

April 2017 – Live English Broadcast
Netzach Yisrael Yeshivah, Yerushalayim
Abraham's Essential Character Traits
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1. THE SEVENTH OF ADAR

Good afternoon to everyone around the world. We are about to enter the festival of Pesach which is the holiday of liberation and freedom. The Exodus from bondage and from Egypt and all its limitations, the limitations in life.

The name of the month in the Torah is the month of Nissan, which is the month of the spring. In the Torah it is called “the month of spring” (חדש האביב), connecting it with new growth and new life. The entire world is renewing itself with new life. Winter is a period of hibernation and now we are all meant to wake up and sprout anew, like a little piece of vegetation.

This is also how the Mashiach is described, like a new sprout, new life that comes out of the earth. In English the word “spring” also means to leap, like a springboard, which can help you in rejuvenating and renewing yourself.

The topic today is about rejuvenation and renewal. We are taught in Psalms, “May my youth be renewed and rejuvenated like an eagle.”¹ The *midrash* relates that in essence the eagle dies and returns to life every ten years. Renewal is what the Exodus is all about.

In Hebrew the word for “renewal” is *hitchadshut* (התחדשות), from the word “new,” or *chadash* (חדש). This word can also be read as “month” (חודש) because the beginning of each month is with the rebirth of the moon, which so to speak passed away and then is suddenly reborn. About this month, the month of Nissan, it says, “This for you is the month that is the head of all months.”² From this verse we learn that Nissan is “the month” (חודש). “The month” means the experience and Divine service of renewal and rejuvenation. Whereas Rosh Hashanah, the New Year begins with the month of Tishrei, the first month of the year is actually Nissan. Additionally, there are a number of particular laws for which the new year is the first day of Nissan.

In our last two live broadcasts, we focused on a specific archetypal soul of Israel. The archetypal figure that we will focus on today, Abraham, is related to the renewal in Nissan and its being the first of the months. Abraham was the first Jew, the first Jewish soul. When experiencing renewal, we connect ourselves to the first Patriarch, Abraham. Abraham was born after nineteen generations of darkness and with him begins a new epic; a new light appears on the horizon of history. The prophet Isaiah describes Abraham's appearance on the historical stage with the words, “Who awakened justice

¹. Psalms 103:5.

². Exodus 12:2.

from the east?"³ Abraham! One might say that the whole world is being renewed in the merit of the appearance of the first Jew, Abraham.

As we have done in the previous broadcasts, we will try now to outline a full model, a *partzuf*, of the soul of Abraham as he is described in the Torah. This will include the events that happened to him in his life, his interactions with other people. Abraham dedicated his life to all of humanity, striving to bring them to recognize the truth of one good God who is the continual Creator, the one who renews creation at every moment. As stressed in Chassidic teachings, Abraham's consciousness of the Creator was not that creation was a one-time event, but rather that God recreates and sustains all of reality at every moment.

Apart from his renewal of spirit and faith in one God, Abraham is linked with the month of Nissan in another way. The Torah's three festivals, Pesach, Shavu'ot, and Sukkot correspond to the three Patriarchs. Pesach, the festival that occurs in Nissan corresponds to Abraham and thus the entire month of Nissan is connected with Abraham from this context as well.

The first thing about Abraham that makes him the first Jew more than any other soul, is that he had total self-sacrifice for his mission on Earth. People can be in this world and not realize that they have a purpose, that they have something they need to do in the world. But, Abraham, was constantly living with his mission.

Abraham and 1948

Abraham was born in the year 1948 from the creation of Adam. This is obviously a number that many Jews today have a certain awareness of. Here it measures the amount of time it took for Abraham to appear on the scene of history and as we shall see it has another more modern meaning. Until Abraham, the world was in a state of darkness and with Abraham's soul entering, there was light. Darkness in the Torah is also a symbol for exile. For instance, in Egypt we were in exile, in darkness. Currently we have been in exile since the destruction of the Second Temple. How many years have we now been in exile? To give an answer, we have to know in what year the Second Temple was destroyed. There are two opinions among the historians: either 68 CE or 70 CE. If you add 1948 to these two numbers, you will find that we are currently, this year, in between the two values (i.e., the sum of 69 and 1948 is 2017). Meaning that this year, it has been 1948 years of darkness since the destruction of the Second Temple.

