

# AVRAHAM INITIATED THE 2000 YEARS OF TORAH

*by Rabbi Yissocher Frand*

## Parshas Lech Lecha

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These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 478 Sandek - Can You Change Your Mind. Good Shabbos!

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### Avraham Initiated The 2000 Years of Torah

I would like to elaborate on a comment of the Ravad in Hilchos Avodas Kochavim [the Laws of Idolatry] regarding Avraham Avinu, based on a thought I saw in the writings of Rabbi Zev Leff.

The Rambam provides us with a very basic portrayal of the personality of the first Jew (Avraham Avinu) at the very beginning of Hilchos Avodas Kochavim [Sefer Mada: Avodas Kochavim Chapter 1, Halachos 1-3]. So much of Halacha is devoted to Avodah Zarah (idolatry) and so much of Jewish history is influenced by the destruction that was wrought within the Jewish nation by idol worship, that Rambam felt it necessary to give us a historical background of the beginning of idol worship in the world.

The Rambam writes that people made a fundamental error way back in the days of Enosh. The Sages of that generation developed a faulty theology, and Adam's own son was one of those who erred. They argued that since G-d created the stars and the heavenly bodies to lead the world and he placed them on high and gave them honor, it is appropriate for man to praise them and to glorify them and to honor them. This, they felt, was the Will of G-d, to elevate and to honor those whom He elevated and honored. This is analogous to an (earthly) king who wishes to honor those who stand before him. Such homage to the servants of the king becomes a form of honor of the king himself.

Once they established this idea, they began building temples to the stars and offering sacrifices to them, praising and glorifying them with words and bowing down before them in order to -- according to their erroneous philosophy -- "satisfy the will of the Creator." This was the essence of "Star worship".

This was the explanation of those who worshipped and who knew the origins of this worship. They

did not deny the existence of G-d or claim that such and such a star was all powerful or even possessed its own power.

As has been common throughout history, that which began as an innocent mistake, misunderstanding, or misconception (the original innocuous error) became way off track through the passage of time. False prophets came and taught that the stars possessed their own independent powers. Ultimately, people forgot about G-d Himself, until Avodah Zarah as we know about it today evolved into existence. People then literally worshipped these other "forces" thinking that the sun was a god. This all began from that original innocuous mistake.

The matter deteriorated further and further and ultimately these corrupted philosophies swept the world until that time when the pillar of society arose, namely Avraham Avinu. Avram looked up at the moon and the stars and asked himself how it was possible for the universe to revolve without a driver to turn it. Avram understood that it was impossible for it to run by itself. Avram had neither a teacher nor anyone to instruct him. He himself lived in a society that was permeated by idolatry. He nevertheless came to the recognition that there must be a Master of the Universe who controls everything.

Once Avram came to this realization, he began dialogues and debates with the residents of Ur Casdim. He tried to set them straight. He advised that it was proper to destroy all graven images so that people not err after them. He went about from city to city and from kingdom to kingdom preaching and gathering followers to his philosophy of monotheism and convincing them of the ridiculousness of Avodah Zarah until ultimately he reached the Land of Canaan. There he proclaimed the Name of the L-rd, as the pasuk states: "Avraham called there on the name of the L-rd, the everlasting G-d" [Bereishis 21:33]. Avraham was very successful to the extent that he returned many of the masses to the path of truth. He had thousands and tens of thousands of followers. These were known as the "people of the household of Avram."

This is the essence of the Rambam's brief history of how Avodah Zarah developed and what the theological state of affairs looked like throughout society until Avraham came along and tried to set the world straight.

The Ravad questions the whole scenario painted by the Rambam: "I am astonished. After all, Shem and Ever lived during this era. How could it be that they did not protest?"

The Ravad objects to the idea that Avraham was the only enlightened person in the world during his lifetime. There was the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever. There were other people who knew Torah and other people who knew G-d. It is simply not true that Avraham was the only person in the world who believed in monotheism!

The Ravad, however, does allow for a slight modification of the Rambam's thesis. The Ravad says that it is possible that Shem and Ever did object and protest against the theological philosophies of their time. However, they were not successful in breaking up the idols because the people hid their

idols from them. It was not until Avraham came and discovered the hidden idols and broke them that the real clash between monotheism and idolatrous society occurred.

What does this mean? Is the Ravad saying that Avraham was a better detective - a better snoop - than the others? Furthermore, it was not even true that the idols were hidden - idolatry was out in the open in society! According to the Medrash, Terach was a statue salesman. Are we to assume that Terach ran a clandestine business? This seems far-fetched, to say the least. What, then, is the meaning of the Ravad that the Avodah Zarahs were hidden and that it was Avraham Avinu who was successful in breaking them?

