

THE
TORAH

חומש

בראשית

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TORAH

CHUMASH BEREISHIT

The Book of Genesis

Parshat Lech Lecha

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*With an Interpolated English Translation
and Commentary Based on the Works of
The Lubavitcher Rebbe*

THE TORAH - CHUMASH BEREISHIT

WITH AN INTERPOLATED ENGLISH TRANSLATION
AND COMMENTARY BASED ON THE WORKS OF
THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE

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*With an Interpolated English Translation
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The Lubavitcher Rebbe

Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

CHUMASH BEREISHIT

The Book of Genesis

Parshat Lech Lecha



Kehot Publication Society

770 Eastern Parkway, Brooklyn NY 11213



GENESIS

Bereishit

Noach

Lech Lecha לך לך

3

Vayeira

Chayei Sarah

Toldot

Vayeitzei

Vayishlach

Vayeishev

Mikeitz

Vayigash

Vayechi

EXODUS

Shemot

Vaeira

Bo

Beshalach

Yitro

Mishpatim

Terumah

Tetzaveh

Ki Tisa

Vayakheil

Pekudei

LEVITICUS

Vayikra

Tzav

Shemini

Tazria

Metzora

Acharei Mot

Kedoshim

Emor

Behar

Bechukotai

NUMBERS

Bemidbar

Naso

Beha'alotecha

Shelach

Korach

Chukat

Balak

Pinchas

Matot

Masei

DEUTERONOMY

Devarim

Va'etchanan

Eikev

Re'eh

Shoftim

Ki Teitzei

Ki Tavo

Netzavim

Vayeilech

Ha'azinu

Vezot Habrachah



Lech Lecha

Overview

It would not be an exaggeration to state that the two words that open this *parashah* and lend it its name—*Lech lecha*, “Go, to you”—are the most important words ever spoken in history. With these words, God set Abraham on the course that would reverse the process of degeneration that humanity had been locked into ever since the expulsion from the Garden of Eden, a course that would eventually lead it to the Giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai.

There were, as we know, a number of righteous individuals who preceded Abraham, but none of them had been successful—and some of them not even interested—in stemming the tide of estrangement from God that had overtaken the earth. At best, they preserved the old traditions within their sequestered hideouts, sheltered from a world antagonistic to Divinity and safe from its corruptive influences. But these righteous individuals lacked the courage or creativity necessary to resist and oppose this corruption and to try to heal the rift between heaven and earth.

Abraham, in contrast, was not fazed by the rampant corruption around him; on the contrary, it was precisely the world’s depravity that inspired him to become an activist. As we saw at the end of the preceding *parashah*, Abraham circulated among his contemporaries, pointing out the illogic of their way of life and encouraging them to join his monotheistic revival.

Still, despite his impressive accomplishments, Abraham’s efforts were limited by the fact that he was speaking only from his personal convictions and out of the force of his own reasoning. To the people whom he addressed, he merely represented a more intellectually honest and morally virtuous version of themselves. True, he and his contemporaries had witnessed God’s miraculous intervention in life when he was rescued from Nimrod’s furnace,¹ so both he and they had been exposed to the existence of a transcendent God not bound by the limits of nature or human reason. But Abraham had not yet reached the next stage—the awareness that this transcendent God can be encountered within mundane life as well. The prevailing notion was that God was immanent, assuming the guise of nature, and transcendent, occasionally defying nature; but human intellect could not conceive of the possibility that the transcendent God could also be found immanently within nature and

1. Above, 11:28.

everyday life. Therefore, monotheism in that era was hardly more than deism — the acknowledgment that God had created the world and had set the mechanism of nature in motion.

All this changed when God spoke His first words — “*Lech lecha*” — to Abraham. Firstly, the very fact that God openly responded to a human being’s efforts to dedicate his life to truth changed the rules forever. God demonstrated that He is indeed accessible to those who sincerely seek Him. (True, God had spoken to Noah, but He did so solely on His own initiative; Noah did not actively seek out God, nor did he actively try to promulgate monotheism, as we have seen.)

Secondly, with these words, God transformed Abraham into His emissary. Abraham was no longer acting merely as an inspired visionary; he could now speak with an authority beyond himself, making the conviction of his message incomparably more effective than it had previously been. It was thus only through his efforts after God spoke to him that the Divine Presence began its true descent back to earth.

Finally, and most importantly, by telling him to “go,” God made Abraham into a new person who could now progress beyond his own abilities. “Go, to you” means “Go to your true, higher self, the self you could never reach on your own.” The definition of a Godly person was no longer “a person who connects to God as far as the limits of human capacity allow”; its definition had now become “a person who connects to God by infinitely progressing beyond the limits of human capacity.”

In this context, God in *parashat Lech Lecha* takes the dynamic initiated in *parashat Noah* to its next level. In *parashat Noah*, we saw how God introduced the notion of *teshuvah* to the world, the possibility to correct wrongdoing and remake our lives even after committing what would otherwise appear to be fatal mistakes. Now, in *parashat Lech Lecha*, God not only makes it possible for us to return to our original selves, He even makes it possible for us to “return” to our authentic, fundamental selves, the selves we never even knew existed, constantly uncovering new and infinitely higher vistas of our innate Divine personality and connection with God.

Based on this opening, we would expect the rest of *parashat Lech Lecha* to chronicle Abraham’s successes in fulfilling his Divine mission. And indeed, throughout most of the *parashah*, this is how we see Abraham, as he valiantly rescues his nephew from a foreign invasion, astutely concludes beneficial commercial treaties with the local chieftains, and justly receives God’s promise for both the blessing of offspring and the inheritance of the Land of Israel.

Nevertheless, the first major incident recorded in this *parashah* — the famine that occurred immediately upon Abraham’s arrival in the Land of Israel — rather than auguring success, threatened to doom his entire enterprise to failure when he had scarcely embarked on it. Firstly, the famine could have easily been construed by the local population as the vengeance of the gods of nature against the insolent missionary activities of this newly arrived monotheist. Secondly, instead of being allowed to pursue his monotheistic revival in God’s Promised Land, Abraham was thrust into the world’s greatest bastion of paganism, a land so thoroughly steeped in idolatry that it considered its kings to be gods. Egypt’s hopeless obsession with its gods surely dwarfed the purely utilitarian worship of nature that Abraham had encountered in his native Mesopotamia and in his new home in Canaan. How ironic, then, it must have seemed to witness this ambitious monotheist, the self-proclaimed servant of the Almighty God, no sooner having begun

his great undertaking in the Promised Land suddenly reduced to seeking the mercy of a cultural environment that mocked and contravened his every ideal.

Yet, in a miraculous reversal of fortune, Abraham soon had the Egyptians begging *him* for mercy, and shortly thereafter, he returned to the Land of Israel even better equipped to further his goals than he was before he left: with greater wealth, with a greater reputation, and accompanied by the Egyptian princess who would, in time, become the mother of his first child. It thus became retroactively clear that this apparent regression was actually a further stage in Abraham's progression toward his goals, an integral part of his Divine mission to "go."

The lessons for us from *parashat Lech Lecha* are, thus, firstly, not to be intimidated by the world—neither by the world outside us nor by the "world" of personal desires, fears, or preconceived notions within us. Abraham and Sarah were only two individuals, but because they dedicated themselves to the truth, God became their partner and made them into His emissaries. Secondly, once we answer God's call to "go, to you—to yourself," we are no longer bound by the limits of our own capabilities; even apparent regressions will ultimately prove to be an integral part of the process leading to ever-higher levels of Divine consciousness.²

2. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 5, pp. 58-63, vol. 20, pp. 58-60, pp. 301-308.

ONKELOS

12:1 וַיֹּאמֶר יי לְאַבְרָם אֵיל לֵךְ
מֵאֶרֶץ וּמִלְדוֹתֶיךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבוֹךָ
לְאֶרֶץ דִּי אֲחֻזָּתָךְ

12:1 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-אַבְרָם לֵךְ-לְךָ מֵאֶרֶץְךָ וּמִמְּלֹדֹתֶיךָ
וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֶרְאֶה:

RASHI

1 לך לך. להנצחתך ולטובתך, ושם אעשה לך גדול, וכאן אי אתה זוכה לבנים. ועוד, שאודיע טבעך בעולם:

CHASIDIC INSIGHTS

forever the “Jewish” land. Even during their exiles, the Land of Israel remains the Jewish people’s land.⁸

God’s command to Abraham in this verse can additionally be seen as a command to us to leave the comfort of our own insulated lives and venture out to the world-at-large in order to transform it into a Godly place. Naturally we would rather remain apart from the world, instead sequestering ourselves in our co-

coon of prayer and Torah study. God therefore tells us that if we enter the real world, our full inner potential will be realized and our true, best selves will be manifest; this never could have happened had we stayed focused solely on our own self-improvement.

With this explanation in mind, God’s words can now be read, “Go...that I may show [the world the real] you.”⁹

INNER DIMENSIONS

[1] Go from your land and from your birthplace: go away from your father’s house, to the land that I will show you: Metaphorically, this command is given to every soul about to be born, which must then descend from its source in the heavenly spheres through progressively lower gradations, gaining more definition, self-awareness, and distance from God at each step, until it reaches the physical plane. Its next step is to begin the process of ascent, traveling back in the opposite direction to transcend the shortsighted perspective of the body. Finally, it must then transcend even its own holy inclinations. This verse can thus be explained as follows:

Go: Descend from the highest levels—

From your land: The word for “land” (*eret*) is related to the word for “will” or “desire” (*ratzon*). “Land” therefore alludes to God’s will, which is identified with the *sefirah* of *keter*. The soul is thus told to take leave of its lofty roots (*keter*) and descend to the next level, *chochmah*.

From your birthplace: Divine insight (*chochmah*) is called “father,” since *chochmah* “fathers” and gives birth to ideas. The soul must leave this level as well and descend even further, into the realm of understanding (*binah*).

Your father’s house: *Binah* is the womb where the seed of *chochmah* is developed and expanded, which is why it is called “your father’s house.” The soul must descend even further—

To the land, i.e., to the physical world: This is the ultimate, most difficult descent, yet through it the soul arrives in this world, which is the “land” —

That I will show you: The non-descriptive “I” refers to God’s essence, which is likewise beyond description. God promises the soul that in the merit of descending into this world and fulfilling the commandments, it will be shown the “I” of God, enabling it to cleave to God’s essence.

Once the soul enters this world and becomes garbed in a human body, it is commanded and given the strength to—

Go: this time in the opposite direction, from the lowest sphere to the highest—

From your land: “Land,” as we have explained above, alludes to will and desire. Firstly, the soul must transcend the animalistic desires of the body. It is then told to go—

From your birthplace: i.e., to transcend the assumptions and limited perspective of the intellect and emotions of the ego. It must then go—

From your father’s house: i.e., to transcend those behavioral habits that it acquired and became accustomed to due to a faulty education and less-than-perfect environment. It must go beyond all of these limitations—

To the land that I will show you: to a holy place, such as a synagogue or place of Torah study, where the desires of the Divine soul dominate and prevail.

Only after we have successfully transcended the limitations of the body’s animating soul can we then proceed to the next task, that of transcending even the inclinations of the Divine soul, its own *ratzon* (land), *chochmah* (birthplace), and *binah* (father’s house), and reach a level that is beyond reason, “the land that I will show you,” a place where the soul does not merely comprehend Divinity but actually sees it.¹⁰

From another perspective:

From your land: from the coarseness of the *netzach*, *hod*, and *yesod* of the animating soul;

From your birthplace: from the habits of the animating soul, its *chesed*, *gevurah*, and *tiferet*;

From your fathers’ house: from the *chochmah*, *binah* and *da’at* of the animating soul.¹¹

Abram in the Land of Israel

12:1 In the year 2023, **God said to Abram**, “You have already left your homeland and birthplace by moving to Charan. Now **go** even further away **from your land** and **from your birthplace**: go away **from your father Terach’s house** in Charan.” Since Terach was only a closet monotheist, outwardly still serving idols and taking no steps to reform his idolatrous society, God told Abram to leave the detrimental environment of his home—even though Abram himself was privy to Terach’s secret.¹ God continued, “Follow My directions **to the land that I will show you**.” By keeping Abram in suspense over the exact destination, God (a) endeared the Land to him, and (b) enabled him to receive reward for trusting Him implicitly.

— CHASIDIC INSIGHTS —

1 Go: Rabbi Shalom DovBer of Lubavitch once said: From the very moment that God instructed Abram to leave his homeland and set out on his journey, the cosmic process of refinement began. Sparks of Divine consciousness lay embedded in the physical world, awaiting their redemption. Saintry individuals, who possess “clear” vision, can perceive on their own just where the captive sparks they are meant to refine are located and go there on their own. The rest of us are led by Divine providence to places or situations in which the sparks we are meant to liberate await us.²

Go: Literally, this command reads, “Go to you.”³ This instruction to Abram is also an instruction for every individual: “Go to you”—return and connect to the real you, to your essence and spiritual root.

Only a small part of the soul enters the body and envelops it. The greater part of the soul, its root, remains above, transcending the limitations of the physical world and experiencing Divinity as clearly and naturally as we experience materiality. During our stay in this world, our challenge is to connect the earthly dimension of our soul (whose physical perception has blinded it to Divinity) with its transcendent root. “The more we connect with our root, the more we, too, will be able to see Divinity.”⁴ Thus, the Torah tells us:

Go to yourself: return to your inner core, by going—

From your land: that is, by transcending your earthly desires,

From your birthplace: by overcoming your natural habits and inclinations, and

From your father’s house: by transcending the intellectual limitations of your animating soul (since the intellect “fathers” ideas and, eventually, emotions as well).

“Leaving our birthplace” (overcoming our natural habits and inclinations) means first and foremost overcoming negative inclinations, such as anger and jealousy.⁵ But beyond this, we must also “overcome” our good inclinations, such as the desire to give charity; we must do good deeds because this is God’s command and not only because our natural inclination to do good drives us to. Only then can we be sure that we are transcend-

ing our earthly selves and connecting with the higher dimension of our soul.⁶

From your land...to the land: Land, which is constantly trampled underfoot, symbolizes lowliness. There is a healthy, holy type of lowliness, which encourages us to fulfill

God’s will, and there is an unhealthy, negative type of lowliness, which prevents us from fulfilling our Divine mission. Healthy lowliness is the humility we feel when we realize that we are standing in God’s presence at all times. Unhealthy lowliness is the slavish submission to our animalistic cravings for the lowly, physical aspects of life, such as food. We, as human beings, the apex of creation, should rightfully rule over the animal, vegetable, and mineral kingdoms; when we allow them to wield power over us, we succumb to the ultimate in self-degradation. This unhealthy lowliness is actually a product of unhealthy *haughtiness*: our inflated sense of self-worth convinces us that we deserve whatever form of indulgence we can enjoy without consequences.

The Torah therefore instructs us: “Go from your *land*,” i.e., from unhealthy lowliness, “to the land that I will show you,” to the healthy lowliness that stems from Divine awareness.⁷

Go...that I will show you: Just as, in order to spread the message of God to all humanity, it became necessary to isolate a unique nation from all others and dedicate it as God’s messengers, it also became necessary to isolate a unique homeland for that nation from all other countries and designate it as the stage from which God’s nation would deliver His message to the world.

Inasmuch as the purpose of creation was to reveal Divinity in a realm innately not conducive to such a revelation, the Land of Israel had to parallel this dynamic. Therefore, even though God designated it as the Jewish homeland as soon as it was created, He first gave it to pagan nations, intending that the Jewish people later conquer it from them.

When the Jewish people conquered the Land of Israel, they changed its spiritual nature and it thereby became

1. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 15, p. 63, note 6. 2. *HaYom Yom*, 1 Marcheshvan. 3. Alshich on this verse. 4. *Or HaTorah, Bereishit*, vol. 4, pp. 1860-1862. 5. See *Keter Shem Tov* 24, in the name of Rabbi Saadiah Gaon. 6. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 2, p. 659. 7. *Sefer HaMa’amarim* 5702, p. 53-55. 8. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 5, pp. 8-9. 9. *Sefer HaSichot* 5749, vol. 1, pp. 38-47. 10. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 1, pp. 15-18. 11. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 2, p. 659.

ONKELOS

2 ואַעבֶרְנָה לַעַם סִגִּי וְאַבְרָהָם
וְאַבְרָם שְׁמֵהּ וְהָיָה מִבְּרָךְ: 3 וְאַבְרָם
מִבְּרָכִי וּמִלְטָטֵף אֱלֹהִים וְיִתְבָּרְכוּן
בְּדִילָךְ בַּל יִרְעִית אֲרַעָא: 4 וְאַזֵּל
אַבְרָם כְּמָה דִּי מַלִּיל עֲמָה יִי וְאַזֵּל
עֲמָה לֹט וְאַבְרָם בַּר שִׁבְעִין וְחֲמִשָּׁה
שָׁנִין בְּמַפְקָה מַחְרִין:

2 וְאַעֲשֶׂה לְגֹי גְדוֹל וְאַבְרָכָךְ וְאַגְדִּלָּה שְׁמִי וְהָיָה
בְּרָכָה: 3 וְאַבְרָכָה מִבְּרָכִי וּמִקְלָלָךְ אֲדָר וְנִבְרָכִי בְּךָ
כָּל מִשְׁפַּחַת הָאֲדָמָה: 4 וַיֵּלֶךְ אַבְרָם בְּאִשְׁרֵי דְבַר אֱלֹהִים
וַיְהִי וַיֵּלֶךְ אִתּוֹ לֹט וְאַבְרָם בֶּן־חֲמִשָּׁה שָׁנִים וְשִׁבְעִים
שָׁנָה בִּצְאָתוֹ מִחָרִין:

RASHI

יעקב, וכל, יהיו חותמין בכלן? תלמוד לומר: "והיה
ברכה" — בך חותמין ולא בהם: מארצה. והלא, כבר
יצא משם עם אביו וקא עד לחרין אלא, בך אמר לו:
התרחק עוד משם וצא מבית אביו: אשר ארצה. לא
גלה לו הארץ מיד, כדי לחבבה בעיניו, ולתת לו שָׁכר
על כל דבור ודבור. פיוצא בו: "את בנך את יחידך
אשר אהבת את יצחק". פיוצא בו: "על אחד ההרים
אשר אמר אליך". פיוצא בו: "וקרא אליה את הקריאה
אשר אנכי דבר אליך": 3 ונברכו בך. יש אגדות רבות,
וזהו פשוטו: אדם אומר לבנו: תהא כאברהם. וכן כל
"ונברכו בך" שבמקרא. וזה מוכיח: "בך יברך ישראל
לאמר, ישמך אלהים כאפרים וכמנשה":

2 וְאַעֲשֶׂה לְגֹי גְדוֹל. לפי שהדרך גורמת לשלשה
דברים — ממעטת פריה ורביה, וממעטת את המזון,
וממעטת את השם, לכה הוקק לשלשה ברכות הללו,
שהבטיחו על הבנים ועל המזון ועל השם. והוא
"ואגדלה שמך", הריני מוסיף אות על שמך, שעד
עכשו שמך "אברהם" מכאן ואילך "אברהם", ואברהם
עולה רמ"ח, כנגד אבריו של אדם: וְאַבְרָכָה. במזון,
בראשית רבה: וְהָיָה בְּרָכָה. הברכות נתונות בידך. עד
עכשו היו בדי, ברכתי לאדם ונח, ומעכשו אתה תברך
את אשר תחפץ. דבר אחר: "ואעשה לך גדול" — זה
שואמרים: "אלהי אברהם". "ואברכך" — זה שואמרים:
"אלהי יצחק". "ואגדלה שמך" — זה שואמרים: "אלהי

1. לט, יא. 2. בראשית כב, ב. 3. שם. 4. יונה ג, ב. 5. בראשית מח, כ.

INNER DIMENSIONS

[4] **Abram was in his seventy-fifth year:** As mentioned in the Overview, Abram had already reached great spiritual heights long before God spoke to him: At the age of three, he recognized God's existence²⁴ and began fulfilling all the commandments of the Torah that would later be given to the Jewish people.²⁵ As he grew older, his perception of God reached even greater heights.²⁶ He engaged in acts of kindness and taught others about God's existence.

By refining himself and the world, Abram perfected all seven of his emotional attributes. This is alluded to by the number seventy-five: Seventy refers to the seven *midot* after they have reached their full development, each having been expanded into a full array of ten sub-attributes, i.e., the three *sefirot* of the intellect and the seven *midot*. The perfection of the emotions in multiples of *ten* signifies that Abram's three attributes of intellect did not remain detached from his emotions, but rather permeated them and influenced them. As a rule, that which we know and that which we feel remain two distinct

domains. For example, we might *know* that God is the only true existence, but that knowledge does not necessarily influence how we *feel* about life—for example, what attracts us or repulses us. The mind and heart function as if linked only by a narrow passageway (the throat) that prevents the insight of the mind from engendering emotional reactions in the heart.

The number five alludes to the five states of loving-kindness (*chasadim*) that deepen the penetration of the intellect into the emotions, helping them mature properly.

When Abram's emotional maturation was completed—as alluded to by his age at the time, 75—he was able to leave Charan. The numerical value of the word *Charan* (258) is the same as that of the word for "throat" (*garon*), the narrow passageway mentioned above; Abram's departure from Charan thus alludes to his successful "unclogging" of the bottleneck of the throat, which allowed his intellect to fully mature his emotions.²⁷

12. *Sefer HaSichot* 5749, vol. 1, p. 42. 13. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 20, p. 122, note 51. 14. This refers to the opening blessing of the *Amidah* ("standing [prayer]"), the formal prayer that is the central element of the liturgy. The *Amidah* comprises nineteen blessings; the names of all three patriarchs are mentioned at the beginning of the first blessing, but only Abraham's name is mentioned in its closing. 15. See above, 9:7. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 15, p. 63, note 6. 16. See Alshich on this verse. 17. Below, 18:27. 18. *Mishneh Torah*, *Teshuvah* 10:2. 19. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 20, p. 51. See below on 15:1. 20. Below, 27:29. 21. *Likutei Levi Yitzchak* (*Zohar*), vol. 2, p. 372. 22. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 7, p. 236. 23. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 5, p. 143, note 16*. 24. *Nedarim* 32a. 25. *Nedarim* 32a. 26. *Mishneh Torah*, *Avodah Zarah* 1:1. See also *Bereishit Rabbah* 30:8, and *Pesikta Rabbah*, Bo. 27. *Hitva'aduyot* 5751, vol. 1, p. 271.

2 God said, “I promise that the move will be to your benefit. Firstly, you will enjoy the immediate benefit of distancing yourself from the unwholesome, idolatrous environment of Charan.¹² Secondly, even though traveling generally decreases the odds of having children, and since you are childless you are hesitant to undertake a journey, be assured that I will make you and your wife fertile in your new home, whereas if you stay,¹³ you will continue to remain childless. Thirdly, if you undertake this journey, **I will multiply your offspring and thereby make you into a great nation.** Fourthly, even though traveling involves many expenses, **I will bless you** with wealth in your new home. Fifthly, even though traveling usually adversely affects a person’s renown, as he is forgotten in his former home and is not yet established in his new home, **I will make your name great** and famous there. And sixthly, **you shall become a source of blessing**—I will endow you with the power to bless others, and I promise you that your blessings will be efficacious. In addition, you, your son, and your grandson will be collectively considered the ‘patriarchs’ of My chosen nation, who henceforth will address their prayers to Me by invoking your names. Nonetheless, even though they will mention all three of you in the first blessing of their prayers, **you alone shall be mentioned at the end of this blessing,**¹⁴ in recognition of the fact that you were the only patriarch whom I required to leave his family.

3 **I will bless those who bless you, and, I will curse he who curses you. All the families of the earth will be blessed through,** i.e., will be compared to **you:** when someone wants to bless someone else, he will say, ‘May you be like Abram.’”

4 **Abram set out as God had directed him, and Lot went with him. Abram was in his seventy-fifth year when he left Charan.** Although his father, Terach, was 145 years old at the time and would live for another sixty years, the Torah tells us of his death before it tells us of Abram’s departure in order not to highlight the fact that God prevented Abram from fulfilling his filial obligation of parental respect by making him leave his father unattended, to fend for himself in his old age.¹⁵

❧ A CLOSER LOOK ❧

[2] **I will make your name great:** God did not have to promise Abram renown in order to entice him to obey His instructions.¹⁶ Abram was a selfless man who considered himself as lowly as dust and ashes,¹⁷ utterly unconcerned about his personal fame and glory. Furthermore, he is described by Maimonides as someone who served God without any care for reward, physical or spiritual, who “followed the truth because it is the truth.”¹⁸

Rather, since Abram viewed himself as a mere conduit for God’s will, he knew that his own renown was essentially God’s renown; the more famous he would become, the more it would indicate that he was succeeding in his mission of spreading Divine consciousness throughout the world.¹⁹

[3] **I will bless those who bless you, and he who curses you, I will curse:** In the first part of this blessing, God mentions His own blessing before those of others—“I will bless those who bless you”—whereas in the second part, the sequence

is reversed: God mentions others’ curses before mentioning His own—“he who curses you, I will curse.” This means that God blesses those who are about to bless Abram even before they actually bless him, but He will curse Abram’s enemies only after they have actually cursed him. In contrast, when Isaac bestowed a similar blessing upon his son, Jacob, he said:²⁰ “He who blesses you shall be blessed.”²¹

The reason for the difference between God’s blessing to Abraham and Isaac’s blessing to Jacob is that God is beyond time. He can therefore bless those who will (only afterwards) bless Abram even *before* they actually do so.²²

[4] **The followers they had persuaded to accept monotheism:** Prior to the Giving of the Torah, the legal status of “Jew” did not formally exist. Therefore, Abram and Sarai could not “convert” their students and confer this legal status on them; they could only persuade them to espouse new beliefs.²³

ONKELOS

5 וַיֵּבֶר אַבְרָם יְת שָׂרִי אֵתְהָ וַיֵּת לֹט בַּר אַחֻזִּי וַיֵּת כָּל קִנְיָהוֹן דִּי קְנוּ וַיֵּת נַפְשָׁתָא דִּי שַׁעֲבִידוּ לְאוֹרִיתָא בְּחָרָא וּנְפָקוּ לְמִיזַל לְאַרְעָא דְכְנַעַן וְאַתּוּ לְאַרְעָא דְכְנַעַן: 6 וַיֵּבֶר אַבְרָם בְּאַרְעָא עַד אֲתֵר שָׂכָם עַד מִיִּשֵׁר מוֹרָה וַיִּכְנַעְנָהּ בְּכֹן בְּאַרְעָא: 7 וְאַתְגְּלִי יִי לְאַבְרָם וְאָמַר לְבְנִיךָ אֲתָן יֵת אֲרַעָא הָדָא וּבְנָא תִמְן מִדְּבָחָא קְדָם יִי דְאַתְגְּלִי לָהּ:

5 וַיֵּבֶר אַבְרָם אֶת־שָׂרִי אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאֶת־לֹט בֶּן־אֲחִיו וְאֶת־כָּל־רְכוּשָׁם אֲשֶׁר רָכְשׁוּ וְאֶת־הַנַּפְשׁ אֲשֶׁר־עָשׂוּ בַּחֲרָן וַיָּצֵאוּ לְלֶכֶת אֶרֶצָה כְּנַעַן וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶרֶצָה כְּנַעַן: 6 וַיַּעֲבֵר אַבְרָם בְּאֶרֶץ עַד מְקוֹם שָׂכָם עַד אֵלּוֹן מוֹרָה וַהֲכַנְעֵנִי אָז בְּאֶרֶץ: 7 וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה אֶל־אַבְרָם וַיֹּאמֶר לְיִרְעָךָ אֲתָן אֶת־הָאֶרֶץ הַזֹּאת וַיִּבֶן שָׂם מִזְבֵּחַ לַיהוָה הַנִּרְאָה אֵלָיו:

RASHI

עִיבָל, שְׂשָׁם קָבְלוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁבוּעַת הַתּוֹרָה: וְהַכְנַעְנִי אָז בְּאֶרֶץ. הִיָּה הוֹלֵךְ וְכוּבֵשׁ אֶת אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל מוֹרְעוֹ שֶׁל שָׂם, שֶׁבִּחְלָקוֹ שֶׁל שָׂם נִפְלָה בְּשִׁחְלָק נָח אֶת הָאֶרֶץ לְבְנָיו, שֶׁנֶּאֱמָר: "וּמִלְכִּי צֶדֶק מֶלֶךְ שָׁלֵם." לְפִיכָּה "וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל אַבְרָם, לִירְעָךָ אֲתָן אֶת הָאֶרֶץ הַזֹּאת," עֲתִיד אֲנִי לְהַחְזִירָהּ לְבְנִיךָ שֶׁהֵם מוֹרְעוֹ שֶׁל שָׂם: 7 וַיִּבֶן שָׂם מִזְבֵּחַ. עַל בְּשׁוֹרֵת הַזֶּרַע וְעַל בְּשׁוֹרֵת אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל:

5 אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ בַּחֲרָן. שֶׁהִכְנִיסָן תַּחַת כּוֹפֵי הַשְּׂכִינָה, אַבְרָהָם מְגִיר אֶת הָאֲנָשִׁים, וְשָׂרָה מְגִירַת הַנָּשִׁים, וּמַעֲלָה עֲלֵיהֶם הַכְּתוּב בְּאֵלּוֹ עָשָׂאָם. וּפְשׁוּטוֹ שֶׁל מְקָרָא, עֲבָדִים וּשְׁפָחוֹת שֶׁקְנוּ לָהֶם, כְּמוֹ: "עֲשֵׂה אֶת כָּל הַכְּבֹד הַזֶּה," לְשׁוֹן קִנְיָן. "וַיִּשְׂרָאֵל עֲשֵׂה חֵיל," לְשׁוֹן קוֹנָה וְכוּנִס: 6 וַיַּעֲבֵר אַבְרָם בְּאֶרֶץ. נִכְנַס לְתוֹכָהּ: עַד מְקוֹם שָׂכָם. לְהַתְפַּלֵּל עַל בְּנֵי יַעֲקֹב, כְּשִׁיבּוֹאוֹ לְהַלְחֵם בְּשָׂכָם: אֵלּוֹן מוֹרָה. הוּא שָׂכָם. הָרְאָהוּ הָרַ גְּרוֹזִים וְהָרַ

6. בראשית לא, א. 7. במדבר כד, יח. 8. בראשית יד, יח. 9. עיין בראשית יב, א.

CHASIDIC INSIGHTS

for God attracted and awakened the sparks of Godly devotion dormant in these people.

It was for this very end that God made Abram and Sarai descend to Egypt: to inspire whatever individuals they could to cleave to their Godly source. Due to the lofty origin of their souls, Abram and Sarai were able to descend into Egypt, the most spiritually corrupt of environments, emerge unscathed, and even redeem these people from the depths of depravity. As is known,³³ "The higher one's source, the lower he can descend."³⁴

As descendants of Abram and Sarai, we are also called upon to "acquire souls in Charan": Inasmuch as the word *Charan* is related to the word for "anger," Charan is a metaphor for places that are indifferent or even hostile to holiness.³⁵ Yet God sends the heirs of Abram and Sarai's legacy to "Charan" to seek out those who, for whatever reason, have become alienated from their roots and bring them under the wings of the Divine Presence, re-connecting them to God by involving them both in studying the Torah and fulfilling of the commandments.

By fulfilling this mission, we not only further the goal of making the world into a Godly place—since we bring Divine awareness even to a "Charan"—we also reap benefits. By selflessly working *with* others, we simultaneously learn *from* them, since "the wise learn from everyone they encounter."³⁶ If we claim that there is nothing to be learned from a particular individual, we are merely revealing our own lack of wisdom.³⁷

7 I will give this land to your offspring: The Midrash

relates that as Abram traveled from land to land, he would observe the inhabitants of each locale. In every land, he saw them dissolutely eating, drinking, and reveling, and he said, "I pray that I will have no portion in this land." But when he arrived in the Land of Israel and saw its inhabitants working the land, he said, "I hope that my portion will be in this land." God then said to him, "I will give this land to your offspring."³⁸

This anecdote underscores the Torah's view of the importance of working, especially in the Land of Israel. Similarly, God instructed the generation of Jews that was about to enter the Land of Israel to plant trees as soon as they arrived. In so doing, they imitated their Creator, whose initial action in the world was to plant a garden in Eden.³⁹

The significance of planting is that it is an act that bears fruit, which in turn bears more fruit. It thus epitomizes our mandate for life: to continually plant the seeds of future growth.⁴⁰

Abram built an altar there to God who had appeared to him: The verse following this one also relates that Abram built an altar to God, but it does not mention that God appeared to him. Accordingly, these two verses describe two different levels of perceiving God; this notion is also alluded to by the fact that the word for "he built" (*yiven*) can also mean "he understood." These two levels of perceiving God give rise to two distinct types of love for God.

In this verse, Abram builds an altar to the God who *appeared* to him, meaning that his love for God was

33. *Torah Or* 40a; *Likutei Torah* 3:37a, 3:38b, 4:99a, 5:9a, 5:23a, etc. 34. *Sefer HaMa'amarim* 5711 (Rayatz), pp. 205-206. 35. See 11:32, above. 36. *Avot* 4:1. 37. *Hitva'aduyot* 5745, vol. 1, pp. 558-559. 38. *Bereishit Rabbah* 39:8. 39. *Vayikra Rabbah* 25:3. 40. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 10, p. 201.

