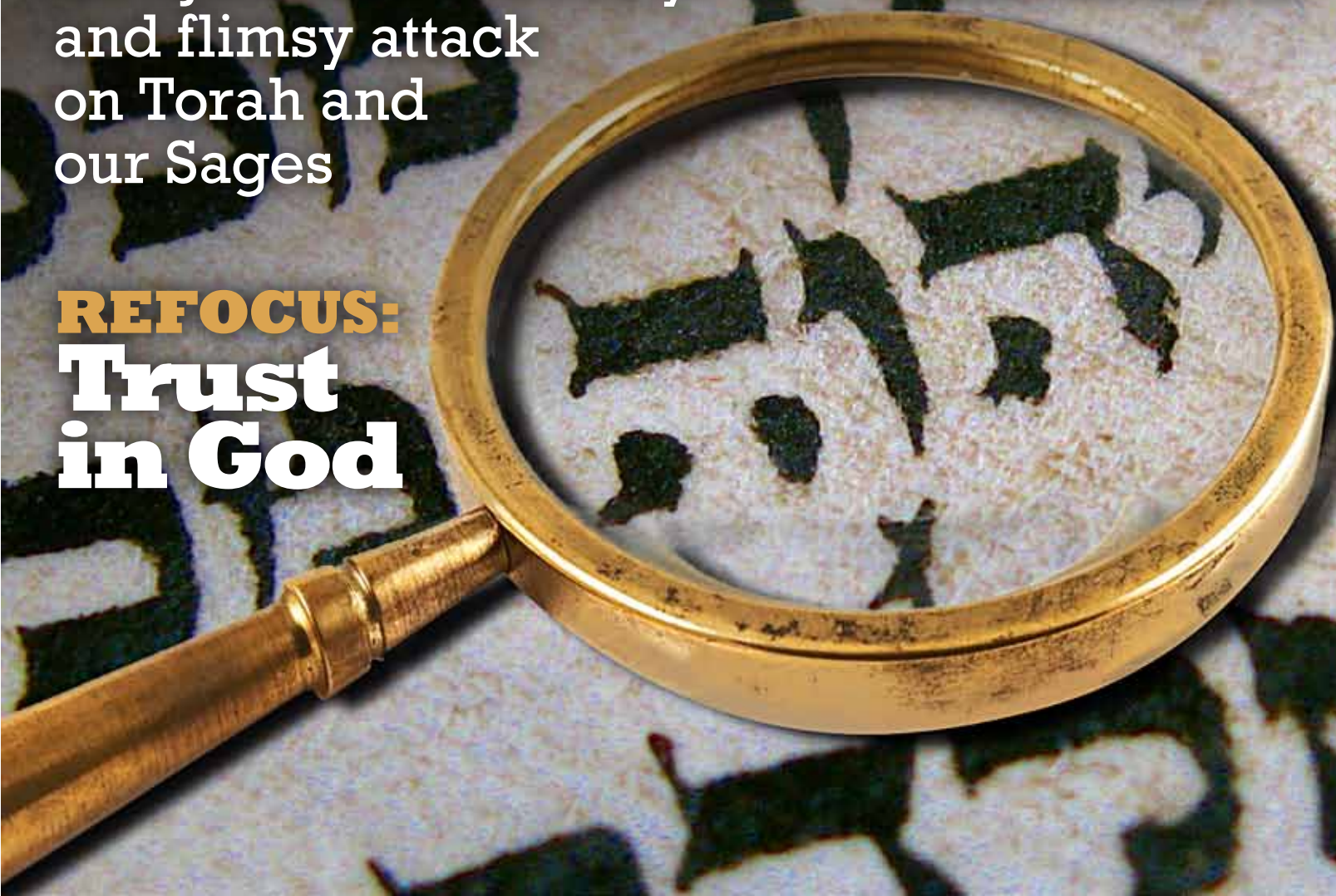
Rabbi Bernie Fox

# Bible Critics

Invoking reason and the proof of Torah from Sinai to reject man's literary and flimsy attack on Torah and our Sages

