

QUALIFYING AS THE FOUNDING FATHER OF A CHOSEN PEOPLE



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Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

Avram was a Different Dimension

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Avram Wanted THE Answer

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Figuring out G-d in a Pagan World

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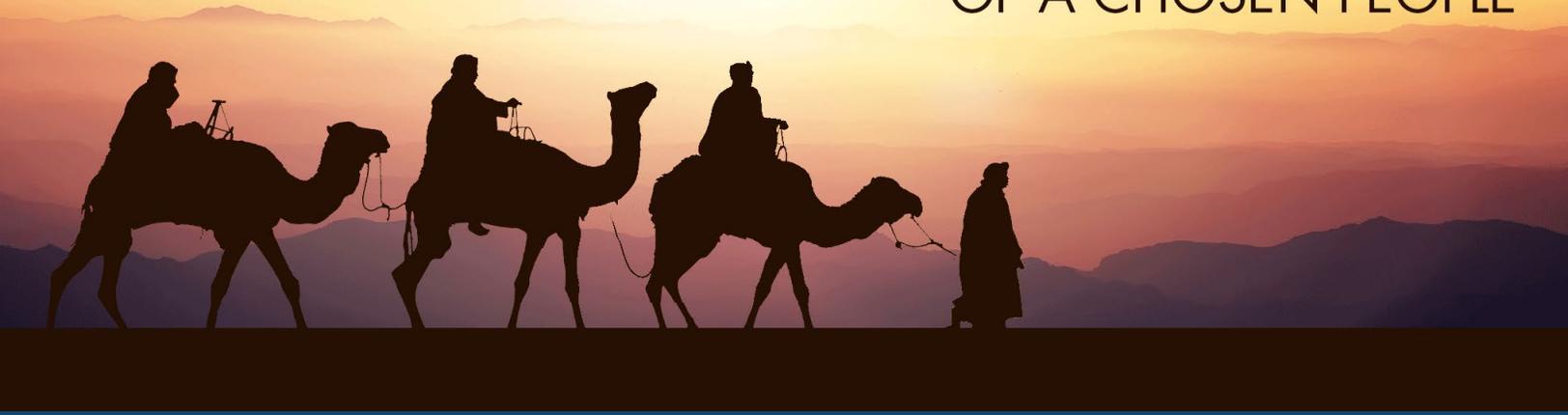


Avram Understood the Counterforce that Exists

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How Weighty is The Debt of Gratitude

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1. G-d told Avraham to leave his homeland, birthplace, and family.
2. He separated himself from every member of his family including Lot.
3. Why did Avraham agree to take his nephew Lot with him?
4. When Avraham was told by Nimrod to bow to the idol or be thrown into the kiln- he chose to die.
5. Haran, Lot's father and Avraham's brother, stood by the sidelines thinking that if his brother came out unscathed, he would follow.
6. He entered and perished.
7. Haran was the first man to die to sanctify G-d's name.
8. Avraham believed that Lot, as Haran's son, was the exception to the family.
9. Avraham separated from Lot when it was revealed he was a thief.
10. Lot, with all of his possessions, moved to Sedom- the seat of all evil.
11. Before separating, Avraham made a pact with him to be there for him at all costs.
12. When Lot was taken captive by the four mightiest kings, Avraham miraculously saved him, regardless if it cost him his merits. Why?

A Metamorphosis To Begin A New Existence

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1. Avraham was told by G-d that He will make his name great.
2. Rashi: The letter Hey will be added to his name: Avraham is numerically 248, which is equal to the number of parts of the human body.
3. Before Avraham was circumcised he did not have full control over his physicality.
4. He fathered Yitzchok after he was circumcised and added Hey to his name.
5. Gemara: G-d created the world to come with the spirituality of the letter Yud and the physical world with the spirituality of letter Hey.
6. Midrash: Just as the letter "Hey" brought about all existence, when added to your name, it will cause a metamorphic change within you.
7. Avraham became a new creation; one that did not previously exist.
8. The innateness of the Jew is the equivalent of all existence.
9. Midrash: G-d said "I will make you into a great People, not one that will evolve into a great People."
10. The Jewish People coming into being is the equivalent of Ex nihilo.

Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Lech-Lecha

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Avraham Safeguarding His Spirituality Through Fences

Midrash regarding Avraham our Patriarch: “One who is meticulous regarding *mitzvos*, his reward is great.” One could think that the *Midrash* is referring to one who is meticulous in the performance of *mitzvos*; however, it is actually referring to something that surpasses this.

Midrash: “We find that Avraham was meticulous regarding *mitzvos*. Because of this, he is identified as ‘the beloved of G-d.’ As it states in *Yeshaya*, ‘They are the progeny of Avraham, my beloved...’ Even the rabbinic law of *eiruv tavshilin* was observed in the household of Avraham. As it states, ‘He observed My Commandments, My Dictates, and My *Torahs*...’ Are there multiple *Torahs*? We know that there is only one *Torah* as it states, ‘There is one *Torah* that shall be yours...’ Why then does the verse refer to the *Torah* in the plural? It is to communicate that Avraham had observed the *Torah* and its intricacies by establishing

fences to guarantee that the *Torah* will not be violated. G-d said, ‘You who are meticulous in My *mitzvos*, should sit among pagans and idol worshipers? You should leave their midst and go to the Land that I shall show you...’”

At Sinai, the Jewish people had unequivocally accepted the *Torah* with the declaration of, “*Naaseh V’nishma* – we will do and we will listen.” They were willing to accept the dictate of G-d without understanding its extent and its ramifications. However, despite this, G-d had given them an ultimatum to accept the *Torah*. He held the mountain over their heads and said to them, “If you accept the *Torah* it will be good. If not your will be buried under the mountain.”

Tosfos: “If they had already accepted the *Torah* unequivocally with the declaration of *Naaseh V’nishma*, why did G-d need to hold the mountain over their heads?” The fires that they had seen at Sinai were the fires of *geheimom*, to indicate that if they should fail

they would be punished in this manner. When they became aware of their level of their liability (if they deviate from the Word of G-d) they wanted to retract their acceptance of the *Torah*. Therefore, G-d needed to put the mountain over their heads and give them an ultimatum. They had no choice but to remain firm in their commitment.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh: Although it is true that the Jewish people had accepted the *Torah* at Sinai unequivocally, G-d had said to them that in order to properly observe the *Torah* they would need to accept upon themselves all of the rabbinic fences that would legislated by *Chazal* throughout time. This, they were not willing to accept. G-d thus needed to hold the mountain over their heads in order to compel them to accept the Rabbinic fences.

Avraham not only observed the Divine dictates of the *Torah*, he established all the safeguards and fences that were necessary to observe the *Torah* meticulously. He understood that the only way one could observe the *Torah* properly was through fences. If our *Torah* Sages had not legislated and promulgated fences, it is inevitable that one would transgress the *Torah* law. Since *Avraham* was meticulous in his observance of the *Torah* through fences, he assumed the classification of the “beloved of G-d.”

Mishna in Ethics of our Fathers: “*Shimon* the righteous, who was the remnant of the High Assembly said, ‘Make fences for the *Torah*.’” Meaning, in addition to the Rabbinic fences that were promulgated, one must establish on a personal level fences in order to protect the *Torah*. Since one is aware of his personal vulnerabilities, he should establish the necessary safeguards for himself so as not to even approach transgression.

Avraham’s Context of Choice

Midrash Tanchuma citing *Song of Songs*: “A young sister (*achos*) whose breasts have not yet developed..’ To whom is this verse referring? It is referring to *Avraham*. The term ‘young (*kitana*)’ alludes to the fact that when *Avraham* went into the fire it was at a time that he had not yet experienced any of G-d’s miracles. Why is *Avraham* referred to as ‘*achos*-sister?’ (*Eecha* in Hebrew means to mend). *Avraham* mended the world before G-d. This is similar to one who wants to mend a garment. First he must tear it, in order to mend it properly. So too did *Avraham* tear and mend. (He

engaged the world in theological dialogue and debate to refute paganism. By tearing down the false beliefs of paganism, *Avraham* was then able to mend the world to establish truth).”

