



58

### BRINGING BLESSING

**A** BRAHAM, ANCESTOR OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE, IS THE HERO of this week's Sedra<sup>1</sup>. It begins with G-d's command that he and his family should leave their home and travel westwards, towards an as yet unknown destination. Eventually it was revealed that this was the land of Israel, the Holy Land.

What was the ultimate purpose of this journey? G-d tells Abraham that he will father a great nation: the Jewish people. They will be a sacred nation, with a special relationship with G-d, dwelling in the Holy Land.

But there is a further dimension to this. G-d tells Abraham: "Through you will be blessed all families of the earth" (Gen. 12:3). This means that there is some kind of universal significance for Abraham and his descendants. It is not just that they will be a people with a special relationship with G-d, but this will bring blessing to others as well, to all humanity<sup>2</sup>.

In fact this blessing was repeated to Abraham himself (Gen.22:18) and also to Jacob: "...through you, and through your children, all families of the earth will be blessed" (Gen. 28:14). Clearly there is some kind of special and wonderful effect that the Jewish people are intended to have on the world. What is this, and how can it be achieved?

One answer is that by virtue of the fact that the Jewish people

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dedicatedly follow G-d's teachings, all the special laws which were given to them at Sinai, they draw blessing into the world for the benefit of all humanity<sup>3</sup>. The Sages describe the effect of the Temple in Jerusalem in these terms. The Temple service brought Divine blessing to the Jewish people in the Land of Israel, and from there blessing and goodness extended throughout the world<sup>4</sup>.

Another answer is in terms of the moral and spiritual input which the Jewish people have given and should give further to the world. The concept of monotheism and the ethical and religious teachings implicit in that concept, called the Seven Noachide Laws, have been an important Jewish gift to a large proportion of world civilization. These teachings indeed constitute 'blessing'<sup>5</sup>.

According to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, basing himself on Maimonides<sup>6</sup>, we the Jewish people have the responsibility to try to communicate these ideas within society. Now, for almost the first time in history we are in a position to do this. We are able to move freely, to write, teach and communicate in a variety of ways. Only now are we free to act for the fullest benefit of humanity.

We thus see two ways in which we can bring blessing to the world: through strengthening our own special Jewish relationship with G-d, and by communicating the universal aspect of Jewish teaching to society at large.

This leads to a third way. Through the fact that we fulfil on every level what it means to be a Jew, we bring the world and all humanity to the next stage of history. This is the ultimate blessing: when we achieve the goal of Creation, that there should be a physical world, peopled by human beings, in which the Presence of the Divine dwells. Through bringing the Messiah, for whom we have been earnestly praying for two thousand years, we will indeed bring blessing to all humanity<sup>7</sup>.

1. Genesis chs.12-17. 2. Rashi explains these words as meaning simply that other people will bless their children that they should be like Abraham and his descendants. However, see the comment on this in Hitva'aduyot, 5742, Lech Lecha, p. 397. 3. See Rabbi Dov Ber, the Mittlerer Rebbe's *Torat Haim* Beshallah, 175b. 4. See Succah 55b and Rashi's comment "70 bulls". 5. See the Lubavitcher Rebbe's Hitva'aduyot, 5748 vol.1, 528-9. 6. See Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Kings, 8:10. 7. See the discourse Ach BeGoral, 5735, sec.6 (Sefer HaMaamarim Melukat vol.4, p.97).

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SEDRA LECH LECHA

**LIKE THE STARS IN THE SKY...**

“Hey what a great telescope!” Sammy’s friend David exclaimed one night, as they were doing homework together in Sammy’s room. “I can see so far away with it.”

“That’s from my uncle. He gave it to me for my birthday last week, together with a book about the stars. It’s really fun - it’s got a map showing what all the different constellations are called - you can really see them in the sky.” Sammy told him enthusiastically.

“Wow! Let’s go out and stargaze, as soon as we finish this geography.”

When the two were done, they went outside to the garden. It was a crisp, cold night, with lots of stars visible. They set up the telescope on its tripod.

The two boys were soon having a good time locating different groups of stars without the telescope, and then trying to home in on one or other of the stars, squinting through the eyepiece.

“Do you know what this reminds me of?” Sammy remarked. “It’s a bit like what we were learning today in school about Abraham, when G-d showed him all the stars and told him to count the stars in the sky - if he

could - and that's how many his descendants would be - so numerous it would be almost impossible to count them."

"I bet I could count them. One, two, three, four, five - no, I did that one already, six, seven, eight..." David got to twenty before getting fed up. "Oh, it's impossible! There's just too many".

"Can you imagine what faith Abraham had in G-d?", said Sammy. "He and Sara were already really old, almost one hundred, past the age when people can have children, yet he had total trust in G-d that it would really happen."

"I thought it says that he laughed when G-d told him he would have a son", said David.

"That was Sarah", answered Sammy.

"No," said David. "In *next* week's Sedra we read about Sarah laughing, and in *this* week's Sedra we read about Abraham laughing." For a moment Sammy too was puzzled. Then he remembered what they had learnt.

"You're right," he said. "Sarah laughed because she was surprised, but Abraham laughed out of joy. Either way, they both trusted in G-d and they had a baby: our great great grandfather Isaac! He was the father of Jacob."

"And just think of all the children, grandchildren and so on that *he* had - I bet no one could count them all!", said David.

"Just like the stars," said Sammy. Then they went back inside, carrying the telescope, window to the children of Abraham.

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