
AVRAHAM AVINU

The Great Progenitor

Avraham Avinu (Abraham) was the progenitor of both the Jewish nation and of all religions that embrace monotheism. In contrast to the other faiths of the world, the Jewish people view Avraham Avinu as a role model who continues to guide and inspire his descendants. As his children, it is incumbent on us to learn about his ways and to follow them. Although our national faith is rooted in the Exodus from Egypt, and Jewish life is based upon the Torah given at Mount Sinai, it is ultimately Avraham Avinu who is the founder of Jewish belief.

This class will address the following questions:

- ~ What was extraordinary about Avraham that revolutionized the world?
- ~ How did Avraham's faith develop in a world immersed in idolatry?
- ~ What ten tests did Avraham overcome that defined his greatness?
- ~ What are the attributes of Avraham's character that we strive to emulate?
- ~ How is Avraham's life a microcosm of Jewish history?
- ~ What is Avraham's legacy that continues to impact the world?

Class Outline:

- Section I: The Development of Avraham's Faith
- Section II: The Ten Tests of Avraham Avinu
- Section III: The Core Attributes of Avraham's Greatness
- Section IV: Bringing Light into Darkness
- Section V: The Covenant of Circumcision
- Section VI: The Life of Avraham is a Microcosm of Jewish History
- Section VII: Continuing the Legacy of Avraham Avinu

SECTION I: THE DEVELOPMENT OF AVRAHAM'S FAITH

The faith of Avraham implied far more than the everyday concept of "believing in God." Born into a pagan environment, Avraham came to perceive the Oneness of God on his own accord, integrating his belief to a degree that nobody had yet achieved, such that he could die for it, and was even prepared to sacrifice his own son for it. His entire life served as a continual definition and manifestation of the faith he established.

1. Rambam (Maimonides), Hilchot Avodah Zarah (Laws of Idolatry), 1:3 – Avraham grows up worshipping idols. Thinking about the cause and effect of the universe leads him to understand the existence of one God.

After this prodigious child was weaned, he began to muse, while he was still young, and started to ponder by day and by night, and would question how it was possible for the earth to continue to revolve without a guide.

And he had no mentor; nor did anyone reveal anything to him, but he was immersed in Ur Kasdim among foolish idolaters. His father and mother and all of the people served idols, and he would serve with them, while his heart pondered and mused, until he understood the path of truth and realized the line of justice by virtue of his own correct reasoning. Then he came to understand that there was only one God, and that He was the guide of the celestial wheel, He created everything, and that there is no God among all of Creation other than Him.

כיון שנגמל איתן זה, התחיל לשוטט בדעתו, והוא קטן, והתחיל לחשוב ביום ובלילה, והיה תמיה היאך אפשר שיהיה הגלגל הזה נוהג תמיד ולא יהיה לו מנהיג וכו'

ולא היה לו מלמד ולא מודיע דבר, אלא מושקע באור כשדים בין עובדי כוכבים הטפשים, ואביו ואמו וכל העם עובדי כוכבים, והוא עובד עמהם, ולבו מושוטט ומבין עד שהשיג דרך האמת והבין קו הצדק מתבונתו הנכונה, וידע שיש שם אלו-ה אחד והוא מנהיג הגלגל, והוא ברא הכל, ואין בכל הנמצא אלו-ה חוץ ממנו.

2. Maharal, Gevuros Hashem, Ch. 5 – Why Avraham was born in Ur Kasdim.

So it was concerning Avraham Avinu, the foundation stone [of the world], who was born in the land of the Kasdim, of whom it is written that God regrets their creation daily, for they are a nation of *tohu*, an incomplete creation ...

That Avraham was born in Ur Kasdim is a great matter, for since Avraham was the beginning of the world, and before him everything was *tohu*, without any creation at all, therefore he was joined to Kasdim, which was a creation without substance, for every beginning has nothingness before it and in proximity to it, which is why it is a beginning.

For this reason Avraham was not born in another land, for then he would not have been a beginning. Because Avraham was a beginning he was born in a place where a beginning was fitting, for before a beginning there is nothingness.

וכן היה באבינו באברהם שהיה ראש אבן פינה, נולד בארץ כשדים אשר עליהם נאמר שהקדוש ברוך הוא מתחרט בכל יום שבראם מצד אשר הם אומה תהו ואין בה שלימות הבריאה וכו'

ומה שנולד אברהם באור כשדים הוא ענין נפלא. כי לפי שאברהם היה התחלת העולם, ולפניו היה הכל תהו ואין בהם בריאה כלל. לכך הצטרף אברהם אל כשדים שהם בריאה שאין בהם ממש, כי כל התחלה, לפניה וסמוך לה העדר שבשביל כך הוא התחלה.

