

OUR FATHER ABRAHAM

A CHARACTER SKETCH

COMPILED AND WRITTEN BY YA'ACOV N'TAN LAWRENCE OF HOSHANA RABBAH MESSIANIC CONGREGATION

(503)-570-3376 • hoshanarabbah@earthlink.net • www.home.earthlink.net/~hoshanarabbah

The Divine Chariot. “God’s Presence rests upon man to the extent that man permits. If he observes God’s commands only so long as they do not conflict with a particular passion — be it a desire for food, lust, avarice, heretical intellectual stimulation — then to whatever extent that weakness conflicts with his dedication to the will of God, the Shechinah [the divine presence of YHWH] cannot rest upon him. The bearer of God’s Presence is referred to as a chariot (*merkavah*). A royal chariot can bear the king if it is free of external encumbrances. Fill it with extraneous burdens[in modern parlance, *baggage*], and it will have no room for the king himself. And a royal chariot with no room for the king is a wagon, not a chariot” (*Bereishis*, Vol. 1, Artscroll Tanach Series, pp. 357-358).

“Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are God’s chariot on earth, because it was through them that His Presence descended to earth and found a place here. So great were they that they were able to negate their selves entirely, dedicating every feeling and fiber of their being to His service. Never was there a selfish consideration. Their very existence — every moment of it — was an exercise in perfect service. Because they negated themselves as individuals with rights and desires, they could totally absorb Godliness and thus become bearers — the Chariot — of His Shekinah” (*ibid.* p. 358).

“When Abraham received the honor of a visit from Abimelech and his field marshal, he greeted them as Abraham, the servant of God, not as Abraham, the Ibri, who had attained status in a strange land, far from his family and servants. Personal considerations concerned the Patriarchs not at all; therefore God’s Presence illuminated their every action and gave their every success an import that had implications millennia into the future” (*ibid.*).

•1 Cor. 3:16 — Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?

•1 Cor. 6:19 — What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?

•Eph. 2:21-22 — In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

Following is a list of the character attributes (followed by comments) of Abraham, the father of our faith. By studying the great personages of Holy Scripture and learning from their examples of obedience, faith and righteousness we may, by diligence, perseverance, personal determination and by YHWH’s grace, possibly attain to some small measure of their spiritual stature before YHWH Elohim.

—KINDNESS (CHESED) — ABRAHAM’S OVERARCHING CHARACTER TRAIT:

•*Bereishis Commentary*, pp. 361ff — “As we have seen, Abraham represents — *chesed* (kindness), for the decisive factor in Abraham’s personality was the unceasing urge to help others...The single-minded-determination to help others requires one to ignore his personal needs. It requires total humility, for if one’s own status, dignity, and comfort matter, then he will stand ahead of others. Even if his own desire for fulfillment can be achieved only by

winning recognition as the unselfish protector of the weak, then his kindness is tarnished by an inherently selfish need to use the deficiencies of others as stepping stones to the attainment of his own ends.” (p. 371)

•A Compassionate Intercessor (18:22-23) — Abraham pleads for the righteous souls of Sodom and the other four cities. In the *Stone Chumash* (p. 83) one commentator explains “why Abraham pleaded so strenuously for people who were so notorious for their wickedness. Ordinarily people preach kindness, but they become outraged and hate those who dispute their values. Abraham, on the other hand, cared only for the truth as defined by the Torah. He felt no animosity toward evildoers; he wanted only for them to change for the better. Therefore he felt that if there was a nucleus of ten good people in a city there was hope that they could influence the others by teaching and example.”

—HOSPITALITY TO STRANGERS:

•*Chumash*, (p. 78) 18:1,7— On the third day after Abraham’s circumcision when during a period when the wound is most painful and when the patient is in a very weakened state and on a day of searing heat he entertained the three Malachim (angels). He was more concerned for the well-being of his visitors than for his own needs. Likewise, it was on the third day of the men of Shechem’s circumcision “**when they were sore**” (Gen. 34:25) that Simeon and Levi took vengeance against them for raping their sister, Dinah.. These men were so sore that they were not able to run to defend themselves, yet Abraham, at age 99 “ran” to the three visitors and “bowed” to them and then went to prepare a feast for them (18:2-4). Remember:

•**Heb. 13:1-2 — Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.**

•**Mt. 25:35 — For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:**

•**Rom. 12:13 Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality.**

•**1 Tim. 3:2 A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach;**

•**1 Pet. 4:8-10 And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins. Use hospitality one to another without grudging. As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.**

—HUMBLE, MODEST AND NOT GREEDY OF MATERIAL GAIN:

•*Artscroll Tikkun*, (p. 35) 18:5 —Abraham offered the three visitors a morsel of bread and served them a sumptuous feast. This teaches that the righteous says little and do much.

