

Avraham - אברהם

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In Bereshit (Genesis) chapter 15 we read of [one](one.html) of the most significant turning points in the history of man. We find Avraham making himself into dust and ashes and then using this dust to make himself into an entirely [new](new.html) creature.

We read this significant chapter twice in a [Sabbatical cycle](shmita.html), when using the [triennial Torah cycle](shmita.html). We read it once in the end of [Kislev](feasts.html) just before the tekufat [Tebet](feasts.html)[[1]](#footnote-1) and again in the end of [Sivan](feasts.html) just before the tekufat [Tammuz](feasts.html).[[2]](#footnote-2) It is read both times on the last [Shabbat](sabbath.html) before [Rosh Chodesh](chodesh.html). The timing suggests a significant turning point in the year. This is an entirely appropriate [time](time.html) to read of the turning point of mankind.

The following [study](study.html) is based on a [study](study.html) by Rabbi Noson Weisz.

# The First Covenant

The [first](one.html) [covenant](covenant.html) recorded in the Torah between [HaShem](hashem.html) and man that is arrived at by a process of negotiation is recorded in Bereshit:

***Bereshit (Genesis) 15:18*** *On that day* [*HaShem*](hashem.html) *made a* [*covenant*](covenant.html) *with Avraham saying, "To your descendants have I given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates river.*

This [covenant](covenant.html) constitutes a legal contract between [HaShem](hashem.html) and man where each takes on obligations and burdens. This [covenant](covenant.html) is a major cornerstone upon which the Bnai Israel, the Children of Israel, stands.

As can be seen from the above text, the subject of the [covenant](covenant.html) was the grant of the [land of Israel](city.html) to the children of Avraham. In this [covenant](covenant.html) [HaShem](hashem.html) promised Avraham [two](two.html) things:

1. [HaShem](hashem.html) promised him offspring. Avraham accepted this part of the [covenant](covenant.html):

***Bereshit (Genesis) 15:2*** *And Abram said, Lord* [*HaShem*](hashem.html)*, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? 3 And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no* [*seed*](flower.html)*: and, lo,* [*one*](one.html) *born in my house is mine heir. 4 And, behold, the word of* [HaShem](hashem.html) came unto him, saying, This shall *not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir. 5 And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward* [*heaven*](heaven.html)*, and tell the* [*stars*](mazaroth.html)*, if thou be able to* [*number*](nchart.html) *them: and he said unto him, So shall thy* [*seed*](flower.html) *be. 6 And he believed in* [*HaShem*](hashem.html)*; and he counted it to him for righteousness.*

2. [HaShem](hashem.html) promised Avraham the [land of Israel](city.html). This promise Avraham raised some doubts for Avraham:

***Bereshit (Genesis) 15:7*** *And he said unto him, I am* [*HaShem*](hashem.html) *that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this* [*land*](city.html) *to* [*inherit*](inherit.html) *it. 8 And he said, Lord* [*HaShem*](hashem.html)*, whereby shall I* [*know*](daat.html) *that I shall* [*inherit*](inherit.html) *it?*

Why did the promise of the land raise doubts in Avraham’s mind? Why did Avraham have more trouble accepting the promise of land than the promise of children?

At the [time](time.html) of the signing of this [covenant](covenant.html) [HaShem](hashem.html) told Avraham:

***Bereshit (Genesis) 15:13*** *And he said unto Abram,* [*Know*](daat.html) *of a surety that thy* [*seed*](flower.html) *shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them* [*four*](four.html) *hundred years; 14 And also that* [*nation*](nations.html)*, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance.*

The [four](four.html) hundred year [exile](galuyot.html) began when Avraham’s descendent, [Yitzchak](isaac.html), was born. A Hundred and ninety years later, Avraham’s descendents went into [exile](galuyot.html) in Egypt. They spent [two](two.html) hundred and [ten](ten.html) years in Egypt. According to the [Gemara](orallaw.html), this 210 year [exile](galuyot.html) and oppression were a result of Avraham's questioning [HaShem’s](hashem.html) promise of the [land of Israel](city.html), and his subsequent request for proof:

***Nedarim 32a*** *R. Abbahu said in R. Eleazar's* [*name*](name.html)*: Why was our Father Abraham punished and his children doomed to Egyptian servitude for* [*two*](two.html) *hundred and* [*ten*](ten.html) *years? Because he pressed scholars into his service, as it is written, He armed his dedicated servants born in his own house. Samuel said: Because he went too far in testing the attributes [i.e., the promises] of the Lord, as it is written, [And he sand, Lord God,] whereby shall I* [*know*](daat.html) *that I shall* [*inherit*](inherit.html) *it? R. Johanan sand: Because he prevented men from entering beneath the wings of the Shechinah, as it is written, [And the king of Sodom said it to Abraham,] Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself.*

Why did [HaShem](hashem.html) have such a significant [time](time.html) period attached to Avraham’s question? A [two](two.html) hundred and [ten](ten.html) year [exile](galuyot.html) for simply asking a question? In answering all these questions, let us begin by trying to understand why it took a [covenant](covenant.html) with [HaShem](hashem.html) to allow Avraham to have children.

