



INTRODUCTION TO JUDAISM

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COURSE LEVEL I

STUDENT GUIDE

NAME _____





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CLASS ONE

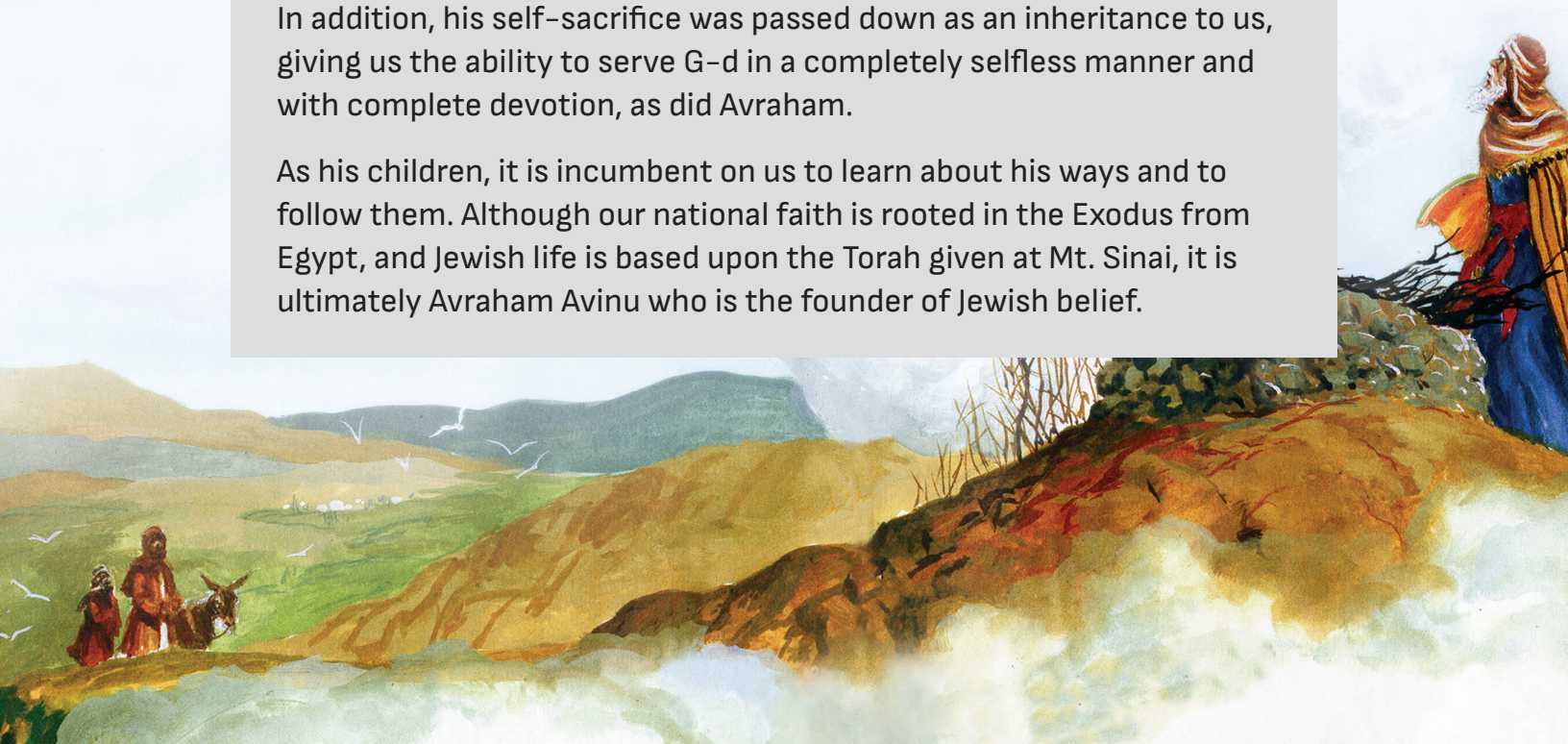
AVRAHAM & SARAH BEGIN THE JEWISH PEOPLE

- OVERVIEW -

Avraham Avinu (Abraham our father) was the progenitor of both the Jewish nation and of all religions that embrace monotheism. In contrast to the other faiths of the world, the Jewish people view Avraham Avinu as a role model who continues to guide and inspire his descendants.

