

Abraham Avinu, Role Model How To Be A Man

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This lesson serves as an introduction into my ten part CD lectures series on the life and times of Avraham, an in-depth study, available on KosherTorah.com

My, how the mighty have fallen. My, how times have changed. My, how far from real Torah are we all. When we read the Biblical account of the life and adventures of the Patriarch Avraham, we encounter a real superman, a man of steel, who at the same time is a man of holiness, righteousness and above of moral conviction. I cannot help but think of the fictional character Superman whenever I read about Abraham, for here was a man, a real man, who without super powers certainly acted in super ways.



Abraham was certainly no cuddly type of grandfather figure similar to how he is fictitiously portrayed today. The real Avraham Avinu invoked awe and fear in the hearts of those he encountered, not feelings of warmth and love. Avraham was a rabble rouser, a rebel, an iconoclast and a revolutionary. He showed absolutely no respect for the corrupt social/political establishment in which he was raised.

He certainly did not accept the modern day emasculating idea to work within the system to bring about change. Avraham was no fool. He was fearless. He was a man, a superman; who acted with strength and resolve, caring nothing for the feelings and sensitivities of the misguided. Avraham would not allow himself to be emasculated, to act as less than a man. When faced with social/religious nonsense and injustice, he acted against the system. He did not seek to modify it; he sought to replace it, by whatever means possible.

Avraham was a warrior, not just in word, but in deed. One who just talks is an emasculated weakling. One who just acts can be a bull-headed fool. Yet, one who knows how to unite the two, to talk and act in harmony; such a one is heard; such a one can change the world. Yet, such a person must be willing to "walk one's talk," and to embrace conflict, if that is what needs be.

Avraham was a man unafraid of conflict. He recognized well that wars are won with a combination of words and arms. He began his war against social/religious hypocrisy by force of words and when necessary conducted it by force of arms. Through it all, G-d was with him. Because Avraham was not willing to compromise; because he stayed on target doing the right thing, regardless of consequence, G-d saw in him the potential to become the father of the chosen nation. Mind you, being chosen did not make one better, smarter, better looking or more rich. Being chosen instead gave one a heavy burden, a responsibility to carry out a nearly impossible task. Yet, who better than a human superman could be chosen to carry out such an impossible mission.

Traditional Judaism, as it developed in exile, placed emphasis on Abraham's attributes of mercy and hospitality. This was a deliberate attempt to remove the rich martial mentality from Jewish history that came to a crashing end with the defeat of the Bar Kokhba revolt against evil Rome. Since this period, accustomed to exile, Jewish leaders have always endeavored to cover up the Jewish martial past for reasons that are subject to much controversy. Yet, before these embellishments were developed, the Biblical story plainly describes Abraham as a desert warrior and a tribal chieftain. Outside and away from his martial element, Avraham is praised and extolled as being a man of hospitality. Yet, this is nothing unique. Even to this day, desert chieftains and tribal elders are proud of the hospitality they show their guests and the viciousness they show their enemies. Abraham was not very much different. Indeed, if Avraham were alive today, modern day tribal chiefs would hold him in the highest esteem.

Ancient legend tells us that the religious and political authorities of his day tried Avraham for crimes against the state and sentenced him to death. Yet, a miracle occurred and he was miraculously spared. It was only after this encounter, when Avraham had proven himself and was Divinely vindicated did G-d tell him to leave that place and to go far away to start anew.

Avraham did not run away. He was in no danger. He had won his battle. Yet, now being victorious, there was nothing more that he could do. Those who would hear him had already listened. Those who would not hear him never would. The present state was a stalemate. Therefore, G-d told Avraham that enough was enough and that it was time to take matters to the next level and that that could only happen in isolation, far away from prying eyes and jealous hearts. So, to Canaan Avraham went, with "all the souls he made in Haran." These are those who saw the truth and could no longer live in a community based upon lies.

Avraham up until now was a man of the city, an urban dweller. He now had to learn to become a desert nomad and a tribal chief. He became responsible for those souls he had "made." He had to provide for them both spiritual and physically. Indeed, he rose up to the occasion and did what he was expected to do.

The real Avraham was a man molded by controversy and adversity. Although G-d was certainly on his side, nonetheless the nomadic lifestyle that Avraham and his tribe lived was arduous and hard. It made Avraham and his party tougher and stronger than they already were from the battles in Ur Casdim. After the legendary victory over the fire in the days of Nimrod, no one would ever dare mess with Avraham. Indeed, years later, in Canaan, when Lot was taken captive, Avraham in the typical desert fashion of his day attacked those who laid hands upon his kin. Avraham did not enter into negotiations with them, nor did he offer any bribes and certainly made no requests for mercy to anyone other than G-d. Avraham attacked his enemies and slaughtered them, as would be expected of any powerful tribal chief.

Avraham was also a man of honor. When restoring the booty from the battle, he wanted nothing for himself. Although he made arrangements for his companions to receive their rewards, Avraham's reward was the knowledge that he had performed a job well done. True men of honor do not seek financial wealth as their rewards; they seek only honor and respect. Indeed, Avraham deserved both, not only from men, but also from Heaven.

This was the reason why Heaven chose Avraham to become its agent here on Earth. This ordination of sorts occurred when Avraham met Melchizedek and through him made an offering of thanks to G-d. According to ancient sources, Avraham's meeting with Melchizedek was not simply to receive refreshments. Melchizedek actually passed on his own priesthood to Avraham. This is the moment when Avraham became the "father" of a "nation of priests."

