

A MAN AND A MISSION

by Rabbi Berel Wein

It is interesting to note that the Torah in its opening chapters deals with the lives of individuals with a seemingly very narrow focus. It portrays general society for us and tells us of the events that led up to the cataclysmic flood that destroys most of humanity, but even then, the Torah focuses on the lives of an individual, Noah and his family. This pattern continues in this week's reading as well with the story of human civilization condensed and seen through the prism of the life of an individual Abraham, his wife Sarah and their challenges and travails.

Unlike most history books which always take the general perspective and the overview of things, the Torah emphasizes to us that history and great events spring forth from the actions of individuals and even though Heaven preordains events and trends, they only occur when individuals actually by their choice, implement them and make them real. The prophet Isaiah described Abraham as "one" – unique, alone, individualistic... important and influential.

We often think that an individual really doesn't make much of a difference in the world of billions of human beings. However, all of history teaches us that individuals are the ones that shape all events, both good and better in the story of humankind. For every individual contains within him and her seeds of potential and of future generations, of events not yet visible or foretold.

The greatness of Abraham is revealed to us in the Torah through the fact that he was a person of strong and abiding faith. We are taught that his faith in God never wavered and that the Lord reckoned that trait of faith as being the righteousness that transformed him into being the father of all nations. However, faith in God carries with it the corollary of faith in one's self and one's purpose in life. There is a great difference between the poison of arrogance and hubris and the blessing of self-confidence and self worth.

Abraham describes himself as being nothing more than dust and ashes. Yet, as a sole individual standing against kings, armies, societies and the accepted mores of the time, he is confident in the success of his mission, in calling out for the humankind to hear, over the millennia, the name and sovereignty of the Lord.

It is the sense of mission within us that drives our creativity and accomplishments in all spheres of our existence. The journey of the Jewish people through the ages of history and the countries of this planet are the journeys of our father Abraham and our mother Sarah during their lifetimes. Both sets of journeys are driven by this overriding sense of mission, of the importance and worth of every

individual who shares that sense of purposeful existence.

Shabbat shalom

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