

Lech-Lecha

In this Parasha we read of the noble activities set forth by our Patriarch Abraham, the first Jew. He was the first individual to promulgate the belief in Monotheism among the masses, teaching them the ways of G-d and His ordinances. But how did Abraham himself arrive at this belief, when the entire world around him was steeped in paganism and heathen cults?

The *Midrash* gives us the answer with a parable:¹

Once, a person was traveling from place to place, when he noticed a Palace on fire. Assuming that it was abandoned, he called out, 'Is it then possible that this Palace has no owner?' At that moment, the owner of the Palace looked out and declared, 'I am the owner of the Palace!'

The same is true with reference to Abraham. As *Maharzav* comments, upon looking at the world and seeing the fiery destruction of humanity during the Deluge and *Dor Haflogo*, Abraham wondered, 'Is it possible that the world has no leader?' In response to this, G-d appeared to him—"And G-d said to Avram..."—indicating to him that He is the Creator of the world (and that there was a specific Divine motive for the previous eradication of the sinful people).

The question, however, is raised: Why is it necessary to state in the parable that the person "was traveling from place to place," when it would have sufficed to state that he saw a Palace on fire? *Maase Hashem* offers the following explanation:

In the era of Abraham, and in the generations preceding him, there were numerous individuals who believed that the world is an eternal entity, with no Creator and no system of law and order.² Then, in the Generation of Dispersion, the people again dispersed into many diverse beliefs and philosophies, all of which negated the belief in a Creator. When Abraham came on the scene, his mind traveled from place to place. He traversed

through the maze of heathen ideologies; he analyzed, questioned and researched each of the various philosophies, in search of the truth. He finally came to the conclusion that they are all false and unfounded beliefs. Thus, upon asking the question, "Is it possible that this Palace (i.e. the world) has no leader?" G-d revealed Himself to him, confirming his Monotheistic belief that there is only One G-d, the Creator and Master of all things.

This Midrashic account conveys a relevant message to us in our times. We live in an era in which multitudes of people from all walks of life, including even Jews, have tried out all kinds of alien beliefs, strange customs and foreign practices. Thousands of our youth, many of whom seek the truth, have been caught in the vicious net of cults, T.M. (meditation) and similar endeavors, presuming that this is the road to G-d and spiritual bliss. The names and identities of these subversive cults are well-known and space does not suffice to list them in detail. However, after "traveling from place to place," and upon witnessing the results of adhering to these alien beliefs, one realizes the devastating effects not only to the soul but to the body as well.

In the final analysis, after everything else has been tested, and after so many have sought an alternative to Torah and to a pure and holy Jewish life but were unable to find one—we can safely conclude that our only salvation lies in the diligent study of Torah.

Indeed, *Nesivas Shalom* comments, this is the pattern which takes effect in all periods of spiritual ignorance and mass confusion: To the human eye it appears as if the world is ownerless; but to those who seek G-d, He appears unto them and declares—'I am the Master of the world!'

This recognition, however, does not come on its own. The Talmud records Abraham as having authored a treatise on Idolatry, containing 400 Chapters.³ Abraham knew that the key to faith and to a clearer perception of truth is only through study.

But our study must be directed to the source. As G-d told

Abraham—*Lech Lecha*—“Go unto yourself.” Don’t seek strange references to learn about Judaism. Rather, take what is yours, study your own background, acquire the wisdom of The Jewish Sages who placed all areas of Torah Law and lore, covering every facet of life, in the monumental work of the Talmud and its commentaries.

FOOTNOTES

1. Bereishis Rabba 39:1
2. Rambam, Hilchoth Avoda Zora 1:2
3. Avoda Zora 14b