When *Nimrod* had given *Avraham*, our Patriarch the ultimatum to either bow to the idol or be thrown into the fiery kiln, *Avraham* did not hesitate to give his life for G-d, although at that time he had not yet experienced any miracles. Only because *Avraham* was willing to die for G-d did he merit to emerge from the kiln unscathed. In contrast, *Avraham*’s brother, *Haran*, who was also thrown into the fiery kiln for not bowing to the idol did not emerge from the fire. The reason he did not merit a miracle to be saved was because he only entered into the fire with the understanding that he would emerge unscathed like his brother *Avraham*. He thus expected that G-d would also perform a miracle on his behalf.

Chazal: If one goes into the fire expecting a miracle, he will not emerge alive. One only merits a miracle if he is willing to sacrifice his life for G-d.

Mishna in Ethics of our Fathers: “*Avraham* was tested with ten tests...” Most of the commentators are of the opinion that “*Lech Lecha*” is the first of the ten tests that G-d presented to *Avraham*. However, *Avraham* being thrown into the Kiln of *Kasdim* is not considered to be one of the tests. If *Avraham* was given the choice to bow to the idol or be thrown into the kiln and die, why is this not considered to be one of the tests?

Gemara in Avodah Zorah: A non-Jew is not obligated to give his life in order to sanctify the Name of G-d. However, if a Jew is faced with the choice to either bow to an idol or give his life, he must give his life to sanctify G-d’s Name. *Avraham*’s classification was a Noahide and thus was not obligated to give his life. If this is so, why is it not considered to be one of the tests?

Because of *Avraham*’s level of internalization of truth, understanding that G-d is the Supreme Omnipotent Being of all existence, he could not tolerate living as a pagan. Living as a pagan was not a consideration to *Avraham* because it was the equivalent of a living death. This is similar to what *Chazal* teach us, “The evil even when they are alive are considered to be dead.” An evil person is considered to be dead, although as a physical being he is fully functional; nevertheless, because he is not addressing his spiritual objective, which is the essence of his being, he is living a life of futility.

In contrast, a devoutly righteous person is considered to be alive even after his passing. This is because the *tzaddik*, when he was alive, was dedicated to a life of truth and spirituality, which is the essence of his being. When the *tzaddik* passes away he advances and continues on to a greater level of understanding of truth. Thus, his physical existence is not the determining factor regarding his purpose. *Avraham* had achieved such an advanced level of clarity regarding truth and the Will of G-d that sacrificing his life for the sake of G-d was not considered to be a challenge. He understood that life only has value if it is a life of truth.

If one would need to accept paganism and bow to the idol, which is baseless and false, it is a greater manifestation of death than death itself. It was because of this special level of clarity that the fiery Kiln was not a test for *Avraham*, our Patriarch. If one is truly committed to G-d and thus lives a life of *Torah* values and dictates, transgressing the *Torah* is not a consideration. If one is confronted with a choice to violate the *Shabbos* or not, when it does not conform with *Torah* criteria to do so, it is not considered to be a challenge for that individual. Something is only considered to be a test if one does not appreciate the innateness of the wrong or the special value of the right. Only then does one feel challenged.

Avraham's Sacrifice, Setting the Dynamic or the Future in Motion

Midrash: After *Avraham* had smashed the idols of his father, *Nimrod* the king had given him an ultimatum either to bow to the idol or be thrown into the fiery kiln. *Avraham* chose to give his life to sanctify G-d's Name rather than bow to the idol. Miraculously, *Avraham* emerged from the kiln unscathed.

Midrash citing a verse regarding the ultimatum that was presented to *Avraham* by *Nimrod*: "The verse states in *Song of Songs*, 'If it is a wall we will build upon it an edifice of silver...' G-d said to *Avraham*, 'If you are willing to give your life to sanctify My Name like a wall, which will remain standing even after enduring many wars, then you will be qualified to build upon you an edifice of silver.' What is the edifice of silver? It is the Jewish people. As it states, 'the dove whose wings are coated with silver....'