## REFOCUS:

# Trust in God

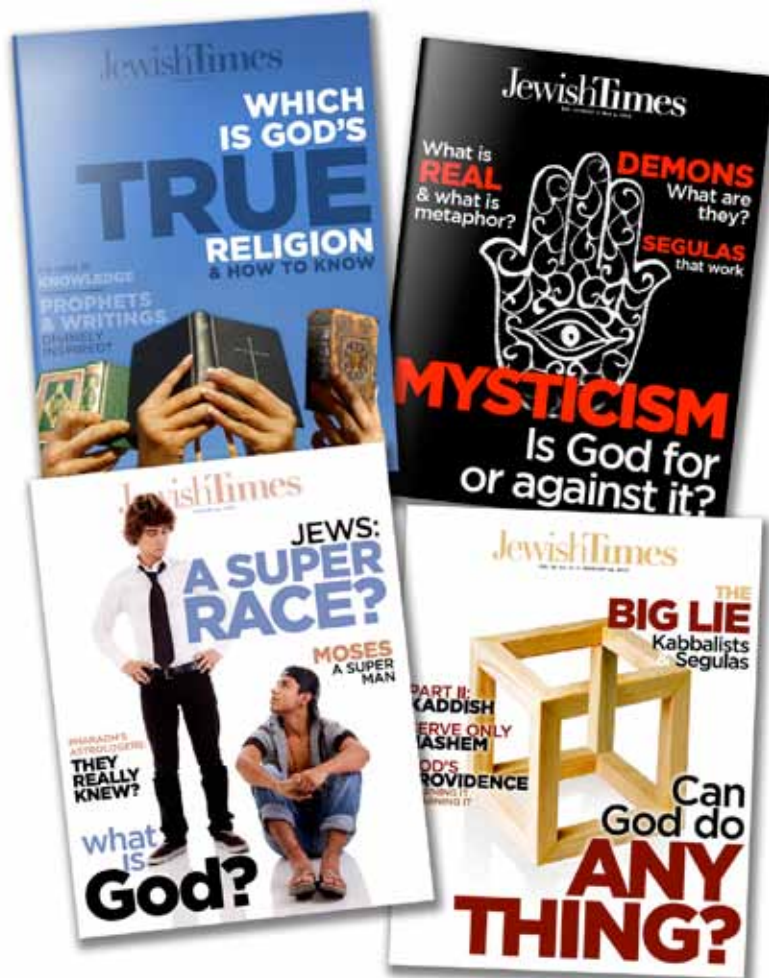


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## LETTERS

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

### Bible Critics

**Reader:** I've recently seen a Rabbi question Moses' exclusive authorship of Torah, and a number of other claims that contradict our accepted Rabbis from Moses through Rav Moshe Feinstein. What is your view?

**Rabbi:** *"The wise men of other nations have defeated the wise men of Israel."* (Maimonides, Guide, book II, chap. xiii)

As our Rabbis embodied in their confession above, reason

must guide each of our analyses and decisions. We are not biased towards people, even our Rabbis.

How do we approach the matter of Bible disputations and critiques? Some people suggest multiple Torah authors, that Biblical facts and characters are really fiction, and other notions that violate traditional Torah understanding. Torah tradition is no more devoid of an intellectual approach than the sciences. How might we intelligently respond to such claims?

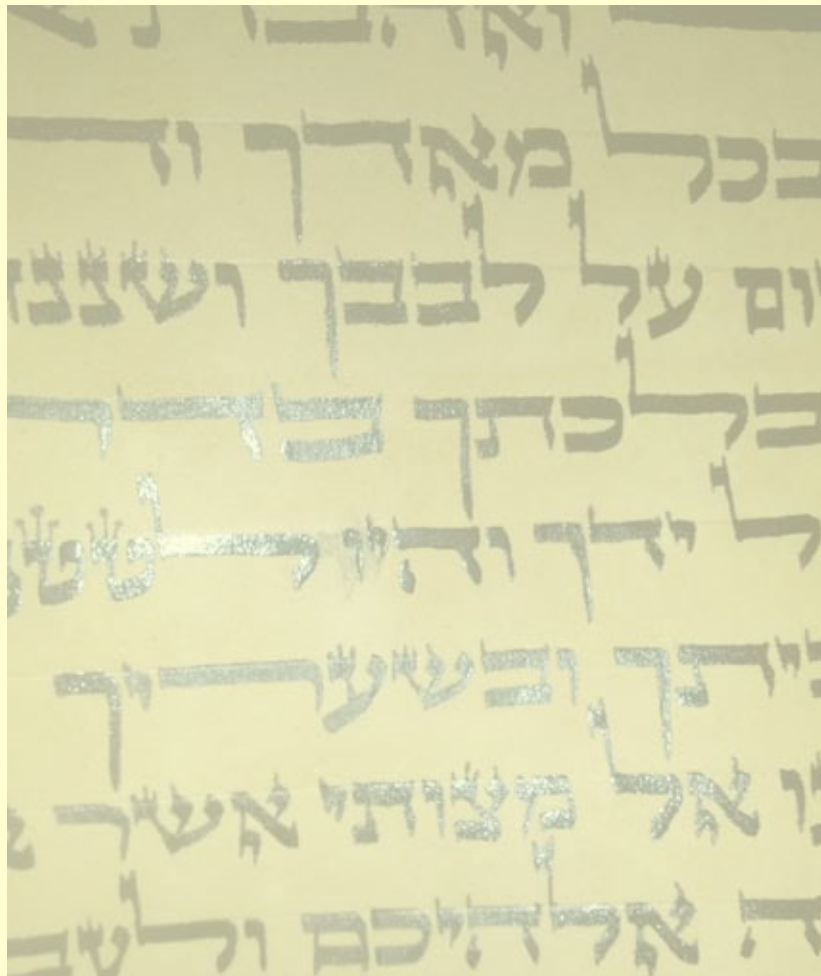
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We have a long tradition of Torah leaders from Moses, Joshua, Samuel, Kings David and Solomon, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and other prophets, the Men of the Great Assembly, Talmudic Rabbis, Tosafos, through Ramban, Radak, Sforno, Rashi and Maimonides, and afterwards seen in Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch, Rav Chaim Brisk, Rav Yosef B. Soloveitchik and Rav Moshe Feinstein. Without producing the scope and depth of a Rav Moshe Feinstein, for example, we would be amused by any person today claiming he holds a candle to Rav Moshe zt"l, let alone to a Maimonides, King Solomon or Moses. Yet, rare individuals do contend with singular Torah fundamentals accepted by these giants, back to Moses.