In addition, his self-sacrifice was passed down as an inheritance to us, giving us the ability to serve G-d in a completely selfless manner and with complete devotion, as did Avraham.

As his children, it is incumbent on us to learn about his ways and to follow them. Although our national faith is rooted in the Exodus from Egypt, and Jewish life is based upon the Torah given at Mt. Sinai, it is ultimately Avraham Avinu who is the founder of Jewish belief.



KEY POINTS

- 1** Simply knowing our family history can raise self-esteem and help us cope with stress.
- 2** Exploring the lives of Avraham and Sarah will help us better understand ourselves and gives us the strength to overcome our challenges.
- 3** Avraham grew up worshiping idols. Thinking about the cause and effect of the universe led him to understand the existence of one G-d.
- 4** Avraham reasoned that the world must have a supreme leader and took a proactive stance against idolatry.
- 5** Idolatry is dangerous because without the foundation of a Supreme Being, ethics have no base to stand on.
- 6** Only once the building blocks of society stand upon the solid ground of a Supreme Being, can a society develop and sustain itself.
- 7** Avraham is called Ivri, “the other side,” reflecting his independent viewpoint. We, his grandchildren, have inherited this trait.
- 8** Avraham would convert men and Sarah would convert women.
- 9** G-d tested Avraham with ten tests.
- 10** G-d’s tests are intended to uncover hidden powers within an individual which would otherwise remain untapped.
- 11** The essential feature of a Jew being a descendant of Avraham is that he trusts in G-d when faced with a test.
- 12** Avraham and Sarah Do Chesed.
- 13** Kindness is not just another trait that the Jewish people possess; rather it is one of our distinguishing qualities.



INTRODUCTION

20 QUESTIONS

*Please answer the following questions by writing "yes" or "no."
(Even if you know the information we are asking about, you don't need to write it down.)*

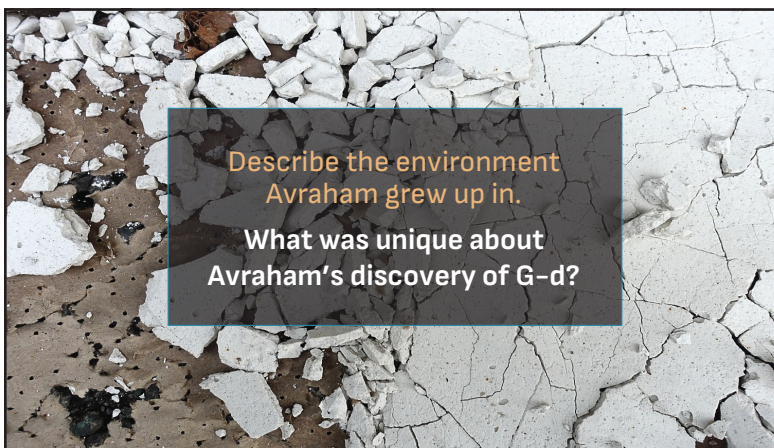
- 1** Do you know how your parents met? **Yes / No**
- 2** Do you know where your mother grew up? **Yes / No**
- 3** Do you know where your father grew up? **Yes / No**
- 4** Do you know where some of your grandparents grew up? **Yes / No**
- 5** Do you know where some of your grandparents met? **Yes / No**
- 6** Do you know where your parents were married? **Yes / No**
- 7** Do you know the source of your name? **Yes / No**

- 8** Do you know which person in the family you act most like?
Yes / No
- 9** Do you know some of the lessons that your parents learned from good or bad experiences? **Yes / No**
- 10** Do you know some things that happened to your mom or dad when they were in school? **Yes / No**
- 11** Do you know the national background of your family (such as British, German, Russian, etc.)? **Yes / No**
- 12** Do you know some of the jobs that your parents had when they were young? **Yes / No**
- 13** Do you know some awards that your parents received when they were young? **Yes / No**
- 14** Do you know the names of the schools that your mom went to?
Yes / No
- 15** Do you know the names of the schools that your dad went to?
Yes / No

The above questions are part of the "Do You Know?" 20 Questions About Family Stories, by Doctors Marshall Duke and Robyn Fivush.



