

Last week's portion was about Noah and the Great Flood. After the flood, people once again spread all over the world.

Before the portion ended, the Torah traced the descendants of Noah's three sons for ten generations until Abram (later Abraham), our first Patriarch, was born.

This week's portion is called *Lech Lecha*. *Lech* means "go," and G-d is telling Abram to leave his father's house and land with all its idolatry, and go to a land that G-d will show him. Rashi (the foremost biblical commentator) says that "lecha" means "for your benefit," because G-d is saying that He will make Abram into a great nation, wealthy, and famous.

Aliya #1 Abram leaves Charan and enters the land of Canaan where he traverses up and down, and back and forth in the land. The Midrash (homeletics) says that according to Jewish law, one way to acquire land is to pace it off, and that is what Abram was doing, acquiring the land of Israel for the Jewish people.

Aliya #2 Just when Abram reaches the land of Canaan, a terrible famine sets in. This is the worst famine the world had ever known, and it only affects the land of Canaan. G-d had promised Abram all sorts of blessings and told him to move to Canaan, so this is one of Abram's tests, to see if he would complain against G-d. But he doesn't.

Abram goes down to Egypt because he heard that food was abundant there, but

his wife, Sarai, is so beautiful that the Egyptians take her captive to marry Pharaoh. But she is a righteous woman, and prays to G-d, and He strikes the Egyptians with boils (and, in fact, with ten plagues in all). Sarai is released unharmed and given many gifts that made her and Abram rich.

This parallels what would happen to the Jewish people in the future: The Jewish people would later descend to Egypt, also because of a famine, in our forefather Jacob's time. The Jewish people would then be enslaved by the Egyptians, but the Jewish women would remain modest in an immoral land. The Egyptians would be struck with plagues, and the Jewish people would be released with riches.

Aliya #3 In the preceding *aliya*, when Sarai and Abram were released from Egypt with riches, Abram's nephew Lot was with them and he also became rich because of his association with Abram. In this *aliya*, they return to Canaan, and quarrel about whether their shepherds should muzzle their sheep when traveling through fields not owned by Abram. Abram says that allowing his sheep to graze on others' land is stealing; Lot says that it is acceptable, since G-d promised that eventually all of the land will belong to them. They decide to go their separate ways. Lot departs and goes to the vicinity of the cities of Sodom and Gemorrah.

When Lot separates from Abram, G-d speaks to Abram and blesses him that his descendants shall be as numerous and uncountable as the dust of the earth.

Aliya #4 There is a war between several kingdoms including Sodom, and Abram's nephew Lot is taken captive. Abram pursues the enemy kings with an army of a few hundred men. Even though they must battle an army of thousands, Abram and his small band are victorious, thanks to miraculous help from G-d.

Aliya #5 Abram discusses his childlessness with G-d. He asks G-d, what is the point of all of his wealth if he has no son to inherit it? G-d promises that he will indeed have a son.

Aliya #6 G-d tells Abram that his descendants, the Jewish people, will be exiled in a strange land under bondage for 400 years.

Also in this *aliya*; Hagar, Sarai's handmaid, becomes a second wife to Abram, and she bears him a son named Ishmael. (Hagar was Pharaoh's daughter. Upon seeing the miracles for Sarai in Egypt, Pharaoh said: "Better she should be Sarai's handmaid than a princess in another house.")

At the very end of the *aliya*, G-d adds the letter "Hay" to Abram's name, making it Abraham (meaning, "father of multitudes").

Aliya #7 G-d makes a covenant with Abraham and his descendants after him, that all males should be circumcised on the eighth day after birth. Abraham goes immediately to circumcise himself, his son, Ishmael. All of the males in his household are also circumcised. (Abraham is 99 years when his brit takes place, and Ishmael is 13 years old when his brit takes place.)

G-d adds a "hay" to Sarai's name, changing it to Sarah. 

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Torah Portion: *Lech Lecha*



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The Luminary

Idols & Reality

by Tzvi Freeman

Torah is not about getting to the truth.

When you are immersed in Torah, even while pondering the question, even while struggling to make sense of it all, you are at truth already.

Torah is about being truth.

From the works of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

Monothism as we know it began with Abraham smashing the idols in his father's house. It seems that discovering truth and smashing idols are closely related.

The human mind functions by creating idols, i.e. models of reality. Often we get carried away and end up worshiping them.

