

Travails of Faith: Why Avraham?

1. Pirkei Avot Chapter 5:2-3

ב. עשרה דורות מאדם ועד נח. להודיע כמה ארך אפים לפניו, שכל הדורות היו מכעיסין ובאין, עד שהביא עליהם את מי המבול. עשרה דורות מנח ועד אברהם. להודיע כמה ארך אפים לפניו, שכל הדורות היו מכעיסין ובאין, עד שבא אברהם וקיבל שכר כולם. ג. עשרה נסיונות נתנסה אברהם אבינו עליו השלום ועמד בכלם, להודיע כמה חיבתו של אברהם אבינו עליו השלום.

- There were ten generations from Adam to Noah. This is to teach us the extent of G-d's tolerance; for all these generations angered Him, until He brought upon them the waters of the Flood. There were ten generations from Noah to Abraham. This is to teach us the extent of G-d's tolerance; for all these generations angered Him, until Abraham came and reaped the reward for them all.
- With ten tests our father Abraham was tested and he withstood them all--in order to make known how great was our father Abraham's love [for G-d].

2. R. Menachem Mendel of Kotzk (quoted in C&C, R. Jonathan Sacks, Noah 5774)

Hassidim had a simple way of making the point. They called Noah *a tzaddik im peltz*, "a righteous man in a fur coat." There are two ways of keeping warm on a cold night. You can wear a fur coat or light a fire. Wear a fur coat and you warm only yourself. Light a fire and you warm others. We are supposed to light a fire.

3. Or HaChaim (R. Chaim b. Attar, Morocco-Israel, 1696-1743), Bereishit 6:9

אלה תולדות נח, נח לבד, ושלל זולתו כי לא היה בו תועלת לבני דורו ולא הועילו זכותיו אלא לו לעצמו, ובזה מתיישב כפל נח. גם אומרו **בדורותיו**, לומר שלא הועיל כלום להטיב לדורותיו להחזירם למוטב כי אם הוא לבדו ובניו שהם ענף ממנו ובשמו נכללים.

4. Ethics from Sinai (R. Irving Bunim, USA, 20th c.), p. 705-707

When he discovered an elemental truth of religion, he did not withdraw to wrap himself in his truth, warm and secure. He spoke out; he acted; he defied powerful authority and death, to guide people out of a miasma of idolatry to the clear light of his faith...

Avraham was not a tzaddik in peltz. He found a world icy cold with fear and insecurity, in which people thought only of themselves. Each worshiped his own little idol, for his own bit of safety and well-being. Avraham spent a lifetime trying to warm the world with the knowledge of a Creator Who would readily safeguard and provide.



5. Ruach Chaim (R. Chaim b. Yitzchak of Volozhin, 1749-1821), 5:3

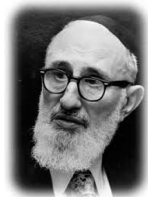


Photo of the Volozhin Yeshiva

ג. עשרה נסיונות נתנסה אברהם אבינו. כאן אמר 'אברהם אבינו', ולעיל אמר מנח ועד אברהם, ולא אמר 'אבינו'! ירצה בזה על פי מה שכתוב (משלי כ, ז) "מתהלך כתומו צדיק אשרי בניו אחריו". כי כמה מדות שהצדיק טרח ויגע להשיגם, לבניו אחריו המה כטבע מוטבע, ובקצת יגיעה יגיעו לזה. כמו שנראה בחוש שרבים מעמי ארץ מהיהודים מוסרים את עצמם על קידוש השם, והוא מוטבע בנו מאבינו אברהם, שמסר נפשו לאור כשדים על אמונתו. וכן כל העשרה נסיונות היו להישיר הדרך לפנינו. וכן ההתעוררות לאדם פתאום לילך לארץ הקודש הוא מנסיון לך לך.

6. *Abraham's Journey* (R. Joseph Soloveitchik, USA, 20th c.), pgs. 2-3

Perhaps Abraham is nothing but a myth, a legend, a vision of a tribe or a clan... To us, this problem is irrelevant. We need no evidence of the historical existence of our patriarch... We may deal in a similar manner with the historical “proofs” of the existence of Abraham. As the architect and founder of our nation, Abraham left such an indelible imprint upon our unfolding historic destiny that he has been integrated into our historical consciousness; he is so singular a motif of our historical emergence that the whole paradoxical, complex experience of our charisma would be impossible if we denied the reality of the Abraham personality.... If we were to deny the truth of the Abraham story, our historic march would be a fathomless mystery, an insensate, cruel, absurd occurrence that prosecutes no goal and moves on toward nothingness, running down to its own doom.



