



Partners In Torah

San Diego-Los Angeles-Ventura

Take home Dvar Torah

תשפ"ה Lech Lecha

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Hello, Welcome!

Partners In Torah is a community-wide, independent and inclusive adult education program focusing on understanding Jewish relevancy to our lives by studying text most interesting to each participant.

Through one-on-one discussion for 1 hour each week, friendships are forged between mentors and mentees.

***Partners in Torah
has proven to be effective at reclaiming the rich legacy of wisdom, inspiration, and guidance for many who have, until now, lacked access.***

Thank you for joining us!

Please encourage friends to join you in participating so that we may grow together as a community.

This week's portion introduces us to our Forefather Avraham.

Maimonides (Laws of Idol Worship 1:3) tells us of Avraham's beginning and his greatness.

ג) כיון שנגמל איתן זה התחיל לשוטט בדעתו והוא קטן והתחיל לחשוב ביום ובלילה והיה תמיהה היאך אפשר שיהיה הגלגל הזה נוהג תמיד ולא יהיה לו מנהיג ומי יסבב אותו, כי אי אפשר שיסבב את עצמו, ולא היה לו מלמד ולא מודיע דבר אלא מושקע באור כשדים בין עובדי כוכבים הטפשים ואביו ואמו וכל העם עובדי כוכבים והוא עובד עמהם ולבו משוטט ומבין עד שהשיג דרך האמת והבין קו הצדק מתבוננת הנכונה, וידע שיש שם אלוה אחד והוא מנהיג הגלגל והוא ברא הכל ואין בכל הנמצא אלוה חוץ ממנו, וידע שכל העולם טועים ודבר שגרם להם לטעות זה שעובדים את הכוכבים ואת הצורות עד שאבד האמת מדעתם, ובן ארבעים שנה הכיר אברהם את בוראו,

Avraham Avinu realized that there must be Hashem at the tender age of three years old. As he looked at the solar system he wondered, "How does this system work? Who is operating it? It can't possibly operate itself! There must be a creator who controls it." He had no one to teach him, and he and his parents and all the people of Ur Kasdim were immersed in idol worship, but he was always searching for the truth. Through clear and logical thinking, he finally arrived at the truth. There must be one G-d who controls the whole system; He created everything, and there is nothing but Him. Avraham was forty years of age when he came to recognize Hashem and all of His attributes.

Avraham was called (Genesis 14:13) אברהם העברי - *The Ivri*. The Midrash explains that עבר means *a side*. Avraham was on one side of the world, alone, and the entire world was against him, on the other side. This was when Nimrod convinced the entire civilized world to rebel against Hashem and build the Tower of Bavel. Although Shem and Eber were around and actually had a Yeshiva, they kept to themselves and did not oppose Nimrod. His sole opposition was Avraham.

Once Avraham realized the truth of Hashem, he didn't keep it to himself. Rather, he set out to teach the entire world about Hashem and explain to them why they should abandon their idols and serve Hashem.

Maimonides continues.

כיון שהכיר וידע התחיל להשיב תשובות על בני אור בשדים ולערוך דין עמהם ולומר שאין זו דרך האמת שאתם הולכים בה ושיבר הצלמים והתחיל להודיע לעם שאין ראוי לעבוד אלא לאלוה העולם ולו ראוי להשתחוות ולהקריב ולנסך

Once Avraham came to this conclusion, he started debating with the people of Ur Kasdim to teach them the true path to follow. He broke all the idols and began telling the people that it is inappropriate to serve them; Instead, they should serve Hashem, Master of the universe! Only to Him they should bow and bring sacrifices and libations.

Because of this, Nimrod, tried to kill Avraham by throwing him into a burning fire from which Hashem miraculously saved him.

In his book *Guide to the Perplexed (Section 3 chapter 29)*, Maimonides mentions an ancient civilization called the "Tzaba" who wrote about Avraham Avinu in their history books. Because they were translated into Arabic, Maimonides could understand them. He quotes what they said about Avraham Avinu in their books.

ידוע ש'אברהם אבינו' ע"ה גדל באמונת הצאבה ודעתם, שאין אלוה רק הכוכבים. וכשאודיעך בפרק הזה ספריהם הנמצאים עתה בידינו, אשר נעתקו ללשון הערב, ודברי הימים שלהם הקדומים, ואגלה לך דעתה מהם ועניניהם, יתבאר לך אמרם בבאור, שהכוכבים הם האלוהות ושהשמש הוא האלוה הגדול. וכן אמרו עוד, ששאר הכוכבים החמישה - אלוהות, אבל שני המאורים הם יותר גדולים. ותמצאם אומרים בבאור, שהשמש הוא אשר ינהיג העולם העליון והשפל - בזה הלשון אמרוהו:

It is known that Avraham Avinu grew up Kuta, where the people believed in the Tzaba religion. They believe that the only gods are the celestial beings. All the planets are gods, but the sun, which is the biggest,

is the god that controls the world. They talk about Avraham Avinu in their books. Here is what they said about him.

