

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

LECH LECHA

OCTOBER 12, 2013

8 HESHVAN 5774

DEDICATIONS: In memory of Maran Ovadia Yosef ben Giorgia

The JCAB plans on a full house this Shabbat and asked us if we can spare me so that that I can officiate as Rabbi for them. Come visit or See you Sunday

Candles: 6:03 PM - Afternoon and Evening service (Minha/Arbith): 6:00 Sharp
SHABBAT 9:00 AM – After last week we are thinking about moving it up to 8:30 in the future
KIDDUSH We no have sponsors – We need sponsors or no Kiddush

New Shabbat Morning Children's Program with Morah Avital. For children ages 0 to 5. 10:30 to 11:30 in the playroom.

11:00 - 12:00 Shabbat Morning Kids Program with Nina upstairs in the Rabbi's study. Stories, Tefillah, Games, Snacks and more . . . And Leah Colish will be babysitting down in the playroom

4:45- Shabbat Afternoon Oneg with Rabbi Yosef and Leah; Treats, Stories, Basketball, Hula-hoop, Parsha Quiz, Tefillot, Raffles and Fun! Supervised play during Seudat Shelishit.

Minha: 5:30 PM –
Seudah Shelishi and a Class 6:00 – with Rav Aharon
Evening Service (Arbith): 6:50 PM - Shabbat Ends: 7:02 PM

WEEKDAY TEFILLA SCHEDULE

Shaharit Sunday 8:00, Mon-Fri at 7:00 (6:55 Mondays and Thursdays)

WEEKDAY TORAH CLASS SCHEDULE

Monday Night Class with Rabba Yanai – 7PM

3rd Long Beach Discovery Seminar sponsored by the Sephardic Congregation of Long Beach and the Bach Jewish Center

SUNDAY, October 13th, from 12:45 PM to 5:30 PM at the newly renovated Long Beach Hotel, 405 East Broadway, in Long Beach.

What is a Discovery Seminar?

More than 200,000 people have enjoyed a Discovery Seminar over the last 20 years all over the world. What is a Discovery Seminar?

Based on analytical techniques used by the Mossad, the Israeli CIA, fascinating interactive discussions ensue challenging audiences to judge whether the Bible was written by men, or by a power "beyond time and space". Educational, entertaining and intellectually stimulating. We look forward to seeing you there!

There is no charge for admission but space is limited. Pre-registration is suggested, so call Jessica at 516 897-2473.

SAVE THE DATE

**Motzeh Shabbat – Saturday Night, November 9th w/ Lido Synagogue at Lido.
Adult Movie Night**

We are planning a Friday night dinner for Erev Shabbat November 29th – Hanukah/ Thanksgiving weekend. It will be Chinese. RSVP a must to either Patti Tina or email Hindy at hmizny@gmail.com. \$20 for those 10 and up \$ 10 for kids 3-9. Last year we had a Thanksgiving dinner on Friday night and it was a huge success. We would like everyone to prepare a minute or two of what Sandy Taught Me!

Dr. Reeva Simon - Whose Jerusalem? The role of religion and politics in the history of Jerusalem. Motzeh Shabbat -Saturday night, December 14 at 7:30pm.

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Daily Minyan Mon – Thurs at 979 Third Avenue, 17th Floor, Artistic Frame at 4PM – Please join us! 212-289-2100

Editors Notes

(This article was written on Sunday morning. Along with all Kelal Yisrael, we mourn the passing of Maran Ovadia Yosef Z'SL ... see Post Script Below.)

In my weekly articles, I've learned to avoid getting into things that are too deep, too heavy, too spooky or too controversial. I leave those for my classes. But in our class this Shabbat we explored an idea that I hope you find interesting. As we complete the portion of Noah, we are introduced to our forefather Abraham.

Abraham (who was first called Ab-ram) was born in the year 1948 after Creation (1813 BCE). His parents were Terah and Amathlaah.

The Midrash expounds a bit on Terah. He was a high priest of the idol worshippers. He had twelve chief gods, one for each month of the year, and other idols. We all heard the story as children; not only did Terah worship idols, there was a workshop in Terah's house, where idols of wood, stone, silver and gold were made. People came to offer sacrifices to these idols, or to buy them, and Terah had a thriving business. We all recall what happened when Terah appointed Abraham to take charge of the business. Terah returned to the shop to find all of the idols smashed except for the largest of them who sat with a hammer resting on his hands. Abraham directed the blame towards that idol.

Some say that it was Terah himself who turned Abraham into Nimrod resulting in Nimrod's failed execution of Abraham but also the tragic death of Haran, Abraham's brother in the fire of Ur Kasdim.

And although there is an opinion that Abraham convinced his father to repent before death, overall Terah goes down as the father none of us would want to have. Terah remains implicated with Nimrod, a man guilty of filicide, a sinner who leads others to sin.

So here's my question. How in the world can someone like Terah merit to have a child like Abraham? The Ramchal tells us that the Neshamot - the souls of the Sadikim - the righteous, originate in the world of Beriah from a place below G-d's Throne of glory - the kiseh Hakavod. Chazal explain that the greatest souls are sent down to the holiest of parents. So how does the first of our forefathers, the man of kindness, G-d's beloved end up in a house of idols?