7. *Mikra and Meaning* (R. Nathaniel Helfgot), p. 57

The rabbis had certain expectations of the origins of a heroic figure such as Abraham; they assumed that the father of our nation must not have been a regular child, but rather was imbued with a unique and perceptive soul at an early age.¹

8. *Midrash Bereishit Rabbah 38:13*

Terah was an idol maker. One day he needed to travel and left Abraham to sell in his stead. A man entered the store seeking to buy an idol. Abraham asked him, “How old are you?” “I am fifty, maybe sixty,” he responded. Abraham exclaimed, “Woe to the man who is fifty or sixty years old and wants to worship something which is one day old!” Embarrassed, the customer left. Next, a woman entered the store with a platter of fine flour which she wished to bring as an offering. Abraham took a stick and smashed all the idols, leaving the stick in the hand of the largest one. When Terah returned he asked, “Who did all this?” Abraham responded: “A woman entered and asked me to bring her flour-offering. The idols began to argue, ‘I want to eat first!’ and ‘No! I want to eat first!’ The largest of them picked up the stick and broke the others.” Terah said, “Why are you mocking me? Are the idols capable of anything?” Abraham responded, “Your ears should hear what your own mouth is saying!”

9. *Yeshoshua 24:2-3*

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי עַם כְּנָעַן כֹּה־אָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעֵבֶר הַנָּהָר יָשְׁבוּ אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם מֵעוֹלָם תְּרַח אֲבִי אֲבִרָהָם וְאֲבִי נַחֹר וַיַּעֲבְדוּ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים: וְאֶקַּח אֶת־אֲבִיכֶם אֶת־אַבְרָהָם מֵעֵבֶר הַנָּהָר וְאוֹלַךְ אוֹתוֹ בְּכַל־אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וְאָרַב [וְאַרְבֵּה] אֶת־זֵרְעוֹ וְאֶתְּנֶלּוֹ אֶת־יִצְחָק:

Then Joshua said to all the people, “Thus said the Lord, the God of Israel: In olden times, your forefathers—Terah, father of Abraham and father of Nahor—lived beyond the Euphrates and worshiped other gods. But I took your father Abraham from beyond the Euphrates and led him through the whole land of Canaan and multiplied his offspring. I gave him Isaac,

10. *Between the Lines of the Bible vol. 1* (R. Yitzchak Etshalom), p. 89

First, society in the ancient world was not transient. People stayed in one area for generations except for cases of war or famine (which is why the call to Abraham to Lech Lekha is so extravagant and reckoned by rabbinic tradition as the first of his tests). Only people whose livelihood allowed them to move easily did so... Terah was the first person who we are told uprooted from one location to another without direct Divine intervention... Hence he must have had a profession that allowed him to easily move, which leaves him either as a shepherd, an artisan, or a salesman... Abraham and Jacob were traders whose chief livelihoods and fortunes were made in that fashion. The use of camels, owned by both, and their possession and use of precious metals (gold and silver) are indications of mercantile behavior.



¹ “We would have liked the Humash to tell us about his sleepless nights when he was struggling with himself, when he began to rebel against pagan society, when he left that society. But we know nothing about him until mature age” *Abraham's Journey*, 19

11. Mishneh Torah (R. Moshe b. Maimon, Egypt, 12th c.), Laws of Idolatry 1:3

- After this mighty man was weaned, he began to explore and think. Though he was a child, he began to think [incessantly] throughout the day and night, wondering: How is it possible for the sphere to continue to revolve without having anyone controlling it? Who is causing it to revolve? Surely, it does not cause itself to revolve.
- He had no teacher, nor was there anyone to inform him. Rather, he was mired in Ur Kasdim among the foolish idolaters. His father, mother, and all the people [around him] were idol worshipers, and he would worship with them. [However,] his heart was exploring and [gaining] understanding.
- Ultimately, he appreciated the way of truth and understood the path of righteousness through his accurate comprehension. He realized that there was one God who controlled the sphere, that He created everything, and that there is no other God among all the other entities. He knew that the entire world was making a mistake. What caused them to err was their service of the stars and images, which made them lose awareness of the truth. Abraham was forty years old when he became aware of his Creator. When he recognized and knew Him, he began to formulate replies to the inhabitants of Ur Kasdim and debate with them, telling them that they were not following a proper path.
- He broke their idols and began to teach the people that it is fitting to serve only the God of the world. To Him [alone] is it fitting to bow down, sacrifice, and offer libations, so that the people of future [generations] would recognize Him. [Conversely,] it is fitting to destroy and break all the images, lest all the people err concerning them, like those people who thought that there are no other gods besides these [images].