Our forefathers and foremothers paved the path for us. They struggled to reveal the truth, they cleared away questions and doubts, they fought to spread the truth openly. Not only does walking on their path provide meaning and guidance for us, it gives us the strength to overcome our challenges today.



1. RAMBAM (MAIMONIDES), LAWS OF IDOLATRY (HILCHOT AVODAH ZARAH), CH. 1:3
Avraham grew up worshipping idols. Thinking about the cause and effect of the universe led him to understand the existence of one G-d.

After this prodigious child was weaned, he began to muse, while he was still young, and started to ponder by day and by night, and would question **how it was possible for the earth to continue to revolve without a guide.** (...)

And he had no mentor; nor did anyone reveal anything to him, but he was immersed in Ur Kasdim among foolish idolaters. **His father and mother and all of the people served idols, and he would serve with them,** while his heart pondered and mused, until he understood the path of truth and realized the line of justice by virtue of his own correct reasoning. Then he came to understand that there was only one G-d, and that He was the guide of the celestial wheel, He created everything, and that there is no G-d among all of creation other than Him.

כיון שנגמל איתן זה, התחיל לשריטט בדעתו, והוא קטן, והתחיל לחשוב ביום ובלילה, והיה תמיהה היאך אפשר שיהיה הגלגל הזה נוהג תמיד ולא יהיה לו מנהיג וכו'.

ולא היה לו מלמד ולא מודיע דבר, אלא מושקע באור כשדים בין עו"בדי כוכבים הטפשים, ואביו ואמו וכל העם עובדי כוכבים, והוא עובד עמהם, ולבו משוטט ומבין עד שהשיג דרך האמת והבין קו הצדק מתבוננתו הנכונה, וידע שיש שם אלוה אחד והוא מנהיג הגלגל, והוא ברא הכל, ואין בכל הנמצא אלוה חוץ ממנו.

2. BEREISHIT (GENESIS) RABBAH 39:1
Avraham reasoned that the world must have a leader.

Rabbi Yitzchak taught, "It is comparable to somebody who traveled from place to place, and saw a palace beautifully lit. **He said, 'The tower cannot be without a leader!'** [Then] the master of the tower appeared to him, and told him, 'I am the master of the palace.' So Avraham Avinu said, 'Can the world be without a leader?' G-d appeared to him and told him, 'I am the Master of the world.'"

אמר רבי יצחק משל לאחד שהיה עובר ממקום למקום וראה בירה אחת דולקת אמר תאמר שהבירה זו בלא מנהיג הציץ עליו בעל הבירה אמר לו אני הוא בעל הבירה כך לפי שהיה אבינו אברהם אומר תאמר שהעולם הזה בלא מנהיג הציץ עליו הקב"ה ואמר לו אני הוא בעל העולם.

3. RAMBAM (MAIMONIDES), LAWS OF IDOLATRY (HILCHOT AVODAH ZARAH), CH. 1:3 – AVRAHAM TAKES A PROACTIVE STANCE AGAINST IDOLATRY.

After Avraham recognized the existence of G-d he began to challenge the idol worship of Ur Kasdim and **argued with the idol worshippers**, saying that the path that they were following did not lead to the truth. He broke their idols and explained to all the people that it is only appropriate to serve the G-d of the Universe ...

