

SHABBAT SHALOM. Today is 10 Mar Cheshvan 5782. Still time for Kiddush Levanah.

TORAH DIALOGUE
(p. 45 Hz) (p. 60 S) (p. 61 Hi) (54 AS)
LECH L'CHA

Genesis 12:1

[Compiled by Rabbi Edward Davis (RED),
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1. Our Patriarch Avraham was destined for greatness from a very early age. In the Midrash the Rabbis try to figure out at what point in Avraham's life he was aware of the Almighty, Creator of the Universe. Whether it was very early, or as an adult, he still stands alone in the world at that time. He was required to live a nomadic life, a life that would take him from Ur Kasdim (possibly Iraq) to Charan (possibly on the Syrian-Turkish border), a distance of over 600 miles, and then to travel south from there to Canaan, a distance of about 450 miles. This trip took him through different lands with different cultures, customs, language, climate, and character traits of people. The majority of his life he was totally distant from the original family which settled in the Charan area. A lot of this trip took him through hostile populations. The nomadic life was seemingly to separate him from existing peoples who rejected him as an outcast and a strong-willed personality. Just being told by Hashem to leave his family and home was in and of itself a mandate that would form a style of life. He was not permitted to settle in any one region for any length of time. (RED)

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

3. After the generation of the Tower of Babel the division among the people also caused strife to exist between these nations who could not communicate well with each other. The strife led to a war mentality that spread throughout the region. The civilized world as it was back then became a world of hand-to-hand combat. Four thousand years ago the Hittites, who were settled in the area of Turkey, invaded the south through Canaan and had a major military encounter with Egypt. These battles between formidable foes were primarily located in Syria and in Canaan. It was this backdrop which makes the story of the war between the Four Kings and the Five Kings simple to accept; it was part of the reality of life in ancient times. When the Torah introduced us to Nimrod in last week's parsha of Noach it designates Nimrod

as a warrior and set the tone for the warlike life that people had yet from his day onward. The Midrash puts Avraham in Nimrod's clutches. It was Nimrod who cast Avraham into a fiery furnace according to the Midrash. That Midrash is so accepted that most commentators feel that the encounter between Avraham and Nimrod is one of the ten tests that Avraham had to endure. The fact that he survived such an encounter is proof of Hashem's protection of Avraham. The military and warlike conditions of the time overwhelmed the entire land of Canaan during Avraham's nomadic life in the region.

4. In this story of Avraham, Hashem is the one who commanded him to make "aliyah," to leave his father and the family back in Charan and to live in the spiritually elevated area of Canaan, the Promised Land. The divine mandate to make aliyah is discussed in the Midrash at the end of Parshat Noach, where it states that Terach had died. If Terach was actually still alive then the question was raised about a son defying the parents' wishes to make aliyah. This is something raised in the Midrash which we see in America to be a topical issue. The other form of aliyah that the Rabbis offer as a model is the mandate that Avimelech later gives to Yitzchak to kick him out of the Plishtim lands and live elsewhere in Canaan. This raises two models of the modern day aliyah experience. One is when the host country in exile is no longer a welcoming site for Jewish living. Discrimination in a hostile environment is the Avimelech motivation for Jews of that country to make aliyah. The Avraham model of aliyah is more like a Nefesh B'Nefesh type of message that we see in North America. This has enveloped thousands of Jewish people in North America who have heard their own form of Lech L'Cha, deciding to make aliyah because of the spirit of a divine message of Avraham, and not because they are running from a hostile environment. (RED)

5. The Brit Bein HaBetarim, the Covenant Between the Pieces, was the second covenant that Hashem made with mankind according to the writings of Rabbi Dovid Tzvi Hoffman. The first was the covenant after the Flood in which Hashem promised not to wipe out humanity again through flood. The second covenant on the other hand was to establish the Chosen People on earth through Avraham's descendants. The people would be purified first by the terrible oppressive slavery in the "iron furnace" of Egypt. Then they would exit Egypt with much wealth and return to the Promised Land. Hashem was telling Avraham at this time not only that he would inherit the land, but also about the nature of that inheritance, that the land had tremendous quality, spiritually and materialistically. Avraham displayed tremendous faith in Hashem and consequently Hashem rewards him for that Emunah, that faith. That would enable the descendants of Avraham to eternally live as spiritual guides for the rest of mankind throughout history. We are supposed to become the kingdom of priests and a holy nation. This was what Hashem meant when He told Avraham "your reward will be very great." (15:1)

6. When Hashem tells Avraham to circumcise himself and his son Yishmael and the other males of his household, Avraham consults with his three comrades and dear friends,

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

7. Three people physically resembled Avraham – one was a close relative; one, a distant relative; and one, a non-relative (Midrash). Who were they?

8 MIDRASH. BEREISHIT RABBAH 45:1. R. Shimon b. Yochai said: Hagar was Pharaoh's daughter, when Pharaoh saw what was done on Sarah's behalf in his own house, he took his daughter and gave her to Sarah, saying: Better my daughter be a handmaid in this house than a mistress in another house. Avimelech, too, when he saw the miracles performed in his house on Sarah's behalf, gave his daughter to her, saying: Better let my daughter be a handmaid in this house than a mistress in another.

HAFTORAH

(p. 60 H) (p. 82 S) (p. 825 Hi) (p. 1133 AS)

ISAIAH יְשַׁעְיָהוּ 40:27

This prophecy, which serves as a consolation to Jews regarding the length of their exile, echoes in passage 41:2—“who aroused from the east”—our Sidrah's account of Avraham coming from the east to overcome the mighty kings in battle. Its theme is that Hashem has not forsaken His people and that He will give them the strength to survive it and learn its lessons in preparation for a return to their land. God is the judge of the world, guiding and supervising it, judging each individual according to his merits. We, however, cannot fathom the wisdom of His justice. The

prophet, therefore, proclaims, “How can you think that the Almighty does not pay attention to you? Indeed, He supervises the entire world for He created it, and since He created it, He surely gives it His attention. Since He judges the world, He will surely mete out justice upon the nations who oppress you and keep you in bondage.” (Radak)

SHABBAT HALACHAH

FOLDING A TALLIT ON SHABBAT

Authorities such as Magen Avraham and Mishnah Brurah, do not permit folding a tallit on Shabbat morning after prayer, except where it is customary to wear a tallit again during the Minchah service. Others permit it if the tallit is not folded in its original folds. (This is the opinion that I favor—RED.) Some permit folding it in the same folds, especially if one wears that tallit only on Shabbat. The reason given for permitting it is that it is a tallit used in performance of a mitzvah, and the duty to beautify a mitzvah requires that the tallit be kept in good condition and not subject to being torn and soiled when left unfolded every Shabbat.

SWIMMING

It is clearly forbidden to go swimming on Shabbat, according to all Poskim.