

exalted, far beyond the physical practicalities of the world. In fact his name Abram, before it was changed later in the Sedra², means ‘exalted father’ (*av ram*), signifying an exalted level of consciousness. Despite this, he and his wife Sarah sought to teach other people, as Rashi tells us: Abraham would communicate with the men and inspire them with belief in G-d, while Sarah would teach the women³.

Then at the beginning of our Sedra tells us that G-d told him to travel, ‘Go for yourself’. This meant a kind of descent, towards worldliness, in order to share further his wisdom with others⁴. The Midrash describes him as a phial of fragrant spices which is brought into the open so that others can benefit from its fragrance⁵.

We also learn in the Sedra that when he reached the Land of Israel “he called in the name of G-d” (Gen.12:18). Says the Talmud: Do not read this as meaning simply that Abraham himself called in the name of G-d. It means that he *caused others* to call in the Name of G-d⁶.

Wherever he went, Abraham and his wife Sarah fearlessly proclaimed knowledge of G-d. One G-d, one moral standard, expressed in the Seven Noachide Laws. This idea was so different from the current fashions of his time that Abraham was persecuted, his life was threatened, he was denigrated and derided. But he did not stop. Eventually he prevailed. His legacy is the Jewish Nation which has lived according to Divine teaching for thousands of years, and which has also generated an awareness of Monotheism in many parts of the world, paving the way for the Messiah.

At the beginning of the Sedra, G-d gave a promise to Abraham: “All families of the earth will be blessed through you”. The Torah and the later history of the Jewish people describe how this promise begins to come true, bringing positive illumination to every human being in the world.

1. Genesis chs.12-17. 2. Gen. 17:5. 3. Rashi to Gen.12:5. 4. See Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi’s *Torah Or*, Lech Lecha 11a. 5. Gen. Rab. 39:2. 6. Sota 10a-b. The Talmud says: do not read *vayikra* – ‘he called’ – but *vayakri* – ‘he caused others to call’.

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SEDRA LECH LECHA

AGAINST THE TIDE

Alex came into the classroom and at once noticed the new boy. He had thick rimmed glasses. Although the class was buzzing before the lesson, no one was talking to the new boy.

Soon the lesson began. Mr. Frankel, their history teacher, was talking about something and showed them quite interesting pictures on a screen. Then at last it was break, and Alex and his friend Daniel were together as usual in the playground.

Suddenly they could see the new boy approaching them. They went quiet. "Hi," said Alex, "what's your name?"

"Joseph," answered the new boy. He seemed to have an accent of some kind. "Where are you from?" asked Daniel. "From France" answered Joseph.

"How long have you been here in England?" asked Alex. "Excuse me?" said Joseph. "Can you pliz say it again?"

"How long have you been in England?" repeated Alex, saying each word slowly.

"Two weeks" said Joseph. Again the boys went quiet. Sam, who was also in their class, came up to their corner of the playground.

“He’s from France”, said Daniel, rolling his eyes in an unfriendly way. Sam sniggered, and didn’t say anything.

Then the bell went, and they began going back to the classroom.

Here was Mr Benson, teaching them about the Sedra.

“Abraham lived at a time when everyone served idols. Even his own father was the idol merchant of his city Haran. But then Abraham realized that there is one G-d, and we should only serve Him. The Midrash tells us that he broke the idols in his father’s store. He knew what was right, and refused to follow the tide of everyone doing wrong.”

Mr Benson looked round at the boys in the class. Alex seemed to be listening intently.

“Now, another point,” said Mr Benson. “Abraham represents a certain quality. Who can tell me what that is?”

The boys looked blank. Then to everyone’s surprise, Joseph the new boy put up his hand.

“He represent the qualité of Chesed” said Joseph, with a strong French accent.

“Yes!” said Mr Benson. “The quality of Kindness!”

The class went on, but Alex was no longer listening. There were two ideas going round and round in his head. One was that you have to stand against the tide, and do what is right, whatever other people are doing. The other idea was the quality of Kindness.

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