We are not only seeking an explanation for the workings of [HaShem](hashem.html) that determined that Avraham and Sarah should be naturally childless. We also have to explain why a couple bearing a child in their middle years[[3]](#footnote-3) takes on the proportions of such an immense miracle. After all, Avraham was willing to enter a [fiery](fire.html) [furnace](furnace.html)[[4]](#footnote-4) out of loyalty to [HaShem](hashem.html), so why did the mere belief in the promise of having children earn him so much praise from [HaShem](hashem.html)? What is so immense here?

The [Midrash](orallaw.html) relates that when [HaShem](hashem.html) told Avraham to leave Ur, Avraham was nervous that people would criticize him for abandoning his parents just as they were getting old. [HaShem](hashem.html) told Avraham that he is absolved from the obligation of honoring his parents.

[***Midrash***](orallaw.html) ***Rabbah - Genesis 39:7*** *Now what precedes this passage? And* [*Terah*](stages.html) *died in Haran (ib. XI, 32), [which is followed by] NOW THE LORD SAID UNTO ABRAM: GET THEE (LEK LEKA). R.* [*Isaac*](isaac.html) *said: From the point of view of chronology a period of sixty-*[*five*](five.html) *years is still required.[[5]](#footnote-5) But* [*first*](one.html) *you may learn that the* [*wicked*](wicked.html)*, even during their lifetime, are called dead.[[6]](#footnote-6) For Abraham was afraid, saying, ' Shall I go out and bring dishonour upon the Divine* [*Name*](name.html)*, as people will say, “He left his father in his old age and departed”? ‘Therefore the Holy* [*One*](one.html)*, blessed be He, reassured him: ‘I exempt thee (leka) from the duty of honouring thy parents, though I exempt no* [*one*](one.html) *else from this duty.[[7]](#footnote-7) Moreover, I will record his death before thy departure.’ Hence, 'And* [*Terah*](stages.html) *died in Haran’ is stated* [*first*](one.html)*, and then, NOW THE LORD SAID UNTO ABRAM, etc.*

[HaShem](hashem.html) added that Avraham was the only person in all of human history who would ever receive such absolution. But why was Avraham absolved?

The Maharal[[8]](#footnote-8) explains in his work *Gevurat* [*HaShem*](hashem.html)*[[9]](#footnote-9)* that Avraham received this absolution because he was a [new](new.html) beginning. Usually, children [inherit](inherit.html) their potential, whether [physical](physical.html) or [spiritual](physical.html), entirely from their parents. As such, they owe their parents honor and respect as the ultimate source of their beings.

On his own, Avraham climbed to a [new](new.html) pinnacle of spirituality. Avraham did not [inherit](inherit.html) his [spiritual](physical.html) potential from anyone. On his own he climbed to a [new](new.html) pinnacle of spirituality whose potential was innate in all human beings but that no [one](one.html) else had ever actualized since the fall of [Adam](adam.html).

The ability to form the powerful [spiritual](physical.html) bond with [HaShem](hashem.html) which prompted [HaShem](hashem.html) to finally [command](cmds613.html) Avraham to depart from Ur to go to live in the [Holy Land](city.html) was a heretofore unexploited human resource that Avraham obtained directly from [Adam](adam.html) himself, as no human being had ever tapped into it before.

Avraham is described by the [Midrash](orallaw.html)[[10]](#footnote-10) as the very [first](one.html) [convert](aliens.html) to Judaism:

***Tehillim (***[***Psalms***](psalms1.html)***) 47:9*** *The princes of the people are* [*gathered*](gather.html) *together, even the people of the God of Abraham: for the shields of the earth belong unto God: he is greatly exalted.*

The God of Avraham and not the God of [Yitzchak](isaac.html) and [Yaaqov](israelja.html)? The God of Avraham who was the very [first](one.html) [convert](aliens.html) to Judaism. [He is the noble of spirit among the peoples, as it was only Avraham's nobility of spirit that brought him to [HaShem](hashem.html). He was not raised to be a [Jew](gen-jew.html) by his parents. [Isaac](isaac.html) and [Jacob](israelja.html) already had [Jewish](gen-jew.html) parents.] The ruling that applies to all [new](new.html) converts to Judaism, stated many times in the [Talmud](orallaw.html) is that the [convert](aliens.html) is like a [new](new.html) born child.

***Yevamoth 48b*** *R. Jose said:* [*One*](one.html) *who has become a proselyte is like a child newly born.[[11]](#footnote-11)*

In the [eyes](body.html) of [Jewish Law](law.html), he is no longer related to his previous family. On the other [hand](fourteen.html), all converts are considered the children of Avraham, their predecessor and the very [first](one.html) [convert](aliens.html).

But there is a necessary downside to this. The ability to have children is also a potential [one](one.html) inherits from his parents. Indeed, it could be argued that the human genome is the most basic human factor that is transmitted from [generation](toldot.html) to [generation](toldot.html). Each and every human being who is born represents yet another link in the endless chain of DNA that stretches all the way back to the [first](one.html) man. If Avraham is not a continuation of this chain, but represents an entirely [new](new.html) human departure, then it follows that he cannot serve as a connecting link along the existing chain of [generations](toldot.html), but has to originate a brand [new](new.html) chain of his own. To transform oneself is [one](one.html) thing. To be able to transmit this transformation to all [future](future.html) [generations](toldot.html) of [one](one.html)'s descendants is quite another. This is the background to the [covenant](covenant.html) described in Bereshit (Genesis) 15.