ולפיכך לא היה נולד אברהם בארץ אחרת, שאם כן לא היה התחלה, ומפני שאברהם הוא התחלה היה נולד במקום שראוי להיות התחלה שקודם התחלה הוא ההעדר, וזה נכון כאשר תבין:

3. **Rambam, Hilchot Avodah Zarah, 1:3. – Avraham takes a proactive stance against idolatry.**

After Avraham recognized the existence of God he began to challenge the idol worship of Ur Kasdim and argued with the idol worshippers, saying that the path that they were following did not lead to the truth. He broke their idols and explained to all the people that it is only appropriate to serve the God of the Universe ...

When Avraham and his ideas gained recognition the King [Nimrod] attempted to kill him. He was miraculously saved and traveled to Charan. Then Avraham arose and strongly asserted in a loud voice informing the entire world that there is one God in the universe, and only He should be served. He would travel from city to city and from kingdom to kingdom until he arrived at the Land of Canaan ...

When the people gathered around him and asked him about his teachings, he instructed them individually, according to each person's understanding, until each one returned to the path of truth. He continued to do this until he had tens of thousands of followers.

כיון שהכיר וידע התחיל להשיב תשובות על בני אור כשדים ולערוך דין עמהם ולומר שאין זו דרך האמת שאתם הולכים בה ושיבר הצלמים והתחיל להודיע לעם שאין ראוי לעבוד אלא לאלוה העולם...

כיון שגבר עליהם בראיותיו בקש המלך להורגו ונעשה לו נס ויצא לחרון, והתחיל לעמוד ולקרוא בקול גדול לכל העולם ולהודיעם שיש שם אלוה אחד לכל העולם ולו ראוי לעבוד, והיה מהלך וקורא ומקבץ העם מעיר לעיר ומממלכה לממלכה עד שהגיע לארץ כנען.

וכיון שהיו העם מתקבצין אליו ושואלין לו על דבריו היה מודיע לכל אחד ואחד כפי דעתו עד שיחזירוהו לדרך האמת עד שנתקבצו אליו אלפים ורבבות.

4. **Rabbi Noson Weisz, Mayanot – Lech Lecha, Aish.com – Why did God communicate with Avraham?**

Rambam stresses the fact that Avraham came to the true vision of God that allowed him to overcome the ancient human mistake of idolatry all on his own, totally unaided. It was in recognition of the greatness of this achievement and the correctness of Avraham's vision, that God elevated Avraham to the level of prophecy and gave him the ultimate recognition of communicating with him personally.

5. **Bereishit (Genesis) Rabbah 39:1 – Avraham reasoned that the world must have a leader.**

Rabbi Yitzchak taught, "It is comparable to somebody who traveled from place to place, and saw a burning palace. He said, 'The palace cannot be without a leader!' [Then] the master of the palace appeared to him, and told him, 'I am the master of the palace..'So Avraham Avinu said, 'Can the world be without a leader?' God appeared to him, and told him, 'I am the Master of the world.'"

אמר רבי יצחק משל לאחד שהיה עובר ממקום למקום וראה בירה אחת דולקת אמר תאמר שהבירה זו בלא מנהיג הציץ עליו בעל הבירה אמר לו אני הוא בעל הבירה כך לפי שהיה אבינו אברהם אומר תאמר שהעולם הזה בלא מנהיג הציץ עליו הקב"ה ואמר לו אני הוא בעל העולם.

6. **Talmud Bavli (Babylonian Talmud), Berachot 7b – Avraham related to God as the Master of the world.**

Rabbi Yochanan taught, in the name of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai: From the day that God created the world, no human being called God

אמר רבי יוחנן משום רבי שמעון בן יוחי מיום שברא הקדוש ברוך הוא את העולם לא היה אדם שקראו

“Master,” until Avraham came and called Him “Master,” as it says, “He said, ‘My Master (Lord), with what shall I know that I will inherit it?’”

להקדוש ברוך הוא אדון עד שבא אברהם וקראו אדון שנאמר ויאמר אדני-י במה אדע כי אירשנה.

7. **Rashi, Bereishit 14:13 – Why is Avraham called the Ivri?**

“Avraham the *Ivri*.”

Rashi explains that Avraham is called the *Ivri*, meaning the one who comes from the “other side of the river.”

אברם העברי

רש"י: העברי - שבא מעבר הנהר:

8. **Bereishit Rabbah 42:8 – The “other side of the river” has a deeper meaning. In truth, it reflects Avraham’s opposition to the world’s paganism.**

“Avram (Abram) the *Ivri*.” Rabbi Yehudah said, “[This teaches us that] the entire world was on one side, and he was on the other side.”

“אברם העברי” רבי יהודה אומר כל העולם כולו מעבר אחד והוא מעבר אחד

The connotation of being an *Ivri* is the Jewish legacy enjoining each of us to be prepared to stand up for our principles even if we are alone in our moral convictions.

9. **Talmud Bavli, Pesachim 118a – King Nimrod casts Avraham into a furnace for his belief in one God and opposition to idol worship.**

When the wicked Nimrod threw Avraham into the furnace, the angel Gabriel said before God, “Lord of the world, I will descend, and cool, and save the righteous one from the furnace. God answered him, “I am singular in My world, and he is singular in his world: it is fitting for the singular to rescue the singular.”

