



us to growth and self-development.

What, then, are some of the non-odious, non-odorously, non-invidious comparisons that we ought to make – though we may suffer some discomfort from the process?

First, let us compare Jews and Goyim. I think I am fairly philo-Semitic. Yet, sometimes, I think we suffer by such comparison. Take the specific case of Israel and the United States of America. Permit me to quote to you several sentences in English translation of an article by Shlomo Nakdimon, a writer for Maariv, and not particularly known for his excess of religious zeal. He writes as follows:

“Sometimes one cannot fail to be astonished at the fact that we, the people of the Bible, are estranged from the recognition of the source and roots of our nationhood.

This thought arose in my mind when I listened to the inaugural address of Gerald Ford, the 38th President of the USA. At the end of his impressive remarks, he uttered the words, “may God help me.”

... On American coins you will find the words, “in God we trust.” However, for us, the Jewish people, who first brought about the enthronement of the Deity, He is almost non-existent. It seems almost as if we are ashamed to indicate that we are linked to Him.

The United States is not a theocratic country. Nevertheless it seeks opportunities to stress its relationship between man and its Creator...

In Israel, however, when we open the Knesset, when we swear in a President, a Prime Minister, cabinet or Knesset members, we do not relate to the Deity. It was only with great reluctance that the non-religious groups agreed to include the words “Rock of Israel” in the State’s Declaration of Independence, as a reference to a Supreme Being.

Quite frankly, the comparison hurts.

Next, let us compare Jews with Arabs. This has been a month of a great deal of diplomatic activity and traveling. The American Secretary of State was in Egypt, and the Israeli Prime Minister was in Washington. On October 10th or 11th, Mr. Kissinger went to meet with President Sadat. Sadat kept the Secretary of State of the most powerful country of the world cooling his heels during the daytime, and would not meet with him until after nightfall, because he did not want to violate the Islamic holy day of Ramadan. But when the Prime Minister of Israel came to

America, and was told that the White House would be glad to offer him a kosher meal, he declined it! What a painful and humiliating comparison! Is this the “national pride” that Zionism promised us as a result of the founding of a Jewish state?

Now, let us compare Jews with Jews. We American Jews are rightly proud of our great charitableness. If nothing else, at least we have made history with our contributions to the UJA. So, let us compare ourselves to another Jewish community, one that is much smaller in size, South Africa. The Yom Kippur War stimulated a campaign by the five million Jews of the United States, who together pledged 750 million dollars, averaging \$150 per capita, for the UJA. In South Africa, 120 thousand Jews, who form the Jewish community there, raised 58 million dollars – an average of \$480 per capita!

Or, compare American Jews with Russian Jews, other than the contrast between our relaxed attitude toward Israel and the obvious heroism of Russian Jews who are defying the might of the Communist empire in order to emigrate to Israel – and most of them do emigrate to Israel and stay there.

In America, several weeks ago, a friend of mine uttered a contemptuous comment about New York Jews who are indelicate enough to carry the lulav and etrog in the street. The remark angered me greatly, because I have just read about Yosef Mendelovitch, interned in slave labor camp in Vladmire who, despite the fact that he was ill with high blood pressure, risked extra punishment by refusing to appear without his kippah. Some comparison!

The Brit-Milah Board of New York informs us that circumcision is vanishing amongst non-Orthodox Jews in New York, who resort to physicians rather than to mohalim, and for whom circumcision has become a surgical procedure rather than a profoundly important religious ceremony. Compare that to Uri Wadka, who became religious in the course of agitating for emigration, and who achieved a degree of fame – or notoriety, if you are a Soviet Communist – in the slave labor camp at Perm, when he circumcised himself with crude instruments, and was denied medical attention for his efforts.

The same, above-mentioned Mendelovitch and Wadka, plus a man called Garilius, were together in a Soviet maximum labor camp, and were punished with solitary confinement. The reason was that they decided to finish their back-breaking weekly quota of work in one day less

during the week so that they could rest on Shabbat. When it was denied to them, they went on a strike – in a Russian slave-labor camp! I am told that there are even Orthodox Jews, or at least Jews who belong to Orthodox synagogues, who feel that they cannot take off Yom Tov, especially the second day of Yom Tov... What an embarrassment!

Such are the kinds of comparisons that occur to me. I confess that I suffer, we suffer, from them. Yet, such suffering by comparison may be the stimulus we need to rouse us from our complacency, to make us aware of the goals that are within our power to attain.

But perhaps more important than comparing oneself to others, is what Walter Scott advised, “comparing what thou art with what thou mightst have been.” That is the true test – measuring our reality against our potential.

Indeed, this is probably the meaning of one particularly striking comparison in the Midrash from which we quoted above. That is the comparison of Adam to Moses. In it, in a magnificent leap over the generations, Adam says to Moses that, “I am greater than you are, because I was created in

the צלם אלוקים (image of God). Moses responds that no, I am greater, because you lost your כבוד (dignity) by sinning, whereas I was given זיו הפנים (a special glow or halo) which I kept to the very end, to the very day of my death.

Here, I believe, we find not the comparison of one against the other, but each man measured against himself. Take Adam. Look at how he began. He had enormous promise; he was created in the very image of God. And yet, he disappointed himself. Compared to what Adam might have been, Adam was a failure.

Moses was born with great potential and he fulfilled it. Compared to what he might have been – that, indeed, he was. He expressed all his talents and his abilities.

So, ultimately, the most important comparison, the one that may cause us to suffer most, but the one which is most creative, is each man against himself.

Perhaps if we compare what we might have been to what we are, we will assure that in the future we will be more than we would otherwise have become.

*Read more at [www.yu.edu/about/lamm-heritage](http://www.yu.edu/about/lamm-heritage).*

## The Reputation Nation

*Dr. Erica Brown*

**W**arren Buffet famously said, “It takes 20 years to build a reputation, and five minutes to ruin it.” Digitally, we can ruin someone’s reputation even faster than that. One negative tweet, Uber rating, restaurant posting, rate my professor rant, or newspaper comment can damage someone’s reputation irrevocably. There are websites today that try to manage or defend reputations to “help professionals develop and promote a truthful and positive online image through proactive reputation management strategies.”

If it were only that easy. Gossip, cancellations, and trash talk doesn’t just disappear, especially in this polarizing climate. Buffet, in his quote above, puts the onus on the person rather than his or her critics. “If you think,” he says, about how quickly your reputation can change, “you’ll do things differently.”

Understanding the importance of a sterling reputation is as old as the first-Jew, Abraham. One of the most astonishing and understudied encounters between Abram, as he was then called, and his neighbors, appears in this week’s Torah reading, parshat Lekh Lekha. In chapter 14, Abraham found himself amidst a battle between four kings

and five kings when he tried to rescue his nephew Lot. The verses are not easy to follow given the number of leaders involved and the complex geography.