These great, unparalleled beacons of Torah never doubted Moses' exclusive authorship of the Torah. They accepted that each of his words were inspired by God, and therefore absolute truths, not compromised by any consideration. Our Talmudic Rabbis severely condemned alternate views of Torah authorship. Our Torah authorities understood all Biblical people, places and events as literal. We must understand what unanimously convinced such great minds of these views.

Bible – Torah – derives its absolutely truthful status from Revelation at Sinai. This proven event is no different than any other historical fact. Whether or not artifacts exist, a unanimously-accepted history (i.e., masses of attendees) cannot be fabricated, accepted and successfully transmitted as the single version of a history, unless it truly occurred. While false "beliefs" do exist widespread, such as beliefs in other religions and in the supernatural, we easily distinguish between a "belief," and "historical fact", the latter possessing mass witnesses. Belief, however, contains no evidence or credible witnesses. This is why it is referred to as a self-incriminating "belief."

Our great Rabbis understood this principle, and recognized that God gave His Torah on Mount Sinai in year 2448 of the current 5774-year count since Adam. They understood that God wishes mankind to



possess truth; thus, a mass-attended event. God punishes sinners and those who wish to abrogate the Torah, or its leaders, seen in the Gold Calf worshippers' deaths and in Korach's demise. Thus, God's condoning of Moses' teachings throughout his life endorses all Torah content as literal truths, as Moses taught, and that Moses alone authored the Torah. Had Moses lied about any element, God would not have sustained the public miracle of Moses' glowing face until he died.

We must remain true to reason. And when we hear others suggesting alien and unproven notions, we must realize that such theories cannot undermine facts and proofs. Sinai Torah is fact; it is defined today by what the Rabbis transmit, and they transmitted fundamentals unanimously agreed-upon by the above list of leaders. God further promised we would never lose the Torah (Isaiah 59:21). Therefore, what we possess is

God's truth. But if one wishes, he may not take God's prophetic oath as truth; but he must be consistent and also abandon all of Torah. Thereby, we have no common ground on which we might engage him in dialogue. And it would also be sinful to engage with such a heretic.

Our stand is a trust in God and in the unanimous transmission, while few others trust in their creative, inconclusive critiques, denying all Rabbis and God's promise.

*"...man should not rashly engage in speculation with false conceptions, and when he is in doubt about anything, or unable to find a proof for the object of his inquiry, he must not at once abandon, reject and deny it; he must modestly keep back, and from regard to the honor of his Creator, hesitate (from uttering an opinion) and pause. (Guide, book I, chap xxxii) ■*

# Abram's Perfections

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

## Abram's Respect for Human Rights

God commanded Abraham to leave Charan. Abraham did so and headed towards Canaan:

*"And Avram traversed the land until the place of Shechem; until Alon Moreh; and the Canaanite people were in the land." (Gen. 12:6)*

Later we read,

*"And also to Lote who traveled with Avram were there sheep and cattle and tents. And the land could not sustain them both for their property was great and they could not dwell together. And there was a dispute between the shepherds of Avram (Abraham) and the shepherds of Lote; and the Canaanite and Prizzite then dwelled in the land. And Avram said to Lote, 'Please let there not be a dispute between myself and you, and between my shepherds and yours, for we are brothers. Is not the entire land before you? Separate before me; if you go left I will go to the right; if you go right I will go to the left.'" (Gen. 13:5-9)*

What is significant to mention that these nations were "in the land"? Why mention this obscure detail, and why join this detail with seemingly unrelated information, regarding Avram's travels, and the shepherds' dispute?

Rashi (Gen. 13:7) teaches that Avram's shepherds justly rebuked Lote's shepherds for their grazing in pastures belonging to others. Lote's shepherds' justification was that Avram is to eventually inherit all of

Canaan. But Avram's shepherds knew that Avram did not "yet" receive that promise.

We learn Avram's perfection, through this Rashi citing his shepherd's perfection. We are told that Avram initially "traversed the land until the place of Shechem; until Alon Moreh". He traveled "until" this location. "Until" is stated twice in this verse, stressing Avram's respect of others' property. He didn't travel further for the reason that the verse explains, the Canaanite people "were in the land." Similarly, the verse that describes the dispute of the shepherds also ends with "and the Canaanite and Prizzite then dwelled in the land (ibid 13:7) ."

The Torah's means of catching our attention is often through repetition. Repeating the idea that the Canaanite were in the land causes us to compare that verse 13:7 with the previous verse 12:6. We then note the context of both verses. The first verse describes how Avram traveled "until" a certain location, due to the presence of the Canaanites. The second verse describes the shepherd's dispute, also related to the Canaanite's presence in the land. Through this repetition, and the seemingly unrelated content of both verses, we learn that Avram did not trespass occupied land, nor did he allow his shepherds to graze there; the cause of the dispute with Lote's shepherds as Rashi teaches.

## Abram's Care for Monotheism

A second story records Abraham's military victory over the powerful four kings. However, the Torah's intent is that man learns values relating to God; Torah is not concerned with

man's prowess per se. As always, God provides ample clues in His words.

