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Avraham Avinu

A Man Of Yesterday, A Role Model For Today

Commentary to Parashat Lekh L’kha

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Our holy Rabbis have taught us that “Ma’aseh Avot Siman LaBanim” (the deeds of the Patriarchs serve as guides to behavior for their children). The life, character, and personality of Avraham Avinu have become for us a role model of civil responsibility, social action, and spiritual maturity. Rather than address any specific pasukim of this parasha, I have chosen to expound upon Avraham Avinu, the man, and his accomplishments. Rather than quote specific midrashim and pasukim, I am instead culling from numerous sources in my attempt to present to you Avraham Avinu as the role model for us to follow today.

When all is said and done Avraham Avinu has to have been the most influential man to have ever lived. While being a powerful spiritual leader, Avraham Avinu was also an iconoclast and a rebel, a political outcast and a guerilla fighter. This man alone, without the help of country or kin is responsible for much of the present forms of both western and eastern civilizations. G-d, indeed, fulfilled His Divine promise to him when He said that he would become the father of many nations.

Avraham Avinu was not one who we would call “one of the crowd.” On the contrary, he stood out from the crowd and in a big way. He stood up for what he believed was right. He not only spoke out against what he viewed as immoral and improper behavior; he acted against it and rallied others to act against it as well. Avraham Avinu was nothing short of a revolutionary, one that was most unwelcome by the population of his country. Regardless of political correctness, Avraham Avinu continued his campaign against the ruling political powers of his day. Oral Torah teaches us that Avraham was arrested tried and condemned to death for treason by no less a person that Nimrod, the evil dictator. Avraham was miraculously saved (whereas Haran his brother also so condemned was not). The miraculous saving of his life added an extra spiritual depth to Avraham’s teachings and authority. This won for him many new adherents to his message.

While many are under the impression that Avraham was starting a new religion, this is most certainly not true. Avraham was actually continuing on an older religious path, one that the people of his day dismissed as old fashioned. This was the religion of old Noah and his son Shem. They lived far away in the city of Shalem. Avraham lived in Ur of the Chaldees, which at that time in history was the center of life, culture, and the arts. The land of Canaan was “the old country.” No one wanted to go there or associate with its old fashioned inhabitants. While some new arrivals to the area had modernized it (i.e., Sodom and

Gomorra), these were still little cities out in the desert (similar to modern day Las Vegas). The major urban areas of Chaldea could be compared to modern American metropolises. It was here that Avraham was active and it was from here that he had to leave. Avraham suffered cosmopolitan living until he could do no more in that environment. At that moment G-d called him out of there and sent him to the desert, the place where prophets are molded.

As a youth, Avraham discovered G-d on his own. He did not have any connection to Noah and Shem until much later in his life. Avraham's level of spiritual insight must have been intensely keen in order for him to have accomplished this. This is similar to Ba'alei Teshuva (late comers to Torah, i.e., repenters), who although raised in totally secular environments still respond to an inner arousal that calls them back to Torah. Many Gerim (converts) also experience this tugging in their hearts. Avraham Avinu, our holy Rabbanim say, was the first Ger. Later, while learning in Shem's yeshiva in Shalem, Avraham mastered the full scope and parameters of spiritual knowledge and truth. This again is another lesson for us, that regardless of what one feels or believes in one's heart, without a proper Torah education to fine-tune and direct such feelings and zeal, one will never accomplish greatness or even fulfillment.

Unlike Shem and his immediate followers, Avraham was not content to know the truth for himself. He wanted to tear the blinders off the blind eyes of the members of his generation. Avraham was dedicated to challenging the idolatrous religions of his day. He viewed the idolatry of his day as been a pitifully immature form of spirituality that psychologically enslaved its believers into unrealized potential. This left mankind being weak minded and thus subject to manipulation by others. The idolatry of astrology, similar to the Hindu idolatry called karma is a case in point. These systems teach that either the stars or one's predestinated fate will decide what a person will do with their lives, what potentials they have and what destinies that cannot avoid. Avraham correctly taught that such limitations are not ordained from Heaven, but are self-imposed by self-serving manipulative men.

In order to instruct the members of his generation, Avraham wrote for them a 400-chapter book to educate them about the true parameters of "kosher" spirituality. Only a minor fragment six chapters long of this most remarkable text has survived. Arranged into its present format by none other than Rabbi Akiva, we today call this book the Sefer Yetzirah. Although today this text is a masterpiece of Kabbalistic literature, its original purpose was to teach non-Jews how to experience the true G-d. (Those familiar with the text know that it is a guide to mystical meditation. When used properly the text teaches its users how to experience spiritual reality. Such techniques were far more advanced than anything else in Avraham's day. By showing people how they themselves individually can experience G-d in kedusha (holiness), the pull towards primitive, immature unclean idolatries would forever be broken. This was Avraham's plan. However, after the births of Yishmael and Esav, the book was concealed by Yitzhak and given exclusively to Yaakov and his sons). Even in its present form, the Sefer Yetzirah can serve as a remarkable guide to the sincere Ben Torah and Benei Noah (righteous gentile). The text, when studied sincerely and in depth, in complement to full mitzvah observance, each at their own level, can provide a tremendous amount of information and spiritual practices that will enable souls, Jewish and Benei Noah to repair and ascend.

