



# A New Path At 75

*When Abraham was seventy five years old, G-d spoke to him for the first time, setting him on a new path of connection to the Divine. What message could that have for a broken, devastated Israel?*

## Be Like Abraham

This week, I met the principal of a high school in the Netherlands. This school has 800 students from various backgrounds, including Christians, Muslims, and others. During our conversation, when we discussed the situation in Israel, he mentioned that he tries to present both sides of the conflict to the students, to allow them make their own decisions about who is right.

That really got me going. I pointed out that if one believes in the Ten Commandments, one accepts that there are absolute moral guidelines, and it's not up to us to decide who is right. I asked him a hypothetical question: if a student at his school were to steal money from a wealthy child to buy a sandwich for a hungry child from a poor family, would he have the moral courage to reject the behavior? What if the student would say, "With all due respect, we live in a democracy. You are entitled to your beliefs and I am entitled to my beliefs. —and I think that not only is it allowed, it's a duty to take from the rich to feed the poor"?

I asked if he had studied the Bible. Things started to make more sense to me when he responded, "It was too boring." But then he added, "When I hear you say it, it makes more sense."

I explained that the Torah teaches us ethics—it's not something open to personal choice; it's God who decides what is right and what is not. The Almighty stated in the Ten Commandments that one must not commit murder, and therefore it is forbidden. It's not me, you, or the students who decide what is right and what is not.

He still wasn't comfortable with the idea, because the percentage of

religious people in the Netherlands was decreasing, he said, making it very difficult to discuss religion in school.

Of course, I had a ready answer. "Have you heard of Abraham?"

"Of course."

"When Abraham began promoting the belief in one G-d, he was a lone voice; the entire world was against him." I told him. "But in the end, he prevailed, and today, most of the world believes in one God. So, being in a minority is not a reason to be deterred; we could follow in the footsteps of Abraham."

This guy, by the way, was not an anti-semite at all. He was very proud to share that he grew up with stories about his grandmother in the Netherlands who had saved Jews during World War II in her own home. In fact, there was a period when they had to host Nazi soldiers in their home, yet incredibly, those soldiers did not reveal the secret they were keeping a Jewish family there.

## **When Did Abraham's Career Start?**

In the beginning of last week's Parshah, on the words "Noach, a righteous man in his generation," Rashi says that according to one opinion, "If he had lived in the generation of Abraham, he wouldn't have been considered anything."

The Rebbe notes that commentators are confused by this statement: Abraham was born 58 years before Noah passed away, so Noah was alive and active during Abraham's time. How can Rashi say that if Noah had lived in Abraham's generation, he still wouldn't have been considered anything? He actually lived in Abraham's generation!

The Rebbe answers that the story of Abraham begins in our Parshah, with God's command, "Go forth from your land, from your birthplace, and from your father's house." Rashi explains that the reason God wanted Abraham to leave Haran and go to the land of Israel was to make him famous; so that "I will make your name great in the world." This implies that Abraham's name and reputation were not widely known in the world beforehand.

In other words, despite the fact that Abraham technically lived in the lifetime of Noah, it cannot be called "his generation" until he actually began making an impact. This command in our Parshah—when he was seventy five years old, some twenty years after Noah's passing—marked the beginning of Abraham's influence on the world

(Sichos Kodesh 5740 v. 1 p. 294).

## **The Key Difference**

But this still seems difficult to understand.

Abraham was already famous from a young age. Every child who starts learning about Parshat Lech Lecha knows the story of Terach, Abraham's father, who used to sell idols. Once, when Terach went out of the city, he asked Abraham to watch over the idols, but instead, he proceeded to break them all, and for that, he was thrown into a fiery furnace from which he miraculously emerged unscathed. All of this was well-known at the time, in Ur Kasdim before he went to Haran. Afterwards as well, when he was in Haran, we learn that he influenced many people to believe in one God, and Sarah reached many women as well.

So what does it mean, "to make your name great in the world." Had he not been influencing the world until then?

The Rebbe explains that until the command of "Lech Lecha," Abraham did what *he* thought was ethical; God hadn't specifically commanded him anything yet. In our portion, however, with "Lech Lecha," a new path begins. God instructs Abraham, and Abraham fulfills God's command. This adds a whole new dimension to their relationship. This is when he truly connects to Hashem. It starts with the command of "Lech Lecha," and continues with the command to perform circumcision when Abraham was ninety-nine years old, and culminates with the ultimate test, the binding of Isaac.

So, "I will make your name great in the world" means that Abraham shows us how to behave not based on our own decisions—but by following God's guidance on what is right and moral. That's what is unique about Abraham's life after age seventy five.

## **The Israeli Equivalent**

My friends, not many people know that Abraham our forefather was born in the year 1948 from the creation of the world. Modern Israel was born in its secular equivalent—1948.

It took Abraham seventy-five years before he truly found his calling; it was only then that his greatness truly became known. From 1948 to 2023 is also seventy five years. Perhaps I could suggest that everything Israel has experienced in the past seventy-five years is likewise akin to before "Lech Lecha." Israel has been thrown into the fiery furnace numerous times, emerging stronger each time. It has

influenced both Jews and non-Jews worldwide—but all of this was part of its preparation. Now, in the year 5784, it is setting out on a new path.

The unity we've witnessed in the past weeks and the spiritual awakening that is everywhere, hasn't been seen for many, many years, whether in Israel or abroad.

There are endless stories of acts of kindness and inspiration. Apartment owners are forgoing rent for young soldiers going to reserves; thousands around the world who own apartments in Israel are offering them for free to families forced to evacuate. Jews all over the world want to buy pairs of tefillin—there is such huge demand for tefillin and mezuzot that the supply can't keep up with the demand.

It's as if the Jewish people are now fulfilling the command of "Lech Lecha."

According to the Chassidic interpretation, going "from your land" means giving up your personal desires. Indeed, we are starting to do what G-d wants.

"From your birthplace" refers to your inherent nature; some people are born with tempers and some people are born stingy, and changing one's nature is extremely difficult, so we are told, "Lech Lecha" - leave that behind, transform yourself.

"From your father's house" relates to the education we receive at home. Unfortunately, a lot of what people thought was true has been proven to be disastrously wrong. Sometimes, even that needs to be cast aside to fulfill G-d's will. (Toras Menachem v. 41 p. 218. Likkutei Sichos v. 1 p. 17).

We had become accustomed to endless arguments, to the point that we forgot what we were arguing about. But after Simchat Torah of 5784, we're embarking on a new path: "To the land that I will show you." We're heading to the inner Land of Israel, where the desire to fulfill God's will is paramount. From today, we strive to do God's will, and with that commitment, we can be confident that the promise to Abraham will be fulfilled: "And I will make your name great, and you shall be a blessing."