The sages ask a seemingly straightforward question regarding Abraham's birth. Since

Since Abraham is light and faith in God and His continuous renewal of creation, why did God not bring his soul down right at the start of creation? Why was Abraham's soul not the soul of the first man? There is actually a relatively well-known allusion in the Torah to Abraham's soul being present at the moment of creation. The verse reads, "These are the annals of the heavens and the earth when they were created."⁴ The word for "when they were created" (בְּהִנְרָאם) permutes to spell the word, "with Abraham"

³. Isaiah 41:2.

⁴. Genesis 2:4.

(בְּאֲבְרָהָם), suggesting to us that the world was created with the soul-root of Abraham. There is yet another allusion to Abraham's soul being the primary building block of creation. Abraham's attribute is loving-kindness. A verse in Psalms states that, "the world is built [created] with loving-kindness."⁵ Abraham's attribute of loving-kindness was present at the creation of the world. These two allusions merely strengthen the question of why God did not put Abraham's soul into a body at the outset of creation and then surely everything would have been different. Adam would not have sinned and all of mankind would have accepted faith in one God.

The answer given by the sages is that God saw that if Adam would not be able to complete his own mission in life, if humanity was derailed by Adam's actions (as it indeed was) then Abraham would offer the world a second chance by rectifying whatever Adam damaged. But, if God would have brought Abraham's soul down at the very beginning of creation, who knows what might happen. The situation in the Garden of Eden with the serpent and the Tree of Knowledge was very precarious. If Abraham would have failed his own mission, there would be no one left to rectify the damage. This is a simple but profound point. Abraham had the power to fix all that had gone wrong in the nineteen generations that had passed from the creation of Adam until his own generation. It is profound because it reveals that the Jewish essence (Abraham being the first Jew) is to fix things, and with a soul as great as Abraham's the goal is to fix the entire world.

Maybe if Abraham was the first person, the whole world would have turned out good and then there would be no special place for the Jewish people. What gives ultimate pleasure to the Creator we cannot know, but from what actually happened we can surmise that God knew that it was a very good possibility that Adam would sin and then Abraham would appear on the scene and fix everything. So in short, Adam ended up ruining reality while Abraham fixed it. In Hebrew these two phrases, "Adam ruined" (אָדָם הָרָאשׁוֹן קִלְקַל) and "Abraham fixed" (אֲבְרָהָם אֲבִינוּ תִקַּן) actually have the same value, 867. Since in Hebrew each of the phrases has 3 words, the average value of each word in both phrases is 289, or the square of 17, where 17 is the value of "good" (טוֹב). 289 is also the value of the second and third words in the Torah, "God created" (בְּרָא אֱ-לֹהִים). As we said before, Abraham's name is related to the word "when they were created" (בְּהִבְרָאָם). Once again, the Divine plan was that if Adam would cause damage, Abraham would fix things.

There is another teaching from the sages that relates to Abraham's role as the individual who began to rectify reality. The purpose of creation was for God's Presence to be here with us in our physical realm. The sages describe this as, "the Almighty craved a dwelling place below." The sages note that there were seven great sins until Abraham appeared. Each sin caused the Divine Presence to recede further from this world into the seven firmaments, which also correspond to the seven emotive faculties. First, Adam sinned, then Cain murdered Abel, and so on. The final sin caused the

⁵. Psalms 89:3.

Divine Presence to disappear completely from our reality (similarly to how the world was created in seven days).

Then Abraham appeared and his essential renewal was that he reversed the process. He drew the Divine Presence down from where it was beyond all reality and made it descend into the first level, corresponding to loving-kindness, the first emotion of the heart, which is also Abraham's essential faculty. Actually, this first descent included in its essence a complete return of the Divine Presence into reality, just as the first emotion, loving-kindness, includes in its essence all seven emotive faculties. Still, in practice, it took six more generations (until Moses) for the Divine Presence to fully come back down into our reality. The point is that no one but Abraham could have initiated the reversal needed to get the Divine Presence back into our reality. God was, so to speak, leaving reality and all of a sudden comes Abraham and makes God return to reality. The essential reversal Abraham caused was for loving-kindness to reappear and in loving-kindness were inter-included the other emotive faculties of the heart. Even though it took another seven generations until Moses came and with the Giving of the Torah and the construction of the Tabernacle made the Divine Presence dwell in our reality, it all started with Abraham. In fact, it says that what makes Moses great is that he is the seventh generation from Abraham. It all depends on the first.

