

CHEVRAH TORAH...5777

With HEART in MIND

MUSSAR Teaching to Transform the Text & Our Lives

Lech L'cha—Genesis 11:26-12:6

Pilpul HaTalmidim—Debating with Students

...Key KOSHI...

WHY Abraham?

HOW is Abraham a model of “Pil’pul”—with God, with the world, with himself?



P'SHAT...Studying Torah—Encountering The Word—The Will—The ONE

The truly wise individual is not one who has achieved wisdom but a *talmid chacham*—a wise student...one who is constantly learning—including by observing and reflecting on what can be learned from other people.

26] Terah had lived 70 years when he begot Abram, Nahor and Haran. 27] This is the chronicle of Terah: Terah begot Abraham, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran begot Lot. 28] Then Haran died in the presence of Terah his father, in the land of his birth, in Ur of the Chaldeans. 29] Then Abram and Nahor took wives: Abram's wife was named Sarai, and Nahor's wife was named Milcah daughter of Haran father of Milcah and of Yiscah. 30] And Sarai was barren; she had no offspring.

31] Then Terah took his son Abram and his grandson Lot son of Haran and his daughter-in-law sarai, and they all left Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan; but they got as far as Haran and settled there. 32] The years of Terah's life cam to 205; then Terah died in Haran.

Chapt. 12:1] The Eternal One said to Abram, “Go forth from your land, your birthplace, your father's house, to the land that I will show you. 2] I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and it shall be a blessing. 3] I will bless those who bless you, and I will pronounce doom on those who curse you; through you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” 4] So Abram went forth as the Eternal had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was 75 years old when he left Haran. 5] Abram took his wife Sarai, his brother's son Lot, all the possessions they had amassed, and the people they had acquired in Haran. They set forth for the land of Canaan, and they arrived in the land of Canaan. 6] Abram then traversed the land as far as the sacred site of Shechem, as far as the Oak of Moreh. (At that time the Canaanites were present in the land.)

וַיְחִיתֶרַח שְׁבַעִים שָׁנָה וַיֹּלֵד אֶת־אַבְרָם אֶת־נְחוֹר וְאֶת־הָרָן׃²⁶ וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת תְּרָח תְּרָח הוֹלִיד אֶת־אַבְרָם אֶת־נְחוֹר וְאֶת־הָרָן וְהָרָן הוֹלִיד אֶת־לוֹט׃²⁷ וַיָּמָת הָרָן עַל־פְּנֵי תְּרָח אָבִיו בְּאֶרֶץ מוֹלְדוֹתוֹ בְּאֹר כַּשְׂדִּים׃²⁸ וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָם וְנְחוֹר לָהֶם נָשִׁים שֵׁם אִשְׁת־אַבְרָם שָׂרַי וְשֵׁם אִשְׁת־נְחוֹר מִלְכָּה בַת־הָרָן אִבְי־מִלְכָּה וְאִבְי יִסְכָּה׃²⁹ וַתְּהִי שָׂרַי עֲקָרָה אֵין לָהּ וָלֵד׃³⁰ וַיִּקַּח תְּרָח אֶת־אַבְרָם בְּנוֹ וְאֶת־לוֹט בְּרֵהוּן בְּרָבֻנוֹ וְאֶת שָׂרַי כַּלְתּוֹ אִשְׁת־אַבְרָם בְּנוֹ וַיֵּצְאוּ אֹתָם מֵאֹר כַּשְׂדִּים לָלֶכֶת אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וַיָּבֹאוּ עַד־חָרָן וַיֵּשְׁבוּ שָׁם׃³¹ וַיְהִי יַמִּיתֶרַח חֲמִשׁ שָׁנָיִם וּמֵאתַיִם שָׁנָה וַיָּמָת תְּרָח בְּחָרָן׃³²

Chapt. 12

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־אַבְרָם לֵךְ מֵאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וּמִמּוֹלְדוֹתֶיךָ וּמִבְּיַת אָבִיךָ אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲרָאָךְ׃¹ וְאֶעֱשֶׂה לְךָ גֹּדֹל וְאַבְרָכְךָ וְאֶגְדְּלָהּ שְׁמִי וְהָיָה בְּרָכָה׃² וְאַבְרָכָה מִבְּרַכְיֶיךָ וּמִקְלָלֶיךָ אֲאֹר וְנִבְרַכְוּ בְּךָ כָּל מִשְׁפָּחַת הָאָדָמָה׃³ וַיִּלְכֵד אַבְרָם כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֱלֹהִים וַיֵּלֶךְ אִתּוֹ לוֹט וְאַבְרָם בְּרַחֲמֵשׁ שָׁנָיִם וְשִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה בְּצִאתוֹ מִחָרָן׃⁴ וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָם אֶת־שָׂרַי אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאֶת־לוֹט בְּרֵ אָחִיו וְאֶת־כָּל־רְכוּשָׁם אֲשֶׁר רָכְשׁוּ וְאֶת־הַנֶּפֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ בְּחָרָן וַיֵּצְאוּ לָלֶכֶת אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן׃⁵ וַיַּעֲבֹר אַבְרָם בְּאֶרֶץ עַד מְקוֹם שְׁכֵם עַד אֵלּוֹן מוֹרָה וְהַכְּנַעֲנִי אָז בְּאֶרֶץ׃⁶