First we create a little concept in our mind to assist us in dealing with what we see out there. Then we start believing that this model in our mind is the reality - to the point that we ignore any of the reality that does not fit into our model. Eventually, we build an idol to represent this new god of ours.

It's a practice that has stuck with us since the beginning of recorded history. Just as the priests of ancient idolatry believed that the powers-that-be could be grasped in wood and stone, so too the modern priests of science believe they can define and describe reality


to its essence; that their measurements and their theories will one day bring them the absolute truth of all things.

Theories, models and measurements are great tools for predicting events, especially in the short term, and for protecting and managing the environment. They are not reality! They are measurements of it. The only perfect model for reality is reality itself. And, as long as we are subjective beings, an objective picture of reality is beyond us.

We are part of this reality we attempt to observe. For us, knowing means that there is an observer, an object of observation and the act of observation. And they are three separate items. So you've already begun with a presumption that reality separates these three elements. Furthermore, your very act of observation has already changed the reality: Before it was a reality that was not being observed, and now it is being observed. In the realm of quantum physics, this change has been demonstrated to have real and measurable consequences. In fact, this is a

significant factor in every realm of observation.

To truly know reality in its raw essence takes the Essence of Reality Itself. That is the One G-d that Abraham chose over his father's idols. A G-d that, as Maimonides writes, is the Knower, the Known and the Act of Knowing all at once. Not with the knowledge outside of Himself, a knowledge that changes as it grows and gains more knowledge, but with a knowledge that is entirely one with the object that is known, which in turn is one with its Knower.

The spiritual path of monothism, is then an attempt to leap beyond subjectivity into an objective knowledge of the Essence. To escape the idols and artificial models of the human mind and connect with the essential inner oneness of all things. This, the Lubavitcher Rebbe writes, is fulfilled by study of Torah, when it is learned with an open, objective mind. 

Tzvi Freeman is the author of *Bringing Heaven down to Earth - 365 Meditations of the Rebbe*.

"The Luminary" is published weekly by Yeshiva Ateres Menachem of Ottawa

812 Kirkwood Ave. Ottawa, Canada K1Z 5Y2 (613) 798-7843 Copyright © 2003/5764.

A portion of this publication has been reprinted from L'Chaim - The weekly publication for every Jewish person.

Published by Lubavitch Youth Organization. www.lchaimweekly.org

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"We hope you enjoyed reading this as much as we enjoyed writing it."

Please email your comments to: info@theluminary.com. We look forward to hearing from you soon. ISSN: 1533-6956

Insights into the weekly Torah portion,
adapted from the works of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

In the opening lines of this week's Torah portion, *Lech Lecha*, G-d commands Abraham to "go out" from his land, from his place of birth, to a land that G-d will show him.

What can we learn from this very first commandment to Abraham that can be applied to our own lives as well?

The first and most fundamental requirement of every Jew is to "go out" - to be in a constant state of ascent, developing and elevating both one's inner potential and one's surroundings.

But the very next thing that happened to Abraham after heeding this command appears to be the exact opposite of development and elevation: "And there arose a famine in the land, and Abraham went down

into Egypt." Thus, Abraham had to leave Canaan and journey to Egypt, during which time Sarah was forcefully taken to Pharaoh's palace. Although G-d protected her from harm while there, she nevertheless underwent the hardship of the whole incident.

How does this obvious descent fit into the aforementioned theme of ascent and our task of climbing ever higher?

On a superficial level, Abraham's and Sarah's hardship was a step down, but on a deeper level it was merely a part of their eventual elevation and triumphant return. The purpose of the descent was to achieve an even higher ascent than was possible before. When they returned to Canaan they were "very heavy with cattle, with silver, and with gold."

Just as Abraham's descent was part of the greater plan of ascent, so it was the Jewish people of all

generations. The Jewish people have found themselves thrust into exile after exile, only to return to their Land and achieve even higher spiritual heights than before. Exile, although appearing to us to be a negative phenomenon, actually carries the potential for the highest good. And now that we are in the last moments of the final exile, we approach an era of unprecedented spirituality and goodness. For although the First and Second Temples were destroyed, the Third Temple is to stand forever, and our coming Redemption will have no exile to follow.

We therefore draw encouragement from our ancestor Abraham's descent into Egypt and eventual return to Israel: We must remember that the darkness that seems to prevail is only external, and is part of G-d's greater plan for the ultimate prevailing of good over evil and the coming of Moshiach.