בשעה שהפיל נמרוד הרשע את אברהם אבינו לתוך כבשן האש אמר גבריאל לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא רבנו של עולם ארד ואצנן ואציל את הצדיק מכבשן האש אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא אני יחיד בעולמי והוא יחיד בעולמו נאה ליחיד להציל את היחיד

God appears to Avraham in response to his unswerving commitment to morality based on monotheism and charges him with the mission of leaving his home to travel to the Land of Canaan, in order to establish the claim to the future homeland of the Jewish nation.

10. **Bereishit 12:1**

And God said to Avram, “Go for your own good, from your homeland, from your birthplace and from your father’s house, to the land that I will show you.”

ויאמר יקוק אל אברם לך לך מארצך וממולדתך ומבית אביך אל הארץ אשר אראך:

11. **Rabbi Noson Weisz, Mayanot – Lech Lecha, Aish.com – What makes Avraham unique?**

But how was Avraham so unique? What happened to Noah? And what about Shem and Ever who established a Yeshivah where Yaakov (Jacob) went to study? These people were all older than Avraham,

so how do we know that Avraham didn't learn what he knew from them? Why didn't these great righteous individuals chastise and correct the idolaters long before Avraham came along?

The key to the greatness of Avraham is in the story of the fiery furnace. Avraham had not yet spoken to God at this point in his career. He had no notion of the commandment to sanctify God's name by giving up your life. He had no one's example to guide him.

The great *tzadikim* who lived before him did not undertake this mission of sanctifying God's name to the point of self-sacrifice. Had God commanded them to share the truth with the world even at the risk of their lives they certainly would have done so. But in the absence of God's command what made risking your life the right thing to do?

The answer: it was really Avraham who invented *Lech Lecha*, and not God who imposed it on him. Avraham figured to himself: If my worldview is correct, I was not placed in the world to worry about my economic or physical well-being. God endowed me with intelligence so I could figure out my way to finding Him and doing His will. If this is correct, it makes sense to leave the concern over my physical and economic well-being in God's capable hands, and worry about how I can be of service to Him.

12. Bereishit 12:6-7 – God tells Avraham that the Land of Canaan belongs to his progeny.

And Avram crossed into the land ... And God appeared to Avram and said to him, "I will give this land to your descendants." Avram then built an altar there to God, Who had appeared to him.

ויעבר אברם בארץ... וירא יקוק אל אברם ויאמר לזרעך
אתן את הארץ הזאת ויבן שם מזבח ליקוק הנראה
אליו.

SECTION II. THE TEN TESTS OF AVRAHAM AVINU

1. Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) 5:3 – What did these tests prove?

Avraham was challenged with ten tests and overcame all of them to inform us how great was the love of our father Avraham [for God].

עשרה נסיונות נתנסה אברהם אבינו עליו השלום ועמד
בכולם להודיע כמה חבתו של אברהם אבינו עליו
השלום:

2. Midrash Tehillim (Psalms), Ch. 18 – The ten tests – What were the ten tests?

"God's saying is pure" – he [Avraham] was purified by ten trials. And these are [the ten trials]: 1. He was thrown into the furnace, as it says, "I am God that took you out from Ur Kasdim." 2. God instructed him, "Go for yourself." 3 & 4. Two tests concerning Sarah. 5. Hagar, as it says, "Consort, now, with my maid-servant." 6. And with Yishmael, as it says, "Drive out this slave-woman [with her son]." 7. [Going to war] with the kings, as it says, "He armed his

אמרת ה' צרופה. שצרפו הקב"ה בעשר נסיונות. ואלו
הן – כשירד לתוך כבשן האש, שנאמר (שם טו, ז) אני
ה' אשר הוצאתיך מאור כשדים. שנים, כשאמר לו לך
לך. ושנים בשרה. בהגר, (שם טז, ב) בא נא אל שפחתי.
ובישמעאל, (שם כא, י) גרש האמה הזאת. ובמלכים,
(שם יד, יד) וירק את חניכיו.

his disciples.” 8. Circumcision: that God instructed him, “Walk before Me and be perfect.” 9. In the Covenant Between the Parts, when he prophesied that his descendants would be enslaved in four exiles. 10. With Yitzchak (Isaac): “Take, please, your son, your only one.”

ובמילה, שאמר לו הקב"ה (שם ז, א) התהלך לפני והיה תמים. ובין הבתרים, כשראה המלכות משעבדות לבניו. וביצחק, (שם כב, ב) קח נא את בנך את יחידך.

3. Bereishit 22:16-18 – The Binding of Yitzchak: Avraham recognizes that whatever God commands defines morality, even if it is beyond one's comprehension.

And he said, “By Myself I swear – the word of God – that because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only one, that I shall surely bless you and greatly increase your offspring like the stars of the heavens and like the sand on the seashore; and your offspring shall inherit the gate of its enemy. And all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your offspring, because you have listened to My voice.”

