

[The Rav began the shiur by saying that he heard from his father that without the methodology of studying Talmud that was introduced by his grandfather Reb Chaim, it would be impossible today to study Halacha with students who are trained as scientists. The method of Reb Chaim is a most modern method that involves classification, conceptualization and definition, particularly to look for unity in Halacha. The problems need to be formulated and understood. The question and the answer are of secondary importance. This was also the method of Rabbi Akiva Eiger, a forerunner of Reb Chaim, whose children described his approach in similar terms. When it comes to the study of Tanach there was no Reb Chaim. We don't tend to look enough between the lines and get hold of the larger picture. The Ramban was unique in his ability to see and understand ideas in Chumash. His spiritual perceptions are exceptionally fine and sensitive to every word of Chumash. The Ramban contributed greatly to the philosophy of religion because he was original in his thoughts and approach to religion.]

ויאמר ד' אל אברם לך לך מארצך וממולדתך ומבית אביך ספר בראשית as ספר היצירה. It focuses on the creation of the world and mankind at the macro and micro levels. However its main subjects of the narrative are the life events of the patriarchs, concluding with the death of Joseph. The story of the patriarchs is important to us as their lives foreshadow what has and will happen to their descendants, specifically the Jewish People, throughout the ages. The events of ספר בראשית including the travel, exile and digging of wells is paradigmatic of what happened to us.

The sensational premise of the Ramban is that we may anticipate and correlate an event in Jewish History or destiny from a similar event recorded in ספר בראשית. Any event recorded as experienced by the patriarchs will never be invalidated and must occur at some point to their descendants. For example, the destruction of the 2 Temples are foretold by the 2 wells that Isaac dug and were obstructed by Philistines. In short, the experiences of the patriarchs pre-determined the future course of history.

Abraham is commanded to leave his homeland, birthplace and father's house and travel to an unknown destination, a foreign land that will be revealed to him during his journey. Rashi and the Chachmei Sefard disagree as to what is referred to by the terms מארצך וממולדתך ומבית אביך. Rashi and other commentaries are of the opinion that they refer to Ur Kasdim and not Charan. (Ramban disagrees). Abraham left Ur Kasdim long before he received the commandment of Lech Lecha. Rashi rearranges the order of the places referred to in the first verse of Lech Lecha. Even though Abraham already left Ur Kasdim his native land and

ancestral home that was subsequently established in Charan by his father Terach, Gd instructed him to distance himself even further from his ancestral home that was reestablished by Terach in Charan. According to Rashi, Terach left Ur Kasdim voluntarily. Abraham's further migration away from Charan came later.

Ibn Ezra disagrees with Rashi and rearranges the chronology and sequence of instructions mentioned in the verse based on the license of *אין מוקדם ומאוחר בתורה*. According to Ibn Ezra, Abraham was initially commanded to leave Ur Kasdim. The departure from Ur Kasdim was the initial leg of the journey for which Abraham was commanded by Gd. The reading of the verses should therefore be conceptually rearranged so that the opening verses of Lech Lecha are inserted before the verse of *ויקה תרה את אברם* at the end of Parshas Noach. The first phase of the migration was Terach leaving Ur Kasdim and settling in Charan. Lech Lcha begins phase 2 of the migration with Abraham leaving Charan and departing for Canaan.

Ramban rejected the approach of Ibn Ezra because the Torah refers to Terach, not Abraham, as the central figure in the migration from Ur Kasdim to Charan. According to bn Ezra, the Torah should have emphasized that Abraham took the initiative to leave, not Terach. Terach's decision to leave was spontaneous and apparently Abraham left with him out of obedience and not because of a divine commandment.

Were we to accept the opinion of the Ibn Ezra we would find the answer to another puzzling question. Chazal stated that Terach repented and embraced the new faith preached by his son, accepting a Gd that he could not see or touch. This is most interesting in light of the statement in Joshua that describes Terach and his son Nachor as idolaters (his father, also Nachor, was clearly an idolater as well). Rashi quotes Terach's idolatrous nature in his commentary on the verse *ואתה תבא אל אבותיך בשלום*. Why would Hashem promise to unite Abraham with his idolatrous father? From here we conclude that Terach repented. It would appear from that verse that Terach's portion in the world to come was close to that of his son Abraham.