5 Abram took his wife Sarai and his nephew Lot, and all their possessions that they had acquired, as well as the souls they had acquired in Charan—both the followers they had persuaded to accept monotheism as well as the servants they had purchased. They set out, following God’s directions and heading toward Canaan, and they entered Canaan.

6 Abram traveled through the land as far as the location of Shechem. He stopped there because he perceived prophetically that his great-grandchildren would wage war in the future against the inhabitants of this city,²⁸ and he prayed for their success. He had come as far as the **Plain of Moreh**, where Shechem was located, between Mount Gerizim and Mount Eival (see figure 15a). God informed him that it would be at this place that his descendants would confirm their acceptance of the Torah upon entering the Land.²⁹ **The Canaanites were then in the land**, gradually conquering it from the descendants of Shem.



Figure 15a: Abram Enters the Land of Canaan

7 God appeared to Abram and said, “Even though, as you see, I am allowing the Canaanites to possess this land for the time being, I will eventually give this land to your offspring, thus returning it to the descendants of Shem, its rightful owners.”³⁰ God here promised Abraham and his descendants national ownership of the Land of Israel. **So Abram built an altar there** and offered up a sacrifice **to God, who appeared to him** and promised him offspring and the repossession of the Land of Israel. Abram harbored no doubts as to the fulfillment of God’s promise.

8 CHASIDIC INSIGHTS 8

4-5 And Lot went with him...Abram took...his nephew Lot: Lot was ambivalent about Abraham’s beliefs and mission, and this was evident when Abram left Charan. On the one hand, “Lot went with him” of his own accord, as he had in the past. On the other hand, Abram “took his nephew Lot” by the hand, so to speak, having to persuade him to join him. This am-

bivalence resolved itself later,³¹ when Lot and Abram parted ways.³²

5 The followers they had persuaded to accept monotheism: Abram’s love of God was so palpable that its intensity inspired others to abandon their idolatrous lifestyles and serve the one, true God. Like a large flame that attracts smaller sparks, Abram’s fiery love

28. See below, 33:18-34:31. 29. See Deuteronomy 11:29-30; Joshua 8:30-35. 30. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 5, pp. 11-12. 31. Below, 13:6-11. 32. *Sefer HaSichot* 5750, vol. 1, p. 101 (note 46).

ONKELOS
8 וְאֶתְלַק מִתְמֵן לְטוֹרָא מִמְדִּנָּה
לְבֵית אֵל וּפְרִסָּה לְמִשְׁכְּנָה בֵּית אֵל
מִמְעַרְבָא וְעִי מִמְדִּנָּה וּבְנָא תְּמֵן
מִדְּבָחָא קָדָם יְיָ וְצִלִּי בְּשִׁמְאָא דִּיִּי
9 וְנִטְל אַבְרָם אֶזֶל וְנִטְל לְדְרוֹמָא:
10 וְהָיָה כִּפְנָא בְּאַרְעָא וּנְחַת
אַבְרָם לְמַצְרַיִם לְאַתּוּתָבָא תְּמֵן
אַרִי תִקֹּף כִּפְנָא בְּאַרְעָא: 11 וְהָיָה
כִּד קָרַב לְמִיעַל לְמַצְרַיִם וְאַמֵּר
לְשָׂרֵי אֲתִתָּהּ הָא כִּעֵן יִדְעָנָא אַרִי
אַתָּנָא שְׂפִירָתָא חִיּוּ אָתָּה:

8 וַיֵּעָתֶק מִשָּׁם הַהִרָה מִקֶּדֶם לְבֵית־אֵל וַיֵּט אֶהְלָה בֵּית־
אֵל מִיָּם וְהָעִי מִקֶּדֶם וַיִּבְנֶה־שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ לַיהוָה וַיִּקְרָא בְּשֵׁם
יְהוָה: 9 וַיֵּסַע אַבְרָם הַלֹּךְ וְנִסּוּעַ הַגִּנְגָּבָה: פ
10 וַיְהִי רָעַב בְּאֶרֶץ וַיֵּרֶד אַבְרָם מִצְרַיִמָּה לְגִנּוֹר שָׁם
כִּי־כִבְדַּר הָרָעַב בְּאֶרֶץ: 11 וַיְהִי בְּאֶשֶׁר הִקְרִיב לְבֹוא
מִצְרַיִמָּה וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־שָׂרֵי אִשְׁתּוֹ הִנֵּה־נָא יֹדְעֵתִי כִּי
אִשָּׁה יִפְת־מְרָאָה אָתָּה:

RASHI

אם יהרהר אחר דבריו של הקדוש ברוך הוא, שאמר
לו ללכת אל ארץ כנען, ועבשו משיאו לצאת ממנה:
11 הנה נא ידעתי. מדרש אגדה: עד עכשו לא הכיר
בה, מתוך צניעות שבשניהם, ועכשו הכיר בה על ידי
מעשה. דבר אחר: מנהג העולם, שעל ידי טורח הדרך
אדם מתבזה, וזאת עמדה בפינה. ופשוטו של מקרא:
הנה נא הגיע השעה שיש לדרוג על יפנה, ידעתי זה
ימים רבים כי יפת מראה אתה, ועכשו אנו באים בין
אנשים שחורים ומכוערים אחיהם של בושם ולא
הרגלו באשה יפה. ודומה לזו: "הנה נא ארני סורו
נא":

8 וַיֵּעָתֶק מִשָּׁם. אֶהְלוֹ: מִקֶּדֶם לְבֵית אֵל. בְּמִזְרָחָה שֶׁל
בֵּית אֵל. נִמְצְאָתָה, בֵּית אֵל בְּמַעְרְבוֹ, וְהוּא שְׁנָאֵמַר: "בֵּית
אֵל מִיָּם": אֶהְלָה. "אֶהְלָה" כְּתִיב — בְּתַחֲלָה נִטְעַ אֶת
אֶהֱל אִשְׁתּוֹ, וְאַחֲרַיִךְ אֶת שְׁלוֹ: וַיִּבְנֶה שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ. נִתְּנָבָא
שְׁעִתִּידִין בְּנִי לְהַכְשִׁיל שָׁם עַל עֵצוֹן עָכּוֹן, וְהַתְּפַלֵּל שָׁם
עֲלֵיהֶם: 9 הַלֹּךְ וְנִסּוּעַ. לְפָרִיקִים, יוֹשֵׁב כָּאֵן חֹדֶשׁ אוֹ
יֹתֵר וְנִסּוּעַ מִשָּׁם וְנִסּוּעָה אֶהֱלוֹ בְּמִקּוֹם אַחֵר. וְכָל מִסְעָיו
"הַגִּנְגָּבָה", לְלַכֵּת לְדְרוֹמָה שֶׁל אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְהוּא לְצַד
יְרוּשָׁלַיִם, שְׁהִיא בְּחֻלְקוֹ שֶׁל יְהוּדָה, שְׁנִטְלוּ בְּדְרוֹמָה
שֶׁל אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל הַר הַמּוֹרִיָּה, שְׁהִיא נִחְלָתָה, בְּבִרְאשִׁית
רַבָּה: 10 רָעַב בְּאֶרֶץ. בְּאוֹתָהּ אֶרֶץ לְבָדָה, לְנִסּוּתוֹ

10. לט, טו. 11. תנחומא לך-לך ה. 12. בראשית יט, ב.

CHASIDIC INSIGHTS

ing." Allegorically, this refers to the spiritual process of
"running and returning" (*ratzo vashov*),⁴⁶ the two inter-
dependent yet opposing thrusts that must constantly
and successively occur in order for life to continue and
for physical and spiritual growth to take place. For
example, the Divine energy that animates the world
from within naturally seeks to escape the confines of
the finite world and cleave to its source. But as soon
as it does so, it complies again with God's will and re-
turns to its task of animating physical reality, only to
seek once more to ascend to its source. Similarly, in its
yearning to cling to its source, the soul leaves the body,
but as soon as it does so it immediately returns to con-
tinue with its mission. This constant spiritual oscilla-
tion is reflected in the physical pulsation of the heart
and lungs.

Our mission to unite heaven and earth must also com-
prise both "running and returning," separating our-
selves periodically from the mundane world by losing
ourselves in meditation, prayer, or Torah study, yet
always returning to the world to fulfill our mission.
Abram, too, served God in this way, "going and travel-
ing," "running and returning."⁴⁷

Toward the south: Metaphorically, the south signifies
warmth and kindness. Accordingly, Abram's "moving

steadily toward the south" meant that he was steadily
intensifying his enthusiastic, warm love for God as
well as increasing in acts of kindness to others. Ulti-
mately, through his universal acts of kindness, he "re-
placed" the Divine attribute of kindness itself, which
said to God, "My job has become superfluous—Abram
has taken my place!"⁴⁸

In truth, Abram did a better job than did the attribute
of kindness: When the attribute of kindness shows
kindness to the undeserving, it corrupts them further.
When Abram, on the other hand, showed kindness to
the undeserving, he was able to rehabilitate them and
redirect their focus to God.⁴⁹

**11 I know you to be a woman of beautiful appear-
ance:** Metaphorically, man symbolizes the soul and
woman symbolizes the body.⁵⁰ The body's "beautiful
appearance," in this context, means its capacity to el-
evate the soul to heights even loftier than those it en-
joyed in heaven, before birth.

Inasmuch as Abram had always served God with com-
plete selflessness, he never took notice of the body's
"beautiful appearance," since he was completely im-
mersed in serving God and never gave a thought to
accruing spiritual benefits in the process.

46. See Ezekiel 1:14. 47. *Sefer HaMa'amarim* 5699, p. 86. 48. *Sefer HaBahir* 191. 49. *Sefer HaMa'amarim* 5702, pp. 100-101. 50. *Zohar* 1:122b; *Rabbeinu Bachya* on 3:21, above.

8 From there he moved on to the mountains east of Bethel and pitched his tent. Although a married couple generally lived together in the same tent, the wife would typically have a second, separate tent in which to do her work.⁴¹ Abraham gentlemanly pitched his wife's work-tent first and only then did he set up their common living tent. **Bethel was to the west and Ai to the east. He built a second altar there,** offered up a sacrifice on it, **and invoked God.** He perceived prophetically that one of his descendants would commit a sin at this very locale⁴² that would endanger the entire people, and therefore prayed in advance for mercy. Indeed, when Joshua conquered Jericho, the spoils were given to the treasury of the Tabernacle. An individual named Achan took a valuable garment for himself; because of this sin, God withdrew His supra-natural protection from the people, rendering them vulnerable to their enemies.⁴³

9 Abram then continued on his way, making camp for a month or so in a number of places, but always **moving steadily toward the south,** in order to eventually reach Mount Moriah, the future site of the Temple (see figure 15b).

Abram in Egypt

10 In that same year, there was a famine in the land of Canaan. God wanted to see if Abram would complain about having to leave the land after having exerted so much effort to reach it in the first place, and after God had promised it to him. **Abram did not complain; he went down to Egypt to sojourn there for a time, since the famine in the land of Canaan had grown severe.** Lot accompanied Abram and Sarai.

11 Abram was always careful not to indulge himself in his wife's beauty. But when they were wading through a stream, he saw her reflection in the water and was reminded how attractive she was. Their extensive travels had not marred her beauty in the least. So, **as they approached Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, "Look, I know you to be a woman of beautiful appearance."**



Figure 15b: Abram enters the Land of Canaan

CHASIDIC INSIGHTS

inspired by his perception of God as the Creator, the aspect of God that is evident (i.e., that “appears”) within the world. The love that we feel for God as our Creator is a love born out of self-love: we love the feeling of being alive and therefore love the source of that life-force.⁴⁴

In the following verse, Abram meditates upon the God

who does *not* appear to him, the aspect of God that transcends creation and which we recognize as being completely beyond our ken. Such meditation awakens a deeper love, which transcends self-love: a passionate love for God's essence and the desire to be totally absorbed within that essence.⁴⁵

9 Moving steadily: Or, literally, “going and travel-

41. Rashi on 24:28; *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 15, p. 169, note 38. 42. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 30, p. 37, note 19. 43. See Joshua 7. See below, 38:30. 44. See Deuteronomy 30:20: “To love God, your God...for He is your life.” 45. *Or HaTorah, Bereishit*, vol. 4, p. 1368. Although both verses refer to the Name *Havayah*, they refer to two dimensions within the Name.

ONKELOS

12 ויהי כד יחזון יתיר מצראי ויירון אתה דא ויקטלון יתיר ויתיר יקטלון: 13 אמרי כען אחתי את בדיל דייטב לי בדילך ויתקנים נפשי בפתגמיכי: 14 והיה כד על אברם למצרים וחזו מצראי ית אתה ארי שפירא היא לחדא: 15 וחזו יתה רב רבי פרעה ושכחו יתה לפרעה ואדברת אתה לבית פרעה: 16 ולאברם אטיב בדילה והו לז עאן ותורין ותמורין ועבדין ואמקון ואתגן וגמלין:

12 וְהָיָה כִּי יֵרְאוּ אֶתְךָ הַמִּצְרַיִם וְאָמְרוּ אִשְׁתּוֹ זֹאת וְהָרְגוּ אֹתִי וְאַתָּה יָחִיד: 13 אֲמַרְיָנָא אַחֲתִי אַתָּה לְמַעַן יֵיטְבִלִי בְּעִבְרֶיךָ וְחִיתָה נַפְשִׁי בְּגִלְגָּלָךְ: שְׁנֵי 14 וְהָיָה כִּבּוֹא אֲבָרָם מִצְרַיִמָּה וַיֵּרְאוּ הַמִּצְרַיִם אֶת־הָאִשָּׁה כִּי־יָפָה הִוא מְאֹד: 15 וַיֵּרְאוּ אֹתָהּ שְׁרֵי פְרַעֲה וַיַּחְלְלוּ אֹתָהּ אֶל־פְּרַעֲה וַתִּקַּח הָאִשָּׁה בֵּית פְּרַעֲה: 16 וְלֹא־אֲבָרָם הֵיטִיב בְּעִבְרָה וַיְהִי־לּוֹ צֶאֱנ־וּבְקָר וַחֲמֹרִים וְעַבְדִּים וְשִׁפְחֹת וְאַתָּנָת וְגַמְלִים:

RASHI

המקס פתחו וראו אותה: 15 ויהללו אתה אל פרעה. הללו בניהם, לומר: הגונה זו למלך: 16 ולאברם היטיב. פרעה בעבורה, נתן לו מתנות:

13 למען ייטב לי בעברך. יתנו לי מתנות: 14 ויהי כבוא אברם מצרימה. היה לו לומר "כבואם מצרימה", אל. למד שהטמין אותה בתבה, ועל ידי שתבעו את

INNER DIMENSIONS

[12] When the Egyptians see you: The sinful lecherousness of the Egyptians caused the Divine Presence to retreat from the sixth firmament to the seventh.⁶¹

[13] Say that you are my sister: Allegorically, Abram signifies the the soul; Sarai, the body; and Egypt in general, and Pharaoh's palace in particular, the physical world. Allowing Sarai to be taken into Pharaoh's palace reflects the idea that we cannot expect to accomplish our Divine mission on earth by living an ascetic life, seeking to avoid contact with the physical world. Rather, our task is to sanctify the physical world by using physical things for holy purposes.

Our tool in this process is the body. The body's natural tendency is to pursue material fulfillment and promote materialistic values, both of which are detrimental to Divine consciousness. However, the body can be trained to allow the soul to use it to elevate the physical world, and even more, to actively pursue spirituality itself, to love God on its own. Since the soul is a "part" of God, its love for God is akin to the love of siblings for one another: calm and consistent. In contrast, the physical body is the antithesis of God, who "is not a body and has no bodily form."⁶² Therefore, when it learns to love God, its love is like the love between spouses:

ardent and unpredictable.

Each type of love possesses its inherent advantages: the love between spouses is more passionate, but this is because the natural distance that separates them allows them to fuse into one being. Siblings can never achieve this unity, because the love between them is not ardent. On the other hand, the love between spouses is not innate and therefore can dissipate if not properly cultivated, whereas the love between siblings is not subject to change.

Similarly, the body's love for God can reach intense heights of passion that the soul can never know. Nonetheless, precisely because this passion is subject to the vicissitudes of life, the body must remain ever-conscious of the advantage of the soul's calm love for God in order to acquire the consistent devotion it needs to succeed in its mission.

Hence, we must allow the body to "enter Pharaoh's palace," but at the same time we must also instruct it to "say that you are my sister," that is, to stipulate that it also emulate the soul's consistent, calm, fraternal love for God. Only then can the body succeed in its mission: it will be able to elevate the physical world without succumbing to its lures and, in the process, enable the soul to experience the ecstasy of its own passionate love of God, as well.⁶³

A CLOSER LOOK

[13] Say that you are my sister: Abraham assumed that despite their depravity, the Egyptians would prefer the one-time sin of murder to the repeated

sin of adultery. Killing Abraham would render Sarah permissible to them.⁶⁴ He therefore asked Sarah to pose as his sister.⁶⁵

12 The Egyptians are not used to beholding such beauty. Their women are all swarthy, and you are fair-skinned. **When the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife,' and they will kill me,** since they will not expect me to surrender you to them,⁵¹ **and allow you to live.**

13 I will try to smuggle you into Egypt in a crate. But if they discover you anyway, **if you would, say that you are my sister, so that it may go well with me for your sake.** They will try to curry my favor by giving me gifts in order to bribe me into letting one of them marry you. In this way, **through you my life will be spared."**

◆ **Second Reading 14 When Abram came to Egypt,** the customs officials demanded that he open the crate in which he had hidden Sarai, in order to inspect its contents. **The Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful.**

15 Pharaoh's ministers of state saw her and spoke highly of her, agreeing among themselves that she was fit as a wife **for Pharaoh, so the woman was taken into Pharaoh's palace.**

16 When questioned, Sarai told Pharaoh that Abram was her brother. Lot did not divulge the truth, either.⁵² As Abram had predicted, **Pharaoh treated Abram well because of her;** in this way Abram **acquired sheep, cattle, donkeys, servants, handmaids, she-donkeys, and camels.**

❧ CHASIDIC INSIGHTS ❧

However, when he was about to descend to Egypt, Abram had to prepare for the spiritual task he was going to undertake there, namely, disseminating Divine awareness. This entailed familiarizing himself somewhat with Egyptian ways, by all means a most unpleasant and dangerous task, considering that Egypt was the most depraved, immoral society of the time. Indeed, this submersion in the Egyptian psyche impaired Abram's own superior spiritual awareness: (a) he now became more aware of his wife's physical beauty,⁵³ and (b) in the metaphoric sense, he became more aware in general of the body's "beautiful appearance," i.e., that the soul benefited from the body.⁵⁴

If Abram suffered such spiritual descent when he merely *approached* Egypt, we are certainly liable to be adversely affected by the culture in which we actually live and work. Furthermore, Abram could rely on his lofty soul⁵⁵ to keep him from falling too far. We, however, have no way of objectively estimating our ability to withstand the negative influence of our environment. If Abram suffered a descent to a lower level of holiness, we may suffer a descent to levels lower than holiness, eventually permitting ourselves unnecessary excesses or even outright violations of the Torah's laws.

We must therefore take measures, as Abram did, to

ensure that we not be influenced negatively by our cultural environment; on the contrary, we should influence it and grow from doing so.⁵⁶

13 They will try to curry my favor by giving me gifts: Abram was not interested in material wealth as an end in itself; he understood that the great wealth he had been promised by God was to be elevated and used for holy purposes, thus liberating the Divine sparks buried within it. He further realized that the key purpose of his descent into Egypt was to acquire this great wealth.⁵⁷

Therefore, when he saw the opportunity to acquire wealth by claiming that Sarai was his sister, he took it as a Divine mandate to use the situation advantageously. According to the *Zohar*,⁵⁸ Abram knew that the merit of Sarai's good deeds would protect her; he therefore did not hesitate to expose her to the apparent peril of being abducted into Pharaoh's house. Furthermore, Abram knew that wealth comes to a husband in the merit of his wife. He therefore saw that Sarai would be the conduit through which they would receive their wealth.

The Talmud⁵⁹ similarly states that a husband should always be heedful of his wife's honor, since blessings rest on the home on her account.⁶⁰

51. Seforno, cited as *peshat* in *Igrot Kodesh*, vol. 2, p. 182, footnote. 52. Rashi on 19:29, below. 53. See *Meor Einayim*, end of *Shemot*, citing the Baal Shem Tov. 54. He therefore said: "Say that you are my sister," alluding to the verse, "say to wisdom you are my sister" (Proverbs 7:4): Abram sought to elevate himself once again and prepare himself for his descent into Egypt by cleaving to the level of supernal wisdom. See *Meor Einayim*, *loc. cit.* 55. See on v. 5, above. 56. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 5, pp. 301-306. 57. On a human level, Abram and Sarai also "redeemed" the righteous convert, Hagar, who left behind a life of luxury as Pharaoh's daughter to follow them. 58. 3:52a. 59. *Bava Metzia* 59a. 60. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 20, pp. 38-40. 61. *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 5:1; *Sefer HaMa'amarim* 5710, pp. 111 ff. 62. *Mishneh Torah*, *Yesodei HaTorah* 1:7. 63. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 20, pp. 40-44. 64. *Sifte Chachamim*. 65. *Igrot Kodesh*, vol. 2, p. 182.

ONKELOS

17 וַיִּנָּע יְהוָה אֶת־פָּרְעֹה נִגְעִים גְּדֹלִים וְאֶת־בֵּיתוֹ עַל־
דְּבַר שָׂרִי אִשְׁת־אֲבָרָם: 18 וַיִּקְרָא פָּרְעֹה לְאַבְרָם וַיֹּאמֶר
מַה־זֹּאת עֲשִׂיתָ לִּי לָמָּה לֹא־הִגַּדְתָּ לִּי כִּי אִשְׁתְּךָ הוּא:
19 לָמָּה אָמַרְתָּ אֲחֹתִי הוּא וַאֲקַח אֹתָהּ לִי לְאִשָּׁה וְעַתָּה
הִנֵּה אִשְׁתְּךָ קַח וְלֵךְ: 20 וַיֵּצֵא עֲלָיו פָּרְעֹה אֲנָשִׁים וַיִּשְׁלְחוּ
אֹתוֹ וְאֶת־אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ: 13:1 וַיַּעַל אֲבָרָם
מִמִּצְרַיִם הוּא וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ וְלוֹט עִמּוֹ הַנִּגְנָבָה:
2 וְאַבְרָם כָּבֵד מְאֹד בְּמִקְנֵה בַּכְּסָף וּבַזָּהָב: 3 וַיֵּלֶךְ
לְמִסְעָיו מִנִּגְבַּ וְעַד־בֵּית־אֵל עַד־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־הָיָה שֵׁם
אֲחֵלָה בְּתַחֲלָה בֵּין בֵּית־אֵל וּבֵין הָעֵי: 4 אֶל־מָקוֹם
הַמְּזֻבָּח אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה שָׁם בְּרֹאשִׁיטָה וַיִּקְרָא שָׁם אֲבָרָם
בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה:

RASHI

הולך ממצרים לארץ כנען, מדרום לצפון הוא מהלך,
שארץ מצרים בדרומה של ארץ ישראל, כמו שמוכח
במסעות ובגבולי הארץ: 2 כבד מאד. טעון משאות:
3 וילך למסעיו. כשהחזר ממצרים לארץ כנען, היה
הולך ולן באכסניות שלן בהם בהליכתו למצרים. למדך
דרך ארץ, שלא ישנה אדם מאכסניא שלו. דבר אחר:
בהחזרתו פגע הקפוטיו: מנגב. ארץ מצרים בדרומה של
ארץ כנען: 4 אשר עשה שם בראשונה ויקרא שם.
ואשר קרא שם אברהם בשם ה', וגם יש לומר: ויקרא
שם עבשו בשם ה':

17 וַיִּנָּע ה' וגו'. במפת ראיתו לקה, שהתשמיש קשה
לו. בראשית רבה: ואת ביתו. בתרגומו: ועל אנש
ביתו. ומדרשו: לרבות בתליו ועמודיו וכליו: על
דבר שרי. על פי דבורה, אומרת למלאך: "הך", והוא
מכה: 19 קח ולך. לא באבימלך שאמר לו: "הנה
ארכי לפניך", אלא אמר לו: לך ואל תעמוד, שהמצרים
שטופי זמה הם, שנאמר: "וורמת סוסים ורמתם":
20 ויצא עליו. על אודותיו, לשלחו ולשמו: וישלחו.
בתרגומו: "ואליאיו": 1 ויעל אברהם וגו' הנגבה. לבא
לדרומה של ארץ ישראל, כמו שאמר למעלה: "הלוך
ונסוע הנגבה", להר המוריה. ומכל מקום, כשהוא

13. מא, ב. 14. תנחומא לך-לך ח. 15. בראשית כ, טו. 16. יחזקאל כג, כ.

CHASIDIC INSIGHTS

17 At the word of Sarai: Sarah's resistance to Pharaoh's overtures gave her descendants, the Jewish women in Egypt, the spiritual fortitude to resist the lure of adultery even in the midst of the prurient Egyptian culture.⁶⁹ The sages point out that these women's righteous behavior was one of the four merits in which the Exodus occurred.⁷⁰

We too, can draw strength from the example of Sarah and the righteous Jewish women throughout history. No matter how depraved the society we live in, we possess the spiritual fortitude to resist its temptations, if only we choose to avail ourselves of it.⁷¹

2 Abram was heavily laden with wealth: Abram's departure with great wealth presaged the wealth-laden exodus of the Jews from Egypt some 400 years later.⁷²

3 He continued on his travels: "His" travels can also imply God's travels, meaning that it was God's plan

that Abram travel to these particular places. Similarly, as mentioned above, God determines where we find ourselves at any given moment; if we are delayed or take a "wrong" turn, we should remember that it is all part of God's unalterable plan. We are left only with the free choice of whether to fulfill our mission in that place.⁷³

To pay off debts he incurred: Here we see Abram's extraordinary generosity: Although he left Charan with great wealth, we are told that that when he went down to Egypt, he had to borrow money! This was because Abram distributed all his wealth among the needy during the years of famine, doing acts of kindness toward anyone he encountered. He even borrowed money to graciously and generously host his guests. Only after returning from Egypt "with great wealth" was he able to repay his debts.⁷⁴

17 God then struck Pharaoh and his household with severe plagues—skin diseases that made carnal relations extremely painful. This plague was so severe that it even afflicted the walls, pillars, and utensils of Pharaoh's palace. This did not faze Pharaoh however, so God sent Sarai an angel, who was invisible to Pharaoh; the angel struck Pharaoh **at the word of Sarai, the wife of Abram**, whenever Pharaoh tried to approach her.

18 Pharaoh understood from all this that Sarai must be Abram's wife. He **summoned Abram and said, "What is this that you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife?"**

19 Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her to myself as a wife? Now **here is your wife; take her and go!** You are better off not staying in Egypt, because the Egyptians are a lecherous people and I cannot be held responsible for what might happen to a woman as lovely as your wife."

20 Pharaoh charged men to escort and guard him, and they escorted him together with his wife and all that he possessed. Pharaoh gave his daughter, Hagar, to Sarai as a handmaid, saying that it is preferable for his daughter to be a servant to a woman like Sarai, who is so openly favored by God, than to be a queen elsewhere.⁶⁶ By the close of this episode, Abram had been in Egypt for a total of three months.⁶⁷

Lot Leaves Abram

13:1 From Egypt, Abram went up to the Negev desert—he and his wife and everything he owned, and Lot was with him.

2 Abram was heavily laden with wealth: with cattle, silver, and gold.

3 He continued on his travels, retracing his steps and patronizing the same inns at which he had lodged on his way to Egypt, both to (a) avoid suspicion, for not staying at the same inns might be interpreted by others to mean that he had some reason to be embarrassed to be seen where he had been seen before, and to (b) pay off the debts he had incurred on his way to Egypt. He traveled **from the Negev toward Bethel, until the place where he originally had his tent, between Bethel and Ai,**

4 the site of the altar that he had built there at first⁶⁸ and where Abram had invoked God. And now again, Abram invoked God there (see figure 16).



Figure 16: Abram in Egypt

66. Rashi on 16:1, below. 67. Rashi on 21:34, below. 68. Above, 12:8. 69. *Vayikra Rabbah* 32:5; *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 4:25. See also *Tzeror HaMor* on Genesis 12:1. 70. *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 4:12. 71. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 5, p. 61. 72. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 5, p. 61. Exodus 11:2. 73. *Sefer HaSichot* 5704, p. 51. 74. Commentary of Rabbi Zev Wolf Einhorn on *Bereishit Rabbah* 41:3; *Sefer HaMa'amarim* 5689, p. 91.

ONKELOS

5 וְאֵף לָלוֹט דָּאָל עִם אַבְרָם הָיָה
עָאן וְתוֹרִין וּמִשְׁכְּנִין: 6 וְלֹא סוֹבְרַת
יְהוֹנָן אֲרַעָא לְמַתָּב בְּחֻדָּא אָרִי
הָיָה קְנִינְהוֹן סִגִּי וְלֹא יְכִילוּ לְמַתָּב
בְּחֻדָּא: 7 וְהוּת מִצוּתָא בֵּין רַעֲי
בַּעֲרִיָּה דְאַבְרָם וּבֵין רַעֲי בַּעֲרִיָּה
דְּלוֹט וּבְנִינְהוֹן וּפְרוּזָא בְּכֹן יִתָּב
בְּאַרְעָא: 8 וְאַמֵּר אַבְרָם לָלוֹט
לֹא כַּעַן תְּהִי מִצוּתָא בֵּינָא וּבִינְךָ
וּבֵין רַעוּתִי וּבֵין רַעוּתְךָ אָרִי גְבָרִין
אֲחִין אֲנַחְנָא: 9 הֲלֹא כָל אֲרַעָא
קְדֻמָּה אֲתַפְרֹשׁ כַּעַן מְלֻתִי אִם אֵת
לְצַפּוֹנָא וְאַנָּא לְדְרוֹמָא וְאַם אֵת
לְדְרוֹמָא וְאַנָּא לְצַפּוֹנָא: 10 וְזָקָף
לוֹט יֵת עֵינוּהִי וְחֻזָּא יֵת כָּל מִישׁוֹר
יִרְדְּנָא אָרִי כְּלָה בֵּית שְׁקֵיָא קְדָם
חֲבָלוֹת יֵת סְדוּם וְיֵת עֲמוּנָה
כְּגֻנְתָּא דִּי בְּאַרְעָא דְמִצְרַיִם מִטִּי
לְצוּר: 11 וּבַחֵר לָהּ לוֹט יֵת כָּל
מִישׁוֹר יִרְדְּנָא וְנִטְל לוֹט בְּקֻדְמִיתָא
וְאַתְפָּרְשׁוּ גְבַר מְלֻת אֲחוּהִי:

שְׁלִישִׁי 5 וְגַם-לָלוֹט הִהָלֵךְ אֶת-אַבְרָם הָיָה צֹאן-וַבְּקָר
וְאֶהְלִים: 6 וְלֹא-נִשָּׂא אֹתָם הָאָרֶץ לְשֹׁבֶת יַחְדּוֹ כִּי-
הָיָה רְכוּשָׁם רָב וְלֹא יָכְלוּ לְשֹׁבֶת יַחְדּוֹ: 7 וַיְהִי-רִיב בֵּין
רַעֲי מִקְנֵה-אַבְרָם וּבֵין רַעֲי מִקְנֵה-לוֹט וַהֲבִנְעֵנִי וַהֲפָרְזִי
אֲזַי יֵשֵׁב בְּאַרְצִי: 8 וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָם אֶל-לוֹט אֵל-נָא תְּהִי
מְרִיבָה בֵּינִי וּבֵינְךָ וּבֵין רַעֲי וּבֵין רַעֲיָה כִּי-אֲנָשִׁים אֲחִים
אֲנַחְנוּ: 9 הֲלֹא כָל-הָאָרֶץ לְפָנֶיךָ הִפָּרַד נָא מֵעָלַי אִם-
הִשְׁמָאל וְאִמְנָה וְאִם-הַיְמִין וְאִשְׁמַאֵלָהּ: 10 וַיֵּשֶׁא-
לוֹט אֶת-עֵינָיו וַיֵּרָא אֶת-כָּל-כְּפַר הַיַּרְדֵּן כִּי כְּלָה מִשְׁקָהָ
לְפָנָי שַׁחַת יְהוָה אֶת-סְדוּם וְאֶת-עֲמֹנָה בְּגוֹי-יְהוָה
בְּאַרְצֵי מִצְרַיִם בְּאֶכָה צַעַר: 11 וַיִּבְחַר-לוֹ לוֹט אֶת כָּל-
כְּפַר הַיַּרְדֵּן וַיֵּסַע לוֹט מִקְדָּם וַיִּפְרְדּוּ אִישׁ מֵעַל אָחִיו:

RASHI

אַבְרָם כִּי נִשְׁבָּה אָחִיו וְגו': וְאִמְנָה. אִימִין אֶת עֲצָמֵי,
כְּמוֹ "וְאִשְׁמַאֵלָהּ", אִשְׁמַאֵל אֶת עֲצָמֵי. וְאַם תֹּאמַר:
הִיָּה לוֹ לְנֶקֶד "וְאִימִינָה"? כֹּף מִצִּינוּ בְּמִקּוֹם אַחֵר: "אִם
אֵשׁ לְהַמִּין", וְאִין נֶקֶד "לְהַמִּין": 10 כִּי כְּלָה מִשְׁקָהָ.
אָרֶץ נְחָלֵי מִים: לְפָנֵי שַׁחַת ה' אֶת סְדוּם וְאֶת עֲמֹנָה. הָיָה
אוֹתוֹ מִישׁוֹר: כְּגוֹן ה'. לֹאִילָנוֹת: בְּאַרְצֵי מִצְרַיִם. לְזֻרְעִים:
בְּאֶכָה צַעַר. עַד צַעַר. וּמִדְּרַשׁ אֲגָדָה דּוֹרְשָׁה לְגַנְאִי,
עַל שֶׁהָיָה שְׂטוּפִי זִמָּה, בְּחֹר לוֹ לוֹט בְּשׁוֹכְנֵתָם. בְּמִסְכַּת
"הוֹרִיאוֹת"²⁰: 11 כְּפַר. מִישׁוֹר, כְּתִירָגוֹמוֹ: מִקְדָּם. נִסְעָה
מֵאֶצֶל אַבְרָם מִמְּוֹרָח, וְהָלַךְ לוֹ לְמַעְרָבוֹ שֶׁל אַבְרָם,
נִמְצָא נִסְעָה מִמְּוֹרָח לְמַעְרָב. וּמִדְּרַשׁ אֲגָדָה²¹. הִסְעָה
עֲצָמוֹ מִקְדָּמוֹנוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם, אָמַר: אִי אֶפְשִׁי, לֹא בְּאַבְרָם
וְלֹא בְּאַלְהֵי:

5 הִהָלֵךְ אֶת אַבְרָם. מִי גָרַם שֶׁהִיָּתָה לוֹ זֹאת? הִלִּיכְתָּ
עִם אַבְרָם: 6 וְלֹא נִשָּׂא אֹתָם. לֹא הִיָּתָה יְכוּלָה לְהִסְפִּיק
מְרָעָה לְמִקְנֵיהֶם. וְלִשְׁוֹן קָצֵר הוּא וְצָרִיף לְהוֹסִיף עָלָיו.
כְּמוֹ: "וְלֹא נִשָּׂא אֹתָם מְרָעָה הָאָרֶץ". לְפִיכָף כְּתַב: "וְלֹא
נִשָּׂא" בְּלִשׁוֹן זָכָר: 7 וַיְהִי רִיב. לְפִי שֶׁהָיָה רוּעִיו שֶׁל לוֹט
רָשָׁעִים וּמְרָעִים בְּהִמָּתֵם בְּשָׂדוֹת אַחֵרִים, וְרוּעֵי אַבְרָם
מוֹכִיחִים אוֹתָם עַל הַגָּזֹל, וְהֵם אוֹמְרִים: נִתְּנָה הָאָרֶץ
לְאַבְרָם, וְלוֹ אֵין יוֹרֵשׁ וְלוֹט בֶּן אָחִיו יוֹרֵשׁוֹ, וְאֵין זֶה
גָּזֹל, וְהַפָּתוּב אוֹמֵר: "וְהַבְּנִיעֵנִי וְהַפָּרְזִי אֲזַי יֵשֵׁב בְּאַרְצִי",
וְלֹא זֶכֶה הָאָבְרָם עָדֵין: 8 אֲנָשִׁים אֲחִים. קְרוֹבִים.
וּמִדְּרַשׁ אֲגָדָה²²: דוֹמִין בְּקִלְסֶתֶר פָּנִים: 9 אִם הִשְׁמָאל
וְאִמְנָה. בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר תֵּשֵׁב לֹא אֲתַרְחֹק מִמָּךְ, וְאַעֲמִד לְךָ
לְמִגְן וְלַעֲזָר. וְסוֹף דְּבַר הַצָּרָה לוֹ, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר²³: "וַיִּשְׁמַע

17. בראשית מא, ו. 18. בראשית יד, יד. 19. שמואל ב יד, יט. 20. י, ב. 21. בראשית רבה מא, ז.