12. The Beginning of Desire: Reflections on Genesis (Aviva Zornberg), pgs. 81, 84

Abraham undergoes an autodidactic process, from the age of three to the age of forty. It is a process of cognitive questioning that leads him logically to the First Cause (“How is it possible? ... It is impossible”). This inner process alienates him, teacherless and fatherless, from his entire world. Externally, however, he remains integrated into his society, until the process is completed... Then begins, literally, his iconoclastic phase, which in Rambam’s account is primarily a philosophical contesting of ideas, in which Abraham defeats his opponents. As part of his development, he becomes a peripatetic teacher of Monotheism, arriving finally at Canaan. In Rambam’s account, Abraham’s life is essentially the continuous growth of a thinker, teacher, and writer... The anger of his iconoclasm is literally enacted here in the smashing of idols; while in Rambam’s account, Abraham engages in philosophical encounters.. The actual smashing of idols is there merely a logical outcome of his arguments.

13. Abraham’s Journey, pgs. 35, 39

...but *mitgalgel* means aimless, directionless movement, like an object rolling down a hill carried by the external force of gravity. In other words, *mitgalgel* signifies man’s surrender to the elemental, external forces that push him from the outside, when man becomes an object... *Mitgalgel* means unsupervised, non-directed, purposeless, and destinationless motion drifting toward disaster. Greek tragedy portrays such irreversible motion as symbolizing uncontrollable fate... Maimonides wrote that the world moved on in this fashion until Abraham was born. He did not write “until Abraham recognized the Almighty and began to proclaim God’s name to the whole world.” Apparently, it was immediately with Abraham’s birth that the world stopped rushing down into a yawning abyss. The significance of his birth, consists in the certitude that greatness in a human being cannot be suppressed or destroyed. No matter how fiendish the circumstances, however corrupt and wicked society may be, genuine holiness and greatness eventually triumph over satanic opposition. Once Abraham was born, it was quite certain that he would redeem the world. The expectation on the part of Providence was that the great courageous spirit which entered the frail body of a crying infant would defy and defeat the power of pagan tyranny.

14. Bereishit 11:26-32, 12:1

כּו וַיְחִי־תֵרַח שְׁבַעִים שָׁנָה וַיֹּלֵד אֶת־אַבְרָם אֶת־נְחוֹר וְאֶת־הָרָן: כז וְאַלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת תֵּרַח תֵּרַח הוֹלִיד אֶת־אַבְרָם אֶת־נְחוֹר וְאֶת־הָרָן וְהָרָן הוֹלִיד אֶת־לוֹט: כח וַיָּמָת הָרָן עַל־פְּנֵי תֵרַח אָבִיו בְּאֶרֶץ מוֹלְדֹתוֹ בְּאֹר פְּשְׁדִים: כט וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָם וְנְחוֹר לָהֶם נָשִׁים שָׁם אֶשֶׁת־אַבְרָם שָׂרִי וְשָׁם אֶשֶׁת־נְחוֹר מִלְכָּה בִת־הָרָן אָבִי־מִלְכָּה וְאָבִי יִסְכָּה: ל וַתְּהִי שָׂרִי עֶקְרָה אֵין לָהּ וָלֵד: לא וַיִּקַּח תֵּרַח אֶת־אַבְרָם בְּנֵו וְאֶת־לוֹט בֶּן־הָרָן בְּנֵוֹ וְאֶת שָׂרִי כַלְתּוֹ אֶשֶׁת אַבְרָם בְּנֵו וַיֵּצְאוּ אֹתָם מֵאֹר פְּשְׁדִים לָלֶכֶת אֶרְצָה כְּנַעַן וַיָּבֹאוּ עַד־חָרָן וַיֵּשְׁבוּ שָׁם: לב וַיְהִי יְמֵי־תֵרַח חֲמֵשׁ שָׁנִים וּמֵאֵתִים שָׁנָה וַיָּמָת תֵּרַח בְּחָרָן: (ו) יב:א וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל־אַבְרָם לְךָ־לֶךְ מֵאֶרֶץ וּמִמּוֹלְדֹתֶךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲרָאךְ:

26 When Terah had lived 70 years, he begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran. 27 Now this is the line of Terah: Terah begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran begot Lot. 28 Haran died in the lifetime of his father Terah, in his native land, Ur of the Chaldeans.