"However, if *Avraham* is like a door (*deles*), meaning you are weak (*dal*) and do not have the resolve to give your life to sanctify My Name. I will then consider you a

location upon which one places a plank of cedar wood. Just as something that is etched upon cedar wood with time will become blotched and thus has no lasting value, so too will you *Avraham* have no value in My eyes.

"*Avraham* responded, 'I am like the wall. I am willing to give my life for the sake of Your Name- not only me, 'my breasts are like towers.' To whom are the towers referring? *Chananya*, *Meshael*, and *Azaria*, and the generation of *Reb Chananya Ben Tradyon* and his peers (Ten Martyrs). They will give their lives to sanctify G-d's Name. Because of this, *Avraham* will have peace come upon him, and will emerge from the fiery kiln unharmed." It is understood that *Avraham* could speak on his own behalf regarding his choice to give his life for the sake of G-d, to sanctify His Name. However, how could *Avraham* guarantee that his future progeny would do the same?

Torah at the beginning of *Lech Lecha*: Regarding the blessing that G-d had given to *Avraham*, "...Go for yourself from your land... And I will make of you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great, and you shall be a blessing."

Rashi citing the *Midrash*: "The verse, 'I will make you into a great nation' means I (G-d) will be identified as 'the G-d of *Avraham* - *Elokei Avraham*.' 'I will bless you...' means I (G-d) will be identified as 'the G-d of *Yitzchak* - *Elokei Yitzchak*.' 'I will make your name great...' means I (G-d) will be identified as 'the G-d of *Yaakov* - *Elokei Yaakov*...' What is the correlation between the promise of making *Avraham* into a great nation and identifying G-d as "*Elokei Avraham*?" Having great renown corresponding to "*Elokei Yaakov*?"

Chazal: Before the building of the *Mishkan* the Patriarchs were the location of the Divine Presence in this existence. "*Hein hein ha Merkava* (they are the Chariot)." Each Patriarch was the equivalent of the Holy of Holies in the Temple. *Avraham*, *Yitzchak*, and *Yaakov* had the capacity to be the domicile of G-d's Presence in existence. Each of the Patriarchs were unique in their own right. Each emulated G-d through one of His Attributes. *Avraham* chose to emulate G-d through loving kindness (*chesed*), *Yitzchak* emulated precision and exactness (justice), *Yaakov* emulated the Attribute of Mercy. Since each one of the Patriarchs was qualified to be the location of the Divine Presence, the consequence of each Patriarch's dimension of spirituality generated its own particular result that was eternal.

The derivative of *Avraham's* spirituality was that the Jewish people would be a great nation. The derivative of *Yitzchak's* spirituality was that the Jewish people would have blessing. The derivative of *Yaakov's* spirituality was that the Jewish people would have great renown. When *Avraham* chose to give his life to sanctify G-d's Name, his act of sacrifice for the sake of G-d was done with the greatest level of purity and selflessness. Thus, it brought about the most advanced eternal result and effect.

Avraham thus said that not only would he be willing to give his life, but also his descendants in the future would do the same because of the spiritual dimension of his sacrifice. His quality of self sacrifice gave the future generations the ability to sanctify G-d's Name in a similar manner. *Chananya*, *Meshael*, and *Azaria*, when they were thrown into the kiln was a unique level of sanctification of G-d's Name. Reb *Chananya* Ben Tradyon and the Ten Martyrs were only able to achieve that special level of sacrifice because of *Avraham's* quality of sacrifice.

The Dual Value of the Tests Presented to Avraham

Mishna in *Ethics of our Fathers*: "*Avraham* was tested with ten tests..." One would think that a test is intended to be only for the sake of the one being tested. However, we see from *Chazal* that the tests that were presented to *Avraham* were not only for his own personal development. The first test that G-d presented *Avraham* was "*Lech Lecha*." *Avraham* was told by G-d to leave his land, relatives, and his father's house to go to a land that would be shown to him. G-d revealed to *Avraham* that he would need to journey to the land of *Canaan*. The *Torah* states after *Avraham* arrived in the land of *Canaan*, "There was a famine in the land..."