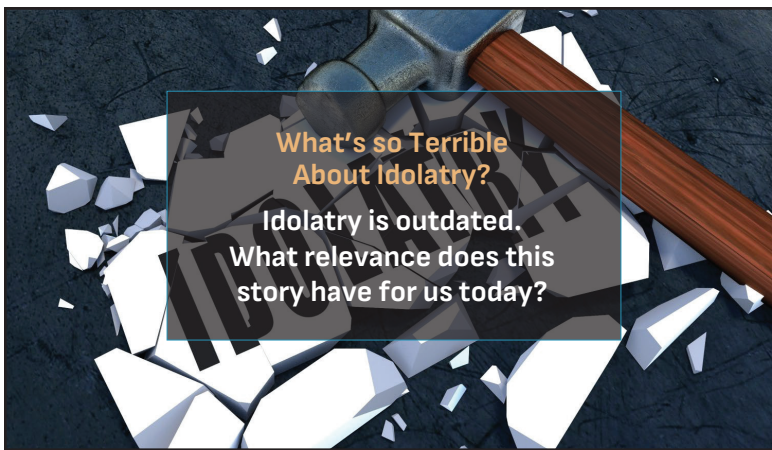
When Avraham and his ideas gained recognition the **King [Nimrod] attempted to kill him**. He was miraculously saved and traveled to Charan. Then Avraham arose and strongly asserted in a loud voice informing the entire world that there is one G-d in the universe, and only He should be served. He would travel from city to city and from kingdom to kingdom until he arrived at the **Land of Canaan ...**

When the people gathered around him and asked him about his teachings, he instructed them individually, **according to each person's understanding**, until each one returned to the path of truth. He continued to do this until he had tens of thousands of followers.

כיון שהכיר וידע התחיל להשיב תשובות על בני אור כשדים ולערוך דין עמהם ולומר שאין זו דרך האמת שאתם הולכים בה ושיבר הצלמים והתחיל להודיע לעם שאין ראוי לעבוד אלא לאלוה העולם...

כיון שגבר עליהם בראיותיו בקש המלך להורגו ונעשה לו נס ויצא לחרן, והתחיל לעמוד ולקרוא בקול גדול לכל העולם ולהודיעם שיש שם אלוה אחד לכל העולם ולו ראוי לעבוד, והיה מהלך וקורא ומקבץ העם מעיר לעיר ומממלכה לממלכה עד שהגיע לארץ כנען.

וכיון שהיו העם מתקבצין אליו ושואלין לו על דבריו היה מודיע לכל אחד ואחד כפי דעתו עד שיחזירוהו לדרך האמת עד שנתקבצו אליו אלפים ורבבות.



What's So Terrible About Idolatry?

With idolatry, ethics have no base to stand on. If you don't like what one god demands of you, you go find another god more to your taste. When none of the gods is all-powerful, anything could be justified.

**What was unique about Avraham?
Didn't Adam and Noach and others serve G-d?**

Idolatry is outdated. What relevance does this story have for us today?

4. BEREISHIT 12:5

<p>And Avram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had acquired, and the souls they had made in Haran...</p>	<p>וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָם אֶת־שָׂרַי אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאֶת־ לוֹט בְּנֵי־אָחָיו וְאֶת־כָּל־יְרוּכּוֹשָׁם אֲשֶׁר רָכָשׁוּ וְאֶת־הַנַּפְשׁ אֲשֶׁר־עָשׂוּ בְּחָרָן ...</p>
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5. BEREISHIT RABBAH 39:14

The “souls they had made in Haran” has a deeper meaning.

And the souls they had acquired in Haran:

Said Rabbi Elazar the son of Zimra: if all the dwellers of the universe would gather to create even one mosquito, they wouldn't be able to throw in it a soul. And yet you say “and the soul that they made?”

Rather this refers to the converts which they converted.

But if so that [the verse means] they converted [these people], why [does it say] “which they made?”

But it comes to teach you that whoever brings close a worshiper of the stars and converts him, it is as if he created him.

But let it say “which he made.” Why does it say “which they made?”

Said Rav Huna: **Abraham would convert the men and Sarah would convert the women.**

ואת הנפש אשר עשו בחרן

אמר רבי אלעזר בן זימרא אם מת-
כנסין כל באי העולם לברוא אפילו
יתוש אחד אינן יכולין לזרוק בו
נשמה ואת אמר ואת הנפש אשר
עשו אלא אלו הגרים שגיירו

ואם כן שגיירו למה אמר עשו אלא
ללמדך שכל מי שהוא מקרב את
העובד כוכבים ומגיירו כאלו בראו

ויאמר אשר עשה למה נאמר אשר
עשו אמר רב הונא אברהם היה
מגייר את האנשים ושרה מגיירת
את הנשים:

WHY IS AVRAHAM CALLED THE HEBREW IVRI?