About eight weeks ago I had the pleasure of speaking at the wedding of my dearest friends Abie and Jocelyn Safdieh. From our days in Flatbush Abie has really been a best friend. Abie is someone you know will always be there for you no matter what; a guy with a heart of gold who wouldn't think twice before giving you the shirt off his own back.

People tell me today that when my friends and I were young, we were very scary. I'm not sure how scary we were, but I know that we were certainly wild. And some labeled us the bad boys. Come to think of it we were pretty bad.

I once recounted to Abie that we were certainly lucky to have two incredible fathers, true leaders who are tremendous baaley chesed who have had a huge impact on the community - May Hashem bless them with health, happiness and arichat Yamim. At the same time I worried about something we call Yeridat ha-dorot, meaning literally "the decline of the generations".

The concept is based on a statement in the tractate Shabbat: "R. Zera said in Raba bar Zimuna's name: If the earlier [scholars] were sons of angels, we are sons of men; and if the earlier [scholars] were sons of men, we are like donkeys".

If we assume that each generation is inferior in merits to the previous generation and we simply compare us to our fathers and see how inferior we are to them I worried at the time as to what children we would end up with. "Could they", I asked, "be inferior to us? What does that mean? How was it possible?"

At the wedding I told the story with appreciation that this great fear was never realized. For some strange reason our generation has been blessed with children who are not inferior to us; they are in so many ways that much better than us.

As I've written previously, I attributed this to the heels of the messianic age we are said to be experiencing. The rabbis teach us that as we approach the end of days, children will come to lead the parents. We

certainly see this in our time. We are witnesses to a generation that has a greater level of dedication, self-control, and is committed in their search for truth and knowledge.

So it all sounded good. But then I was struck with the same or an even greater problem surrounding the birth of Abraham. And began to search for an answer as to why Terah was given Abraham.

The rabbis teach us that when Adam sinned, many holy souls were left under the lock and key of the dark side. Fearing that these souls were so precious and filled with light, the dark side would not release them. But when the negative forces saw one of their own personified in Terah they guessed that giving him this holy soul to raise would do them no harm. After all they assumed that even the holiest soul would become corrupted in the confines of Terah's home awash in a sea of black magic. So they sent Abraham down to Terah hoping that in corrupting the holiness of this soul it would be forced to return to them blackened and as a result would strengthen them. Their plan backfired and Abraham changed the world.

In discovering this answer I was struck with an even better understanding of our own generation. History was repeating itself. The dark side looked at our generation growing up in a world with no restrictions and quickly losing its moral compass. The negative forces saw a population mired in pleasure for pleasures sake. The me generation of a self-centered mankind was as appealing as Terah's home. And so they released these holy souls into a world full expecting them to be even worse than us.

But we see their plan is back firing. We see children dedicated to Torah and misvot with a strength that seems and is super human. A generation dedicated to sharing and caring and acts of kindness has been born.

When I told Abie I couldn't imagine a generation worse than ours, I think I was right.

The dark side looked at us and saw the bottom of the barrel. But just as they erred 3826 years ago, they erred with us. And knowing this, we should feel a tremendous sense of responsibility.

Each of our children is an Abraham. Each of our children is a Sarah. Each has a soul from the highest level of creation. Each is holy beyond our wildest dreams. The dark side is hoping we blemish them. But we have an opportunity to polish them and make

them shine. What a tremendous task and responsibility we have.

Abraham and Sarah changed the world. Our children and grandchildren have the unique capability to do the same. They have the ability to bring such tremendous light to the world and to eradicate darkness forever.

Being the bottom of the barrel may not be so bad after all. Perhaps it's given us the chance to play a role in bringing the world the finest wine it's known in thousands of years. Let's make sure we foil the plan of the dark side once more and this time may its defeat be permanent. The future is depending on us.

Shabbat Shalom
Rabbi David Bibi



Haham Ovadia Yosef Z'sl with my teacher Rabbi Asher Abittan z'sl

PS... My mother just called. She was very upset about an article in the Post ... I don't read the Post very often so I didn't see the article. But I did receive a note from the Editors at the Jewish Voice where my article is included each week Following that is an article by Ron Yitzchok Eisenman, entitled *What About Me?. And finally there is a letter from Rabbi Haskel Lookstein who quotes Rabbi Benny Lau.

This Shabbat I was asked to officiate at the Jewish Center of Atlantic Beach where they expect a full house. I hope to speak about the life of Haham Ovadia z'sl. I recall first meeting him when I was about 11 years old. He came to the Yeshiva and a few of us were brought out by Cantor Meir Levy to sing for the Rabbi. Then I was brought up to be "tested". I guess with my Great Uncle David Bibi and Isadore Dayan and my dad there with Rabbi Wolf, I was selected probably because of my name alone. I was asked to read and explain something and I did get that great smile and the tap across the cheek. I recalled him coming to visit over the years in Deal and Brooklyn and always asking for a Beracha.

