

THE PURPOSE OF CREATION PART IV

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

Teacher Training

In the beginning of last week's Parsha, Avraham was commanded at the age of 75 to leave his country of origin and the home of his father. Sarah, her brother Lot, and the "souls that they had made in Charan," willingly (Rashi 12:5) accompanied him on his journey.

1. Who were these "souls that they had made in Charan?"
2. Why are they mentioned only this one time in the Torah?
3. What happened to these "converts to monotheism?"
4. Why is it important to know Avraham's age at the time of his departure?

In Pirkei Avos (Ethics of The Fathers) 5:1, it states that G-d chose Avraham to be His partner in order to accomplish the purpose of the universe. Avraham's selection to be progenitor of the Chosen People was not arbitrary. Avraham and Sarah were chosen because they had proven through their deeds that they were able to do the job and were worthy of G-d's confidence.

Most of our information about Avraham and Sarah's early years is recorded in the Medresh. The Medresh (See Sefer Haparshios - Eliyahu Ki Tov) relates that from his earliest years Avraham questioned society's status quo. Whether at the age of 3 or the age of 40, Avraham was someone who sought to know and understand the truth.

It is important to note that he was not the only one in his generation to seek the truth or have a relationship with G-d; however, he was unique among them. All the others sought truth as a comfort for their troubled and questioning souls in hope of gaining personal perspective and direction, Avraham on the other hand went a step further.

Avraham embraced the obligation of all humans to share the truth and understanding of G-d with all others. He accepted the job of teaching. As such he was different than Noach, Shem, and Ever, his sagely and righteous ancestors. They waited for the truth-seekers to come to them, whereas Avraham went out looking for the truth-seekers. In fact, Avraham was less interested in the truth-seekers than he was in those who didn't even know that there was truth to seek. Truth-seekers could have been directed to the academy of his grandfather's Shem and Ever where they would

have satisfied their thirst for spirituality and knowledge. Avraham's uniqueness was the ability to awaken in others the desire to know their Creator. Most of the "souls that he had made in Charan" never expressed any interest in truth, spirituality, or personal change. It was Avraham and Sarah who challenged their students to first ask the question and then find the answers.

At whatever age Avraham and Sarah began to do outreach, they proved to be very successful. Many flocked to their banner of meaning, purpose, and understanding. Some decided to stay as members of Avraham and Sarah's household. While others gleaned whatever they had come for and returned to their personal destinies. Those who stayed and became part of the greater household were the "souls that they had made in Charan." These "souls" represented the monumental impact that the "fathers of monotheism (Avraham and Sarah)," had upon their world during the first 75 years of Avraham's life.

What happened to them? What happened to the souls of Charan? According to some of the commentaries, these "souls," as well as the many who were touched by Avraham's beliefs and teachings but had not stayed to be part of his household, were the true seeds of monotheism.

Every farmer knows that if the planting ground is not properly prepared it will not support the growth of the seed. The seed will dry up and die. At whatever time in the future of the world the truths of G-d and Torah would become available to the "general public," G-d had to make sure that the truth would be able to take root and grow. The early students of Avraham and Sarah and the truths they shared with others slowly seeped into the conscience of humanity and became the fertile ground that would eventually support the growth of monotheism.

However, it is extremely revealing that the Torah refers to them only this one time and at the moment that Avraham and Sarah were commanded to leave the centers of civilization and travel to the relative wilderness of Canaan. It is as if the Torah was recording the extent of their accomplishments, closing that chapter in their lives, and then directing them to the next stage of their mission.

Avraham was a missionary, and like all other businesses the most important element for success was "location, location, location." Avraham needed exposure and public access. Therefore, Avraham opened up his "soup kitchen" in downtown Mesopotamia (Aram Naharayim) corner of 1st and Broadway. When the opposition from Nimrod became "too hot to handle," Avraham moved his meeting tent and kitchen to neighboring Charan. There, he and Sarah continued offering classes, beginner prayer sessions, and an ancient but deliciously divine dish called "Chulent." Their successes in teaching the truths of monotheism continued to grow along with their reputations.

At the age of 75 Avraham's place in society was secured. Nimrod's influence and power had been broken along with his Tower of Babel and Avraham did not have to worry any longer about his personal safety. The number of "souls" continued to increase and the latest article suggested that Avraham's "new-age spirituality and monotheistic belief was gaining greater acceptance among the

young and the old." At that moment G-d appeared to Avraham and told him, "Pack it up and head west!" I am sending you on your life's mission to the wilderness of Canaan where you will become a "blessing." Do not worry about your reputation or wealth, I assure you that the "nations of the earth will be blessed through you and your children."