In the 14th year of their reign, Cadarlomer and his three mighty companion kings succeeded over the five kings who rebelled. Cadarlomer then pillaged Sodom:

*"And they took all the wealth of Sodom and Amora and all their food and they left. And they took Lote and his wealth, the son of Abraham's brother, and they left, and he [Lote] dwelled in Sodom. And a refugee came and told Abram the Ivri..."*

*"And Abram heard his brother was captured... (Gen. 14:11-13)"*

Abram was victorious in battle:

*"And Abram returned all the wealth and also Lote his brother...(ibid 16)"*

Why did Cadarlomer leave "twice"? Clearly, Cadarlomer returned after his



(continued on next page)



first leaving, this second time for Lote, "son of Abram's brother." Why do we need to be told of Lote's relation to Abram? Why here, is Abram called the "Ivri"? Finally, why does Abram return the wealth, before Lote? Was not Lote his true concern?

Abram recognized the Cadarlomer's objective in kidnapping Lote. Lote was Abram's relative. Cadarlomer, like many in that generation, disliked Abram the "Ivri", the "Hebrew" or the one who lived differently ("ever hayam", the river's other side). Abram was a monotheist, unlike all others, metaphorically "living on the river's other bank." In his battle, Cadarlomer saw another opportunity aside from power and booty: to repudiate Abram and his monotheism. This is why Cadarlomer returned for Lote alone, "Abram's relative."

Abram's battle was twofold: 1) to save his nephew, 2) to defend monotheism. And in order not to give an impression of nepotism, Abram returned the wealth of the victims first, then Lote second. Abram was sensitive to the public's feelings of self interest. He wished that his reputation as a monotheist be untarnished. So he maintained respect by deferring to the victims' cares first. In this manner, the public would accept Abram, and be more open to his monotheism.

Torah teaches correct values and morals, in God's framework. Torah is not a historical book, or a book that praises man. It is all about God and the truths He wishes to impart to man. God imparts these truths in a special method, and this method is where we find Torah's objectives. It is not a literary work, where we might use "literary styles and critiques" as means of interpretation. It is not a work where anything anyone suggests contains merit. Only that which "must" be said, should be said. All other theories, and certainly views that contradict our greatest minds, must be dismissed.

To learn Torah's true lessons, we must defer to our leaders, in whom God instilled great insights so as to keep His promise that we will never lose His Torah (Isaiah 59:21). ■

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# *the Religion of* **Avraham**

*Rabbi Reuven Mann*

This week's Parsha, Lech Lecha, introduces us to one of the most important figures in history, our father Avraham. He was raised at a time when virtually the entire world lost cognizance of Hashem and was hopelessly steeped in idol worship. Avraham was not the beneficiary of an education rooted in true principles.

As Rambam points out, his parents were idolaters and he was raised to worship with them. However, he had a great mind and a fearless, independent spirit. He began thinking about religious matters at the precocious age of three. He inquired and reasoned by day and night until he recognized the utter falsehood of idolatry. In the course of his investigations, he came to a recognition of the Supreme Being, the Creator of the Universe, who, alone, was worthy of man's worship.

Avraham was not content to keep his findings to himself. He was disturbed that the rest of mankind was steeped in such tragic error. He could not just sit back and do nothing. He felt obligated to expose falsehood and teach truth. In doing so, he embodied the supreme Jewish virtue of chesed. We have a responsibility to alleviate the suffering of our fellow humans. Most people think of this in terms of offering relief to those in physical distress. Thus, we render assistance to victims of wars or calamities and offer support to those who suffer from illness. Avraham Avinu took chesed to a new level. He provided for people's physical needs such as food and lodging, but his main goal was to save people from the evil of idolatry. He regarded the health of the body as a means to perfection of the soul. What is the good of saving a person physically if he is dying spiritually? After all, man was created to recognize the true G-d of reality and to refine his nature by emulating His perfect ways. To deprive a person of vital knowledge which is essential to his spiritual well-being, and in effect allowing him to die is an expression of cruelty.

Avraham, thus, embarked on the task of saving mankind from the futility of idolatry. This required supreme wisdom, dedication, and super human courage. He set up debates with the theologians of the times and overpowered them with

his brilliant arguments. Though his preferred method was logical argumentation, he was fully aware of the emotional resistances of some of the people he dealt with. In his youth, he had experienced the same emotions, but had analyzed and freed himself from them. Thus, after engaging in debates and disproving the false claims of the idolaters, he would smash the idols. He realized that sometimes people are very emotionally attached to certain objects which they have deified. When that happens, reason is not always enough to affect their emotions and physical destruction of the revered object is necessary. This illustrates the tremendous extent to which Avraham went and the great risks he took to purify the World from the spiritual disease of idolatry. The Rambam says that the entire purpose of the Torah and all its commandments is to uproot idolatry from the World. It is only then that the goals of creation, which we pray for on Rosh Hashana, to perfect the World with the kingdom of Hashem, can be realized.

When Avraham had achieved these heroic goals and had won over a significant following, Hashem appeared to him and revealed His plans for the future. Avraham would become the father not only of the Jewish people, but of all mankind. He commanded Avraham to leave his birth place and father's house and travel to the land "I will show you." Avraham accepted the Divine mission and began the journey which would culminate on Sinai with the emergency of the Jewish people and their acceptance of Hashem's Torah. Our task is to be the children of Avraham by emulating His wisdom, rejecting idolatry, and committing to saving the World from false religion. As Jews, we must always ask, are we practicing the religion of Avraham Avinu?