The only time I spoke with the Rabbi was right after I was married. Chantelle and I went to Israel and there we were sort of adopted by Bert and Adele Chabot, A'H. Mr. Chabot took me to pray by Haham Ovadia in his small Synagogue located by the Great Synagogue. There he took me up and introduced me and told him who my family was. The Rabbi spoke with me for a few minutes. The gist was that although my father's family had the crown of malchut and my mother's family the crown of Kehunah, the most important crown was the crown of Torah and that I would need to earn. He concluded his blessing with a double tap across the cheek. For some reason, I can feel that tap now. I saw the Rabbi many times after that, but never again spoke with him. Chantelle asked me why not and when I told her that for some reason I became tongue tied with my Hebrew she was surprised. As I aged, I had a greater appreciation of how great he truly was and yes, I got nervous in front of such greatness.

I hope to write more in the coming weeks. Of the Rabbis relationship with so many who taught me.

JEWISH VOICE NY

As we join the entire Jewish nation in mourning the loss of HaGaon HaRav Ovadia Yosef, a truly Gadol HaDor (Torah giant of our generation), we were beyond outraged when we read The New York Post of Tuesday, October 8th. The blaring headline of their article pretty much sums it up. "Goy Very, What a Putz!" it was called and it condemned Democratic mayoral candidate Bill deBlasio for tweeting his praise of HaRav Ovadia's life and legacy. It appears that one Yoav Gonen, an ostensible New York Post writer decided to take deBlasio to task for not vetting HaRav Ovadia's record before taking to the social media sites. Always seeking out some salacious and blatantly spurious gossip to pedal, it seems like the Post really out did themselves this time when they allowed Gonen to fulminate over his inherent antipathy towards HaRav Ovadia.

One doesn't have to be a genius to realize that Gonen (if that is his real name) is most probably a disaffected Israeli who wants to use the death of one of the greatest Torah sages of our lifetime as a chance to spew forth his venom and lies. As with anyone who is a skilled propagandist will tell you, it is not the truth that matters but how you distort it and take it out of context.

Gonen used his bully platform to besmirch the stellar reputation of HaRav Ovadia by accusing him in the most ribald of ways, of embodying every evil under the sun. According to the blather that Gonen tries to pass off as journalism, he concludes that the great sage was a racist who castigated in the harshest terms all non-Jews and even Jews who died during the Holocaust.

Gonen fails to mention that HaRav Ovadia was the single most unifying rabbinic force not only in Israel but throughout the world. His closest friends included the left-wing Israeli President Shimon Peres who stood by his bed side during his final hours and even Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas who sent his heartfelt and genuine condolences. HaRav Ovadia followers included his very own Jews of Sephardic origin, atheists, Chassidic Jews and just about everyone in between. His whole life represented an avatar of kindness and compassion; of the highest levels of Torah scholarship, of courageous leadership during challenging times and above all an abiding love for all of humanity.

The New York Post owes its readers an apology for this effrontery and for viciously assailing the legacy of Rav Ovadia Yosef.

What About Me?

Ron Yitzchok Eisenman, Rabbi, Congregation Ahavas Israel, Passaic, NJ

As the appreciations and tributes continue to pour in about the greatness and impact of Rav Ovadia Yosef, I once again find myself extremely at a loss in my ability to add anything of value to the treasure trove of memories of this larger than life personality. Therefore, I will attempt to focus on one point which in my humble assessment has been overlooked; perhaps even purposely by some.

Which point is that? Is it his almost unmatched diligence in continual study? No, that point has been impressed upon us by many. Perhaps it is his fluency and breadth of encyclopedic knowledge in all areas of Torah literature? No, here as well his works speak for themselves and no one questions his mastery

over almost the entire corpus of Torah. What point then can I add?

The one point I believe which has not been adequately addressed or in some cases I fear even purposely glossed over is his humble beginnings. Many mention that his family was poverty stricken when he was a child and that he himself and his wife struggled financially during much of their married life. Raising eleven children on a rabbi's salary was not easy and it was only in the last third of his life, after his children were grown and out of the house that he achieved a semblance of financial stability.

However, few dare to point out that his father was not a great Talmid Chochoh and scholar. Although many of our greats were indeed the son of this famous Tzaddik and that well-known Rosh Yeshiva or Rav, however, this was not the case with Rav Ovadia Yosef. He was not the son of a great scholar. Indeed, we have anecdotal evidence that his father was not a compliant supporter of his son's singular devotion to study. It is related that the father who was a grocery store proprietor, insisted that his son contribute to the family's welfare by taking time away from yeshiva and instead sit behind the counter of the grocery. It was only after Rav Attia (Rosh Yeshiva of Porat Yosef where Rav Ovadia was studying) donned an apron and informed the father that he would do Rav Ovadia's shift in the store in his stead that the father relented and allowed the son to continue learning uninterrupted.

This point should be shouted from the rooftops and plastered on the walls. Here was an Iraqi born youngster who came as an immigrant at the age of four to what was then Palestine and specifically to poverty ridden Jerusalem and became a great scholar. His father was a simple and hardworking grocer who seemingly had no premonitions about his son becoming a world leader. He was not 'destined for greatness' by his birthright. He was not born into a house where full time learning was the theme of the home. He was not brought up in a neighborhood where the boys were groomed for greatness. He earned and worked for each and every line of Gemara he mastered. His father did not teach him the secrets of Torah and his home was not known as the hub of Torah learning. He sweated and he persevered. He toiled and he perspired; one page at a time. And he never rested.