3. ABRAHAM'S ESSENTIAL CHARACTER TRAITS

Crown: self-sacrifice

Let us now begin to look at Abraham's character, taking care to explain the correspondence between his traits and the *sefirot*.

To accomplish all this, to live with his mission, Abraham had to exhibit self-sacrifice from an early age. It began when he was a little boy. His father, Terach, had a store where he sold idols. Abraham did not like his father's occupation, so he simply broke all the idols. God created the world with human nature and human nature dictates that a father loves his son. But, this time Abraham had gone too far. When Terach entered his store and saw all the idols shattered on the floor and realized that it was Abraham's doing (he was Terach's firstborn), not only did he not forgive Abraham, he handed him over to the king, Nimrod. Because Abraham had destroyed their gods, King Nimrod threw him into the furnace. Surviving the fiery furnace was the first of the ten trials that Abraham endured, trials that tested his faith in one God. This first trial is not described explicitly in the Torah, but is alluded to in certain phrases. Miraculously, Abraham emerged unscathed from the furnace.

In many Chassidic classics, we are taught that a person needs to be able to imagine how for the sake of his faith in God, he is willing to be thrown into the fire. If my father Abraham was like this and could do that, then I too have the same genes in my spiritual makeup. His readiness for self-sacrifice is the trait that makes up the crown of Abraham's figure.

The conscious mind cannot constantly entertain a single thought. But, the super-conscious mind can. When a person is living according to a mission, that mission is in

his crown. It is continuously present with him. Abraham is living with his mission from the very first moment that he came to recognize and know God, the Creator.

The three heads in Abraham's crown

Abraham is referred to as the "first man of faith," the head of all believers. The crown contains three heads, the highest of which is the head of faith. The first to have that revealed in him is Abraham. He had simple faith in God, above reason and above the intellect.

The second head is called "Divine pleasure." Abraham purchased the Cave of the Machpela for 400 silver coins. According to the *Zohar*, these 400 silver coins represent 400 worlds of infinite Divine pleasure. If a person is identified with love, that too goes together with pleasure, in what is known as "Pleasurable love" (אהבה בתענוגים). Love, which when consummated, is infinite pleasure. So, since Abraham is all love, he is also infinite pleasure.

The first command Abraham received from the Almighty was to leave his birthplace and move to the land that God would show him. This command began with the words "*Lech Lecha*" (lit., "Go for your own sake"). The Torah's third portion begins with these words and is therefore named after them as the portion of *Lech Lecha*. God instructs Abraham to go from his land to the land that He will show him. The word "land" (ארץ) in Hebrew is cognate to the word for "will" (רצון). Will is the third supernal head in the crown. To leave one's land and go to a yet unknown land requires tremendous power of will, the will necessary to fulfill one's Divinely guided mission on earth.

All three heads of the crown are thus manifest in Abraham. He is the first to believe, he possesses infinite pleasure, and the first commandment he receives from God reveals God's will that he leave his initial state of will (his initial homeland) and adopt the will that God shows him, symbolized by the Promised Land. Thus, the Promised Land represents the ability to tune in and be attentive not to your own will, but to what God wants from you, and even to nullify your will before God's will. One nullifies his initial will because one realizes that everything that happens in life, from the moment you wake up to the moment you go to sleep is a sign from God about where God wants you to go. Everything is a form of *Lech Lecha*, a command from God to go to the place He will show you. Right now you do not know what the destination is, but God will show you. Again, this is the nullification of my own will before God's will. The limited state of my own will is the Egypt—the constricted and limited space—from where I need to escape. It is what keeps me submissive to my own limited will. As soon as I am able to break beyond my limited will and be attentive to God's will, then I will right away see how God is sending me signs in which direction to head. This is the third head of the crown.

