

Travails of Faith: Challenges in the Land

1. Bereishit Ch. 12

י ויהי רעב בארץ וירד אברם מצרימה לגור שם כי כבד הרעב בארץ: יא ויהי כאשר הקריב לבוא מצרימה ויאמר אל-שרי אשתו הנה נא ידעתי כי אשה יפת-מראה את: יב והיה כי יראו אותך המצרים ואמרו אשתו זאת והרגו אתי ואתך יחיו: יג אמרי-נא אחתי את למען ייטב-לי בעבורך וחייתה נפשי בגללך: יד ויהי כבוא אברם מצרימה ויראו המצרים את-האשה כי יפה הוא מאד: טו ויראו אתה שרי פרעה והללו אתה אל-פרעה ותקח האשה בית פרעה: טז ולאברם היטיב בעבורה והיילו צאן-ובקר וחמרים ועבדים ושפחות ואתנת וגמלים: יז וינגע יהוה | את-פרעה נגעים גדלים ואת-ביתו על-דבר שרי אשת אברם: יח ויקרא פרעה לאברם ויאמר מה-זאת עשית לי למה לא-הגדת לי כי אשתך הוא: יט למה אמרת אחתי הוא ואקח אתה לי לאשה ועתה הנה אשתך קח ולך: כ ויצו עליו פרעה אנשים וישלחו אתו ואת-אשתו ואת-כל-אשר-לו:

10 There was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land. **11**

Now it came to pass when he drew near to come to Egypt, that he said to Sarai his wife, "Behold now I know that you are a woman of fair appearance. **12** And it will come to pass when the Egyptians see you, that they will say, 'This is his wife,' and they will slay me and let you live. **13** Please say you are my sister, in order that it go well with me because of you, and that my soul may live because of you." **14** And it came to pass when Abram came to Egypt, that the Egyptians saw the woman, that she was very pretty. **15** And Pharaoh's princes saw her, and they praised her to Pharaoh, and the woman was taken to the house of Pharaoh. **16** And he benefited Abram for her sake, and he had flocks and cattle and he donkeys and men servants and maid servants², and she donkeys and camels. **17** And the Lord plagued Pharaoh great plagues as well as his household, on account of Sarai, Abram's wife. **18** And Pharaoh summoned Abram, and he said, "What is this that you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? **19** Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her to myself for a wife? And now, here is your wife; take [her] and go." **20** And Pharaoh commanded men on his behalf, and they escorted him and his wife and all that was his.

2. Rashi (R. Shlomo b. Yitzchak, France, 12th c.), 12:10

ארץ רעב A FAMINE IN THE LAND — in that land only to test him whether he would take exception to God's commands in that He had bidden him to go to the land of Canaan and now forced him to leave it (Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer 26).

3. Ramban (R. Moshe b. Nachman, Spain, 1194–1270), Bereishit Ch. 12

...And you should know that our father Avraham committed a great sin unintentionally, in which he brought his righteous wife to stumble into transgression because of his fear of getting killed, and he should have trusted the Name to have saved him, his wife and all that was his, because Elohim has power to help and to save. Also his going out from the land - of which he had been commanded at the beginning - due to famine was a transgression that he committed, because Elohim would have saved him from dying (even) in a famine. And because of this deed it was decreed that his seed would be in exile in Egypt...

4. Radak (R. David Kimhi, France, 1160–1235), Bereishit Ch. 12

As to why he did not trust G'd, Who had promised to make him into a great nation, a promise that had not yet begun to be fulfilled, and preferred to resort to subterfuge, this is not surprising. We find that Yaakov also took extreme precautions in spite of having been given many assurances by G'd. The promises by G'd are based on man having

¹ קידושין סט: - ארץ ישראל גבוה מכל ארצות מנלן דכתיב (ירמיהו כג, ז) לא יאמר עוד חי ה' אשר העלה את בני ישראל מארץ מצרים כי אם חי ה' אשר העלה ואשר הביא את בני ישראל מארץ צפון ומכל הארצות ("ונראה שכוונת חז"ל גם לגבוה במשמעות רוחנית" דעת מקרא דף ש"ו)