All war brings confusion and collateral damage. As the battle ends, “King Melchizedek of Salem brought out bread and wine” and blessed Abram. The Jewish ritual of blessing wine and breaking bread originates with a foreign king. Abram gave a tenth of what he owned to King Melchizedek, likely as a form of tax or tribute. Then the King of Sodom, another of the warring kings, said to Abram, “Give me the persons, and take the possessions for yourself.”

When wars are over, it’s time to tally up losses and split rewards. Abram, however, was not willing to take a thing. “Abram said to the king of Sodom, ‘I swear to the Lord, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth: I will not take so much as a thread or a sandal strap of what is yours; you shall not say, ‘It is I who made Abram rich.’” Rashi observes that Abram was confident that God would provide him with wealth, implied in Genesis 12:2. He did not, therefore, want a human being to take the credit.

Abram wanted nothing from these skirmishes.

He gave a portion of what he had without taking as much as a shoelace. He did not even take a small and insignificant item. The Talmud (BT Hullin 89a) concludes from this that Abram's descendants would merit two commandments that involve a string or strap: the thread of sky-blue wool worn on ritual fringes and the strap of the phylacteries.

Abram, it seems, wanted to make a statement to those around him about his personal integrity as a leader and about the kind of God he served. Abram attributed his success to God alone. War to him was not about bounty, captives, or exploitation of the vulnerable. It was about mediating unfortunate obstructions to the Divine promise he received. According to the King of Sodom, Abram was within his right to take what he wanted but gave away his money instead. By not taking the loot of war, Abram was making a positive character deposit in the minds of the leaders who surrounded him. Abram was forgoing short-term gains for the long-term investment that was his reputation. When it comes to our reputations, there are no short-cuts.

Later, in Genesis 34:30, after Dina was taken and violated by Shechem, Jacob chastises his sons Simeon and Levi for creating and implementing a devious plan to punish Shechem's community: "You have brought trouble on me, making me odious among the inhabitants of the land..." The Hebrew expression to make one odious, *akhartem oti*, literally means to make me smell bad. A smell is invisible but can leave a highly potent signature of one's presence. The medieval Spanish commentator, Abraham ibn Ezra, explains Jacob's fears: "They will hate me as one loathes something which gives off a horrible odor." While there are many interpretations of Jacob's behavior here, one message Jacob tried to teach his sons is that our reputations matter. Even when others hurt us profoundly, we must always seek higher ground.

Abram's defense of his personal integrity as a leader brings to mind another dramatic Biblical moment. As the prophet Samuel aged and effectively retired from service, he publicly pledged his honesty.

Then Samuel said to all Israel, "I have yielded to you in all you have asked of me and have set a king over you. Henceforth the king will be your leader. As for me, I have grown old and gray—but my sons are still with you—and I have been your leader from my youth to this day. Here I am! Testify against me, in the presence of the

LORD and in the presence of His anointed one: Whose ox have I taken, or whose ass have I taken? Whom have I defrauded or whom have I robbed? From whom have I taken a bribe to look the other way? I will return it to you." They responded, "You have not defrauded us, and you have not robbed us, and you have taken nothing from anyone." (I Samuel 12:1-4)

One view in the Talmud (BT Nedarim 38a) is that Samuel, like Abraham, was wealthy; he did not need to rely upon the bribes and handouts of his flock. But there is something deeper going on in this odd summative speech.

Samuel was a steward of the Israelites from his youngest years. His mother Hannah pledged him to the Temple under the high priest Eli when he was a child. As he ages, he recounted a lifetime of devotion to his people, culminating with a testament about the many storms they weathered together: "Here I am!" Despite it all. Because of it all. I am still here with you. Samuel needed his flock to affirm that after he was gone, his noble reputation would stay intact. If there had been any misunderstanding or misuse of his authority, let it be known now. The people let it be known. Samuel, they responded in unison, took nothing. He was outstanding in character and in trustworthiness.

Reputations are fragile. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks affirms this in *Essays on Ethics*, "When people associate religiosity with integrity, decency, humility, and compassion, God's name is sanctified. When they come to associate it with contempt for others and for the law, the result is a desecration of God's name."

Leaders can control many things. But they cannot control what is said about them. What they can do, as Abraham, Jacob, and Samuel teach us, is protect the reputations they already have. So, too, with us all. We must work hard. Serve. Apologize often. Compensate for error. And, most importantly, assume others have good intent. The fact that someone may not judge us favorably does not mean we should do the same. And, in the worst-case scenario, we must remember that we are not the worst mistake we have ever made. Reputations, our reputations, are built on justice and a thousand small acts of kindness.

# Kehunas Avraham

Rabbi Elchanan Adler

In the middle of Parshas Lech Lecha after Avraham's battle with the four kings, the Torah describes two interactions immediately following his victory. The Torah tells us about the well-known offer that the king of Sedom makes to Avraham. He tells Avraham to take all of the spoils of war, and in return all he wants is his people who had been taken captive. Before delving into Avraham's response, it is worth noting the following quirk in the pesukim setting this scene. It is in pasuk yud zayin that the Torah tells us that the king of Sedom went out to greet Avraham after his victory. However, it is only three pesukim later that the Torah continues to describe the interaction between Avraham and the king of Sedom. Meanwhile, smack in the middle of this story are three pesukim describing how Malkitzedek, the king of Yerushalayim, also comes out to meet Avraham and brings with him refreshments and blessings. After feeding Avraham, Malkitzedek – who was a kohein – gives both Avraham a blessing and Ha-Kadosh Baruch Hu himself a blessing. After this interlude the Torah resumes telling us about the king of Sedom's offer to Avraham and how Avraham refuses to take from the king even a shoelace, lest he take credit for making Avraham wealthy when in fact it was a guarantee from Ha-Kadosh Baruch Hu that he would be wealthy. The curious placement of this interaction with Malkitzedek begs the question, why would the Torah interrupt describing Avraham's meeting the King of Sedom to tell us about Avraham's meeting Malkitzedek?

Ohr Hachaim (Bereishis 14:18 *DH U'Malkitzedek*) suggests that the Torah was trying to draw a stark contrast between the behavior of Malkitzedek, who was righteous, and the king of Sedom, who was evil. Avraham had been returning from war. He was likely exhausted and hungry, so like the mensch that he was, Malkitzedek brought Avraham "*lechem v'yayin*", food and wine. The king of Sedom on the other hand, despite being the king that he was and despite the degree of appreciation he should have been expressing to Avraham for defeating the four mighty kings, he shows up empty handed.