•*Chumash*, (p. 65) 14:18-24 — Abraham’s little band of 318 household servants and herdsman did what the five kings of Canaan could not and defeat the four kings of the East showing his superiority as a military leader and strategist he neither humiliated the king of Sodom nor accepted the kings offer to keep the spoils of war which justly belonged to Abraham, the victor.

•**Prov. 22:4 — By humility and the fear of the LORD are riches, and honour, and life.**

•**Mt. 5:3 — Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

•Mt. 23:12 — And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.

•Jms. 4:6,10 — But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble...Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.

—A TORAH TEACHER (TO HIS SERVANTS AND CHILDREN) AND A SOUL WINNER:

•*Chumash*, (p. 83) 18:19 — “For I [YHWH] have loved him, because he commands his children and his household after him that they keep the way of YHWH, doing charity and justice, in order that YHWH might then bring upon Abraham that which He had spoken of him.” The *Chumash* commentators say that, “the word *y’dah-tiv* refers to *knowledge* not *love*, but the Torah often uses love as its secondary meaning, for one who loves another brings him close and seeks to know him well...One reveals his values by what he teaches his children. For one to preach morality but not inculcate it in one’s own family reveals that the preaching is less than sincere.”

•*Chumash*, (p. 55) 12:5 — “Abram took his wife Sarai and Lot, his brother’s son, and all their wealth that they had amassed, and the souls they had made in Haran; and they left to go to the land of Canaan, and they came to the land of Canaan.” The commentators say, “The *souls* refer to those whom they had converted to faith in Hashem, for Abraham converted the men and Sarah the women. According to the simple meaning, however, it refers to the servants they had acquired, who agreed unanimously to accompany Abraham on his mission.”

•*Tikkun*, (p. 51) 24:35 — When making his case to Rebecca’s family to let her come with him, Eliezer says, “Hashem has greatly blessed my master, and he prospered; He has given him flocks, cattle, silver and gold, servants and maidservants, camels and donkeys.” The *Tikkun* comments that the word for *servants* is *avodim* and is usually spelled ayn, vet, dalet, yod, mem. However, in this passage the spelling is defective with the yod being substituted with a vowel point under the dalet. The absence of this letter teaches that Abraham did not have as many *avodim* as he could have had since he taught all the members of his household including his servants and herdsman the Torah and to be honest and God-fearing people. Those who could not meet Abraham’s high standards of character were not permitted to remain.

•Prov. 11:30-31 — The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise. Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth: much more the wicked and the sinner.

•Dan. 12:2-3 — And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.

•Jms. 5:20 — Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.

—COURAGEOUS:

•*Chumash*, (p. 61) 14:1 and (p. 63) 14:14 — “This chapter reveals a new side of Abraham’s nature: his physical courage in battle. The Sages identify King Amraphel as Nimrod who reigned over Shinar (Babylon) and who was a world leader in rebellion against YHWH and in establishing an satanic and idolatrous religious system. This would have put righteous and God-fearing Abraham, who had a reputation in that region as “mighty prince” (See Gen. 23:6) and who originally hailed from Babylon squarely at odds with Nimrod, his spiritual antithesis and archrival. Nimrod who was at the head of the list of the four kings, and therefore was the lead and most powerful

king, dominated the five Canaanite kings who were his vassals. The Canaanite kings were rebelling against Nimrod who had swept into the area to quell the uprising. Against this backdrop Abraham, with at least two scores to settle (his ire at Nimrod's attempts to paganize the world and his capture of Abraham's nephew, Lot) arose in righteous indignation against the wicked Nimrod. Abraham armed his disciples and pursued the Babylonians "splitting his forces to follow the fugitives as they scattered in various directions, and he forced them to return home ignominiously."

•**Prov. 28:1** — **The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion.**

•**Heb. 13:6** — **So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.**

•**Rom. 8:31** — **What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?**

•**1 John 4:4** — **Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.**

•**Rom. 8:37** — **Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.**

—**INTERNAL FORTITUDE AND COURAGE TO OBEY YHWH QUICKLY (EVEN IN THE FACE OF EXCRUCIATINGLY TOUGH DECISIONS):**

•*Chumash*, (p. 96), 21:9-14 — The sending away of Hagar and Ishmael at YHWH's command. "That Abraham found it repugnant to send Ishmael away is clear from the narrative, but he was strong enough to do whatever he was commanded."

