

Weekly Torah Portion: *Lech-Lecha* (Genesis 12-17)

In this week's Parsha we are introduced to the first patriarch of the Jewish people, Abraham. God tells him to leave his father's house, his relatives and his homeland.

*So Abram went as God had spoken to him and Lot went with him; Abram was 75 years old when he left Haran. Abram took his wife Sarai and Lot, his brother's son, and all their wealth that they had amassed, **and the souls they made in Haran...*** (Breishis/Genesis 12:4-

5)

What does "souls they made in Haran" mean? How does one make a soul? How do you take it with you? "Souls" refers to the students of Abraham and Sara when they lived in Haran. In a world of idolatry, Abraham and Sara taught that there is one God. They weren't preaching faith, they were using logic to establish the idea that it isn't logical to believe in idols. It didn't make sense to place one's trust in statue that was just created the previous day, month or year. They were teachers, not preachers. Belief in God isn't accomplished through faith, it's done through intellectual honesty.

Here's a point to ponder: what happened to Abraham and Sara's students? Later when Abraham's grandson Jacob went to Egypt with his family—70 in all—they became the Jewish nation, the one group in the world that were monotheistic—believed in one God. But what happened to Abraham and Sara's students; where were they when the Jewish nation was formed? Where were their children? They are never mentioned again.

We mentioned that Abraham was a teacher not preacher and he spoke about God from a logical angle. His students accepted his teaching and did the things that were logical to them. However, Jacob's family kept God's word for a different reason—because God commanded it. Once one comes to an intellectual understanding that there is God, he keeps His commandments because God said so, not because it's logical. This is comparable to a healthy marriage. Which scenario is better: A man is asked by his wife to go shopping. (a) He logically concludes that food is necessary for the family and therefore he should shop or (b) he goes simply because his wife asked him. He loves her and trusts her judgment. This love and trust didn't happen overnight but once it's there, *it* becomes a motivation to do things.

The students of Abraham and Sara came to God from their rational teachings but they never transcended to the next level; to do things simply because God said so. Abraham's own

decedents—the people who would become the Jewish nation—were superior because they developed a deeper relationship with God—one of love and trust.

This idea provides one of the most applicable models for present day Jewry. People and organizations talk about ‘Jewish values’ but what some of them really mean is that whatever is convenient for them or the organization at that time and place should ultimately be the deciding factor. Sure, they’ll say, they believe in God (Judaism doesn’t amount to much more than a few ancient rituals without Him), but do their decisions for their families and communities take God into account; do they use their own criteria when making a decision concerning Jewish values? For example, “love your neighbor” is a Jewish value but it has parameters. You don’t love an evil neighbor. “Don’t lie.” How about if it’s to save your life, prevent monetary loss, or harm to someone else? Do you tell your child to tell the person on the phone you’re not home when you really are home? How about killing? Would you kill a sniper who was about to spray a school bus of innocent children with bullets? Every Jewish value has depth and must be understood. Whether it’s stealing or what time to put on *tefillin*, if we decide according to a logic based on our own vested interests, it’s bound to break down the Jewish value and turn it into a personal convenience.

Abraham and Sara’s students were way ahead of the idol believing people of their generation and even kept God’s word to a point but in the end they lived their lives like the husband who does what his wife asks only when it makes sense to him. Why should he go shopping, he works at least as hard as she does? Personal agenda, laziness, insecurity and a host of other reasons will make it that he will do whatever suits him. Even seemingly pure logic is subjective; the proof is that throughout history any group or society that persecutes others argues on logical grounds that the people of this race, color or economic class must be persecuted and that’s what’s best for society.

Jews are obligated to use their brains to the fullest but we must realize that our logic isn’t always pure and can’t be trusted in many circumstances. Be a loving and trusting spouse, parent—and Jew.

Good Shabbos

(Sources: *Pirkei Drabbi Elazar*, *Drash Moshe-Behar*)