There is in fact another distinction to be drawn between the behavior of Malkitzedek and the King of Sedom. Malkitzedek is identified by the Torah as being a kohein. Seemingly it was for that reason that Avraham gave

ma'aser to Malkitzedek. Kohanim had the responsibility of bringing korbanos on behalf of klal yisrael, but they had an additional job as well. The pesukim say in parshas Eikev (Devarim 10:8) that in addition to bringing korbanos they also had the responsibility of giving a beracha to klal yisrael. But, they cannot just give any type of beracha. The beracha preceding birkas kohanim ends by saying "*le'varech es amo Yisrael be'ahava*". Based on this word, the Magen Avraham (OC 128:18) quotes the Zohar that a kohein can only give the beracha if he is in good spirits. In other words, there is a certain sense of generosity and camaraderie necessary for the kohein to be fit to give this beracha. If he isn't in the right state of mind then he shouldn't give the beracha. As displayed by the presents that Malkitzedek gave to Avraham Avinu, he gave him a beracha filled with love and connection. He gave Avraham a beracha that was focused solely on Avraham's betterment. This comes in stark contrast to the king of Sedom who only offered Avraham the spoils of war for his own self interest and never thought to wish Avraham well for Avraham's sake alone.

In truth, this interaction between Malkitzedek and Avraham bears greater fruit in the pages of Chazal. Chazal (Nedarim 32b) wonder why Malkitzedek was stripped of the zechus to have his offspring become the future kohanim of klal yisroel for it to be given to Avraham. They answer that it was because when Malkitzedek gave a beracha to Avraham and HaKadosh Baruch Hu, he first gave one to Avraham and only then blessed Hakadosh Baruch Hu, when he should have first given a beracha to HaShem and only then blessed Avraham. In Chazal's words, it was because Malkitzedek was *makdim birkas eved le'birkas kono* [preceded the blessing of a servant to the blessing of a creator] that he was held responsible. This transgression and punishment beg an explanation. What's the connection between the injustice and the retribution? What did Avraham have that Malkitzedek was missing?

The Gemara in Rosh Hashana (28b) discusses the topic of ba'al tosfis in the context of the birkas kohanim. The gemara entertains the following scenario where a kohein goes to bless the kehillah and says to himself that since Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave him the reshus to bless the people, he might as well add his own additional beracha.

In such a case the gemara says that if he does make any additions, he has transgressed ba'al tosf. Often the word "reshus" refers to authority or power. If so, there is an interesting tension that emerges from this gemara. On one hand, the kohanim are given a degree of autonomy and are in fact imbued with authority in this process of blessing klal yisroel; it finds expression in their needing to raise their hands or in their need to face the congregation when blessing. They are in fact playing an essential role and contributing towards the blessing. They aren't merely praying to G-d and letting Him do the rest. However, on the other hand, they're limited in their contribution to the beracha in that they cannot add anything to the beracha itself.

In truth the tension is not as contradictory as it seems. It's not that Kohanim are merely davening to HaShem to bless the people and it is not that the kohanim are blessing the people themselves. There is a middle ground. The Kohanim act as a medium and as a channel through which the blessing of Hakadosh Baruch Hu can flow. Ultimately it is Hashem himself giving the blessing but the kohanim are the vehicles.

Not only is this potentially the reality of how birkas kohanim works, but since the kohanim are in fact the vehicles for the beracha of Hakadosh Baruch Hu they themselves must recognize and be cognizant of the fact that they are not the source of the beracha but rather that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is the source of the beracha and that they are merely the conduits for its passage.

With this understanding we can explain a little bit better the episode with Malkitzedek and Avraham. Malkitzedek was giving a birkas kohein to Avraham. However, because he gave a beracha to Avraham before giving a beracha to HaShem Himself, it suggests that he believed that he was in fact the source of the blessing being given. He failed to recognize that really it was coming from HaShem. Had Malkitzedek recognized that, of course he would have honored HaShem by giving Him the blessing first. Malkitzedek had the giving nature and good spirit necessary to give a birkas kohein but his conduct conveyed a lack of recognition that the source for the beracha was Hashem himself. Avraham on the other hand had both prerequisites. Avraham had the good spirits, the giving nature, but never lost sight of Hakadosh Baruch Hu's role in the world. Chazal tell us how Avraham would encourage his guests before eating food to recognize who the food

was coming from. In our story itself, Avraham's behavior highlights the synthesis of these character traits. When the king of Sedom offered Avraham the spoils of war, the very first thing Avraham does is acknowledge Hashem as the creator and sustainer of all things. Then he goes onto say that although those with him should take spoils for themselves, he will not take even a shoelace. It's from this that Chazal know that Avraham has an "ayin tova". This episode clearly depicts his unequivocal acknowledgement of Hakadosh Baruch Hu in addition to his keen sensitivity, care, and love for those surrounding him.

To conclude, the berachah in shmoneh esrei immediately following Birkas Kohanim is *Sim Shalom*. There is a unique connection in halacha between these two berachos in that we only ever recite Sim Shalom when we are also reciting Birkas Kohanim. The connection between these two berachos goes beyond just the halacha. We beseech HaKadosh Baruch Hu in Sim Shalom, "*barcheinu aveinu kulanu ke'echod*". We ask Hashem to bless us like "echod". Who is "echod"? The meforshim tell us that "echod" is really Avraham Avinu. We're asking HaKadosh Baruch Hu to bless us like he did Avraham. We know that Avraham was blessed with a critical role in future berachos. The pasuk (Bereishis 12:3) says "*ve'nivrechu vecha kol mishpechos ha'adamah*". Future generations will be blessed through him. People will bless their children by asking Hashem to help their children be like Avraham. In light of what we said until now maybe we can explain this a little better. Avraham Avinu was the original mekareiv. He was the one and only person who dedicated himself at his time to spreading the name of G-d throughout the world. It's because of his commitment to spreading the oneness of HaKadosh Baruch Hu that Avraham is referred to as "echod". Avraham embodied the meeting point between the two middos we mentioned earlier. Firstly, he was a *nadiv lev*, a giving person; he was a person filled with love and connection towards others. Secondly, Avraham was the model servant of G-d in his recognition that all comes from Hashem. Avraham never failed to recognize HaKadosh Baruch Hu as the source behind the happenings of the world. With these two unique and critical attributes that Avraham lived with, he was a most worthy beginning for the line of kohanim, those gifted with the merit to bestow blessing on klal yisroel.

## Take Your Time

Rabbi Joshua (The Hoffer) Hoffman z"l

As Avraham and Sarah approach Egypt, Avraham, realizing that Sarah is a beautiful woman, takes measures to prevent her abduction and violation. He asks her to tell people that she is his sister, not his wife. Avraham tells her that by doing this it will go well for him for her sake (Bereishis 12:13). Rashi explains this to mean that the Egyptians would give him presents. This is really difficult to understand, because we know that, later, Avraham refused to take anything from the spoils of the war in which he was victorious. Moreover, the Rambam (Sefer HaMitzvos #3) tells us that Avraham was suffused with a love of God and was moved by it to draw others to His service. How could such a person be interested in obtaining gifts at such a critical moment?