² י"ש לשער, שאת הגר המצרית נתן לה פרעה לשפחה (או שרכשה עבורה אברם) בהיותם במצרים. וראה עוד ועל 'עבדו זקן ביתו' דע"מ,

taken every reasonable precaution not to require a miracle to save him from danger. When one is aware that one finds oneself in a situation where danger to one's life is likely, one must first take every precaution at one's disposal to counter such danger. Our sages (Pesachim 64) have told us that it is inadmissible to sit with one's hands in one's hands, waiting for G'd to perform a miracle to save one's life... One must not leave matters to miracles.

5. *Innocents Abroad* (Mark Twain, USA, 1835–1910), p. 213

Stirring scenes like these occur in this valley no more. There is not a solitary village throughout its whole extent—not for thirty miles in either direction. There are two or three small clusters of Bedouin tents, but not a single permanent habitation. One may ride ten miles, hereabouts, and not see ten human beings.

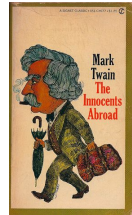
To this region one of the prophecies is applied:

I will bring the land into desolation; and your enemies which dwell therein shall be astonished at it. And I will scatter you among the heathen, and I will draw out a sword after you; and your land shall be desolate and your cities waste.

Come to Galilee for that. If these unpeopled deserts, these rusty mounds of barrenness, that never, never, never do shake the glare from their harsh outlines, and fade and faint into vague perspective; that melancholy ruin of Capernaum; this stupid village of Tiberias, slumbering under its six funereal plumes of palms;

We reached Tabor safely, and considerably in advance of that old iron-clad swindle of a guard. We never saw a human being on the whole route.

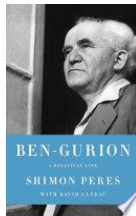
Jericho the accursed lies a moldering ruin to-day, even as Joshua's miracle left it more than three thousand years ago;



6. Ben-Gurion: A Political Life (Shimon Peres, Israel, 1923–2016), pgs. 16–18

Young David Gruen had had no training or experience in agricultural work and found it hard going at first. After just a fortnight he was felled by the malaria that made life so miserable for so many of the pioneers. A doctor who examined him quietly suggested that he might do well to consider returning home. He had clearly misjudged his patient. “For weeks, the whole country prayed for rain,” David wrote to his father in December 1906.

When the rain comes, the oranges are picked, so there's work. That's not the only blessing it brings us workers: when the rain comes the malaria stops. At the end of Heshvan the skies to the west darkened with clouds. Gradually they spread . . . The parched earth swallowed or, more accurately, sucked in the liquid treasure that the skies emptied down on it for two whole weeks . . . In the morning, in groups of ten or a dozen, we young men and women go out to the orchards to pick the oranges. This is one of the easiest and pleasantest tasks.



the First Aliyah settlements. About a year after his aliyah, David moved to the Galilee, where he found work, pleasure, and peace of mind in the village of Sejera, near Mount Tabor. All the farmhands in this small settlement were Jewish. “I get up at half past four in the morning,” he reported to his father in February 1908,

and go to the cowshed to feed “my” animals. Then I brew up some tea and have my breakfast. At first light, I take my “flock”—two pairs of oxen, two cows, two calves, and a donkey—over to the trough to drink. The sun's still not up, and

I'm harnessing the yoke on my oxen, putting the bag of seed on the donkey, getting my cattle-prodder ready [a detailed description of this implement appears here in parentheses], and heading for the field, where I plow steadily all day long. How easy and pleasant plowing is! . . . The oxen plod slowly ahead, like important burghers, and I have all the time in the world to think and to dream. And how can one not think when one is walking and plowing the land of Eretz Yisrael, and when all around other Jews are plowing their land in their own country? This land that you tread on, this land that reveals itself in all its rich shades and magic charm . . . isn't this experience itself a dream? . . . At four I'm back