אמנם אברהם, שגדל בכותא, כשחלק עם ההמון ואמר שיש שם עושה בלתי השמש, טענו עליו בכך וכך; וזכרו בטענותיהם מה שהוא מבואר נגלה מפעולות השמש במציאות, ואמר להם - רצונם לומר, אברהם - צדקתם, הוא כגרזן ביד החוצב בו. וסוף הענין ההוא זכרו שהמלך שם אותו בבית הכלא, ושהוא התמיד לטעון עליהם ימים רבים - והוא בבית כלאו. ואחר כן פחד המלך שיפסיד עליו ממלכתו וישיב בני אדם מאמונתם, ויגרשו המלך לקצה המזרח, אחר שלקח כל אשר לו.

“However, Avraham, who grew up in Kuta, argued with everyone and said that there is a force behind the sun. They (the Tzaba) argued against him with different forms of evidence from the obvious way the sun works. Avraham said to them. ‘You are correct; however, it is all like an axe in the hands of a woodchopper who controls the ax.’”

In the end, they tell how the king imprisoned Avraham because of his beliefs, but he continued to convince people from his prison cell, and because the king was afraid of losing his kingdom because of him, he banished him to the far east after taking all that he had from him.

It is remarkable that the ancient history books of the people who lived in Avraham Avinu’s time, tell the same story about him as our Sages in the Midrash.

The Mishna in Pirkei Avot (5:2) teaches us:

(ב) עֲשָׂרָה דורות מאדם ועד נח, להודיע בְּמָה אֶרֶץ אֲפִים לְפָנָיו, שְׁכָל הַדורות הָיוּ מְכַעֲסִין וּבָאִין עַד שֶׁהִבִּיא עֲלֵיהֶם אֶת מִי הַמַּבּוּל. עֲשָׂרָה דורות מִנֹּחַ ועד אַבְרָהָם, להודיע בְּמָה אֶרֶץ אֲפִים לְפָנָיו, שְׁכָל הַדורות הָיוּ מְכַעֲסִין וּבָאִין, עַד שֶׁבָא אַבְרָהָם וְקָבַל (עָלָיו) שְׂכָר בָּלֵם

2) There were 10 generations from Adam to Noach. To teach you how patient Hashem is. Because each generation angered Hashem more than

the previous one, yet Hashem waited a full ten generations before bringing the flood.

There were 10 generations from Noach to Avraham. To teach you how patient Hashem is. For as each generation angered Hashem more than the previous one, Hashem nevertheless waited until Avraham came and received the reward of all those generations.

Although the ten generations before Noach and the ten generations before Avraham both angered Hashem to the same degree, the outcome for each was different. Noach's generations were destroyed, whereas Avraham's were not. Not only that, Avraham took their reward! What was the dispositive factor that changed the fate of the two sets of ten? And how did Avraham merit all their reward?

The Zohar teaches us:

מה הַשִּׁיב הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לְנֹחַ כְּשִׁיָּצָא מִהַתְּבָה וַרְאָה אֶת הָעוֹלָם חָרָב, וְהִתְחִיל לְבַכּוֹת לְפָנָיו וְאָמַר: רַבּוֹנוּ שֶׁל עוֹלָם, נִקְרָאתָ רַחוּם, הֲיָה לְךָ לְרַחֵם עַל בְּרִיּוֹתֶיךָ וְכוּ'?

הַשִּׁיבוּ הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא וְאָמַר: רוּעָה שׁוֹטָה, עֲכָשׂוּ אֶתְּהָ אֹמֵר אֶת זֶה? לָמָּה לֹא אָמַרְתָּ בְּשָׁעָה שֶׁאָמַרְתִּי לְךָ כִּי אֶתְּךָ רְאִיתִי צָדִיק לְפָנַי וְגו', וְאַחַר הִנְנִי מְבִיא אֶת הַמַּבּוּל מִיָּם, וְאַחַר כֵּן עָשָׂה לְךָ תְּבַת עֲצִי גִפְרִי? כֵּל זֶה הִתְעַכְּבַתִּי וְאָמַרְתִּי לְךָ כִּדִּי שֶׁתִּבְקַשׁ רַחֲמִים עַל הָעוֹלָם, וְיִמָּאֵז שֶׁשִּׁמְעֶתָ שֶׁתִּנְצֵל בַּתְּבָה, לֹא נִכְנַס בְּלִבְךָ לְבַקֵּשׁ רַחֲמִים עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל הָעוֹלָם, וְעָשִׂיתָ תְּבָה וְנִצַּלְתָּ, וְכַעַתָּה, אַחַר שֶׁנִּצְאָד הָעוֹלָם, פָּתַחְתָּ פִּיךָ לֹאמֹר לְפָנַי בְּקִשׁוֹת וְתַחֲנוּנִים?!