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וַיְצַוֵּנוּ לַעֲסוֹק בְּדַבְרֵי תוֹרָה.
Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech haolam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu laasok b'divrei Torah.
Blessed are you, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, who hallows us with mitzvot, commanding us to engage with words of Torah.

REMEZ...Acquiring Torah...When Torah penetrates our entire being, not just our *seichel/intellect*, this is the acquisition of Torah. —R' Avi Fertig

11:31-32 *Terach took his son Avram, his grandson Lot...his daughter-in-law Sarai and they set out together from Ur for the Land of Canaan; but when they came as far as Haran, they settled there. The days of Terach came to 205 years, and Terach died in Haran.*

HERTZ... The death of Terach did not take place till more than 60 years after Avram left Haran, but it is recorded here to complete the story of Terach and so concentrate on the life of Avram.

ETZ HAYIM... The Torah must then be describing Terach here as 'spiritually dead,' having given his soul over to the worship of idols. [cf. B'reishit Rabbah, 39:7]

B'REISHIT RABBAH... R' Shimon Bar Yochai said: Our father Abraham—his own father did not teach him, nor did he have a master to teach him.. From whom, then, did Abraham learn Torah? It was the Holy One who provided him with reins that were like two pitchers overflowing, filling him with Torah and wisdom all through the night. R' Levi, however, said: Abraham learned Torah all by himself.

B'REISHIT RABBAH... When Avram was three years old, he went out of the cave [where his father hid him from King Nimrod...] and Avram wondered in his heart: Who created the heaven and the earth and me? So all that day Avram prayed to the sun. In the evening, the sun set in the West and the moon rose in the East. Upon seeing the moon and the stars surrounding, Avram said: This one must have created the heaven and the earth and me. So all night he prayed to the moon, but in the morning the moon sank and the sun rose...Then Avram said: There is no might in either of these. There must be a higher Lord unseen over them. To Him shall I pray...

12:1 *Then Adonai said to Avram: Go forth from your native land and from your father's house to the land that I will show you.*

J.P.S...."*Lech L'cha*" The preposition "L" gives the verb *HaLaCH*—to go additional force—of separating or taking leave from.

E.FOX... Although the text purports to be about "fathers," it is God himself who most consistently fits that role for the Genesis characters. God acts *in loco parentis* for each of the Patriarchs, always, significantly, after the loss of a human father. He first appears to Avraham after the death of Terach...

B'REISHIT RABBAH... Abraham's family used to make and sell images in the market. One day, it was Abraham's turn to sell in his father's shop....A woman came in carrying a bowl of fine flour and said: Here, offer it to the gods. At that, after she left, Abraham grabbed a stick, smashed all the idols except for one, and placed the stick in the hand of the biggest idol still remaining. When his father returned, he asked his son: Who did this to the gods? Abraham answered: Would I hide anything from my father? A woman came in with a bowl of fine flour, saying: Offer it up! When I offered it, one god declared: I will eat first! And another countered: No, I will eat first. Then the biggest of them rose up and smashed all the others to pieces. His father replied: Are you making fun of me? These gods cannot do anything! Abraham retorted: You say they cannot! Then, father, let your ears hear what your mouth is saying! ...So Terach took hold of his son and turned him over to Nimrod. King Nimrod asked Abraham: Do you know that I am the Lord of all the heavenly works—the sun, the moon and the stars? How dare you destroy the gods! In that instant, the Holy One gave Abraham the capacity to argue ingeniously, so that he answered Nimrod: It is the way of the world that the sun goes forth from the east and sets in the west. Tomorrow, bid the sun to go forth from the west and to set in the east, and I shall then bear witness that you are lord of the world...Nimrod summoned Terach and angrily asked: What judgment shall be imposed on your son Abraham who destroyed my divinity?....

R'S.R.HIRSCH... As soon as Avram appears, he stands in opposition to the spirit of the times. Amidst an idolatrous, immoral society...Avram willingly gives up all the family ties and closeness usually so dear...He becomes the bearer of God's message and throws a protest in the face of the gods worshipped by all the nations. This demands courage and deep conviction...This demands Jewish confidence and boldness—in short, the obstinacy, argumentativeness and persistence which characterizes the Jew.

D’RASH...*Helping the Heart feel what the Mind understands ...*

Prof. LEON KASS...