7. Abraham's Journey (R. JB Soloveitchik, USA, 20th c.), p. 104–105

Abraham's journey apparently took a long time. He finally arrived in Canaan, but later had to leave it: “There was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt *lagur sham*, to sojourn there” (Gen. 12:10). We remember the quotation about Jacob from the Haggadah: “*Lagur sham* indicates that he did not go down to settle, but only to stay [temporarily]. As it is said: ‘And [Joseph's brothers] said to Pharaoh, We have come *lagur sham*, to sojourn in the land’ (Gen. 47:4).” Abraham left the Land of

Israel temporarily, intending to return when the famine would pass. Perhaps his sojourn there would be a long one. But *lagur* also implies to retain one's identity, to carry on a mission, to remain loyal to a great vision. That is why Rashi (Gen. 32:5) says with regard to Jacob that there is an equation between *Im Lavan garti* ("I have sojourned with Laban") and *taryag mitzvot shamarti* ("I have observed the 613 commandments"). I served Laban for twenty years, says Jacob, but I retained my identity... However, in my opinion, it is also true that Egypt attracted Abraham. He knew that if he succeeded in persuading Pharaoh that polytheism and idolatry were wrong and that there is one God who wills man to lead a moral life, then the battle between paganism and monotheism would be won³. Egypt was the metropolis of the Middle East, the seat of the developed technology and civilization. Her influence was powerful. If Egypt were to join Abraham, the redemption of mankind would be achieved quickly. Abraham had not succeeded in persuading the people of Chaldea, the second cultural center of antiquity. Nevertheless, he tried again in Egypt--only to fail there, too. Even so, the disappointing experience in Egypt did not discourage him from pursuing his original goal--the total redemption and conversion of mankind.

6. Bereishit 2:10-13

10 And a river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it separated and became four ... 11 Pishon... 13 Gihon... 14 the name of the third river is Tigris... and the fourth river that is the Euphrates⁴.



7. Devarim 11:10-12

10 For the land to which you are coming to possess is not like the land of Egypt, out of which you came, where you sowed your seed and which you watered by foot, like a vegetable garden. 11 But the land, to which you pass to possess, is a land of mountains and valleys and absorbs water from the rains of heaven, 12 a land the Lord, your God, looks after; the eyes of Lord your God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year.

8. דעת מקרא (יהודה קיל) בראשית יב:

והיה זה נסיון נוסף לאברם שעזב את ארצות עבר הנהר המשקות, והלך במצות ה' אל ארץ אשר 'למטר השמים תשתה מים', שרעבונים פוקדים אותה מעת לעת.

9. Rashi (R. Shlomo b. Yitzchak, France, 12th c.), Devarim 11:10

The land of Egypt required bringing water from the Nile by foot in order to water it; you had to rise from your sleep and toil. And only the low-lying areas were watered [i.e., were irrigated by the Nile], but not the high land, so you had to carry up water from the lower to the higher areas. But this [land, namely Canaan] "absorbs water from the rains of heaven." While you sleep in your bed, the Holy One, blessed is He, waters both low and high areas, both areas that are exposed and those that are not, all at once

10. HaAmeK Davar (R. Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin, Poland, 19th c.), Bereishit 12:10

כי כבד הרעב בארץ. כפל הכתוב להודיע שכל עוד שהיה אפשר להשתדל למכור רכשו ולבטוח בה' עשה עד שמכ"מ כבד עליו הרעב אז קיים בעצמו רעב... והי' בזה נסיון לא"א שלא הקפיד אלא הבין שכך הוא עצת ה' ורצונו. ולא כהרמב"ן ז"ל שכתב שחטא במה שיצא שהיה לו לבטוח בה'.



³ יוסף בן מתתיהו (קדמוניות א, מהד' שליט, עמ' 18, סעיף 161) סבר שביקש אברם גם לשמוע מפי כהני מצרים את דעתם על האלהות, וביקש להחזיר למוטב.
⁴ דעת מקרא דף נח- אין חולק על זהוים עם הנהרות הידועים- מקור שניהם מצפון לעיראק, בתורכייה המזרחית של ימינו.