Why is Avraham called the Hebrew *Ivri*?

“אברם העברי” רבי יהודה אומר כל העולם כולו מעבר אחד
והוא מעבר אחד

Rabbi Yehudah said, “[This teaches us that]
the entire world was on one side,
and he was on the other side.”

IVRI STANDING UP FOR THE TRUTH

6. RASHI, BEREISHIT 14:13 Why is Avraham called the Hebrew Ivri?

“Avraham the *Ivri*.”

Rashi explains that Avraham is called the *Ivri*, meaning the one who comes from the “other side of the river.”

אברם העברי

רש"י: העברי - שבא מעבר הנהר:



7. BEREISHIT RABBAH 42:8

**The “other side of the river” has a deeper meaning.
In truth, it reflects Avraham’s opposition to the world’s paganism.**

8. LIKUTEI SICHOT VOL. 20, PG. 13FF.

Nobody believed Noah. But Abraham, some say, convinced most of his generation.

Noah talked as someone who followed a tradition of the past. Abraham described how he had discovered G-d on his own.

Only once you have made it your own, then you can give it to others.



THE TEN TESTS OF ABRAHAM

9. PIRKEI AVOT (ETHICS OF THE FATHERS) 5:3 What did these tests prove?

Avraham was challenged with ten tests and overcame all of them to inform us how great was the love of our father Avraham [for G-d].

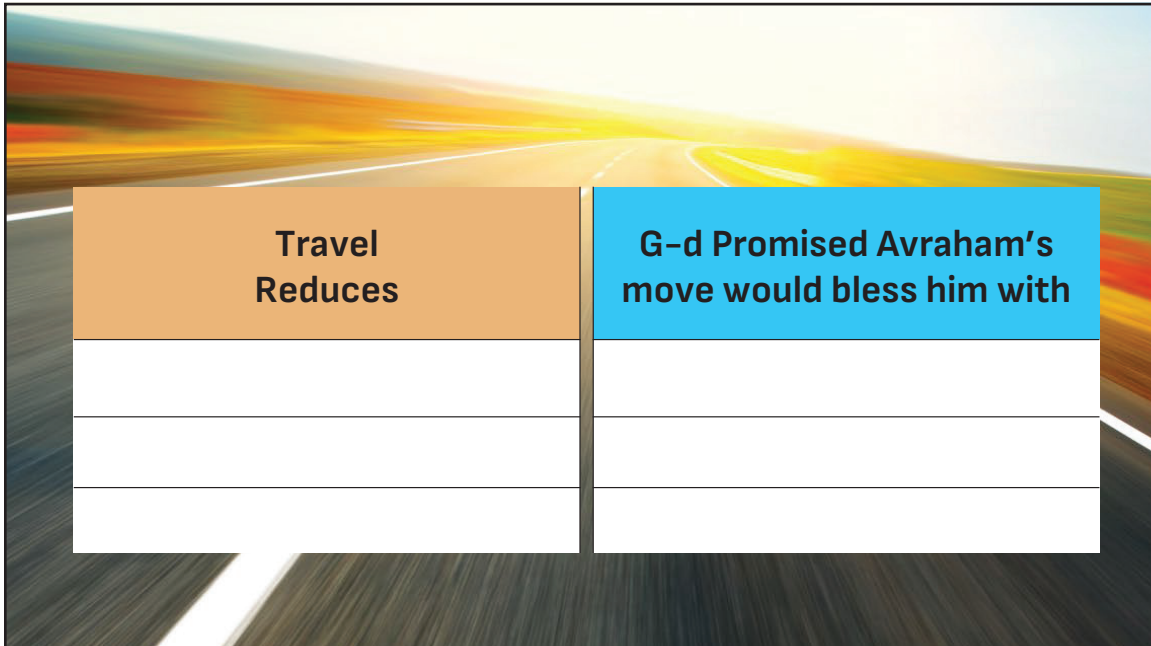
עשרה נסיונות נתנסה אברהם
אבינו עליו השלום ועמד בכולם
להודיע כמה חבתו של אברהם
אבינו עליו השלום:

G-d's tests are intended to uncover within an individual hidden powers which would otherwise be untapped. Abraham always had the courage, fortitude and love for G-d necessary to sacrifice his son, however, neither he nor the world was cognizant of this latent potential until G-d actually put him to the test.