When did Terach make this monumental life change to embrace the Gd of his son Abraham? To answer this question, we must examine Terach's conversion in the context of his relationship with his son Abraham. Chazal tell us that Terach was among the most committed idolaters of his time and land. He was perhaps the expert and most famous purveyor of idols. It was Terach who sought the death penalty for his own son, Abraham, after he realized that Abraham destroyed his

inventory of idols. Terach himself informed the king of Abraham's outrageous actions knowing full well it would lead to a death sentence for his son. If not for the intervention of the Almighty, his plan would have succeeded. To fully appreciate Terach's actions, we should recognize that, in general, in cases of tension between father and son, usually it is the son who develops deep enmity towards his father. Intense hatred of a son by a father is indicative of a mental aberration bordering on the psychopathic. It indicates a sick soul that delights in destructive behavior. Chazal wanted to emphasize that Terach was sick with hatred towards his son. He was willing to sacrifice his own family and his own son to mollify his psychosis. Terach would have to expend a monumental effort to relent and change himself from such ingrained behavior and blind hatred. Suddenly, Chazal tell us that he repented. When did Terach make this change?

Apparently, the change happened when Terach decided to abandon Ur Kasdim and move his family to Charan. Prima facie, Terach's decision to abandon Ur Kasdim was most perplexing when viewed through the Midrashic background. Terach was one of the leading citizens of Ur Kasdim, some were of the opinion that he was a member of the royal council and possibly related to the royal household. The society of Ur Kasdim was the most advanced and developed, technologically and industrially, at that time. It must have been very difficult to relocate to a primitive, minimally agricultural society in a place like Charan. Why was he willing to abandon his position of honor that he enjoyed in Ur Kasdim?

The answer is *הרהור תשובה*, a simple initial thought of repentance. The thought that perhaps his son Abraham was correct and that his own philosophy was absurd. The *בעל תשובה* in Terach was responsible for the decision to leave Ur Kasdim and begin life anew in either Charan or Canaan.

Terach's repentance was not a coincidence. Gd waited for this moment to arrive, for Terach to be willing to make this extreme sacrifice and undergo the difficulties the immigrant must endure. His change of heart was independent of Abraham's decision to leave his homeland. When Terach made this decision, Hashem told Abraham it was time for him to leave.

We don't know if Terach knew of Abraham's contacts with Gd. The Torah does not [usually] describe the physical appearance of the people being discussed. We have several exceptions, Joseph, Leah, Rachel and Sarah. Wherever the Torah does provide a physical description it is usually because the physical characteristic is critical to the narrative. [In *נ"ך* we do find them (e.g. Saul, David).] Typically these descriptions are not relevant to the unfolding events of

the covenantal community or the realization of the great vision foreshadowed by the patriarchs. For example, in the story of the עקידה, the Torah is interested only in the event. It does not mention if Abraham knew the way to the mountain or if he inquired as to directions to the mountain from anyone along the way. There is only one important subject matter: Abraham's compliance with the divine order to sacrifice Isaac. It is interesting to note that in the story of Jacob sending Joseph to search for his brothers, the Torah describes in detail the encounter and conversation between Joseph and the mysterious man (who according to Chazal was the angel Gabriel) he encountered along the way from whom he inquired as to the brothers' whereabouts. At first glance this narrative appears to be inconsistent with the usual style of the Torah. Why tell us all this? Because Joseph's mission was not planned by Jacob. Chazal say that at first glance Jacob should not have sent Joseph to look for his brothers. He knew very well the enmity the brothers felt towards Joseph. Gd forced him to send him, because the time arrived to fulfill the edict of גר יהי-ה זרעך. We don't know if Terach knew that Gd commanded Abraham to migrate to Canaan. We do know that when the message came through for Abraham to leave, he discovered to his great surprise that his father's bags were packed long ago and he was ready to leave on the great march to Canaan. Father and son who were locked in mortal combat for so long, joined hands and marched off together in pursuit of the land of Canaan.