INNER DIMENSIONS

[5] **Lot accompanied Abram:** Lot's name alludes to his covert evil: the word *lot* is related to one of the synonyms for the word "curse" (*lut*).⁷⁷ This evil was initially subsumed within Abram's holiness, like dross mixed in with the gold before it is purified—"Lot accompanied Abram." But like the dross that is separated out of the gold, Lot, too, became separated from Abram.

Lot personified the spiritual root of *chochmah* and *binah* of *kelipah*, which are personified, respectively, by Moab and Ammon. *Moab* means "from father," and "father" signifies *chochmah*. The letters that

spell *Ammon* also spell the word for "pleasantness" or "delight" (*noam*), which allude to *binah*, since it is the presence of delight (*Atik Yomin*) in *binah* that induces the insight of *chochmah* to descend into *binah*.

Over the course of the ensuing generations, the residual sparks of holiness within these corrupt forms of *chochmah* and *binah* were purified into their parallel manifestations in the realm of holiness and were manifest as Ruth the Moabite and King Solomon's wife Na'amah⁷⁸ the Ammonite.⁷⁹

- ◆ **Third Reading 5** Lot, by virtue of the fact that he **had accompanied Abram, also acquired flocks of sheep and cattle, and tents.**

6 The pasturage of **the land** between Bethel and Ai **could not support them living together, for their possessions were so extensive that they could not remain together.**

7 Due to the shortage of pasturable land, Lot's herdsmen began to graze their cattle in other people's fields. **Quarreling developed between the herdsmen of Abram's cattle and the herdsmen of Lot's cattle** over this issue: Abram's herdsmen accused Lot's herdsmen of robbery, while Lot's herdsmen argued that the land rightfully belonged to Lot since God had promised it to Abram, who had no heir other than Lot. Their argument was faulty, however, since **the Canaanites** (i.e., some of the nations descended from Canaan) **and the Perizites** (a non-Canaanite nation) **were then living in the land** and Abram had not yet acquired it. Nonetheless, Abram could not convince Lot that this argument was erroneous, and that his herdsmen should not let their flocks graze in other people's fields. Despite the fact that he was quite wealthy in his own right, Lot savored the prospect of inheriting Abram's wealth, as well.

8 Abram said to Lot, "Please, let's not have contention between me and you, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen. After all, we are relatives. The two of us even resemble each other enough to be mistaken for brothers.

9 Look, the whole land is before you. So please, separate yourself from me. If you go to the left, I will go to the right; if you go to the right, I will take the left. Furthermore, wherever you go, I will remain close enough at hand to come to your aid if you are ever in danger."

10 Lot looked up and saw that the entire Jordan Plain was well irrigated. Before God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah,⁷⁵ it was full of trees like God's own garden and full of vegetation like the land of Egypt, and it extended as far as the city of Bera, which would later become known as Tzoar.⁷⁶ But Lot saw that inhabitants of this region indulged in numerous forms of licentious behavior. As Abram's strict standards of morality had begun to seem extreme to Lot, he found the looser, amoral behavioral standards of this region appealing.

11 So Lot chose for himself the entire Jordan Plain. He journeyed from the east, and they separated from one another (see figure 17). Lot's journey was ideological, as well: he had had enough of Abram and his God, and was more than happy to distance himself from them both.



Figure 17: Lot Moves to the Plain; Abram Moves to Hebron

75. Below, 18:20-19:28. 76. Below, 14:2. 77. See *Bemidbar Rabbah* 9:18, 35. 78. 1 Kings 14:21. 79. *Torah Or* 11cd.

ONKELOS

12 אַבְרָם יִתֵּב בְּאַרְעָא דְקָנָען וְלוֹט יִתֵּב בְּקִרְיֵי מִישְׁרָא וּפְרִס עַד סְדוֹם: 13 וְאַנְשֵׁי סְדוֹם בִּישִׁין בְּמִמּוֹנֵהוּן וְחִיבִין בְּגִיטֵיהוֹן קָדָם יי' לְחֻדָּא: 14 וַיֵּי אָמַר לְאַבְרָם בְּתֵר דְּאַתְפָּרֶשׁ לוֹט מֵעֵמָה זְקוּף כְּעֵן עֵינֶיךָ וְחֻזִּי מִן אַתְרָא דִּי אַתְּ תִּמְנָן לְצִפּוּנָא וּלְדִרּוּמָא וּלְמִדְנָחָא וּלְמַעְרָבָא: 15 אַרְיִ יֵת כָּל אַרְעָא דִּי אַתְּ חֻזִּי לָךְ אֶתְנַנָּה וּלְבִנְיָךְ עַד עֲלָמָא: 16 וְאַשּׁוּיִי יֵת בְּנִיךָ סְגִיאיִן כְּעַפְרָא דְאַרְעָא כְּמָא דְלִית אֶפְשָׁר לְגַבֵּר לְמִמְנֵי יֵת עַפְרָא דְאַרְעָא אִף בְּנִיךָ לֹא יִתְמַנּוּ: 17 קוּם הֲלִיךְ בְּאַרְעָא לְאַרְבָּה וּלְפִתְיָה אַרְיִ לָךְ אֶתְנַנָּה: 18 וּפְרִס אַבְרָם וְאַתָּא יִתֵּב בְּמִישְׁרֵי מִמְרָא דִּי בְּחִבְרוֹן וּבְנָא תִּמְנָן מִדְּבָחָא קָדָם יי':

12 אַבְרָם יִשְׁבַּב בְּאַרְצֵי-קָנָען וְלוֹט יִשְׁבַב בְּעָרֵי הַכְּפָר וַיֵּאָהֶל עַד-סְדוֹם: 13 וְאֲנָשֵׁי סְדוֹם רָעִים וְחַטָּאִים לַיהוָה מְאֹד: 14 וַיְהוָה אָמַר אֶל-אַבְרָם אַחֲרֵי הַפֶּרֶד-לוֹט מַעֲמֹו שָׂא נָא עֵינֶיךָ וּרְאֵה מִן-הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר-אַתָּה שָׂם צַפְנָה וּנְגִיבָה וּקְדָמָה וְיָמָה: 15 כִּי אֶת-כָּל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר-אַתָּה רֹאֶה לְךָ אֶתְנַנֶּנָּה וְלִזְרַעֲךָ עַד-עוֹלָם: 16 וְשִׁמְתִּי אֶת-זֶרְעֲךָ כְּעַפְרַיִם הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אִם-יִיכָבֵל אִישׁ לְמִנּוֹת אֶת-עַפְרַיִם הָאָרֶץ נָם זֶרַעֲךָ יִמְנָה: 17 קוּם הִתְהַלֵּךְ בְּאַרְץ לְאַרְבָּה וּלְרֶחֱבָה כִּי לְךָ אֶתְנַנֶּנָּה: 18 וַיֵּאָהֶל אַבְרָם וַיָּבֹא וַיִּשְׁבַב בְּאַלְנֵי מִמְרָא אֲשֶׁר בְּחִבְרוֹן וַיִּבֶן-שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ לַיהוָה: פ

RASHI

יודעים רבונם ומתכוננים למרוד בו: 14 אחרי הפרד לוט. כל זמן שהקשע עמו, היה הדבור פורש ממנו: 16 אשר אם יוכל איש. כשם שאי אפשר לעפר להמנות, כך זרעך לא ימנה: 18 ממרא. שם אדם:

12 וַיֵּאָהֶל. נטע אהלים לרועיו ולמקנהו, עד סדום: 13 וְאֲנָשֵׁי סְדוֹם רָעִים. ואף על פי כן לא נמנע לוט מלשכון עמהם. ורבותינו²² למדו מכאן: "שם רשעים ירקב"²³: רעים. בגופם: וחטאים. בממונם: לה' מאד.

22. יומא לח, ב. 23. משלי י, ז.

CHASIDIC INSIGHTS

thank God for anything in particular, nor to prevent some future calamity, but simply to express his oneness with God and his desire to glorify His Name.⁸⁹ There he built a third altar to God: Abram's three al-

tars express the three general levels in our relationship with God:⁹⁰ Abram built his first altar to thank God for the promise of sustenance, children, and a land in which they could

A CLOSER LOOK

[18] There he built a third altar to God: Abram built three altars for three different reasons: he built the first one to thank God when he heard that he would finally be blessed with a son and that his descendants would inherit the land of Canaan;⁹¹ he built the second to atone for a sin of one of his future descendants;⁹² he built the third solely as an expression of his love for God and commitment to Him.

The experiences of the patriarchs, especially Abram's, presaged that which would occur to their descendants, the future Jewish people.⁹³ In this case, Abram's three offerings were the precursors for the three types of sacrifices that his descendants would later offer up in the Temple:⁹⁴

the peace-offering, whose purpose was to "inspire" God to provide sustenance for the world. To this end, part of the peace-offering's meat was eaten by humanity's representatives (the ones who brought the offering) and part was given to God's representatives (to be eaten by the priests and

burnt on the altar).

the sin-offering, whose purpose was to atone for sins. Since it was offered up for totally spiritual purposes, its meat was given only to be eaten by the priests and burnt on the altar.

the ascent-offering, whose purpose was to express our unconditional love for God. In accordance with this purpose, its meat was left to be burnt entirely on the altar.

Abram's first altar, built in thanksgiving for what he would receive, was a precursor of the peace-offering, through which the world would receive sustenance. His second altar, built to atone for the sin of a future descendant, was a precursor of the sin-offering. And his third altar, which he built with no other motive than to glorify God, was a precursor of the ascent-offering, which expressed the Jewish people's unconditional love for God, which in turn reciprocally evoked God's love for the Jewish people.⁹⁵

89. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 30, pp. 41-43. 90. See above, 12:7. 91. See above, 12:8. 92. *Bereishit Rabbah* 40:6. 93. See *Ketubot* 10b and Rashi *ad loc.* 94. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 30, pp. 36-40. 95. See commentators on *Avot* 1:2.

12 Abram lived in Canaan, while Lot dwelt in the Cities of the Plain, and pitched his herdsmen's tents throughout the whole plain, as far as Sodom.

13 Lot did not shy away from living in these cities even though the inhabitants of Sodom and its neighbors were wicked by engaging in immoral practices and **sinner**s in that they also used their possessions for immoral purposes, as well. They sinned **against God** deliberately, in order to anger Him.

14 Ever since Lot began to resent Abram and his God and to rebel against them both, God refrained from communicating with Abram. But after Lot had separated from him and Lot's negative presence was no longer a factor, God resumed communicating with Abram, reaffirming His promise to grant him offspring and negating the supposition that Lot would inherit him. **God said to Abram**, "I have already promised you *national* ownership of the Land of Israel. Now, I wish to confer *private* ownership of the land upon you and your descendants.⁸⁰ Therefore, **raise your eyes and, from the place from where you are, look to the north, to the south, to the east, and to the west.** Examine the land in detail, and see how it has sufficient space for your numerous descendants to each own his own parcel.

15 For all the land that you see, I will give to you and to your offspring forever.

16 I will make your offspring as numerous as the dust of the earth: if a man will be able to count the particles of dust in the world, then your offspring, too, will be countable.

17 In order to legally take private possession of the land, rise, walk through the land, along its length and breadth, for walking through an area of land with the intent of thereby taking possession of it is a legal means of acquisition,⁸¹ and thus, by your doing this, I will give it to you."⁸²

18 Abram continued to explore the land, and eventually found a suitable place in which to settle. Abram set up tents, and came and settled in the plains of Mamre the Amorite, in Hebron (see figure 17, p. 83). **There**, in appreciation for having begun to dwell permanently in the land, and in thanksgiving for the blessings that God had recently bestowed upon him, **he built a third altar to God** and offered up a sacrifice on it.⁸³ He made allies of Mamre and his two brothers, Aner and Eshkol.⁸⁴

❧ CHASIDIC INSIGHTS ❧

18 In Hebron: The name *Hebron* (*Chevron*) is related to the word for "connect" (*chaber*).⁸⁵ The city of Hebron, both metaphorically and physically, expresses the unity of the Jewish people as well as their unity with God.⁸⁶

This is why King David was crowned in Hebron.⁸⁷ Of all Biblical figures, he most epitomized constant, ab-

solute unity with God. Furthermore, King David is the ancestor of the Messiah, who will usher in an era in which we will all live with the constant awareness of our unity with God. For this reason, as well, King David was crowned in Hebron, the city of unity.

This is the deeper explanation of why Abram built his third altar in Hebron. He did not build this altar to

❧ INNER DIMENSIONS ❧

[13] Now the people of Sodom were very wicked sinners against God: Their sinfulness caused the

Divine Presence to retreat from the fifth firmament to the sixth.⁸⁸

^{80.} See on 12:7, above. ^{81.} Bava Batra 100a. ^{82.} Likutei Sichot, vol. 30, pp. 86-87. ^{83.} Likutei Sichot, vol. 30, pp. 36-38. ^{84.} Below, 14:13. ^{85.} Shir HaShirim Rabbah 5:1; Sefer HaMa'marim 5710, pp. 111 ff. ^{86.} Zohar 1:122b and 125a. ^{87.} See below, on 23:2. ^{88.} 2 Samuel 5:3.

ONKELOS

14:1 וַהֲוָה בְּיוֹמֵי אַמְרָפֶל מֶלֶךְ
דְּבָבֵל אַרְיוֹף מֶלֶךְ אֶלְסָר
בְּדִרְלֵעֹמֶר מֶלֶךְ דְּעִילָם וְתִדְעֵל
מֶלֶךְ דְּעִמְמוֹי: 2 עֲבָדוּ קֶרֶבָא עִם
בְּרַע מֶלֶכָא דְסָדוּם וְעַם בְּרַשַׁע
מֶלֶכָא דְעִמְמוֹהָ שְׁנָאָב מֶלֶכָא
דְּאִדְמָה וְשִׁמְאָבֵר מֶלֶכָא דְעִבּוּיִים
וּמֶלֶכָא דְבָלַע הִיא צוּעֵר: 3 כָּל
אֶלֶין אֲתִכְנָשׁוּ לְמִישַׁר חֻקְלָא הוּא
אֲתֵר יִמָּא דְמִלְחָא: 4 תִּרְתִּי עֲשִׂי
שְׁנִין פִּלְחוּ יֵת בְּדִרְלֵעֹמֶר וְתִלַּת
עֲשִׂי שְׁנִין מָרְדּוּ: 5 וּבְאַרְבַּע
עֲשִׂי שְׁנִין אֲתָא אֲתָא בְּדִרְלֵעֹמֶר
וּמִלְכִּיא דְעִמְמוֹהָ וּמַחוּ יֵת גְּבִרְיָא
דִּי בְעִשְׂתָּרוֹת קֶרְנִים וְיֵת תִּקְפִּיָּא
דְּבִהֻמָּתָא וְיֵת אֲמַתְנִי דְבִשְׁוָה
קֶרֶתִּים: 6 וְיֵת חוֹרָאֵי דִי בְטוּרְדִין
דְּשַׁעִיר עַד מִישַׁר פֶּאֶרְן דְּסִמְיָךְ עַל
מִדְבָּרָא:

רביעי 14:1 ויהי בימי אמרפל מלך-שנער אריוף מלך
אלסר בדרלעמר מלך עילם ותדעל מלך גוים: 2 עשו
מלחמה את-ברע מלך סדם ואת-ברשע מלך עמורה
שנאב | מלך אדמה ושמאבר מלך צביים {עבויים} ומלך
בלע היא-צוער: 3 כל-אלה חברו אל-עמק השדים הוא
ים המלח: 4 שתים עשרה שנה עבדו את-בדרלעמר
ושלש-עשרה שנה מרדו: 5 ובארבע עשרה שנה
בא בדרלעמר והמלכים אשר אתו ויכו את-רפאים
בעשתרת קרנים ואת-הוויזים בהם ואת האילים בשנה
קרייתים: 6 ואת-החרי בהררם שעיר עד איל פארן
אשר על-המדבר:

RASHI

חמשה מלכים הללו "את בדרלעמר": 5 ובארבע
עשרה שנה. למרדו: בא בדרלעמר. לפי שהוא היה
בעל המעשה, נכנס בעבי הקורה: והמלכים וגו'. אלו
שלשה מלכים: הוויזים. הם וזמרים: 6 בהררם. בדר
שלהם: איל פארן. בחרגומו: "מישור". ואומר אני,
שאין "איל" לשון "מישור", אלא מישור של פארן
"איל" שמו, ושל ממרא "אלוני" שמו, ושל ירדן "בכר"
שמו, ושל שטים "אבל" שמו — "אבל השטים"²⁶, וכן
"בעל גד"²⁷ — "בעל" שמו, וכלם מתרגמין "מישור",
וכל אחד שמו עליו: על המדבר. אצל המדבר, כמו:²⁸
"ועליו משה מנשה"

1 אמרפל. הוא נמרוד, שאמר לאברהם: פל לתוף
בכשן האש: מלך גוים. מקום יש ששמו "גוים", על שם
שנתקבצו שמה מבמה אמות ומקומות, והמליכו איש
עליהם, ושמו תדעל, בבראשית רבה:²⁴ 2 ברע. רע
לשמים ורע לבריות: ברשע. שנתעלה ברשעו: שנאב.
שונא אביו שבשמים: שמאבר. שם אבר לעוף ולקפץ
ולמרד בהקדוש ברוך הוא: בלע. שם העיר: 3 עמק
השדים. כף שמו, על שם שהיו בו שדות הרבה: הוא ים
המלח. לאחר זמן נמשך הים לתוכו, ונעשה ים המלח.
ומרדש אגדה²⁵ אומר, שנתבקעו הצורים סביבותיו,
ונמשכו יאורים לתוכו: 4 שתים עשרה שנה עבדו.

24. מב, ד. 25. בראשית רבה מב, ה. 26. במדבר לג, מט. 27. יהושע יא, יז. 28. במדבר ב, כ.

CHASIDIC INSIGHTS

us than the enticement of whatever transgression we had succumbed to.

Abram built his third altar purely for the sake of glorifying God. This altar expressed yet a higher level of connection to God: that of our ability to abandon our sense of independent selfhood and fuse with Him. When we are one with God, we transcend our egos and fulfill our Divine mission with unadulterated devotion¹⁰⁴ and without any material or spiritual ulterior motives.¹⁰⁵

Accordingly, Abram's three altars were also precursors of the three Temples. God gave us the first Temple based on the premise that we would observe His commandments faithfully and completely. When we sinned, the first Temple was destroyed and subsequently re-

placed by the second Temple, which was based on the premise of repentance. The third Temple will be built in the messianic era, when our physical senses will be so refined that they will perceive Divinity as readily as they presently perceive physical matter.¹⁰⁶ This perception will obliterate any sense of self, and we will naturally and instinctively conduct ourselves in complete accordance with God's will. We will embody the selfless commitment to God and Godliness expressed by Abram's third altar.

Although we have not yet attained this degree of perception, we can and should nonetheless recognize that it is the ultimate fulfillment of our Divine mission. This recognition will further inspire our yearning for the messianic era, thereby hastening its arrival.¹⁰⁷

104. See Tanya, chapters 18-19. 105. See Mishneh Torah, Teshuvah 10:2. 106. See Isaiah 52:8. 107. Likutei Sichot, vol. 30, pp. 40-43.

The War of the Kings

- ◆ **Fourth Reading 14:1** Despite Lot's desire to be on his own, he soon found himself in need of Abram's assistance. This **happened in the days of Amrafel, i.e., Nimrod,⁹⁶ king of Shinar; Aryoch, king of Elasar; Kedorlaomer, king of Elam; and Tidal, king of Goyim** ("[Many] Nations," a poly-national city).

2 Immediately after the dispersion, in the year 1996, **they** formed an alliance, headed by Kedorlaomer, and **waged war against Bera, king of Sodom; Birsha, king of Gomorrah; Shinav, king of Admah; Shemever, king of Tzevoyim; and the king of Bela, which is Tzoar**, and subdued them. The king of Sodom was nicknamed *Bera*, to indicate that he sought to be "evil" (*ra*) to both God and humanity. The king of Gomorrah was nicknamed *Birsha*, to indicate that he exceeded Bera "in wickedness" (*be-resha*) both to God and to humanity.⁹⁷ The king of Admah was nicknamed *Shinav*, to indicate that he "hated" (*sana*) God, his heavenly "father" (*av*). The king of Tzevoyim was nicknamed *Shemever*, to indicate that he "set" his "limbs" (*sam eiver*) to rebel against God. Thus, the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah sought to behave wickedly both towards God and humanity, while the kings of Admah and Tzevoyim only sought to behave wickedly against God. The king of Bela, in contrast, was not as wicked as his comrades; he merely joined in their alliance out of passive convenience. Therefore, no descriptive nickname was applied to him and his city was eventually spared.

3 **All the latter joined forces in the Valley of Sidim** ("[Many] Fields"), which later, as the Jordan River and other streams emptied into it, became **the Dead Sea**.

4 **For twelve years** (1996-2008), the five kings of the Plain **served Kedorlaomer** and his allies, **and for thirteen years** (2009-2022) **they rebelled**.

5 **In the fourteenth year** of their rebellion (2023, the same year in which Abram and Lot arrived in Canaan, and in which all the events related above took place), **Kedorlaomer and the other three kings who were with him came** to quell the rebellion. On the way, **they defeated the Rephaim in Ashterot-Karnaim,⁹⁸ the Zuzim** (later known as the Zamzumim⁹⁹) **in Ham, and the Emim¹⁰⁰ in Shaveh-Kiryataim**, wiping out all but one of the giants (whose name was Og) that had survived the Flood.¹⁰¹

6 They also defeated **the Horites at their mountain of Seir, as far as the Plain of El-Paran, which borders on the desert**. They did not wipe out the Horites, however, so the Horites regained control of Mount Seir after Kedorlaomer and his allies were defeated.¹⁰²

∞ CHASIDIC INSIGHTS ∞

live. This corresponds to the first aspect of our relationship with God—observing His commandments—which gives life to the soul and sustains the soul's connection to the body.¹⁰³

Abram built his second altar to atone for the sin of one of his future descendants. This altar corresponds to a higher way of relating to God, that of repentance. In

order to rectify our relationship with God after having sinned, we must surpass our previous level of commitment (which was clearly insufficient since it did not prevent us from sinning). In order to obligate ourselves to this stronger level of commitment, we must deepen and intensify our relationship with God; we must uncover in ourselves a level of consciousness in which our relationship with God is more important to

⁹⁶. Above, 11:28. ⁹⁷. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 35, p. 72. ⁹⁸. See Deuteronomy 1:4. ⁹⁹. Deuteronomy 2:20. ¹⁰⁰. See Deuteronomy 2:10-11. ¹⁰¹. Above, 7:23; Rashi on Deuteronomy 3:11. ¹⁰². See Deuteronomy 2:12, 22. ¹⁰³. See Leviticus 18:5; *Likutei Torah* 4:45c.

ONKELOS

7 וַיָּשְׁבוּ וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל-עֵין מִשְׁפָּט הוּא קָדֵשׁ וַיִּכּוּ אֶת-כָּל-
שָׂדֶה הָעֵמֶלְקִי וְגַם אֶת-הָאֹמְרִי הַיֹּשֵׁב בְּחֻצָּצֵן תְּמָר:
8 וַיֵּצֵא מֶלֶךְ-סֹדֹם וּמֶלֶךְ עֵמֶרָה וּמֶלֶךְ אֲדָמָה וּמֶלֶךְ
צִבְיִים {צִבְיִים} וּמֶלֶךְ בִּלְע הוּא-צֶעֶר וַיַּעֲרְכוּ אֹתָם
מִלְחָמָה בְּעֵמֶק הַשָּׂדִים: 9 אֵת כְּדָרְלֶעֶמֶר מֶלֶךְ עֵילָם
וְתִדְעָל מֶלֶךְ גֹּזִים וְאַמְרֶפֶל מֶלֶךְ שִׁנְעָר וְאַרְיוֹךְ מֶלֶךְ
אֶלְסָר אַרְבַּעַה מְלָכִים אֶת-הַחֲמִשָּׁה: 10 וַעֲמֶק הַשָּׂדִים
בְּאֶרֶת בְּאֶרֶת חָמָר וַיִּגְסוּ מֶלֶךְ-סֹדֹם וְעֵמֶרָה וַיִּפְּלוּ-
שָׁמָּה וַהֲנִשְׁאָרִים הָרָה גָּסוּ: 11 וַיִּקְחוּ אֶת-כָּל-רֶכֶשׁ סֹדֹם
וְעֵמֶרָה וְאֶת-כָּל-אֲכֻלָּם וַיִּלְכוּ: 12 וַיִּקְחוּ אֶת-לוֹט וְאֶת-
רַכְשׁוֹ בֶּן-אִחִי אַבְרָם וַיָּלְכוּ וַהֲוֵא יֹשֵׁב בְּסֹדֹם:

RASHI

הָאֵשׁ, וְכִינּוּן שִׁינָּא זֶה מִן הַחֲמָר, הָאֵמִינוּ בְּאַבְרָהָם
לְמַפְרֵעַ: הָרָה גָּסוּ. לְהָר גָּסוּ. "הָרָה" כְּמוֹ "לְהָר", כָּל
תְּבָה שֶׁצָּרִיכָה לְמַד בְּתַחֲלָתָהּ, הֵטִיל לָהּ הָיָא בְּסוּפָה.
וַיֵּשׁ חֲלוּק בֵּין "הָרָה" לְ"הָהָרָה", שֶׁהָיָא שְׂבֻסוֹף הַתְּבָה
עוֹמֶדֶת בְּמָקוֹם לְמַד שְׂבָרָשָׁה, אָבֵל אֵינָה עוֹמֶדֶת
בְּמָקוֹם לְמַד וְנִקְוָה פֶּתַח תַּחֲתִיָּה, וְהָיָא "הָרָה" כְּמוֹ
"לְהָר", אוֹ כְּמוֹ "אֵל הָר", וַאֲנִינוּ מִפְּרֵשׁ לְאִיזָה הָר, אֵלָּא
שֶׁכָּל אֶחָד נָס בְּאֶשֶׁר מִצָּא הָר תַּחֲלָה, וְכִשְׁהוּא נֹתֵן
הָיָא בְּרָשָׁה לְכַתֵּב "הָהָרָה" אוֹ "הַמְדָּבָרָה" — פֶּתְרוֹנוֹ
כְּמוֹ "אֵל הָהָר" אוֹ כְּמוֹ "לְהָהָר", וְנִשְׁמַע לְאוֹתוֹ הָר
הַיָּדוּעַ וּמִפְּרֵשׁ בְּפֶרֶשׁ: 12 וַהֲוֵא יֹשֵׁב בְּסֹדֹם. מִי גָרם
לוֹ זֹאת? וַיִּשְׁיבֵהוּ בְּסֹדֹם:

7 עֵין מִשְׁפָּט הוּא קָדֵשׁ. עַל שֵׁם הָעֵתִיד, שֶׁעֲתִידִין
מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן לְהַשְׁפֵּט שָׁם עַל עֲסָקִי אוֹתוֹ הָעֵין, וְהֵם
"מִי מְרִיבָה". וְאַנְקְלוֹס תַּרְגָּמוֹ כְּפִשּׁוּטוֹ: מָקוֹם שֶׁהָיוּ בְּנֵי
הַמְדִּינָה מִתְקַבְּצִים שָׁם לְכָל מִשְׁפָּט: שָׂדֶה הָעֵמֶלְקִי.
עֲדִין לֹא נִוְלַד עֲמֶלְק, וְנִקְרָא עַל שֵׁם הָעֵתִיד: בְּחֻצָּצֵן
תְּמָר. הוּא "עֵין גְּדִי", מִקְרָא מָלֵא בְּדָבָרֵי הַיָּמִים²⁹
בִּיהוֹשֻׁפֵּט: 9 אַרְבַּעַה מְלָכִים וְגו'. וְאֵף עַל פִּי כֵן נִצָּחוּ
הַמוֹעֲטִים, לְהוֹדִיעַ שְׂגֻבוֹרִים הָיוּ, וְאֵף עַל פִּי כֵן לֹא
נִמְנָע אַבְרָהָם מִלְרַדֵּף אַחֲרֵיהֶם: 10 בְּאֶרֶת בְּאֶרֶת חָמָר.
בְּאֶרֶת הָרָה הָיוּ שָׁם, שְׂנוֹטְלִין מִשָּׁם אֲדָמָה לְטִיט שֶׁל
בִּנְיָן. וּמִדְרַשׁ אֲגָדָה³⁰, שֶׁהָיָה הֵטִיט מִגִּבַּל בְּהֵם, וְנִעֲשֶׂה
גָּס לְמֶלֶךְ סֹדֹם שִׁינָּא מִשָּׁם, לְפִי שֶׁהָיוּ בְּאֵמוֹת מִקְצָתָן
שֶׁלֹּא הָיוּ מֵאֲמִינִין שֶׁנִּצָּל אַבְרָהָם מֵאוֹר כְּשִׁדִּים מִכְּבָשָׁן

²⁹ דב"ב כ, ב. ³⁰ בראשית רבה מב, ז.

CHASIDIC INSIGHTS

on Abram's astuteness. Yet Abram did not totally sever ties with Lot: even when he was left with no choice but to send him away, he assured him that he would always remain in close enough proximity to protect him if the need would arise, and when it did, Abram did not hesitate to risk his life to save him.

