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Rabbi Elliot Pearlson

*Parashat HaShavuah Series*

Parashat Lekh Lekha

This week, we read how Avram was commanded by God to leave his “country, [his] birth place, [his] father’s household, and go to the land that I will show you.” Just as his father Terach had fled Ur, Avram likewise sets out for holier prospects.

It was during this process that Avram was tested with the famous Ten Trials of Faith. One of these was the above-mentioned command to leave his home and travel to the unknown destination of the Promised Land. Among the other trials that Avram successfully passed were the trial of The Binding of Isaac and the lesser-known story of how Avram was thrown into the fiery furnace by King Nimrod and survived unscathed.

These stories suggest two very simple but dynamic questions: Why isn’t Terach acknowledged for leaving Ur as Avram was for leaving Charan? And the second question: Why was the amazing *midrash* of Avram’s first trial of Fiery Furnace not included in the Torah?

The classical answers to these questions give us tremendous insight into a philosophy of Judaism that has not only kept our People strong and a powerful force throughout history, but also enable us to respond to difficulties in our times as well.

Our Rabbis explain that Terach’s journey from Ur was an excellent beginning. He determined that the sinful environment was not appropriate for his family and so he left for a more suitable Holy Land.

That is truly noteworthy.

Therefore, this **is** mentioned in the Torah (Genesis 11:31), though this action is not compared to the holiness of Avram’s endeavor, because it was inconclusive. Even though we learn the famous maxim “*Lo alekha ham’lakha ligmor...*” (you are not obligated to finish the task), we also learn “*v’lo ata ben chorin l’hibbatel mimena*” (yet you are not free to evade it). Terach started on the right path but never finished the great journey that would have culminated in his arrival in the Holy Land of Israel.

Why wasn’t the story of Avram’s willingness to be thrown into a fiery furnace included in the Torah? Here, too, our rabbis teach us a very valuable lesson for today. Many people

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are willing to die for what they believe in. At the appropriate time, under appropriate circumstances, to die for certain Jewish values, *al kiddush HaShem*, is appropriate and praiseworthy.

The reality of life is that dying for one's values is relatively easy, if you think about it. How long would one suffer in a conflagration of the furnace? Ten seconds? A minute? Ninety seconds? Although a great mitzvah, not only is it fleeting, it is passive! The action is perpetrated by others upon the victim!

To die for one's beliefs is easy. To live for them is more difficult, more taxing and even more painful.

How long does it take to keep kosher? Hours! One must buy supervised foods, buy meats in specific shops, and arduously prepare them in labor-intensive ways.

How difficult is it to keep Shabbat? One must not only not work on the seventh day, one must stop working early on Friday to properly prepare for all the needs of a proper festive day. Dying for one's beliefs is easy. Living and toiling for a Torah way of life takes tremendous effort and perseverance.

Many propose that this is why Avram's willingness to die in the furnace is not recounted in the Torah and was relegated to *midrash*. Our faith is a religion that affirms and encourages LIFE and not death.

We could never send our children off to wars, hopeful that they will become martyrs for our cause. Jews could never send our children with a Bible in hand to lead the tanks into a field of land mines. Jews would never celebrate the death of children killed rioting or throwing stones or blowing themselves up.

Dying for one's beliefs is sometimes the easy way out. Living for Peace and Torah is hard work, a challenge that Jews have reached for and met for four thousand years.

*Shabbat Shalom!*

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