The Intellectual Faculties: Wisdom, Understanding, and Knowledge

Wisdom is called the father principle. Not only is Abraham the first patriarch, meaning father, but his name itself begins with the two letters that spell the word "father" (אב). When God told Abraham later on to circumcise himself, He said that Abraham would be made into the "father of all nations." He added a *hei* (ה) to Abraham's name. Before that his name was Avram, which means, "the father of Aram," his own nation. But, now,

with the additional *hei*, Avram becomes “Abraham,” which means “the father of all nations,” not just his own. He becomes the father of all mankind in the present and all mankind in the future. Again, father in Kabbalah is related to wisdom.

Abraham initial name, Avram, also meant, “Exalted father” (אב רם). In Kabbalah, this name is related to what is known as the “concealed wisdom” (חכמה סתומה), simply put, the faculty of wisdom within the supernal crown. He was gifted with a supreme faculty of mind that until that moment in history had not yet been revealed by any human being. Because of this faculty of concealed wisdom, he was able to rectify reality and that made him the father of all mankind.

Wisdom, Understanding, and Knowledge in knowing the Creator

The sages tell us that from the age of three, Abraham was already able to make use of this concealed faculty of wisdom and as a result, the Creator revealed Himself to Abraham. How did this happen? Abraham contemplated nature. As a gifted child, Abraham, the father of the Jewish people and the father of all of humanity used his intelligence. To be able to put intelligence to use is related to the faculty of understanding. Abraham contemplated nature, all the while trying to figure out which of nature’s many forces was the one that created the universe. Eventually, he came to the recognition that the sun is not what created the universe, nor was it the moon, etc. At this very moment, when he had ruled out all possibilities about the Creator being a force in nature, God revealed Himself to Abraham. In effect, we can relive Abraham’s experience ourselves, particularly this month. When you have negated all other options—when you are able to negate everything around you—that is the moment when the Almighty appears, revealing Himself as the Creator of everything. At this point Abraham had come to know and recognize his Creator. What we have thus described is how the two powers of the intellect—wisdom and understanding—work in conjunction and then lead to the faculty of knowledge. The process that Abraham’s intellect followed is the exact order that the intellectual faculties follow: from wisdom and understanding to knowledge. Wisdom was his innate gift, as explained above.

Innate wisdom (as opposed to acquired wisdom, wisdom that is the result of experience) allows an individual to see the effect that will come out of every cause, to see the future as it develops from the present, to see that which is coming into being. Then, the faculty of understanding allows you to contemplate and use your rational mind to figure out what the reason behind what you are seeing is. Finally, when you are able to negate all your initial theories, you merit knowledge. All of a sudden, the true reason for all that you have seen is revealed and you come to know God.

Abraham’s first three years

We might say that it was these three faculties that Abraham used during the first three years of his life, and in order. The first year was dedicated to the wisdom of an innately gifted child. The second year was dedicated to contemplation and investigation. In the third year of his life, God appeared to him and from then on Abraham knew God. So, these are the three intellectual faculties of the first Patriarch that in Abraham appeared successively.

Let us stress that this is what might be called the natural order of appearance of the intellectual faculties. This might not be the order in which they appear in every individual. There are people in whom the order of their appearance is different.

Loving-kindness: Abraham's love

Every permutation of the order of the intellectual faculties begets a different emotive faculty in the heart.⁶ In Abraham's case, where wisdom, understanding, and knowledge appeared in that order, the emotive faculty that is born in the psyche is loving-kindness (אהבה), whose inner experience is love. Thus, even though Abraham is described as having set himself apart from all the people of his generation due to his opinions and his belief in monotheism, he was full of love for all people and all nations—the root experience of his heart. His love was not without direction though, as he loved all people for the sake of bringing them over to his understanding and faith in the one God.

In the Prophets we find that Abraham is described as, "Abraham, the one who loves me [God]."⁷

In the Pentateuch, there are exactly 42 instances of different conjugations of the word "love." As we might expect, the very first time the word "love" appears in any context is in relation to Abraham, specifically, regarding Abraham's love for Isaac. When God commands Abraham to take his son Isaac and to offer him as a sacrifice, He says, "Take your son, your only one, whom you love, Isaac."⁸ Meaning, that all the love of the Torah, all the love in reality is encapsulated in this first appearance of the word "love." Isaac was Abraham's only son from his wife, Sarah, and he was meant to be his successor. The simple meaning then is that with all this love, Abraham should offer him as a sacrifice. In the end, it was revealed that this was only a trial.