29 Abram and Nahor took to themselves wives, the name of Abram's wife being Sarai and that of Nahor's wife Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah and Iscah. 30 Now Sarai was barren, she had no child. 31 Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot the son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and they set out together from Ur of the Chaldeans for the land of Canaan; but when they had come as far as Haran, they settled there. 32 The days of Terah came to 205 years; and Terah died in Haran.

12:1 The Lord said to Abram, "Go forth from your native land and from your father's house to the land that I will show you.

15. אברהם: סיפורו של מסע (ר. יונתן גרוסמן) דף 25

...כבר בפסוק הבא מתוארת טרגדיה במשפחת תרח: אחד הבנים נפטר. מבחינה זו, אנו שבים דווקא למשפחת אדם הראשון שהיו לו שלושה בנים- קין, הבל ושת - ואחד מהם (הבל) מת על פני הוריו. בכך, כבר בהצגת משפחת תרח אולה הציפיייה של הקורא: תרח ובניו מוצגים בסיפור כמקבילים לאדם הראשון ובניו מזה ולנח ובניו מזה. שתי נקודות התחלה שליוו את הקורא עד כה פורצות כאן לנקודת ראשית חדשה.

16. Genesis: From Creation to Covenant (R. Zvi Grumet), p. 120

<i>Terah's journey (11:31)</i>	<i>Abram's journey (12:5)</i>
Terah took	Abram took
Abram his son	
Lot the son of Haran, his grandson;	Lot, his nephew;
Sarai his daughter-in-law, the wife of his son Abram	Sarai, his wife;
	And all their possessions and the souls they acquired in Haran
They left together from Ur Kasdim	They left
to go to the land of Canaan,	to go to the land of Canaan,
But they arrived in Haran and stayed there.	And they arrived in the land of Canaan

17. דעת מקרא (יהודה קיל) בראשית דף ש

ארצה כנען- אף כאן סתם הכתוב ולא פרש, מה ראה תרח ללכת דוקא ארצה כנען. על כרחך עליך לומר, שגם בידיו היתה מסרת (אולי עמומה במקצת), שקבל מאבותיו (אם מנח עצמו אם משם בן נח), על סגלותיה של ארץ כנען... ולדעת ראב"ע², מצות ה' אל אברם, לך-לך מארצך וממולדתך ומבית אביך' וגו' (יב א) קדמה למעשה היציאה שבכאן. ולפי זה אברם היה היוזם העקרי ליציאה מאור כשדים לארץ כנען כמצוה ועומד מפי הגבורה. וזה פשר הלשון הבא בהמשך, ויצאו אתם, - אתו (את תרח) היה לו לומר, ואמר ויצאו [תרח ואברם]. וכתב חתם סופר: נמצא שההליכה היה מכח שניהם... תרח יצא מדעת עצמו ואברם בצווי השם יתברך

18. Abraham's Journey, p. 54

Surely the great revolution in Terah's thinking was precipitated by doubts, soul-searching, and reappraisal. In a word, it was the transvaluation of a ba'al teshuvah that was responsible for the decision to abandon Ur in Chaldea and start out for a primitive land where he planned to begin a new life. God commanded Abraham to emigrate from Ur of the Chaldees after Terah had undergone the great, dramatic change and had decided to give up everything and go forth to a new world. Whether Terah knew of Abraham's rendezvous with God in the fertile fields of Chaldea under the starry night sky is hard to ascertain. Equally difficult to answer is the question of whether Abraham ever told Terah about the instructions he received from God pertaining to the journey to an unknown country. However, all that is irrelevant. What is important is the coincidence of revelation and free decision. When the command of lekh lekha came and Abraham began to pack his bags, he realized to his great surprise that his father's bags had already been packed long before. Father and son, hitherto locked in mortal combat, joined hands and together started out on the great march to Canaan, away from the hustling and bustling cities of Chaldea, away from a highly developed country, away from a magical, well-organized, and disciplined social order.