11. Malbim (R. Meir Leibush, Ukraine, 19th c.), Bereishit 12:10

ואברהם לא הרהר כי היה קטן בעיניו שישנה ה' את הטבע בעבורו, ולכן לא סמך ג"כ על הנס שיחיהו ברעב, רק בקש הצלה טבעיית.

12. דעת מקרא, בראשית יב:יב, טז, יח, יט

אשתו זאת- ולמותר להטעים ולומר שאשת-איש אסורה על כל בני-נח: "הנך מת על האשה אשר לקחת והיא בעלת בעל" (כ:ג). ולפיכך: **והרגו אתי-** כדי שתהיי כפנויה' בעיניהם... **ואתנת וגמלים-** ואין זאת 'ההטבה' שבקש אברם. אברם בקש להשאר בחיים כדי שיוכל להגן על שרי ועל כבודה. ולא עלה כלל על דעתו שהיא עשיוה להלקח דוקא לבית פרעה. ואין לנו לדמין את החרדה הגדולה שאחזה את שניהם. וגם אין ספק ששניהם נשאו את עיניהם לשמים. **ויקרא פרעה לאברם-** משלקה פרעה לפתע ב'נגעים גדולים' והרופאים נלאו מלרפאותו הבין שקים קשר סבתי בין המעשה שבקש לעשות לבין הנגעים שמנעו זאת ממנו. נתן לשער שאף יחס את הנגעים לאלהי אברם ושרי, והחליט לזמן את אברם בארץ דחוף לארמונו כדי להוכיחו ולעשותו שתף ואולי אף אחראי למעשה. **ואקח אתה לי לאשה-** אין לשון 'קיחה' זה מדבר במעשה אישות בפעל במחשתו, לשאת את שרי לאשה, שלומר לעשותה מלכה... 'בית פרעה' = בית הנשים אשר בארמון פרעה.

13. Kohelet 7:20

כִּי אָדָם אֵין צְדִיק בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה טוֹב וְלֹא יִחְטָא: For there is not one good man on earth who does what is best and doesn't err

14. R. David Zvi Hoffman (Germany, 20th c.), Bereishit 12:13

ואם בחר בדרך שבה בחר, הרי זה משום שהיה מקום לקוות להציל את חיי אשתו, אם בערמה ואם בכוח הזרוע, אם אמנם ישאר הוא בחיים, בעוד אשר שרי תהא אבודה בהחלט אם יומת בגינה. יתרה מזו, ייתכן גם שקווה, כי יתיחסו אליו כאחיה של שרי לכל דבר, כלומר ישאו ויתנו עמו תחילה, לפני שיקחה ממנו, כך שירוויח זמן וישמור על סיכוי להצילה.

15. HaAmek Davar (R. Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin, Poland, 19th c.), Bereishit 12:16

ולאברם היטיב בעבורה. לטובתה היינו לכבודה שאין כבוד לאשת מלך שיהיה לה אח הדיוט. ע"כ עשה לראש ולשר וגדול במדינה:

16. דעת מקרא, בראשית יב:יז

וינגע ה' את פרעה- לראשונה מאז ירידת אברם ושרי מצרימה נקט הכתוב את שם הוי"ה, ורומז בכך שגם בשעה שבני אדם סוברים, שה' הסתיר את פניו מהם- עיניו אל יראיו. **אשת אברם-** הטעים הכתוב את דבר האישות כדי להודיע שפרעה היה מנוע- בגלל הנגעים הגדולים שנחתו עליו- לטמא את שרי, וזו נשארה בטהרתה: אשת אברם.

17. Bereishit 13:1

1 And Abram came up⁵ from Egypt, he and his wife and all that was his⁶, and Lot with him, to the south. 2 And Abram was very heavy with cattle, with silver, and with gold⁷. 3 And he went on his journeys, from the south and until Beth el, until the place where his tent had been previously, between Beth el and between Ai. 4 To the place of the altar that he had made at first, and

⁵ "Abram went up from Egypt" (Gen 13:1). Of course, travel from Egypt to the Negev is physically an upward movement, climbing a hill. But we can also interpret the verse in a metaphoric fashion. After his experience in Egypt, Abraham rose to new heights. His sojourn in Egypt somehow enriched his personality, opening up new vistas for him. When he returned to Eretz Yisrael, he was not the same Abraham who had left; he returned with more imagination and a bolder, more aggressive outlook on the world." *Abraham's Journey*, p. 113