ויאמר בי נשבעתי נאם ה' כי יען אשר עשית את הדבר הזה ולא חשקת את בנך את יחידך: כי בך אברכך והרבה ארבה את זרעך ככוכבי השמים וכחול אשר על שפת הים וירש זרעך את שער איביו: והתברכו בזרעך כל גוים הארץ עקב אשר שמעת בקולי

4. Bereishit Rabbah 14:6 – Avraham is the role model for Tikun Olam.

Rabbi Levi said, “Avraham is called the great man amongst giants. Why is he called ‘great’? Because he was worthy to have been created before Adam. However, the Holy One, Blessed be He, said, ‘Perhaps Avraham will damage the world and there will not be anyone to come and rectify it after him.’ Therefore, God said, ‘I will create Adam first, and in the event he damages the world, Avraham will come and fix it up after him.’”

א"ר לוי כתיב האדם הגדול בענקים זה אברהם ולמה קורא אותו גדול שהיה ראוי להבראות קודם לאדה"ר אלא אמר הקב"ה שמא יקלקל ואין מי שיבא לתקן תחתיו הרי אני בורא את האדם תחלה שאם יקלקל יבא אברהם ויתקן תחתיו.

5. Rabbi Shalom Brezovsky, Nesivos Shalom – The Ten Tests: Avraham's tests as a paradigm for each individual.

Just as Avraham was tested with the Ten Trials, so too each and every Jew is challenged during the course of their lives with “ten trials.” For the life of every Jew is marked by ongoing challenges to inform him how endeared he is to God ... The essential feature of a Jew being descended from Avraham is that he trusts in God when faced with a test.

כמו שאברהם אבינו נתנסה בעשרה נסיונות כך כל אחד ואחד מישראל מתנסה בימי חייו בעשרה נסיונות, שכל חייו של איש יהודי רצופים נסיונות, להודיע כמה חיבתו לפני המקום... כל יהודי מזרע אברהם אבינו העיקר מה שנמצא נאמן בשעת נסיון.

SECTION III. THE CORE ATTRIBUTES OF AVRAHAM'S GREATNESS

What were the core attributes that made Avraham Avinu great – was it overcoming the ten tests (discussed above), practicing *chesed* (acts of loving-kindness towards others) or perhaps something else?

1. Pirkei Avot 1:2 – Chesed is one of the three pillars of the world.

The world rests on three pillars: On Torah, Divine Service and chesed.

על שלשה דברים עומד על התורה ועל העבודה ועל גמילות חסדים:

2. Bereishit 18:1-2 – Avraham runs to welcome three travelers.

God appeared to him [Avraham] at Elonei [the plain of] Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. Avraham lifted his eyes and there were three men standing before him. He saw them, and ran to greet them from the entrance to his tent, and bowed to them. He said, "If I have found favor in your eyes, please do not pass over your servant."

וירא אליו יקוק באלני ממרא והוא ישב פתח האהל כחם היום: וישא עיניו וירא והנה שלשה אנשים נצבים עליו וירא וירץ לקראתם מפתח האהל וישתחו ארצה: ויאמר אם נא מצאתי חן בעיניך אל נא תעבור מעל עבדך:

3. Rashi, ibid. – What is meant by “the heat of the day”?

What is meant by “the heat of the day”? God removed the sun from its protective covering in order not to bother Avraham with travelers [while he recovered from his circumcision]. But when God saw that he was upset that no travelers were coming, He brought the angels to him in the form of men.

כחום היום - הוציא הקב"ה חמה מנרתיקה שלא להטריחו באורחים, ולפי שראהו מצטער שלא היה אורחים באים, הביא המלאכים עליו בדמות אנשים:

4. Bereishit Rabbah 49:4 – Practicing chesed and imparting awareness of the Creator.

Avraham used to offer hospitality to passers-by. After they would eat and drink, he would tell them to say grace. They asked him, “What should we say?” He answered them, “Blessed is the Master of the world that we have eaten from what is His.” If [the guest] would agree to make the blessing, he would eat and drink, and depart. But if he would not agree to do so, he [Avraham] would tell him to pay his dues ... Whoever saw the distress that Avraham was in would say, “Blessed is the Master of the world that we have eaten from what is His.”

אברהם היה מקבל את העוברים ואת השבים משהיו אוכלים ושותים אמר להם ברכו ליה מה נאמר א"ל אמרו ברוך אל עולם שאכלנו משלו אם מקבל עליו וברוך הוה אכיל ושתי ואזיל ואי לא הוה מקבל עליה וברוך הוה א"ל הב מה דעלך וכו' מן דהוה חמי ההיא עקתא דהוה עקי ליה הוה אמר ברוך אל עולם שאכלנו משלו:

5. **Talmud Bavli, Ketubot 8b – Practicing chesed is an intrinsic part of the covenant forged by Avraham.**

“What words would you ascribe to those who comfort mourners?” He replied, “Our brothers who bestow kindness, the children of those who bestow kindness, are clinging to the covenant of Avraham Avinu.”