Shabbat Shalom. ■





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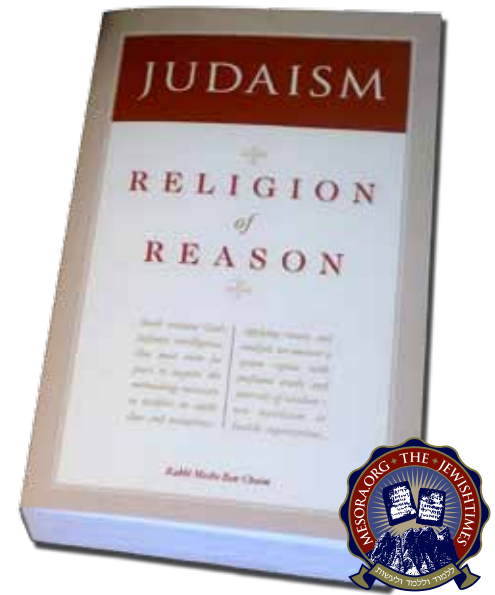
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### REVIEWS



**RABBI REUVEN MANN** — Rabbi, Y. Israel of Phoenix

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim has written extensively on Jewish philosophy for many years. His ideas are rooted in a rational approach. He follows the great philosophers like Rambam and Saadia Gaon. He is opposed to all forms of "mysticism" and seeks to debunk all practices and beliefs which are rooted in superstition and contrary to reason. This work covers a wide variety of topics, of interest to contemporary; insightful analyses of Biblical narratives as well as the significance of many mitzvot. Rabbi Ben-Chaim demonstrates that Judaism can be harmonized with human reason. He is not afraid to ask the most penetrating and challenging questions as he is convinced that Torah is the Word of God and based on the highest form of wisdom. Jews who have a profound desire to make sense out of their religion will benefit greatly from reading this book.



**RABBI STEVEN WEIL** — Executive Vice President, The Orthodox Union

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim asks critical, crucial and defining questions that any thinking Jew needs to ask. His method enables the reader to explore and engage our theology in a meaningful and serious way. Following the Rishonim, he forces us to define, weigh and analyze each phrase of chazal, showing there is no contradiction between an investigation of Science and an investigation of Judaism. Rabbi Ben-Chaim has written a work that addresses the thinking person of all faiths. This work speaks to the scholar and lay person alike and will help you gain insight into how the great Rishonim define how we view the world. Rabbi Ben-Chaim's website, Mesora.org is a very serious tool and resource for thinking human beings who want to engage and explore the Almighty, the Almighty's universe and do so within the realm of wisdom, rationality and intellectual honesty.



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tion is interrupted by a severe famine. Avraham decides to temporarily quit the Land of Canaan and to wait-out the famine in the Land of Egypt. As he approaches this land that he hopes will be his temporary sanctuary, he begins to study and consider the inhabitants, their values, practices, and ethics. He understands that a dilemma is quickly approaching. The Torah does not explicitly describe Avraham's conclusions regarding Egyptian culture and behavior. However, his conclusions are apparent from the action that he takes.

*And it will come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see you, that they will say: This is his wife; and they will kill me, but you they will keep alive. Say, I pray thee, that you are my sister; that it may be well with me for your sake, and that my soul may live because of you. (Sefer Devarim 12:12-13)*

## 2. Avraham and Sarah's subterfuge

Avraham tells Sarah that her unusual beauty will place him in danger. If she reveals that he is her husband, some Egyptian who is enamored with Sarah's beauty will kill him in order to take her as a wife. He asks her to not reveal that he is her husband but to instead identify him as her brother. Through this subterfuge he will be treated well by his new neighbors and saved from inevitable murder.

What precisely did Avraham observe that caused him to expect this treatment? There is some debate among the commentators regarding the issue. However, Rav Ovadia Sforno and others note that during this era Egypt was identified with lewd and lascivious behavior. Avraham observed this and suspected that the cultural obsession with lust and sex in combination with Sarah's remarkable beauty would place him in mortal danger.<sup>1</sup>

The Torah does not clearly explain Avraham's strategy to save himself. This has led to an interesting controversy regarding the issue. Some suggest that Avraham merely selected the lesser of two evils. He assumed there was nothing he could do to prevent Sarah from being taken from him. He therefore, focused on how he might save his own life. Sarah's identification of her companion as her brother would in no way protect her. But at least her suitors would have no reason to murder Avraham.<sup>2</sup>

Many other commentators reject this explanation of Avraham's strategy and suggest that he was attempting to save himself from death and Sarah from being taken. Avraham and Sarah would present themselves as elder brother and sister. A suitor would naturally seek the elder brother's approval of his marriage to the younger sister. This would provide Avraham the opportunity to obstruct and delay the marriage. In the interim, hopefully, the famine in Canaan would end and they would escape Egypt unharmed. Malbim expands on this explanation of Avraham's strategy. He adds that Avraham planned to demand an enormous dowry. The protracted negotiations over the dowry would provide Avraham the opportunity to indefinitely delay any marriage.<sup>3</sup> Malbim's comments suggest an

## Parashas Lech Licha

# Who Can You Trust?

Rabbi Bernie Fox

**A**nd there was a famine in the land. And Avram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine was intense in the land. (Sefer Beresheit 12:10)

## 1. Avraham is forced to descend to Egypt

The first of our Patriarchs – Avraham – is introduced in the closing passages of Parshat Noach. Parshat Lech Licha begins in earnest the Torah's narrative of his life. In the opening passages of the parasha he is commanded by Hashem to abandon his homeland and to travel to an unidentified land. Hashem tells Avraham that He will create a great nation from him and that he will enjoy Hashem's providence. Avraham embarks upon his journey and travels to the Land of Canaan – the land that will become the Land of Israel. There, Hashem again speaks to Avraham and tells him that He will give this land to his descendants.