19. Ramban (R. Moshe b. Nachman, Spain, 12th c.), Bereishit 12:1

And this (Ibn Ezra's interpretation) is not correct. Because if this were so, the point of the journey would be Avram's leaving his father's house on God's command, and Terach would just be accompanying him out of his own personal desire. But the verse says, "Terach took Avram his son" (Gen. 11:31), which shows that Avram was following his father, and it was his father's idea that they leave Ur Kasdim to go to the land of Canaan.³

20. Nechemia 9:7-8

אֶת־הַהוֹאֵה' הַאֱלֹקִים אֲשֶׁר בְּחַרְתָּ בְּאַבְרָם וְהוֹצֵאתוֹ מֵאֹר כְּשָׁדִים וְשִׁמְתָּ שְׁמוֹ אַבְרָהָם: וּמִצֵּאתָ אֶת־לְבָבוֹ נְאֻמָּן לְפָנֶיךָ וְכָרוֹת עָמֹ הַבֵּר' יֵת לְתֵת אֶת־אָרֶץ הַכְּנַעֲנִי הַחֲתִי הָאֱמֹרִי וְהַפְּרִזִי וְהַיְבוּסִי וְהַגְּרָגְשִׁי לְתֵת לְזֶרְעוֹ וְתָקַם אֶת־דְּבָרֶיךָ כִּי צִדִּיק אָתָּה:

² דברי הראב"ע לבראשית יא:לא- והנכון בעיני שפרשת לך לך שאמר השם לאברם קודם זה הפסוק שהוא ויקח תרח. וכמוהו בתורה באחד לחדש השני בשנה השנית, ואחר כן בחדש הראשון בשנה השנית והעד שאמר הכתוב ללכת ארצה כנען. וכאשר בא תרח אל חרן ישר המקום בעיניו וישב שם וימת, ואין מוקדם ומאוחר בתורה.

"There was no reason why Terah should have departed from Ur of the Chaldees. He was a very prominent citizen in Chaldea; he was a member of the royal house and people respected him. Why should a man suddenly emigrate from his native land for no reason under the sun? That is why Ibn Ezra says that Terah went in response to the divine command Abraham received from God." *Abraham's Journey, p. 52* "It is difficult to know precisely why Terah initially thinks to leave Ur Kasdim and move toward Canaan. As we saw earlier, according to one version of the biblical chronology, the story of the Great Dispersion takes place when Abraham is forty-eight years old. If that is true, then it is not just Terah who is on the move; everyone is on the move!" *Genesis: From Creation to Covenant, p. 125*

³ "Terah felt the mysterious pull that the Holy Land exerted upon those who search for meaning and a rationale in life and who are questing for God." *Abraham's Journey, p. 56*

You are the Lord God, Who chose Abram, took him out of Ur of the Chaldees and made his name Abraham. And You found his heart faithful before You, and You made the covenant with him to give the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, and the Girgashites, to give to his seed, and You kept Your words, for You are righteous.