Rav Eli Munk, in his *Call of the Torah*, explains that Avraham was certainly not interested in amassing personal wealth. Rather, he felt that through his excessive demands of payment in order to grant Sarah's hand in marriage he would gain time for Divine providence to intervene, or for the famine to end. We may add that this tactic is similar to that later used by Queen Esther, who asked the king to come with Haman to a feast where she would make her request, and at the feast asked them both to come the next day to a second feast, where she would finally make her request. As the commentators explain, she was waiting for an indication that Divine Providence would intervene on behalf of the Jewish people. So, too, did Avraham engage in negotiations for Sarah's hand to provide for wider range of time for Divine Providence to take over.

On a different plane, Rav Eliyahu Meir Bloch, zt"l, in his *Pninei Da'as*, says that the actions of our forefathers, even in mundane matters, were all done for the higher purpose, to sanctify God's name. For example, in Parshas Vayeitzei

(Bereishis 29:21), Yaakov tells Lavan to give him his wife so that he can come upon her. Rashi notes that the most vulgar of people do not speak in this way. Rather, he says Yaakov's intention was to produce offspring. A super-commentary to Rashi, Be'er Yitzchak, adds that although the most vulgar of people do not speak in this way, the most holy of people, who have only holy intentions in mind, does. Yaakov viewed his relations with his wife as a way to produce the tribes of Israel, with no personal consideration in mind. In the same way, says Rav Bloch, Avraham sought gifts to use for the sanctification of God's name. At whatever inn he stayed at, he would call out in the name of God. Although Rav Bloch does not spell this out, perhaps Avraham's intention was to be able to repay the loans on his return trip to Canaan, that he made when he went down to Egypt without any money. By repaying the loans, he would have an opportunity to thank and praise God, and draw more people towards his service.

Rabbi Aryeh Leib Lipkin, a nephew of Rav Yisroel Salanter, in his *Divrei Yedidiah*, offers yet another explanation. He says that Avraham, knowing Sarah and understanding the close relationship that they had, understood that she was not interested in her own welfare but in Avraham's. Each of them acted with chesed, or loving kindness, toward the other, and focused on their spouse's welfare. When Sarah realized that it would benefit Avraham if she said that she was his sister, she readily consented. Based on the comments of Rav Bloch we can add that her wish to benefit Avraham stemmed from their mutual goal of using all of their resources in order to sanctify God's name. Sarah understood how Avraham would use the gifts that he would receive for this purpose, and, therefore, as his partner in this mission, she went along with his plan.

## Whats in a Name?

Rabbi Yossi Goldin

One theme that courses beneath the narratives of Sefer Bereishit is the theme of names. From the day of creation- when Hashem gives names to day, night, heaven and earth- to Adam HaRishon's naming of all the animals on earth, to the names that parents give to their children across the generations- naming plays a prominent

role throughout this Sefer and beyond...

Yet in this week's parsha, names play an even more prominent role. For the first time, G-d changes a person's name- as He changes Avram's name to Avraham and Sarai's name to Sarah. In addition, twice in our Parsha Hashem tells parents what to name their sons- Hagar is told to name

her son Yishmael and Avraham is told to name his son Yitzchak. Why does G-d play a much more active role in the process of naming in this week's parsha?

It would seem that G-d is relaying a message regarding the prominence and importance of names. More than simply a social construct used for the purpose of communication, a person's name has tremendous power and significance. It defines the way that everyone around him relates to him, and it also captures the essence of the person. When Avram and Sarai's life roles changed fundamentally, therefore, that change had to be reflected in their names. And, as Yishmael and Yitzchak were about to be born, G-d apparently felt it crucial that particular messages be highlighted in their names, and He therefore relayed those messages to Hagar and Avraham.

The power and importance of a name is repeatedly emphasized by Chazal. Some meforshim point out that the two middle letters of neshama, the Hebrew word for "soul", spell the Hebrew word "sheim", which means "name" - because a person's name is an expression of their inner soul, it captures the essence of who they are. In Parshat Bereishit, before Chava is created, the Torah states that Hashem brings all the animals to Adam "to see what he would call them, as whatever Adam, a living being, calls for himself, that is its name". At first glance, this passuk seems strange. -What is the relevance of Adam's naming of the animals? Why is this process even recorded in the Torah, at all? The Midrash explains that Adam did not choose random names for the animals. Instead, Adam was divinely granted

the unique ability to understand the true character of each animal, and thereby give it a name that truly expresses its essence and depth. In the same vein, Chazal say, parents are enabled to follow in Adam's footsteps, as Hashem endows them with a small piece of prophecy in choosing the correct name for their child - one that expresses the essence of the child.

Taking these ideas a step further, Chazal maintain that the name given to a child can also have a concrete impact upon that child's life path. The Gemara Brachot 7b states that "shma garim", "the name of a person has an effect on who they become" - and it lists a number of examples in Tanach where a person's name ultimately defined his future actions.

When Hashem blesses us with a child, as parents we are given the unique privilege to name that child. This privilege is an important responsibility that should not be taken lightly. We are charged with finding a name that builds upon our child's rich familial history, while also expressing our hopes and dreams for who he or she will become. Yet thankfully, at that moment we are not alone. Although Hashem does not tell us directly what to name our children - as He did with Hagar and Avraham - Chazal maintain that He is there guiding us in our decision, enveloped in a small glimmer of prophecy. And from that moment on, we daven that our children should live up to the legacy, hopes and dreams, of their names - while we also do our best to parent in a way that will ensure that he does so.

## The Value of Future Potential

*Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh (Transcribed and adapted by a talmid from the YUTorah shiur originally given at Gruss Kollel on Oct 29, 2020)*

**T**here is an interesting contrast between the beginnings of last week's Parsha and this week's Parsha. In the case of Noach, Torah says: *Eileh toldos Noach. Noach ish tzadik, tamim haya be-dorosav*—he was righteous; he was perfect; he was a *tzadik ha-dor*. And therefore, *Va-yomer Hashem la-Noach: Make a teiva and I will save you because you are special. But by Avraham Avinu we find that the Torah says: Va-yomer Hashem el Avraham. Lech lecha me-artzecha u-me-moladtecha, u-mi-beis avicha el ha-aretz asher areka. Ve-e'escha le-goy gadol*, etc. What do we know about Avraham? We know who his father was and who his brothers were, etc. We know his

family migrated. But we don't know anything special about him. The Torah doesn't say that Avraham was a *tzadik tamim* or anything else about him that was unique. Why is it that Hashem chose Noach because he was so righteous, while He chose Avraham seemingly out of the blue?! We know the Midrashim about all the wonderful things Avraham did until that day. But why are they not written in the Chumash?

