


**CHABAD**  
  
**RESEARCH UNIT**

שבת..... *for Friday nights* ..... קדש

**Friday 30 October 2009 - 12 Cheshvan 5770**  
**Sedra Lech Lecha**

**CHOSEN PEOPLE**

**D**O WE CHOOSE G-D OR DOES G-D CHOOSE US? THIS IS ONE OF THE THEMES THAT emerges from the Sedra<sup>1</sup> of the week, in which we learn about Abraham, the great ancestor of the Jewish people who in many ways is the very first Jew.

‘Choosing G-d’ means we are dealing with a person who is on a spiritual quest, searching for holiness and for meaning in life. He or she embarks on a spiritual journey, which may well have some twists and turns, and - let us say - eventually discovers the wealth of Jewish teaching. The person finds this genuine, wholesome and inspiring, and gradually comes closer to Jewish ideals in thought, feeling and practice.

This person has chosen G-d and Judaism.

In many ways this typifies the life of Abraham, as described in the Midrash, which is the Jewish tradition providing further information about the ideas and events mentioned in the Bible. The Midrash tells us that Abraham began life as the son of an idol merchant<sup>2</sup>. Seeing the variety of idolatrous worship which was taking place around him in the ancient city of Ur, he began to wonder about the nature of true service of the Divine. He rejected idolatry and discovered monotheism and worship of G-d the Creator. Abraham’s father was dismayed and he gave him up to Nimrod, who had Abraham thrown into a furnace for his beliefs. Miraculously he survived.

Now Abraham determined to leave Ur in order to find an

environment where he could freely serve G-d. He began travelling westwards. At this point G-d spoke to him, at the beginning of our Sedra, and told him to travel further, leaving everything behind, “to the land which I will show you”, the Land of Israel. So first Abraham chose G-d, then G-d spoke to him.

Now, an intriguing fact is that while all this is described in the Midrash, the Torah text itself starts with G-d speaking to Abraham: the point when G-d chose Abraham. It prefers to conceal the traditions of the Midrash, which indicate that prior to this, Abraham chose G-d. Why should this be?

Abraham, the first Jew, helps us understand something important about the nature of Judaism. Of course, each person is on a spiritual path of discovery, and this is very important in the development of their consciousness as a human being facing the Infinite. Yet there is a significant further element.

G-d chooses the Jew. Whether we merit this or not, whether we welcome it or not: each Jewish man or woman is chosen for a spiritual destiny. For our part, we have to live up to this responsibility, for the benefit of all humanity.

When G-d instructs us to do something, as He instructs Abraham at the beginning of the Sedra to “go to the land which I will show you”, or commands each of us to carry out a law of Jewish teaching in our lives, we have the firm obligation to try to carry this out. A Command goes beyond our own power of discovery and understanding. It applies to us even if we understand nothing: the action of a Mitzvah (Command) has infinite power, linking us directly with the Divine.

Further, however profound our inner spiritual qualities, we should always recognise that there is a level beyond them, the point at which G-d chooses us rather than we choosing Him. This gives us an unlimited quality: we are not held back by our own perception of the holy. We recognise that there is infinite holiness beyond. From this level of holiness comes the Command which chooses Abraham, the first Jew, and which chooses each of us, his descendants through the generations<sup>3</sup>.

1. Genesis chs.12-17. 2. At this stage in his life he was called Abram. 3. Based freely on the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot*, vol.25, pp.47-53. See Ramban on Gen.12:2.

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SEDRA LECH LECHA

### **SPARKS OF HOLINESS**

David couldn't imagine a more desolate place. The old stone-work showed that it must have been something interesting at one time. But now it was a ruin. Weeds sprouted from cracks in the ground and large stones lay in crumbled heaps. A canal flowed nearby. "What do you think this was?!" Yoni got off his bike and walked it closer to the site. David followed suit.

"I don't know. A pumping station? Part of an old farm?" The two boys poked around a bit. "Well, I guess this is a good place to take a rest and have some lunch, whatever it is, or was." Yoni said.

The two boys unpacked their lunch packs, washed their hands for bread with the bottle of water and cup they had brought with them, and made the blessings. Then they sat on some rocks in front of an old wall with lots of gaps and munched away. The food tasted so good after all the biking that morning. Neither of the boys noticed the pair of eyes that was watching them.

"Isn't it funny that we're here, Yoni? I mean, why do we need to be here, of all places, eating lunch in some old ruin?"

Suddenly the boys heard a rustling coming from over the wall behind them. They froze and looked at each other. Then they looked round behind them and saw clearly they were not alone. Through a gap in the bottom of the wall they could see a pair of feet.

“Aaaaahhhhhh!” The boys jumped up in fright. “It’s okay. It’s just me,” they heard a young voice say. Now he came round the wall and stood in front of them. They saw a young boy with a notebook in one hand and a guitar in the other. He looked quite harmless. Yoni and David let go of each other and cleared their throats. He was wearing a baseball cap, and they could see him looking at their kippot.

“What are you two doing here?”

“Well, actually, we were just wondering the same thing,” David said. “We’ve just discovered this place. Why are *you* here?”

“I come to write songs and play my guitar. But you know, I don’t *really* know why I come here.”

The boys looked at him questioningly. The boy continued: “This week we read the Sedra Lech Lecha. G-d told Avraham to go on a journey. Avraham had to go to many different places, and each place he went he would reveal the hidden sparks of holiness and elevate it. Since then, we all do the same thing.”

“So is that what you are doing?” asked Yoni.

“Yes, and so are you. We don’t really know why we end up in certain places, but we do know that wherever we are, that place has been waiting since the beginning of time for us to come along and elevate it! So your blessings on the food, my songs about Torah teachings, and then a few words about the Sedra all have the same kind of effect. We are raising sparks of holiness, and the stones of this old water-mill are really happy.”

David and Yoni laughed. Then they sat down together. David produced three apples, and they each said the blessing on fruit, lifting some more sacred sparks...

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