21. Between the Lines of the Bible vol. 1 (R. Yitzchak Etshalom), p. 89

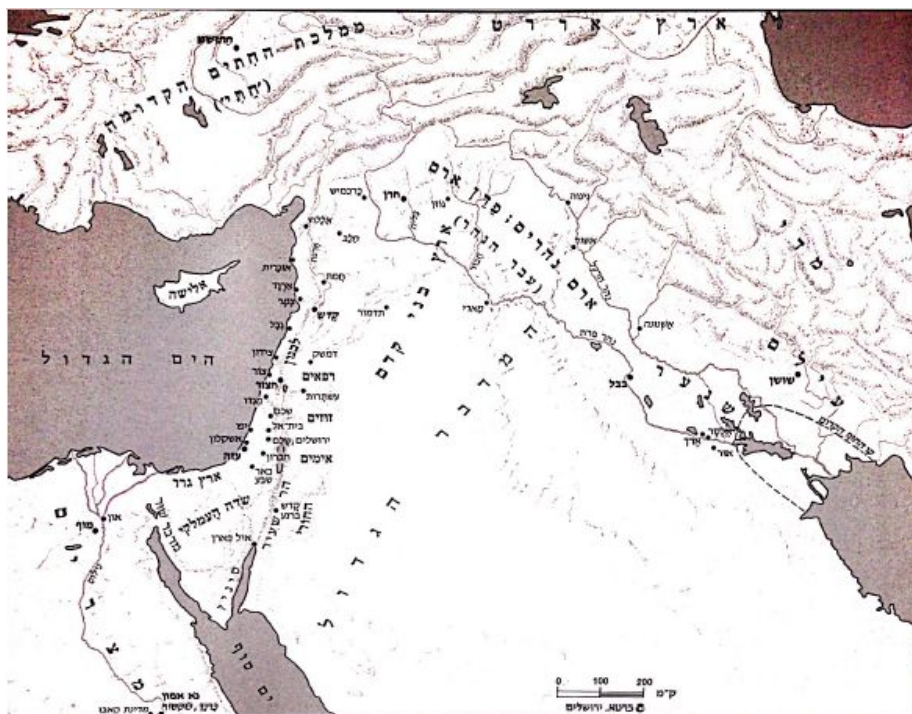
Hashem says to Avraham that He is the God that took Avraham out of Ur Kasdim... What is *hotzeiticha*? The only other place this phrase appears is by *yetziat mitzrayim* in the ten commandments- there the taking out was miraculous. So if we accept this concept, Avraham being saved from Ur Kasdim was an 'Exodus'.⁴

22. Abraham's Journey, p. 126

The Torah is not interested in Abraham as an individual. Private episodes with no direct relevance to the unfolding of the great drama of Jewish existence are omitted. Abraham's story is important insofar as he is the father of the nation

23. Talmud Bavli, Avodah Zara 9a

Tanna d'Vei Eliyahu teaches: Six thousand years were decreed upon the world: 2000 years of emptiness (without Torah), 2000 years of Torah, and 2000 years for (the days of) Mashi'ach... What signifies the beginning of the years of Torah? it is "ha'Nefesh Asher Asu b'Charan" (when Avraham and Sarah started teaching people Hashem's ways)



24. Likkutei Moharan (R. Nachman m'Breslov, Ukraine, 19th c.), Hashmatot

"אחד היה אברהם' (יחזקאל ל"ג, כ"ד) - שאברהם עבד ה' רק על-ידי שהיה אחד, שחשב בדעתו שהוא רק יחידי בעולם, ולא הסתכל כלל על בני העולם, שסרים מאחרי ה' ומונעים אותו, ולא על אביו ושאר המונעים, רק כאילו הוא אחד בעולם... וכן כל הרוצה לכנוס בעבודת ה', אי-אפשר לו לכנוס כי אם על-ידי

⁴ "God now introduces Himself, so to speak, to Abraham: "I am the Lord who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give you this land to inherit it" (Gen. 15:7). Reading this, we are immediately reminded of the verse in the Ten Commandments, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Ex. 20:2)" *Abraham's Journey, p. 145*

בחינת שיחשוב שאין בעולם כי אם הוא לבדו יחיד בעולם, ולא יסתכל על שום אדם המונעו, כגון: אביו ואמו או חותנו ואשתו ובניו וכיוצא, או המניעות שיש משאר בני העולם, המלעיגים ומסיתים ומונעים מעבודתו יתברך.