... אימא מלתא כנגד מנחמי אבלים, פתח ואמר: אחינו גומלי חסדים בני גומלי חסדים המחזיקים בבריתו של אברהם אבינו

6. **Pirkei Avot 5:19 – What attributes characterize the disciples of Avraham?**

Whoever has these three attributes is among the disciples of Avraham Avinu: a good eye, a humble demeanor and an undemanding soul.

כל מי שיש בידו שלשה דברים הללו הוא מתלמידיו של אברהם אבינו – עין טובה ורוח נמוכה ונפש שפלה.

7. **Bartenura, ibid. – Explanation of a good eye, a humble demeanor, and an undemanding soul.**

To be considered a disciple of Avraham Avinu one learns from him and follows in his path.

A “good eye” means one who is satisfied with his possessions and does not crave the money of others. This attribute was found in Avraham following the war against the Four Kings when he declined any of the booty from the King of Sodom.

How do we understand a “humble demeanor”? [Despite his recognized stature] Avraham had great humility, as he stated, “I am merely dust and ashes.”

“An undemanding soul” means one who exercises control over his desires. This control was found in Avraham when he and Sarah were about to enter Egypt, as it is written, “Behold, now I know that you are beautiful,” for until this point he had not noticed her beauty because of their great modesty (Bereishit 12:11).

מתלמידיו של אברהם אבינו - למד ממנו והולך בדרכיו:

עין טובה - מסתפק במה שיש לו ואינו חומד ממון אחרים. שכן מצינו באברהם שאמר למלך סדום (בראשית י"ד) אם מחוט ועד שרוך נעל ואם אקח מכל אשר לך:

רוח נמוכה - ענוה יתירה. וכן מצינו אברהם אומר (שם י"ח) ואנכי עפר ואפר:

ונפש שפלה - זהירות והפרישה מן התאוות. ומצינו זה באברהם, דכתיב (שם י"ב) הנה נא ידעתי כי אשה יפת מראה את, שעד עכשיו לא הכיר בה מרוב צניעות.

8. **Rabbi Shalom Brezovsky, Nesivos Shalom – The Ten Tests – Why doesn't the Mishnah teach that a disciple of Avraham endure ten tests or practice chesed?**

In retrospect, it would have been more appropriate for the Mishnah above to teach that whoever can endure ten tests is a disciple of Avraham Avinu – for isn't this his principal achievement? Similarly, why does the Mishnah not teach that whoever practices chesed and invites guests is a disciple of Avraham, for his character represents the pillar of kindness?

לכאורה היה מתאים יותר לומר שכל העומד בעשרה נסיונות הוא מתלמידיו של אברהם אבינו, כאמור שזו היא עיקר חובתו וגדלותו? וכמו"כ קשה למה לא נקט כל שיש בידו מידת החסד והכנסת אורחים, שזו מידתו של אברהם אבינו עמוד החסד, ומה ענין שלשה דברים אלו דוקא.

What is so special about these three attributes?

One learns from here that all of Avraham Avinu's extraordinary qualities – that he withstood the ten tests and practiced chesed – flow from these three attributes, which gave him the strength to withstand all of his challenges. The term “disciples of Avraham Avinu” means that the primary ideals that he constantly taught his students were the importance of a good eye, a humble demeanor and an undemanding soul.

יש ללמוד מזה שכל מעלותיו של אברהם אבינו, מה שעמד בעשרה נסיונות ומדת החסד שלו, הכל המה תוצאות משלשה דברים הללו שמכחם עמד בכל הנסיונות... ומשמעות מתלמידיו של אברהם אבינו היינו שזה היה הלימוד שאברהם אבינו לימד תמיד לתלמידיו, עין טובה ורוח נמוכה ונפש שפלה.

SECTION IV: BRINGING LIGHT INTO DARKNESS

The ultimate accomplishment of Avraham was to bring light into darkness: to light up a darkened world with the light of *emunah*, faith. He himself was a convert (Chagigah 3a), coming from the darkness of idolatry to the light of belief, and he strove to imbue his surroundings with his own light.

1. Bereishit Rabbah 2:3

God said, “Until when will the world languish in darkness. Let the light come.” God said, “Let there be light,” – this is Avraham. Of this it says, “Who inspired the one from the east [i.e. Avraham], at whose [every] footstep righteousness attended ...” – do not read “inspired,” but rather “shone.”

אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא עד מתי יהא העולם מתנהג באפילה תבא האורה ויאמר אלהים יהי אור זה אברהם הה"ד (ישעיה מא) מי העיר ממוזרח צדק יקראהו לרגלו וגו' אל תקרא העיר אלא האיר.

God changed Avraham's name from Avram to Avraham to reflect his newly established role for the world, as explained in the next two sources.

2. Bereishit 17:4-5

As for Me, this is My covenant with you: You shall be a father of a multitude of nations; your name shall no longer be called Avram, but your name shall be Avraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.