•Sacrifice of Isaac, 22:1,3

—**A PEACEMAKER AND TOTALLY SELFLESS:**

•*Chumash*, (p. 59), 13:8 — "**So Abram said to Lot: 'Please let there be no strife between me and you, and between my herdsman and your herdsman, for we are kinsmen...'**" "Abraham wanted peace, but he understood that the only way the two families could avoid strife was to separate from one another. So, too, in the future, God in His wisdom decreed that Israel was not to be friendly with Lot's descendants, for anyone who tried to show them mercy would suffer humiliation and war. The Torah loves peace and Abraham exemplified peace, but any person who seeks peace in opposition to the wisdom of the Torah courts disaster. Abraham bowed to God's wisdom when he said to Lot, '**Let there be no strife...'**"

Additionally, even though YHWH had given all this land to Abraham and his descendants (12:7) (though Lot was a relative of Abraham, he was not his descendant) and it was his, by divine right, to give to whomsoever he desired, he let Lot choose the better portion of land (13:10-11).

•**Acts 20:35** — **I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Yeshua, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.**

•**Php. 2:3** — **Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.**

•**Rom 12:10** **Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another...**

—THE TEN TRIALS OF ABRAHAM:

The concept of trial. According to the commentary in the *Stone Edition Chumash*, Abraham did not win his new status [as being YHWH's human instrument through which the divine Torah would be passed on to future generations and as the progenitor of the chosen people of YHWH] by default; he had to prove his greatness by passing ten tests of faith. The first trial mentioned in Scripture is in the very first verse of the first passage where Abraham is introduced in Scripture (Gen. 12:1). Here YHWH commands Abraham to give up his entire past and follow God's lead to a new land. By definition, a Heavenly test is one that forces a person to choose between God's will and his own nature or understanding of what is right. Clearly, it would be no challenge to Abraham, who was the epitome of kindness, to be asked to help the needy, but it would be a supreme test of faith for him to desert his aged father and homeland or to give his cherished, beloved son as an offering. Thus, Abraham was tested by being forced to subordinate his wishes and wisdom to those of God. By doing so, he demonstrated his conviction that man's highest goal is to accept the Divine wisdom as the sole truth (*ibid.* p. 54).

"Everyone's trial varies according to what he is. For someone to follow his instincts and preferences proves only whether or not his instincts are sound, but it does not prove that his love of God is great enough to lift him above his personal desires. Abraham could not be tested by asking him to search for guest [or to show kindness or hospitality]...Those would not be tests, for they were nothing more than normal behavior for Abraham...Therefore, many of Abraham's trials involved behavior which ran counter to his generous personality or which would have driven people away from his company...The command, Get **yourself rom your land (12:1)**, can be seen as a break with family and past, never an easy thing to do for a man of seventy five" (*Bereshis Commentary*, p. 395).

"When Abraham began his life of recognizing and proclaiming God, man had fallen from the cognition of creation through two successive ten-generation plunges into the spiritual abyss. The Ten Trials were designed to raise Abraham to ever higher levels of greatness [by transcending his own natural proclivities and those of the society around him — a refining process in character development, i.e., in righteousness, holiness and obedience to YHWH] until he stood at the level of 'in the beginning' (*ibid.* p. 391).

Why ten trials? "Ten denotes perfection; the Ten Sefiros emanations, represents a development from beginning to completion" (*Ibid.*, p. 391). God created the universe with ten utterances, there were ten generations from Adam to Noah, another ten generations from Noah to Abraham, the ten trials of Abraham, the Ten Statements of Exodus 20, and so on (*ibid.*).

Here is a list of the Ten Trails:

- (1) Exile from his family and homeland—leaving Babylon and trekking to Canaan (or going from New York City to the badlands of Wyoming):
- (2) Famine in Canaan forces flight to Egypt:
- (3) Abduction of Sarah in Egypt:
- (4) War with the four kings:
- (5) Marriage to Hagar:
- (6) Commandment of circumcision:
- (7) Abimelech's abduction of Sarah:
- (8) Having to drive Hagar away:
- (9) Having to drive Ishmael away:
- (10) The binding of Isaac on the altar.