Melchizedek, according to legend was none other than Shem, son of Noah. He received his priesthood from his father Noah, who in turn received it from his father, who received it in direct lineage from Adam himself. This priesthood was not an office of pomp and ceremony. Rather, it was a burden of responsibility. This priesthood was to serve all humanity. Its purpose was twofold, to provide humanity with the necessary instruction how to unite with Heaven by living proper moral lives and to provide the necessary atonement when such union fails to occur. Who more than Avraham was naturally capable of performing these tasks. The body of spiritual instruction associated with a "Melchizedekian priest" is what we refer to as the seven categories of universal law, known in Hebrew as the Sheva Mitzvot of Benei Noah.

Avraham passed this special birthright to Yitzhak. Yitzhak to Ya'aqob, who in turn delegated it equally to all twelve of his sons. Thus, we have the birth of the "nation of priests." Yet, although we have identified the priesthood, we often fail to understand what exactly is the role of such a priest. For this priesthood belongs to the entire Jewish people, whose job it is to be a "light to the nations."

A priest according to the order of Melchizedek, a term we find used in Psalms 110:4 with regards to David HaMelekh, was a person of responsibility. David was such a priest, as was the entire Jewish nation. His job, as King of Israel, was to unite Heaven and Earth. As a priest, he was not better than anyone else, not smarter, richer, or more handsome. A priest is not identified by his advantage over another, but rather by his burden.

A priest is not one who is served, but rather is the one who serves. A priest bares his burden of responsibility and carries out his tasks, often in a harsh and hostile environment where the surrounding peoples most need his services. Thus, we have defined the role and function of the Jewish people in this world. From its inception Israel was destined to be G-d's "suffering servant," even as described by the prophet Isaiah (chapter 53). All this began with Avraham.

Long before Avraham became a priest, he was a deeply spiritual Sage. In ancient times, no one considered there to be a distinction between one's physical life and one's spiritual wellbeing. Both were viewed as two sides of the same coin. Avraham was as concerned for his people's spiritual welfare as he was for their physical. In those ancient days, everybody did what was necessary to appease "the gods." Avraham, in his youth, along with his family were no exceptions. What made Avraham different was that he could think outside the context imposed upon him by his society. Rather than just follow the leadership of his family and people, Avraham set out on his own path and came to his own spiritual conclusions. Avraham found G-d through experience, not by rote teachings from a book.

Based upon the convictions of his own experience, Avraham began to teach his generation how they too can experience spiritual reality for themselves. Avraham did not teach a creed or a new religion. He taught people to open their eyes and to see spiritual truth for themselves. Needless to say, this did not make him a very popular fellow amongst the religious leadership of his community. We can only imagine the insults and accusations they hurled against Avraham, calling him every name in the book and accusing him of every crime ever conceived.

Avraham was indeed a very dangerous man to them. Not because he challenged the religious authorities of his day with a competing theology, but rather because he could release people from their religious prisons and teach them how to know G-d directly. He did not teach others to follow him instead of the local priests. Instead, he taught people to open their eyes and to see for themselves. Those with open eyes would by themselves see the foolishness in the pagan concepts taught around them. They would leave the old ways in droves because they could see for themselves what spiritual truth actually was. The pagan priests of the day certainly could not do this. Their religion was one of "follow me," as opposed to "see for yourself." This made Avraham a serious threat.

Avraham taught the most ancient of spiritual teachings emanating from Adam himself and passed on through Noah and Shem. These Sheva Mitzvot of the Benei Noah became the foundation upon which the Torah is built. They are the bridge that connects the Jewish people to the nations of the world. Torah Law requires every individual Jew, who comprise the nation of priests, to be a light to the nations.

Specifically there is a Halakhic obligation for Teachers of Torah to teach the Sheva Mitzvot to non-Jews. For centuries, Jewish people, in fear of their Gentile neighbors have failed miserably in doing this. Fear is a terrible thing. It should never have a place in the heart of a Jew, one who is a priest according to the order of Melchizedek. The Jewish people need to return to the role model of the warrior Sage priest Avraham and like him rise to the battle at hand.

Cowards will indeed die, they deserve nothing more. The brave will rise and soar like an eagle. Even the flames of kiln fire will not singe their garments. For like the phoenix, the children of Torah will be reborn and rise up from out of the ashes.

Religious people, take note! It is one thing to preach a good talk, to sound and look all so religious. It is quite another for one to "walk his talk" and act like a child of Avraham Avinu. Avraham did not only speak about good things, he put them into action. This is the way of Adam, Noah, Shem/Melchizedek, Avraham, Yitzhak, Ya'aqov, Moshe, Aaron, David and Shlomo. This is the way of Torah, the way of the Jew.

Frightened, weak, overly talkative types are not properly walking the Torah path, however religious they appear on the outside. For them history will indeed repeat itself. Their own weakness and cowardice will bring about their demise, as it was in Europe. I repeat, cowards will indeed die, they deserve nothing more. The brave will rise and soar like an eagle. Even the flames of kiln fire will not singe their garments. For like the phoenix, the children of Torah will be reborn and rise up from out of the ashes.

The Jewish people need to return to the role model of the warrior Sage priest Avraham and like him rise to the battle at hand. It is time for iconoclastic action and for confrontation. We have to emulate Avraham and not be afraid. In our world, where there are so few men, we all need to strive to become men. Our Sages in Pirkei Avot have taught this. They learned this simple wisdom from the life stories of the Biblical patriarchs. Avraham Avinu is our role model. We have to emulate him and not be afraid.