I think about the time I met him when he was already 57 years old and Chief Rabbi of the State of Israel; most people would have rested on their laurels by this time of their life. However, for a man who always

beat the odds, the best was yet to come. For the next 36 years of his life (twice 'chai') he probably achieved more than ten people achieve in their entire lives.

He learned and he taught. He laughed with the people and he loved them. He taught all of us to say: 'never say never'. Never say, "I can't". Never say, "If only I was so and so's son or so and so's daughter I could have been great". The 800,000 to one million people who came to escort the son of the grocer to his final resting place proves these excuses wrong.

You *can* achieve greatness and you *can* impact on this world.

You *can* start when you are four or when you are fifty four.

You *can* achieve and you *can* make a difference.

Just ask Rav Ovadia Yosef Zt"l.

Haskel Lookstein

Congregation Kehilath Jeshurun mourns the passing on Monday of HaRav Ovadia Yosef, the acknowledged religious leader of Sephardic Jewry in Israel and a great religious influence on all of world Jewry. The author of many volumes of Halakhic decisions and the man to whom many turned for responses to the difficult religious questions of our time, HaRav Ovadia was a brilliant intellectual, a profound student of Jewish law and a compassionate decisor when confronted with complex life situations and thorny personal problems implicating Jewish law. For example, it was he who passionately urged the State of Israel to bring home tens of thousands of Ethiopian Jews. He said it was a mitzvah to return them to the center of Jewish life and into the arms of their Jewish brothers and sisters. He urged that in order to avoid all questions of their Jewish status they should undergo a formal conversion, l'chumra, but when he was subsequently approached by a Kohain who had fallen in love with an Ethiopian Jewish woman and asked whether the Kohain could marry her (Kohanim are not permitted to marry converts according to Jewish law), HaRav Ovadia ruled that the woman's conversion was "just to make sure" and, essentially, not really necessary and hence the marriage could take place. This is but one important example of his practical and compassionate approach to applying Jewish legal maxims in difficult situations.

To get an even more personal - and poignant - perspective on the nature of this saintly man, please read the beautiful eulogy, below, shared by Rav Benny Lau with his congregation in Jerusalem:

"The angels have overpowered the mortals and the Holy Ark has been captured." [The cry of Bar Kappara, when he discovered that Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi had died.] The death of our rabbi and mentor Rabbi Ovadia Yosef marks the end of an era. During the last 15 years, I was privileged to become acquainted firsthand with the teachings of Rav Ovadia. I was also privileged to receive his enthusiastic blessing for my book "From 'Maran' to 'Maran': The Halachic Philosophy of Rav Ovadia Yossef." The use of the term 'Maran'-the term used by Sephardic Jews for a great rabbi and mentor-in the book title reflects my thoughts about Rav Ovadia and his place in the history of Jewish law throughout the ages. If Maran Rabbi Yosef Caro [the author of the Code of Jewish Law] was the first of the Achronim, the later authorities, then Maran Rabbi Ovadia Yosef was the last of the Achronim. His generation still has a kind of hegemony. The departure of Rav Ovadia marks the end of hundreds of years of halakhic creativity by great individuals. His books will stand alongside the writings of all of the halakhic authorities of the last generations; he will take his place as an equal among equals, among those who devoted themselves to "fighting the battle of Torah" and bequeathing its treasures to future generations. At this moment, a picture comes to my mind-one that I pray I can pass on to the next generation. The place: The home of Rabbi Ovadia Yosef on Hakablan Street in the Har Nof neighborhood of Jerusalem. The time: An afternoon in the year 2000. Rav Ovadia gets up from his afternoon nap, while I am waiting for another hour of guidance on the work that I have written about his teachings. In those days, I was fortunate to find favor in the eyes of all the members of his household. His daughter-in-law Yehudit, who was entrusted with his wellbeing and privacy, opened the door for me. The house was quiet and calm. Rav Ovadia came in from his bedroom and sat down in his chair. Suddenly, there was a great commotion. Dozens of members of a family from a city in the South poured into the room. They crowded in and stood there with great excitement. I didn't understand what all the fuss was about, until Rav Ovadia's assistant, Zvi Hakak, explained the situation:

That morning, Rav Ovadia had decided the family's fate. The family matriarch, a woman of about 80, had immigrated to Israel from France as a widow from World War II. Here in Israel, she remarried and built a large tribe that was a source of pride and joy-a family of children and grandchildren who engaged in Torah study and work; a family that was known for its admirable values and acts of kindness. Suddenly, it emerged that the evidence that the woman's first husband had died during the war was unfounded; the

"dead man himself had appeared." A story that seemingly could only exist in Agnon's *And the Crooked Shall be Made Straight* was actually happening here in Israel! Following this revelation, all of the woman's children and descendants were considered to have the status of "mamzer" according to Jewish law, as they were born of forbidden relations. A terrible tragedy. Rav Ovadia plunged into the thick of it, and after an intense process of inquiry and investigation that involved hearing testimony and cross-checking information, he liberated the family from their forbidden status. (This is not the place to describe how he freed them and the nature of their liberation from the status.) Now the family had come to thank Rav Ovadia. They enveloped him with tears. There wasn't a single dry eye in the room. And here is where my story begins:

After they left, I remained with Rav Ovadia in the quiet room. He held my hand and said in a soft voice: "Feel my hand-it is wet, wet. Did you see their tears? Did you see the tears of the oppressed?" And then, without any preparation, he raised his voice and said, paraphrasing a passage in Midrash Vayikra Rabbah [32:8] in which God undertakes to comfort oppressed people who cry and have no one to console them: "I saw the tears of the oppressed - These are the mamzerim. Who oppressed these people? The Sanhedrin, which judged them strictly by the laws of the Torah. And there is no one to comfort them? - I will comfort them!" It was a rare moment. A once-in-a-lifetime experience. I was holding the hand of a man who felt, with all his being, the responsibility for those people who could be sentenced to a life of Gehinnom by the laws of the Torah, when he was drawing on his sense of responsibility and intensity and was undertaking to be their protector and aid. This was the man, and this is his legacy. May his soul find rest and be bound up in the bond of eternal life."

May HaRav Ovadia Yosef's memory, his life's work, and his brilliant Halakhic decisions live on forever.

Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading:

1st Aliya: Avram is instructed to leave Charan and travel 400 miles to the Land of Canaan. (Charan was 600 miles from Ur Casdim) Upon arriving, they are forced to leave Canaan, due to a local famine, and travel to Mitzrayim in search of food.

2nd Aliya: Avram plans for his encounter with the amorality of Egypt. His and Sarah's confrontation with Pharaoh is detailed. Avram and Sarah return home.

3rd Aliya: Avram separates from his nephew / brother-in-law Lot, due to Lot's defection from the teachings of Avram. Hashem reassures Avram that he will have children, "like the dust of the earth", who will inherit the Land and carry on his work.

4th Aliya: Avram is forced to rescue Lot from captivity. In so doing, he adjusts the balance of power in Canaan and is recognized by the other political leaders for his military and moral strength. His encounter with Malki Tzedek (Shem) is in stark contrast to his confrontation with the King of Sodom.

5th Aliya: Hashem again reassures Avram that he will have genetic children (not just students) who would be as numerous as the stars in the sky.

6th Aliya: The monumental "Covenant Between the Halves" takes place during which the next 430 years of Jewish history is revealed. Avram is 70 years old. Sarai instructs Avram to marry Hagar. The story of her conflict with Sarai, her encounter with an angel, and the birth of Yishmael in 2034 is told. Following the birth of Yishmael Avram's name is changed to Avraham.

7th Aliya: Avraham is presented with the Mitzvah of Circumcision. Sarai's name is changed to Sarah, and Hashem assures Avraham he and Sarah will have a son called Yitzchak. It is the year 2047 and Avraham circumcises himself, Yishmael, and his entire household.

Isaiah 40:27 - 41:16 - This week's Haftorah continues the theme of Hashem's manifest presence within nature and our selection as the Chosen People. The opening verses, taken from the end of Yishaya Chap. 40, directly attribute strength and success to belief in Hashem. "But those who put their hope in Hashem shall renew their vigor...they shall run and not weary...." (40:31)

Hashem's eternity in relation to all generations is established, "...I am first, and with the last ones I am He." (41:4) and it therefore makes sense to trust Hashem. This realization mirrors Avraham's quest for understanding. Nature's inherent consistency and order revealed itself to Avraham as absolute proof of a Creator who cares for His creations. "...he says of the cement, "It is good," and he strengthened it with nails that it should not move." (41:7)

With the conviction of certainty and truth, Avraham embraces G-d as a true servant. Hashem, in return, bestows upon him the singular accolade as the one "who loved me". In all of the Tanach, only Avraham is referred to in this manner. To love Hashem means to trust Hashem, and Avraham trusted Hashem more completely than anyone else. In merit for his devotion, Hashem promises to protect his children from the onslaught of the other nations.

As all things are put into perspective, we realize that our nation's greatness and praise is but a reflection of Hashem's greatness. (41:16)

EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

"I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing." (Beresheet 12:2)

In this week's perashah, Hashem says to Abraham Abinu, "I will make your name great," and then adds "v'heye berachah." Rabbi Shimshon Rafael Hirsch zt"l writes that these words are a directive to all of us to "become a blessing, bring happiness and inspiration to mankind."

Rabbi Pesach Krohn says, you might ask "But how can I be a berachah?" Well, many surely remember the ill-fated flight of US Air 1549, which left Laguardia Airport on a freezing afternoon in January 2009. Within a minute of takeoff, Captain Chesely Sullenberger realized that he had no power because a flock of birds had been sucked into the engines. He would have to crash land his plane someplace. He could land on the streets of New York, where those on board, in addition to people on the ground, would no doubt be killed – or he could try to set his plane down in the Hudson River.

Incredibly, and with great skill (and of course, with help from Hashem), he landed the plane perfectly on the Hudson and everyone on board survived. A year later, he visited the site, where he was asked, "Where did you get the inner strength to accomplish that remarkable feat?"

