**Sins of the Fore forefathers?**

Dr. Chana Tannenbaum

DrCTann@Gmil.com

**1.Isaiah (51:1-2)**

: “Look unto the rock from where you were hewn and to the hole of the pit from where you are digged.  Look onto Avraham your father and onto Sarah that bore you, for I called him alone and blessed him and increased him.”

**תלמוד בבלי מסכת שבת דף נה עמוד ב- נו עמוד ב**

אמר רבי שמואל בר נחמני אמר רבי יונתן: כל האומר ראובן חטא - אינו אלא טועה...

אמר רבי שמואל בר נחמני אמר רבי יונתן: כל האומר בני שמואל חטאו - אינו אלא טועה...

אמר רבי שמואל בר נחמני אמר רבי יונתן: כל האומר דוד חטא - אינו אלא טועה...

אמר רבי שמואל בר נחמני אמר רבי יונתן: כל האומר שלמה חטא - אינו אלא טועה...

אמר רבי שמואל בר נחמני אמר רבי יונתן: כל האומר יאשיהו חטא - אינו אלא טועה...

**תלמוד בבלי מסכת שבת דף קיב עמוד ב**

אמר רבי זירא אמר רבא בר זימונא: אם ראשונים בני מלאכים - אנו בני אנשים, ואם ראשונים בני אנשים - אנו כחמורים, ולא כחמורו של רבי חנינא בן דוסא ושל רבי פנחס בן יאיר, אלא כשאר חמורים.

**Rav Aharon Kotler:** Approaching the *Avos*—Through Up-Reach or Drag-Down”, March 1991

1. When one teaches students a section dealing with the actions of the Patriarchs, one must explain to them that we are not speaking about regular human beings who have character traits and desires. Rather we are discussing individuals of whom we cannot in any way understand their level, people devoid of all human desire and internal will, and, just as we have no criteria by which to evaluate angels, so, we have no way of evaluating and appreciating the level of the forefathers

*Jewish Observer*‘s editorial scrutiny of the “silver-tongued preachers who hope to inspire their flocks with all sorts of homilies drawn from Bible stories, making the *Avos hakedoshim* ‘jes’ folks,’ with all the same kind of personal weaknesses and domestic problems that you and I have. Their agenda is commendable: to make us better people. But the price—in terms of cutting down Biblical personalities to ‘accessible’ size—is much, much too high”

R. Aharon Lichtenstein- “Torah and General Culture: Congruence and Conflict” in Judaism’s Encounter with Other Cultures,

Advocates of hagiographic parshanut, which portrays the central heroic figures of scriptural history as virtually devoid of emotion, can only regard the sharpening of psychological awareness with reference to Tanakh with a jaundiced eye. But for those of us who have been steeped in midrashim, the Ramban and the Ha’ameik Davar—in a tradition, that is, which regards our patriarchal avot and their successors as very great people indeed but as people nonetheless, and which moreover sees their greatness as related to their humanityenhanced literary sensitivity can be viewed as a significant boon

**Ramban 12:6**

And Avram passed through the land, to the place of Shekhem” — I will tell you a rule to allow you to understand all of the coming passages, the matter of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov. This is a fundamental subject, mentioned by our Rabbis in a condensed way, namely that **the incidents which befell our fathers is an omen for the children (siman le-vanim).**Therefore, the verses will elaborate on the narrative of the journeys, digging wells, and other incidents, and one may be led to think that these things are extraneous and purposeless, **but they all come to teach of the future.**When a prophecy of the Patriarchs comes true through these occurrences, he must think of the matter decreed to come upon his seed as a result.

(ו): ויעבר אברם בארץ עד מקום שכם -   
אומר לך כלל תבין אותו בכל הפרשיות הבאות בעניין אברהם יצחק ויעקב, והוא עניין גדול, הזכירוהו רבותינו בדרך קצרה.   
  
ואמרו (תנחומא ט): 

כל מה שאירע לאבות סימן לבנים, ולכן יאריכו הכתובים בספור המסעות וחפירת הבארות ושאר המקרים, ויחשוב החושב בהם כאלו הם דברים מיותרים אין בהם תועלת, וכולם באים ללמד על העתיד, כי כאשר יבוא המקרה לנביא משלשת האבות יתבונן ממנו הדבר הנגזר לבא לזרעו:

ודע כי כל גזירת עירין כאשר תצא מכוח גזירה אל פועל דמיון, תהיה הגזרה מתקיימת על כל פנים. ולכן יעשו הנביאים מעשה בנבואות כמאמר ירמיהו שציווה לברוך והיה ככלותך לקרוא את דברי הספר הזה תקשור עליו אבן והשלכתו אל תוך פרת ואמרת ככה תשקע בבל וגו' (ירמיה נא סג סד). וכן ענין אלישע בהניחו זרועו על הקשת (מ"ב יג טז - יז), ויאמר אלישע ירה ויור ויאמר חץ תשועה לה' וחץ תשועה בארם. ונאמר שם (פסוק יט): ויקצוף עליו איש האלוהים ויאמר להכות חמש או שש פעמים אז הכית את ארם עד כלה ועתה שלש פעמים תכה את ארם:  
ולפיכך החזיק הקב"ה את אברהם בארץ ועשה לו דמיונות בכל העתיד להיעשות בזרעו, והבן זה. ואני מתחיל לפרש העניינים בפרט בפסוקים בעזרת השם:

Ramban: **Bereshit 12:10**

Know that Avraham Avinu inadvertently committed a great transgression by placing his righteous wife in a stumbling block of sin because of his fear lest they kill him; he should have relied on the Almighty that He would save him and his wife and all his possessions…. Also his departure from the land that he was commanded about at the outset, because of famine, was a sin he committed, for the Almighty in famine would redeem him from death.  Because of this incident the decree of galut in the land of Egypt at the hands of Pharaoh was imposed on his seed; the place of judgment is the place of transgression and wrong.

16:6

Our mother sinned with this act of affliction, and also Avraham by permitting her to do this.  God heard her [Hagar’s] affliction and gave her a son that would be a ‘pereh adam’ to afflict the seed of Avraham and Sarah with all types of affliction.

24:32

“‘And he unfastened the camels…’ – He unfastened their neck bridles, because the custom was to lead them harnessed… And Rashi wrote, ‘He loosened their muzzles, for he would shut their mouths so that they would not graze along the way in fields belonging to others.’ And in the words of Breishit Rabah (60:8), ‘He loosened their muzzles. R’ Huna and R’ Yirmiyah asked R’ Chiya the son of R’ Abba, “Were not Avraham Avinu’s camels comparable to R’ Pinchas ben Yair’s donkey…”’ And this question refutes that their muzzles were unfastened, because it is not possible that the chassidut (piety) in R’ Pinchas ben Yair’s home was greater than in Avraham Avinu’s home. And since R’ Pinchas ben Yair’s donkey did not need to be kept away from the things which are forbidden for his owner to feed him, all the more so Avraham Avinu’s camels. And there was no need to muzzle them, because ‘there shall not be caused to a righteous man any iniquity.’ (Mishlei 12:21)”

**Rambam: Guide for the Perplexed (part 3, chapter 51)**

When we have acquired a true knowledge of God and rejoice in that knowledge in such a manner, that while speaking to others or attending to our bodily wants, our mind is all that time with God; when we are with our heart constantly near God, even while our body is in the society of men…then we have attained not only the height of ordinary prophets, but of Moses, our teacher…The Patriarchs likewise attained this degree of perfection…. Their mind was so identified with the knowledge of God that He made a lasting covenant with each of them…. When we therefore find them also engaged in ruling others, in increasing their property, and endeavoring to obtain possession of  wealth and honor, we see in this fact a proof that when they were occupied in these things, only their bodily limbs were at work, while their heart and mind never moved away from the name of God….

**Rav Hirsch Bereshit 12:10-13**

The Torah never hides from us the faults, errors and weaknesses of our great men. Just by that it gives the stamp of veracity to what it relates. But in truth, by the knowledge which is given us of their faults and weaknesses, our great men are in no wise made lesser but actually greater and more instructive

If they stood before us as the purest models of perfection we should attribute them as having a different nature, which has been denied us. Were they without passion, without internal struggles, their virtues would seem to us the outcome of some higher nature, hardly a merit and certainly no model that we could hope to emulate

[*Bereishit* 25:27](https://www.sefaria.org/Genesis.25.27?lang=he-en));

Our Sages, who never objected to drawing attention to the small and great mistakes and weaknesses in the history of our great forefathers, and thereby reflected the greatness of the Torah and upheld its lessons for all generations…

(ibid. 27:1).

"We follow the opinion of our sages, and do not consider it our task to be apologists for our great men and women, just as the Word of God, the Torah itself, never refrains from informing us of their errors and weaknesses"

**Nechama Leibowitz**

Our Sages were very exacting in their standards where the Patriarchs were concerned. If they found their conduct wanting, they had no qualms about drawing attention to it. They indicated, too, that the righteous man was eventually punished for his fault, emphasizing where it was recorded in the narrative, and they did not excuse him (*Studies in the Book of Genesis, VaYetse* 6)

**Introduction of the netziv**

This volume, Genesis, is referred to by both the prophets, Joshua and Samuel, as “Sefer HaYashar,” (Hebrew for “The Book of the Upright”).

Rabbi Yochanan explains  that this is the book that deals with the lives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who are called upright, as we see that Balaam said, “Let my soul die the death of the upright“.We shall try to understand the reason why Balaam called our forefathers specifically “upright ones” and not “righteous ones” or “pious ones” or any other appellation.  Moreover, we shall analyze the questions of why Balaam prayed for himself, wishing that his end would be as these upright ones, and why this volume was given the added name, The Book of the Upright.

                                                     \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

All these questions can be answered and explained by elucidating upon the phrase in the Song of Ha’a’zi’nu, “The Rock, His Work is perfect…HE is righteous and upright.” The word “upright” shows the “justness of the judgment” of His destruction of Jerusalem and the Second Temple during the time of a generation whose outlook was crooked and twisted.