Abram's perseverance with Lot paid off: although Abram failed to reform him totally, Lot still maintained

some of the praiseworthy practices Abram taught him. For example, we see that he observed the holiday of Passover and insisted on practicing hospitality, even when he knew that it was a capital offense. Thus, the narrative of Abram's ongoing association with Lot demonstrates that he was able to imbue his willingness to sacrifice his life for the ideal of Divine goodness to his disciples, thus truly fulfilling God's mandate to "go from your land."¹¹²

¹¹² Sefer HaSichot 5750, vol. 1, pp. 100-102.

7 They then turned back and arrived at Ein-Mishpat (“The Well of Judgment”), a spring at whose edge the inhabitants of the area would gather to hold court cases, and where Moses and Aaron would in the future be sentenced to not enter the Land of Israel, **which is also known as Kadesh.**¹⁰⁸ **They conquered the entire field that would later be settled by the Amalekites, as well as the Amorites who lived in Chatzatzon-Tamar, later known as Ein-Gedi.**¹⁰⁹

8 The king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Tzevoyim, and the king of Bela, which is Tzoar, went forth and engaged them in battle in the Valley of Sidim

9 —against Kedorlaomer, king of Elam; Tidal, king of Goyim; Amrafel, king of Shinar; and Aryoch, king of Elasar; four kings against the five. Despite the fact that these four kings were outnumbered, they nevertheless won the battle.

10 The Valley of Sidim was full of clay pits that supplied the inhabitants of the Plain with clay for building. **When the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, they fell there** into the quagmire of clay. The king of Sodom escaped miraculously; as a result, the skeptics who had previously cast doubt on the veracity of Abram’s miraculous survival from Nimrod’s furnace now believed that such miracles are possible. **The other survivors fled to the mountains.**

11 The four kings seized all the belongings of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their provisions, and they departed.

12 When they left, they also took Abram’s nephew Lot and his possessions, since he had been living in Sodom. By choosing to sever himself from God, Lot forfeited God’s protection.

∞ CHASIDIC INSIGHTS ∞

12 They took Abram’s nephew Lot: As we have seen, when God instructed Abram to leave Charan, He told him that he must transcend everything he previously knew and was, unconditionally committing himself to God. Implicit in this directive was God’s expectation that Abram would impart his new awareness and devotion to those around him, just as he had always disseminated Divine consciousness wherever he went prior to this directive. And indeed, Abram was so successful in this mission that people came to consider God not just the God of heaven—known only to the celestial beings—but also the God of earth.¹¹⁰

Although Abram found many sympathetic listeners whom he won over to his way of thinking, he did not shy away from antipathetic or even hostile audiences as well. Even though many of these people continued to cling to their own beliefs and lifestyles despite Abram’s efforts, Abram knew that the true test of his ability to

fulfill his mission was to reach such people—even if he could only get them to concede a crucial point.

This concept is reflected in Abram’s relationship with his wicked nephew, Lot:

We would have expected that Lot, Abram’s kinsman and perennial travel companion, would have become Abram’s foremost disciple. Yet not only did Lot eventually reject both Abram and God, he even went so far as to move to the city of Sodom, the paradigm of immorality and corruption. When their ways parted, Abram himself suggested that they part company, as well. Had Abram failed in influencing Lot? Did he lose all hope for him?

The answer is, no. We have seen Lot’s ambivalence toward Abram’s message, even when they first left Charan.¹¹¹ Already at that point, and perhaps even prior to that, Lot’s incipient wickedness was certainly not lost

¹⁰⁸. Numbers 20:1-13. ¹⁰⁹. 2 Chronicles 20:2. ¹¹⁰. Below, 24:7. ¹¹¹. Above, on 12:4-5.

ONKELOS

13 וַאֲתָא מְשִׁיבָא וְחַוִּי לְאַבְרָם
עֲבָרָאָה וְהוּא שְׂרִי בְּמִישְׁרֵי מִמְרָא
אַמְוָרָאָה אַחוּהִי דְאַשְׁבּוּל וְאַחוּהִי
דְעֵנָר וְאַנּוּן אֲנָשִׁי קִמְנָה דְאַבְרָם:
14 וְשִׁמְעָה אַבְרָם אָרִי אֲשֶׁתְּבִי
אַחוּהִי וְזָרִי יֵת עוֹלְמוֹהִי יִלְדִי
בֵּיתָה תִּלְתָּ מֵאָה וְתִמְנֵי עֶסֶר
וְרִדְף עַד דָּן: 15 וְאַתְּפִלִּיג עֲלֵיהוֹן
בְּלִילִיָּא הוּא וְעֲבָדוּהִי וּמְחֻנּוֹן
וְרִדְפֻנּוֹן עַד חוּבָה דִּי מִצְפּוֹנָא
לְדִמְשֶׁק: 16 וְאַתִּיב יֵת כָּל קִנְיָנָא
וְאַף יֵת לוֹט בֵּר אַחוּהִי וְקִנְיָנָה
אַתִּיב וְאַף יֵת נְשִׂיאָהּ יֵת עֲמָא:
17 וְנִפְקַ מִלְּפָא דְסָדוּם לְקַדְמוּתָהּ
בְּתֵר דְּתֵב מִלְּמַחֵי יֵת בְּדִרְלָעוֹמֵר
יֵת מִלְּכִיָּא דִּי עֲמָה לְמִישֵׁר מִפְּנָא
הוּא אַתֵּר בֵּית רִיסָא דְּמִלְּכָא:

13 וַיָּבֹא הַפְּלִיט וַיֵּגֶד לְאַבְרָם הָעֵבְרִי וְהוּא שֶׁכֵּן בְּאַלְנֵי
מִמְרָא הָאֲמֹרִי אָחִי אֲשֶׁבֶל וְאָחִי עֵנָר וְהֵם בְּעָלֵי בְרִית־
אַבְרָם: 14 וַיִּשְׁמַע אַבְרָם כִּי נִשְׁבָּה אָחִיו וַיִּרְק אֶת־
חֲנִיכּוֹ וַיִּלְחֶם בֵּיתוֹ שְׂמֹנֶה עָשָׂר וּשְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת וַיִּרְדֹּף עַד־
דָּן: 15 וַיַּחַלֵּק עֲלֵיהֶם לִילָה הוּא וְעַבְדָּיו וַיִּבְּסוּ וַיִּרְדְּפֻם
עַד־חוּבָה אֲשֶׁר מִשְׁמָאל לְדִמְשֶׁק: 16 וַיָּשֶׁב אֶת כָּל־
הָרֶכֶשׁ וְגַם אֶת־לוֹט אָחִיו וּרְכֻשׁוֹ הַשֵּׁבִי וְגַם אֶת־הַנְּשִׁים
וְאֶת־הָעַם: 17 וַיֵּצֵא מִלְךְ־סָדוּם לְקָרְאָתוֹ אַחֲרֵי שׁוּבוֹ
מִהָבוֹת אֶת־בְּדִרְלָעוֹמֵר וְאֶת־הַמְּלָכִים אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ אֶל־
עֶמֶק שָׁוֵה הוּא עֶמֶק הַמֶּלֶךְ:

RASHI

עֵשֶׂר וּגו'. רבתינונו אָמְרוּ: אֲלִיעֶזֶר לְבָדוֹ הָיָה, וְהוּא
מִנֵּן גְּמִטְרִיָּא שֶׁל שְׁמוֹ: עַד דָּן. שֶׁם תֵּשֵׁב כָּחוּ, שְׂרָאָה
שְׁעִתִּידִין בְּנֵי לְהַעֲמִיד שֶׁם עֵגֶל: 15 וַיַּחַלֵּק עֲלֵיהֶם.
לְפִי פְשׁוּטוֹ, סָרַס הַמֶּלֶךְ: וַיַּחַלֵּק הוּא וְעַבְדָּיו עֲלֵיהֶם
לִילָה. כְּדֶרֶךְ הַרְדִּיפִים שֶׁמְתַפְּלִגִים אַחֵר הַנִּרְדָּפִים
כְּשֶׁבוֹרְחִים, זֶה לְכָאן וְזֶה לְכָאן: לִילָה. כְּלוֹמֵר, אַחֵר
שֶׁחֲשָׁכָה לֹא נִמְנַע מִלְּרִדְפָם. וּמִדְּרַשׁ אַגְדָּה³⁵, שֶׁנֶּחֱלַק
הַלִּילָה, וּבְחֻצוֹת הָרָאשׁוֹן נִעֲשֶׂה לוֹ נֶס, וְהָצִיז הַשָּׁנִי
נִשְׁמַר וְכֹא לוֹ לְחֻצוֹת לִילָה שֶׁל מִצְרַיִם: עַד חוּבָה. אֵין
מְקוֹם שֶׁשְׁמוֹ "חוּבָה", אֶלָּא "דָּן" קוֹרָא "חוּבָה" עַל שֶׁם
עֲבוּדָה זָרָה שְׁעִתִּידָה לְהִיּוֹת שָׁם: 17 עֶמֶק שָׁוֵה. כִּי
שְׁמוֹ, כְּתִירוֹמוֹ: "לְמִישֵׁר מִפְּנָא", פְּנוּי מֵאִילָנוֹת וּמִכָּל
מִכְשׁוֹל: עֶמֶק הַמֶּלֶךְ. "בֵּית רִיסָא דְּמִלְּכָא", בֵּית רִיס
אַחֵר שֶׁהוּא שְׁלִשִׁים קָנִים, שֶׁהִיָּה מִיָּחִד לְמֶלֶךְ לְצַחֵק
שָׁם. וּמִדְּרַשׁ אַגְדָּה³⁶, עֶמֶק שֶׁהָשׁוּ שָׁם כָּל הָאֲמוֹת,
וְהַמְּלִיכִים אֶת אַבְרָהָם עֲלֵיהֶם לְנִשְׂאֵי אֱלֹהִים וּלְקָצִין:

13 וַיָּבֹא הַפְּלִיט. לָפַע פְּשׁוּטוֹ זֶה עוֹג, שֶׁפִּלְט מִן
הַמִּלְחָמָה, וְהוּא שְׁכֵתוֹב³⁷: "כִּי רַק עוֹג נִשְׂאָר מִיָּתֵר
הָרַפָּאִים". וְזֶהוּ "נִשְׂאָר", שֶׁלֹּא הִרְגוּהוּ אִמְרָפֶל וְחִבְרִי
כְּשֶׁהָבּוּ אֶת הָרַפָּאִים בְּעֶשְׂתֵּרוֹת קִרְנִים. תִּנְחוּמָא³⁸.
וּמִדְּרַשׁ בְּרַאשִׁית רַבָּה³⁹: זֶה עוֹג, שֶׁפִּלְט מִדּוֹר הַמְּבוּל.
וְזֶהוּ "מִיָּתֵר הָרַפָּאִים", שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר⁴⁰: "הַנִּפְלִים הָיוּ בְּאֶרֶץ־
וְגו'. וּמִתְפַּנֵּן שֶׁיִּהְיֶה אַבְרָהָם וַיִּשָּׂא אֶת שָׂרָה: הָעֵבְרִי.
שָׂבָא מֵעֵבֶר הִנָּה: בְּעָלֵי בְרִית אַבְרָם. שֶׁכָּרְתוּ עִמּוֹ
בְּרִית. דְּכָר אַחֵר: שֶׁהָשִׂיאוּ לוֹ עֶצֶה עַל הַמִּילָה, כְּמוֹ
שֶׁמֶרְשׁ בְּמִקּוֹם אַחֵר⁴¹: 14 וַיִּרְק. כְּתִירוֹמוֹ: "וְזָרִי",
אַרְמִי"ר בְּלַעְז⁴², וְכֵן⁴³: "וְהִירִיקְתִּי אַחֲרֵיכֶם הָרִב" — אֲזִידִין
בְּחִרְבֵי עֲלֵיכֶם, וְכֵן⁴⁴: "אַרְיִק חִרְבִּי", וְכֵן⁴⁵: "וְהִרְק חֲנִית
וְסִגְרִי": חֲנִיכּוֹ. חֲנִיכּוֹ כְּתִיב, זֶה אֲלִיעֶזֶר שֶׁחֲנִכּוֹ לְמִצְוֹת.
וְהוּא לְשׁוֹן הַתְּחַלֵּת בְּנִיסַת הָאָדָם אוֹ בְּלִי לְאֲמָנוֹת שֶׁהוּא
עֲתִיד לַעֲמֹד בָּהּ, וְכֵן: "חֲנֹךְ לְנֶעֱרֹם"⁴⁶, "חֲנִכַּת הַמִּזְבֵּחַ"⁴⁷,
"חֲנִכַּת הַבֵּית"⁴⁸. וּבְלַעְז קוֹרִין לוֹ אִינִיצִי"ר⁴⁹: שְׂמֹנֶה

31. דברים ג, יא. 32. חוקת כה. 33. נמצא בנדה סא, א. ועיין ב"ר מב, ח ובחוקוני. 34. בראשית ו, ד. 35. בראשית יח, א. 36. לצידו בנשק. 37. ויקרא כו, לג. 38. שמות טו, ט. 39. תהלים לה, ג. 40. משלי כב, ו. 41. במדבר ז, יא. 42. תהלים א, 43. לחנוך. 44. בראשית רבה מג, ב. 45. בראשית רבה מג, ג. 46. בראשית רבה מג, ה.

A CLOSER LOOK

[13] **Og...came and told Abram:** The Midrash relates that Og assumed that Abram would try to save Lot by going to war against the four kings and be killed in battle, allowing Og to then marry Sarai.¹¹⁹ The Midrash further relates that when Og came to Abram, it was Passover, and he found him eating *matzo*.

In telling us that Abram was eating *matzo* at the

time of Og's arrival, the Midrash is explaining Og's certainty that Abram would irrationally place himself in such great danger by going to war against the four kings: *matzo* is "the bread of faith,"¹²⁰ meaning that eating it endows us with supra-rational faith. Og, witnessing Abram eating "the bread of faith," perceived that it would cause Abram to act "beyond reason," risking his life to save Lot.¹²¹

119. Bereishit Rabbah 42:8. 120. Zohar 2:183b. 121. Reshimot 17.

13 Og,¹¹³ the sole survivor of the battle between the four kings and the Rephaim,¹¹⁴ came and told Abram, the Hebrew [*Ivri*, “the other-sider,” i.e., who came from the East, the other side of the Euphrates River], who was living in the plains of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshkol and brother of Aner, who were Abram’s allies.

14 When Abram heard that his kinsman had been taken captive, he armed his chief servant and greatest disciple, Eliezer, putting him in charge of his 318 attendants who had been born in his household.¹¹⁵ Even though the four kings had proven themselves invincible against the five kings of the Plain, Abram nevertheless did not hesitate to go into battle against them. He instructed his allies, Aner, Eshkol, and Mamre, to stay and guard his tents.¹¹⁶ He set out in pursuit as far as Dan, where he prophetically foresaw that his descendants would set up a public idol in competition with the Temple in Jerusalem;¹¹⁷ this disheartening vision sapped his strength, and he had to stop to rest.

15 He and his servants divided themselves, preparing to pursue the four kings should they flee in different directions. They continued their pursuit into the night. Abram attacked before midnight, and pursued them as far as Dan—also known as Chovah [“Guilt,” on account of the idolatry that would be practiced there in the future]—which is north of Damascus. Even though he only had 318 soldiers, Abram’s strategies and Eliezer’s military prowess secured them a miraculous victory. God reserved the second half of the night to be used for the future miraculous deliverance of Abram’s descendants from Egypt.¹¹⁸

16 He retrieved all the belongings; he also brought back his kinsman Lot along with all his belongings, as well as the women and the other people (see figure 18).

17 After he returned from his victory over Kedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom came out to greet him at Open Valley, a plain void of trees and other obstacles to movement, which was the king of Sodom’s sporting ground. This sporting ground was 180 cubits (88 meters or 290 feet) in length and width (i.e., 7,465 square meters or 1.84 acres in area). There, the survivors of the war unanimously proclaimed Abram their king.

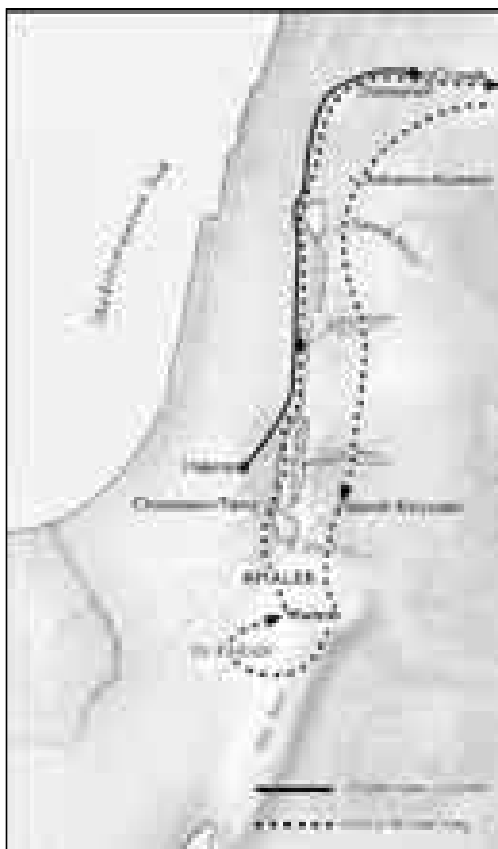


Figure 18: The War of the Kings

113. Rashi on Numbers 21:34 and Deuteronomy 3:11. 114. Above, v. 5. 115. *Hitva'aduyot* 5748, vol. 1, pp. 437-438, 440-441. 116. Rashi on 14:24, below. 117. 1 Kings 12:28-30. 118. See Exodus 11:4 ff, 12:29 ff.

— ONKELOS —

18 ומלכי צדק מלך אדק מלכא דירושלם אפיק לחם וחרמר והוא משמש קדם אל עלאה: 19 וברכה ואמר בריך אברם לאל עלאה דקנינה שמיא וארעא: 20 וברך אל עלאה די מסר סנאף בידך ויהב לה חד מן עשרא מכלא: 21 ואמר מלכא דסדום לאברם הב לי נפשתיא וקנינא סב לך: 22 ואמר אברם למלכא דסדום ארמית ידי בצלו קדם יי אל עלאה דקנינה שמיא וארעא: 23 אם מחוטא ועד ערקת מסנא ואם אסב מכל די לך ולא תימר אנא אעתיית ית אברם: 24 בר מדאכלו עולמיא וחלק גבריא די אלו עמי ענר אשכול וממרא אנון וקבלו חלקהון:

18 ומלכי צדק מלך שלם הוציא להם ויין והוא כהן לאל עליון: 19 וברכהו ויאמר ברוך אברם לאל עליון קנה שמים וארץ: 20 וברוך אל עליון אשר מנן צריך בידך ויתן לו מעשר מכל:

חמישי 21 ויאמר מלך סדם אל אברם תן לי הנפש והרבש קח לך: 22 ויאמר אברם אל מלך סדם הרמתי ידי אליהוה אל עליון קנה שמים וארץ: 23 אם מחוטא ועד שרוד נעל ואם אקח מכל אשר לך ולא תאמר אני העשרתי את אברם: 24 בלעדי רק אשר אכלו הנערים וחלק האנשים אשר הלכו אתי ענר אשכול וממרא הם יקחו חלקם: ם

— RASHI —

מחוט ועד שרוד נעל. אעפב לעצמי מן השבי: ואם אקח מכל אשר לך. ואם תאמר לתת לי שכר מבית גניו, לא אקח: ולא תאמר וגו'. שהקדוש ברוך הוא הבטיחני לעשרני, שנאמר: "ואברכה" וגו': 24 הנערים. עבדי "אשר הלכו אתי", ועוד "ענר אשכול וממרא" וגו'. אף על פי שעבדי נכנסו למלחמה, שנאמר לעיל: "הוא ועבדיו ויבם". וענר וחבריו ישובו על הפלים לשמור, אפלו הכי "הם יקחו חלקם". וממנו למד דוד, שאמר: "בחלק הירד במלחמה ובחלק הישב על הפלים, יחדו יחלקו". ולכך נאמר: "ויהי מהיום ההוא ומעלה וישמה לחק ולמשפט", ולא נאמר "והלאה", לפי שכבר נתן החק בימי אברהם:

18 ומלכי צדק. מדרש אגדה: "הוא שם בן נח: להם ויין. כך עושים ליגיעי מלחמה. והראה לו שאין בלבו עליו על שהרג את בניו. ומדרש אגדה: רמו לו על המנחות ועל הנסכים שיקריבו שם בניו: 19 קנה שמים וארץ. כמו: "עשה שמים וארץ". על ידי עשייתן קנאן להיות שלו: 20 אשר מנן. אשר הסגיר. וכן: "אמגנך ישראל": ויתן לו. אברם "מעשר מכל" אשר לו, לפי שהיה כהן: 21 תן לי הנפש. מן השבי שלי שהצלת, החזר לי הגופים לבדם: 22 הרמתי ידי. לשון שבועה, מרים אני את ידי לאל עליון. וכן: "בי נשבעתי" — נשבע אני. וכן: "נתתי בסף השדה קח ממני" — נתן אני לך בסף השדה, וקחהו ממני: 23 אם

47. נדרים לב, ב. 48. בראשית רבה מג, ו. 49. תהלים קלד, ג. 50. הושע יא, ח. 51. בראשית כב, טז. 52. בראשית כג, יג. 53. יב, ב. 54. פסוק טו. 55. שמואל א ל, כד. 56. שם, כה.

— CHASIDIC INSIGHTS —

order to improve our lives and the lives of our loved ones; if we have internalized the Torah's values, our motivation becomes generalized into the desire to make the world more Godly. Thus, such wealth is a priori directed towards higher ends than pure sensual indulgence.

Wealth that we do not earn, however, has no such implicit ontological direction; we are apt to relate to it much more indulgently. By tithing the spoils of war, which he received miraculously, Abraham demonstrated that the fact that all our possessions truly be-

long to God applies not only to that which we have produced with our own labor but to all our wealth.

Moreover, we are taught that God promises to pay us back many times over for giving Him our tithes, and in fact implores us to test Him in this.¹²⁹ Since one of the purposes of this commandment is thus to show how God rewards those who fulfill His will, the Torah tells us how Abraham fulfilled it, for Abraham devoted himself to disseminating the knowledge of God's goodness and kindness throughout the world.¹³⁰

129. Shabbat 119a; Ta'anit 9a; Malachi 3:10. 130. Likutei Sichot, vol. 5, pp. 68-76.

18 Noah's son Shem, who was also known as **Malki-Tzedek** ("My King is Righteousness"), **King of Salem** came to Open Valley and **brought forth bread and wine**; this was the customary way of greeting those who return from battle. In addition, this was Malki-Tzedek's way of demonstrating to Abram that he was not angry with him for having killed his descendants, the Elamites,¹²² and indicating to Abram that his own descendants would one day offer up grain-offerings and wine-offerings to God at the location of his city, the future Jerusalem. Malki-Tzedek, besides being a king, **was also a priest to God, the Most High.**

19 **He blessed Abram, and said, "Blessed be Abram before God the Most High, owner of heaven and earth.**

20 **And blessed be God the Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand."** Abram then **gave Malki-Tzedek a tithe of everything** he owned, fulfilling the Torah's requirement to give the priestly caste a tenth of one's produce.¹²³ But whereas the Torah only requires giving a tenth of certain agricultural crops, Abraham went beyond the letter of the law and gave Malki-Tzedek a tenth of *all* his possessions.¹²⁴

- ◆ *Fifth Reading* 21 Abraham's gift to Malki-Tzedek did not include any of the articles that the four kings had captured and that he had returned.¹²⁵ Regarding these articles, **the king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the people you have rescued from my kingdom and keep the belongings you have retrieved for yourself.** This will be my reward to you for having come to my aid."

22 **Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have raised my hand and sworn to God, God the Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth,**

23 **that I shall not even retain a thread or a shoelace from among the returned belongings! Nor will I take anything that you offer me from your treasury as payment, so you will not be able to say, 'It was I who made Abram rich.'** God has promised to make me rich;¹²⁶ I rely solely on His promise.

24 **That is, except for what the young men have eaten, and the share due the men who came with me into battle, as well as what is due Aner, Eshkol, and Mamre, who did not accompany me in battle but stayed to guard the camp. All these may take their share."** Abram was so insistent that the guards and combatants share equally in the spoils of war that this eventually became a permanent custom among his descendants, and King David eventually gave it force of law.¹²⁷

— CHASIDIC INSIGHTS —

20 [Abram then] gave him a tenth of everything: All three patriarchs voluntarily fulfilled all the Torah's commandments.¹²⁸ When the Torah mentions specific cases in which a patriarch observed a certain commandment, it does so for two reasons: (1) to indicate how doing so expressed his unique way of serving

God, and (2) to teach us how to perform these commandments the way the patriarchs did.

Tithing our wealth demonstrates that everything we possess belongs to God and must therefore be used for holy purposes. Generally, we seek to accrue wealth in

122. Above, 10:22. 123. Leviticus 27:30-32; Numbers 18:21-24. 124. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 25, pp. 118-119. 125. *Gur Aryeh. Likutei Sichot*, vol. 25, pp. 118-119. 126. Above, 12:2. 127. 1 Samuel 30:24-25. 128. *Kidushin* 82a; *Yoma* 28b.

ONKELOS

15:1 בַּתֵּר פִּתְגָמִיּא הָאֵלִין הָיָה
פִּתְגָמִיּא דִּין לֵאבְרָם בְּנִבְוָאָה לְמִימָר
לֹא תִדְחַל אֲבָרָם מִימְרֵי תְקוּף לָךְ
אֲנִיךְ סָגִי לַחֲדָא: 2 וְאָמַר אֲבָרָם יִי
אֱלֹהִים מָא תִתֵּן לִי וְאָנָּה אֶזְל בְּלֹא
וְלֹד וְבֵר פִּרְנָסָא הָדִין דְּבִבִּיתִי הוּא
דְּמִשְׁקָאָה אֲלִיעֹזֵר: 3 וְאָמַר אֲבָרָם
הָא לִי לֹא יִהְיֶה וְלֹד וְהָא בֵּר בֵּיתִי
יֵרִית יִתִּי: 4 וְהָא פִּתְגָמִיּא דִּין עֲמֹה
לְמִימָר לֹא יִירְתֵּנָךְ דִּין אֲלֵהִין בֵּר
דְּתוּלִיד הוּא יִירְתֵּנָךְ:

15:1 אַחֲרֵי | הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה הָיָה דְּבִרְיָהוּהָ אֶל־אַבְרָם
בְּמַחֲזֶה לֵאמֹר אֶל־תִּירָא אֲבָרָם אֲנֹכִי מִגֵּן לָךְ שְׂכָרְךָ
הֶרְבֵּה מְאֹד: 2 וַיֹּאמֶר אֲבָרָם אֲדֹנָי יְהוֹה מַה־תִּתֶּן־לִי
וְאֲנֹכִי הוֹלֵךְ עֲרִירִי וּבֶן־מֶשֶׁק בֵּיתִי הוּא דְּמֶשֶׁק אֲלִיעֹזֵר:
3 וַיֹּאמֶר אֲבָרָם הֵן לִי לֹא נִתְּנָה זֶרַע וְהִנֵּה בֶן־בֵּיתִי
יֹרֵשׁ אֹתִי: 4 וְהִנֵּה דְּבִרְיָהוּהָ אֵלָיו לֵאמֹר לֹא יִירְשֶׁךָ זֶה
כִּי־אִם אֲשֶׁר יֵצֵא מִמֶּעֶיךָ הוּא יִירְשֶׁךָ:

RASHI

דישאנפנטי"ץ⁶⁰. וְלִי נִרְאָה: "עַר וְעֵנָה" מְגֻרָתָהּ: "וְלִבִּי
עַר." וְ"עֲרִירִי" לְשׁוֹן חֶרֶב, וְכֵן: "עַרְוִי", וְכֵן:
"עֲרוֹת יְסוֹד", וְכֵן: "עַרְעַר תִּתְעַרְעַר", וְכֵן:⁶¹ "כִּי אֶרְוֶה
עֲרָה": וּבֶן מֶשֶׁק בֵּיתִי. כְּתִירוֹמֹ, שְׂכָל בֵּיתִי גִזוֹן עַל פִּי,
כְּמוֹ:⁶² "וְעַל פִּי יִשָּׁק", אֲפֻטְרוּפָא שְׁלִי. וְאֵלֹהִי הָיָה לִי בֶן,
הָיָה בְּנִי מְמֻנָּה עַל שְׁלִי: דְּמֶשֶׁק. לְפִי הִתְרַגּוּם מִדְּמֶשֶׁק
הָיָה, וְלִפִּי מִדְּרַשׁ אֲגָדָה⁶³, שְׂרָדָה הַמְּלָכִים עַד דְּמֶשֶׁק.
וּבְגִמְרָא שְׁלֵנִי⁶⁴ דְּרִשׁוּ נֹטְרִיקוֹן: דּוֹלָה וּמִשְׁקָה מִתּוֹרַת
רַבּוֹ לְאַחֲרִים: 3 הֵן לִי לֹא נִתְּנָה זֶרַע. וְכֵן תּוֹעֵלֶת
בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר תִּתֵּן לִי:

1 אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה. כָּל מְקוֹם שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "אַחֲרֵי" —
סָמוּךְ, "אַחֲרֵי" — מִפְּלֵג, בְּרֹאשִׁית רַבָּה⁵⁷. אַחֲרֵי שֶׁנַּעֲשֶׂה
לֹא נֵס זֶה שֶׁהֵרֵג אֶת הַמְּלָכִים, וְהָיָה דוֹאֵג וְאֹמֵר: שְׁמָא
קִבְּלֹתִי שְׂכָר עַל כָּל צִדְקוֹתִי, לָכֵן אֶמַר לֹא הִמְקוֹם: "אֵל
תִּירָא אֲבָרָם, אֲנֹכִי מִגֵּן לָךְ" מִן הָעֶנֶשׁ, שֶׁלֹּא תַעֲנֵשׁ עַל
כָּל אוֹתוֹן נְפֻשׁוֹת שֶׁהִרְגָּת. וְכֵן שְׁאֵמָה דוֹאֵג עַל קְבוּל
שְׂכָרְךָ — "שְׂכָרְךָ הֶרְבֵּה מְאֹד": 2 הוֹלֵךְ עֲרִירִי. מְנַחֵם
בֶּן סֵרוּק פָּרֵשׁ לְשׁוֹן יוֹרֵשׁ, וְהִבֵּר לֹא "עַר וְעֵנָה"⁵⁸. עֲרִירִי
בְּלֹא יוֹרֵשׁ, כְּאֲשֶׁר תֹּאמַר⁵⁹: "וּבְכָל תְּבוּאָתִי תִשְׂרֹשׁ" —
תַּעֲקֹר שְׂרָשִׁיךָ, כִּי לְשׁוֹן "עֲרִירִי" חֹסֵר בְּנִים. וּבְלִעֻז

57. מִד, ה. 58. מִלְכָּה ב, יב. 59. אִיּוֹב לֵא, יב. 60. חֶסֶד-וְלֵדִים. 61. שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים ה, ב. 62. תְּהִלִּים קלו, ו. 63. חֲבֻקוֹק ג, יג. 64. יִרְמִיָּה נא, נח. 65. צִפְנִיָּה ב, יד. 66. בְּרֹאשִׁית מֵא, מ. 67. בְּרֹאשִׁית רַבָּה מִד, ט. 68. יוֹמָא כח, ב.

CHASIDIC INSIGHTS

him from studying Chassidic teachings and refining himself. When the Rebbe then wished to bless him with longevity, he

replied: "But not with 'peasant' years, in which I will be unable to see or hear Godliness."¹⁴⁰

INNER DIMENSIONS

[1] I am a shield for you: Abram embodied the Divine attribute of indiscriminate kindness and saw everyone as good and therefore worthy of receiving Divine sustenance.¹⁴¹ Thus, when God refers to Himself here as "a shield for Abram," it allegorically means that He saw the need to spread a "shield" over His own attribute of kindness to thereby sustain the world according to merit and not indiscriminately. Inasmuch as Abraham is also associated with the morning,¹⁴² the daily morning sunrise alludes to God's daily-renewed desire to conduct the world with His attribute of pure

kindness. But God limits His own kindness, not allowing it to indiscriminately sustain everything. In this way, He allocates only enough sustenance to evil to allow it to survive, so it can eventually be transformed into holiness. Hence the verse: "God is a sun and a shield."¹⁴³

This is why each morning, when Abram's attribute of kindness is reawakened, we refer to God in our prayers as the "Shield of Abraham," asking Him to limit His kindness for the world's own benefit. Only when evil does not receive indiscriminate sustenance can we eradicate it entirely from the world.¹⁴⁴

140. Sefer HaSichot 5702, p. 103; HaYom Yom, 6 Marcheshvan. 141. See below, 17:18: "If only Ishmael would live...." 142. Below, 19:27 and 22:3. 143. Psalms 84:12. 144. Torah Or 12a.