When translating the verse describing God's command to Abraham regarding Isaac, we usually find, "[God] said: Take your son, your only one, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and raise him there as a sacrifice on one of the mountains that I will show you."⁹ As we know, this did not actually happen. Did God deceive Abraham? It is explained that God's commandment to Abraham can be understood just a little bit differently and then God's true intent is revealed concealed in the words. The sages comment¹⁰ that the command, "raise him there as a sacrifice," can be alternately understood to be a command to take Isaac up the mountain and elevate him, then to bring him down, alive and well. That was all that was intended.

In Kabbalah¹¹ this is explained even more deeply. Since the command was to take the son that he loves and elevate him, the meaning was that Abraham should elevate the

⁶. In short, the order of the three intellectual faculties can be permuted in six different ways. There are also six emotive faculties of the heart. Corresponding them correctly to one another illustrates that each particular permutation in the order of the intellectual faculties gives rise to a different emotive power of the heart.

⁷. Isaiah 41:8.

⁸. Genesis 22:2.

⁹. Ibid.

¹⁰. *Bereisheet Rabbah* 56:8.

¹¹. Rabbi Issac Luria, *Sefer Haleekuteem*, c. 21, s.v. *Vayehee achar hadevareem*.

tremendous love (again, encapsulating all the love in the world) that he had for his only son that was born when he was one hundred years old, take that love and elevate it all to the Almighty; give it back to God. When you give it back to God, God will return it to you. But, as we explained, to serve God, one must first elevate all his will and give it to God. As God commanded Abraham, relinquish your will (the land in which you were born, as above) and go to the land that I will show you. God created love and it's good to love other people—there's a commandment in the Torah to love all Jewish souls and all creatures that God created. But, the idea is that you give all this love to God, and by standing that trial, God tells you that you can have it back to love your son, to love what you loved before.

Abraham's fear: the power to elevate love

What is the power that elevates love? Here we have reached the deep secret behind the binding of Isaac: the inter-inclusion of Abraham and Isaac's principle faculties: love and fear. At the end of this trial, God's angel says to Abraham, "Now I know that you are God-fearing."¹² If before the Binding of Isaac Abraham possessed only love of God, now he had fear of God as well. This came from his uniting or binding with his son Isaac causing their principal faculties to inter-include: Isaac's faculty of fear of God within Abraham, who until now was one who only loved God.

We are taught in Kabbalah and Chassidut that the fear that Abraham gained is an elevating faculty. In general, love descends (as it is relatively a masculine/right-axis power, and the right axis begins above and moves downwards) while fear or awe ascends (as it is a relatively feminine/left-axis power). If God wanted Abraham to elevate his love towards Him, the only way that Abraham could do this was by adding or inter-including fear into his psyche. Together, love and fear are like the two wings of the soul with which it can both ascend and descend. The power to descend lies with love—the right wing—and the power to ascend lies with fear—the left wing. Now, following the Binding of Isaac, Abraham possessed both love and fear in a balanced manner and so he could elevate his love for Isaac to love of God.

When everything was done, God gave Abraham back all his love so that he could continue to love Isaac and the entire world. But, Abraham's fear of God remained. The idea here is that as the Ba'al Shem Tov's father told him before his passing, you should fear only God. So the fear that helped elevate Abraham's love remained focused on God while the love descended back down into reality, giving Abraham the renewed ability to love all of God's creation. This is the ideal state of love and fear in every person: to love all of God's creation but to fear only God alone.

This has been an explanation of Abraham's first two emotive attributes: loving-kindness (which is love) and might (which is fear).

Beauty: Compassion for and from his offspring

Where do we find that Abraham had compassion (רחמים), the third emotive faculty associated with the *sefirah* of beauty (*tiferet*), the special faculty of the third Patriarch,

¹². Genesis *ibid.* v. 12.