10. BEREISHIT 12:1

And G-d said to Avram, **“Go for your own good, from your homeland, from your birthplace and from your father’s house, to the land that I will show you.”**

ויאמר ה' אל אברם לך לך מארצך וממולדתך ומבית אביך אל הארץ אשר אראך:



Travel Reduces	G-d Promised Avraham's move would bless him with

11. LUBAVITCHER REBBE SEFER HASICHOT 5749 VOL 1 P42

G-d promised Abraham that the move would be to his benefit in five ways:

- He would enjoy the immediate benefit of distancing himself from unwholesome people of Charan.
- Traveling usually reduces the odds of having children, but Abraham and Sarah would stay fertile.
- Traveling is expensive, but Abraham and Sarah would be blessed with wealth.
- Although traveling may lessen a person's renown because they are forgotten in their former home, G-d promised to make his name great.
- G-d promised to give Abraham the power to bless others and to make him a source of blessing.

12. BEREISHIT 22:1-3 The test of “the binding”

And it came to pass after these things, that G-d tested Abraham, and He said to him, “Abraham,” and he said, “Here I am.”

And He said, “Please take your son, your only one, whom you love, yea, Isaac, and go away to the land of Moriah and bring him up there for a burnt offering on one of the mountains, of which I will tell you.”

And Abraham arose early in the morning, and he saddled his donkey, and he took his two young men with him and Isaac his son; and he split wood for a burnt offering, and he arose and went to the place of which G-d had told him.

וַיְהִי אַחַר הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וַתְּסֻבֶּה אֱלֹהִים לְבָרֵךְ אֶת־אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֲבִי־רָחֵם וַיֹּאמֶר הִנְנִי׃

וַיֹּאמֶר קְחוּ־נָא אֶת־בְּנֵיךְ אֶת־יִחְזָקְיָהוּ אֲשֶׁר־אַתְּבֹרָה אֶת־יִצְחָק וְלֵךְ־לְךָ אֶל־אֶרֶץ הַמֹּרְיָה וְהַעֲלֵהוּ שָׁם לְעֹלָה עַל אֶחָד הַהָרִים אֲשֶׁר אֹמַר אֵלֶיךָ׃

וַיִּשְׁפֹּם אַבְרָהָם בַּבֹּקֶר וַיַּחֲבֹשׂ אֶת־חֲמֹרוֹ וַיִּקַּח אֶת־שְׁנֵי נְעָרָיו אֹתוֹ וְאֵת יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ וַיִּבְקַע עֵצִי עֲלֶיהָ וַיִּקֶּם וַיֵּלֶךְ אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־אָמַר־לּוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים׃

13. ABARBANEL BEREISHIT 22:1-3

[In the Binding of Isaac] lies the entire glory of Israel and their merit before their Father in Heaven. And that is why it is continually in our mouths, in our prayers, every day.

העקידה היא “כל קרן ישראל וזכותם לפני אביהם שבשמים, ולכן היא שגורה בפינו בתפילתינו כל היום”

The essential feature of a Jew being descended from Avraham is that he trusts in G-d when faced with a test.

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

14. RABBI SHALOM BREZOVSKY, NESIVOS SHALOM, BEREISHIT, PARSHAS LECHA LECHA
The Ten Tests – Avraham’s tests as a paradigm for each individual.

Just as Avraham was tested with the Ten Trials, so too each and every Jew is challenged during the course of their lives with “ten trials.” **For the life of every Jew is marked by ongoing challenges to inform him how endeared he is to G-d ...** The essential feature of a Jew being descended from Avraham is that he trusts in G-d when faced with a test.