The Promise of Offspring

15:1 Abram expressed concern that his miraculous victory in battle represented full compensation for his accrued merits, thereby supplanting the other rewards God previously promised him, namely: offspring and the Land of Israel. These were necessary for him to continue his mission of disseminating Divine consciousness.¹³¹ He was also concerned that he would be punished for killing. Therefore, **after these words**¹³² of Abram's, **God's word came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not fear punishment, Abram; I am a shield for you against My attribute of judgment. As for your reward, do not fear that it has already been paid you in full; your reward shall still be very great."**

2 Abram said, "O God, what can You give me, seeing that I am childless, and because I have no son, **the administrator of my household is Eliezer of Damascus?** True, he is a worthy disciple: he skillfully helped me pursue the four kings, and he alone of all my pupils¹³³ has become so dedicated to my cause that he helps me disseminate my teachings.¹³⁴ But he is not my son."

3 Abram continued, "**Look, You have given me no children**, and according to the science of astrology—which I learned from those to whom it was passed down from Adam—I foresee that I am destined to never father children! So what good is everything else You have given me? Eliezer, a mere **member of my household, will inherit me.**"

4 At that moment the word of God came to him, saying: "**This person will not be your heir! Rather, one born from your own flesh will inherit you.**"

❧ CHASIDIC INSIGHTS ❧

1 Your reward shall be very great: According to the rules of strict justice, finite acts of goodness should elicit a commensurately-finite reward. God, however, bestows upon us infinite reward for our fulfillment of the commandments. This is the meaning of "Your reward shall be *very* great."¹³⁵

The reason for this is because, in this context, the Torah's commandments are characterized by two aspects: finite and infinite.¹³⁶ On the one hand, each individual commandment refines one particular aspect of our animal nature;¹³⁷ on the other hand, each individual commandment also expresses the will of the infinite God, and thus, fulfilling any one commandment connects us with infinity.

We therefore receive both finite and infinite reward, corresponding to the two aforementioned aspects of the commandments. Abram, however, performed the commandments before they were given by God. Because the latter, infinite aspect did not yet exist in his lifetime, he was afraid that his reward for fulfilling the

commandments would be finite, meaning that he had already received this reward in the form of the beneficence he already enjoyed. God therefore assuaged his fears, reassuring him that He would grant him infinite reward as well—"your reward shall be *very* great."

Abram earned this reward by passing the many tests and trials God posed to him, most notably the test at Ur, where he chose to be thrown into a fiery furnace rather than serve idols.¹³⁸ Through successfully overcoming these challenges, Abram connected to God's infinite essence and therefore merited infinite reward.¹³⁹

3 What good is everything else you have given me: Abram, whose focus was always outward, giving to and teaching others, was not content with receiving a blessing that would merely ensure his personal well-being and good fortune while not also perpetuating his spiritual legacy.

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi once wanted to bless one of his students with great wealth. But the student refused the blessing, explaining that material wealth would only distract

¹³¹ *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 20, pp. 45, 53. ¹³² *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 35, pp. 164-165. ¹³³ *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 25, p. 62, note 6. ¹³⁴ *Hitva'aduyot* 5748, vol. 1, pp. 441-442. ¹³⁵ *Ikarim* 4:36. ¹³⁶ See on Exodus 20:15. ¹³⁷ See *Bereishit Rabbah* 44:1. ¹³⁸ See *Bereishit Rabbah* 44:1. ¹³⁹ *Sefer HaMa'amarim* 5699, p. 84-89, *Sefer HaMa'amarim Kuntreisim*, vol. 1, pp. 703-710.

— ONKELOS —

5 ואפיק יתה לברא ואמר אסתבי כען לשמיא ומני בוכביא אם תבול לממני יתהון ואמר לה בדין יהון בנין: 6 והימין במימרא דיי וחשבה לה לזכו: 7 ואמר לה אגא יי די אפקתך מאורא דכשדאי למתן לך ית ארעא הדא למירתה: 8 ואמר יי אלהים במא אדע ארי אירתנה: 9 ואמר לה קריב קדמי עגלין תלתא ועזין תלת ודכרין תלתא ושפנינא ובר יונה:

5 וַיֵּצֵא אֹתוֹ הַחוּצָה וַיֹּאמֶר הַבִּטְנָא הַשְּׁמִימָה וּסְפֹר הַכּוֹכָבִים אִם־תּוּכֵל לִסְפֹּר אֹתָם וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ כֹּה יִהְיֶה וְרַעְדָּ: 6 וְהָאֵמֶן בִּיהוָה וַיַּחֲשֹׁבָהּ לִּצְדָקָה: שֵׁשִׁי 7 וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֲנִי יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאוּר כַּשְׂדִּים לָתֵת לְךָ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת לְרִשְׁתָּהּ: 8 וַיֹּאמֶר אֲדָנִי יְהוָה בְּמָה אֲדַע כִּי אִירִשְׁנָה: 9 וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו קְחָה לִּי עֵגֶלָה מִשְׁלֶשֶׁת וְעֵז מִשְׁלֶשֶׁת וְאֵיל מִשְׁלֶשֶׁת וְתֹר וְגֹזֶל:

— RASHI —

חשבה לאברם לזכות ולצדקה, על האמונה שהאמין בו. דבר אחר: "במה אדע", לא שאל לו אות, אלא אמר לפניו: הודיעני באיזה זכות יתקיימו בה. אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא: בזכות הקרבנות: 9 עגלה משלש. שלשה עגלים, רמז לשלשה פרים: פיר יום הכפורים, ופיר העלם דבר של צבור, ועגלה ערופה: ועז משלש. רמז לשעיר הנעשה בפנים, ושעירי מוספין של מועד, ושעיר חטאת יחיד: ואיל משלש. אשם ודאי, ואשם תלוי, וכבשה של חטאת יחיד: ותר וגוזל. תור וגן יונה:

5 וַיֵּצֵא אֹתוֹ הַחוּצָה. לפי פשוטו: הוציאו מאהלו לחוץ, לראות הכוכבים. ולפי מדרשו¹⁵⁷: אמר לו: צא מאצטגנינות שלך שראית במזלות שאינך עתיד להעמיד בן — אברם אין לו בן, אבל אברם יש לו בן. וכן שרי לא תלד, אבל שרה תלד. אני קורא לכם שם אחר, וישתנה המזל. דבר אחר: הוציאו מחללו של עולם, והגבירו למעלה מן הכוכבים, וזהו לשון הבטה מלמעלה למטה: 6 והאמן בה'. לא שאל לו אות על זאת, אבל על ירשת הארץ שאל לו אות, ואמר לו: "במה אדע"¹⁵⁸: ויחשבה לו צדקה. הקדוש ברוך הוא

69. בראשית רבה מד, י. 70. פסוק ח.

INNER DIMENSIONS

[5] Pay no heed to your astrological calculations: As was mentioned above,¹⁵⁸ God originally gave humanity the choice to override the natural mechanisms of predetermination and predestination that become manifest in the world via the celestial bodies. As history progressed and people increasingly opted to forgo any close relationship to God, they forfeited much of this free choice and thereby subjected themselves to natural, astrological influences. By reinstating humanity's original close relationship with God, Abram earned anew the ability to override predestination.

The uniquely close relationship with God that Abram bequeathed to his progeny similarly raises them above the natural order. Accordingly, we are

taught that "there is no astrological sign that holds dominion over the Jewish people."¹⁵⁹ This is not to say that we are not influenced by spiritual forces outside our normative consciousness; rather, what influences us¹⁶⁰ is just the spiritual source of our own soul—the part of our soul whose intense awareness of God precludes it from entering our conscious mind. This aspect of the soul is its *keter*, which is termed "nothingness" because it transcends our normative consciousness. Thus, the phrase "there is no [אין] influence that holds dominion over the Jewish people" can be read: "Nothingness [אין] is the influence that holds dominion over the Jewish people."¹⁶¹

A CLOSER LOOK

[9] The three calves...the three goats...the three rams: Abraham was worried that his descendants would sin and thereby forfeit the privilege of inheriting the Promised Land. God therefore assured him that He would let them repent and that, once they repented, they would be able to atone

for their sins by offering appropriate sacrifices. In this way, they would remain worthy of possessing the land. As will be detailed throughout the Torah, there are many types of sacrifices; what is unique about the nine types mentioned here is that they all effect atonement for the people as a whole:

157. *HaYom Yom*, 5 Marcheshvan. 158. On 1:14. 159. *Shabbat* 156a. 160. See *Shabbat* 53b, 156a; *Moed Katan* 28a; *Zohar* 3:289. 161. *Likutei Torah*, 4:17d; see Inner Dimensions on 11:30, above.

5 He took him outside his tent and said, “Look towards heaven and count the stars—if you can count them!” And He said to him, “That is how your descendants will be: they will be so numerous that you will not be able to count them.¹⁴⁵

And pay no heed to your astrological calculations. I am going to change your name and your wife’s name, and this will change your destiny. Moreover, if you are connected to Me, you can transcend the celestial order.” To demonstrate this, He miraculously transported him outside the celestial sphere and told him, “You are higher than heaven and should look *down* at it, not *up* to it!”

6 Abram believed in God, and did not ask Him for any sign that He would keep His promise. God **accounted it for him as an act of righteousness.** God would later transform this implicit trust in Him into an inherited character trait in Abram’s descendants. Therefore, the belief in God’s promises on their part would not be considered a righteous act of free will, as it was for Abram.¹⁴⁶

The Covenant between the Halves

◆ **Sixth Reading** **7** However, Abram *had* asked God for a sign regarding His promise that He would give him the Land of Israel. When he was in the Land of Israel the first time, on the 15th of Nisan of the year 2018,¹⁴⁷ God appeared to Abram and **He said to him, “I am God who took you out of Ur of the Kasdites to give you this land to inherit it.”**

8 “O Lord God,” replied Abram, **“by what sign can I know that I will inherit it?** And by what merit will my descendants be deserving of it?”

9 And He said to him, “By merit of the sacrifices that they will offer up to Me as part of their ongoing enhancement of their relationship with Me. To express this merit tangibly, **bring for Me three calves, three goats, three rams, a turtle-dove, and a young dove.** The three calves correspond to (1) the bull offered on *Yom Kippur*,¹⁴⁸ (2) the bull offered when the community innocently acts in accordance with an erroneous ruling of the high court,¹⁴⁹ and (3) the calf whose neck must be broken when a murdered body is found and the murderer’s identity cannot be determined.¹⁵⁰ The three goats correspond to (1) the goat offered on *Yom Kippur*,¹⁵¹ (2) the goat offered on each of the festivals,¹⁵² and (3) the goat offered as a personal sin-offering.¹⁵³ The three rams correspond to (1) the ram offered when an individual has committed certain specific offenses,¹⁵⁴ (2) the ram offered when an individual thinks he might have committed an offense punishable by excision,¹⁵⁵ and (3) the lamb (a young ram) offered as a personal sin-offering.¹⁵⁶ Slaughter the animals and cut them in half. Then walk between the halves and I shall send a fire to pass between the halves. This will indicate that I am bound by an inviolable covenant to give your descendants the land.”

∞ CHASIDIC INSIGHTS ∞

5 Count the stars: The Jewish people, the descendants of Abram, are metaphorically compared to the stars that sparkle in the sky; their light is so bright that even those walking in the thick of night will not stumble. We

are all “shining stars”; we all possess sufficient moral and spiritual fortitude to prevent those around us from stumbling and to exert a positive influence on them.¹⁵⁷

8 By what sign can I know that I will inherit it: It

^{145.} *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 19, p. 20, note 49. ^{146.} *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 19, p. 566. ^{147.} Rashi on Exodus 12:41; above, 11:31. ^{148.} Leviticus 16:3, 6, 11, 14, 18-19. ^{149.} Leviticus 4:13-21. ^{150.} Deuteronomy 21:1-9. ^{151.} Leviticus 16:9, 15, 18-19. ^{152.} Numbers 28:22, 30, 29:8, 11, 16, 19, 22, 25, 28, 31, 34, 38. ^{153.} Leviticus 4:27-31. ^{154.} Leviticus 5:14-16, 20-26, 19:20-22. ^{155.} Leviticus 5:17-19. ^{156.} Leviticus 4:32-35.

ONKELOS

10 וְקָרִיב קְדָמוּהִי יָת כָּל אֱלֹהִים
וּפְלִיגִי יִתְהוּזִין בְּשׁוּנֵי וִיהִב פִּלְגִּיא פִּלְגִּי
לְקַבֵּל חֲבֵרָה וְיָת עוֹפָא לֹא פִלְגִּי:
11 וְנִחַח עוֹפָא עַל פִּגְלִיא וְאַפְרַח
יִתְהוּזִין אֲבָרָם: 12 וְהוּת שְׁמִשָּׁא
לְמִיעֵל וְשִׁנְתָּא נִפְלֵת עַל אֲבָרָם
וְהָא אִימָא קָבֵל סְגִי נִפְלֵת עֲלֵהּ:

10 וַיִּקְחֵהוּ אֶת-כָּל-אֱלֹהִים וַיִּבְתֵּר אֹתָם בְּתוֹךְ וִיתֵן אִישׁ-
בְּתָרוֹ לְקִרְאָתָא רַעְהוּ וְאֶת-הַצֶּפֶר לֹא בְתָר: 11 וַיִּרְדֵּה
הָעִיט עַל-הַפְּגָרִים וַיֵּשֶׁב אֹתָם אֲבָרָם: 12 וַיְהִי הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ
לָבוֹא וְתִרְדְּמָה נִפְלָה עַל-אֲבָרָם וְהִנֵּה אִימָה חֲשִׁכָה
נִדְלָה נִפְלֵת עָלָיו:

RASHI

רָמַז שִׁיְהִי יִשְׂרָאֵל קִימִין לְעוֹלָם: 11 הָעִיט. הוּא עוֹף.
וְעַל שֵׁם שֶׁהוּא עֹט וְשׂוֹאֵף אֶל הַנִּבְלֹת לְטוֹשׁ עָלֵי אֲכָל,
כְּמוֹ: "וְתַעַט אֶל הַשָּׁלָל": עַל הַבְּתָרִים. עַל הַפְּגָרִים.
"הַפְּגָרִים" מִתְרַגְּמִין "פִּגְלִיא", אֲלֵא מִתּוֹךְ שֶׁהִרְגֵּלוּ
לְתַרְגֵּם "אִישׁ בְּתָרוֹ" — "וִיהִב פִּלְגִּיא", נִתְחַלֵּף לָהֶם
תַּבַּת "פִּגְלִיא" לִ"פִּלְגִּיא", וְתַרְגֵּמוּ "הַפְּגָרִים" — "פִּלְגִּיא",
וְכָל הַמִּתְרַגֵּם כֵּן טוֹעָה, לִפִּי שְׂאִין לְהַקִּישׁ "בְּתָרִים"
לִ"פְגָרִים", שֶׁ"בְּתָרִים" תַּרְגֵּמוּ "פִּלְגִּיא", וִ"פְגָרִים"
תַּרְגֵּמוּ "פִּגְלִיא" לְשׁוֹן פְּגוּל, כְּמוֹ: "פְּגוּל הוּא", לְשׁוֹן
פְּגָר: וַיֵּשֶׁב. לְשׁוֹן נְשִׁיכָה וְהַפְּרָחָה, כְּמוֹ: "וַיֵּשֶׁב רוּחוֹ".
רָמַז שֶׁיָּבֵא דָּוִד בֶּן יִשִׁי לְכָלֹתָם, וְאִין מִנִּיחִין אוֹתוֹ מִן
הַשָּׂמַיִם עַד שֶׁיָּבֹא מֶלֶךְ הַמְּשִׁיחִי: 12 וְהִנֵּה אִימָה וְגו'.
רָמַז לְצָרוֹת וְחֹשֶׁךְ שֶׁל גְּלוּת:

10 וַיִּבְתֵּר אֹתָם. חָלַק כָּל אֶחָד לְשָׁנֵי חֲלָקִים. וְאִין
הַמִּקְרָא יוֹצֵא מִיָּד פְּשׁוּטוֹ, לִפִּי שֶׁהִיָּה כּוֹרֵת עִמּוֹ בְּרִית
לְשֹׁמֵר הַבְּטָחָתוֹ לְהוֹרִישׁ לְבָנָיו אֶת הָאָרֶץ, כְּדִכְתִּיב: "בַּיּוֹם
הַהוּא בָּרַת ה' אֶת אֲבָרָם בְּרִית לְאָמֹר" וְגו',
וְדָרָךְ כּוֹרֵת בְּרִית לְחָלֵק בְּהִמָּה וּלְעַבֵּר בֵּין בְּתָרִיָּה,
כְּמָה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר לְהִלָּן: "הַעֲבָרִים בֵּין בְּתָרִי הָעֵגֶל", אִף
כָּאן "תִּנּוֹר עֶשֶׂן וּלְפִיד אֵשׁ אֲשֶׁר עָבַר בֵּין הַגִּזְרִים",
הוּא שְׁלוּחֹה שֶׁל שְׂכִינָה, שֶׁהוּא אֵשׁ: וְאֵת הַצֶּפֶר לֹא
בְתָר. לִפִּי שֶׁהָאֱמוּנוֹת נִמְשְׁלוּ לְפָרִים וְאֵילִים וְשִׁעִירִים,
שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "סִבְבוּנִי פָרִים רַבִּים" וְגו', וְאֹמֵר: "הָאֵיל
אֲשֶׁר רָאִיתָ בַּעַל הַקִּרְנִים מִלְכִּי מִדֵּי וּפָרִס", וְאֹמֵר:
"וְהַצֶּפֶר הַשֶּׁעִיר מִלֶּךְ יוֹן". וְיִשְׂרָאֵל נִמְשְׁלוּ לְבָנֵי יוֹנָה,
שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "וְנִתְּנִי בְּחִגִּי הַסֵּלַע". לִפְיָךְ, בְּתָר הַבְּהֵמוֹת,
רָמַז שֶׁהִיוּ הָאֱמוּנוֹת בָּלִין וְהוֹלְכִין, וְאֵת הַצֶּפֶר לֹא בְתָר,

71. פסוק יח. 72. ירמיה לד, יט. 73. תהלים כב, יג. 74. דניאל ח, כ. 75. שם, כא. 76. שיר השירים ב, יד. 77. שמואל א טו, יט. 78. פסוק י. 79. ויקרא יט, 80. תהלים קמו, יח.

CHASIDIC INSIGHTS

dread: literally, "a dread that was dark and ominous overwhelmed him." The Midrash comments that these four expressions allude to the four exiles of the Jewish people:

Dread: This refers to the Babylonian exile.

Dark: This refers to the Median exile.

Ominous: This refers to the Greek exile.

Overwhelmed: This refers to the Edomite exile.¹⁷¹

The Torah alludes to these exiles in addition to the Egyptian exile, since the latter is a general exile, the root of the other four exiles, and therefore encompasses them all.

Similarly, these four exiles correspond to the four letters of God's Name *Havayah* (יהוה). The Egyptian exile is alluded to in the crown of the letter *yud*, which appears at the beginning of the very first letter and therefore includes all the following letters.¹⁷²

Prophetically foreboding the horrors of exile: On the one hand, God had just made an everlasting covenant with Abram, affirming His eternal and unlimited love for him. Yet at that very same moment, God simultaneously revealed to Abram the suffering and darkness of

exile that his descendants would experience in the future. How can God's essential love for Abram and the Jewish people be reconciled with the horrors of exile that He discloses will later come upon them? And why did Abram, who had argued so poignantly and tenaciously on behalf of the wicked inhabitants of Sodom, calmly accept God's plans to exile his descendants? Even if they deserved to be exiled, couldn't Abram have convinced God to exonerate them, as he did in the case of his son Ishmael?

The answer lies in the fact that, in its inner meaning, exile does not express God's estrangement from the Jewish people but rather His essential love for them.

By way of metaphor: In the midst of teaching, a teacher may think of a new idea and turn his attention to it. The deeper and more compelling the idea, the more the teacher is engrossed by it. The student, not understanding the real reason behind his teacher's distraction, only sees that the teacher has become distanced from him. In fact, though, the disconcerting interruption is ultimately for the benefit of the student, since the teacher is concentrating deeply on the new idea and developing it in order to transmit it to the student.

169. See below, verse 13. 170. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 15, pp. 100-101. 171. *Bereishit Rabbah* 44:17. 172. *Sefer HaMa'amarim* 5706, p. 107.

10 Following God's instructions, Abram brought Him all of these, slaughtered the animals, cut them in half, and placed each piece opposite its counterpart. The birds, however, he did not cut in half. The different treatment accorded the animals and the birds indicated the difference between the destinies of the gentile nations and the destiny of the nation that would descend from Abram. In prophetic imagery, the gentile nations are represented by animals, while the Jewish people are represented by birds.¹⁶² Dividing the animals thus indicated that the gentile nations will eventually cease to exist as nations; leaving the birds intact indicated that the Jewish people will likewise survive intact into the messianic future.

11 Vultures swooped down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away. This was a prophetic vision of how King David (represented by the vulture) would aspire to do away with the antagonistic gentile nations, but will not be allowed to. Only his descendant, the Messiah, will be allowed to do this.

12 Then, as the sun was about to set, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and he was overwhelmed by a dark and ominous dread, prophetically foreboding the horrors of exile his descendants were destined to experience.

∞ CHASIDIC INSIGHTS ∞

seems incomprehensible that the saintly Abram would question God's promise by asking for a sign. And indeed, this is not really what his question meant. Rather, Abram knew that God's blessings do not necessarily manifest themselves in our physical world; they can be equally fulfilled on a spiritual plane. He was therefore concerned that God's promise to give the land to his offspring might occur only in a spiritual sense, in which case only spiritually-attuned people would be able to perceive and appreciate it. He therefore insisted on entering into a covenant made over a physical deed, which would ensure that the fulfillment of the promise would likewise manifest itself in physical reality.¹⁶³

From another perspective, Abram's request for a sign can indeed be considered a lack of absolute faith on his part.¹⁶⁴ Therefore, as we shall see,¹⁶⁵ God's promise of the land in this passage differs from God's prior promises of the land.¹⁶⁶ The earlier promises refer to Joshua's conquest of the land, whereas this promise refers to Ezra's conquest. This promise comes in the wake of Abram's "sin" of asking God for a sign, which is why it alludes to Ezra's conquest, which followed a period of sin and the subsequent Babylonian exile. (God therefore alludes to the Babylonian exile, and others, specifically in this promise and not in the earlier ones.)¹⁶⁷¹⁶⁸

12 He was overwhelmed by a dark and ominous

∞ A CLOSER LOOK ∞

[continued...] The bull offered on Yom Kippur atones for the sins of the High Priest, thereby enabling him to perform the Yom Kippur rites and effect atonement for the people.

The bull offered when the community innocently acts in accordance with an erroneous ruling of the high court, the calf whose neck must be broken when a murdered body is found, the goat offered on Yom Kippur, and the goat offered on each of the festivals are all communal sin offerings—that is, they atone for communal sins and are paid for by the community or their representatives.

The goat or lamb offered as a personal sin-offering, the ram offered when an individual has committed certain specific offenses, and the ram offered when an individual thinks he might have committed

an offense punishable by excision, although not communal offerings, are designed to be offered up by any individual who inadvertently commits specific sins. Therefore, they too can be considered offerings that effect atonement for the entire Jewish people.¹⁶⁹

This will indicate: In ancient times, a covenant was formalized by cutting something in two and having the parties to the covenant walk in between the severed halves. By so doing, they expressed the notion that they are both incomplete by themselves, just as an animal is complete only when its two halves are connected to each other. In the present case, God sent a smoking furnace and flaming torch as His "representatives" to pass through the halves after Abraham in order to seal the covenant.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶² E.g., Psalms 22:13, 74:19; Daniel 8:20-21; Song of Songs 2:14. ¹⁶³ *Or HaTorah, Bereishit*, vol. 1, p. 82. ¹⁶⁴ *Nedarim* 32a; Abarbanel, and others. ¹⁶⁵ Below, 15:18. ¹⁶⁶ Above, 12:7 and 13:15. ¹⁶⁷ Mizrachi. ¹⁶⁸ *Torat Shmuel* 5630, p. 103.

ONKELOS

13 וַיֹּאמֶר לְאַבְרָם מִדַּע תִּדַּע אֲרִי
דִּירִין יְהוֹן בְּנִיד בְּאַרְעָא דְלֵא
דְלֵהוֹן וַיִּפְלְחוֹן בְּהוֹן וַיַּעֲנוּ יְתֵהוֹן
אַרְבַּע מֵאָה שְׁנִין: 14 וְאַף יֵת עֲמָא
דִּיפְלְחוֹן בְּהוֹן דְּאִין אֲנָא וּבִתֵּר כֵּן
יִפְקוֹן בְּקִנְיָא סְגִי:

13 וַיֹּאמֶר לְאַבְרָם יָדַע תִּדַּע בִּיגֵר | יְהִיָּה זִרְעֶךָ בְּאַרְץ
לֹא לָהֶם וַעֲבָדוּם וַעֲנוּ אֹתָם אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה: 14 וְגַם
אֶת־הַגּוֹי אֲשֶׁר יַעֲבֹדוּ דָּן אֲנִי וְאַחֲרֵיכֶן יֵצְאוּ בְּרֶכֶשׁ
גָּדוֹל:

RASHI

וְאַתָּה צָרִיךְ לְהוֹצִיא מִהֶן כָּל הַשְּׁנִים שְׁחִי קָהָת אַחֵר
לִידֵת עַמָּרָם, וְשְׁחִי עַמָּרָם אַחֵר לִידֵת מֹשֶׁה: **בְּאַרְץ לֹא**
לָהֶם. לֹא נֶאֱמַר "בְּאַרְץ מִצְרַיִם" אֶלָּא "בְּאַרְץ לֹא לָהֶם",
וּמִשְׁנֹלֵד יִצְחָק "וַיִּגֹּר אַבְרָהָם" וְגו',⁸² וּבִיִּצְחָק "גֹּר בְּאַרְץ
הַזֹּאת"⁸³, "וַיַּעֲקֹב גָּר בְּאַרְץ חָם"⁸⁴, "לְגֹר בְּאַרְץ בָּאֲנוּ"⁸⁵.
14 **וְגַם אֵת הַגּוֹי.** "וְגַם" לְרִבּוּת אַרְבַּע מִלְּכִיּוֹת, שְׁאֵף
הֵם כָּלִים עַל שֶׁשָּׁעֲבָדוּ אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל: **דָּן אֲנִי.** בְּעֶשֶׂר
מִכּוֹת: **בְּרֶכֶשׁ גָּדוֹל.** בְּמִמּוֹן גָּדוֹל, כְּמוֹ שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר:⁸⁶ "וַיִּנְצְלוּ
אֶת מִצְרַיִם":

13 **כִּי גֵר יְהִיָּה זִרְעֶךָ.** מִשְׁנֹלֵד יִצְחָק עַד שֶׁיֵּצְאוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל
מִמִּצְרַיִם אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה. בִּיצֵד? יִצְחָק בֶּן שְׁשִׁים
שָׁנָה בְּשֹׁלֵד יַעֲקֹב, וַיַּעֲקֹב בְּשִׁירָד לְמִצְרַיִם אָמַר יימי
שְׁנֵי מִגֻּרֵי שְׁלֹשִׁים וּמֵאֹת שָׁנָה, הָרִי מֵאָה וְתִשְׁעִים.
וּבְמִצְרַיִם הָיוּ מֵאוֹתִים וְעֶשְׂרִי כְּמִנֵּן רַד"ו, הָרִי אַרְבַּע
מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה. וְאֵם תֹּאמַר: בְּמִצְרַיִם הָיוּ אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת, הָרִי
קָהָת מִיִּזְרָדֵי מִצְרַיִם הֵיךְ, צֵא וְחֹשֹׁב שְׁנוֹתָיו שֶׁל קָהָת
וְשֶׁל עַמָּרָם וְשִׁמְעֹנִים שֶׁל מֹשֶׁה שֶׁהָיָה בְּשִׁירָד יִשְׂרָאֵל
מִמִּצְרַיִם, אֵין אִתָּה מוֹצֵא אֶלָּא שְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת וְחֲמִשִּׁים.

81. בראשית מז, ט. 82. בראשית כא, לד. 83. בראשית כו, ג. 84. תהלים קה, כג. 85. בראשית מז, ד. 86. שמות יב, לו.

CHASIDIC INSIGHTS

These sparks had thus become trapped and embedded within the depraved, materialistic civilization of Egypt. By serving the Egyptians and therefore earning as remuneration the vast wealth of the storehouses of Egypt, the Jewish people were to liberate these sparks and restore them to the realm of holiness.

In this vein, this verse can be interpreted allegorically, as follows:

Know for sure that your descendants will be foreigners in a land, but the reason is—

Not theirs, i.e., not solely for the purpose of refining them or cleansing them of their sins, but rather so that—

The people will enslave them: The Jews will "enslave" the Egyptians: they will assume dominion over all the sparks of holiness embedded within Egypt—

And oppress them: The Hebrew word for "to oppress" (*inuy*) can also be translated as "to impoverish." Hence: The Jews will impoverish Egypt by extracting all the sparks of holiness, taking them along with them, and departing with the "great wealth" which was imbedded in these sparks.

And so, too, is it regarding our current and final exile: its primary objective is not to atone for sin, but rather to enable us to redeem the holy sparks that were scattered around the world and which became embedded in physical reality. Sometimes it suffices for a single individual to be "exiled" to a given country; in such a case, God grants that solitary individual the capacity to elevate all the sparks of that locale, thus preparing it for the messianic age.¹⁸¹

Furthermore, Abram foresaw other positive byprod-

ucts of exile. For example, when Godliness is concealed from us, we value it and yearn for it intensely. Abram therefore chose to overlook the pain and suffering exile would entail in favor of its advantageous benefits.¹⁸²

The people will enslave them: This statement seems to imply that *all* of Abram's descendants would be enslaved, but we shall see later that the tribe of Levi was not.¹⁸³ However, the Levites did play a crucial role in the exile: as the spiritual leaders, they made sure the people remained loyal to their heritage, which in turn bolstered their morale and enabled them to endure the horrors of enslavement. Without this ongoing spiritual guidance and encouragement from the Levites, the people were liable to become hopelessly resigned to their misfortune and, as a result, opt to immerse themselves in the depravity of Egypt. This, of course, would have counteracted the whole purpose of the exile, which was to refine the people.¹⁸⁴ God therefore made certain that one tribe, the Levites, remained unenslaved, enabling them to become the spiritual leaders.

Due to the pivotal role they played in successfully fulfilling the objective of the exile, the Levites are considered to have themselves undergone actual enslavement along with the rest of their brethren; they therefore were to receive its reward and benefits, as well.¹⁸⁵

14 After that they will leave with great wealth: As we have seen,¹⁸⁶ the primary purpose of the Egyptian exile was that the Jewish people extract the sparks of holiness that the Egyptians had misused and which thereby had become embedded within the fabric of the depraved Egyptian civilization;¹⁸⁷ likewise, the primary purpose of the present exile is for us to redeem whatever sparks of holiness remain embedded within

181. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 3, pp. 1016d-1016e. 182. *Sefer HaMa'amarim* 5689, p. 214. 183. Exodus 1:10. 184. See Deuteronomy 4:20. 185. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 20, pp. 239-240. 186. On the previous verse. 187. *Likutei Torah (Arizal)*, *Teitzei*; *Torah Or* 56d, 60c.

13 And God said to Abram, explaining this dread, **“Know for sure that your descendants will be foreigners in a land that is not theirs, and the people will enslave them and oppress them for 400 years.** The sufferings of exile will purify and refine them so they will be able to sense and appreciate the holiness of the Promised Land.¹⁷³ These 400 years will begin as soon as your first descendant, your son, is born, for even now, in Canaan, you are considered a foreign resident.¹⁷⁴ Your grandson and his children will actually be exiled to another country altogether, and exactly 400 years after your son’s birth, your descendants will leave that land.” Abram’s son, Isaac, was born on the 15th of Nisan, 2048, and the Exodus from Egypt took place on the 15th of Nisan, 2448.

14 “When they leave that land, I will also execute judgment upon the nation whom they shall serve for having oppressed them cruelly. I will afflict them with ten debilitating plagues. Similarly, in the messianic future, I will execute judgment upon those nations that oppressed them during their other exiles. **After that they will leave with great wealth.**

— CHASIDIC INSIGHTS —

The seeming aloofness and estrangement stem purely from the teacher’s love for the student and his desire for the student to benefit from the novel concept.

Similarly, from a superficial perspective, exile seems like a terrible reality. But exile’s true purpose is to serve as a preparation for a greater revelation that will take place in the future redemption, a revelation that will shed light on the inner meaning of the suffering of exile.

This is why exile is mentioned specifically at the very moment of the sealing of the covenant expressing God’s great love for the Jewish people. For in its purest form, exile, too, is an expression of God’s infinite love.

Furthermore, this also explains why, during the de-

struction of the Temple, the cherubim on the Ark cover were embracing each other, an indication of God’s love for the Jewish people,¹⁷⁵ since ultimately, the destruction and subsequent exile are an expression of God’s love.¹⁷⁶

13 Foreigners in a land that is not theirs: The phrase “in a land that is not theirs” seems like a tautology: If they will be foreigners, isn’t it obvious that the land in which they are to sojourn will not be theirs? Rather, God was intimating here to Abram that there was an additional, loftier purpose over and above whatever material benefits his descendants would reap in their exile. The Egyptians had intentionally misused the “sparks” of holiness latent in the great resources with which God had blessed them and their country.