אני הנה בריתי אתך והיית לאב המון גוים: ולא יקרא עוד את שמך אברהם והיה שמך אברהם כי אב המון גוים נתתיך:

3. Talmud Bavli, Berachot 13a

Avram, he is Avraham: Initially, he became the father of Aram; finally, he became the father of the entire world.

אברם הוא אברהם בתחלה נעשה אב לארם ולבסוף נעשה אב לכל העולם כולו

4. **Shelah, Lech Lecha, Torah Ohr 3; and Pesachim, Derush 3 – Avraham made God known to the world. This is the concept of the merkava (Chariot).**

The expression, “The God of Avraham, the God of Yitzchak, and the God of Yaakov (Jacob),” would seem to raise a difficulty: surely God is the God of the entire world? Rather, He is God of the Patriarchs, as in the secret of the Chariot, for the Patriarchs serve as a chair for the presence of His glory upon them.

The expression, “The God of Avraham,” [means that] the existential presence of God was made known by him.

וזהו שאנו אומרים א-להי אברהם א-להי יצחק וא-להי יעקב, ולפום ריהטא קשה הלא השם יתברך א-להי כל העולם הוא. אלא הענין הוא א-להי אבות בסוד המרכבה שהם כסא לשריית כבודו יתברך עליהם.

זהו שאומרים א-להי אברהם, שנתפרסם מציאות הש"י על ידו.

SECTION V: THE COVENANT OF CIRCUMCISION

1. **Bereishit 17:7 – God forges an eternal covenant with Avraham and his descendants.**

I will ratify My covenant between Me and you and between your offspring after you, throughout their generations, as an everlasting covenant, to be a God to you and to your offspring after you.

והקמתי את בריתי ביני ובינך ובין זרעך אחריך לדורותי לברית עולם להיות לך לאלהים ולזרעך אחריך

2. **Ibid. 10-11 – The circumcision is the sign of the covenant.**

This is My covenant which you shall keep between Me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin, and that shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you.

זאת בריתי אשר תשמרו ביני וביניכם ובין זרעך אחריך המול לכם כל זכר: ונמלתם את בשר ערלתכם והיה לאות ברית ביני וביניכם:

3. **Rabbi Yehoshua Pfeffer – Symbolism of the circumcision.**

The mitzvah of Brit Milah is the covenant between God and Avraham. Symbolically, the removal of the foreskin alludes to removing the layer of evil present in the world, and revealing the light of Divine Holiness. Many commentaries make a direct connection between Brit Milah and *emunah* – the light of faith with which Avraham imbued the world. Through the Brit, the covenant is sealed upon the body of every Jew – God became the God of Avraham, and the God of his descendants. The deeper meaning of the Brit is that God becomes revealed in the world through all those who enter the covenant of Avraham.

4. **Rabbi Isaac Chaver, Ohr Torah, 38 – An all-encompassing mitzvah.**

... The mitzvah of milah, the stamp of the Brit, which includes all the 613 mitzvot, which is

מצות מילה שהוא חותם הברית, שכולל כל תרי"ג מצות, שלכן נקרא ברי"ת כמו הנקודה הכולל הכל,

why it is called “Brit”, to indicate that it is one mitzvah which includes every other mitzvah. Through this mitzvah [a person] becomes rooted in *emunah*, which is the covenant that God sealed with Avraham Avinu, as He told him, “Walk before Me and be complete, and I will give My covenant ... to be a God for you and for your descendants after you.”

מצומצד מצוה זאת נשרש באמונה שהוא הברית שכרת הקדוש ברוך הוא לאברהם אבינו, שאמר לו התהלך לפני והיה תמים ואתנה בריתי כו', להיות לך לאלקים ולזרעך אחריו.

5. *Akeidas Yitzchak, Shaar 28*

Concerning this *emunah* [God] sealed His covenant of milah, as it says, “And I will establish My covenant between Myself and between you and your descendants.”

ועל האמונה הזאת כרת אתו ברית המילה שנאמר (שם י"ז) והקמותי את בריתי ביני וביניך ובין זרעך

SECTION VI: THE LIFE OF AVRAHAM IS A MICROCOSM OF JEWISH HISTORY

Maaseh avot siman lebanim – the ways by which the forefathers, beginning with Avraham, lived their lives, sets the precedent for the nation of Israel that emerged from them.

1. *Ramban (Nachmanides), Bereishit 12:6*

“Avram passed into the land as far as the site of Shechem ...” I will tell you a general principle, by which you will understand all of the coming episodes concerning Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. This is a fundamental issue, which has been mentioned briefly by our Sages, who have said: “Everything that occurred to the forefathers is a sign for their descendants.”

Therefore, the verses write the tales of the forefathers at length, including their journeys, their digging of wells, and other happenings, which the reader may deem as being superfluous and without purpose. Yet, all of these things teach us about the future, for each event that happened to one of the forefathers was the nucleus for the same event to happen to his descendants. This is why God kept Avraham in the land, and brought upon him events that correspond to everything that will happen to his descendants.