- Nati Helfgot (Mikra and Meaning 55-65)- this is biblical intertextuality philosophical question- based on having certain expectations of the origins of Abraham- must have had a unique upbringing- second is why God chose Avraham- based on Shoftim 6- angel tells Gideon to destroy his father's altar to the Ba'al god- Gideon destroys it and then it's discovered and they want to kill him- parallels- Gideon's father defends him who mocks the idol and mocks the people that the idol should fight his own battles- Gideon is renamed yerubaal- there is father who is pro idolatry and son who is against it- son destroys the idols, they try to figure out who did it, son is in harm's way, emerges unharmed- mocking comment directed at idols- but why compare Avraham to Gideon? See article for 9 textual comparisons- Gideon is carrying on Avraham's actions- only the midrashim never actually make this connection
- When Haran dies this leaves a gap and someone needs to take over the shop when Terach had to be out- BR 38:16
 - No reference to text in Midrash, but very detailed- Where did Rabbis derive this information? How do they know Terach is an idol salesman; that Avraham spoke that way to the customers and to Nimrod, and why would we think that Avraham and Nimrod ever met?
 - One answer is mesorah- this is appealing, but there are lots of versions of this story- serious problems- if it's mesorah, why doesn't it say- gemara or halacha Imoshe misinai or mesorah byadeinu- also why is this not anonymous instead of being credited to R' Chiya the grandson of Rav Ada
 - A different answer is that this aggadda is a polemic against idolatry at this time in history- not claiming to know anything about Avraham's actual life
 - Third answer (Etshalom)- it is exegesis- not 100% of the words of the Midrash but each general component is derived from a careful reading of the Torah text
 - Six principle components of Aggadah
 - Terach the idolater
 - Yehoshua 24:2- explicit that Terach worshipped idols- so the Aggadah begins by saying Terach was an idolater this is explicit in Yehoshua's farewell address
 - Terach the Salesman
 - "First, society in the ancient world was not transient. People stayed in one area for generations except for cases of war or famine (which is why the call to Abraham to *Lekh Lekha* is so extravagant and reckoned by rabbinic tradition as the first of his tests). Only people whose livelihood allowed them to move easily did so... Terach was the first person who we are told uprooted from one location to another without direct Divine intervention... Hence he must have had a profession that allowed him to easily move, which leaves him either as a shepherd, an artisan, or a salesman. Avraham and Yaakov were traders and this was their livelihood- Using camels and possession and use of gold and silver are indications of mercantile behavior- we also have in Shoftim 17-18- seems to indicate that the Temple of Micha was a source of revenue and that's what upset the townspeople when the idol was gone- strong association between idolatry and trade
 - Avraham's style of Argumentation
 - Avraham was into theology
 - Avraham used this style with Avimelech in perek 20
 - Avraham's meeting with Nimrod
 - Both Nimrod and Avraham are viewed as Kings in the text (10:8-10, 23:5-6)
 - Nimrod was the first self-declared King in history and he was also the first to directly challenge the Rule of God- Avraham's life was about teaching one God and everyone should accept this rule- they're lives overlapped, and Nimrod ruled in the district Avraham operated in
 - Avraham in the fire
 - **Pg. 147-** Why God waited so long after Avraham left Ur vs. revealing to BY after Mitzrayim- "The answer is that in Egypt anyone could recognize God's grace. They were taken out of physical bondage, were set free after having been slaves for hundreds of years. Having felt the oppressor's whip on their backs, having seen their children drowned in the Nile, they understood very well what freedom means in comparison to slavery. There was no need for meditation to understand what God had done for them. But Avraham was not in a "house of slavery" in a physical sense. On the contrary, he was taken out of a rich, aristocratic home, in an ancestral land to which he was bound by hundreds of threads. God suddenly told him to become a wanderer, an immigrant, a stranger, a vagabond, a nomad--worse off than he had been before. Therefore, God could not immediately demand reciprocity. Avraham had to understand what God wanted him to become, what idol worship was, and what his new life meant. There was a need for thoughts to ripen and for understanding to become clear. This process of education helped Avraham comprehend retrospect what God had done for him, how he had been spiritually a slave with no inner freedom. When God knew that Avraham finally understood, He introduced Himself as the one who had taken him out of Ur of the Chaldees.
 - Haran and "Pascal's Wager"
 - Pascal's Wager is that you can't lose out if you believe in God- if there is a God then there will be salvation, if not, nothing lost anyway
 - Haran is opportunistic- this is not how faith works- just when it's convenient

- P. 44- (in reference to Avram internally finding God)- The famous French writer Romain Rolland describes how restless Beethoven was in his youth. From early childhood, Beethoven used to hear melodies. He would say that there

was an orchestra hidden somewhere--under the table, behind the curtain, in the attic, or in the oven. He always heard beautiful melodies playing, and he thought it was somewhere outside of himself. The orchestra was indeed an orchestra. But it was hidden in him, not outside of him.