# The Second Covenant

The [seventh](seven.html) of [Avraham](avraham.html)’s [ten](ten.html) tests was to be circumcised in his old age. When [Abraham](avraham.html) was 99 years old he was commanded to undergo brit mila. He was very apprehensive about this, since he hoped to have a son in his old age, and everything possible would have to be done to enhance his virility. Now he was told to reduce his virility by undergoing brit mila, or so he thought.

***Bereshit Rabbah 46:2*** *Why should [*[*Abraham*](avraham.html)*] not have circumcised himself at the age of* [*forty*](forty.html)*-*[*eight*](eight.html)*, when he recognized his Creator? So as not to shut the door in the* [*face*](body.html) *of converts. Then why not be circumcised at the age of eighty-*[*five*](five.html)*, when He* [*spoke*](mashal.html) *with him between the parts?[[12]](#footnote-12) In order that* [*Isaac*](isaac.html) *might issue from a holy source. Then let him be circumcised at the age of eighty-*[*six*](six.html)*, when Ishmael was born? Rabbi Shim’on son of Laqish said: ‘I will set up a cinnamon tree in the* [*world*](worlds.html)*: just as the cinnamon tree yields fruit as long as you manure and tend around it, so [shall* [*Abraham*](avraham.html) *be] even when his* [*blood*](body.html) *runs sluggishly and his passions and* [*desires*](needs.html) *have ceased’ [i.e., the blessed Holy* [*One*](one.html) *promised to renew* [*Abraham*](avraham.html)*’s virility, precisely, by means of brit mila].*

With this worry behind him, [Avraham](avraham.html) moved swiftly to enter a [covenant](covenant.html) with [HaShem](hashem.html). To understand this [covenant](covenant.html), we need to see the structure with which the [covenant](covenant.html) was enacted. When we do this, we see that the [covenant](covenant.html) of circumcision, brit mila, is intimately tied up with the Promised land.

When you examine Bereshit (Genesis) chapter 17, which details the [covenant](covenant.html) that involves brit mila, you can see a sort of ATBASH structure, aka chiasm, that forces our attention to the center and shows us that the chapter [wants](needs.html) us ‘to keep the [covenant](covenant.html)’. Everything leads to the center.

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| --- | --- |
| **Bereshit (Genesis) 17** | **Structure** |
| **3** And [Abram](avraham.html) fell on his [face](body.html); and God talked with him, saying: | And [Abram](avraham.html) fell on his [face](body.html) |
| **4** ‘As for Me, behold, My [covenant](covenant.html) is with thee, and thou shalt be the father of a multitude of [nations](nations.html). |  [Avraham](avraham.html) will be a father |
| **5** Neither shall thy [name](name.html) any more be called [Abram](avraham.html), but thy [name](name.html) shall be [Abraham](avraham.html); for the father of a multitude of [nations](nations.html) have I made thee. |  [Abram](avraham.html) is changed to [Avraham](avraham.html) |
| **6** And I will make thee exceeding fruitful (וְהִפְרֵתִי ), and I will make [nations](nations.html) of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. |  To multiply greatly - וְהִפְרֵתִי  |
| **7** And I will establish My [covenant](covenant.html) between Me and thee and thy [seed](flower.html) after thee throughout their [generations](toldot.html) for an everlasting [covenant](covenant.html), to be a God unto thee and to thy [seed](flower.html) after thee. |  Everlasting [covenant](covenant.html) |
| **8** And I will give unto thee, and to thy [seed](flower.html) after thee, the land of thy sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.’ |  God / Land / God |
| **9** And God said unto [Abraham](avraham.html): ‘And as for thee, thou shalt keep My [covenant](covenant.html), thou, and thy [seed](flower.html) after thee throughout their [generations](toldot.html). |  And you shall keep the [covenant](covenant.html) (The land is dependent on the covenant.) |
| **10** This is My [covenant](covenant.html), which ye shall keep, between Me and you and thy [seed](flower.html) after thee: every [male](male%2Bfemale.html) among you shall be circumcised. |
| **11** And ye shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of a [covenant](covenant.html) betwixt Me and you. **12** And he that is [eight](eight.html) days old shall be circumcised among you, every [male](male%2Bfemale.html) throughout your [generations](toldot.html), he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any foreigner, that is not of thy [seed](flower.html). |  Brit mila / [Covenant](covenant.html) / Brit mila  |
| **13** He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must [needs](needs.html) be circumcised; and My [covenant](covenant.html) shall be in your flesh for an everlasting [covenant](covenant.html). |  [Physical](physical.html) everlasting [covenant](covenant.html) |
| **14** And the uncircumcised [male](male%2Bfemale.html) who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that soul shall be cut off (הֵפַר) from his people; he hath broken My [covenant](covenant.html).’ |  To utterly nullify - הֵפַר |
| **15** And God said unto [Abraham](avraham.html): ‘As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her [name](name.html) Sarai, but Sarah shall her [name](name.html) be. |  Sarai is changed to Sarah |
| **16** And I will bless her, and moreover I will give thee a son of her; yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of [nations](nations.html); kings of peoples shall be of her.’ |  Sarah will be a mother |
| **17** And [Abraham](avraham.html) fell upon his [face](body.html), and laughed, and said in his [heart](body.html): ‘Shall a child be born unto him that is a hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?’ | And [Abraham](avraham.html) fell upon his [face](body.html) |

The final message: I will give you land - You will keep the [covenant](covenant.html) and be circumcised. This is clearly, and forcefully conveyed by Yehoshua. Just before the Bne Israel entered the promised land, Yehoshua was commanded to circumcise the Bne Israel. Thus, he established, again, a [connection](connection.html) between the promised land and brit mila.