The objection of the Ramban to the opinion of the Ibn Ezra as to Terach being the central figure in the migration to Canaan is no longer critical. The sensational aspect of Parshat Noach and the story of leaving for Canaan was not that Abraham obeyed Gd and set out for an unknown destination. After all Abraham's dedication and commitment to Gd was so great that eventually he would willingly offer his own son at the עקידה. The greatest story in Parshat Noach is not the departure of Avraham from Ur Kasdim but the repentance, Teshuva of Terach and his abandoning all he knew and loved to follow the Gd of his son Abraham. It is the great story of the בעל תשובה contained in the verse of ויקח תרה. The Torah tells us all this in a few words. But the sensational aspect of this story is not the journey they took, but rather the dramatic change that occurred in Terach.

Abraham attempts to convert his family to his faith were not always successful. He did not succeed with his brothers and nephews, he had limited success with his nephew Lot. The word לך means that Avraham and Sarah alone were commanded to go to Canaan, no other family members should come along. Still, Lot tagged along. Once Lot decided to remain at Abraham's side, Abraham had to teach him and train him, even though he did not want him to come along. In order to be a great teacher one must be able to reach his own family. Teaching begins at home.

In order for Abraham to be considered the **אב המון גויים** Av he had to be able to show success within his family.

Terach was his success story. Abraham saw Terach was ready to leave so he remained silent about his own desire to leave. He was respectful of his father and kept his own decision in the background to give the impression that it was Terach who initiated the decision to leave Ur Kasdim. He knew that Terach, the Baal Teshuva, had attained a very high level and did not want to minimize the great achievement and sacrifice that Terach decided to make.

There is a verse in Job, **מי יתן טהור מטמא לא אחד**. Who can make impurity to yield purity? The Midrash says that this refers to Abraham who came from Terach. Abraham ultimately became a great prophet but he attained his covenant with Hashem and his prophecy only after searching long and hard for Him. Abraham asked many questions and was relentless in his search for Gd. As Rambam writes, Abraham in his youth was immersed in Chaldean life with the people of his generation yet he was constantly questioning their practices, looking for the truth. He had the mind of a genius. He had vision and curiosity. There was depth to his intuition, breadth to his understanding. Otherwise Gd would not have chosen him as the **אב המון גויים**. Such traits are hereditary. Terach passed these traits on to him. Terach wasted his talents for a long time. Abraham on the other hand, utilized his starting at a much younger age.

Rashi comments on the verse **אל הארץ אשר אראך**: Gd did not reveal to Abraham his ultimate destination in order to increase his love for the land and to reward him for each statement. (Rashi uses a similar pattern in explaining the commands to sacrifice Isaac at the **עקידה**.) Gd did not give Abraham any directions or hints as to his destination. How did he know where to go? Abraham traveled from place to place, finally arriving in Canaan. When he arrived he did not recognize immediately that this was his destination. Only later did Gd inform him that he arrived and promised him that this will be his homeland. Ramban, like Rashi, said that Abraham did not receive directions. So how did he know where to go and which direction to follow? Should he go north, south, east or west?

Abraham used the phrase **התעו אותי אלקים**, Gd caused Abraham to be lost and bewildered, confused as to which direction to follow. Ramban says that he wandered like a stray sheep not knowing how to return home. Hashem did not guide Abraham. He wanted to bewilder and mystify him, to keep him wandering till he found the land intuitively, till he was magically attracted to the land, the way birds are mechanically drawn to migrate in fall and spring to some specific

location. Somehow they are able to distinguish between hospitable and inhospitable areas. We don't understand what pulls them, it is instinctive. In a similar way, Gd wanted Abraham to develop the ability to distinguish between קודש and חול, and to be guided by his own intuition along his journey to the land of Canaan.

אתה הוא ד' אלקים אשר בחרת באברם והוצאתו מאור כשדים ושמם את שמו אברהם. The verse states that Gd chose Avram and took him out of Ur Kasdim and changed his name to Avraham. Even though he wandered for a long time from place to place as a lost sheep, he felt intuitively that his destination was Canaan. He toured Canaan and spent time there even before Gd confirmed that he had arrived in the right land and it would be eventually given to his children as their homeland.