Rabbi Leff offers the following explanation of the Ravad: The Talmud tells us [Sanhedrin 97a; Avodah Zarah 9a] that the world will exist for 6000 years and that these six millennia are divided into three historical epochs: 2,000 years of "confusion" (tohu v'vohu); 2,000 years of "Torah"; and 2,000 years of "Messianic Days". The period of "Torah" begins, according to the Gemarah, with Avraham Avinu.

What does this mean? It would seem to imply that Noach and those who preceded Avraham did not know "Torah". However, there are Talmudic and Medrashic sources that state otherwise. So what is meant by the statement that the period of "Torah" began with Avraham Avinu?

Rav Leff suggests as follows: As we know from the opening pasukim of Chumash, "Tohu v'vohu" means "confusion." It represents the mingling of light and darkness. In the period of "tohu v'vohu" there is not a clear delineation between night and day, between black and white, between right and wrong.

"Torah" represents a clear departure from the era of "tohu v'vohu": "Behold I have set before you this day Life and Goodness; Death and Evil" [Devorim 30:15]. Torah represents clear and absolute choices. It tells us what is right and what is wrong; what is night and what is day; what is light and what is darkness. Until the time of Avraham Avinu, there was a "tohu v'vohu" in the world. There were people claiming: "There is nothing wrong with worshipping Avodah Zarah. It is even a mitzvah to do so! This is G-d's Will. We serve Him by serving the sun and His other heavenly servants." There existed confusion throughout society.

When the Ravad says that the Avodah Zarah was hidden, he does not mean the statues were hidden behind closed doors. He means confusion reigned in the world, preventing people from delineating between what was right and what was wrong, what was monotheism and what was idolatry. Avraham Avinu began the era of Torah because he was able to lay bare the mistake. He eloquently argued: "This is right. That is wrong. That is not monotheism. THAT IS AVODAH ZARA!"

When the Ravad says that Avraham Avinu was successful in breaking the idols, the intention is that no one else was successful in laying bare the lies of the proponents of star worship. Avraham exposed the "Big Lie" that one could worship the sun on "Sunday" and worship the moon on "Monday", and worship G-d the next day and still be called a fine spiritual individual. Avraham argued that the idols had to be destroyed. Belief in monotheism is an "either / or" situation. One cannot have

it both ways!

The era of Torah began! Absolutism entered the world to counter "situational morals" and "situational ethics." One thing can be 100% right and another thing can be 100% wrong.

In a classic Chassidic quip, The Baal Shem Tov said that the Yetzer HaRah [evil inclination] will not be punished for making people sin. After all, that is his job. However, the Yetzer HaRah WILL be punished, the Besh"t said, for making people believe that the sins they commit are in fact mitzvos.

There are many such examples of the wiles of the Yetzer HaRah: "Sleep late and skip minyan this morning, that way you will have a clearer head to learn later on in the day." "Do not give this Tzedakah now; save it for a better cause that will come along later." The Yeter HaRah WILL be punished for creating "tohu v'vohu" -- for causing people to believe that the sins that they commit are mitzvos.

This "tohu v'vohu" is what Avraham Avinu set out to destroy. He gave the world the clarity of what is right and what is wrong, what is Service of G-d and what is Avodah Zarah.

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This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Lech Lecha are provided below:

Tape # 028 - Conversion (Geirus)  
Tape # 070 - Bris Milah: The Metzizah Controversy  
Tape # 119 - Conversion for Ulterior Motives  
Tape # 166 - The Childless Couple in Halacha  
Tape # 212 - Non-Jews and the Mitzvah of Kibbud Av  
Tape # 256 - Mohel and Baby: Who Goes to Whom  
Tape # 302 - The Mitzvah of Yishuv Eretz Yisroel  
Tape # 346 - Trading Terrorists for Hostages  
Tape # 390 - Geirus -- Mitzvah, Reshus, or Issur?  
Tape # 434 - Anesthesia During Milah  
Tape # 478 - Sandik -- Can You Change Your Mind?  
Tape # 522 - Calling Avraham, Avrum  
Tape # 566 - Learning Vs. Saving A Life  
Tape # 610 - The Widow and the Divorcee - How Long Must They Wait to Remarry  
Tape # 654 - Sonei Matonos Yichye - Refusing Gifts

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