Avraham begins to explore the land. His exploration

(continued on next page)



image of Avraham playing one suitor against another – all of the suitors competing for the prize of the astoundingly beautiful sister. Avraham could endlessly protract the competition under the guise of seeking the best dowry and match for his beloved sister.

And it came to pass that when Avram came to Egypt, the Egyptians beheld the woman that she was very fair. And the princes of Paroh saw her, and praised her to Paroh. And the woman was taken into Paroh's house. (Sefer Beresheit 12:14-15)

*And Paroh called Avram, and said: What is this that you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? Why did you say, "She is my sister?" so that I took her to be my wife. Now therefore behold your wife, take her, and go your way. (Sefer Bereshiet 12:18-19)*

### 3. Sarah is seized by Paroh

Avraham's plan was only partially successful. He did succeed in protecting Sarah but only to a point. Eventually, Paroh himself became aware of the astounding beauty who had entered his kingdom and he took her as his wife. No other Egyptian could compete with Paroh's wealth and Avraham was not in a position to reject the enormous dowry Paroh would provide.<sup>4</sup>

At this point, Hashem intervened to save Avraham and Sarah. He struck Paroh and his household with an unspecified plague. Paroh ascertained that the cause was that he had taken Sarah and that she was actually Avraham's wife and not his sister.

Paroh confronted Avraham. He asked him why he had deceived him by identifying Sarah as his sister and concealing that they were really husband and wife. He chastised Avraham and told him that it was Avraham's fault that he took Sarah from him. He returned Sarah to Avraham and ordered him from the country.

### 4. Avraham's response to Paroh

The Torah does not record that Avraham provide any response to Paroh's criticism of his behavior. Gershonides suggests that Avraham did indeed respond and explained to Paroh the concerns that had motivated him to conceal his true relationship to Sarah. He offers an interesting proof for this contention. The Torah explains that upon dismissing Avraham and expelling him from the country, Paroh appointed officers to care for Avraham and Sarah. The Torah does not explain the precise function of these officers. Gershonides explains that apparently these officers were appointed in response to Avraham's explanation of his concerns. Paroh accepted Avraham's explanation and appointed these officers to protect Avraham and Sarah from suitors who might resort to extreme and desperate means to secure Sarah.<sup>5</sup>

This is not the general view among the commentators. Most suggest that Avraham did not respond to Paroh. Why then did Paroh appoint officers to care for Avraham and Sarah? There are a number of interesting explanations offered. Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra offers the simplest explanation. Paroh understood that some providential power had struck at him on behalf of Avraham. He was angry with Avraham, but also impressed. He demonstrated his respect for Avraham by appointing a royal retinue to serve him.<sup>6</sup>

Rashi suggests that Paroh was angry with Avraham but he also fully understood his reason for concealing his relationship with Sarah. Paroh chastised Avraham for his action but he also appreciated that it was a necessary precaution. Therefore, he appointed a bodyguard to protect Sarah and Avraham during the balance of their time in Egypt.<sup>7</sup>

Malbim offers one of the most interesting explanations for Avraham's silence. He contends that a careful reading of the passages suggests that Paroh's only criticism of Avraham was that he maintained his subterfuge even with Paroh. He understood

Avraham's concern over the behavior of commoners. His criticism was that Avraham should not have suspected the ruler of Egypt. He had no right to assume that he was an immoral despot who would violate the marriage of a citizen or guest in his country. Avraham's only response could be silence. He did not regard Paroh as morally superior to his subjects but he did not feel he could reveal this assessment to the king.<sup>8</sup>

In summary, Gershonides suggests that Avraham indeed did respond to Paroh. Malbim suggests that because Paroh only criticized Avraham for concealing the truth from him Avraham could not respond. Most commentators assume that Paroh's criticism was broader and was an attack against Avraham's deception and distrust of the king and the commoners. Why according to these commentators was Avraham silent?

### 5. Understanding Avraham's silence

Rabbayu David Kimchi – Radak – responds that Paroh asked the question in a curt and dismissive manner. This suggested to Avraham that the question was no more than rhetorical and was intended only as a criticism. Because the question did not represent an authentic desire to understand the concerns that had prompted Avraham's actions, Avraham judged that a response would be useless.<sup>9</sup>

This brings us to an important question. Most of the commentators come to two conclusions. First, they assume that Paroh was deeply shaken by his encounter with Avraham. Avraham – or his G-d – had brought him to his knees and forced him to return Sarah. He recognized that Avraham was in some way special and powerful. Second, they conclude that Paroh questioned Avraham about his deception. However his question was insincere and really only intended as a criticism. In other words, Paroh recognized that he had encountered a remarkable power that had punished him for his actions. Yet, he continued to profess innocence and did not make a sincere inquiry regarding why he had been punished. Why did Paroh not sincerely ask Avraham to explain himself? What prevented Paroh from trying to understand the remarkable events he had just experienced?