What he replied is illuminating. He said that his father had died when he was in his early teens, and that the anguish, fear and loneliness he had experienced were excruciating. "As I was flying over the Hudson, all I could think of was that if I don't land the plane perfectly, relatives of those who perish will feel the terrible pain that I felt, and I wanted to avoid that."

That's how he became a berachah to others, and that's what you can do to emulate the directive given to Abraham Abinu – "become a blessing." Look into your life. Have you gone through a

financial crisis, a difficult marriage, a divorce, a severe problem with a child, a health issue? If you have made it through any of these crises, reach out to someone who is going through the same thing. Reassure the person, tell him or her that there is hope. Discuss, listen and advise. Become a berachah! Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Reuven Semah

“And there was quarreling between the herdsman of Abram’s livestock and the herdsmen of Lot’s livestock...Abram said to Lot, ‘Please let there be no strife...’ (Beresheet 13:7-8)

When Abraham and Lot accumulated a lot of sheep, the land wasn’t able to provide enough pasture and their shepherds began to argue. The word for argument is *ch’ir*, but when Abraham tells his nephew that they should part ways, he says, “Let there not be a *vSch’rShn*, a fight between us.” There are a few lessons to learn from this passage.

First of all, an argument between two people could start out small (like a *ch’ir*) and end up in a fight (like *vSch’rShn*), unless steps are taken to stop it in its tracks. How often do we see a small issue between people turn into a major affair!

Secondly, Abraham says at the end of the verse, “*UbShjæ²bEt oh!j©t oh!J²bEt’hœ²F*, For we are like brothers (we are family).” At first glance, it seems Abraham is saying, “Let’s not fight since we are family.” But maybe we can say Abraham was saying, “Since we are family it will be easier for the fight to develop, therefore, let us stop it now.” That is - precisely when people are closer is the risk greater that something small becomes a big thing. Let us try to remember to keep relationships healthy and peaceful. Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

RABBI ELI MANSOUR

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MishnaBerura.com, LearnTorah.com

Parashat Lech-Lecha begins with Hashem’s command to Abraham that he should leave his homeland and resettle in Eretz Yisrael. This command is regarded as one of Abraham’s ten tests, as he heeded G-d’s call and left everything behind to begin a new life in a distant land.

The status of this command as a “test” comes into question, however, when we consider the continuation of the Pesukim. After instructing Abraham to relocate, G-d promises him that in his new land Abraham would be blessed with great wealth, children and fame. Until that point, as we

know, Abraham was childless and poor. Was it really such a “test” for him to heed G-d’s command to move to a different place where he would bear children, become very wealthy, and earn worldwide fame? If G-d would have spoken to us and issued a command to relocate with the same promise of reward, wouldn’t we immediately comply? Why was this a “test” for Abraham?

The answer emerges from a closer reading of the Pasuk that describes Abraham’s compliance with Hashem’s command. The Torah tells, “*Va’yelech Abram Ka’asher Diber Elav Hashem*” – “Abraham went as G-d had spoken to him.” Abraham left his homeland and went to Eretz Yisrael only “as G-d had spoken to him” – in order to fulfill Hashem’s command. He did not go in order to earn the great rewards promised to him. He was driven solely by the sincere desire to serve G-d and do the right thing. It turns out that the promise of reward is specifically what made this test so difficult. They tempted Abraham to serve G-d for selfish purposes, for his own interests, rather than as a sincere, devoted servant of his Creator.

Let us imagine if a distinguished Sadik asked us to bring him a cup of coffee, promising us \$1 million in exchange. Is there any chance we would serve him the cup of coffee strictly out of a desire to do a favor for the Sadik, and not for personal gain? This was the “test” that Abraham Abinu passed.

We, Abraham’s descendants, must strive to serve G-d with this same degree of sincerity. We should not be doing the Misvot for our own selfish interests, or for personal gain. Our primary concern and desire must be to serve our Creator with genuine devotion and love, without any ulterior motives.

Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks

Leaders lead. That does not mean to say that they don’t follow. But what they follow is different from what most people follow. They don’t conform for the sake of conforming. They don’t do what others do merely because others are doing it. They follow an inner voice, a call. They have a vision, not of what is, but of what might be. They think outside the box. They march to a different tune.

Never was this more dramatically signalled than in the first words of God to Abraham, the words that set Jewish history in motion: “Leave your land, your birthplace and your father’s house and go to the land that I will show you.”

Why? Because people do conform. They adopt the standards and absorb the culture of the time and place in which they live – “your land.” At a deeper level they are influenced by friends and neighbours – “your birthplace.” More deeply still they are shaped by their parents and the family in which they grew up – “your father’s house.”

I want you, says God to Abraham, to be different. Not for the sake of being different, but for the sake of starting something new: a religion that will not worship power and the symbols of power – for that is what idols really were and are. I want you, said God, to “teach your children and your household afterward to follow the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just.”