Avraham's uncompromising zeal to bring Divine truth to the masses is what made him so beloved in G-d's Eyes. Avraham's soul bore within it all the necessary characteristics to

become the father of the special souls of HaShem's choosing, Yisrael. Someone had to start the dynasty. HaShem waited ten generations from Noah. Finally, the wait was over, now there was Avraham. According to the holy Zohar, there was a secret reason for Avraham being chosen by G-d. Avraham, the Zohar reveals, was none other than the reincarnation of Adam. As Adam was long ago chosen to do HaShem's work, yet failed, now he comes back to earth again as Avraham to accomplish the task.

After the battle with the kings, Avraham is greeted by Malkhitzedek, the King of Shalem. Avraham gives him a ma'aser (tithe) offering, eats and then goes his way. From the written text, this apparently is all that happened. Indeed, the Christian Bible is mystified by this encounter and created an entire ridiculous mythology upon the identity and role of Malkhitzedek. It is truly a shame that Avraham himself is not here to appropriately correct them of the errors of their ways. Nonetheless, we, the Jewish people, the children of Avraham, Yitzhak and Ya'akov are here to do so. May we endeavor to counter missionaries and cults with the zeal of Avraham our father!

Malkhitzedek, the Oral Torah teaches us, was none other than Shem Ben Noah himself. Avraham knew well his old teacher and recognized to give him the tithe for HaShem. More than this, Shem Malkhitzedek blessed Avraham and this blessing is what changed the world. Shem was the Kohen, the priest for all mankind to El Elyon (Supernal G-d, which is what HaShem was called before He revealed to mankind through Moshe Rabbeynu His Name YKVK). Shem was thus the High Priest for the Benei Noah. With this blessing, Shem was passed on this mantle of priesthood to Avraham Avinu. Avraham became the new Kohen Gadol.

Avraham passed on this priesthood to Yitzhak and Yitzhak to Ya'akov. Ya'akov passed it onto all his sons, with special emphasis on Levi. Therefore, at Mt. Sinai HaShem called the Jewish people, the children of Israel a nation of priests. Indeed this is true because they inherited the priesthood from Avraham Avinu.

The role of priest is to make peace between man and their Father in Heaven. The Jewish people accomplish this when we faithfully observe the mitzvot of the Torah. More than this the Jewish people were to serve as Kohanim, yet, to whom are they Kohanim? The answer to this is that Benei Yisrael serve as the Kohanim to the world to bridge the gap between man and G-d. For this was the Jewish people chosen, to be a "light to the nations".

In order for Benei Yisrael to accomplish our task, we must follow in the footsteps of Avraham Avinu and behave with his characteristics and pursue the same goals that he did. We must have the courage to publicly challenge what is wrong in the world. We must stand up for morality and religion. We must guide the Benei Noah in the ways of their mitzvot. We must condemn and seek to destroy the idolatries of today's world, which include much more than the false religions. We must have the courage to fight.

With all the challenges that we face we must never forget to exercise the attribute of mercy, for nothing else sums up the character of Avraham Avinu more than his mercy. Most of all, like Avraham Avinu we must not expect instant gratification. We must have faith that we are doing the right thing, regardless of appearances. G-d said it, we believe it, and we do it. That's it, there is no more. That is the faith of Avraham Avinu. G-d promised him to be the father of many nations and to inherit Eretz Yisrael. Avraham to his dying day never saw

either of these promises fulfilled. Nonetheless, he never doubted G-d for a minute. Although we have been promised many things, such as the coming of Mashiah, the rebuilding of the Temple and others, we must not lose faith either. We must not even stumble in our resolve. We must keep on fighting and doing the right thing, for this is the way of Avraham Avinu and of us, his children.

In light of modern events, each of us should strive to embody the attributes of Avraham Avinu, not just in word, but in deed. Each of us should become active in the political, social and business arenas to influence and if need be manipulate matters in a direction which is favorable to Torah and to those who observe its mitzvot.

We should all be outgoing, seeking out the lost Jew and entering into debate with him/her, challenging them, pushing them if need be, to return to a life of Torah and mitzvot.

Our children we should raise to be proud and strong Jews. Each and every Jewish child, boy and girl alike, should attend classes in martial arts and study hard to receive a black belt. Avraham Avinu was a fighter. He fought the enemies of G-d, so must we. As Anti-Semitism grows, martial arts training for our children becomes ever more important. For the sake of your children and their safety, be a warrior like Avraham Avinu and prepare your children. You will regret it later if you do not heed this warning!

Always act with mercy, but be prepared for war. Although we must coexist in the secular world, for commerce or other business reasons, each individual Torah observant Jew must become the dominant factor of influence in his environment instead of allowing the secular world to influence him. This requires of one a strong character, a confident personality, a resolve, a will and a mission to serve HaShem and conviction that Torah is right and will prevail over the foolish idolatries of today.

No one said that to be like Avraham Avinu was easy. Nevertheless, whatever it takes to be like him, we have it inside us, within our souls and within our genetics. The negative spiritual mutations within Avraham were sifted out into Yishmael and Esav. The Jewish people have retained the pure spiritual genes of holiness and righteousness.

It takes courage to admit we are a chosen people. It takes even more courage to act like one. Avraham had such courage. As his children so must we.