I want to suggest a possible angle via another comparison between Avraham and Noach. What does the Torah say about Noach? *Noach Ish tzadik, tamim haya be-dorosav. Es ha-Elokim his'halech Noach*. Noach was Tamim,

and he walked with Hashem. At the very end of this week's Parsha, after many of Avraham's trials and tribulations, Hashem makes a bris with Avraham—Bris Milah—and says: *his'haleich lefanai ve-vehyei tamim*. Noach was described as *Tamim* from the beginning. Yet Hashem commands Avraham: *hishaleich lefanai vehyei tamim*. That seems very strange. After a full-parsha worth of growth, Avraham seems to be in a place where Hashem tells him to start working on what Noach had already accomplished! That can't be. Rather, the Torah is trying to make a very sharp point here. Hashem chose Noach because of the madreiga that he had reached—Noach was special because of what he did. Why did Hashem choose Avraham? It was not because of what he did. Maybe he did a lot of things, and maybe he didn't. Midrashim tell us about the incident of the *Kivshon ha-Aish* and all kinds of stories from Avram's early life. But the Torah doesn't mention them. Hashem chose Avraham because of what he was going to do, not because he already was *tamim*. The pasuk emphasizes the future tense: *his'haleich lefanai, vehyei tamim*. The bechira of Avraham was not a reward for what he already did. Rather, it was a mission for what he was going to do in the future. *Ki yedativ*—as it says in next week's Parsha—*le-ma'an asher yitzaveh es banav ve-es beiso acharav*, i.e., what he is going to accomplish. On the other hand, why did Hashem pick Noach? What was Noach's mission? He just had to do one thing—to survive. And what did Noach do right after the Mabal? Whatever he did was not terribly impressive. Let's not repeat it now. But what did Hashem tell Noach to do in the future? Not die... *Yasher Koach!* Noach may have done a lot. But Hashem didn't think that the future of the world came from him. Hashem did not give him a mission.

He just didn't die. By Avraham, though, the Torah doesn't even tell us what Avraham did or did not do before he was chosen. That is not important. What is important is what he will do, what his *tafkid* is, and what mission Hashem gives him. He will be *tamim*. He will walk before Hashem. He is going to *metzaveh* others *acharav*. Ultimately, we are called Bnei Avraham. We are not Bnei Noach.

How do you judge someone? It's so natural for us, at first glance, to judge someone for what they have done already. Who am I? I am what I already accomplished. How great am I? Well, let's see, what have I accomplished until now? And that could lead to two equally problematic psychological results. I am great because I have done a lot. And then I am like Noach—I am amazing; I am great! But then perhaps I will end up like Noach. Or... You could say: I haven't done everything I should have done. I haven't done everything I wanted to do. I haven't done as much as the next guy has done, etc. And that's why I don't believe in myself. The Torah is telling us here: No. What is important is not what you have done until now. It's a good start. But what's really important is what you are going to do from now on. This is what they say in the outside world: Today is the first day of the rest of your life. You are not what you have failed or succeeded in until now. If you have succeeded until now, don't rest on your laurels. And if you failed until now, don't beat yourself up. You are what you will do tomorrow, the day after, and the day after that. If you put yourself on the path of growth, of *veyhei tamim*, *his'haleich lefanai*, then you are following Avraham Avinu and therefore you are part of this amazing mesorah. Don't look at the rearview mirror of your past. Rather look to the future like Avraham Avinu. Shabbat Shalom.

## Was Avraham an Influencer?

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

**A**vraham was selected by Hashem to transform a dark pagan world by educating them about a “one G-d”. For thousands of years, Hashem's presence was obscured from a lost world lost which had fallen into moral disarray. Finally, one man discovered Hashem and he was determined to inspire his fellow human beings to a life of religion and meaning.

Avraham's first teaching opportunity arose in the aftermath of a bloody battle. For 25 years, the world was engulfed in a vicious conflict, incited by a large-scale

rebellion against four oppressive tyrants. Avraham was slowly dragged onto the battlefield, in part to quell the violence, and in part, to rescue his nephew Lot who had been taken as prisoner of war. Avraham liberated his nephew and rescued the entire kingdom of Sedom from these belligerent and repressive monarchs.

As was common practice in the ancient era, Avraham, a military hero, was offered lavish financial compensations as well as human reward in the form of the citizens of Sedom who would now be reassigned to him and become

members of his clan.

Avraham lifts his hands to Heaven and foreswears any reward or any “people transfer”, refusing even to accept something as meager as a shoe-string. This disavowal of reward is both noble-spirited and expected. Avraham aspires to establish a new moral standard and the best way to begin is to avoid any trace of greediness or desire for profit. Greed is a dark and powerful human instinct especially when we sense the opportunity for free profits. The thought of profiting upon the misfortunes of others is repugnant and this move would sabotage Avraham’s lofty moral agenda. To memorialize Avraham’s moral courage, we wear string-laden tzizit as a constant reminder to live within ourselves and within our resources, rather than chasing unbridled consumerist longing.

Though his frugal rejection of war loot is admirable, Avraham’s refusal to naturalize the citizens of Sedom is surprising. The residents of the corrupt city of Sedom would soon be incinerated in a hail of sulphuric fire and heavenly flames. This is a perfect opportunity for Avraham to save the souls of condemned sinners and convert them to Judaism. Avraham stumbles upon a giftwrapped opportunity to save people from a looming disaster, yet, he takes a pass. His decision is so odd and is so incongruous with his mission, that the Gemara itself critiques him. What could possibly have convinced Avraham to reject these potential converts?

### **Education of Manipulation**

After his heroic rescue mission, Avraham enjoys extraordinary popularity. He was heralded by kings and lauded by grateful soldiers whom he had protected on the battlefield. Most of all, the average common citizen was indebted to Avraham for saving their lives.

If Avraham parlays his influence to inculcate his new religious ideas, those ideas may not be authentically incorporated. How genuine would people’s acceptance of Avraham’s ideology be if they were coerced to consent because Avraham was so popular and because he enjoyed a position of such authority? Given his wild popularity they may sheepishly follow his lead, but it is unlikely that they would deeply internalize his new notions about religion and morality.

Moreover, is it even fair of Avraham to take advantage of his stature and his rising popularity to indoctrinate others? Using our moral authority or our popularity to aggressively influence others can be intrusive and manipulative. It is

one thing to suggest ideas or even to passionately assert our beliefs. However, when our audience has no choice but to accept our opinions, we must be exceedingly careful about how we offer our opinions and how strong we peddle our influence. It may work in the short term but rarely yields genuine education. Even when this approach is successful it raises several moral red flags. Avraham pauses before he exerts his popularity and influence upon the impressionable people of Sedom and perhaps, as the gemara implies, he made an incorrect decision. However, his moral quandary was vital for preserving his moral integrity.

These are very delicate questions about the manner in which we convince people of our ideas. When we are deeply committed to values, we share our opinions with others hoping to persuade them to our view. However, we must also check ourselves against manipulating or

deceiving others. Do we spread our influence in a respectful and dignified manner which doesn’t insult the intelligence of our listeners? Do we abuse our positions of authority to unduly influence other people, thereby robbing them of their autonomy and personal discretion? There are no easy answers to this dilemma, but these are important questions worth pondering-especially for educators and Rabbis.

### **Information or Influence**

Avraham’s dilemma also sheds light upon our current cultural moment. The internet, and in particular, social media have empowered us to spread our influence to larger audiences than ever before. At best, the internet makes us better informed people, as it allows information to flow more freely and more efficiently. The internet is a portal which grants us access to wisdom, knowledge, and expertise which we don’t personally possess.