***Yehoshua (Joshua) 5:2-3*** *At that* [*time*](time.html)[*HaShem*](hashem.html) *said unto Joshua: ‘Make thee knives of flint, and circumcise again the children of Israel the second* [*time*](time.html)*.’* ***3*** *And Joshua made him knives of flint, and circumcised the children of Israel at Gibeath-ha-araloth.*

# Above The [Stars](mazaroth.html)

***Shabbath 156a*** *Rab too holds that Israel is immune from planetary influence. For Rab Judah said in Rab's* [*name*](name.html)*: How do we* [*know*](daat.html) *that Israel is immune from planetary influence? Because it is said, and he brought him forth from abroad.[[13]](#footnote-13) Abraham pleaded before the Holy* [*One*](one.html)*, blessed be He, ‘Sovereign of the Universe!* [*one*](one.html) *born in mine house is mine heir.’ ‘Not so,’ He replied, ‘but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels.’ ‘Sovereign of the Universe!’ cried he, ‘I have looked at my* [*constellation*](mazaroth.html) *and find that I am not fated to beget child.’ ‘Go forth from [i.e., cease] thy planet [gazing], for Israel is free from planetary influence.*

According to [Jewish](gen-jew.html) thought, all [physical](physical.html) potential is mapped out in the [stars](mazaroth.html), which serve as both reservoir and conduit of the [spiritual](physical.html) force required to bring about all [physical](physical.html) changes in the [world](worlds.html). Avraham was an expert in the science of reading the [stars](mazaroth.html). Thus he concluded, that his lack of offspring did not result from a mere [physical](physical.html) defect which could theoretically be repaired by some sort of operation or its miraculous equivalent, but was due to the fact that the natural universe contained no [spiritual](physical.html) energy that could be translated into providing him with offspring. [HaShem](hashem.html) was informing Avraham that he was correct in this assessment but it was irrelevant, as He, [HaShem](hashem.html), was moving him out of this entire system controlled by the [stars](mazaroth.html).

There is a major difficulty in going above nature and drawing energy straight from this ultimate source.

However, there is a major difficulty in the way of going above nature and drawing energy straight from this ultimate source. [HaShem](hashem.html) may be perfectly willing to supply the necessary inputs, but the recipient has to be able to reach up all the way to the ultimate source to be able to receive this input. In order to be able to accomplish this, Avraham had to somehow increase his own stature so that he could reach above nature, and such length of reach was not yet programmed into human beings.

Here is where *emunah[[14]](#footnote-14)* or the power of faithful obedience comes in to the picture. Suppose that a person who is naturally potent genuinely believes himself or herself to be sterile. As they inherited the capacity to conceive from their parents, and such capacity is already part of their phenotypes, their lack of belief is unlikely to interfere with their ability to actually bring children into the [world](worlds.html). They may find themselves shocked to be pregnant. But the contrary is certainly not so. For someone who did not [inherit](inherit.html) any such capacity, belief is very much an issue. Avraham, who was not born with a capacity to reproduce and had to acquire it in midlife, could only accomplish such acquisition through the power of *emunah*, faithful obedience.

Perhaps the most illustrative example of this principle at work is in the story of Nachshon ben Aminadav. In Shemot ([Exodus](exodus.html)) 14, the Torah relates the story of the splitting of the sea. The pursuing Egyptians found the [Jewish](gen-jew.html) people encamped on the [shores of the Red Sea](stages.html) and began their [attack](attacks.html). Faced by the sea on [one](one.html) side, and the hostile Egyptians on the other, the [Jewish](gen-jew.html) people had nowhere to run. Moses assured them that [HaShem](hashem.html) would [save](salvation.html) them and then immersed himself in [prayer](prayer.html).

***Shemot (***[***Exodus***](exodus.html)***) 14:15*** *The Lord said to Moses: “Moses, Why do you* [*cry*](mashal.html) *out to me?* [*Speak*](mashal.html) *to the Children of Israel and let them* [*journey*](stages.html) *forth.”*

But what else was Moses supposed to do? The sea was raging before them. There was nothing else to do except [pray](prayer.html). Explains Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin, the student of the Gaon of Vilna:

“[HaShem](hashem.html) told Moses that from His part, He had done everything He could possibly do to split the sea. But the miracle could not happen unless the [Jewish](gen-jew.html) people believed it could happen. They had to start moving in to the sea as though it would get out of their way.”

The [Gemara](orallaw.html)[[15]](#footnote-15) relates that Nachshon ben Aminadav walked straight into the water. [First](one.html) it covered his knees, soon he was immersed in the water up to his [neck](body.html), and finally it was over his [nose](body.html) and he began to drown. But Nachshon believed that the water could not drown him, as [HaShem](hashem.html) had told the children of Israel to start [traveling](mashal.html). Following [HaShem](hashem.html)'s orders could not lead him into danger. Just before he reached the point of drowning this power of *emunah* finally parted the waters and others who were not on this level of *emunah* were also able to follow. His faithful obedience was the key!

The [connection](connection.html) between *emunah* and Avraham's children and the need for a [covenant](covenant.html) with [HaShem](hashem.html) to bring this about is now clear.

Let us now move on to the [land of Israel](city.html).