Midrash: Since the beginning of creation there was never such a severe famine in existence as there was in the land of *Canaan*. "G-d wanted to test that *tzaddik* (*Avraham*) to make known to the world his good deeds." Thus, the test was not only for *Avraham's* personal spiritual growth, it was also for the entire world to be able to appreciate who he was. *Avraham* was to be the role model for existence. The world would come to learn that the motivating factor in every aspect of *Avraham's* life was to fulfill the Will of G-d. Thus, despite the adversity and difficulty of the tests, he succeeded. The world would come to understand and appreciate

if one is totally dedicated to G-d, He will accommodate every aspect of his needs.

Gemara in Tractate *Berachos*: *Moshe* had asked G-d to explain to him the rationale of "A righteous person who experiences suffering and an evil person who experiences blessing and a righteous person who experiences bounty and an evil person who experiences suffering." G-d did not respond to *Moshe's* question. If every devoutly righteous person experiences only success and bounty, then every person would be motivated to be a *tzaddik*. If every evil person was severely punished immediately then no one would want to follow a path of evil. Thus, in order to maintain a context of free choice to give man the option to choose, G-d created a setting that appears to indicate that the consequences of one's behavior are random. There is no correlation between reward and good deeds and suffering and evil.

Chofetz Chaim: If one were to live long enough, one would see that ultimately everything that comes upon the *tzaddik* is for the good. However, since our lifespan is so short, it is not possible to witness the positive consequences and ramifications of the suffering that is seen in the short frame of life. Thus, one is not able to appreciate the circumstance of the *tzaddik*.

There is no civilization that has victimized and persecuted the Jewish people that remains. G-d has destroyed them all. The Roman and Greek empires no longer exist as well as the other enemies of the Jewish people. One who had lived during the time of their prominence and power would not be able to imagine that these empires would be temporary and the Jewish people would continue and thrive. Existence is a continuum that must be seen in its entirety, in order to be fully appreciated.

G-d dealt with *Avraham* differently because He wanted that he should be known and appreciated by the world. The successes and blessings that came upon *Avraham* were seen to be linked to him passing the tests that were presented to him. One did not need to wait years or lifetimes in order to see G-d in *Avraham's* life. After the first seventy five years of life, during which he experienced great difficulty and lived as a pariah *Avraham* became wealthy and gained renown after he left Egypt to go to *Canaan*. He defeated the four mightiest kings in battle and was proclaimed by the world to be the prince of G-d and the father of all nations.

Although *Avraham* had great challenges and difficulties that were unique and extreme, he emerged to be successful and blessed in every way. *Avraham* was born into a pagan world, where G-d's Presence was an unknown entity. By establishing *Avraham* as a world-renown figure and recognized as a G-d fearing individual who sacrificed himself to the Omnipotent would establish a context of choice that man could choose to emulate the ways of *Avraham* or continue in their pagan ways.

This is similar to what *Ramban* writes in *Parshas Bo*. Although G-d does not normally perform revealed miracles because He does not want to undermine free choice and force one to accept His Presence; nevertheless, at the time of the redemption from Egypt G-d did perform revealed miracles in order to provide mankind a context of choice to be able to believe in the Omnipotent G-d or follow paganism. *Avraham's* success did not undermine the free choice of mankind because the basis for his success was not as overt and obvious as the miracles of Egypt, because they were cloaked in nature.

Noach's Impediment to Clarity **(from Noach)**

Torah: "G-d said to *Noach*, 'For in seven days I will send rain upon the earth, forty days and forty nights, and I will blot out existence....'"

Torah: "And *Noach* did according to everything that G-d had commanded him."

Rashi citing *Chazal*: "And *Noach* did..." can mean, "*Noach* entered into the Ark."