What did Hashem respond to Noach when he came out of the ark and saw the world destroyed, and began crying to Hashem, and said: "Master of the Universe, You are called merciful! You should have had mercy on your creatures!" Hashem responded and said, "You foolish shepherd, Now you say this? Why didn't you say this when I singled you out as a Tzadik, and told you that I was going to bring a flood, and that you should make for yourself an ark of gofer wood? I waited the whole

time (120 years) so that you should ask Me for mercy on the world! But once you heard that you would be saved in an ark, it didn't enter your heart to ask for mercy for the rest of the world. You made your ark and saved yourself. And now that the world has been destroyed, you open your mouth with a complaint of 'Why didn't You save Your world?'"

Noach was building the ark on dry land for 120 years. People would ask him, "Noach, why are you building such a large boat on dry land? How will you ever get it to water?"

Noach responded, "If you don't improve your ways, Hashem is going to bring a flood and destroy the world! Me and my family are going to save ourselves in this ark!" Although he rebuked them, Noach did not influence a single person in his generation to mend his ways. He also did not pray to Hashem to save them.

Here again Hashem demonstrated His patience by waiting 120 years for the people to see the folly of their ways, and repent. When they did not, Hashem destroyed them.

This is why the prophet Isaiah (54:9) finds Noach guilty for the flood.

(ט) כִּי מִי נִחַ זֹאת לִי

9) For [like] **the waters of Noach** shall this be to me...

Isaiah calls the flood - "**the waters of Noach**" implying that had he prayed for his generation, he could have saved them. Therefore, he is held responsible for their demise.

Here lies the essential difference between Noach and Avraham. Noach did not teach his generation about Hashem. He was content to save himself and his family. Avraham, on the other hand, could not keep it to himself. He set out to teach the entire world about Hashem.

Our Sages teach us that through this, Avraham actually saved his generation from destruction. They were headed on the same crash course as the ten generations of Noach. They both angered Hashem equally. True, Hashem had promised that he would not destroy the entire world with a flood, but He has other ways He could have done it had He wanted!

But, because of Avraham, there was hope for the world! Avraham was out convincing people of Hashem's existence! He was making inroads. People were listening to him, and he was building a following. As we saw in the ancient writings of the Tzaba people, Nimrod the king banished Avraham from his kingdom because he was afraid that Avraham was going to topple his false idolic regime.

The epitome of Avraham's goal for reforming the world is seen in his attempt to save even the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. These people had instituted policies against kind acts to a fellow. No one was allowed give a poor person a piece of bread. No one was allowed to offer a person a place to stay. These policies were the antithesis of Avraham Avinu who had built a five-star hotel to provide free food and lodging to any and every passerby.

Yet, when Hashem revealed to Avraham that the people of Sodom had crossed the line and were marked for destruction, instead of saying, "It's about time! Those evil people have been my archenemies forever," Avraham argued and negotiated with Hashem to try to save them! What prompted Avraham to do that?

Before executing His plan, Hashem told Avraham that He intended to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. Unlike Noach, who was also told of the impending destruction, Avraham asked himself, "Why is Hashem telling me this? What does He want from me?"

Avraham correctly concluded that Hashem wanted him to pray for them, and he tried valiantly to save them. In the end, none of them were worthy of being saved, indicating that even Avraham would not have been able to turn them around. Avraham, not knowing that, sought to keep them alive so he could help them change their erroneous ways.

So, we understand how Avraham saved the world, but how did he manage to get all of their reward? The Mishna says, *Avraham came and received the reward of all those generations.*

Rabbeinu Yona a commentary on the Mishna explains.

וקבל שכר כולם. ואע"פ שכל אדם יש לו חלק בגן עדן וחלק בגיהנם, אם יזכה יטול חלקו בגן עדן ואם יתחייב בדינו יטלנו בגיהנם, אבל מאחר שכלם נצטוו לעשות טובה וזה אינו עושה וחבירו מקיים צויו וצווי עצמו, מדת הדין נותנת שיטול חלקו וחלק חבירו בגן עדן, ועל זה נטל אברהם אבינו שכר כולם

Even though every person has his place either in Gan Eiden (Paradise) or gehenom, (hell) - if a person is meritorious he will take it in Gan Eden, and if not he will take it in gehenom. Since all were commanded to do good, and one is not doing his share, and his fellow is doing his own share and the share of the other, the law is that he should also take the reward of the other along with his own reward. This is how Avraham Avinu took all of their reward.