⁶ "כפל הכתוב דבור זה ("וכל אשר לו") כדי להטעים שגם בהליכתו ממצרים הנגבה לא ארעה לו כל תקלה, וכך נעשתה הבטחת ה' 'ואברכך' למציאות ממשית." **דעת מקרא, שמו**

⁷ "אכו"כ היה זה סימן לבנים יוצאי מצרים, ששאלו במצות ה' עליהם משכניהם המצריים 'כלי-כסף וכלי-זהב'" **דעת מקרא, שמו**

Abram called there in the name of the Lord. **5** And also Lot, who went with Abram, had flocks and cattle and tents. **6** And the land did not bear them to dwell together, for their possessions were many, and they could not dwell together. **7** And there was a quarrel between the herdsmen of Abram's cattle and between the herdsmen of Lot's cattle, and the Canaanites and the Perizzites were then dwelling in the land. **8** And Abram said to Lot, "Please let there be no quarrel between me and between you and between my herdsmen and between your herdsmen, for we are kinsmen. **9** Is not all the land before you? Please part from me; if [you go] left, I will go right, and if [you go] right, I will go left."⁸ **10** And Lot raised his eyes, and he saw the entire plain of the Jordan, that it was entirely watered; before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, as you come to Zoar. **11** And Lot chose for himself the entire plain of the Jordan, and Lot traveled from the east, and they parted from one another. **12** Abram remained in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled in the cities of the Plain, pitching his tents near Sodom. **13** Now the inhabitants of Sodom were very wicked sinners against the LORD. **14** And the LORD said to Abram, after Lot had parted from him, "Raise your eyes and look out from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west, **15** for I give all the land that you see to you and your offspring forever. **16** I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, then your offspring too can be counted. **17** Up, walk about the land, through its length and its breadth, for I give it to you." **18** And Abram moved his tent, and came to dwell at the terebinths of Mamre, which are in Hebron; and he built an altar there to the LORD.

18. Abraham's Journey (R. JB Soloveitchik, USA, 20th c.), p. 119

But Abraham might have been in Egypt for years--who knows how long! Egypt was the world's most advanced country, and Abraham was a shepherd. Lot was completely overpowered and overwhelmed by the stupendous Egyptian culture, civilization, and technology. He could not resist the influence of the environment. Abraham could, Sarah could, but Lot couldn't. Here is the acid test of a Jew: can he resist environmental pressures, can he withstand the impact of a culture that is materially great but morally and ethically very primitive? ... Rashi (Gen. 12:10) says that the purpose was lenassoto--to test his faith, to test how Abraham would react to Egyptian culture and civilization, to an entirely new environment. Would he be overwhelmed and succumb to Egyptian society, to its ideals, its philosophy, its views? Or would Abraham resist and emerge triumphant? Got the test twice more--with Jacob in Haran and with Joseph in Egypt--to show that a Jew can live in exile and still retain his spiritual identity, either in poverty and in need, as a day-laborer or shepherd, or in riches and luxury as the prime minister of a foreign country. The Torah tested the patriarchs because the tests of the patriarchs were characteristic and indicative of the destiny of their descendants. That was the main purpose of bringing Abraham to Egypt.

19. Genesis: From Creation to Covenant (R. Zvi Grumet), p. 142

Apparently, despite what Abram *says*, what he actually *does* is follow Lot and keep watch from the hills of Hebron. Imagine a mother letting her child walk to school alone for the first time. She is likely to follow him from a distance to make sure that everything is okay, careful that he doesn't discover her subterfuge and discover that he is really not independent... Not surprisingly, when Abram saves Lot he is greeted as a hero and thanked... yet from Lot we hear silence. Lot's silence is revealing - to thank Abram would be to acknowledge his own error. Not only can Lot not confront Abram, he cannot confront his own failure in decision-making... Lot reminds us of the overconfident teen who believes that he can make it on his own, and who bristles at the thought of adult involvement in his life, but who does not know what to say when he needs the adult to bail him