Torah: "*Noach* with his sons, his wife... went into the Ark because of the waters of the flood."

Rashi citing *Chazal*: "The verse is telling us that *Noach* was a 'small believer (*katnei amaanah*)' (deficient in his belief). He believed and he did not believe that the Flood was going to come. He thus did not enter into the Ark, until the floodwaters forced him to do so."

Seemingly, there is a contradiction between the two verses. One verse states that *Noach* entered into the Ark as G-d had commanded him, while the other verse indicates that it was only because of the floodwaters that *Noach* entered into the Ark? How do we reconcile these verses? If *Noach* had invested 120 years of his

life into the building of the Ark, it is evident that he believed that if the generation would fail, the Flood was going to destroy the world. If so, why did *Noach* resist and not enter into the Ark when he was told to do so by G-d?

Torah: "The end of all flesh has come before Me...I am about to destroy them from the earth. Make for yourself an Ark..." G-d commanded *Noach* to embark upon the building of the Ark, which would entail investing 120 years of his life. Since *Noach* was a world-renowned person, through engaging in the building of the Ark, he would attract the attention of all humanity. Thus, allowing him to engage them in a dialogue that was necessary to convince them to repent. *Noach* was given the mission by G-d to affect his generation in order for them to repent.

Factually, *Noach* failed. He did not succeed in causing the generation to repent. The Prophet refers to the waters of the Flood as "*Mai Noach* – the waters of *Noach*" indicating that the Flood came upon existence only because *Noach* had failed in his mission. *Noach* being told by G-d that the Flood was imminent, was the equivalent of telling him that he failed and all existence would be obliterated because of his failing. This was beyond *Noach's* capacity to accept. He thus went into a state of denial and could allow himself to enter into the Ark. It was only after seeing the floodwaters, that he no longer had a choice but to accept the reality of his failing. He is thus classified as "*katnei amaanah* (small believer)."

Gemara in Tractate *Bava Basra*: *Reb Yochanon* had lectured to his students, citing a verse, that at the time of the rebuilding of the Third Temple, the stones that will be used for the gates of Jerusalem will be made of diamonds that would be ten cubits by ten cubits in size. One of *Reb Yochanon's* students was skeptical of what he had heard. At a later time, when this student was traveling the high seas he witnessed in the midst of the ocean, angels cutting large blocks of diamonds. He asked them, "What are you doing?" They responded, "We are cutting these stones to be used for the rebuilding of the Temple."

When he heard what the angels had said, *Reb Yochanon's* student became ecstatic, because what he had witnessed confirmed what his teacher had taught him. Upon returning to Jerusalem, he approached his teacher and exclaimed, "I witnessed with my own

eyes the large diamonds of ten cubits that will be used to rebuild Jerusalem.' When *Reb Yochanon* heard his student's excitement he became enraged and said, "Until you saw the enormity of the diamonds, you did not believe? *Reb Yochanon* gazed upon him and he became a pile of bones. This a more extreme example of one who is deficient in faith.

Noach did not believe, due to his own conflict of interest. Since the destruction of humanity and the world would indicate that he was one who had failed in his mission, he could not accept that the Great Flood was to occur. The veracity of G-d's Words were only confirmed when the floodwaters forced him in to the Ark.

Torah: When the angel told *Avraham* that his wife *Sarah* would have son, the verse states, "And *Sarah* laughed at herself..."

Torah: "Then G-d said to *Avraham*, 'Why did *Sarah* laughed?...."

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh: *Sarah's* laughing did not indicate that she was skeptical as other commentators explain, but rather it means that she was joyous. However, the claim against her was why did she first need to experience a rejuvenation within her physicality by regaining her youth before rejoicing. She should have rejoiced immediately after hearing the angel's good tidings to *Avraham*. The words of the angel only because a reality when she saw her physical rejuvenation. This was the claim against *Sarah*. *Sarah*, our Matriarch definitely was a full believer; however, what was demanded of her was that her belief should have been internalized immediately as a reality.



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