# Promise of the Land of Israel

If Avraham had the necessary strength of *emunah* to reach above nature, connect directly to [HaShem](hashem.html), and bring the power of reproduction down to the [world](worlds.html), why did this *emunah* fail him about receiving the [land of Israel](city.html)? Why did he ask for a guarantee on this promise?

We must understand what is so special about this [land of Israel](city.html) that [HaShem](hashem.html) promised Avraham.

The answer to this question also emerges from these same ideas that we have been exploring. [First](one.html) of all, we must understand what is so special about this [land of Israel](city.html) that [HaShem](hashem.html) promised Avraham. Why did [HaShem](hashem.html) want Avraham to leave a place where he had a large following and was a major force for good and [travel](mashal.html) to the land of Canaan? After all isn’t [HaShem](hashem.html) everywhere?

In the [world](worlds.html) as [HaShem](hashem.html) arranged it, the human habitat is always perfectly adjusted to sustain the people it must support. The same [spiritual](physical.html) forces that were implanted by [HaShem](hashem.html) into nature which produce human children also must be able to produce the energy required to sustain them. It would be futile to place human beings into the [world](worlds.html) without providing them with the necessities of survival. This [connection](connection.html) between man and his [world](worlds.html) is clearly enunciated in the following passage of the [Talmud](orallaw.html), commenting on the following Torah pasuk.

***Bereshit (Genesis) 7:23*** *And He blotted out all existence that was on the* [*face*](body.html) *of the ground -- from man to animals to creeping things and to the bird of the* [*heavens*](heaven.html)*.*

***Sanhedrin 108a*** *And every living substance was destroyed which was upon the* [*face*](body.html) *of the ground, [both man and cattle]. If man* [*sinned*](sin.html)*, how did the beasts* [*sin*](sin.html)*? — A Tanna* [*taught*](teacher.html) *on the* [*authority*](authority.html) *of R. Joshua b. Karha: This may be compared to a man who set up a* [*bridal canopy*](wedding.html) *for his son, and prepared a banquet with every variety [of* [*food*](food.html)*]. Subsequently his son died, whereupon he arose and broke up the feast, saying, ‘Have I prepared all this for any but my son? Now that he is dead, what need have I of the banquet?’ Thus the Holy* [*One*](one.html)*, blessed be He, said too, ‘Did I create the animals and beasts for aught but man: now that man has sinned, what need have I of the animals and beasts?’*

But if this is so, then Avraham's offspring must [face](body.html) another serious problem. For just as nature contained no [spiritual](physical.html) energy that Avraham could draw on to reproduce, it also contained no energy for the habitat to sustain any potential offspring that he might have. The promise of offspring and the promise of the [land of Israel](city.html) are thus intertwined.

Just as Avraham had to surmount nature to access his children, he had to reach above the natural [world](worlds.html) to provide them with a habitat. This habitat is the [land of Israel](city.html). To bring this down to earth, Avraham had to leave Ur and [travel](mashal.html) to Canaan. But to bring it to earth also required *emunah*. Oddly enough however, the reach for the habitat takes more *emunah* than the reach for offspring.

To understand this point let us consider the remedy for Avraham's lack of *emunah,* the [four](four.html) hundred year long [exile](galuyot.html), a large part of which was the 210 years spent in Egypt in a state of oppression. The final step of the [Exodus](exodus.html) was the splitting of the sea referred to above about which is written:

***Shemot (***[***Exodus***](exodus.html)***) 14:31*** *And the people revered* [*HaShem*](hashem.html)*, and they had faith in* [*HaShem*](hashem.html) *and in Moses, His servant.*

The [type](types.html) of *emunah* required to calmly [walk](walking.html) into the waves of the sea, or to follow [HaShem](hashem.html) into the barren desert, is the [type](types.html) of faithful obedience that is ready to accept the possibility of existing in the [physical](physical.html) [world](worlds.html) without the aid of any natural inputs. Thus man can breathe in the absence of air, can relieve his thirst in the absence of water, and can satisfy his hunger in the absence of [food](food.html) if that is the will of [HaShem](hashem.html).

It takes great *emunah* to be able to reach up to [heaven](heaven.html) and bring the [land of Israel](city.html) down to earth.

It is obviously this [type](types.html) of *emunah* in [HaShem](hashem.html) that is required to be able to reach up to [heaven](heaven.html) and bring the [land of Israel](city.html) down to earth. Avraham was not certain that he could pass this [type](types.html) of *emunah* down the chain of [generations](toldot.html) along with his genes. He [knew](daat.html) that in the absence of such *emunah* it was impossible to hold on to the [land of Israel](city.html). And so, he asked [HaShem](hashem.html) for a guarantee.

Thus, the [four](four.html) hundred year [exile](galuyot.html) was not a punishment but a means by which the [nation](nations.html) of Israel could acquire the necessary *emunah* to be able to settle and hold onto the [land of Israel](city.html).

In the natural [world](worlds.html) there is no room or provision for the children of Avraham. But if they can survive intact for [four](four.html) hundred years and grow into a great [nation](nations.html) without their own land or country or army, they will internalize the *emunah* that their prosperity and survival comes from [HaShem](hashem.html) Himself, bypassing the conduit of the [world](worlds.html) of nature. This *emunah* will also give them a long enough reach to stretch their arm all the way up to [heaven](heaven.html) and bring down for themselves their country, Israel.