— A CLOSER LOOK —

[13] The people will enslave them: If God Himself promised that the people would eventually be enslaved, it seems unjust that He subsequently punished the Egyptians for implementing His promise. Maimonides explains that God did not designate any one Egyptian to participate in the enslavement and persecution of the Jews; each individual Egyptian was free to refuse to do so, since God’s plan could have equally been fulfilled through another person.¹⁷⁷ By following their own evil inclinations and willingly oppressing the Jews, they became liable to punishment, even though they were the instruments God’s will.¹⁷⁸ Even Pharaoh, who was singled out by God as the only one who could have fulfilled his role in the Jews’ oppression,

was punished because he did so out of his own evil desire.

The truth is that everything that occurs to us is ordained by God. For example, if a person suffers harm, either at the hands of another or by a natural disaster, the victim must realize that, were it not God’s will that he suffer harm, no harm would have befallen him. Yet the perpetrator is still guilty of a sin, since because of his evil motivation, he committed a punishable crime. Our sages therefore say that getting angry is tantamount to serving idols,¹⁷⁹ since if we were truly to believe that all comes from God—and God, of course, does only what is good for us—we would not get angry.¹⁸⁰

^{173.} *Torah Or* 49a ff; *Or HaTorah, Shemot*, p. 11. ^{174.} See below, 21:34, 26:3, Psalms 105:23, and below, 47:4, where the verb “to sojourn” is applied to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jacob’s sons, respectively. ^{175.} *Yoma* 54a, even though they would generally be facing away from each other, God was unhappy with the Jewish people’s behavior. ^{176.} *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 2, p. 359. ^{177.} *Mishneh Torah, Teshuvah* 6:5. ^{178.} See *Igeret HaKodesh* 25. ^{179.} *Zohar* 1:27b. ^{180.} *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 27, pp. 152-155.

ONKELOS

15 ואת תבוא אל-אבותיך בשלום תקבר בשיבה
טובה: 16 ודור רביעי ישובו הנה כי לא-שלם עון האמרי
עדר-הנה: 17 ויהי השמש באה ועלטה היה והנה תנור
עשן ולפיד אש אשר עבר בין הגזרים האלה: 18 ביום
ההוא פרת יהיה את-אברם ברית לאמר לזרעך נתתי
את-הארץ הזאת מגתר מצרים עד-הגתר הגדל נהר-
פרת:

RASHI

רמז לו שיפלו המלכיות בגיהנום: באה. טעמו למעלה,
לכך הוא מבאר: שבאה כבר. ואם היה טעמו למטה
באל"ף, היה מבאר: כשהיא שוקעת, ואי אפשר לומר
כן, שהרי כבר כתיב: "ויהי השמש לבוא", והעברת
תנור עשן לאחר מכאן היתה, נמצא שכבר שקעה.
וזה חלוק בכל תבה לשון נקבה שיסודה שתי אותיות,
כמו: "בא" "קם" "שב", כשהטעם למעלה — לשון עבר
הוא, כגון זה, וכגון: "ורחל באה"⁹², "קמה אלמתי"⁹³,
"הנה שבה יבמתך"⁹⁴. וכשהטעם למטה — הוא
לשון הווה, דבר שנעשה עכשו והולך, כמו: "באה
עם הצאן"⁹⁵, "בערב היא באה, ובבקר היא שבה"⁹⁶:
18 לזרעך נתתי. אמירתו של הקדוש ברוך הוא, כאלו
היא עשויה: הנה הגדל נהר פרת. לפי שהוא דבוק
לארץ ישאל קוראיו "גדול", אף על פי שהוא מאוחר
בארבעה נהרות היוצאים מעדן, שנאמר: "והנהר
הרביעי הוא פרת". משל הדיוט: עבר מלך מלך, הדבק
לשחור וישתחוו לו:

15 ואתה תבוא. ולא תראה כל אלה: אל אבותיך.
אביו עובד עבודה זרה והוא מבשרו שיבא אליו? אלא,
למדך שעשה תרח תשובה: תקבר בשיבה טובה. בשור
שיעשה ושמעאל תשובה בימיו, ולא יצא עשו לתרבות
רעה בימיו. ולפיכך מת חמש שנים קדם ומנו, ובו ביום
מרד עשו: 16 ודור רביעי. לאחר שיגלו למצרים יהיו
שם שלשה דורות, והרביעי ישובו לארץ הזאת, לפי
שבארץ כנען היה מדבר עמו וברית זו, בדכתיב:
"לתת לך את הארץ הזאת לרשתה". וכן היה — יעקב
ירד למצרים, צא וחשוב דורותיו: יהודה, פריץ, חצרון,
וכלב בן חצרון מבאי הארץ היה: כי לא שלם עון
האמרי. להיות משתלח מארצו עד אותו זמן, שאין
הקדוש ברוך הוא נפרע מאמה עד שתתמלא סאתה,
שנאמר:⁸⁷ "בסאסאה בשלחה תריבנה": 17 ויהי
השמש באה. כמו: "ויהי הם מריקים שקיהם"⁸⁸, "ויהי
הם קברים איש"⁸⁹, כלומר: ויהי דבר זה: השמש באה.
שקעה: ועלטה היה. חשך היום: והנה תנור עשן וגו'.

87. פסוק ז. 88. ישעיה כז, ח. 89. בראשית מב, לה. 90. מלכים ב יג, כא. 91. פסוק יב. 92. בראשית כט, ט. 93. בראשית לו, ז. 94. רות א, טו. 95. בראשית
כט, ו. 96. אסתר ב, יד. 97. בראשית ב, יד.

CHASIDIC INSIGHTS

fore, the Jews assumed control of the land by simply settling it. This form of acquisition was not based on wresting ownership from anyone else; it therefore established Jewish ownership of the land as an actualization of God's original gift to them.

In other words, even though the land became the possession of the Jewish people as soon as God gave it to Abram's descendants, this premise for their ownership was not "activated" until they took possession of the land the second time. For this reason, the land's conquest by foreign powers after its second Jewish acquisition did not negate its acquired holiness, and the legal obligation to observe the commandments specific to the Holy Land remained in force despite foreign occupation.

God's first two promises refer to the first conquest of the Land of Israel by Joshua. His third promise, however, refers to the Jews' reacquisition of the land in the

days of Ezra. This is why the first conquest is referred to as a future gift, and the second as an already-bequeathed gift and as an inheritance.¹⁹⁷

Giving a gift is a voluntary act of generosity on the part of the giver; the recipient is not entitled to the gift, nor does he necessarily deserve it. An inheritance, on the other hand, always belonged, *in potentia*, to the recipient, as an irrevocable birthright. Therefore, since the second conquest actualized God's original bequest of the land to Abram's descendants—the future Jewish people—it is referred to as an inheritance. The first conquest, in contrast, was only a portent of the future redemption, at which point the Jewish people will assume control of the land by both inheritance and conquest.

In any case, although the Jewish people's ownership of the Land of Israel was only actualized gradually, in stages, it in fact dates back to the time when God

15 And as for you, you will not live to see any of this; before it happens **you shall join your fathers** in the afterlife **in peace** for, as you know,¹⁸⁸ your father, Terach, is no longer an idolater and will therefore be assured a place in the afterlife. **And you will be buried** after reaching a **good old age**, i.e., you will live to witness your children and grandchildren remaining loyal to your ideals.” Indeed, although Abram’s son Ishmael was wicked for much of his life,¹⁸⁹ he repented before Abram died.¹⁹⁰ Abram’s grandson Esau likewise turned wicked only after Abram died.¹⁹¹

16 “The fourth generation after your grandson is exiled to another country **will return here, for not until then will the sin of the Amorites**—which is the first nation they will conquer¹⁹²—**have run its course** and will the Amorites have accrued enough demerits to warrant their being supplanted by your descendants.”

17 Having informed Abram about the future exile of his descendants, God proceeded to implement the covenant as He promised. **The sun set, it became very dark, and behold a smoking furnace and a flaming torch passed between those animal pieces.**

18 On that day, after making the furnace and torch pass between the animal halves, **God made a covenant with Abram, saying, “To your descendants I have given this land, from the Egyptian River (Wadi el-Arish) to the Euphrates**, which, since it is now serving as one of the borders of the Promised Land, can be termed **‘the great river.’**”

— CHASIDIC INSIGHTS —

material reality.

The task of liberating these sparks is not merely a collective mission. We have each been assigned a unique connection to a particular spark that only we, and none other, can free from bondage. Divine providence leads us to our spark; if we redeem these sparks, we redeem ourselves from our personal, private exile, as well.

This is the reason God promised Abram that his descendants would leave Egypt “with great wealth”: their liberation depended on their success in extracting the wealth of Egypt.¹⁹³

15 You will be buried in good old age: Metaphorically, this means that Abram would reach a state of spiritual awareness during his lifetime in which neither his body nor the world around him would obscure Divinity at all. He would thus achieve the transcendent consciousness of the afterlife during his physical life in this world.¹⁹⁴

18 To your descendants I have given this land: In His earlier promises of the land,¹⁹⁵ God used the future tense (“I will give this land”) and did not define Abram’s descendants’ ownership of the land as an inheritance. Here, He uses the past tense (“I have given this land”) and tells Abram that his descendants will inherit the land.¹⁹⁶

This is because when God gave the Land of Israel to the Jewish people, two major changes took place: (a) the land became the legal property of the Jewish people, and (b) it acquired an additional degree of holiness, which obligated its Jewish inhabitants to perform certain specific commandments with its produce (tithes, the sabbatical year, etc.). The first change took place the moment God gave the land to the people; the second effect occurred only when the people assumed control of the land.

Nonetheless, these changes only took effect in stages, as follows:

The first time the people assumed control of the land was when Joshua conquered it immediately after Moses’ death, as God had commanded them to. But since they assumed control through conquest, the effect of their control—the land’s additional degree of holiness—lasted only as long as the duration of the conquest itself. As soon as the land was reconquered, the effect of the conquest was nullified and the land lost its acquired holiness.

The second time the people assumed control of the land was when Ezra returned with the exiles from Babylonia. This was not a conquest; the Persians, who had conquered the Babylonians, voluntarily granted the Jews semi-autonomy within their empire. There-

¹⁸⁸. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 5, p. 307. ¹⁸⁹. Below, 16:12, 21:9-14. ¹⁹⁰. Below, 22:1, 25:9. ¹⁹¹. Below, 25:29 ff. ¹⁹². Numbers 21:13 ff. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 32, pp. 95-96. ¹⁹³. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 3, p. 827. ¹⁹⁴. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 5, p. 306. ¹⁹⁵. Above, 12:7, 13:15. According to Rashi, these promises, although chronicled in the Torah *before* the promise in the present passage, actually took place chronologically *after* it. ¹⁹⁶. 15:7-8. ¹⁹⁷. *Tzofnat Paneiach* on 15:7, above.

— ONKELOS —

19 וְיִתְּ שְׁלֵמָאִי וְיִתְּ קִנְזָאִי וְיִתְּ
קִדְמוֹנָאִי: 20 וְיִתְּ חֲתָאִי וְיִתְּ פְרוֹנָאִי
וְיִתְּ גְבֻרָאִי: 21 וְיִתְּ אֲמוֹרָאִי וְיִתְּ
בְנֵעֲנָאִי וְיִתְּ גִרְנָשָׁאִי וְיִתְּ יְבוֹסָאִי:
16:1 וְשָׂרִי אֶתְּ אַבְרָם לֹא יִלְדִית
לֵה וְלֵה אֲמַתָּא מִצְרִיתָא וְשָׂמָה
הָגֵר: 2 וְאֲמַרְתָּ שָׂרִי לֵאבְרָם הָא
בְּעֵן מִנִּיעֵנִי יִי מִלְמִילֵד עוֹל בְּעֵן
לֹת אֲמַתִּי מֵאִים אֲתִבְנִי מִנָּה וְקִבֵּל
אַבְרָם לְמִימֵר שָׂרִי:

19 אֶת־הַקִּינִי וְאֶת־הַקִּנְזִי וְאֶת־הַקִּדְמוֹנִי: 20 וְאֶת־הַחֲתָאִי
וְאֶת־הַפְּרוֹנִי וְאֶת־הַגְּבֻרָאִים: 21 וְאֶת־הָאֲמוֹרִי וְאֶת־
הַבְּנֵעֲנִי וְאֶת־הַגִּרְנָשִׁי וְאֶת־הַיְבוֹסִי: 8
16:1 וְשָׂרִי אֶתְּ אַבְרָם לֹא יִלְדָה לוֹ וְלֵה שְׂפָחָה מִצְרִית
וְשָׂמָה הָגֵר: 2 וְתֹאמַר שָׂרִי אֶל־אַבְרָם הִנֵּה־נָא עֲצָרְנִי
יְהוָה מִלְּדַת בֶּן־נָא אֶל־שְׂפָחָתִי אוֹלִי אֲבִנָה מִכֶּנֶה
וְיִשְׁמַע אַבְרָם לְקוֹל שָׂרִי:

— RASHI —

בְּשָׂרָא נָסִים שְׂנַעְשׂוּ לְשָׂרָה, אָמַר: מוֹטָב שֶׁתְּהֵא בְּתִי
שְׂפָחָה בְּבִית וְהָ, וְלֹא גְבִירָה בְּבִית אַחֵר: 2 אוֹלִי אֲבִנָה
מִכֶּנֶה. לְמַד עַל מִי שֶׁאֵין לוֹ בָּנִים, שֶׁאֵינוֹ בְּנוֹי אֶלָּא
הָרוּס: אֲבִנָה מִכֶּנֶה. בְּזִכּוֹת שֶׁאֲבָנִים צָרְתִּי לְתוֹךְ בֵּיתִי:
לְקוֹל שָׂרִי. לְרוֹחַ הַקֹּדֶשׁ שָׁבָה:

19 אֶת הַקִּינִי. עֶשֶׂר אַמּוֹת וְשׁ בָּאֵן, וְלֹא נָתַן לָהֶם אֶלָּא
שְׂבָעָה גּוֹיִם, וְהַשְׁלִשָּׁה: אָדוֹם וּמוֹאָב וְעַמּוֹן — וְהֵם קִינֵי
קִנְזִי וְקִדְמוֹנִי — עֲתִידִים לִהְיוֹת יִרְשָׁה לְעַתִּיד, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר:
”אָדוֹם וּמוֹאָב מִשְׁלֹחַ יָדָם, וּבְנֵי עַמּוֹן מִשְׁמַעְתָּם”:
20 וְאֶת הָרַפָּאִים. אֶרֶץ עֹג, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר בַּהֲ” הַהוּא יִקְרָא
אֶרֶץ רַפָּאִים: 1 שְׂפָחָה מִצְרִית. בֵּת פְּרָעָה הָיְתָה,

98. ישעיה יא, יד. 99. דברים ג, יג.

INNER DIMENSIONS

[21] In the messianic future, they will possess the first three lands: Allegorically, conquering the land of Canaan and transforming it into the Land of Israel means conquering the animalistic side of our personalities and reorienting it toward Godliness. Just as our godly souls comprise ten holy faculties, which derive from the ten *sefirot*, so, too, our animal souls comprise ten materially-oriented faculties. The latter ten faculties are reflected in the ten pagan nations whose territories were promised to Abraham.

The first three nations correspond to the three levels of the intellect; the other seven nations correspond to the seven emotions. The fact that we are to inherit the lands of the first three nations only in the messianic future indicates that, until that time, we will not be able to fully rectify our animal intellect; our main task in the meantime is to refine our animalistic emotions, training ourselves, for example, to love and fear God with the same intensity of feeling with which we naturally love material comforts and pleasures and fear physical pain and suffering.

This change in reality is reflected in the fact that, in his lifetime, King David played a seven-stringed harp, whereas we are taught that in the messianic future, King David will play a ten-stringed harp.²⁰⁸

We are further taught that whereas the territories of the latter seven nations were conquered by war, the territories of the first three nations will be acquired peacefully.²⁰⁹ This, too, reflects the difference in the way in which we refine our animal/material emotions vs. how we refine our animal/material

intellects: the conquest of the emotions is a grueling struggle, requiring constant vigilance, since the emotions naturally resist change. The task of refining the intellect, in contrast, requires much less effort, since the intellect—even the animal intellect—is naturally more disposed to accepting change.

As we draw close to the advent of the messianic era, we have already begun to experience a foretaste of the new order at our doorstep; this is one of the reasons why the inner dimension of the Torah (Kabbalah and Chasidism) has become an essential ingredient of Torah study in our times.

The Ten Nations²¹⁰

	Keter Edomites (Kadmonites)	
Binah Ammonites ²¹¹ (Kenites)		Chochmah Moabites ²¹² (Kenizites)
Gevurah Hittites		Chesed Canaanites
	Tiferet Amorites	
Hod Hivites		Netzach Perizites
	Yesod Jebusites	
	Malchut Girgashites	

19 This Promised Land comprises the territories of **the Kenites, the Kenizites, the Kadmonites**— which will in the future be occupied respectively by the Ammonites, the Moabites, and the Edomites¹⁹⁸—

20 **the Hittites, the Perizites**, part of the territory presently occupied by **the Rephaim**,¹⁹⁹

21 the territory of **the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Gergashites, and the Jebusites**" (see figure 19). I will give the last seven lands to your descendants as soon as they return from their first exile. In the messianic future, they will possess the first three lands.²⁰⁰ In any case, they will acquire *legal* ownership of the land only when they enter and conquer it.²⁰¹

The Birth of Ishmael

16:1 Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had not borne him a child. She had an Egyptian handmaid whose name was Hagar.²⁰²

2 Sarai said to Abram, "Look, God has kept me from having children through whom I might perpetuate myself after my life in this world is over; my essence is therefore in danger of being lost from this world. Therefore, **come to my handmaid**, take her as a concubine and engage in marital relations with her; **perhaps through** the merit of sharing you with **her I will** bear children of my own and thereby **be built up** into a matriarch whose essence will be perpetuated." Abram discerned that Sarai was speaking prophetically, so he **heeded Sarai's voice**.



Figure 19: The Land Promised to Abraham

CHASIDIC INSIGHTS

gave it to Abram's descendants as an inheritance at the Covenant between the Halves. At that very moment in time, the Promised Land in its entirety became, and remains to this day, the inheritance of every single Jew, not subject to negotiation or trade. It is God's promise to Abraham—not treaties, military victories, or diplomatic machinations—that constitutes our claim to our land. When we articulate this fact unequivocally, the community of nations will acknowledge its truth, and we will be able to uncontestedly possess the land. This, in turn, will hasten the time when we will be granted full possession of the entire Promised Land—the messianic redemption.²⁰³

1 **An Egyptian handmaid:** Hagar was a very righteous

woman. Although she was the daughter of Pharaoh, one of the most powerful rulers of the time, she agreed to leave behind a life of royalty in the king's palace in favor of the holy environment of Abram's and Sarai's home.²⁰⁴ She is later on referred to as Keturah;²⁰⁵ this name is related to the word for incense (*ketoret*), meaning that her saintly behavior was as pleasing as the scent of incense.²⁰⁶

With this fact in mind, we may safely assume that Hagar tried valiantly to raise her son Ishmael in the paths of righteousness, as well. Knowing this, we can understand why (when God informed him that he was to have another son) Abram initially insisted that Ishmael was sufficiently righteous to inherit him.²⁰⁷

198. *Ma'amarei Admor HaEmtzai, Devarim*, pp. 10-11. 199. See Deuteronomy 2:11, 20, 3:13. 200. See Isaiah 11:14. 201. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 15, pp. 204, 206. 202. Above, 12:20. 203. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 15, pp. 100-109. 204. *Bereishit Rabbah* 45:1. 205. Below, 25:1. 206. *Tanchuma, Chayei Sarah* 8. 207. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 1, p. 19. See below, 17:18. 208. *Arachin* 13b. 209. *Sefer HaMa'amarim* 5737, pp. 98-99, *Siddur im Dach* 189a. 210. These correspondences between the nations and the *sefirot* are taken from *Kehilat Yaakov*, under the entries of the specific nations. The author quotes several systems of aligning the seven nations with the seven emotions; the system followed here is that of his mentor, Rabbi Yaakov Yosef (the "seer") of Lublin. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 21, p. 229, note 40. 211. See above, 13:5. 212. See above, 13:5.

— ONKELOS —

3 ודברת שרי אתת אברם ית הגר
מצריאתא אמתה מסוף עשר שנין
למתב אברם בארעא דכנען ויהבת
יתה לאברם בעלה לה לאנתו:
4 ועל לות הגר ועדיאת וחזות ארי
עדיאת וקלת רבונתה בעינתא:
5 ואמרת שרי לאברם דין לי עלך
אנא יהבית אמתי לך וחזות ארי
עדיאת וקלית בעינתא ידיו יי ביני
ובניך: 6 ואמר אברם לשרי הא
אמתיך בידך עבדי לה בדתקן
בעיניכי ועניתה שרי וערקת מן
קדמקא: 7 ואשכחה מלאכא
דיי על עינא דמיא במדברא על
עינא בארעא דחגרא: 8 ואמר
הגר אמתא דשרי מן את אתיא
ולאן את אןלא ואמרת מן קדם
שרי רבונתי אנא ערקא: 9 ואמר
לה מלאכא דיי טובי לות רבונתיך
ואשתעבדי תחות ידך: 10 ואמר
לה מלאכא דיי אסגאה אסגי ית
בניכי ולא יתמנון מסגי: 11 ואמר
לה מלאכא דיי הא את מעדיא
ותילדין בר ותקרין שמה ישמעאל
ארי קבל יי עלותיך:

3 ותלקח שרי אשת-אברם את-הגר המצרית שפחה
מקין עשר שנים לשבת אברם בארץ כנען ותתן אותה
לאברם אישה לו לאשה: 4 ויבא אל-הגר ותהר ותרא
כי הרתה ותקל גברתה בעיניה: 5 ותאמר שרי אל-
אברם חמסי עליך אנכי נתתי שפחתי בחיקך ותרא
כי הרתה ואקל בעיניה ישפט יהוה ביני וביניך:
6 ויאמר אברם אל-שרי הנה שפחתי בידך עשילי
הטוב בעיניך ותענה שרי ותברח מפניה: 7 וימצאה
מלאך יהוה על-עין המים במדבר על-העין בדרך
שור: 8 ויאמר הגר שפחת שרי אי-מזה באת ואנה
תלכי ותאמר מפני שרי גברתי אנכי ברחת: 9 ויאמר
לה מלאך יהוה שובי אל-גברתך והתעני תחת ידיך:
10 ויאמר לה מלאך יהוה הרבה ארבה את-זרעך ולא
יספר מרב: 11 ויאמר לה מלאך יהוה הנה הרה וילדת
בן וקראת שמו ישמעאל כי-שמע יהוה אל-עניך:

— RASHI —

ביני וביניה. כל "בינה" שבמקרא חסר וזה מלא, קרי
בה "וביניה", שהכניסה עין הרע בעבורה של הגר,
והפילה עברה, הוא שהמלאך אומר להגר יי: "הנה
הרה", והלא כבר הרתה והוא מבשר לה שתהר? אלא
מלמד שהפילה הריון הראשון: 6 ותענה שרי. היתה
משעבדת בה בקשי: 8 אי מזה באת. מהיכן באת.
יודע היה, אלא לתן לה פתח לכנס עמה בדברים.
ולשון "אי מזה", אינה המקום שתאמר עליו מזה אני
בא: 9 ויאמר לה מלאך ה' וגו'. על כל אמירה היתה
שלוח לה מלאך אחר, לכה נאמר "מלאך" בכל אמירה
ואמירה: 11 הנה הרה. כשתשובי תהרי, כמו¹⁰²: "הנה
הרה" דאשת מנוח: וילדת בן. כמו "וילדת". ודומה
לוי¹⁰³: "ישבת בלבנון מקננת בארזים": וקראת שמו. צווי
הוא, כמו שאומר לזכר¹⁰⁴: "וקראת את שמו יצחק":

3 ותקח שרי. לקחתה בדברים: אשריה שוכית לדבק
בגוף קדוש כזה: מקין עשר שנים. מועד הקבוע לאשה
ששהתה עשר שנים ולא ילדה לבעלה, חייב לשא
אחרת: לשבת אברם וגו'. מגיד, שאין ישיבת חוצה
לארץ עולה לו מן המנין, לפי שלא נאמר לו "ואעשה
לגוי גדול" עד שיבא לארץ ישראל: 4 ויבא אל הגר
ותהר. מביאה ראשונה: ותקל גברתה בעיניה. אמרה:
שרי זו, אין סתירה בגלויה, מראה עצמה כאלו היא
צדקת ואינה צדקת, שלא זכתה להריון כל השנים
הללו, ואני נתעברתי מביאה ראשונה: 5 חמסי עליך.
חמס העשוי לי עליך אני מטיל הענש, כשהתפללת
להקדוש ברוך הוא: "מה תתן לי ואנכי הולך עריירי"¹⁰⁰,
לא התפללת אלא עליך, והיה לך להתפלל על שנינו,
והייתי אני נפקדת עמך. ועוד, דבריה אתה חומס ממני,
שאתה שומע בזיוני ושותק: אנכי נתתי שפחתי וגו'

100. בראשית טו, ב. 101. פסוק יא. 102. שופטים יג, ה. 103. ירמיה כב, כג. 104. בראשית יז, יט.

3 Abram and Sarai knew that the Torah requires a man who has been married for ten years and has not fathered children to take an additional wife to try to have children through her. Although they had been married for a number of years prior to this episode, God had only promised Abram and Sarai offspring when He commanded them to move to Canaan, so they understood that they should calculate these ten years only beginning from that point in time. Therefore, it was only in the year 2033, **after Abram had lived in Canaan for ten years**, that they decided upon the following plan: **His wife, Sarai, convinced Hagar the Egyptian, her hand-maid**, to marry Abram by telling her how fortunate she is to have relations with someone who has so sanctified his physical body. In this way **she gave her to her husband, Abram, as a second wife**.

4 **He married her, and she conceived** immediately. When Hagar later saw that she was pregnant, she regarded her mistress with disdain. She concluded that Sarai was a hypocrite: if she was really as righteous as she pretended to be, why didn't God bless *her* with children, as He had blessed Hagar from her very first conjugal union with Abram?

5 When Sarai heard Hagar's words, she said to Abram, "I do not blame Hagar for feeling this way; **you are to blame for the wrong** of my humiliation and deserve to be punished for it! When you entreated God for children,²¹³ you prayed only for yourself instead of for both of us as a couple! Moreover, you see that **it was I who selflessly placed my handmaid in your bosom, and now that she sees that she is pregnant, she regards me with disdain** and yet you do not admonish her! **Let God judge between me and you!**" She then turned to Hagar and said again, "As for your accusations against me, **let God judge between me and you!**" and Hagar miscarried.

6 Abram replied to Sarai, "Here, your handmaid's fate is in your hands. Deal with her as you see fit." Sarai dealt harshly with her, giving her hard work in order to break her ego. So Hagar ran away from her and went into the desert.

7 An angel of God found her by a spring of water in the desert, next to the spring on the road to Shur. Hagar was accustomed to seeing angels in Abram's tent, so she was not afraid.

8 He said, "Hagar, handmaiden of Sarai! From where are you coming, and where are you headed?" Obviously, the angel knew where Hagar was coming from, but he used this question to initiate a conversation. She replied, "I am running away from Sarai, my mistress."

9 A second angel of God appeared and said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit yourself to her dominion."

10 A third angel of God appeared and said to her, "I will grant you a multitude of descendants; they will be so numerous that they will be uncountable."

11 A fourth angel of God appeared and said to her, "You will again conceive, and will give birth to a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for God [El] has heard [*shama*] your outcry.

213. Above, 15:2.

ONKELOS

12 והוא יהי מרוד באנשא הוא יהי צריך לכלא ואף כל בני אנשא יהיו צריכין לה ועל אפי כל אחיהי ישרי: 13 וצליאת בשמא דיי דאתמליל עמה אמרת את הוא אלהא חזי כלא ארי אמרת האף אנא שריתי חזיא בחר דאתגלי לי: 14 על בן קרא לבקרא בקרא דמלאך קימא אתחזי עלה הא היא בין רקם ובין חגרא: 15 וילידת הגר לאברהם בר וקרא אברהם שום ברה וילידת הגר ישמעאל: 16 ואברהם בר תמנן ושית שנין בד וילידת הגר ית ישמעאל לאברהם: 17 והנה אברהם בר תשעין ותשע שנין ואתגלי יי לאברהם ואמר לה אנא אל שדי פלח קדמי והוי שלים:

12 והוא יהיה פרא אדם ידו בכל ויד כל בו ועל-פני כל-אחיו ישבן: 13 ותקרא שם-הזה הדבר אליה אתה אל ראי פי אמרה הגם הלם ראיתי אחרי ראי: 14 על-בן קרא לבאר באר לחי ראי הגה בין-קדש ובין פרה: 15 ותלד הגר לאברהם בן ויקרא אברהם שם-בנו אשר-ילדה הגר ישמעאל: 16 ואברהם בן-שמונים שנה ושש שנים בלדת-הגר את-ישמעאל לאברהם: 17:1 ויהי אברהם בן-תשעים שנה ותשע שנים וירא יהוה אל-אברהם ויאמר אליו אני-אל שדי התהלך לפני והיה תמים:

RASHI

דברי המלאך שאמר "וקראת שמו ישמעאל", שרתה רוח הקדש עליו וקראו ישמעאל: 16 ואברהם בן שמונים וגו'. לשבחו של ישמעאל נכתב, להודיע שהיה בן שלש עשרה שנה בשנמול, ולא עבב: 1 אני אל שדי. אני הוא שיש די באלהותי לכל בריה, ולפיכך "התהלך לפני" ואהיה לך לאלוה ולפטרונו. וכן כל מקום שהוא במקרא, פרושו כך: די שלו. והכל לפי הענין: התהלך לפני. בתרגומו: "פלח קדמי", הדבק בעבודתי: והיה תמים. אף זה צווי אחר צווי — היה שלם בכל נסיונותי. ולפי מדרשו¹⁰⁷: "התהלך לפני" במצות מילה, ובדבר הזה תהיה תמים", שכל זמן שהערלה בק אתה בעל מום לפני. דבר אחר: "והיה תמים", עכשו אתה חסר חמש אברים: שתי עינים, שתי אזנים, וראש הגויה, מוסיף אני לך אות על שמך, ויהיו מנין אותיותיך רמ"ח במנין אבריו:

12 פרא אדם. אזהב מדברות לצוד חיות, כמו שכתוב¹⁰⁸: "וישב במדבר ויהי רבה קשת": ידו בכל. לסטים: ויד כל בו. הכל שזנאין אותו ומתגרין בו: ועל פני כל אחיו ישבן. שיהיה ורעו גדול: 13 אתה אל ראי. נקוד חטף קמץ, מפני שהוא שם דבר: אלוה הראיה, שרואה בעלבון של עלובין. דבר אחר: "אתה אל ראי", משמע שהוא רואה הכל ואין שום דבר רואה אותו: הגם הלם. לשון תימה: וכי סבורה הייתי שאף הלוים במדברות ראיתי שלוחו של מקום, "אחרי ראי" אותם בביתו של אברהם, ששם הייתי רגילה לראות מלאכים. ותדע שהיתה רגילה לראותם, שהרי מנוח ראה את המלאך פעם אחת ואמר¹⁰⁹: "מות נמות", וזו ראיה ארבעה זה אחר זה, ולא חרדה: 14 באר לחי ראי. בתרגומו: "בירא דמלאך קימא אתחזי עלה": 15 ויקרא אברהם שם וגו'. אף על פי שלא שמע אברהם

¹⁰⁵. בראשית כא, כ. ¹⁰⁶. שופטים יג, כב. ¹⁰⁷. בראשית רבה מו, ד.

CHASIDIC INSIGHTS

13 Called by name upon God who had spoken to her: Although Hagar was speaking with an angel and not with God, the Torah nevertheless refers to the angel as "God." The reason for this is that when an angel is engaged in a Divine mission, it is at that moment a completely selfless and transparent being, a pure conduit for God's will, possessing no separate identity of its own.

Even human beings can achieve this spiritual transparency. When Moses was conveying God's promise of reward for fulfilling the commandments, he was so oblivious to his own existence that he addressed the people in the first person, saying, "I will give you

grass in the fields for your cattle."²¹⁷ In Talmudic times, the students of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai said that the verse "Three times a year all your menfolk shall appear before the Master, God, the God of Israel"²¹⁸ referred in their days to Rabbi Shimon,²¹⁹ and the verse "God is in His holy Temple"²²⁰ was applied to Rabbi Yitzchak bar Lazar sitting in the synagogue of Caesaria.²²¹ In each of these cases, the individuals had so completely nullified their own egos and transformed themselves into vehicles for God's will that His presence was manifest through them; those around them felt they were in God's presence rather than in the presence of these particular sages.²²²

²¹⁷. Deuteronomy 11:15. ²¹⁸. Exodus 34:23. ²¹⁹. Zohar 2:38a. ²²⁰. Habakkuk 2:20. ²²¹. Y. Bikurim 3:3 (11b). ²²². Sefer HaMa'amarim 5699, p. 167-168. Likutei Sichot, vol. 3, pp. 510-511.