[*The Beginning of Wisdom*, pgs 251-252]

Pious tales of the patriarch regard him as a precocious monotheist even before God calls him, a man who smashed his father’s idols, a man who sprang forth fully obedient and knowledgeable about the ways of the Lord. But a careful reading of the biblical text shows otherwise: Abraham indeed goes to school, God Himself is his major teacher, and Abraham’s adventures constitute his education, right up to his final exam, the binding of Isaac.

To appreciate God’s education of Abraham, it is necessary to keep in mind the pre-Abrahamic, which is to say the natural and uninstructed, human condition and to see just what needs educating and why...These primordial stories have shown us why it will be extremely difficult to establish a better way of life for human beings. For they have exposed the perennial problems in human relations and laid bare their deep psychic roots...Those first eleven chapters have demonstrated the troubles within the household—between man and woman, between brothers, between parents and children—and the ever-present risks of patricide, fratricide, and misogyny.

By the time the careful reader has finished the first eleven chapters of Genesis, he is well-nigh convinced that mankind, left to its own devices, is doomed to failure, destruction, and misery. He hopes that there might be an alternative, a way of life different from the natural or uninstructed ways of men, a successful way in which mankind might flourish. According to the text, God more than shares the reader’s dismay as well as the reader’s hopes, and so decides to take a more direct role in the matter, beginning with Abraham. God Himself, as it were, will take Abraham by the hand, will serve as his tutor, and will educate him to be a new human being, one who will stand in right relation to his household, to other peoples, and to God—one who will set an example for countless generations, who, inspired by his story, will cleave to these righteous ways. Because of the moral education available to us through the first eleven chapters, when God calls Abraham we readers are also eager to listen.

MARTIN BUBER...

The establishment of humanity, the blessing of God, man’s fall, the decree of destruction, the preservation of a second humankind, and again, God’s blessing and man’s falling and the decree of division, all this was a prelude to the election of Abraham. And this second election is different from the first which took place before the Flood. The first had chosen one family for deliverance, whereas the second, taking place after the division in the world of nations, is the election of a new people, not yet existing—a people that must be yet generated. The man who was fetched out of the world of nations received the third blessing, which differs from the former two. The blessing of Adam and the blessing of Noah were natural, bestowing natural gifts, promising fertility, whereas this third blessing is dialogic, promising and demanding at the same time: promising the formation of a people and imposing the obligation of becoming a people, addressing the people in the person of its father and demanding of it/him to “*become a blessing.*” [Gen 12:2]

SOD...*Helping the soul-light shine...*

Practice doesn’t involve seeking some sort of spiritual generator to fill you with light, because all the holiness you need already lives within you. ...Practice focuses on recalibrating the soul-traits that are obstructing your soul’s light from shining into your life.

ALAN MORINIS...

There are famous examples where people engage God in argument, and these instances create the template for our own need to argue in order to discern the Divine Will. When God hears how sinful the people of Sodom and Gomorah had been, God reveals to Abraham that both cities and all their inhabitants will be destroyed. Abraham then challenges God not to “*sweep away the innocent with the guilty*” and proceeds to negotiate...The Torah describes Abraham as fully righteous but of Noah it says that he was “*righteous in his generation.*” Abraham is judged more righteous because when God threatened destruction, he argued, whereas Noah did not raise his voice. If arguing is how we work things out with God, how much more must argument have a vital role in sorting things out with other people?...

We find this illustrated in the story...

Rabbi Yochanan was the teacher of Reish Lakish: [Baba Metsia, 84a]

So much did the teacher value the arguments he had with his student that when Reish Lakish passed away, Rabbi Yochanan was inconsolable. He no longer came down to the assembly of scholars. So the Sages deliberated: Who can go to him and set his mind at ease? Let R' Eliezer ben Pedat go, since his knowledge of halacha is acute. So R' Eliezer ben Pedat sat down before the great sage, and whatever Rabbi Yochanan said, R' Eliezer would observe: There is a Baraitha that supports your position.

Finally, Rabbi Yochanan exclaimed: Do you think you are at all like Reish Lakish?

When I would state an opinion on a matter, Reish Lakish used to raise twenty-four objections, to which I would respond with twenty-four rebuttals, creating a debate that led to an expansion of and greater comprehension for the tradition. But all you can say is: There is a Baraitha that supports your position. As if I do not know on my own that what I said was correct!

Then Rabbi Yochanan stood up, rent his garments, and bursting into tears, cried out in anguish:

Where are you son of Lakish? Where are you....? He kept on crying in anguish until he went out of his mind. Then the Sages, seeing his suffering, besought Mercy on his behalf, and he died.

PRACTICE...

WHO is [or was] the person you can argue with and, as a result, learn about yourself and your world?

WHY is that debate so important/such a gift in our lives?

- ⌘ Consider HOW you can foster a more open-affirming-respectful dialogue of difference by the way you interact with the people who share your life....
- ⌘ WHAT do you need to do to make that divine dialogue real?.....