### 6. Paroh's dismissal of Avraham as a moral authority

The answer to this question is that Paroh was confronted by a painful dilemma. There is no doubt that at some level he realized that his experiences represented a punishment and he suspected that it was deserved. Yet, courage would be required to fully consider the lessons to be learned from his encounter with Avraham and the plague that had humiliated him and his household. This left him with two choices. One option was to consider the possibility that Avraham had acted with reason and justly. The plague that had humbled him and his household were a deserved punishment for his conduct and leadership failings. To adopt this perspective would require that he find the courage to engage in honest introspection and that he accept Avraham as a mentor and teacher.

The second option available to Paroh was to dismiss the entire episode and to retreat back into his lusts and fantasies. This would require his dismissal of Avraham as a moral guide and of the plague as a just consequence for his own immoral behaviors. Of course, dismissal of Avraham would require that he find fault with Avraham. Thereby, he could dismiss any standing Avraham might otherwise deserve as a moral guide.

Paroh opted for the second course of action. He was not unaware of the real possibility that he had been justly punished. He merely was unwilling to investigate and take seriously this possibility. He feared that such an introspective process might lead to a painful

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assessment of his basic values and lifestyle. Therefore, he rejected the punishment as a moral warning and next he rejected Avraham as a moral guide. Instead of sincerely seeking his guidance, he rhetorically questioned his behavior and accused him of acting with deceit and injustice. He told Avraham that he – Avraham – bared full responsibility for the trauma Sara had endured. His own deceit had caused it.

### 7. Everyday life repeats Paroh's dilemma

We are constantly faced with the dilemma that confronted Paroh. We must choose between seeking moral guidance, taking seriously the lessons provided by the Torah and taught by its teachers or rejecting those which we find challenging or threatening. Do we ever resort to Paroh's subterfuge? Do we ever criticize or search for fault in the Torah and its teachers so that we can thereby, avoid heeding their lessons?

Rabbaynu Menachem Meiri addresses this issue in his commentary of Avot. He notes that the mishne teaches that a person should "make" for himself a rav – a master or teacher. He explains that every person requires a teacher. Even a person who is an outstanding scholar and can find no other who is his equal, requires a teacher to advise him. This is because it is impossible to be objective about one's own actions and conduct. The great scholar can receive invaluable guidance from the lesser scholar. This is because in regard to his own actions and behaviors, even the greatest scholar can be a fool. Meiri explains that this is the reason the mishne suggests that one "make" for oneself a teacher. Even if the teacher only deserves this role because the greater scholar has made him his teacher, he is nonetheless an invaluable asset to this scholar.<sup>10</sup>

### 8. Everyone needs to "make" a teacher

However, Meiri's insight also applies to every person. Each person must decide to trust another who will provide moral guidance and, when necessary, criticism. It is always necessary to "make" this person one's

guide and mentor. This is because criticism can always be deflected by finding fault in the mentor – just a Paroh rejected Avraham as a mentor. Sometimes the fault will be imagined – as in Paroh's case. More often, the fault will be an inevitable result of the mentor's own humanity.

The Talmud comments that it is prohibited to suspect one's teacher.<sup>11</sup> Maimonides explains that this is an expression of the general obligation to respect teachers.<sup>12</sup> However, in light of the above discussion, another explanation of the prohibition is suggested. A teacher can only be effective if both his pleasant teachings and his criticisms are accepted by the student. It is natural for the student to wish to dismiss and ignore the criticisms. Therefore, every teacher inevitably is a target of intense scrutiny and is often harshly critiqued by his students. The Talmud perhaps is warning us that our suspicions and our criticisms of our teachers may have a self-serving motive. We may be criticizing our teacher to escape confronting an unpleasant message. ■

1. Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 12:11.

2. Rabbaynu Levi ben Gershon (Ralbag / Gershonides), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 12:13.

3. Rav Meir Leibush ben Yechiel Michel (Malbim), HaTorah VeHaMitzvah – Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 12:13.

4. Rav Meir Leibush ben Yechiel Michel (Malbim), HaTorah VeHaMitzvah – Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 12:14-15.

5. Rabbaynu Levi ben Gershon (Ralbag / Gershonides), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 12:20.

6. Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 12:20.

7. Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 12:19-20.

8. Rav Meir Leibush ben Yechiel Michel (Malbim), HaTorah VeHaMitzvah – Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 12:19.

9. Rabbaynu David Kimchi (Radak), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 12:19.

10. Rabbaynu Menachem Me'eri, Bait HaBechirah, Mesechet Avot 1:6.

11. Mesechet Sanhedrin 110a.

12. Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Talmud Torah 5:1.



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# LECH LICHA

Rabbi Israel Chait

Transcribed by a student



Genesis 11:31,32 records 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 died thereafter in Charan. Rashi tells us that Abraham was actually commanded by God 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 God commanded Abraham while his father was still alive, to "leave your land, your birthplace and your father's house and go to the land that I (God) will show you."