Jacob? There is a verse that reads, “Jacob who redeemed Abraham.”¹³ This verse contains an allusion to Abraham’s first trial with his father’s idols in Ur Cassdim. This verse is actually saying that God saved Abraham—Abraham was redeemed—from the furnace miraculously by the merit of his grandson, Jacob, who was yet to be born. God looked into the future and saw that Jacob would be born from Abraham. God is above time and sees past, present, and future together all at once. The *Tanya* explains that this verse also means that if you feel that you cannot love someone (perhaps he hurt you, or perhaps he is hurting his surroundings), you can redeem the love in your heart, you can rekindle the love for that person, by having compassion for him or her. You can do so for instance by identifying with God who also has compassion for this person, hoping that he will change for the better. These are the two interpretations of this verse that links Abraham with Jacob’s attribute of compassion.

How else do we see this connection in Abraham’s life apart from his being saved from Nimrod’s furnace in Ur Cassdim? We see it in Abraham’s relationship with his first son, Ishmael, who was born fourteen years before Isaac from Sarah’s maidservant Hagar. Abraham beseeched God that, “would it be that Ishmael will live before You [God].” In spite of knowing how bad Ishmael was, Abraham had compassion for him. When Sarah found out about how dangerous Ishmael’s behavior and personality were (he would shoot arrows at Isaac, supposedly in play, but with the secret intent that one would kill Isaac), she asked Abraham to cast him away together with his mother, Hagar. For Abraham this was very difficult to do. So much so that it is considered one of the ten trials that he endured in his life. God Himself appeared to Abraham telling him, “Whatever Sarah tells you to do, listen to her,”¹⁴ because Abraham’s pedigree will continue only through Isaac. Abraham then did as Sarah told him.

Acknowledgment: Respecting his wife’s wishes

Listening to his wife and acknowledging that her opinion was closer to the Almighty’s than his own is an example of Abraham’s faculty of acknowledgment, the fifth faculty of the heart. Acknowledgment means to admit to something that does not make any sense to you and that goes against the grain of your being, but because God told you to do so, you follow it. Here we see that acknowledgment is especially revealed in the context of listening to one’s wife. Casting Ishmael out was very difficult for Abraham, because as bad as he was, for Abraham who had compassion on him, this was unthinkable. Even more so, by having compassion for Ishmael, Abraham was actually rectifying the lack of compassion that his own father had for him. For when Abraham was a young child, as we recall, he shattered all the idols in his father’s store, an act considered a criminal offense. But, instead of protecting him, Terach actually turned the young Abraham in to the authorities and that is how he ended up being cast into the fiery furnace.

Victory: Battling the four kings

Now we come to the fourth faculty of the heart, which is victory. Abraham’s victory appears when he goes to war against the four kings of the East who had captured his

¹³. Isaiah 29:22.

¹⁴. Genesis 21:12.

nephew Lot.¹⁵ It is true that with his Divine inspiration, Abraham knew that Lot would play an important role in creating the pedigree of the Mashiach (Lot's great-great granddaughter was Ruth, the Moabite princess who converted and married Bo'az and from whom King David was descended). But, even without this Divinely inspired knowledge, the fact is that Abraham went willingly to war with the greatest empire of the time. Indeed, God delivered him in this war. Nachmanides says that this war is the archetypal war for all of history and teaches us how the Messiah will be victorious over his enemies.

Foundation: Circumcision

The final and sixth emotive faculty is foundation, which is very easy to identify in Abraham's life. It is the commandment he was given by God to circumcise. The sages count circumcision as one of Abraham's ten trials, because he was ninety-nine years old at the time, which made it very dangerous for him physically. He is the first person to be circumcised. At every circumcision of a Jewish child we recall that this is the covenant between God and Abraham. There is thus no greater manifestation of the *sefirah* of foundation, which in the body corresponds to the organ of procreation.

Kingdom

The final faculty of the soul is kingdom. Kingdom begins its manifestation in Abraham's life after he was victorious over the four kings of the East. The Torah relates that when he returned, all the kings of the world coronated Abraham as universal king.¹⁶ In fact, this illustrates how Abraham is the person, who out of everyone in the Pentateuch, provides us with the clearest picture of what the Mashiach will be like.