12 He will be a wild savage; he will be a robber, so his hand will be set against everyone, and therefore everyone will hate him and their hand will be set against him to attack him. But although his offspring will be numerous, they will live harmoniously with one another, so he will dwell near all his relatives."²¹⁴

13 Hagar called by name upon God who had spoken to her, saying, "You are the God of Seeing, who mercifully saw my humiliation!" For she said, "Would I have even dared to think that I would be privileged to see angels here, too, by myself, after having seen in



Figure 20: Hagar's Wanderings

Abram's tents that one must be very righteous in order to merit such a privilege? Certainly not! It is only out of God's mercy that He sent me these angels." Hagar's declaration proved that she had repented of her previous haughtiness and had thereby earned the right to now return to Abram's household.

14 The well was therefore called Be'er LaChai Ro'i ("the well where the living [angel] appeared"). **It is between Kadesh and Bered, i.e., Shur**²¹⁵ (see figure 20).

15 Hagar again conceived and bore a son to Abram. Although Hagar never told Abram that the angel had instructed her what to name the child, **Abram** was invested with Divine inspiration and **gave the name Ishmael to his son whom Hagar had borne.**

16 Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram in the year 2034.

The Covenant of Circumcision

17:1 On the 12th of Nisan in the year 2047,²¹⁶ when Abram was ninety-nine years old, God appeared to him again, this time in order to prepare him to conceive a child through Sarai. **God appeared to Abram and** informed him that He was about to give him the commandment of circumcision. Abram expressed concern that differentiating himself this way from other people would discourage them from joining his religious movement. **So God said, "I am God Almighty. I can overcome this possible repercussion, so you need not worry. Walk in My ways,**

²¹⁴. Cf. 25:18, below. ²¹⁵. Onkelos here and on 20:1, below. ²¹⁶. See below, 18:1.

— ONKELOS —

2 וְאַתְנָה בְּרִיתִי בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶךָ וְאַרְפָּה אֶתְּךָ בְּמֵאֵד מֵאֵד:
 2 וְאַתְנָה בְּרִיתִי בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶךָ וְאַרְפָּה אֶתְּךָ בְּמֵאֵד מֵאֵד:
 2 וְאַתְנָה בְּרִיתִי בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶךָ וְאַרְפָּה אֶתְּךָ בְּמֵאֵד מֵאֵד:

— RASHI —

2 וְאַתְנָה בְּרִיתִי. בְּרִית שֶׁל אֱהָבָה, וּבְרִית הָאֶרֶץ לְהוֹרִישָׁהּ לָךְ, עַל יְדֵי מִצְוָה זוֹ:

— CHASIDIC INSIGHTS —

be proven genuine, we should constantly strive to enhance the quality of our relationship and commitment to God.²²⁴

Be perfect: The word for “perfect” (*tamim*) has three meanings:

- ♦ “without blemish,”²²⁵
- ♦ “of extraordinary quality,”²²⁶ and
- ♦ “possessing unquestioning faith²²⁷ and commitment to God under all circumstances.”²²⁸

These three different meanings can be viewed as successive steps in our process of self-refinement: first, we need to eliminate our imperfections; next, we must develop our inborn talents and gifts; and finally, we must strive to apply this perfection to all aspects of our lives and to all situations we encounter.

To attain the first two levels of perfection, rational strategies will suffice, since it is reasonable to aspire to be free of blemish and even to attain an extra measure of completion that goes beyond being faultless. To achieve the third level, however, we must invoke supra-rational commitment, since there are often very compelling, rational excuses for not upholding our moral integrity in specific situations. It is for this very reason that consistency in moral behavior is such a highly-valued yet elusive commodity in life.

These three discrete definitions of the word *tamim* correspond to the three constituent parts of circumcision:

- ♦ the removal of the stigma of being uncircumcised (which is considered a blemish);
- ♦ the transformation of the individual into a circumcised person (which permanently enhances the person’s spirituality); and
- ♦ the act of circumcision itself (which, because it causes pain, requires faith and commitment in the face of challenge).

(These three constituent parts usually occur simultaneously, and therefore their distinction is only theoretical. However, there are some situations in which they may occur independently. For example: If a baby boy is born without a foreskin, in which case the first two conditions are automatically satisfied, he must still undergo a symbolic act of “circumcision”—by having

a drop of blood drawn from the organ—to satisfy the third condition.)

Although all three patriarchs embodied all three meanings of *tamim*,²²⁹ each one also expressed a particular emphasis on one of its three meanings:

- ♦ Abraham, having been born into a corrupt society and degenerate family, had to struggle to overcome these obstacles and to remove all the negative elements in his life.
- ♦ Isaac, having been born into holiness, spent his life developing and deepening the holiness he received *gratis* from his parents.
- ♦ Jacob was also born into holiness, but unlike Isaac, who never left the Holy Land, had to struggle to remain holy in the face of opposition and challenges.

In our own lives, we attain the first level of *tamim* (faultlessness) by severing ourselves from our attachment to physical desires (“removing the foreskin”),²³⁰ thereby liberating ourselves from the dictates of our animal instincts. We then proceed to attain the second level of *tamim* (“extraordinary quality”) by developing our potentials and thereby ascending within the realm of goodness and holiness (“being circumcised”). Finally, we proceed to attain the third level of *tamim* by transcending our subservience to reason. On this level, we carry out God’s will implicitly; we are not fazed by any obstacles or difficult circumstances, because we simply cannot imagine behaving otherwise.²³¹

Now, I will give you control even over these organs: Like Abraham, many righteous individuals down through the generations were able to control their senses, as demonstrated in the following episode:

Rabbi Shalom DovBer of Lubavitch once complained that he had become deaf in one ear. Upon investigation, it was discovered that while in the midst of delivering his Chassidic discourse on the Sabbath, his concentration would be disturbed by idle conversations taking place in an adjoining room. Because of his total, selfless commitment to teaching, he had unknowingly removed his ability to hear from the ear that was closest to the distracting noise.²³²

224. *Sichot Kodesh* 5741, vol. 1, p. 397. 225. See Leviticus 22:19 ff. 226. See *Mishneh Torah*, *Isurei HaMizbeach* 1:1. 227. Deuteronomy 18:3. 228. *Sefer HaMa’amarim* 5672, end of page 156. 229. Abraham: as described in this verse; Isaac: as seen in 25:21, below; Jacob, as described in 25:27, below. 230. See *Guide for the Perplexed* 3:49. 231. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 30, pp. 44-52. 232. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 1, pp. 25-26.

and everything will be fine. **And** in addition, please **be perfect**—that is, without any defect—in walking in My ways: pass the test I am about to give you, just as you have passed all the tests that I have made you undergo so far, and continue to pass My future tests as well. **Walk in My ways** by observing the commandment of circumcision I am about to give you, **and** through this **be perfect**—for as long as you remain uncircumcised I consider you blemished. Finally: although you have ascended as far as you can by yourself on the ladder of self-refinement, you are still not in control over five of the 248 parts of the body: your two eyes, your two ears, and your organ of procreation—you have no control over what you see or hear nor over how your body reacts to erotic stimuli. But now, I will grant you control even over these organs, and thus **you will be perfect**: you will be able to ignore inappropriate sights and sounds, and control your erotic drive. Your present control over 243 of the parts of your body is alluded to by the fact that the numerical value of your name, Abram (אַבְרָם), is 243; I will now add the letter *hei* (ה) to your name, thus increasing its numerical value to 248.

Letter	Numerical Value	
א (<i>alef</i>)	1	1
ב (<i>beit</i>)	2	2
ר (<i>reish</i>)	200	200
מ (<i>mem</i>)	40	40
ה (<i>hei</i>)	5	
Total	248	243

2 I will make a covenant between Me and you to love you and, in the merit of your observing the commandment of circumcision, to give you the Promised Land, and I will make you exceedingly numerous.”

✧ CHASIDIC INSIGHTS ✧

1 Walk in My ways: Abraham had been walking in God’s ways for virtually his whole life. But the level of Divine living to which God wished to elevate him now was infinitely more exalted. Relatively, then, he would only now begin to truly walk in God’s ways.

Furthermore, had Abraham not risen to the occasion and accepted God’s formal covenant, it would have in-

dicated that, retroactively, he had not really been walking in God’s ways all these years, but had evidently been motivated by other concerns. Passing this test would prove that Abraham had indeed been walking in God’s ways all along.

The lesson for us here is that we should never rest on our laurels; if our previous accomplishments are to

✧ INNER DIMENSIONS ✧

[1] Walk in My ways: Until now, Abraham possessed the consciousness of the world of *Atzilut*. At this level, we are not aware of ourselves per se; we are aware only of ourselves as part of God, and we therefore identify totally with God. However, inasmuch as Abraham personified only one of God’s attributes, that of *chesed* (“loving-kindness”), his

consciousness was limited by this self-definition. To “become perfect” here means that God planned to grant Abraham infinite Divine consciousness, which transcends that of the world of *Atzilut*.

As we will explain further, this ascent of consciousness was necessary in order for Abraham to father Isaac.²²³

²²³ *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 3, p. 30.

— ONKELOS —

3 ונפל אברהם על אפודי ומליל עמה יי למימר: 4 אָנָא הָא גִזְר קְרַמִּי עִמָּךְ וְתָהִי לְאֵב סְגִי עִמָּמִין: 5 וְלֹא יִתְקַרֵּי עוֹד יֵת שְׁמֶךְ אֲבָרָם וְיִהְיֶה שְׁמֶךְ אֲבָרָם אֲרִי אֵב סְגִי עִמָּמִין וְהִבְתֵּךְ: 6 וְאִפִּישׁ יִתֵּךְ לְחֹדָא לְחֹדָא וְאִתְנַנֵּךְ לְכַנְשִׁין וּמְלִכִין דְּשִׁלִּיטִין בְּעִמָּמִיא מְנָךְ יִפְקִין: 7 וְאִקְרִים יֵת קְרַמִּי בֵּין מִימְרֵי וּבִינְךָ וּבֵין בְּנִיךָ בְּתֵרֶךְ לְדִרְיָהוֹן לְקַם עֲלֵם לְמַהוּי לָךְ לְאַלְהָ וּלְבְנִיךָ בְּתֵרֶךְ: 8 וְאַתָּן לָךְ וּלְבְנִיךָ בְּתֵרֶךְ יֵת אֲרַע תּוֹתְבִיתֵךְ יֵת כָּל אֲרַע דְּכַנְעֵן לְאַחַסְתָּן עֲלֵם וְאַהוּי לְהוֹן לְאַלְהָ: 9 וְאָמַר יי לְאַבְרָהָם וְאַתָּה יֵת קְרַמִּי תִּשָּׁר אֵת וּבְנִיךָ בְּתֵרֶךְ לְדִרְיָהוֹן: 10 דִּין קְרַמִּי דִּי תִּשָּׁרוֹן בֵּין מִימְרֵי וּבִינִיכֹן וּבֵין בְּנִיךָ בְּתֵרֶךְ מְנָךְ לְכֹון כָּל דְּכוּרָא:

3 ויפל אברהם על־פָּנָיו וידבר אתו אלהים לאמר: 4 אָנִי הִנֵּה בְרִיתִי אִתְּךָ וְהָיִיתָ לְאֵב הַמּוֹן גּוֹיִם: 5 וְלֹא־יִקְרָא עוֹד אֶת־שְׁמֶךָ אֲבָרָם וְהָיָה שְׁמֶךָ אֲבָרָהָם כִּי אֲב־הַמּוֹן גּוֹיִם נִתְתִּיד: 6 וְהִפְרַתִּי אִתְּךָ בְּמָאֹד מְאֹד וְנִתְתִּיד לְגוֹיִם וּמְלָכִים מִמֶּךָ יֵצְאוּ:

7 וְהִקְמַתִּי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי בֵּינִי וּבֵינְךָ וּבֵין זֶרְעֶךָ אַחֲרֶיךָ לְדֹרֹתָם לְבְרִית עוֹלָם לְהָיוֹת לְךָ לְאֱלֹהִים וּלְזֶרְעֶךָ אַחֲרֶיךָ: 8 וְנִתְתִּי לְךָ וּלְזֶרְעֶךָ אַחֲרֶיךָ אֵת אֶרֶץ מִגְרִיד אֵת כָּל־אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן לְאַחֲזוֹת עוֹלָם וְהָיִיתִי לָהֶם לְאֱלֹהִים: 9 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־אֲבָרָהָם וְאַתָּה אֶת־בְּרִיתִי תִשְׁמֹר אַתָּה וְזֶרְעֶךָ אַחֲרֶיךָ לְדֹרֹתָם: 10 וְאַתָּה בְּרִיתִי אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁמְרוּ בֵּינִי וּבֵינִיכֶם וּבֵין זֶרְעֶךָ אַחֲרֶיךָ הַמּוֹל לָכֶם כָּל־זָכָר:

— RASHI —

6 וְנִתְתִּיד לְגוֹיִם. יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאַדּוּם, שְׁהָרִי יִשְׁמַעֲלָל כְּבָר הָיָה לוֹ, וְלֹא הָיָה מְבֹשְׁרוֹ עָלָיו: 7 וְהִקְמַתִּי אֵת בְּרִיתִי. וּמָה הָיָה הַבְּרִית? "לְהָיוֹת לָךְ לְאֱלֹהִים": 8 לְאַחֲזוֹת עוֹלָם. וְשֵׁם אֲדִיָּה לָכֶם לְאֱלֹהִים, אֲבָל הִדָּר בְּחוּצָה לְאֶרֶץ, דּוּמָה כְּמִי שְׁאִין לוֹ אֲלוּהָ: 9 וְאַתָּה. וְאִ"ו זֶה מוֹסִיף עַל עֲנִין רִאשׁוֹן — "אֲנִי הִנֵּה בְרִיתִי אִתְּךָ", וְאַתָּה הָיָה זֶהִיר לְשִׁמְרוֹ. וּמָה הָיָה שְׁמִירָתוֹ? "זֹאת בְּרִיתִי אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁמְרוּ וְגו' הַמּוֹל לָכֶם" וְגו': 10 בֵּינִי וּבֵינִיכֶם וְגו'. אוֹתָם שֶׁל עֲבָשׁוֹ: וּבֵין זֶרְעֶךָ אַחֲרֶיךָ. הַעֲתִידִין לְהוֹלֵד: הַמּוֹל. כְּמוֹ "לְהַמּוֹל", כְּמוֹ שְׁאֵתָה אוֹמֵר "עֲשׂוֹת" כְּמוֹ "לְעֲשׂוֹת":

3 ויפל אברהם על פָּנָיו. מְמוֹרָא הַשְׁכִּינָה, שְׁעַד שְׁלָא מָל לֹא הָיָה בּוֹ כַח לְעַמֵּד וְרוּחַ הַקֹּדֶשׁ נִצְבָּת עָלָיו. וְזֶהוּ שְׁנֵאמַר בְּבִלְעָם¹⁰⁸: "נִפְל וּגְלוּי עֵינַם". בְּבִרְיָתָא דְּרַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר מִצְאִיתָ בּוֹ: 5 כִּי אֵב הַמּוֹן גּוֹיִם. לְשׁוֹן נוֹטְרִיקוֹן שֶׁל שְׁמוֹ. וְרִ"שׁ שְׁהִיתָה בּוֹ בְּתַחֲלָה — שְׁלֹא הָיָה אֵב אֱלָא לְאֶרֶם שְׁהוּא מְקוּמוֹ, וְעָבָשׁוֹ אֵב לְכָל הָעוֹלָם, וְאַפִּילוּ רִ"שׁ שְׁהִיָּה בּוֹ בְּתַחֲלָה — לֹא זֶה מְקוּמוֹהָ, שְׁאֵף יו"ד שֶׁל שָׂרִי תִּתְרַעֲמָה עַל הַשְׁכִּינָה, עַד שֶׁנִּתְּסַפָּה לְהוֹשֵׁעַ, שְׁנֵאמַר¹⁰⁹: "וַיִּקְרָא מֹשֶׁה לְהוֹשֵׁעַ בֶּן נוֹן יְהוֹשֻׁעַ":

108. במדבר כד, ד. 109. במדבר יג, טו.

INNER DIMENSIONS

[5] **Your name shall be Abraham:** Spiritually, Abraham's original name, Abram, refers to the lofty level of Divine consciousness he was able to attain with his own, inborn abilities. The first syllable, *ab*, means "father," referring to *chochmah*, the flash of insight that fathers emotions and expression; the second syllable, *ram*, means "sublime" or "exalted," indicating that the reference is to "supernal *chochmah*," the supra-conscious *chochmah* of Arich Anpin. *Ab-Ram* thus refers to abstract insight, a level of perception too high to be applied to any situation or manifest in the world in any way.

The expansive shape of the added letter *hei* alludes to revelation; thus, the addition of the letter *hei* to Abram's name enabled him to articulate this sublime consciousness in a way that made it accessible, revealed, and relevant to everyone.

Yet Abraham's new name still retained the *reish* of the syllable *ram*; this indicates that even in its practical manifestation, nothing of his original, abstract Divine consciousness was lost. He did not need to dilute or compromise the intensity of his lofty perspective on life to be able to transmit it to the common folk.²⁴⁰

240. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 25, p. 68.

3 As he always did when God spoke to him—before he was circumcised—**Abram threw himself on his face**. Inasmuch as the uncircumcised procreative organ indicates the lack of control over erotic urges, he had to “hide” his organ by lying on the ground. **God spoke to him, saying,**

4 “As for Me, here is My covenant with you: **You shall be the father of a multitude of nations.**

5 No longer²³³ shall you be named Abram, meaning ‘The Father—i.e., ruler—of Aram.’²³⁴ Rather, as I told you previously, I shall insert the letter *hei* into your name, and thus **your name shall be Abraham [Avraham], for I have made you the father of a multitude [av hamon] of nations**. Yet, your name will still retain the letter *reish*, alluding to Aram, in order to indicate that your transformation will not detract at all from your previous status.

6 I will make you exceedingly fruitful—even more so than I promised you before: **I will make you into many nations, and kings will descend from you.**

◆ **Seventh Reading** 7 I will also maintain another aspect of My covenant between you and Me and your descendants after you throughout their generations, as an everlasting covenant: Your descendants will remain true to the Divine mission with which you will inculcate them. Thus I will be able to be God both to you and to your descendants after you.²³⁵

8 And I will give the land in which you are sojourning, the entire land of Canaan, as an everlasting heritage to you and to your descendants after you, and here, in this land, **I will be God unto them**. But I will not bestow this special relationship on those of your descendants who live outside the Promised Land.”

9 God further said to Abraham, “And as for you, *your* obligation in this relationship is that you keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you, throughout their generations. Namely—

10 **this is My covenant, between Me and you, i.e., all the current members of your household, and your descendants after you, for you to keep: to circumcise every male among you.**

∞ CHASIDIC INSIGHTS ∞

5 **Your transformation will not detract at all from your previous status:** This teaches us that, although, as heirs of Abraham, we are empowered and obligated to influence the entire world, we must simultaneously bear in mind that our primary obligation is to influence our immediate environs—to first be “the ‘father of Aram,’” and only then the “father of the world.”²³⁶

The *reish* was retained in Abraham’s name since, even after he became the “father of a multitude of nations,” he remained chiefly the father of Aram.²³⁷

The practical lesson here is this: Although, as heirs of Abraham, we have the power and the obligation to positively influence the entire world, we must remember that our primary responsibility is to influence the immediate locale in which Divine providence has placed us—to be “the father of Aram,” and only then

“father of the world.”²³⁸

10 **Circumcise every male:** Circumcision was the first commandment given to the first Jew; it is likewise the first commandment performed in our times by every male Jew. This is because many elements of this commandment serve to shed light on our understanding of the other commandments:

- (a) Circumcision effects a physical change in the body. Similarly, the performance of every commandment affects the body physically, even though we may not be able to perceive it.
- (b) Although the primary benefit of circumcision is spiritual, it also has health benefits.²³⁹ Similarly, the primary benefit of all the commandments is spiritual, but they all have secondary health benefits, too.
- (c) Circumcision causes pain to the child, but he re-

233. See *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 25, p. 62, note 6. 234. Above, 11:26. 235. Rashi on 28:21, below. 236. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 25, p. 69. 237. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 25, p. 65. 238. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 25, p. 69. 239. See *Otzar Yisrael* on circumcision.

ONKELOS

11 וְתַגְדִּירֶנּוּ ית בְּשָׂרָא דְעָרְלָתְכוֹן וַיְהִי לָאֵת קָיָם בֵּין מִימְרֵי וּבִינְיָכוֹן: 12 וּבֵר תַּמְנִיָּא יוֹמִין יְגִזֹּר לְכוֹן כָּל דְּכוּרָא דְדִרְיָכוֹן יִלִּיד בֵּיתָא וּבִין כִּסְפָּא מִכָּל בֵּר עֲמֻמִּין דִּי לֹא מִבְּנִיָּד הוּא: 13 מְגִזֹּר יְגִזֹּר יִלִּיד בֵּיתָא וּבִין כִּסְפָּא וַיְהִי קִנְיָמִי בְּבִשְׂרָכוֹן לְקִים עֲלֵם: 14 וְעָרַל דְּכוּרָא דִּי לֹא יְגִזֹּר ית בְּשָׂרָא דְעָרְלָתָהּ וַיִּשְׁתַּיְצִי אֲנָשָׁא הָהוּא מֵעַמָּה ית קִנְיָמִי אֲשֵׁנִי: 15 וְאָמַר יִי לְאַבְרָהָם שָׂרִי אֲתָתָךְ לֹא תִקְרִי ית שְׁמָהּ שָׂרִי אֲרִי שָׂרָה שְׁמָהּ:

11 וְנִמְלָתֶם אֶת בֶּשֶׂר עָרְלַתְכֶם וְהָיָה לְאוֹת בְּרִית בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם: 12 וּבֶן־שְׁמֹנֶת יָמִים יִמּוֹל לָכֶם כָּל־זָכָר לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם יִלְיָד בֵּית וּמִקְנֵת־כֶּסֶף מִכָּל בֶּן־זָכָר אֲשֶׁר לֹא מִזֶּרְעָהּ הוּא: 13 הַמּוֹל יִמּוֹל יִלְיָד בֵּיתָהּ וּמִקְנֵת כֶּסֶף וְהָיְתָה בְּרִיתִי בִּבְשָׂרְכֶם לְבְרִית עוֹלָם: 14 וְעָרַל זָכָר אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִמּוֹל אֶת־בֶּשֶׂר עָרְלָתוֹ וְנִכְרְתָה הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַהִוא מֵעַמּוּיָה אֶת־בְּרִיתִי הַפֶּר: 15 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־אַבְרָהָם שָׂרִי אֲשֶׁתְּךָ לֹא־תִקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמָהּ שָׂרִי כִּי שָׂרָה שְׁמָהּ:

RASHI

שִׁמְפֶּרֶשׁ בְּמִסְכַּת שְׁבֻתָּא: 14 וְעָרַל זָכָר. כָּאֵן לְמִד שֶׁהִמְלִיָּה בְּאוֹתוֹ מְקוֹם שֶׁהוּא נִכָּר בֵּין זָכָר לְנִקְבָּה: אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִמּוֹל. מְשִׁינִיגֵעַ לְכָלֵּל עֲשִׂינִי, "וְנִכְרְתָהּ". אָבִיו אֵין עֲנוּשׁ עָלָיו כְּרַת, אָבִל עוֹבֵר בַּעֲשֵׂה: וְנִכְרְתָה הַנֶּפֶשׁ. הוֹלֵךְ עֲרִירִי וּמֵת קֶדֶם זְמַנּוֹ: 15 לֹא תִקְרָא אֶת שְׁמָהּ שָׂרִי. דְּמִשְׁמַע שָׂרִי לִי וְלֹא לְאַחֵרִים, "כִּי שָׂרָה" סֵתֵם "שְׁמָהּ", שֶׁתִּהְיֶה שָׂרָה עַל כָּל:

11 וְנִמְלָתֶם. כְּמוֹ "וְנִמְלָתֶם", וְהִנּוּן בּוֹ יִתְרָה לִיסוֹד הַנּוֹפֵל בּוֹ לְפָרְקִים, כְּמוֹ נִי"ן שֶׁל "נוֹשֶׁה" וְנו"ן שֶׁל "נוֹשֵׂא". "וְנִמְלָתֶם" כְּמוֹי"י: "וְנִשְׁאַתֶּם". אָבִל "יִמּוֹל" לְשׁוֹן יִפְעַל, כְּמוֹ "יַעֲשֶׂה" "יֵאבֵל": 12 וְיִלְיָד בֵּיתָהּ. שֶׁיִּלְדָתוֹ הַשְׁפָּחָה בְּבֵיתָהּ: וּמִקְנֵת כֶּסֶף. שֶׁקָּנָא מִשְׁנׁוּלָד: 13 הַמּוֹל יִמּוֹל יִלְיָד בֵּיתָהּ. כָּאֵן כָּפַל עָלָיו וְלֹא אָמַר לְשִׁמּוּנָה יָמִים, לְלַמֶּדֶךְ שֶׁיִּשׁ יִלְיָד בֵּית נִמּוֹל לְאַחֵר שְׁמֻנָּה יָמִים, כְּמוֹ

110. בראשית מה, יט. 111. קלה, ב.

CHASIDIC INSIGHTS

mandment that embodies the empirical synthesis of spirit and matter: the holy deed becomes one with the physical flesh. (This is also why circumcision is painful and why this pain is inexorably intertwined with the deed itself, which is also why the use of anesthesia is prohibited).²⁴⁹

It is not readily understood why experiencing pain should be a requisite of a Divine commandment, especially the first one to be given to Abraham. Furthermore, one would think that Abraham would have been so elated to be performing his first Divine commandment that he would have been oblivious to the pain.²⁵⁰ Yet he did experience pain,²⁵¹ and even fell ill

from it.²⁵²

The answer is that circumcision is a commandment that is meant to permeate the physical flesh of the human being, whose nature is to feel pain. So although Abraham could have remained oblivious to the pain, he chose not to, since otherwise his circumcision would not have effected a true union of spirit and matter.²⁵³

15 For Sarah, meaning 'princess' in general, is her name: Although both Abraham's and Sarah's names connote dominion over the nations, they each fulfilled their new roles in different ways. Abraham is called "a father of nations," whereas Sarah is called "a sovereign."

A CLOSER LOOK

[12] When he is eight days old: In general, we become obligated to perform the Torah's commandments only when we reach legal maturity in Jewish law (the age of *bar* or *bat mitzvah*). This is because before the age of maturity, children do not understand the implication of their actions and therefore cannot be obligated to act a certain way nor held responsible when they do not. True, parents are required to train their young children to observe the commandments, but only in educational

preparation for mandatory performance once reaching the age of legal maturity—and therefore only once they are old enough to be educated.

Circumcision is the only commandment performed on an infant. The reason for this is that one of the objectives of circumcision is to subdue our innate coarseness and hedonistic instinct.²⁵⁴ It is therefore applicable even to a young child, since even a newborn possesses an animalistic instinct²⁵⁵ that needs to be weakened and subdued.²⁵⁶

247. Shabbat 130a. 248. Reshimot 26. 249. See Likutei Sichot, vol. 10, p. 48. 250. See Shulchan Aruch HaRav, Orach Chaim 288:3. 251. Bereishit Rabbah 47:9. 252. 18:1, below. 253. Sefer HaSichot 5749, vol. 1, p. 45. 254. Guide to the Perplexed 3:49. 255. See 8:21, above. 256. Likutei Sichot, vol. 4, p. 1249. See also on 17:18, below.

11 You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin, and this shall be a covenantal sign between Me and you.

12 Throughout your generations, every male among you shall be circumcised when he is eight days old—including a servant born to a handmaid in your household, as well as anyone bought for money from a stranger as a bondman, who is not one of your descendants.

13 However, although anyone born in your household or bought with your money shall surely be circumcised, a purchased bondman should be circumcised immediately upon purchase, even if he is older or younger than eight days old. My covenant shall thus be in your flesh as an everlasting covenant.

14 An uncircumcised male who does not circumcise his foreskin before he reaches legal maturity—that soul shall be cut off from his people: he shall die prematurely and childless, for he has breached My covenant."

15 God said to Abraham, "Regarding Sarai, your wife—you shall not call her anymore by the name Sarai, meaning 'My princess,' the ruler of only my kingdom, for Sarah, meaning 'princess' in general, is her name. Like you, she shall be the progenitor of many nations. Unlike you, however, I will *remove* the letter from her name that is unrelated to its new meaning. In your case, the fact that you remain the ruler of Aram does not limit your greatness; in her case, the implication of 'My princess' is that she is *only* 'My princess'; therefore, I must remove the letter *yud* from her name. But in the future I will add it to the name of another leader of the Jewish people.²⁴¹

❧ CHASIDIC INSIGHTS ❧

acts by screaming because he does not understand the value of what is being done to him. Similarly, fulfilling other commandments at times entails toil and hardships, but the more we appreciate the lofty effect of the commandment, the more oblivious we become to any attendant discomfort or inconvenience.

(d) The Jewish people accepted upon themselves the

commandment of circumcision with joy; they actually gave up their lives for it in times of religious persecution.²⁴² Similarly, we should fulfill all the commandments with joy and be willing to give up anything to do so.²⁴³

13 My covenant shall be in your flesh: God chose circumcision as the commandment that would prefigure the Giving of the Torah, since it is the only com-

❧ A CLOSER LOOK ❧

[10] Circumcise every male: Our present-day obligation to circumcise our sons does not stem from God's command to Abraham, but rather from God's command to Moses at Mount Sinai, like *all* the Torah's commandments—even those practiced by our forebears before the official Giving of the Torah.²⁴⁴ God's instructions to observe these commandments did not yet transform Abraham's family into the Jewish *people*—it only made them into a special subset of Noahides.²⁴⁵

Nevertheless, in the case of circumcision, we find even today that the act is very much associated with Abraham. In fact, after a circumcision is performed, the father of the baby recites a blessing that refers to circumcision as the commandment to

bring our sons into the covenant that God made with Abraham. This is due to the uniqueness of the commandment of circumcision: although our *obligation* stems from God's command to Moses at Sinai, the *nature* of the commandment is identical to its nature as it was performed by Abraham. Unlike other commandments associated with pre-Sinai events,²⁴⁶ the connection of circumcision to Abraham is not merely one incidental aspect of the commandment; it is its very essence.

This explains why most of the detailed laws regarding circumcision are derived from the command given to Abraham,²⁴⁷ and *not* from the command as given to Moses at Mount Sinai.²⁴⁸

241. See Numbers 13:16. Rashi on v. 5, above; *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 25, p. 65. 242. Maimonides, *Commentary on the Mishnah*, Chulin 7:6. 243. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 5, p. 7. 244. Such as the prohibition on eating the sciatic nerve (32:33, below) or the commandment to dwell in huts on Sukot (Leviticus 23:43). 245. *Kidushin* 29a. 246. Leviticus 12:3. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 30, pp. 53-56.

ONKELOS

16 וְאֶבְרָרָה יְתֵה וְאָף אֶתָּן מִנֶּה לָךְ
בְּרִי וְאֶבְרָכְנָה וְתֵהִי לְכַנְשֵׁין מַלְכִין
דְּשְׁלִיטִין בְּעַמְמִיָּא מִנֶּה יְהוֹן:
17 וְנִפְל אֶבְרָהֶם עַל אֶפְדֵּי וְחָדִי
וְאָמַר בְּלִבָּה הִלְכֵר מֵאָה שְׁנִין יְהִי
וְלֵךְ וְאִם שָׂרָה הִבֵּת תִּשְׁעִין שְׁנִין
תְּלִיד: 18 וְאָמַר אֶבְרָהֶם קָדָם יְיָ לֵוי
יִשְׁמַעְעָל יִתְקִים קְדָמָךְ: 19 וְאָמַר
יְיָ בְּקוֹשְׁטָא שָׂרָה אֶתְתָּךְ תְּלִיד לָךְ
בְּרִי וְתִקְרִי יֵת שְׁמָה יִצְחָק וְאָקִים
יֵת קְדָמִי עֲמָה לְקִים עֲלִים לְבִנְהִי
בְּתִרְוָה:

RASHI

תולדותיהם בני ששים ובני שבעים: 18 לוֹ יִשְׁמַעְעָל
יְהִי. הַלּוֹאִי שִׁיחִיה יִשְׁמַעְעָל, אִינִי כְּדָאִי לְקַבֵּל מִתָּן
שְׂכָר כְּזֶה: יְהִי לִפְנֵיהֶ. יְהִי בִּירְאָתָךְ, כְּמוֹ: "הִתְהַלֵּךְ
לִפְנֵי" — "פִּלַּח קְדָמִי": 19 אָבֵל. לְשׁוֹן אֲמַתָּה דְּבָרִים,
וְכֵן: "אָבֵל אֲשָׁמִים אֲנִיכֵן", "אָבֵל בֶּן אֵין לָהּ": וְקִרְאָתָ
אֶת שְׁמוֹ יִצְחָק. עַל שֶׁם הַצְּחֻק, וַיֵּשׂ אוֹמְרִים: עַל שֶׁם
עֲשָׂרָה נְסִיוֹנוֹת, וְתִשְׁעִים שָׁנָה שֶׁל שָׂרָה, וּשְׁמוֹנֶה יָמִים
שֶׁנִּמּוֹל, וּמֵאָה שָׁנָה שֶׁל אֶבְרָהֶם: וְהִקְמַתִּי אֶת בְּרִיתִי.
לְמָה נֶאֱמַר, הֲרִי כְּבָר כְּתִיב: "וְאֵתָה אֶת בְּרִיתִי תִשְׁמֹר,
אֶתָּה וְיִרְעָךְ" וְגו' אֵלָּא, לְפִי שְׁאוֹמֵר: "וְהִקְמַתִּי" וְגו',
יְכוֹל בְּנִי יִשְׁמַעְעָל וּבְנֵי קְטוֹרָה בְּכָלֵל הַקִּיּוֹם, תִּלְמוּד
לִזְמַר: "וְהִקְמַתִּי אֶת בְּרִיתִי אִתּוֹ", וְלֹא עִם אֲחֵרִים. וְאֵת
בְּרִיתִי אָקִים אֶת יִצְחָק, לְמָה נֶאֱמַר? אֵלָּא, לְמֹד שֶׁהִיא
קְדוּשָׁה מְבֻשָּׁט. דְּבָר אַחֵר: אָמַר רַבִּי אַבָּא: מִכָּאֵן לְמִדָּ קַל
וְחֹמֶר בֶּן הַגְּבִירָה מִכָּן הָאֵמָה, כְּתִיב: "הִנֵּה בְּרִכְתִּי
אִתּוֹ וְהִפְרִיתִי אִתּוֹ וְהִרְבִּיתִי אִתּוֹ", זֶה יִשְׁמַעְעָל, וְקַל
וְחֹמֶר "וְאֵת בְּרִיתִי אָקִים אֶת יִצְחָק": אֶת בְּרִיתִי. בְּרִית
הַמִּילָה תֵּהֵא מְסוּרָה לְזִרְעוֹ שֶׁל יִצְחָק:

112. בראשית יח, יב. 113. בראשית כא, ז. 114. שמואל ב, כז. 115. יחזקאל ח, ו. 116. בראשית יז, א. 117. בראשית מב, כא. 118. מלכים ב ד, יד.
119. בראשית יז, ט. 120. בראשית יז, כ.