To be a Jew is to be willing to challenge the prevailing consensus when, as so often happens, nations slip into worshipping the old gods. They did so in Europe throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century. That was the age of nationalism: the pursuit of power in the name of the nation-state that led to two world wars and tens of millions of deaths. It is the age we are living in now as North Korea acquires and Iran pursues nuclear weapons so that they can impose their ambitions by force. It is what is happening today throughout much of the Middle East and Africa as nations descend into violence and what Hobbes called “the war of every man against every man.”

We make a mistake when we think of idols in terms of their physical appearance – statues, figurines, icons. In that sense they belong to ancient times we have long outgrown. Instead, the right way to think of idols is in terms of what they represent. They symbolise power. That is what Ra was for the Egyptians, Baal for the Canaanites, Chemosh for the Moabites, Zeus for the Greeks, and missiles and bombs for terrorists and rogue states today.

Power allows us to rule over others without their consent. As the Greek historian Thucydides put it: “The strong do what they wish and the weak suffer what they must.” Judaism is a sustained critique of power. That is the conclusion I have reached after a lifetime of studying our sacred texts. It is about how a nation can be formed on the basis of shared commitment and collective responsibility. It is about how to construct a society that honours the human person as the image and likeness of God. It is about a vision, never fully realised but never abandoned, of a world based on justice and compassion, in which “They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the

knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11: 9).

Abraham is without doubt the most influential person who ever lived. Today he is claimed as the spiritual ancestor of 2.4 billion Christians, 1.6 billion Muslims and 13 million Jews, more than half the people alive today. Yet he ruled no empire, commanded no great army, performed no miracles and proclaimed no prophecy. He is the supreme example in all of history of influence without power.

Why? Because he was prepared to be different. As the sages say, he was called ha-ivri, “the Hebrew,” because “all the world was on one side (be-ever echad) and he was on the other” (Genesis Rabbah 42: 8). Leadership, as every leader knows, can be lonely. Yet you continue to do what you have to do because you know that the majority is not always right and conventional wisdom is not always wise. Dead fish go with the flow. Live fish swim against the current. So it is with conscience and courage. So it is with the children of Abraham. They are prepared to challenge the idols of the age.

After the Holocaust some social scientists were haunted by the question of why so many people were prepared, whether by active participation or silent consent, to go along with a regime that they knew was committing one of the great crimes against humanity.

One key experiment was conducted by Solomon Asch. He assembled a group of people, asking them to perform a series of simple cognitive tasks. They were shown two cards, one with a line on it, the other with three lines of different lengths, and asked which was the same size as the line on the first. Unbeknown to one participant, all the others had been briefed by Asch to give the right answer for the first few cards, then the wrong one for most of the rest. On a significant number of occasions the experimental subject gave an answer he could see was the wrong, because everyone else had done so. Such is the power of the pressure to conform that it can lead us to say what we know is untrue.

More frightening still was the Stanford experiment carried out in the early 1970s by Philip Zimbardo. The participants were randomly assigned roles as guards or prisoners in a mock prison. Within days the students cast as guards were behaving abusively, some of them subjecting the “prisoners” to psychological torture. The students cast as prisoners put up with this passively, even siding with the guards against those who resisted. The experiment was called off after six days, during which time even

Zimbardo found himself drawn in to the artificial reality he had created. The pressure to conform to assigned roles is strong enough to lead people into doing what they know is wrong.

That is why Abraham, at the start of his mission, was told to leave "his land, his birthplace and his father's house," to free himself from the pressure to conform. Leaders must be prepared not to follow the consensus. One of the great writers on leadership, Warren Bennis (in his book *On becoming a leader*, Basic Books, 1989, 49), writes: "By the time we reach puberty, the world has shaped us to a greater extent than we realise. Our family, friends, and society in general have told us – by word and example – how to be. But people begin to become leaders at that moment when they decide for themselves how to be."

One reason why Jews have become, out of all proportion to their numbers, leaders in almost every sphere of human endeavour, is precisely this willingness to be different. Throughout the centuries Jews have been the most striking example of a group that refused to assimilate to the dominant culture or convert to the dominant faith. One other finding of Solomon Asch is worth noting. If just one other person was willing to support the individual who could see that the others were giving the wrong answer, it gave him the strength to stand out against the consensus. That is why, however small their numbers, Jews created communities. It is hard to lead alone, far less hard to lead in the company of others even if you are a minority.

Judaism is the countervoice in the conversation of humankind. As Jews we do not follow the majority merely because it is the majority. In age after age, century after century, Jews were prepared to do what the poet Robert Frost immortalised in *The Road Not Taken*, *Birches*, and *Other Poems*:

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I,
I took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference.

It is what makes a nation of leaders.

BEREL WEIN

I am not usually given to interpreting prophecy or dealing with messianic and/or apocalyptic visions. However, I have recently been reviewing the book of the prophet Yechezkel and could not help but think that many of the prophecies recorded in the middle section of the book are eerily similar to events that are occurring in our present day Middle Eastern part of the world.

The prophet describes the demise of Tyre and Sidon (Lebanon) through bloodshed, economic weakness and civil turmoil. He predicts an awful war of bloodshed in Syria, Babylonia (Iraq), Yemen and Arabia. Libya and Egypt will also be beset by civil war, much bloodshed and death, and economic deprivation.