If an [exile](galuyot.html) of [four](four.html) hundred years was sufficient to bequeath the [Jewish](gen-jew.html) people such great *emunah,* how much more potent should an [exile](galuyot.html) of [two thousand](two.html) years have proven to be. [One](one.html) would think that the [Jewish](gen-jew.html) people can certainly not be far away from the *emunah* necessary to bring the final [redemption](redemption.html). Yet we are experiencing great difficulties in merely hanging on to a portion of the [land of Israel](city.html). Why is this so? How can we explain such a total lack of *emunah* after such a long period of survival against great odds?

The truth is that the power of *emunah* hidden in the [Jewish](gen-jew.html) people is immense. The trouble with *emunah* is that we only push the switch that turns it on when we are convinced that there is no way to achieve our objectives according to natural [law](law.html).

If we look at the history of modern Israel, it is clearly divisible into [two](two.html) parts. Before 1967 everything we touched turned to gold. Since then things haven't gone so smoothly to put it mildly.

This difference in our success in the outer [world](worlds.html) is entirely matched by the rise and fall of the power of *emunah* within us.

Before 1967, the power of our *emunah* was at full strength. Back then, we looked at ourselves as a people who had to survive against great odds through the strength of our faith and determination. The [world](worlds.html) has regarded us this way as well. Since then we've come to regard ourselves as a local superpower who is able to manage on its own. The [world](worlds.html) also treats us this way.

As our *emunah* has waned and so has our worldly success. The lessons of history are obvious. We have only to read the book.

# Ten Tests

Avraham was given ten tests by HaShem.[[16]](#footnote-16)

***Bamidbar (Numbers) 14:22*** *Our father Abraham was tried with ten tests, and he wi ths tood them all. This is to show how great was Abraham's love. Ten miracles were done for our ancestors in Egypt, and ten at the [Red] Sea. The Blessed Holy One brought ten plagues upon the Egyptians in Egypt, and ten at the [Red] Sea. Our fathers tried the Blessed Omnipresent One with ten tests in the desert, as He said, "they have tested Me these ten times, and they have not listened to My voice.*

God tested Abraham ten times:

1. Abraham suffered greatly in the town of Casdim when Nimrod threw him into the Fiery Furnace (Noah, Chapter 18).

2. God commanded Abraham to separate himself from his father and the rest of his family, and to abandon all his family and friends to go to a strange land. His anguish was greater because God did not tell him where he was to go, nor did He reveal to him the length of his journey.

3. There was a great famine in Canaan. All the world had plenty except the area where Abraham was. Since he did not want. to violate God's command' by returning to his father, he was forced to go to Egypt.

4. When Abraham entered Egypt, Sarah was taken from him and held in the royal palace.

5. A number of kings attacked with the intent to kill Abraham. Their plan was to take his nephew, Lot, captive, and when he came to save Lot, they would kill Abraham. When they took Lot captive along with all the people of Sodom and Gemorrah, Abraham had to do battle with them. This caused him great suffering, because he had to fight against such great odds.

6. God appeared to Abraham between the halves (beyn ha-betarim, and told him of the exile (galut) his children would have to endure if they were wicked, as well as the torments of purgatory that they would suffer.

7. When Abraham was 99 years old he was commanded to undergo circumcision. He was very apprehensive about this, since he hoped to have a son in his old age, and everything possible would have to be done to enhance his virility. Now he was told to reduce his virility by undergoing circumcision.

8. When Abraham went to the land of the Philistines, King Abimelekh ordered that Sarah be taken to his palace.

9. When Isaac grew up, Sarah noticed Ishmael hiding behind a wall, aiming an arrow at Isaac to kill him. She said to Abraham, "I want you to write a note (shetar maianah) right now, giving to Isaac all that God promised to give you. I do not want the son of the slave to inherit (yoresh) together with Isaac." God also commanded Abraham to discharge Hagar and her son from his house. Of all Abraham's troubles, none was worse than having to send his firstborn (bekhor) son away from his house.

10. The 'tenth was the "binding" (akedah) of Yitschaq. After Abraham had been gratified by having a long-awaited son, he was commanded to slaughter him as a sacrifice to God.

God tested Abraham because of his good qualities.

1. When a shopkeeper knows that the cloth he is selling is very fine, he demonstrates its strength to his customers by wrinkling the material and pulling at it with all his might. The customer then knows that the merchandise is sound and will not rip. Obviously, if the goods were of an inferior quality the merchant would not do this, since the goods would tear.

God likewise knew that Abraham was "sound merchandise." that his heart was pure and that he, was extremely God-fearing. God therefore put him through many tests, so that his saintliness (chasidut) would be proclaimed throughout the world, and all would know that his heart was faithful to God. It is thus written, "God tests the saint" (Psalms 11 :4). This means that God only tests those whom He knows will pass.

2. God had promised Abraham tranquility and peace of mind. But instead, Abraham received all these troubles. Still, Abraham remained quiet and did not complain that God was not keeping His promises. Therefore, God increased Abraham's reward. Since Abraham spent his life in one struggle after another, receiving suffering without complaint, his reward was threefold.

3. To a large degree, Abraham's greatness was due to the fact that people learned from his good attributes. When a person brings merit to many others '(mezakeh et ha-rabbim) he is greatly loved and esteemed by God. Thus, for example, when a person is the voluntary fundraiser (gabbai) for the needs of the sick (bikkur cholim) or the Torah school (talmud Torah), he has great merit. Since he is the one who causes the general public to contribute, his spiritual level (maalah) is much greater than those who merely contribute. God tested Abraham so that people would see his greatness and try to emulate him. Many more people would then walk in the paths of righteousness/generosity and ignore the false values of the world.