Rashi on 12:1 asks a very simplistic but insightful question. God 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 God informed Abraham that he should depart further from Charan and leave his father's home. Furthermore, God tells Abraham to move to a land that "I will show you". Rashi comments that God did not show him the land immediately in order to make the land more beloved in his eyes. Additionally, God'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 God wanted to reward him for each and every word that God uttered with respect to his departure from Charan.

Upon closer scrutiny, Rashi's explanations raise several questions: Why didn't God 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 God's concealing the identity of the land make it more appealing. Additionally, what is Rashi's intent in stating that God 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, an idolatrous household. Despite this influences, Abraham recognized God 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 one's 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 man's desire for idolatry. Human nature demands certain assurances in order to protect and shield man from his insecurities. The Pagans sought the protection of many gods, to shield them from all impending disasters of the outside world: real or imagined.

God, by instructing Abraham to leave Ur Casdim, was teaching Abraham an important concept essential for Abraham's quest for moral perfection. Ur Casdim

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represented to Abraham his base of security. He originally departed Ur Casdim for 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. Therefore Rashi explains, God commanded him to leave his "birthplace", although he was already in Charan. Charan represented an extension of Ur Casdim. Charan afforded Abraham 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 God 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.

God 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, God, is his security. Therefore Rashi is teaching us that God told Abraham; leave behind the emotional security of your childhood, your land, your birthplace and your father's home.

"Throw your bundles to God and His will be your portion". A chacham, (wise person) only seeks security in a system of ideas and concepts, with Hashem, God, at the source of this system. His security is the halachic system which gives him comfort and guides him through 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 God did not choose to show Abraham the land immediately. If God were to have shown Abraham the land at the time of his departure from Charan, he would have merely 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, God 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 represents emotional security. It was a qualitatively different type of love, whereby Abraham would find his need for security fulfilled in his relationship with God. Therefore, God 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 God 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 God bless Abraham and make him into a great nation, a "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. ■



# Sanctifying God's Name & Abram's Identity

Rabbi Israel Chait

Transcribed by a student

**T**he Medrash states that Terach informed on Abram, his son. (God had not yet changed his name to "Abraham") Terach reported to Nimrod that Abram was a societal deviant, not adhering to the philosophies of the masses. We learn from Maimonides' history of Abram, (Laws of Idolatry 1:3) that Abram realized and educated many on monotheism. Abram exposed the flaws of idolatry to the masses. These included the entire generation in which Abram lived. Understandably, Abram was not particularly liked, and his father too did not tolerate him. Terach then informed on Abram to the current leader Nimrod. According to Medrash, Abram was then cast into a furnace, but was miraculously saved.

Informing on his son, Terach did not display normal, parental behavior. It is normal for a child to rebel against the father, but not the reverse. However, later on, Terach had a change of heart and took Abram and his nephew Lote from Ur Kasdim: (Gen. 11:31) "And Terach took Abram his son, and Lote, son of Haran, son of his brother, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, wife of Abram his son, and they exited with him from us Kasdim to travel to the land of Canaan. And they came to Charan,

and they dwelled there."

Terach's remaining in Charan - not continuing on to his initial destination of Canaan - teaches that Terach's goal was not so much to reach Canaan, but rather, to leave Ur Kasdim. In Charan, he decided he was far enough out of reach of Ur Kasdim.

Abram's influence in Ur Kasdim was tied to his identity as a citizen of Ur Kasdim, who was a revolutionary in religion. The authorities considered him an irreligious person, who had renounced the religion of the state. He was nevertheless influential. People came to him to hear his ideas. After his conviction and miraculous escape, he assumed another identity: an exile, who had convinced his greatest adversary, his own father, to stand along side him. Terach did not really repent; he did not really embrace the ideas of his son's new religion, but was sorry for acting against him. He felt guilty as a father for wronging him, and took him out of Ur, together with the son of his deceased son who died at the hands of Nimrod. Although Terach acted out of guilt, to the world, it appeared that Abram's former prosecutor was converted to his supporter. This was Abram's new platform for the world. People would no doubt be curious

to meet with such a person; a former rebel against the state, who had escaped miraculously, and had won over his greatest adversary, his own father.

Abram expected to use his new identity as a means to influence people and teach them the true idea of God. At this point, God intervened through prophecy and told him to leave his land and all the attachments he had to it, and to leave the house of his father. He would concern himself only with attaining his further perfection by breaking all attachments and emotional ties to his roots, and emerging as a totally independent individual - not only intellectually, but emotionally as well. As to his identity and public platform, which would be lost due to his travels, God would supply this for him. "...I will bless you and make your name great." (Gen. 12:2) This injunction freed Abram to work only on the world of his inner perfection, while the platform for his success would be supplied by the Almighty.

Why does the Torah not reveal anything about Abram's greatest accomplishments, his own discovery of the true idea of God, the Creator of the universe? The Torah is not a book about personal accomplishments. It is a book about the sanctification of God's name, by making Him known to the world. This could only be accomplished through God's assistance and constant providence. As great as Abram's personal accomplishment was, it would have vanished in time, were it not for God's intervention, which began with the injunction, "Lech Lecha" ("Go forth") to Abram, and found its culmination in the giving of the Torah to the Jewish people.

Thus, the Torah introduces us to Abram under the injunction of "Lech Lecha" - the means through which the eternal sanctification of God's name became possible. ■

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