

BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

"For I have known him, because he shall command his children and his house after him, that they will guard the way of G-d, to do righteousness and justice..." [18:19]

The Chofetz Chaim, Rabbi Yisrael Mayer Kagan, explains this verse in the following way:

We know from Midrashic sources that there were many other righteous individuals in the time of Avraham. There was an entire house of study led by Shem, the son of Noach, and his own great-grandson Ever, from whom Avraham was descended. Why was it, then, that only Avraham fathered an entire nation dedicated to G-d?

We see the answer in Avraham's actions. Although Shem and Ever were both righteous themselves, they had not passed this to their progeny, and thus Avraham had to come to a recognition of the Divine on his own. All of the righteous individuals in that generation were themselves dedicated to service of HaShem - but Avraham's uniqueness was in his concern for the future. Realizing that no man lives forever, he understood that if he did not spread the knowledge of G-d's ways, then honor of G-d would be lost from the world.

So Avraham worked to spread knowledge of HaShem. He inspired many to become righteous, and was even willing to rebuke kings when their servants sinned. And because he was so dedicated to spreading knowledge of HaShem, he was rewarded with a son who followed the same path, and a grandson and 12 great-grandchildren, from whom emerged an entire nation - because G-d knew that Avraham would spread the same ideals within his family.

Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki explains that "knowing" in the verse quoted above reflects an intimate, loving relationship. Thus the Torah tells us that G-d loved him, more than all the others in his generation, because he alone would raise descendants who followed the same path.

It is incumbent upon all of us to learn from our forefathers. Rabbi Pesach Krohn, in his book *Along the Maggid's Journey*, relates a story told to him by Rabbi Yaakov Vann of Lakewood, NJ. Rabbi Vann was in Israel, headed to the synagogue, when he was asked to join a minyan of a mourner in a nearby apartment instead.

He entered, and noticed immediately that the mourner and many of his friends were not particularly

religious, and seemed quite unaccustomed to the yarmulkes they were wearing. Yet they were standing in a room filled with Jewish texts, and when the Rabbi took down a sefer [book], he saw annotations penciled in the margins. If the occupants weren't religious, who owned all of these books?

So after the service, Rabbi Vann inquired about the collection of sefarim. The mourner explained that they were his father's - and this was his father's apartment. Yet when Rabbi Vann asked if any of the children made use of the books, the response was negative. "You see," explained the man, "when my father came home from work, he would lock himself in his room with his books, and he wouldn't come out for hours. We knew that he studied in there, but we hardly ever saw him, and he never studied when we were around."

Shortly thereafter, Rabbi Vann recalled something which he had learned only days earlier. Moshe said, shortly before his death, "the hidden things are G-d's, but the revealed ones are for us and our children, forever." [Deut. 29:28] The Rebbe of Belz, Rabbi Aaron Rokeach, offered the following homiletical interpretation: "the hidden things," the righteous things which we do, but keep hidden, "are G-d's," meaning only G-d knows them. But "the revealed ones," the deeds which we reveal to our children, "are forever," meaning that they will continue within the family.

We must follow the path of Avraham, spreading Judaism both explicitly and by example.