That which every person has a place in Gan Eden, we understand, because every person is created with a mission through which he earns his place in Gan Eden. But, what does Rabbeinu Yona mean when he says that a person may have a place in gehenom?

A deep and profound concept lies at the root of this question.

Hashem created every human being to bring forth "Kiddush Hashem" *sanctification of Hashem's name*. We accomplish this by fulfilling Hashem's commandments. When we are careful to do only

those acts prescribed by Hashem, we are demonstrating that we are servants of Hashem, thus showcasing Hashem, our master, to the world around us.

For example, when a Jew walks to Shul on Shabbat in the pouring rain without an umbrella, he is proclaiming Hashem's kingdom on the world. Why is he walking and not taking his car? If he has decided to walk for some odd reason, why isn't he at least carrying an umbrella?

There is only one answer to these obvious questions. He is Shabbat observant.

I once heard a person say, "God would rather I come to shul looking like a *mensch* and carry an umbrella, rather than come to shul bedraggled by the rain."

The question to ask this gentleman is, "Really? How do you know? In His Torah, Hashem has told us otherwise. It is more important to keep the Shabbat than to look good in Shul, because with that you proclaim Hashem's kingdom on the world."

With every action that we do, and every time we refrain from doing something we are not permitted by Torah to do, we are sanctifying Hashem's name. Since the sole reason for doing what we are doing is because of Hashem's law, we proclaim Hashem with every action.

In the event that one chooses not to sanctify Hashem's name, nevertheless, Hashem's name will ultimately be sanctified in a different way. That is through the punishment that will befall the person who perpetrated the evil. When evil is punished, Hashem's name is sanctified because all see how crime doesn't pay.

When a murderer receives the death penalty for his crime, his death sanctifies Hashem's name by showing others that it does not pay

to murder. In this way, the sanctification that would have ensued had he refrained from the murder, is instead accomplished, by his death.

This is what the Rabbeinu Yona means when he says a person has his share in gehenom. One way or the other, Hashem's name will be sanctified through a person. Either in the Garden of Eden where he receives his reward, or in gehenom where he receives his punishment.

Rabbeinu Yona goes on to say, that when one person exerts himself to sanctify Hashem's name where all others are choosing not to, he can capture their portion in the world to come as well. Since it is so much more difficult to sanctify Hashem's name by doing what is right, in opposition to all the others who are choosing not to, the wall of evil that he is up against has actually had a positive effect on him. It has caused him to exert himself to perform the good more than he would have, had there not been such strong opposition. In a backhanded way, the evil has actually brought out a greater sanctification of Hashem's name from that individual, than would have emerged had the people not been so evil.

This is how Avraham saved his generation from punishment. By being perfectly righteous in a generation that was completely evil, he single handedly produced all of the kiddush Hashem that his generation needed to bring into the world, so they were saved.

Our Sages teach us that each generation has a unique form of kiddush Hashem that it needs to bring into the world. An idea of what that may be can be had by looking at the challenges that prevent the generation from fulfilling their spiritual obligations. Those challenges change with every generation as society adopts new forms of morality or lets go of values and morals that were previously accepted. The values and morals in the Torah can never change, as they are decreed by Hashem, and therefore must be adhered to no matter what society does or feels at any given time.

If, G-d forbid, society would decide that euthanasia is acceptable because it is considered merciful to the suffering patient, in the Torah, it would still be murder in the first degree. In that society, one who held tenaciously on to the “old fashioned idea” that euthanasia is murder, would be vilified and accused of being “heartless and sadistic.” It would be very challenging to adhere to the Torah’s value for human life, in the face of such a society. When one would strain himself and do everything within his power to maintain the proper Torah values, he would be bringing forth the unique kiddush Hashem for that generation.

There are many challenges that confront our generation that Jewish generations of the past have never faced. Any person reading this booklet is like “Avraham Avinu” in his generation. Anyone who is keeping the Torah and its values in this generation must strain himself and deliberately and staunchly oppose so many anti-Torah morals and values that have emerged and taken over our society. It is not easy. But we must realize, that indeed, it is we who are saving our generation just as Avraham Avinu did the ten generations before him. We are bringing forth the kiddush Hashem that our generation needs to bring out, for all those who are opposing us and making it more difficult for us to do so. We will also take their portions in the World to Come just as Avraham Avinu did.

What an inspiring and empowering idea! We are saving our generation by bringing out the kiddush Hashem for our generation! We are going to receive the reward of all the others who are not bringing forth the kiddush Hashem that they were put here to create. Cool!!!!