Everyone Needs to Laugh Sometimes

"So what are your plans?" The father asks the young man. "I am a Torah scholar," he replies. "A Torah scholar. Hmm," the father says. "Admirable, but what will you do to provide a nice house for my daughter to live in as she is accustomed to?"

"I will study," the young man replies, "and G-d will provide for us." "And how will you buy her a beautiful engagement ring such as she deserves?" asks the father.

"I will concentrate on my studies," the young man replies, "and G-d will provide for us." "And children?" asks the father. "How will you support children?"

"Don't worry, sir, G-d will provide" replies the young man. The conversation proceeds like this, and each time the father questions, the young idealist insists that G-d will provide.

Later the mother asks, "How did it go dear?" The father answers, "He has no job and no plans, but the good news is he thinks I'm G-d."

If your Jewish jokes are better than ours, send them to us!
info@theluminary.com

Two men, both seriously ill, occupied the same hospital room. One man was allowed to sit up in his bed for an hour each afternoon to help drain the fluid from his lungs. His bed was next to the room's only window. The other man had spent all his time flat on his back. The men talked for hours on end. They spoke of their wives and families, their homes, their jobs, their involvement in the military service, where they had been on vacation and everything else of which they could possibly think.

Every afternoon when the man in the bed by the window would sit up, he would pass the time describing to his roommate all the things he could see outside the window. The man in the other bed began to yearn for those one-hour periods where his world would be broadened and enlivened by all the activity and color of the world outside.

The window overlooked a park with a lovely lake. Ducks and swans played in

the water, while children sailed their model boats. Young people walked amidst flowers of every color of the rainbow. Grand old trees graced the landscape, and a fine view of the city skyline could be seen in the distance.

As the man by the window described all this in exquisite detail, the man on the other side of the room would close his eyes and imagine the picturesque scene. One warm afternoon the man by the window described a parade passing by. Although the other man couldn't hear the band - he could see it in his mind's eye as the gentlemen by the window portrayed it with descriptive words.

Days and weeks passed...

One morning, the nurse arrived to bring water for their baths only to find the lifeless body of the man by the window, who had died peacefully in his sleep. She was saddened and called the hospital attendants to take the body away. As soon as it seemed appropriate, the other man asked if he could be moved next to the

window. The nurse was happy to make the switch. After making sure he was comfortable, she left him alone.

Slowly, painfully, he propped himself up on one elbow to take his first look at the world outside. Finally, he would have the joy of seeing it for himself. He strained to slowly turn to look out the window beside the bed. It faced a blank wall. The man asked the nurse what compelled his deceased roommate to describe such wonderful things outside this window. The nurse responded that the man was blind and could not even see the wall. She said, Perhaps he just wanted to encourage you.

The Moral... There is tremendous happiness in making others happy, despite our own situations. Shared grief is half the sorrow, but happiness when shared, is doubled. If you want to feel rich, just count all of the things you have that money can't buy. Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, today is a gift! That is why it is called the present.

Ask the Rabbi

Dear Rabbi Berger,
How do we know that G-d created the world?
-Marc F.
Gatineau, QU

Dear Marc,
The belief in a Supernatural Creator is both fundamental to Judaism and a matter of pure logic. There is nothing in all existence that does not have a source. To believe that this complex and beautiful world came to be as a matter of happenstance is completely illogical. There is a famous story that beautifully illustrates this point.

A non-believer came to a rabbi and asked him to prove the existence of G-d. The rabbi instructed him to come back the next day for the answer to his question. The non-believer felt thrilled to have seemingly "stumped" the rabbi. When he came back the next day he excitedly demanded the answer from the learned man. The rabbi replied that he would give his answer momentarily, but before he did he wanted his questioner to read a beautiful poem he had on his desk.

The non-believer read the work and was inspired by the lovely images described within the poem and asked the rabbi who the author was. The rabbi explained that there was no author. What had happened was that while deep in thought pondering the profound question he had been asked the rabbi had accidentally knocked over the ink well on his desk onto a blank piece of paper and this poem was what the spill had produced. The non-believer scoffed at the ridiculous notion that something as wonderful as that poem could be the result of an accident.

At that point the rabbi explained that if something as simple as a poem could not be created by accident or without an author then certainly something as wonderfully complex as our world could not come into being without an Author. Obviously, the skeptic was skeptical no more as he realized the validity of the rabbi's point.

The more profound question is "Do we really exist?"

Good Shabbos,
Rabbi M. Berger

Next week's question: Why do Jewish men wear yahrmulkas (kippa)?

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