⁸ "בהצעתו זו של אברם ללוט היה ותור במודע על שני דברים... ותור על חלקים מסימים מן הארץ שננתה לו מפי הגבורה. וכך עשה אברם את בני לוט (מואב ובני-עמון) ליורשי ארצות מסימות בעבר-הירדן המזרחי, ככתוב בראש ספר דברים. וכך נעשתה מצות ה' לך לך... מבית אביך למציאות." **דעת מקרא, שגב**

out of a difficult bind. Abram, on the other hand, is the cautiously optimistic guardian who wants to give that teen the opportunity to make his own mistakes while extending a safety net from afar.

20. Letter of R. Soloveitchik on Aliyah, 1967

17 Tammuz 5767 (1967)

Her honour, Madam Miriam Shiloh, שרתחיה,

Shalom uBerachah! I request forgiveness for not addressing her letter immediately, and delaying until now. It was difficult for me, and it remains difficult, to write. I am immersed in mourning for the death of my beloved wife, the pupil of my eye and beloved of my soul, of blessed memory. My world has collapsed and is ruined. Even now, I write with tears and with the blood of my torn and agitated heart.

I thank her for her words, and I accept her rebuke willingly. In truth, I have sinned against the Holy Land. I am among those who have been slow. Of course, many causes, which do not depend upon me, have delayed me – but I do not seek an excuse, and I do not justify myself. I have sinned, and the [prisoner's] chain hangs from my neck.

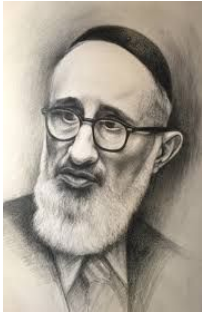
Last year we decided, my wife z"l and I, to come to the Land and to spend six months there, to see the land and the nation dwelling there. But many thoughts are in the heart of man, and what happened happened, and my sighs are many and my heart grieves!

Many of my acquaintances and friends who dwell in the Land and in the Diaspora encourage me to come now. Madam also emphasized in her letter that it is now a propitious time as well as a time of spiritual crisis. But our sages tell us of an "Arch of Accounting" which was situated outside of Jerusalem, because one who takes accounts and finds his account lacking is upset, and regarding Jerusalem it is written, "the joy of the entire earth". How much more so for the "Arch of Black Mourning" in which I am currently found, that it must be outside Jerusalem. How could I now ascend to Jerusalem, when I am a man of a harsh and bitter spirit? G-d is not manifest when one is depressed, upset and pained.

Madam need not justify her words. I, too, am a simple Jew. In the language of the Sages of Yavneh (Berachot 17), I would say: I am a teacher, and many work with the community in the field of Torah education, as teachers. My work is in the large city of New York, in an institution with many students, and their work is in Givat Washington or in another community in a small institution. Whether one does much or little, so long as one directs his heart toward Heaven. The work all of us do is dedicated to nurturing the values of Judaism, the ancestral tradition and the Torah of our masters, authors of the tradition and its sages.

With great respect,

Yosef Dov haLevi Soloveitchik



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B. H. 21 Adar II, 5738
Brooklyn, N. Y.

Sholom uBrocho:

I am in receipt of your letter, written on Purim, and in view of its contents I hasten to reply to it ahead of turn and via Special Delivery.

Following the order in your letter, I will refer to your problem of finding yourself and your wife in a depression "from the disappointment of not following through with our dreams of going to Isarel."

It is surely unnecessary to empha size to you again that the only reason for my opinion that you ought to continue in the USA is that American Jewry, and especially the younger generation, have a priority claim on your services to help permeate them with Yiddishkeit, especially after you have had such a remarkable Hatzlocho in this

To be sure, the Yishuv in Eretz Yisroel would also benefit from your presence there, but it would not be of the same scope and quality as here. Furthermore, making Aliyah requires a certain period of adjustment and getting the proper feel of the new situation, etc., and in the present "Jet-Age" every minute is of the essence insofar as youth is concerned.

especially