However social media doesn’t just better inform us it also powerfully influences us. Social media has manufactured a new public figure called an influencer, who aims to shape our opinions and behavior. Generally, “influencers” do not possess particular talent or unique expertise, but manage to get our attention as they continuously garner followers and “likes”. Social media empowers them to impact our purchase decisions, our thought, our opinions, and our social and political behavior.

We thoughtlessly submit ourselves to the influence of people who possess nothing more than celebrity or

notoriety. Often influencers pontificate about topics which they are completely ignorant of preaching about politics, culture or religion.

Additionally, by submitting ourselves to the influence of others we abdicate our freedom of decision, often falling prey to group think and to herd mentality. Ironically the internet, which was meant to democratize information, and empower personal autonomy, often shrinks our freedom of thought and of opinion.

### **Addicted to Influence**

Sadly, our culture celebrates the phenomenon of influencing others. We start to define ourselves and our worth based upon our capacity to influence others, rather than upon our principles, character or achievements. As we thirst for more and more influence, we become more dependent upon public approval for our self-esteem. We act provocatively just to draw attention to ourselves and “feed the monster” and satiate our desire for public attention.

In a tragic irony, the “influencer” becomes the

“influenced”. Influencing others becomes so addictive that our personal behavior is, itself, influenced by our overwhelming desire to influence others. Are “influencers” the ultimate “influencees”?

### **Religion is about Inherent Value**

Religious people look for inherent value and not “social value” or value based upon public opinion. We construct lifestyles of which should be internally self-sufficient and should not require external social validation.

The validity and integrity of a religious life should never be a product of how much that lifestyle influences other people. Believing deeply in the nobility and meaning of a religious life, we certainly desire others to be similarly inspired, but our own evaluation and appreciation of religion must come from within and not from the impact our religious values have upon others. Too much influence peddling can distract us from the that inner validation which lies at the core of religious meaning. Influence can often degrade meaning. Influence comes and goes, meaning is built to last.

## **The Promise of a Child, the Birth of a Nation**

*Mrs. Michal Horowitz*

**P**arshas Lech Licha, the dawn of our history, the birth of our nation. And Hashem said to Avram: *לך-לך - go to yourself, from your land, and from your birthplace, and from the house of your father, to the land that I will show you* (Bereishis 12:1). And at the age of seventy-five, Avram journeyed, along with Lot his nephew, Sarai his wife, and all their possessions and the souls they converted in Charan (Rashi to Bereishis 12:5), and they arrived in the land of Canaan.

Much is known to us about the lives of Avraham and Sarah from the Torah text. In this week's sedra, they arrive in Canaan, find a famine in the land, descend to Egypt because of the famine, and Sarah is taken by Pharaoh (Ch.12); upon leaving Egypt, Avraham and Lot (his nephew) part ways (Ch.13); Lot is captured in the first World War and Avraham goes to battle to save his nephew (ch.14); Avraham has the nevuah of the Covenant Between the Pieces (Ch.15); Avraham takes Hagar as a wife, but Sarah banishes her from their home, and in the desert, Hagar sees angels and is promised a child (Ch.16);

and finally, Hashem promises Avraham that Sarah will have a child and commands Avraham regarding bris milah (Ch.17)!

In the very last perek of the sedra, Hashem promises Avram that their names are no longer Avram and Sarai, but Avraham and Sarah, and that together, they will have a child.

*וַיִּפֹּל אַבְרָהָם עַל-פָּנָיו וַיִּצְחַק וַיֹּאמֶר בְּלִבּוֹ הֲלֵבֵן מֵאַהֲשָׁנָה יוֹלֵד - and Avraham fell upon his face and he laughed, and he said in his heart: To a man of a 100 years shall there be born (a child)? And shall Sarah - a woman of 90 years - give birth? (Bereishis 17:17); וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹקִים אֲבָל וַיִּשְׁרָה אֶשְׁתּוֹ יֵלְדָת לְךָ בֶן וְקָרָאתָ אֶת-שְׁמוֹ יִצְחָק וְהִקְמַתִּי אֶת-בְּרִיתִי אִתּוֹ - And Elokim said, Indeed, Sarah your wife will bear you a son and you shall call his name Yitzchak; and I will fulfill My covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him (v.19) ... וְאֶת-בְּרִיתִי אֶקִּים - and My covenant I will uphold through Yitzchak whom Sarah will bear to you at this appointed time next year (v.21).*

The covenantal community, which began with Avraham

and the covenant of milah in this week's sedra, will continue, by Divine promise, through the child promised to Avraham and Sarah, namely, Yitzchak. And through this child, the covenantal community would become a teaching community. With Sarah as mother and Avraham as father, new roles in the covenantal community would be formed, as father/mother pass the mesorah onto child/student, ensuring that our national destiny and mission would continue and endure.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik zt'l, the Rav, movingly teaches, "Judaism apparently considers the act of education to be synonymous with the act of faith. Indeed, educational endeavors require the teacher... to turn one's face to the future and sacrifice continually for a great vision that may never be realized during the teacher's lifespan.

"It is not implausible to link the verb 'a-m-n' to 'em', 'mother', since she is the foremost teacher of and believer in the child. A mother will never despair of her child, nor will she spare any effort to further her child's welfare (see Bereishis 21 when Yitzchak is born and Sarah orders Avraham to send Yishmael away), even though she does not expect to live long enough to enjoy the fruits of her toil and sacrifice. She is the most unselfish being. Her faith in her child can never be shaken. She will patiently try to do some particular thing for her child over and over again, since failure, however disappointing, does not weaken her determination to bring out the best and the finest in the child. The em, the mother, is unconditionally committed to her child, in whose capabilities she has unrestricted trust.

"To believe and to bring up are identical accomplishments... The element of faith is indispensable for any pedagogical endeavor. A teacher who lacks confidence that his pupil is able to grasp the ideas he passes on to him will never be successful. The teacher must also have faith that learning will have a moral impact upon the disciple. We believe that knowledge is redemptive and a therapeutic performance. A pessimist must never do any teaching or be entrusted with the care of a child, since his efforts are doomed to failure from the very outset. All educational activities are identical with mothering, for what is mothering if not displaying unlimited faith in a child? ... In a word, the religious teacher is an instructor, a teacher, an educator charged with the mission of

completing G-d's works... He must have faith in G-d and, at the same time, faith in man; he is both a ma'amin and an omen, patient and courageous. Avraham was such a person" (Abraham's Journey, p.97-99).