CHASIDIC INSIGHTS

becomes his primary heir?

We find two main differences in the early childhood years of Abraham's two sons. Firstly, Ishmael was born under natural circumstances, whereas Isaac's birth was entirely miraculous. Secondly, Ishmael was circumcised at thirteen, an age at which he was fully capable of comprehending the significance and implications of the act, whereas Isaac was circumcised as an infant, before his conscious mind could even grasp its importance.

Therein lies the primary difference between the two sons: Ishmael's birth and spiritual development followed a natural and logical order. His connection to God hinged on his own understanding. Isaac, who was conceived and born by Divine intervention, was circumcised at eight days of age, signifying that his eter-

nal bond to God was immutable, transcending reason and nature.

God therefore chose Isaac be the forebear of the Jewish people. Isaac's early life encapsulates the unique bond between God and the Jewish people, a bond that is eternal and unalterable, not subject to the capriciousness of human nature or rationality.

Isaac's upbringing serves as the model for Jewish education. It demonstrates that a Jewish child should be raised from birth to live a Godly, spiritual life. We must not wait idly for the children to grow up, allowing them to develop their commitment to Judaism based on their own understanding. For as Isaac's life teaches us, the Jewish people's connection to God is entirely supra-natural and not bound by the limitations of human intellect.²⁶¹

260. See above, 16:1. 261. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 1, pp. 4-7.

16 I will bless her by restoring her youth to her, **and will also give you a son from her. I will also bless her** with abundant lactation.²⁵⁷ **She will give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall issue from her."**

17 Abraham threw himself on his face in joy **and laughed in joy, saying to himself**, "Previous generations indeed procreated at such an advanced age. But nowa-days, were it not for God, **would a child be born to a man of a hundred?! And would Sarah, at ninety, give birth?!"**

18 And Abraham said to God, "I am unworthy of such a miracle. I would be content if **only Ishmael would live in awe of You** and succeed me!"

19 God said, "Still, **Sarah your wife will indeed bear you a son, and you shall name him Isaac** [*Yitzchak*—'will laugh']. The numerical values of the letters of his name allude to the 10 trials by which I will test you (*yud*), the 90 years of Sarah's age (*tzadik*), the 8 days from Isaac's birth until his circumcision (*chet*), and the almost-100 years of your age (*kuf*)."

Letter	Numerical Value	Allusion
י (<i>Yud</i>)	10	Ten tests
צ (<i>Tzadik</i>)	90	Sarah's age
ח (<i>Chet</i>)	8	Days to circumcision
ק (<i>Kuf</i>)	100	Abraham's age

❧ CHASIDIC INSIGHTS ❧

Sovereigns remain aloof from their subjects and in fact wield their influence by virtue of this very aloofness; the majesty of their office and its absolute power inspires their subjects with awe and submission. A father, by contrast, is very much connected to and involved with his children; he serves as an authority figure, a role model, and an educator.

Abraham fulfilled his mandate to influence people via direct interaction with them, inducing them (either persuasively or, when that didn't work, coercively) to keep God's laws and behave ethically. Sarah, in contrast, fulfilled her mandate to influence others indirectly via personal example and by virtue of her awe-inspiring righteousness. This latter mode of influence was also employed by King Solomon, who affected the nations of the world—without ever leaving his palace—by virtue of the reputation of his wisdom, as exemplified in the episode with the Queen of Sheba.

When God gave the Torah to the Jewish people, in addition to the commandments which are incumbent on us as Jews, He also obligated us to teach non-Jews the specific laws incumbent upon them. Minimally, this means prevailing upon them to simply do what is required of them; optimally, this means convincing them to do so because God commanded them to do so through the Torah. Abraham's method of direct influence generally succeeds in convincing them to accept the laws incumbent upon them, but does not neces-

sarily convince them that they are required to do so because God promulgated these laws at Mount Sinai. In contrast, Sarah's method of indirect influence so profoundly inspires non-Jews with the wisdom and holiness of the Torah and the Jewish people that they instinctively recognize the need to accept the Noahide code of laws because God commanded them to do so at Mount Sinai.

The influence of the Jewish people on the non-Jewish world will come to its ultimate fruition in the messianic era, when both modes of influence will operate in tandem: First, the Messiah will condition the entire world to serve God together²⁵⁸ through direct interaction with them. But at a later stage, when the world's utopian conditions will allow the Jewish people to pursue Divine wisdom and holiness in accordance with God's original plan for them, humanity in general will become profoundly inspired by the Jewish people's example, and, as Maimonides so eloquently puts it, "the sole pursuit of the entire world will be to know God."²⁵⁹

18 If only Ishmael would live in awe of You: Upon being informed of the impending birth of Isaac, who was to become the forefather of the Jewish nation, Abraham prayed to God that Ishmael rectify his ways and thus be deserving of that lofty role. Abraham's plea seems quite reasonable, considering that Ishmael had already been born and would be older than Isaac.²⁶⁰ Why indeed did God not heed Abraham's pleas that Ishmael

257. See below, 21:7. 258. *Mishneh Torah, Melachim* 11:4. 259. *Mishneh Torah, Melachim* 12:5. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 35, pp. 97-100.

ONKELOS

20 ועל ישמעאל קבילית צלותך
הא בריכות יתה ואפיש יתה
ואסגי יתה לחדא לחדא תרי עשר
רברבין יוליד ואתנגנה לעם סגי:
21 וית קימי אקים עם יצחק די
תליד לך שרה לזמנא הדין בשתא
אחרנתא: 22 ושיצי למללא עמה
ואסתלק יקרא דיין מעלווהי
דאברהם:

20 וְלִישְׁמַעֲאֵל שְׁמַעְתִּיךָ הִנֵּה | בְּרַכְתִּי אֹתוֹ וְהַפְרִיתִי
אֹתוֹ וְהִרְבֵּיתִי אֹתוֹ בְּמֵאד מְאֹד שְׁנַיִם-עָשָׂר נְשִׂאִים
יּוֹלִיד וְנִתְּתִיו לְגֹי גָדוֹל: 21 וְאֶת-בְּרִיתִי אָקִים אֶת-
יִצְחָק אֲשֶׁר תֵּלֵד לְךָ שָׂרָה לְמוֹעֵד הַזֶּה בַּשָּׁנָה הָאַחֲרֹת:
22 וַיִּבֶל לְדַבֵּר אֹתוֹ וַיַּעַל אֱלֹהִים מֵעַל אֲבָרָהָם:

RASHI

ולמדנו, שהצדיקים מרכבתו של מקום:

20 שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר נְשִׂאִים. כַּעֲנָנִים יָכְלוּ, כְּמוֹ²⁶⁷: "נְשִׂאִים
וְרוּחַ": 22 מֵעַל אֲבָרָהָם. לְשׁוֹן נִקְדָּה הוּא כְּלָפִי שְׂכִינָה,

121. משלי כה, יד.

INNER DIMENSIONS

[continued...] moods, we can rise above these personal preferences by remaining true to our Divine mission consistently throughout the year.

There are three dimensions to physical space, which is typically represented by a cube. It takes twelve lines to draw a cube, just as the year has twelve months. Although space is normally the way we define ourselves and territorially separate ourselves from each other, the challenge of Torah-life is to rise above this divisive self-orientation and see the inner dimension which we all have in common and unites us all.

Similarly with regard to personality, *Sefer Yetzirah* defines twelve basic human senses which give rise to the basic personality types, which in turn give rise to twelve archetypal approaches of forging a relationship with God and fulfilling our purpose on earth. Our task here, too, is to learn how to function harmoniously with all types of people. Again, we can only do this if we rise above our personal, self-serving interests.

As such, the number twelve figured prominently in the operation of the Temple. There were twelve loaves of showbread, the High Priest's breastplate contained twelve gems, and the names of the twelve tribes were inscribed on the gems on his shoulders. When the Tabernacle (the precursor of the Temple) was dedicated, most of the offerings were twelve in number. The Midrash²⁶⁷ points out that this was in order that the twelve signs of the zodiac, the twelve months, the twelve tribes, and the twelve principle organs and limbs of the body all be reflected in the Tabernacle.

It was known among humanity, therefore, that the Temple would be built by a people whose progenitors consisted of a family-unit of twelve sons.

The Midrash tells us that God originally intended Adam himself to have twelve sons.²⁶⁸ Throughout the early generations of humanity, we see that major figures aspired to realize this goal: After Nachor, Abraham's brother, had eight sons by his wife Milkah, he took a concubine and had another four sons by her.²⁶⁹ Ishmael had twelve sons.²⁷⁰ Jacob's wives knew that he was destined to have exactly twelve sons, and that is why Leah prayed that her seventh child be a girl. Since Bilhah and Zilpah had already had two children each, she wanted her sister Rachel to have at least as many sons as they did. Later, when Jacob thought that Joseph had been killed, this led him to believe that he could no longer be the father of twelve sons who could found the Jewish people, and that therefore, having failed to fulfill his purpose in life, he would have to undergo Purgatory.²⁷¹

The reason Jacob merited being the one to establish the nuclear family of the Jewish nation was that he personified and embodied the attribute of selflessness and therefore was able to instill selflessness in his children. When Jacob said to God, "I am no longer worthy due to all the kindness You have done for me,"²⁷² it was because his selflessness made God's display of favor to him make him feel even more unworthy.²⁷³ He thus epitomized the selflessness that is both the key to rectifying reality and the defining attribute of the holy Temple.²⁷⁴

267. *Bemidbar Rabbah* 14:18. 268. *Bereishit Rabbah* 24:5. 269. Genesis 22:20-24. Perhaps it was out of this desire to father twelve sons that Abraham remarried Hagar (Keturah) after Sarah's passing and had more children (Genesis 25:1 ff). 270. Genesis 17:20, 25:13-16. 271. Genesis 37:35. 272. Genesis 32:11. 273. *Igeret HaKodesh* 2. 274. *Likutei Torah* 3:94ab; *Or HaTorah*, *Bereishit*, p. 15 ff, *Bo*, pp. 254-255; *Derech Mitzvotecha* 125b, etc.

“And although it may seem that I applied My covenant to *all* your descendants,²⁶² including Ishmael’s offspring and any other children you may ever father through any woman other than Sarah,²⁶³ I now clarify that **I will maintain My covenant only with Isaac as an everlasting covenant, for his descendants after him.**

20 Regarding Ishmael, I have heard you: I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful and extremely numerous. He will beget twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation. However, these twelve princes will enjoy only fleeting greatness,

21 for I will maintain My covenant with Isaac, whom you will conceive after your circumcision, and who will thus be holy when **Sarah will bear him to you at this time next year.** Only Isaac’s descendants will be required to circumcise themselves, and just as I promised to multiply Ishmael’s descendants, I will multiply Isaac’s to an even greater degree.”

22 God was directly above Abraham when communicating with him, for Abraham effaced himself so thoroughly before God that he was a direct vehicle (or “chariot”) for the revelation of God’s presence in the world. **When He had finished speaking with him, God’s presence ascended from resting above Abraham.**

∞ CHASIDIC INSIGHTS ∞

19 Ten tests: Abraham was (1) forced to hide for thirteen years from Nimrod, who sought to kill him; (2) thrown into a fiery furnace at Ur of the Kasdites for refusing to bow to an idol; (3) told by God to leave his native land; (4) confronted with a famine in the land to which God had instructed him to go; (5) subjected to his wife Sarai being abducted to Pharaoh’s palace; (6) subjected to his nephew Lot being taken captive; (7) informed by God that his descendants would be enslaved and exiled; (8) commanded by God to circumcise him-

self and his sons; (9) instructed by God to banish Hagar and Ishmael; (10) commanded to sacrifice Isaac.²⁶⁴

These ten tests corresponded to Abraham’s ten soul-powers. His success at passing all these tests demonstrated that Abraham was subservient to God not just selectively, but with all the powers of his soul.²⁶⁵

As the heirs of Abraham’s legacy, we should also expect to be confronted with tests as a matter of course. But we should also rest assured that we have inherited the power to overcome them, as well.²⁶⁶

∞ INNER DIMENSIONS ∞

[20] He will beget twelve princes: When God expelled Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, He told them that humanity would at some point be restored to its intended, idyllic spiritual level, and that this would entail the construction of a Temple that would channel the Divine presence into the world, just as the Garden of Eden had.

Inasmuch as the Temple was to serve as the “lightning rod” that would draw the Divine Presence into the world, it would have to be both a microcosm and a model of the world around it, reflecting the spiritual and physical makeup of the world in their rectified state. It would be the model of the ordered and stable holiness built out of the ruins of the shattered, chaotic world (*Tohu*) that remained in the wake of the primordial sin. The key to this rectification process is selflessness.

We are taught in *Sefer Yetzirah* that reality exists in three dimensions: time, space, and soul. (When we count space as three dimensions, as we normally do, time is counted as the fourth dimension and “soul” as the fifth.) In order to make the world into God’s true home, we must rectify each of these dimensions, making them expressions of our selfless devotion to God rather than of our self-serving pursuits. This rectification process, for each of these dimensions, is indicated by the number twelve:

The all-encompassing unit of time is the year. In Hebrew, the word for “year” (*shanah*) is derived from the root which means “change,” since the year is defined as the time it takes for all the seasonal and monthly changes to run their course before beginning again. Although we all have personal preferences for particular months and their associated

²⁶² V. 9, above. ²⁶³ See 25:1 ff, below. ²⁶⁴ Rashi on *Avot* 5:3. ²⁶⁵ *Torat Shmuel* 5626, p. 116. See also Maharal on *Avot* 5:3 regarding the ten generations between Adam and Noah. ²⁶⁶ *Sichot Kodesh* 5737, vol. 2, pp. 188-190.

— ONKELOS —

23 וְדַבֵּר אֲבָרְהָם יֵת יִשְׁמָעֵאל בְּרָהּ וְיֵת כָּל יְלִידֵי בֵּיתָהּ וְיֵת כָּל זְבוּנֵי כֶסֶף כָּל דְּכוּרָא בְּאַנְשֵׁי בֵּית אֲבָרְהָם וְגִזֹּר יֵת בְּשָׂרָא דְּעֶרְלָתָהּ בְּכָרִן יוֹמָא הַדִּין כְּמָה דִּי מְלִיל עֲמָה יֵי: 24 וְאַבְרָהָם בֵּר תִּשְׁעִין וְתִשְׁעִין שָׁנִין כִּד גִּזֹּר בְּשָׂרָא דְּעֶרְלָתָהּ: 25 וְיִשְׁמָעֵאל בְּרָהּ בֵּר תִּלְתַּת עֶשְׂרִי שָׁנִין כִּד גִּזֹּר יֵת בְּשָׂרָא דְּעֶרְלָתָהּ: 26 בְּכָרִן יוֹמָא הַדִּין אֲתִגְזֹר אֲבָרְהָם וְיִשְׁמָעֵאל בְּרָהּ: 27 וְכָל אָנְשֵׁי בֵּיתָהּ יְלִידֵי בֵּיתָא וְזְבוּנֵי כֶסֶף מִן בְּנֵי עַמְמָא אֲתִגְזֹרוּ עִמָּה:

23 וַיִּקַּח אֲבָרְהָם אֶת־יִשְׁמָעֵאל בְּנוֹ וְאֵת כָּל־יְלִידֵי בֵּיתוֹ וְאֵת כָּל־מִקְנֵת כֶּסֶפוֹ כָּל־זָכָר בְּאֲנָשֵׁי בֵּית אֲבָרְהָם וַיִּמָּל אֶת־בָּשָׂר עֶרְלָתָם בְּעֶצֶם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֱלֹהִים:

מפטיר 24 וְאַבְרָהָם בֶּן־תִּשְׁעִים וְתִשְׁעִי שָׁנָה בְּהִמְלֹו בָּשָׂר עֶרְלָתוֹ: 25 וְיִשְׁמָעֵאל בְּנוֹ בֶּן־שְׁלֹשׁ עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁנָה בְּהִמְלֹו אֶת בָּשָׂר עֶרְלָתוֹ: 26 בְּעֶצֶם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה נִמְּוֹל אֲבָרְהָם וְיִשְׁמָעֵאל בָּנוֹ: 27 וְכָל־אֲנָשֵׁי בֵּיתוֹ יְלִיד בָּיִת וּמִקְנֵת־כֶּסֶף מֵאֵת בֶּן־זָכָר נִמְּלוּ אִתּוֹ: פ פ פ

קבו"ו פטוקים. נמל"ו סימן. מנכבד"י סימן.

— RASHI —

"עמו". בראשית רבה¹²⁴: 25 בהמלו את בשר ערלתו. באברהם לא נאמר "את", לפי שלא היה חסר אלא חתוף בשר, שכבר נתמער על ידי תשמיש, אבל ישמעאל שהיה ילד הוזקק לחתוף ערלה ולפרע המילה, לכך נאמר בו "את". בראשית רבה¹²⁵: 26 בעצם היום הזה. שמלאו לאברהם תשעים ותשע שנה ולישמעאל שלש עשרה שנים, "נמול אברהם וישמעאל בנו": חסלת פרשת לך לך

23 בעצם היום. בו ביום שנצטוו. ביום ולא בלילה, לא נתיירא לא מן הגוים ולא מן הליצנים, ושלם יהיו אויביו ובני דורו אומרים: אלו ראינוהו, לא הנחנוהו למול ולקיים מצותו של מקום: וימל. לשון ויפעל: 24 בהמלו. בהפעלו, כמו¹²²: "בהבראם". נטל אברהם סבין ואחו בערלתו ורצה לחתף והיה מתירא, שהיה זקן, מה עשה הקדוש ברוך הוא, שלח ידו ואחו עמו, שנאמר¹²³: "וכרות עמו הברית", "לו" לא נאמר אלא

122. בראשית ב, ד. 123. נחמיה ט, ח. 124. מט, ב. 125. מז, ח.

— CHASIDIC INSIGHTS —

thy, indifference, and haughtiness that gets in the way of our true connection with God. Spiritual circumcision occurs in two ways: (a) through our own efforts, as in the verse, "Circumcise the foreskin of your hearts";²⁸² and (b) by an act on the part of God, as in the verse, "God will circumcise your heart."²⁸³ This latter aspect of circumcision, which will occur in its fullest sense only in the messianic age, obviously effects a much deeper and stronger transformation of our hearts.

These two types of spiritual circumcision are alluded to in the double expression used previously:²⁸⁴ "anyone born in your household or bought with your money

shall surely be circumcised," which literally reads, "circumcise, yes, you shall circumcise." On the contextual level, this expression refers to the two aspects of circumcision: cutting off the foreskin and peeling back the mucous membrane after the cut is made. Allegorically, it refers to the two levels of spiritual circumcision.²⁸⁵

Abraham wanted to attain the second level of spiritual circumcision. He therefore waited for an explicit command from God since, had he not waited, he would have only attained the first level. The use of the passive voice in this verse alludes to the fact that Abraham did indeed merit that his heart be circumcised by God.²⁸⁶

282. Deuteronomy 10:16. 283. Deuteronomy 30:6. 284. Verse 13. 285. *Hitva'aduyot* 5711, vol. 1, p. 37-38; see *Igeret HaKodesh* 4. 286. *Torah Or* 13ab.

23 Abraham consulted with his allies, the three Amorite brothers, Aner, Eshkol, and Mamre,²⁷⁵ about circumcising himself. Aner said to him, “You are almost a hundred years old. Why should you inflict this pain upon yourself?” Eshkol said to him, “Why should you go and make yourself distinguishable to your enemies?” But Mamre said to him, “God protected you in the fiery furnace, during the famine, and in your war with the kings. How can you not obey Him now?”²⁷⁶ **Abraham then took Ishmael his son, and all those born in his household, and all those he had bought for money—that is, every male among the people of Abraham’s household—and circumcised the flesh of their foreskins on the very same day on which God gave him the commandment, as God had spoken with him.** He performed the circumcisions in broad daylight, being afraid neither of the pagans nor the scoffers, and so that no one would be able to say that they would have prevented him from doing so had they seen him doing it.

24 After circumcising them, he circumcised himself.²⁷⁷ **Abraham was ninety-nine years old when the flesh of his foreskin was circumcised.** When he was about to circumcise himself, it suddenly occurred to him that he might not be able to hold the knife steadily because of his advanced age, so God steadied his hand. Since Abraham was already an old man, he did not have to peel back the upper layer of the foreskin, for it had already been worn away; all that was required was to cut the foreskin away.

25 In contrast, **Ishmael his son was only thirteen years old when the flesh of his foreskin was circumcised,** so the upper layer of his foreskin did have to be peeled back. To his credit, Ishmael did not cry out in pain when he was circumcised.²⁷⁸

26 **On the very day that Abraham turned ninety-nine and Ishmael turned thirteen, Abraham was circumcised, along with Ishmael his son,**

27 **and all the men of his household, whether home-born or bought for money from a stranger, were circumcised with him.**

The Haftarah for parashat Lech Lecha may be found on p. 338.



— CHASIDIC INSIGHTS —

23 **Abraham consulted with his allies:** Why would Abraham have needed anyone’s advice to follow God’s command?²⁷⁹

Abraham wanted his circumcision to be more than a personal, isolated event. He wanted this event, which would mark the beginning of the Jewish nation, to resonate within the world around him. Abraham therefore “consulted” with the leaders of his time in order to involve them and to demonstrate that they approved of the circumcision.²⁸⁰

26 **Abraham was circumcised:** The use of the passive voice, “*was circumcised*,” alludes to a deeper explanation as to why Abraham did not perform the commandment of circumcision until God commanded him to: Firstly, God waited until Abraham was ninety-nine years old before formalizing His covenant with him in order to allow him to demonstrate his willingness to circumcise himself even at such an advanced age.²⁸¹

From a more spiritual perspective, circumcision is the removal of the “foreskin of the heart,” the layer of apa-

275. Above, 14:13. 276. Rashi on 18:1; *Bereishit Rabbah* 14:8. 277. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 5, p. 77, note 5. 278. Rashi on 16:16, above. 279. See *Sifte Chachamim* and others. 280. *Hitva'aduyot* 5750, vol. 1, p. 359. 281. *Sichot Kodesh* 5741, vol. 1, p. 396.

Haftarah for Lech Lecha

Isaiah 40:27–41:16

Parashat Lech Lecha opens with God's call to Abraham to be a source of blessing for all humanity. In this *haftarah*, God reminds the exiled Jewish people that they are the heirs of Abraham's mission (41:8) and promises to give them the strength and inspiration to carry out their Divine mission.

40:27 Isaiah addresses the Jewish people in exile: **"Why, Jacob, do you say, and why, Israel, do you declare, 'My path of faithful obedience is hidden from God, and my cause is disregarded by my God, since He has given foreign nations dominion over us?'"** 28 **Do you not know? Have you not heard? God is the God of the world, Creator of the ends of the earth, who never tires or grows weary.** Clearly, since He has such power, **his wisdom cannot be fathomed** by mortal humans. He prolongs your suffering in order to atone for your sins. 29 **He gives strength to the faint and abounding power to the fatigued,** and so will He do for you one day. 30 **Your enemies, who are like vapid youths, will grow tired and weary; and your enemies, who are now strong like young men, will surely falter.** 31 **But you, who are those who hopefully wait for God will renew their strength, and will grow wings like eagles. They will run and not be weary; they will walk and not tire.**

41:1 **Let the nations of the world, who are like islands, listen to Me in silence** in order to hear My reproof clearly. **Let all the nations gather strength** to try to win their case by force. **Let them approach, then let them speak; together we will come forward for argument.** 2 **Who stirred up Abraham from Aram, in the east, whom righteousness accompanied at every step? It was He who delivered nations to him, and gave him dominion over Kedorlaomer's confederacy of kings. He made his sword smite them, casting the slain ones before him as numerous as grains of dust, and his bow smite them like wind-blown straw.** 3 **And he pursued them and passed on safely, even on paths his feet had never trodden.** 4 **Who performed and did all this for him? It was He who called the generations from Adam, the beginning: I, God, am the first to have come to humanity's aid miraculously; and for you, the last ones, I am He who will come to your aid, too, miraculously.** 5 **The nations of the world, who are like islands, shall see all the imposing deeds I will perform for you and become afraid; the ends of the earth tremble. Yet they will draw near to one another, to consolidate their forces, and come to do battle nonetheless.** 6 **Each one will help his neighbor and say to his brother, "Be strong,"** hoping that their gods will help them.

40:27 לָמָּה תֹאמַר יַעֲקֹב וְתִדְבֹּר יִשְׂרָאֵל
נִסְתַּתֶּרָה דְרָכִי מִיְהוָה וּמֵאֱלֹהֵי מִשְׁפָּטֵי יַעֲבֹר׃
28 הֲלוֹא יָדַעְתָּ אִם־לֹא שָׁמַעְתָּ אֱלֹהֵי עוֹלָם |
יְהוָה בּוֹרֵא קְצוֹת הָאָרֶץ לֹא יִיָּעַף וְלֹא יִיָּגַע אֵין
חֶקֶר לְתִבְנוּתוֹ׃ 29 נָתַן לַיָּעֹף כָּח וּלְאֵין אוֹיְבִים
עֲצָמָה יִרְבֶּה׃ 30 וַיַּעֲפּוּ נְעָרִים וַיִּגְעוּ וּבַחוּרִים
כָּשׁוּל יִכְשֹׁלוּ׃ 31 וְקוֹי יְהוָה יַחֲלִיפוּ כָח יַעֲלוּ
אֶבֶר בְּנִשְׁאָרִים יָרִיעוּ וְלֹא יִיָּגְעוּ וְלֹא יִיָּעֲפוּ׃
41:1 הַחֲרִישׁוּ אֵלַי אֲיִים וּלְאֻמִּים יַחֲלִיפוּ כָח
וַיִּגְשׁוּ אֹז וַיִּדְבְּרוּ יַחֲדוּ לְמִשְׁפָּט נִקְרְבָה׃ 2 מִי
הַעִיר מִמִּוֶּלֶת עֶדֶק יִקְרָאֻהוּ לְרַגְלוֹ יִתֵּן לְפָנָיו
גּוֹיִם וּמַלְכִּים יִרְדּוּ יִתֵּן כַּעֲפֹר חֲרָבּוֹ כְּקֶשֶׁת נִדְּף
כִּשְׁתּוֹ׃ 3 יִרְדָּפֻם יַעֲבֹר שָׁלוֹם אַרְחַ בְּרַגְלָיו לֹא
יָבוֹא׃ 4 מִי־פָעַל וַעֲשֶׂה כִּכֹּחַ הַדְּדוֹת מֶלֶךְ־אֵשׁ
אֲנִי יְהוָה רִאשׁוֹן וְאַתָּה־אֲחֵרִים אֲנִי־הוּא׃ 5 רְאוּ
אֲיִים וַיִּזְכְּאוּ קְצוֹת הָאָרֶץ יַחֲדָרוּ קִרְבּוֹ וַיִּאֲתִיּוּ׃
6 אִישׁ אֶת־רֵעֵהוּ יַעֲזֹר וּלְאָחִיו יֹאמַר חֲזֹק׃

7 The carpenter who fashions the idol encourages the goldsmith who covers it with gold, and he who smoothes it with the hammer encourages the one who strikes the anvil to forge an iron idol; he says of the soldering, "It is good," and reinforces the idol with nails so that it will not collapse.

8 But you, Israel, My servant; Jacob, whom I have chosen; the offspring of Abraham, who did not learn about Me from his fathers, but loved Me on his own; 9 You, whom I grasped and took for Myself from all the nations until the ends of the earth, and called from among its noblest peoples, saying to you, 'You are My servant; I have chosen you and called you My firstborn son;⁴ and not rejected you, as I rejected Esau';⁵ 10 Fear not, for I am with you; be not disheartened, for I am your God. I have strengthened you; I have helped you, and have indeed supported you with My righteous right hand. 11 All who were incensed against you will be shamed and disgraced; those who quarrel with you will be as nothing and will perish. 12 You will seek them, your men of strife, but you will not find them; those who battled against you will be as nothingness and naught. 13 For I am God, your God, who holds your right hand, and who tells you, "Fear not; I will help you."

14 Fear not, Jacob, even though you are weak as a worm, and your only power is prayer. Fear not, Israel, whose number is small, for I have helped you, declares God, your redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. 15 Behold, I am making of you a newly-grooved threshing disk used for cutting straw into small pieces, with many sharp teeth; you will thresh mountains, i.e., kings, and crush them, and turn hills, i.e., princes, into chaff. 16 You will winnow them; a wind will carry them away, and a storm-wind will scatter them to Purgatory. But as for you, you will rejoice in God and glory in the Holy One of Israel.

7 וַיְחַזֵּק חָרָשׁ אֶת-צֹרֶף מְחַלֵּיק פְּטִישׁ אֶת-
הוֹלֵם פָּעֵם אָמַר לְדָבֵק טוֹב הוּא וַיְחַזְּקוּהוּ
בְּמַסְמְרִים לֹא יָמוּט׃ 8 וְאַתָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל עֲבָדִי
יַעֲקֹב אֲשֶׁר בְּחַרְתִּידָּךְ זָרַע אֲבֹרָהֶם אֲהַבִּי׃
9 אֲשֶׁר הִחַזְקִיתִּידָּךְ מִקְצוֹת הָאָרֶץ וּמֵאֲצִילֶיהָ
קָרָאתִידָּךְ וָאָמַר לְךָ עֲבָדִי-אַתָּה בְּחַרְתִּידָּךְ וְלֹא
מֵאֲסָתִידָּךְ׃ 10 אֶל-תִּירָא כִּי עִמָּד־אֲנִי אֶל-
תִּשְׁתָּעַ כִּי-אֲנִי אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲמַצְתִּידָּךְ אֶף-עֲזָרְתִּידָּךְ
אֶף-תִּמְכָּתִידָּךְ בְּיָמִין צִדְקִי׃ 11 הֵן יִבְשׁוּ וַיִּבְלָמוּ
כָּל הַנִּחְרָזִים בְּךָ יְהוָה כְּאֵין וַיֹּאבְדוּ אֲנָשֵׁי רִיבָה׃
12 תִּבְקֶשֶׁם וְלֹא תִמְצָאֵם אֲנָשֵׁי מִצְתָּדָּךְ יְהוָה
כְּאֵין וּכְאֶפֶס אֲנָשֵׁי מִלַּחְמָתֶךָ׃ 13 כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה
אֱלֹהֶיךָ מִחֲנוּק יְמוּנָדָּךְ הָאָמַר לְךָ אֶל-תִּירָא
אֲנִי עֲזָרְתִּידָּךְ׃ 14 אֶל-תִּירָאִי תוֹלַעַת יַעֲקֹב מִתִּי
יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲנִי עֲזָרְתִּידָּךְ נָאִם-יְהוָה וְגִבָּלְךָ קָדוֹשׁ
יִשְׂרָאֵל׃ 15 הִנֵּה שְׂמִיתִידָּךְ לְמוֹרֵג חֲרוּץ חָדָשׁ
בַּעַל פִּיפְיוֹת תִּדְּוֹשׁ הָרִים וְתִדָּק וּנְבָעוֹת בְּמִין
תִּשָּׂאִים׃ 16 תִּזְרֹם וְרוּחַ תִּשְׁאָאֵם וּסְעָרָה תִּפְיִין
אֹתָם וְאַתָּה תִּגִּיל בִּיהוָה בְּקָדוֹשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל
תִּתְחַלֵּל׃



4. Exodus 4:22. 5. Malachi 1:3.

Dedicated in honor of our children

**Nathan, Yitzchok,
Moshe Lev,
and Gilana**

*May you continue to grow in the ways
of our holy Torah*

Yuri and Deana Pikover

