

Echoes of Eden

Rabbi Ari Kahn

Parashat Lech Lecha 5775

Luminosity

Great people are made, not born. Sometimes they are self-made. Avraham was such a person. Born into the dark ages when decency was not common, he alone discovered the light and shared it with the world. His legacy is not merely the impact he had on his contemporaries, nor is he to be judged only by the deeds he performed in his lifetime. Quite the opposite is true: In his hometown, he was reviled. In his lifetime, the scope of his impact was limited, yet his teachings have spread throughout the world and throughout history. Jews, Muslims and Christians all over the world look to Avraham as their spiritual, if not biological, patriarch. Regrettably, there are times that it seems that the greatness of Avraham is one of the few things upon which these religions can agree.

Rabbi Soloveitchik once referred to Avraham as the “loneliest man who ever lived,” the original “lonely man of faith.” Avraham’s greatness lay in his ability to see beyond societal beliefs and norms, and search for a truth that had eluded his contemporaries, but being the only man who believed in a deity with no needs, no appetites or desires made Avraham a loner. The concept of such a God befuddled the pagans and appalled their primitive logic, which required gods who could be manipulated and bribed.

**Rabbi Soloveitchik
once referred to
Avraham as the
“loneliest man who
ever lived,” the original
“lonely man of faith.”**

Avraham’s understanding of God led him to the realization that the creation of our world and of humankind was an act of benevolence and altruism. As soon as Avraham realized this, he knew there was, in fact, nothing he could do for God – so he set out to emulate God. And as he built his life around acts of kindness and morality, something magical happened: People responded. Love and decency became contagious. Talk of one God, all-powerful and without needs, began to spread. The lonely Avraham became popular. He gained a following, yet despite

Avraham's descendants brought light to the darkness, compassion and altruism to the dark ages of paganism and barbarism.

the inroads he made into the surrounding society, his success was limited. Even those closest to him - his nephew Lot and his son Yishamel - found the standards set by Avraham's living example too difficult to emulate. Avraham remained *halvri*, the man perpetually set apart from others, always different, as if a river separated him from the rest of society. In modern parlance, he was always "on the wrong side of the tracks."

Despite the experiences of his own lifetime, from the vantage point we enjoy, Avraham's profound loneliness was only a temporary state: God Himself became Avraham's greatest companion. God took Avraham for a stroll and invited him to look at the beautiful night sky, bright with the light of millions of stars. Avraham was told that one day his descendants would be like the stars. Indeed, this promise has been fulfilled not only in a quantitative sense, but in a qualitative sense: Avraham's descendants brought light to the darkness, compassion and altruism to the dark ages of paganism and barbarism. Avraham's followers taught kindness, decency and love, and illuminated the darkness of the human condition. Like the beauty of the stars on a dark night, Avraham's descendants fill the sky. And the most luminous light of all, the brightest guiding star, was Avraham himself - the father of love and light.

For a more in-depth analysis see:

<http://arikahn.blogspot.co.il/2013/10/lectures-and-essays-lech-lcha.html>