The director of a certain cheder in Beit Shemesh came to consult with Rav Aharon Leib Shteinman zt'l regarding the acceptance of children from a certain family into the cheder. Other parents in the school were pressuring the administration not to accept the children. R' Aharon Leib was incredulous. "It is *gayvah* to insist that you are better than another person and to reject a child based on such haughtiness!" he exclaimed. "But the father is acting crazy!" the principal countered. "He's using any and all means possible to push in the children!" "Other parents in the school also want the best chinuch for their children" R' Aharon Leib countered, "Why isn't the principal calling them crazy? The parents pushing the school to not accept these children are full of *gayvah*!" He then repeated several times, "*Gayvah, gayvah, gayvah!*"

R' Aharon Leib continued, "With the criteria some schools are setting up today, even Avraham Avinu would not be accepted to a 'good' school! After all, he was the son of Terach, an idol merchant! Rikva Imeinu would definitely have trouble getting accepted as well, with Besuel for a father and Lavan for a brother! And our Imahos Rachel and Leah, daughters of Lavan the swindler, would not get accepted either. In fact, a good portion of our Patriarchs and Matriarchs would not be able to get into our schools today! In Brisk, when I was growing up, there was one central cheder for those who wanted a Jewish education - we all learned Torah together" (Reb Aharon Leib, Artscroll, p.151-152).

With the birth of the covenantal community, the teaching community was born. Father/mother teaches child; teacher/rebbe teaches talmid (student). It is with unlimited faith, unbounded patience, and unrestrained love that the mesorah is transmitted from one generation to the next. And with these ideals in mind, Avraham and Sarah were promised that they would have a child. It is from them that we learn for our day and age. For though times have certainly changed, the commitment of mother/teacher to the child, and father/rebbe to the eternal covenant, remain a constant *m'dor la'dor*, from generation to generation.

# Don't Just Learn Torah. Teach Torah.

*Rabbi Jared Anstandig*

**W**hat made Avraham so great? The simple answer is that he was the first monotheist – the first (at least in several generations) to recognize God as the Supreme Being in the universe.

Interestingly, as Rambam explains the greatness of Avraham, he emphasizes a particular aspect of Avraham's approach. It was not only that he was the first monotheist, but that he taught his monotheism to others. Rambam writes that as soon as Avraham recognized God, he sprang into action and "began to teach the people that it is fitting to serve only the God of the world... he would explain to each one of [of his followers] according to their understanding..." (Hilchot Avodat Kochavim 1:3; translation by Rabbi Eliyahu Touger, [rambam.alhatorah.org](http://rambam.alhatorah.org)) The crowning feature of Avraham was that once he began to learn about God, he began to teach about God.

The Talmud (Sotah 49b) makes a similar point, highlighting that this – learning Torah to teach Torah – is the ideal way to learn Torah. The Talmud quotes Proverbs 31:26, which references "a Torah of kindness." The Talmud asks, "Is there such a thing as Torah that is not of kindness?" It answers, "Torah studied in order to teach to others, that is a Torah of kindness; Torah studied with the intent of not teaching to others, that is a Torah that is not of kindness." (adapted from the translation of Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz [shas.alhatorah.org](http://shas.alhatorah.org)) Learning Torah is an incredibly important mitzvah; but to engage in the highest level of learning Torah, that is the Torah of kindness, we must learn in order to pass it along. And this is the model that Avraham set for us.

In fact, Rabbi Eliezer Pappo laments those who believe that educating others is beneath them. He writes, "It is not right that Torah scholars do not want to learn with their children and students, since they see it as a waste of time, since in one day of independent learning they can cover several pages of the Talmud... Unlike when they learn

with students, they need to spend a significant amount of time reviewing and reviewing until the student learns anything." (Pele Yoetz Entry 389, "Torah") Some scholars maintain that their time is better spent in highlevel learning rather than lowlevel teaching. Rabbi Pappo condemns this approach, explaining that nothing brings God greater satisfaction than when Torah is being transmitted to others.

This is relevant not only for great Torah scholars. Every one of us has something to teach someone else. In a letter written on 18 Elul 5710, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson elaborates on the wellknown mitzvah of tzedakah. He notes that there are two categories of tzedakah, material and spiritual. Material tzedakah is the more familiar type, giving financial support to those in need of it. But there is also spiritual tzedakah – giving spiritual support, i.e., teaching, those who need. And, the Rebbe continues, "Just as for material tzedakah, even the materially poor individual is obligated to give – for there is no pauper who has no way to help his fellow pauper – so too with spiritual tzedakah, even the spiritually poor person is obligated to give – for there is no Jewish man or woman who cannot positively impact another Jew and bring them closer to God, Torah, and mitzvot." (Igrot Kodesh, letter 749, volume 3, pages 462464)

It is worth noting that Hillel said, "At a time when people are gathering [Torah], spread it. At a time when people are spreading [Torah], gather it in." (Berachot 63a) But as explained by Rashi there, this is less about limiting one's teaching of Torah, and more about humility in the presence of greater teachers.

The greatness of Avraham was not only his knowledge of God, but his commitment and dedication to sharing his knowledge with others. Whether we study advanced Talmud, or are still working on the aleph bet, let us find ways to share what we have with others.

## The Two Birds of Israel

*Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald*

**I**n this week's parsha, parashat Lech Lecha, Avram (his name had not yet been changed to Avraham) receives a "calling," (Genesis 12:1), to go to the land that G-d will

show him (the land of Canaan).

After settling in Canaan for a while, a famine strikes (Genesis 12:10), and Avram goes down to Egypt—an event

that is uncannily predictive of what will happen to the Jewish people in Egypt in future generations. The Egypt experience is followed, (Genesis 14:1-24), by Avram's dramatic defeat of the four most powerful Kings of the time, and the rescue of Lot, Avram's nephew, who had been captured by the kings. At the battle's conclusion (Genesis 14:18-20), Avram encounters the monotheistic king, Malkitzedek, and G-d promises Avram, (Genesis 15:4), that his heirs will inherit the land of Canaan. The parasha continues, (Genesis 16:1-16), with Hagar becoming a "surrogate mother" for Avram's wife, Sarai, Yishmael is born, and the parasha concludes, (Genesis 17:1-27), with the covenant of the Brit, the mitzvah of circumcision.

After G-d promises Avram that his heirs will inherit the land of Canaan, the Torah (Genesis 15:1-21), tells of the very strange encounter that Avram has with G-d, known in Hebrew as בְּרִית בֵּין הַבְּתָרִים—Brit bain Hab'tarim, the Covenant between the Pieces. G-d takes Avram outside (Genesis 15: 5-6), and instructs Avram to look up at the stars, and asks him if he can count them. "That's the number that your children will be," G-d tells Avram, "They will be as numerous as the stars of the sky that they cannot be counted." Avram believes in G-d, and G-d considers his faithfulness as righteousness on Avram's part.

