

# The Rebbe's Discourses

Summaries of points from the Rebbe's Chassidic Discourses בלי אחריות כלל וכלל  
פרשת לך לך תשד"מ ד"ה אני הגה בריתי בלתי מוגה  
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## THE JEW AND THE WORLD

**A**T WHAT POINT DID THE JEW BECOME 'DIFFERENT'? One could answer that it was a gradual process, step by step through history. But this Discourse pinpoints the moment when G-d gave Abraham the command to circumcise himself<sup>2</sup>.

Before circumcision, Abraham was a great man, with tremendous personal spirituality, and total dedication to G-d. But there was no reason why there could not be other such people, as great as he. For example, Methuselah, who lived in the time of Noah and passed away a week before the Flood began. The Sages tell us that despite the violence and evil of his generation, while he was alive his spiritual merit prevented the Flood from coming, and even after he died, the Flood was held back during the seven day period of mourning for him. However, despite his greatness, he did not try to reform the people of his generation.

The circumcision of Abraham brought a change to the world. It suddenly created a division in humanity: those who were the true 'seed of Abraham', the people whose task is to improve humanity, and those who were not. From then on there could be 'Righteous Gentiles', great men like Job whose merit protected the inhabitants of Canaan, and even gentile Prophets like Balaam – but the special 'chosen' relationship that G-d has with the Jewish people would be exclusively theirs<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Maamar Aniy Hineh Briti 5744 (1984). Printed in Dvar Malchut of Lech Lecha 5774. It was not edited by the Rebbe.

<sup>2</sup> Genesis Lech 17:9-14.

<sup>3</sup> Note that the Sages view a Jewish girl or woman as being 'as if circumcised'. See Talmud Avodah Zarah 27a.

True, the picture is a bit more complicated. When Abraham was given the command of circumcision, he already had a son Ishmael. G-d made clear that the son that Abraham would bear with Sarah, *after* he had had circumcision, would be his 'true' progeny, G-d says: 'in Isaac will be your seed'<sup>4</sup>. But in the next generation, Isaac himself bore two sons, one of whom was Esau, seen as the ancestor of the Christian nations (the Roman Empire). Only Jacob became the father of the Jewish people exclusively. He was given the name Israel and the Jews are indeed the Children of Israel.

Considering this, we can return to the initial idea that the special identity of the Jewish people developed through several stages, to which we can add slavery in Egypt, receiving the Torah, entry to the Promised Land, the two Temples, life in the Diaspora after the destruction of the second Temple. Yes, every stage is important, but the initial step is in our Sedra: the circumcision of Abraham.

What is gained by this division? Isn't it something negative? The seed of Abraham are indeed being singled out for something special, but what about everyone else?

When G-d tells Abraham he will have the Covenant of circumcision, in the same verse He tells him that he will be 'the father of many nations'. By the fact that Abraham and his progeny are singled out they are enabled to have a vital relationship with the rest of humanity. The Chosen People receive the Torah to bond themselves to G-d and also to help all humanity link with the Divine, through their communicating the Torah teaching of the Seven Noahide Laws.

Before Abraham's circumcision, there were individual great men: Abraham himself, Noah, Methuselah, other similar figures. But the world as a whole was rudderless. Methuselah's merit held back the Flood, and Noah and his family survived it, but neither of them made a real attempt to improve humanity so that the Flood would not take place.

The role of Abraham and his seed is to connect humanity with G-d, through their spiritual leadership, a leadership which ultimately will bring all humanity to fulfil the Seven Noahide Laws and to live positive, meaningful lives, inheriting the World to Come.

Further, the fact of this division creates an important possibility. Although any Gentile can become a Righteous Gentile through keeping the Seven Noahide Laws, he or she might come to realise that there is an even deeper way to connect with the Divine, the Jewish way. Hence he or she might choose to convert to Judaism.

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<sup>4</sup> Genesis Vayera 21:12.

The convert brings an important positive element which otherwise would be lacking. Ruth, the Moabite convert, became the immediate ancestor of King David and, ultimately, of the Messiah. In the time of the Sages, Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Akiba, who were descendants of converts to Judaism, had an enormous effect on the development of Jewish thought.

Through the difference, the emergence of the special quality of the Jew, which began with the command of circumcision to Abraham, the first step was made to repair the world.

Torah teachings are holy – please treat these pages with care