Ramban adds that Abraham guessed where to go based on his intuition because he had no pre-conceived notions on which to base his travel decisions. But Terach also left to go to Canaan, the Ramban mentions that Avraham had דעת אביו. Terach also headed to Canaan. Ramban points out that not only was Avraham blessed with uncanny intuition, but so was Terach. He also felt a mysterious pull experienced by those thirsting for knowledge of Gd.

Why was Canaan intuitively selected by both Terach and Abraham? What attracted them to this land? Here we encounter a central idea of Judaism. The idea of קדושה pulled them both to Canaan. Major, life altering decisions are often sudden and intuitive. Decisions of secondary importance are based on careful calculation. Abraham and Terach made a major decision to follow their intuition and have it guide them along their respective paths.

People respond to a stimulus. The דור המבול responded to the challenge of beauty. Their philosophy was that one must succumb to the power of beauty and surrender to the aesthetic challenge. They were attracted to women who represented to them the notion of beauty.

Modern man is still captive to the aesthetic experience, he seeks to exploit and enjoy all life has to offer. The serpent in the Garden of Eden was the first to describe this aesthetic pull when it described the הדעת as עץ לעינים. The aesthetic experience is boundless: you want to grab as much as possible and in the process reach out for the impossible. It has no laws that restrict or limit man. Aesthetic man resents authority and tradition. There is no past or future. There is only one moment, the fleeting present. Ethical life involves restraints. I cannot take whatever I wish whenever I want it. This is directly opposed to the aesthetic

experience which says no limits. Western society shares this philosophy of life with the דור המבול. Such a philosophy results in the disintegration of society.

The דור הפלגה thought that the attainment of power, the desire to be god-like was the great challenge for man. Technological achievement was the yardstick by which they measured their success. Their obsession was to control their environment and prevent Gd from bringing another flood or to punish them in some similar way. The individual is meaningless in such a society. People lived their entire lives in the period that the tower was erected. They were completely focused on the task at hand.

Where Western society is similar to the דור המבול, the Communist philosophy is similar to that of the דור הפלגה. Its theme is the idealization and idolization of technology. A philosophy that ignores and devalues the individual ultimately leads to a breakdown of society. The people of the דור הפלגה would spend years carrying bricks up the tower. They would weep for a dropped brick, yet would not shed a tear for a baby that fell to its death from the tower. For both societies technological achievement was more important than the human being, and they would not allow the individual to interfere with their goals of conquest and supremacy. Man strives to always be triumphant, to be a hero in all situations. He hates to be defeated. Abraham proclaimed a new idea to the world: קדושה, sanctity. The rest of the world is driven by the pursuit to attain maximum pleasure in their lives. Judaism proclaims that the greatest mission for a human being is to seek Gd and cling to Him. Man does not need to always be successful to attain that goal. Man can afford to be defeated, as Abraham was throughout his years of wandering, and use that experience as a springboard to come closer to Gd. As long as he is successful in that pursuit, he achieves success. קדושה is a dialectical, antithetic experience that simultaneously fascinates and frightens man. Those who don't know themselves, fear failure and lack imagination are frightened by the concept of קדושה. Those who are bold and imaginative are instinctively, mechanically pulled to קדושה.

כאיל תערוג על אפיקי מים כן נפשי תערוג אליך אלקים. David compares his quest for Gd as that of the gazelle searching for the brook. Why did he use the metaphor of the gazelle? Why didn't he simply say that he constantly yearns for and seeks Gd? Animals are mechanically driven to find water. They will walk miles in search of a watering hole that they have never seen but instinctively sense. They persevere until they find the river and drink from its life saving waters. David described the Jew as having the same instinctive drive, but instead of water, he is programmed to seek Gd. If man, or society, attempts to deny this drive he and it breaks down.

Every person, even the atheist or agnostic, has this drive. Abraham and Terach were driven mechanically to migrate to Canaan by their thirst for קדושה and to seek Gd. They were only satisfied when they found Him.

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