[What prompted GOD, The OMNIPOTENT ONE, to allow the destruction of The Divine Sanctuary?]

 It is explained  that the people of that generation of the Second Temple were “righteous”, “pious”, and intensely involved in Torah study.  However, they were not upright in their relationships with others, either in their actions, thoughts, or speech.  Therefore, because of the unwarranted hatred each had for the other, one would falsely accuse another of heresy, simply because the other’s religious expression, and way of respecting and showing reverence to GOD, was not in accordance with one’s own way. The one whose way was different   was thereby labeled a non-believer and considered cut off from authentic Judaism, even though that person fulfilled The Torah’s Commandments. This lack of tolerance and limited acceptance of individualreligious expression eventually led to murder  in the first degree and to all the evils in the world.  Eventually, GOD felt that punishment — the destruction of the Holy Temple — was necessary.

 From this punishment we can see the “righteousness of The Divine Judgment”, for The HOLY ONE, The ALMIGHTY, is Upright and will not tolerate so-called “righteous” people such as these. However, The RULER will sanction them only with the stipulation that they choose the upright way in their relationships with others.  GOD does not want people to be devious, even if their acts are proclaimed “for the sake of Heaven,” since the essence of these acts is corrupt.  This perverted manner destroys creation and uproots the tranquil settlement of the earth.

Now we understand the reason for the unique praise attributed to our patriarchs [and matriarchs]:  not only were they righteous and pious and not only did they love GOD to their fullest abilities, but, in addition, they were upright.  That is to say, they accustomed themselves to deal straightforwardly with other people, not only because it is honest to do so, but also because they realized that this positive way of relating to people bestows the continuity of existence on creation.  Even idol worshippers, despite their low and despicable spiritual level, were treated with love and concern for their well-being by our patriarchs [and matriarchs].  This is exemplified by the great extent to which Abraham, our father, applied himself, through intensive prayers and appeals, to gain the preservation of wicked Sodom. Abraham beseeched GOD to spare Sodom even though he hated the people and their leaders to the fullest degree, because of the wickedness that saturated their very being. Nevertheless, he wanted them to continue to exist. In the Midrash, this concept of Abraham’s compassion is touched upon when we learn that The ALMIGHTY said to Abraham, our father, “You love righteousness and hate evil; namely, you love to find the good within all My creatures, to make them right before ME and you hate to attribute evil to them, to make them guilty.”

 Thus Abraham was truly worthy of being called by GOD, “a [real] father to a multitude of nations”.  For just as when a son does not follow a straight path, yet his father nevertheless desires his welfare and goodness, giving him what is best and most beneficial, so Abraham extended his loving-kindness [in a diverse and variety of ways] to give continuity to the world. Another clear example of Abraham’s worthiness is exemplified in the grace that was poured forth by Abraham in his unique extension of tolerance toward Lot.We also see how compassionate, calm and serene Isaac, our father, was, when making no demands himself, he was appeased by his adversaries, Abimelech and his entourage, with a minimum of words of placation.  He was mollified to a much greater extent than they had requested.

 Jacob, our father, got very angry with Laban, for he knew that Laban wanted to kill him, to destroy him completely, and that Laban would have succeeded in killing him, had it not been for GOD’s intervention.  Nevertheless, Jacob spoke gently to Laban and readily formed a peace agreement with him.  Thus our sages say, “Better is the patriarchs’ reconciliatory approach of dealing with assertiveness than the humility of later generations.” There is truly much to be learned from the peaceful manner  in which the patriarchs approached life and accepted others, qualities so vitally necessary to sustain the world.  This is the principal idea of this book, The Book of Creation.  Therefore, it is also called The Book of The Upright because of the many episodes of the patriarchs’ deeds which illustrated their true love of humanity and their astounding tolerance. What about Balaam?  [What was Balaam’s rationale for calling the patriarchs specifically “the upright ones“?  And why did he wish that his end would be as “the upright ones“?]

At the moment of his Divine Inspiration, he did not consider to wonder about his low level of piety, which was in contrast to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob’s devotion to GOD.  This was natural because Balaam was a prophet of the nations of the world, and since he believed in idols, the essence of his being came from a source of impurity.

 But Balaam was upset about his bad conduct toward humankind. Though it was most natural for him, an idolater, to hate The Israelite Nation, because they, The Israelites, were the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and had their source of being in the foundation of sanctity which is diametrically opposed to his source of being, impurity, nevertheless, it was not proper for him to make the demand that an entire nation be uprooted.  Such an act of destruction would not have been in accordance with the continued existence of the world and would have been the antithesis to humanitarianism.  Concerning his recognition of the Jewish patriarchs’ level of tolerance, Balaam cried out, [I pray,] “Let my soul die the death of the upright and let my end be like his.”

That is to say, Balaam wanted his end to be like that of those who sustain creation and help it remain in existence because they are straight-forward, upright people.  The Book of The Upright, The Book of Creation, and The Book of Genesis are one and the same.  The founders of Judaism — Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, and Jacob and Rachel and Leah — are examples to all humanity.  Their godly views reflect true tolerance  for, and a real love of humanity since they desire all of creation to exist.