At the same time, the Jewish people will continue to return home to the Land of Israel and the country will flourish and remain an island of stability in the midst of the raging sea of chaos that surrounds it. That is a pretty accurate description of what is going on in the Middle East currently. Iraq, after decades of war, internecine turmoil and senseless destruction of its own infrastructure is pretty much a basket case today, in spite of all American efforts to put Humpty-Dumpty back together through democratic elections.

From Pakistan in the east to the Maghreb in the west, the Middle East is busily engaged in murdering its own populations. The Sunni-Shiite split in the Moslem world has never been more violent and bitter than it is today. The Kurds and the Alewives, as well as the Druze and Christians are struggling to survive in what is left of Syria. Turkey faces a Kurdish breakaway, Al Qaida has rejuvenated itself, Afghanistan is ungovernable, Egypt is torn asunder and financially bankrupt, Libya is very unstable, Jordan totters on its weak legs fearing a Palestinian takeover, Sudan and Eritrea are engaged in horrific civil wars – in short, the whole Middle East is one awful bloody volatile mess. Except for our blessed Israel. And that is what Yechezkel said would happen when he prophetically peered far into the future times. Quite remarkable!

There are many frightening visions regarding the Jewish people and the Land of Israel that also appear in the book of Yechezkel. Though the prophet foresees eventual redemption and triumph, blessing and tranquility, there apparently is a dark passageway that must be traversed before emerging into the light.

The Talmud and Jewish tradition always portrayed the period preceding Israel's complete redemption as being a difficult one. As such, many of the great rabbis of the Talmud expressed the hope that they would be living in a different generation and thus be spared witnessing the events of that time. We would certainly hope that the persecutions suffered by our people over the past two centuries, culminating in the horrors of the Holocaust and the wars that Israel has been forced to fight in order to prevent its annihilation, will have certainly fulfilled that prophecy of tragedy and terrible trial.

Yet, I still find the prophecies of Yechezkel very cryptic, mysterious and potentially disturbing. So my fall back position is the one expressed by Rambam - that one should not overly concentrate on interpreting such events and matters for they will eventually sort themselves out in God's good time and manner.

The book of Yechezkel devotes a great deal of space to the description of the structure and service of the holy Temple in Jerusalem. Most biblical commentators ascribe all of these descriptions and details to the forthcoming Third Temple. Therefore those prophecies also still await the actuality of their fulfillment. Nonetheless the certainty of Yechezkel's prophecies and the details of his visionary descriptions give one confidence as to their accuracy and reality.

The aforementioned realization of his prophecies regarding what our current Middle East would look like certainly lends credence to the further prophecies regarding the Third Temple and its establishment. Jews have read these prophecies for centuries on end and cherished them and believed in them when there seemed to be no possible way that they could ever actually materialize.

In our time when so many of the prophecies of our holy prophets have been fulfilled in exactitude in our lives and in front of our eyes, there really should be little if any doubt left as to the veracity of the remaining prophecies currently yet unfulfilled. Though the details of our future are shrouded from our gaze, the general outline of that future is discernible through the words of the prophets of Israel.

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL

"In this manner (idolatry) the world continued to develop until the birth of Abraham, the Pillar of the World" (RAMBAM, Idolatry 1:2).

"When this giant among men was weaned, he began to cast about in his mind by day & by night, wondering: Whence comes the Energy which rotated the celestial bodies? There was no one to instruct him. But his mind could not rest and he continued to gain in understanding until he finally arrived at the truth." (adapted from RMBM *ibid.* 1:3).

When Abraham Abinu came on the scene, the Rambam says, he looked at the sun and saw how wonderfully it works. The sun is just big enough to warm us. If it were bigger, we would be burned to a crisp; if it were smaller, we would be frozen. If the sun were a little closer, we would be burned; if it were

more distant, we would be frozen. How did it happen that the sun was the exact distance and the exact size? Abraham was studying the happiness of this world, how good the sun is for us. With that he came to recognize that there is Someone in charge. That is Abraham's system.

He looked at everything in the world and saw that nothing was accidental. Everything is full of plan and purpose which demonstrates Kindness, Wisdom & Power, and from that he came to recognize the Creator/Bore' Olam.

Whenever you look into the whole purpose of the universe, there is not a thing that doesn't demonstrate plan and purpose. Apples turn red when they are ripe and fit to eat. When they are not the right color, they are hard and sour. They are not healthy that way, and you could get a stomachache if you ate them. The fact that apples turn red is enough proof for everyone to know there is a Creator. And peaches turn pink and red, and oranges turn orange and bananas turn yellow and Granny Smith apples turn green.

All of the instructions to produce these fruit are encoded in 1 million bits of information on the DNA of each seed. This includes production of the tree which bears the fruit which has seeds inside them in order to continue reproduction of these fruits for us.

It is as if Hashem signed His name on them, "Hashem is here."

Everything proclaims Hashem's Presence. "The World is filled with the Hesed of Hashem" (Tehillim 33)

Abraham became the "Pillar of Hesed" in emulation of Hashem whose greatest Hesed is revealing Himself to mankind through all His creations. "All of Your deeds praise You" (Ashre).

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