There is another facet of kingdom in Abraham's life. Abraham is called the head of all converts. He himself was the first convert to monotheism and then went on to convert others. When we correspond the parts of the Jewish people to the *sefirot*, then the converts correspond to the *sefirah* of kingdom.

The inner experience of the *sefirah* of kingdom is lowliness, the feeling that one is of lowly stature. Abraham was indeed the first individual ever to express his lowliness with his famous statement, "I am dust and ashes"¹⁷ during his argument with God over the Almighty's decree to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gemorrah and their environs. By doing so, Abraham became worthy of being a king, since the inner quality of all kings is their lowliness, most powerfully expressed by King David who said, "I will be lowly in my own eyes."¹⁸

So we have gone through all the ten *sefirot* and seen how Abraham embodies each of them in his life.

May Hashem give us true renewal with a joyful holiday, and a joyful Exodus from Egypt and coming of the Mashiach.

¹⁵. Ibid. ch. 14.

¹⁶. Ibid. *ibid.*, v. 17.

¹⁷. Ibid. 18:27.

¹⁸. 2 Samuel 6:22.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS SESSION

Q: In the Book of Formation it says that the letter of the month of Nissan is hei, the letter that was added to Avram's name and to Sarai's name. Could you elaborate more on the connection between them.

Answer: The meaning of the name "hei" is to appear, just like Abraham was a new light appearing in the world. *Hei* is also the letter that corresponds to the sense of speech (since the sense of the month of Nissan is speech according to the Book of Formation). That is why we teach that the freedom we experience and celebrate on Passover (the holiday of the month of Nissan) is what is commonly known as "freedom of speech." Abraham had to experience this freedom in order to be able to teach the world his new doctrine of monotheism. The verse, "Abraham was one"¹⁹ is the verse from which the sages learn that Abraham was on one side of reality and everyone else was on another side. It was not because he wanted to stand alone, but because he was the only one who had clarified the true belief in God. The ability to explain monotheism to others was the result of this letter *hei* from the month of Nissan and its being the letter that guides the sense of speech.

It says that Mashiach will come when the heart will be able to express through speech everything that it harbors deep inside. At present, exile is a state in which you cannot truly reveal your heart's deepest, unconscious emotions. Since *hei* is a letter of revelation, it allowed Abraham to teach and express his innermost heart and super-consciousness to others.

Question: Where is the line, or how do we know, what thoughts are coming from our will and what thoughts are being planted or coming into our mind through God's influence? Should we believe that our thoughts are the result of a percolation of lower consciousness, or might they be coming from Above?

Answer: A person has to be an empty vessel in order to receive God's light from above. Every person has desires of the body. The Arizal says that since Abraham lived until 175 and he came to recognize God when he was 3 years old, that means that he lived for 172 years with Godly consciousness. This number 172 is alluded to in the verse, "For Abraham has hearkened my [God's] voice"²⁰ where the word "for" here in Hebrew (אָרְבַּע) is equal to 172. This word in Hebrew also means "heel." The Arizal adds to this teaching that since the word also means "heel" it means that he knew God only when he had rectified his heel. To rectify one's heel means to rectify the mundane things in one life. The heel is the part of the body that makes contact with reality, and so it represents

¹⁹. Ezekiel 33:24.

²⁰. Genesis 26:5.

the daily mundane tasks we have: eating, drinking, sleeping, etc. Only once you have sanctified these mundane needs can you be described as someone who knows God.

You might be inclined to think that knowing God means sitting alone in a room and just refraining from coming in contact with the outside world. But, the truth is that you have to sanctify your connection with the physical and material reality. There is another verse that says that same thing, "Know Him [God] in all your ways."²¹ This verse is saying that if you want to know God, you should do it through all those ways, all those actions, that are for your own benefit—"your ways." By sanctifying them and conducting them in accordance with God's will as revealed in the Torah. Then you can come to know God.

Of course, there are many people that think they are receiving some kind of revelation from Above. But, in truth all they are hearing is their own sub-conscious self. There is no simple answer to know how to differentiate between the two. But, the first step is to empty yourself from egocentric motivations and sanctify your necessary mundane acts.

²¹. Proverbs 3:6.