On the heels of Avram's confirmation of faith, he, uncharacteristically, asks G-d (Genesis 15:8), "How do I know that I'm really going to inherit this land?" The Almighty's reply is indeed strange (Genesis 15:9-21): קַחָה לִי עֵגְלָה מְשֻׁלֶּשֶׁת, Take for Me a 3-year-old heifer, (an alternate interpretation is 3 heifers), וְיֵצֵו מְשֻׁלֶּשֶׁת, and take a 3 year-old goat, (or 3 goats), וְאַיִל מְשֻׁלֶּשֶׁת, and a 3 year-old ram, (or 3 rams), וְתוֹר, וְגֹזָל, and also take 2 birds—a turtledove and a young pigeon. G-d then instructs Avram to split all the animals in half, placing one half opposite the other half on an altar.

Suddenly, birds of prey descend, and Avram chases them away. Avram then falls into a deep sleep and G-d tells him: "You shall surely know that your children will be exiled. They will be enslaved and persecuted for 400 years. I will ultimately judge the people who will enslave you, and eventually your descendants will leave with great wealth. You, Avram, will die in peace, and the 4th generation will return to this land complete, and will inherit the land." The sun quickly sets, a deep cloud forms, and a great fire passes through each side of the altar, through the split animals. G-d confirms the covenant, reiterating that Avram's

children will surely inherit the land.

Any way you look at it, this scene is eerie and esoteric. The Rabbis, however, try to make meaning of the event by interpreting the heavy symbolism.

The animals, the heifer, goat and ram, say the rabbis, represent the nations of the world who wish to destroy the Jewish people. On the other hand, the birds, the turtledove and the young pigeon, symbolize the Jews. The animals are split in half, indicating that those nations that attack Israel will surely be destroyed. But the birds, the turtledove and the pigeon, are not cut. Scripture, (Genesis 15:10), declares: וְאֵת הַצֶּפֶר, לֹא בָתַר, which literally means and the "bird," he did not cut. Notice that scripture refers to both birds in the singular, as "bird."

According to tradition, the birds are not cut because they represent the People of Israel. In their comments to the verse in the book Song of Songs 2:14, יוֹנֵתִי בְּחַגְרֵי הַסֵּלַע, my little dove is in the cracks, in the slits, of the rock, the commentators maintain that the "little Dove" refers to the People of Israel and G-d's protective concern for them. Rashi on Genesis 15:10, quoting the Rabbis, gives the verse even greater import, noting that the reason that these birds are not sliced in half, לְעוֹלָם, underscores the fact that the Jewish people will endure forever.

In these dangerous and tenuous times, we are often fearful that our People will be undone. But, in truth, we need not fear, because of the Eternal Covenant. Unfortunately, most Jews are unaware of this promise, or choose to ignore it. Yet, it is most critical that the Jewish people recognize that we have this very special agreement with the Al-mighty, a covenant which guarantees that our people will endure forever. Try as they may, our enemies will not succeed in destroying us.

This wonderful guarantee is indeed comforting. Yet, the Torah portion remains confounding. Why are the 2 birds referred to in the text as a single "bird?" And why are two birds necessary to symbolize the Jewish people? We are one people, not two. Why the distinction between תוֹר—"tor," a mature turtledove, and גֹּזָל—"gozal," a young pigeon?

I believe that the Torah portion teaches that the Jewish people is essentially a duality, in the form of two types of Jews. There are "mature" Jews, those who have had the good fortune of receiving an intensive Jewish education and who hail from observant homes. These "traditional" Jews have experienced Shabbat, observed the kosher laws,

and have mastered all the basic fundamentals of Judaism and Jewish life. These “mature” Jews have the tremendous advantage of being knowledgeable and well-informed about their Judaism.

There are, however, in every generation, other Jews, who are the equivalent to the gozals, young, inchoate birds, who, often, through no fault of their own, have never had the opportunity to explore their Jewish heritage intensively and gain an appreciation of the revolutionary concepts to be found in our faith.

By referring to the Jewish people as a single “bird,” the Torah tells us that the two birds are really one bird. While the Jewish people cannot exist without the mature,

## Gradual Growth

*Rabbi Efreim Goldberg*

**R**av Yisroel Meir Druck, in *Eish Tamid*, offers an additional insight into the significance of the command לך לך מארצך וממולדתך ומבית אביך. The Torah here made a point of spelling out all three stages of Avraham’s journey – his departure from ארצך, from מולדתך, and from בית אביך – to impress upon us the importance of gradual, incremental growth. When we are trying to advance and move forward, the worst mistake we can make is to try to grow in leaps and bounds, to undergo a quick, drastic transformation. If a person changes too much too fast, then the changes are not authentic. Inner growth and change takes time. If a person is drastically and suddenly changing his lifestyle, his behavior and his appearance, then the change is not real, because a change of heart cannot unfold so quickly.

Rav Druck cites in this context the Chasam Sofer’s interpretation of the command at the end of Parshas Bamidbar (4:20), ולא יבואו לראות כבלע את בקודש ומתו. The Chasam Sofer explained this pasuk as a warning against trying to “swallow” kedusha (כבלע את הקודש) all at once, in large quantities. Just as food must be broken down into small pieces before it can be swallowed, kedusha, too, must be attained in small amounts, one step at a time. And just as a person who swallows too much at once can, Heaven forbid, choke to death, so does a person run the risk of spiritual “demise” if he tries to “devour” kedusha too quickly.

We have all seen examples of this unfortunate phenomenon, of youngsters who spent a year of learning in Israel and changed too much too quickly. More often

knowledgeable Jews, they also cannot survive without those Jews who come to Judaism late in life. These are the Jews who, because they are so excited about their Judaism, continually enrich and invigorate our community with their passion, their vibrancy, their dynamism and their wholesome views and opinions. When these two components, the two birds, are united, they become a single unit, one very powerful creature that can soar mightily and reach unfathomable heights.

I believe that this is what the Covenant between the Pieces, the covenant between the Jewish people and G-d, is all about. If our People work together—we are invincible, and can achieve the impossible.

than not, these changes are not sustained in the long-term. Not too long after these students return home, they decline to the point where they had been before they had gone to Israel, or worse. Real change must occur slowly and incrementally, one step at a time. A person needs to move first מארצך, then ממולדתך, and only then מבית אביך, taking small steps forward.

Rav Druck suggests explaining on this basis the Gemara’s teaching in *Maseches Sota* (17a) regarding the significance of the techeiles dye with which the Torah requires coloring one of the tzitzis strings on each corner of the garment. The Gemara comments that the color of techeiles resembles that of the ocean, the ocean resembles the sky, and the sky resembles the כסא הכבוד (Heavenly Throne), such that by wearing techeiles, we are reminded of Hashem. We might wonder why the Gemara did not simply state that the color of techeiles resembles that of the כסא הכבוד. Why did the Gemara instead go through all the steps – from the techeiles to the sea, to the sky, and then to the Heavenly Throne?

The answer, Rav Druck explains, is that we are incapable of proceeding directly from our tzitzis to the כסא הכבוד. The only way we can hope to grow is gradually and incrementally, one step at a time. We will not look at tzitzis and automatically make the association with the כסא הכבוד. We need to proceed slowly, one step at a time, and then our growth and progress will endure.