- P. 45- The greatness of Abraham consisted in the fact that while he was not encouraged to objectify his emotional agitation in the form of logical categories--on the contrary, he was constantly discouraged--he did succeed in converting volatile primeval emotions into advanced knowledge. He began by being “*meshotet be-da'ato*,” agitated, restless, and then, upon reaching a higher level of intellectual development, he converted this restlessness into thought--”he began to think incessantly throughout the day and night, wondering: How is it possible for the sphere to continue to revolve without anyone controlling it?”
- P. 48- However, the Almighty did not respond to Abraham. Abraham encountered an awesome silence, the silence of eternity. The mystery deepened and became more intriguing and frightening. Cynical pagan opponents asked: Why doesn't the Almighty answer you? Why can't He prove His existence to us? However, Abraham was not discouraged. He taught others. He carried the new code of morality selflessly, trying to convert people to the new faith. He exposed himself to the worst of all tortures: ridicule. He believed in an invisible, unapproachable, silent Being. He sacrificed for Him and served Him. He built altars and prayed to Him. The pagans could not grasp it! They ridiculed Abraham's irrational loyalty to God. Their lack of understanding turned

into hostility, and they began to persecute Abraham.

However, Abraham's faith was not affected by God's silence and transcendence. He served God, teaching and proclaiming a new morality.

- P. 101- Why did Abraham teach? He was not commanded to do so. Rather, he was motivated by two things: an inner will to teach and kindness, *hesed*. The will to teach is an aboriginal urge. Teaching means overflowing, spilling over into another mind. A person who knows little will hardly experience the desire to communicate whatever he knows to others. Only if and when you are filled to capacity with knowledge does it begin to spread beyond the limits. In a word, teaching means the flow of excess knowledge from one individual to another. In this context, teaching is not effort or action; it is a spontaneous process. A person overfilled with knowledge unburdens himself by teaching and passing on the knowledge to another. Through teaching, one releases intellectual pressure. It is the gratification of a pressing need.
- P. 141- "God brought him outside"--by his lapels, so to speak--and said, Stop brooding, Abraham! Remember the nights in Mesopotamia when you were a boy, a young lad, how you used to watch the stars, observe them, study them, trying to find out the position of each star and each constellation, to find all the galaxies. You were so full of enthusiasm and ecstasy. You failed so many times, but you never gave up. "Look up at the sky." Remember your method of patient observation and untiring effort to discover the truth. How do you know how long you will live? Perhaps you will be as vigorous as a young man; perhaps you will be

Isaac's teacher, his *rebbe*, his *melamed*. And even if you aren't able to teach Isaac, did anyone teach you? Did your father teach you? Did your mother? Did Nimrod teach you?! Still, you discovered the truth, so why should you say that no one will teach Isaac if he is born in your old age and you die? Look up, the way you were accustomed to do in your youth, and begin to count the stars. Count long and don't give up. The command is an allusion, a hint, comparing the old Abraham with the young Abraham, telling Abraham to act young.

- P. 143- When God spoke of the dust of the earth, He used the root *m-n-h*. When God used the stars to express to Abraham that there would be so many that it would be impossible to count them, he employed a different root, *s-f-r*. *Lispor* does not mean simply to count; it means to count and reflect. This is the basic difference between *menoh* and *sefor*. *Limnot* means to count with an objective. *Lispor* means to count while organizing new entities, philosophizing, describing and trying to understand.

צאצאיו של תרח

(יא כז — לב)

בתור מבוא לתולדותיו של אברהם מובאות כאן תחילה תולדות תרח ומשפחתו. כל שלושת בניו הם חשובים לתולדות עם ישראל, שכן, נחור הוא אבי רבקה, והרן הוא אבי לוט. עוד חשוב הוא לדעת, מאיזו ארץ בא אברהם. התורה מדגישה גם בדרך זו, שאין אברהם משתייך לכנענים מושחתי המידות, ושאבות האומה לא לקחו את נשיהן מקרב עם זה אלא דוקא מארצם ומבית משפחתם. במשפחה זו נשמרה האמונה בה' במידה רבה באופן יחסי, אף כי אחדים מבניה נטו לעבודת אלילים (השווה יהושע כד, ב). וייתכן שגם סיבת הגירתם של בני משפחה זו נעוצה היתה במאבקים מסביב לשאלות האמונה (השווה ס' יהודית ה, ו'ט וס' היובלות יא ואילך, וראה עוד להלן כאשר ידובר בצאצאי ארפכשד).

דעת מקרא דף שיד (#4) - וכתב ר"ח אלבק בפירושו לשם (פרקי אבות): כמה היה חביב לפני הקב"ה שניסוהו כל כך, כדרך שנאמר (תה' צד יב) 'אשרי הגבר אשר תיסרנו י-ה'. ונאמר (מש' ג יב) 'כי את אשר יאהב ה' יוכיח'