“ויעבר אברם בארץ עד מקום שכם...” אומר לך כלל תבין אותו בכל הפרשיות הבאות בענין אברהם יצחק ויעקב, והוא ענין גדול, הזכירוהו רבותינו בדרך קצרה, ואמרו (תנחומא ט) כל מה שאירע לאבות סימן לבנים,

ולכן יאריכו הכתובים בספור המסעות וחפירת הבארות ושאר המקרים, ויחשוב החושב בהם כאלו הם דברים מיותרים אין בהם תועלת, וכולם באים ללמד על העתיד, כי כאשר יבוא המקרה לנביא [לאחד] משלשת האבות יתבונן ממנו הדבר הנגזר לבא לזרעו... ולפיכך החזיק הקב"ה את אברהם בארץ ועשה לו דמיונות בכל העתיד להעשות בדרכו.

The following three verses regarding Avraham and Sarah's descent to Egypt and encounter with Pharaoh are examples of precedents for events that subsequently occurred in Jewish history.

2. **Bereishit 12:10**

There was a famine in the land, and Avram descended to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land.

וַיְהִי רָעָב בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְגֹרֶשׁ כִּי כָבֵד
הָרָעָב בְּאֶרֶץ:

3. **Ibid. 12:15**

The officials of Pharaoh saw her, and they lauded her for Pharaoh, and the woman was taken to Pharaoh's house.

וַיֵּרְאוּ אֹתָהּ שְׂרֵי פַרְעֹה וַיְהַלְלוּ אֹתָהּ אֵל פַּרְעֹה וַתִּקַּח
הָאִשָּׁה בֵּית פַּרְעֹה:

4. **Ibid. 12:20, 13:2**

Pharaoh gave men orders concerning him, and they escorted him and his wife and all that was his ... Now Avram was very laden with livestock, silver, and gold.

וַיִּצְוּ עָלָיו פַּרְעֹה אֲנָשִׁים וַיִּשְׁלְחוּ אֹתוֹ וְאֵת אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאֵת כָּל
אֲשֶׁר לוֹ: ... וְאֶבְרָם כָּבֵד מְאֹד בְּמִקְנֵה בְּקָסָף וּבְזָהָב:

5. **Rabbeinu Bachya, ibid. (quoting from Bereishit Rabbah) – The parallel of events between Avraham Avinu and the Children of Israel.**

This entire episode concerning Avraham Avinu is a sign for his descendants in the exile of Egypt, for the Egyptians took his wife, and God avenged his vengeance with great plagues, and brought him out with cattle and with silver and gold, and Pharaoh commanded messengers to send him away.

All of this happened to his children, as the Midrash teaches – all that you find concerning Avraham you find concerning Israel: Concerning Avraham it says: “There was a famine in the land,” and concerning Israel it says: “For this has been two of the years of hunger...”

Concerning Avraham it says: “God smote the house of Pharaoh,” and concerning Israel it says: “One more plague I will bring upon Pharaoh.” Concerning Avraham it says: “Behold, here is your wife, take her and depart,” and concerning Israel it says: “He called Moshe (Moses) and Aaron at night, and said, ‘Arise and depart from among my nation.’”

Concerning Avraham it says: “Pharaoh commanded men upon him, and they sent him

הַפְרֵשָׁה הַזֹּאת בְּמִקְרָה אֲאֵה” הַכֹּל סִימָן לִזְרֻעוֹ בְּגִלּוֹת
מִצְרַיִם, כִּי הַמִּצְרַיִם לָקְחוּ אֶת אִשְׁתּוֹ וְהִשְׁׁי נָקָם אֶת
נַקְמָתוֹ בְּנִגְעִים גְּדוֹלִים וְהוֹצִיאוּ מִשָּׁם בְּמִקְנֵה בְּכֶסֶף
וּבְזָהָב, וְגַם צִוָּה עָלָיו פַּרְעֹה אֲנָשִׁים לְשַׁלְּחָם.

וְכָל זֶה אִירַע לְבָנָיִם, וְהוּא מֵה שְׁדַרְשׁוּ רַז”ל בְּבִרְאשִׁית
רַבָּה, כָּל מֵה שֶׁתִּמְצָא בְּאַבְרָהָם תִּמְצָא בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל,
בְּאַבְרָהָם כְּתִיב וַיְהִי רָעָב בְּאֶרֶץ, וּבְיִשְׂרָאֵל כְּתִיב
(בְּרִאשִׁית מֵה 1) כִּי זֶה שְׁנַתִּים הָרָעָב...