כמו שאברהם אבינו נתנסה בעשׂר
רה נסיונות כך כל אחד ואחד מי
שראל מתנסה בימי חייו בעשרה
נסיונות, שכל חייו של איש יהודי
רצופים נסיונות, להודיע כמה חי
בתו לפני המקום... כל יהודי מזרע
אברהם אבינו העיקר מה שנמצא
נאמן בשעת נסיון.

Avraham could easily have chosen to follow the norm.
Instead, he followed his soul; he stood tall and firm in what he
knew to be the truth.

He passed on this legacy to his descendants.

We all have choices: to follow the tide, or to swim upstream.
To be satisfied with the status quo, or to improve our world
through a higher spiritual service or a greater moral code.
Throughout the centuries, Avraham’s descendants have
stood tall, uncompromising in their commitment, not swayed
by popular opinions.

ABRAHAM AND SARAH DO CHESED



Kindness is not just another trait that the Jewish people possess; rather it is one of our distinguishing qualities.

KINDNESS

1. PIRKEI AVOT 1:2 Chesed is one of the three pillars of the world.

The world rests on three pillars: On Torah, Divine service, and chesed – practicing kindness.

על שלשה דברים העולם עומד על
התורה ועל העבודה ועל גמילות
חסדים:

2. BEREISHIT 18:1-2 Avraham runs to welcome three travelers.

G-d appeared to him [Avraham] at Elonei (the plain of) Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. Avraham lifted his eyes and there were three men standing before him. He saw them, and ran to greet them from the entrance to his tent, and bowed to them. He said, "If I have found favor in your eyes, please do not pass over your servant."

וירא אליו יקוק באלני ממרא והוא ישב פתח האהל כחם היום: וישא עיניו וירא והנה שלשה אנשים נצבים עליו וירא וירץ לקראתם מפתח האהל וישתחו ארצה: ויאמר אם נא מצאתי חן בעיניך אל נא תעבור מעל עבדך:

3. RASHI, IBID. What is meant by "the heat of the day?"

What is meant by "the heat of the day"? G-d removed the sun from its protective covering in order not to bother Avraham with travelers [while he recovered from his circumcision]. But when G-d saw that he was upset that no travelers were coming, He brought the angels to him in the form of men.

כחום היום - הוציא הקב"ה חמה מנרתיקה שלא להטריחו באורחים, ולפי שראהו מצטער שלא היו אורחים באים, הביא המלאכים עליו בדמות אנשים:

4. BEREISHIT RABBAH 49:4

Practicing chesed and imparting awareness of the Creator.

Avraham used to offer hospitality to passers-by. After they would eat and drink, he would tell them to say grace. They asked him, "What should we say?" He answered them, "**Blessed is the Master of the world that we have eaten from what is His.**" If [the guest] would agree to make the blessing he would eat and drink, and depart.

אברהם היה מקבל את העוברים ואת השבים משהיו אוכלים ושוים תים אמר להם ברכו אמרו ליה מה נאמר א"ל אמרו ברוך אל עולם שאכלנו משלו אם מקבל עליו וברוך הוה אכיל ושתי ואזיל

5. TANYA CH. 18 Our forefathers inherited to us love for G-d

It is a «very close thing» for him [every Jew] to observe and practise all the commandments of the Torah and the «study of the Torah, which counter-balances them all [i.e. all the other commandments],» in his mouth and heart, from the depths of his heart, in true sincerity, with fear and love; namely, **the hidden love in the heart of all Jews which is an inheritance to us from our Patriarchs.**

קרוב אליו הדבר מאד לשמור ול-
עשות כל מצות התורה ות"ת כנגד
כולן בפיו ובלבבו ממש מעומקא
דלבא באמת לאמיתו בדחילו ור-
חימו שהיא אהבה מסותרת שבלב
כללות ישראל שהיא ירושה לנו
מאבותינו

PARTING QUESTIONS

1. How were Sarah and Abraham different from the people who lived around them?
2. How and why did G-d test Abraham?
3. "Life is a series of tests." What do you think this statement means?
4. How do you think Abraham and Sarah would do chesed if they were alive today?