Canaan, relative to Aram Naharayim and Charan, was a wilderness. The centers of economy and scholarship were located in the teeming metropolises of ancient Mesopotamia and Avraham's best work had been done while battling the paganism of Nimrod and working the streets of downtown. His street-corner debates with the other "scholars" of the generation had attracted the very best to reconsider their beliefs and "think a second time." Why did G-d pull Avraham and Sarah away from their singular and successful work and send them into the isolation and emptiness of Canaan?

Avraham and Sarah as the progenitors of the Chosen People were never intended to "teach the entire world." In the first 75 years of their lives they had set in motion changes that would allow for the world to eventually believe in G-d. However, one couple could not accomplish the job of teaching the world about the Creator. The job of teaching the world can only be accomplished by a nation; therefore, G-d had to find two deserving parents who through their life work had proven their worthiness of birthing that chosen nation. The first 75 years of Avraham and Sarah's lives proved to G-d that they were the right parents for the job.

The "souls" that they had influenced in Charan were not the totality of their accomplishments. Those souls, as many or as few as they may have been, were but a miniscule representation of humanity's potential. They were the testing ground for Avraham and Sarah's greater designation as the parents of Yitzchak, grandparents of Yakov, and great grand parents of the 12 tribes. Therefore, the "souls of Charan" are mentioned only once in the Torah and at the same time that G-d ended that first stage of Avraham and Sarah's life work.

With the focus being on the next stage of the Chosen People's development, G-d effectively removed from Avraham and Sarah all external impediments to doing their main job of raising Yitzchak. "Leave the centers of population and society. Go into the relative isolation of Canaan (Bamidbar 23:9). There you will become a blessing. There, through you and your children, the rest of the nations will be blessed." (Similar to the 40 years in the desert.)

Bridging last week and this week's Parshios is the story of Hagar and Yishmael. In last week's Parsha the pregnant Hagar fled into the desert. Sent back by an angel, Hagar returned to the employ and teachings of Sarah; however, at best, Hagar was biding her time. Promised that all would be well, Hagar awaited the birth of her son.

At the end of Lech Lecha G-d informed Avraham that Sarah would give birth to a son. Avraham fell on his face and laughed. In his heart he knew that the almost 100 years he and Sarah had longed for a child were coming to an end! Everything would now make sense. The first 75 years proved their worthiness and the last 24 years was invested preparing to receive their son. All of it now made

sense!

For Sarah there were no doubts. Sarah knew that Yishmael would not be the spiritual heir to Avraham. Therefore it was only a matter of time till she would have her own child; otherwise, the previous 89 years made no sense!

In this week's Parsha the angel informed Sarah that she would have a son. She too laughed! However, her laughter was to herself. "Yes! I knew this day would come. It had to! Regardless of the fact that I am past my natural time for having a child, I will have a son! Together with Avraham we will join G-d in raising the next stage of the Chosen People!" (18:11-14) "Who would believe such a thing? After I have grown old my body has become young again? Once again I am beautiful? Who will believe that this womb will bear a child and that I will soon be nursing my son? Praised be the Almighty! Praise to Hashem!" (Sefer Haparshios - Eliyahu Ki Tov)

Yitzchak was born and Sarah's entire focus became Yitzchak. He was the reason for her existence. The first 75 years and the last 25 were for one reason - to give birth to the next stage of the Chosen People. It was not to teach others. That was only their proving ground. The real job of educating the world would have to wait until the "nation" had received the Torah and were living in the Promised Land. Until then the focus would be - first raise Yitzchak, first raise the nation!

We now understand the seeming harshness of Sarah's decree - "send away Hagar and Yishmael." If there were even the slightest possibility of Yishmael having a negative influence on Yitzchak, Yishmael would have to go! In Sarah's mind there was no room for mistakes. Yitzchak was the one and only son and he was the future of the nation! They had been sent away from the centers of civilization to avoid the negative influences. Lot, her own brother, was sent away for the same reason. Under no circumstance would Sarah accept a negative influence in her own home!

At the end of the Parsha Avraham and Yitzchak were tested with the Akeidah (Binding of Yitzchak). The emphasis was on Yitzchak's singularity and uniqueness. He was truly the only son of the Avraham and Sarah destined to be partners with G-d. They had given birth and raised the next stage of the Chosen People. The purpose of creation was one step closer to being realized. In so far as Sarah was concerned, her mission was over. Therefore it was time for her to die. In so far as Avraham was concerned, he had another son. Yishmael still required the teachings of his father. Avraham's job wasn't yet over. He had not yet completed his mission.

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