בְּאַבְרָהָם כְּתִיב (בְּרִאשִׁית יב) וַיִּנְגַע ה' אֶת פַּרְעֹה,
וּבְיִשְׂרָאֵל כְּתִיב (שְׁמוֹת יא) עוֹד נֹגַע אֶחָד אֲבִיָּא עַל
פַּרְעֹה. בְּאַבְרָהָם כְּתִיב (בְּרִאשִׁית יב) וַיִּקְרָא פַרְעֹה
לְאַבְרָם וְגו', הִנֵּה אִשְׁתְּךָ קַח וְלֶךְ, וּבְיִשְׂרָאֵל כְּתִיב
(שְׁמוֹת יב) וַיִּקְרָא לְמֹשֶׁה וְלֹאֲהָרֹן לַיְלִיָּה וַיֹּאמֶר קוּמוּ צֵאוּ
מִתּוֹךְ עַמִּי.

בְּאַבְרָהָם כְּתִיב (בְּרִאשִׁית יב) וַיִּצְוּ עָלָיו פַּרְעֹה אֲנָשִׁים
וַיִּשְׁלְחוּ אוֹתוֹ, וּבְיִשְׂרָאֵל כְּתִיב (שְׁמוֹת יב) לְמַהר

away,” and concerning Israel it says: “To hasten, to send them away from the land.” Concerning Avraham it says: “Avram was heavily laden with cattle, with silver and with gold,” and concerning Israel it says: “They borrowed from Egypt vessels of silver and vessels of gold.” Concerning Avraham it says: “He went to his journeys,” and concerning Israel it says: “The Children of Israel traveled from Raamses to Sukkot.”

לשלחם מן הארץ. באברהם כתיב (בראשית יג) ואברם כבד מאוד במקנה בכסף ובזהב, ובישראל כתיב (שמות יב) וישאלו ממצרים כלי כסף וכלי זהב. באברהם כתיב (בראשית יג) וילך למסעיו, ובישראל כתיב (שמות יב) ויסעו בני ישראל מרעמס סכותה:

6. Bereishit Rabbah 42:4 – The Four Kings that Avraham battled correspond to the Four Exiles of the Jewish people.

“And it came to pass in the days of Amraphel, king of Shinar” – this is Babylon; “and Arioch, king of Ellasar” – this is (Greece) Antiochus; “Chedorlaomer, king of Elam” – this is Madai; “and Tidal, king of Goyim” – this is the kingdom of Edom.

ויהי בימי אמרפל מלך שנער זו בבל ואריוך מלך אלסר זה (יון) אנטיוכוס כדלעומר מלך עילם זה מדי ותדעל מלך גוים זו מלכות אדום.

SECTION VII: CONTINUING THE LEGACY OF AVRAHAM AVINU

Our task, in the words of Yeshayahu (Isaiah) is to be a light unto the nations just as Avraham was, lighting up a darkened world with the light of *emunah*.

1. Bereishit 18:19 – The Jewish people follow in the footsteps of Avraham.

For I have loved him, because he commands his children and his household after him that they keep the way of God, doing charity and justice, in order that God might then bring upon Avraham that which He had spoken of him.

כי ידעתינו למען אשר יצוה את בניו ואת ביתו אחריו ושמרו דרך ה' לעשות צדקה ומשפט למען הביא ה' על אברהם את אשר דבר עליו:

2. Yeshayahu 49:8 – A light unto the nations.

I am God; I have called you with righteousness; I will strengthen your hand, I will protect you; I will set you for a covenant to the people, for a light to the nations.

אני יְהוָה קראתיך בצדק ואחזק בידך ואצרך ואתגן לברית עם לאור גוים

3. **The Netziv, Haemek Davar, Bereishit 17:4 – The Jewish people uphold the covenant of Avraham Avinu, follow the Torah, and are a light unto the nations of the world, inspiring them to abandon idolatry and embrace monotheism.**

“Behold, My covenant is with you” – to assist you in that which I have said to you, “And you shall be a father of a multitude of nations.” For until then Avraham had called in the name of God and had converted a number of people, but only those who had converted completely were included among the true servants of God ... This did not apply to all of the world, and the initial intention was not ... that they should all be a part of the Jewish people.

Rather, the intention and purpose was that all the nations should know God, and that idols would instantaneously vanish ... (It was for this purpose that the nation of Israel was created, as Yeshayahu writes, “I will set you for a covenant to the people, for a light to the nations.” *For a covenant* means to spread the faith to all nations, for *emunah* is called a covenant ... and this is the purpose of Creation.)

הנה בריתי אתך. לעזרך למה שאני מדבר אתך והיית לאב המון גוים שעד כה שקרא אברהם בשם ה' וגייר כמה אנשים לא ה' אלא אותם אנשים שנתגירו לגמרי ונכנסו בכלל עובדי ה' וכו' ודבר זה א"א בכל העולם ומראש מקדם לא היה וכו' שיהיו כולם בכלל עדת ישראל.

אבל זה ה' הרצון והתכלית שיהיו כל אוה"ע יודעים את ה'. והאלילים כליל יחליף וכו' (ולזה נוצר אח"כ עם ישראל כמו שאמר ישעיה הנביא מ"ט ואצרך ואתנך לברית עם לאור גוים. ופי' לברית עם לתקן כל עם באמונה שהוא נקרא ברית וכו' וזהו תכלית הבריאה.)