4. We see that some good people have success and peace of mind in this world, while others suffer many troubles and great poverty. Many people consider this highly unfair. If the observance of Judaism yields any good, why do so many good Jews lead a trying life with so much suffering? This can also lead to false conclusions. As a result of such observations, philosophers claim that God acts capriciously, granting wealth or poverty to whomever he desires, with no regard to whether the person is good or bad. One is no different from another in God's eyes; everything depends on the person's destiny (ma'arakhah). If it is his lot to have peace of mind and pleasure, he will have it.

This actually is a false conclusion. We know for certain that a person's merit is enough to change bad to good fortune. God therefore made Abraham undergo many trials. The world would then know his saintliness, and when he had good fortune, they would realize that it was a result of his merit. Just as his saintliness was greater than that of all the other righteous/generous people, so was his success ultimately greater. Moreover, it shows that any person who attains his level (madregah) will also do well, even if it is against his destiny (mazal). When good people suffer, it is because they are not perfect in their Judaism.

Why Does HaShem test people?

# Avraham’s Genealogy

Finally, let’s examine the genealogy of Avraham as found in:

***Bereshit (Genesis) 11:27*** *Now these are the generations of Terah: Terah begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran begat Lot. 28 And Haran died before his father Terah in the land of his nativity, in Ur of the Chaldees. 29 And Abram and Nahor took them wives: the name of Abram’s wife was Sarai; and the name of Nahor’s wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah, and the father of Iscah.*

In this genealogy we have a very interesting background to Megilat Ruth. If one were to map out who’s who, one would find that **Terach** is the patriarch of both the paternal and maternal lines for the messianic genealogy.

It is mind-boggling to see that Terach was the progenitor of Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaaqob, and the twelve tribes; while at the same time he was also the progenitor of the matriarchal line including Sarah, Rivka, Leah, Rachel, Bilha, Zilpa, Ruth, and Naamah. All these righteous men and women were descended from Terach!

If one were to map out who’s who, one would find that **Haran** is the patriarch of the matriarchal line and also of the special women in the messianic line, *including Ruth*.

It is mind-boggling to see that Haran was the progenitor of Sarah, Rivka, Leah, Rachel, Bilha, Zilpa, Ruth, and Naamah. All these righteous women were descended from Haran!

This suggests that the *paternal* and *maternal* ‘genes’ of Mashiach were passed down from Terach, Avraham’s father.

This also suggests that the *maternal* ‘genes’ of Mashiach were passed down from Haran. The following genealogical chart shows the patriarcal (square cornered rectangular boxes) and matriarchal lines (rounded corner rectangular boxes) of Mashiach:



| **Situation** | **Abraham** | **Yaaqob** | **Bne Israel** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |  |
| Brothers struggle |  | Yaaqob and Esav are struggling in the womb over the birthright of a firstborn. | Yoseph is struggling with 10 brothers because of Yoseph’s firstborn elevation. |
|  |  |  |  |
| The birthright is acquired. |  | Yaaqob buys the birthright from Esav to become Yitzchak’s **firstborn**. | Yaaqob gives the double portion of garments to Yoseph who is considered by Yaaqob to be his true **firstborn**. |
|  |  |  |  |
| Trouble brews when a brother is elevated to become the becor, the **firstborn**. |  | When Yaaqob revieved Yitzchak’s blessing for the firstborn by bringing a goat meal, wearing, a goat skin, and representing himself to be the **firstborn**, this forced Yaaqob into his exile.  | In the same way, when Joseph’s brothers dipped Joseph’s garment of a **firstborn** into goat blood (a goat and a garment II) and deceived Yaaqob with it. Thus, both went into exile in virtually the same way: with an elevated **firstborn**.. |
|  |  |  |  |
| Exile began on Passover | Abram left Haran on Passover.Abram leaves Egypt with great wealth. | Yaaqob left after serving Yitzchak the Passover lamb and receiving the blessing of the firstborn. | The Bne Israel left Egypt on Passover, the 430 years to the day when they entered.[[17]](#footnote-17) |
|  |  |  |  |
| The first born is replaced.  | One of Abram’s sons (Yitzchak) is elevated to firstborn because he opened Sarah’s womb. | One son’s elevation to **firstborn** by his father, with a goat and a garment, led to 21 years of slavery, for one man. | Ten son’s deception of their father, with a goat and a **firstborn’s** garment, led to slavery that was ten times longer, 210 years, for an entire nation. |
|  |  |  |  |
| No regards for possessions | When Abram defeated the four kings he refused to take the spoils of war. | Eliphaz stole all of Yaaqob’s belonging.[[18]](#footnote-18) | Yosef commanded his brothers to have no regard for their stuff. |
|  |  |  |  |
| Meet with HaShem on exile journey. | Abraham makes a covenant between the parts with HaShem. | Yaaqob and the ladder to heaven.[[19]](#footnote-19) | HaShem speaks to Yaaqob at Beer-Sheba.[[20]](#footnote-20) |
|  |  |  |  |
| Kiss and weep upon arrival. |  | Yaaqob kisses Rachel.[[21]](#footnote-21) | Yosef kissed his father.[[22]](#footnote-22) |
|  |  |  |  |
| The family grows. | Abraham has Ishmael and Yitzchak in exile.  | Yaaqob acquired four wives and 12 children in exile. | The Bne Israel grew from 70 people to more that 3 million. |
|  |  |  |  |
| Birth Pangs | Ten tests | Laban Changed Yaaqob’s wages ten times.[[23]](#footnote-23) | HaShem plagued Egypt with 10 plagues. |
|  |  |  |  |
| Slavery |  | Laban decieves and enslaves Yaaqob. | The Egyptians deceive and enslave the Bne Israel. |
|  |  |  |  |
| Attempt to leave early |  | Yaaqob decides to leave when Yosef is born.[[24]](#footnote-24) | Some Bne Ephraim leave 30 years too early and are all killed.[[25]](#footnote-25) |
|  |  |  |  |
| The destruction of the Bne Israel. | Paro and Abimelech might kill him for Sarah. | Laban attempts to kill Yaaqob and all of his family. | The Egyptian threw baby boys in the Nile.[[26]](#footnote-26) |
|  |  |  |  |
| Exile begins to end with a firstborn.  | Abraham’s descendents began their exile when Yitzchak was born. | When Yoseph, Yaaqob’s **firstborn**, is born - Yaaqob and his family begin leaving exile. | The Bne Israel are declared to be HaShem’s **firstborn**. This leads directly to the exodus and the end of the Egyptian exile. |
|  |  |  |  |
| Left at midnight | Abimelech set Abraham free at midnigth | Yaaqob was free of Laban at midnight. | The Bne Israel was free of the Ehyptians at midnight.  |
|  |  |  |  |
| Left on Passover | Abram leaves Haran on passover.Abram leaves Egypt on passover. | Yaaqob left Laban on Passover.[[27]](#footnote-27) | The Bne Isreal left Egypt on Passover.[[28]](#footnote-28) |
|  |  |  |  |
| Leaves with great wealth | Abram leaves Egypt, on Passover, with great wealth after being oppressed by the Egyptians.[[29]](#footnote-29) | Yaaqob leaves exile with Laban’s wealth given to him by HaShem for his 21 years of slavery. | The Bne Israel leave exile with the wealth of the Egyptian given to them by the Egyptians as wages for their slavery. |
|  |  |  |  |
| The chase |  | Laban chases after Yaaqob after 3 days. | Paro chases after the Bne Israel after 3 days. |
|  |  |  |  |
| The Torah teaches us that trouble would begin three days into the exodus from Laban and the exodus from Pharaoh. |  | ***Bereshit (Genesis) 31:22*** *And it was told* (וַיֻּגַּד) *Laban on the* third *day that* Yaaqob *was fled.* | ***Shemot (***Exodus***) 5:3*** *And they said: 'The God of the* Hebrews *hath met with us. Let us go, we* pray *thee,* three *days'* journey *into the wilderness, and* sacrifice *unto* HaShem *our God; lest He fall upon us with pestilence, or with the sword.'…****Shemot (***Exodus***) 14:5*** *And it was told* (וַיֻּגַּד) *the king of Egypt that the people fled:* |
|  |  |  |  |
| So, on the third day of fleeing, the bad guys give chase to bring back the good guys. |  | ***Bereshit (Genesis) 31:23*** *And he (Laban) took* (וַיִּקַּח) *his brethren with him, and pursued after him* seven *days'* journey… | ***Shemot (***Exodus***) 14:6*** *And he made ready his chariots, and took* (לָקַח ) *his people with him.* |
|  |  |  |  |
| The identical words are used to describe both Laban’s pursuit and Pharaoh’s pursuit. |  | ***Bereshit (Genesis) 31:23*** *And he (Laban) took his brethren with him, and pursued* (וַיִּרְדֹּף) *after him...* | ***Shemot (***Exodus***) 14:8*** *And* HaShem *hardened the* heart *of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued* (וַיִּרְדֹּף) *after the children of Israel; for the children of Israel went out with a high* hand*.* |
|  |  |  |  |
| And just as Laban caught up to Yaaqob *after* seven *days*, so also did Pharaoh catch up with the fleeing Israelites *on the seventh day*. |  | ***Bereshit (Genesis) 31:25*** *And Laban came up* (וַיַּשֵּׂג) *with* Yaaqob*. Now* Yaaqob *had pitched his tent in the mountain; and Laban with his brethren pitched in the mountain of Gilead.* | ***Shemot (***Exodus***) 14:9*** *And the Egyptians pursued after them, all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, and his horsemen, and his army, and overtook them* (וַיַּשִּׂיגוּ) *encamping by the sea, beside Pi-Hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon.* |
|  |  |  |  |
| Idols insulted |  | Rachel sat on Laban’s teraphim while menstruating. | The 10 plagues defeated the major Egyptian idols.[[30]](#footnote-30) |
|  |  |  |  |
| The birth-like water crossing. |  | Yaaqob crosses the Yabbok river and immediately returns. | The Bne Israel crosses the Reed Sea in a shofar shape and come out on the same side. |
|  |  |  |  |
| Never to return. | Abraham never returns to Haran. | Yaaqob and Laban make a covenant never to cross into the opposite territory, except for business. | HaShem tells the Bne Israel never to return to Egypt, except for business. |
|  |  |  |  |
| The birth | Abram and Sarai’s names are changed to Abraham and Sarah. | Yaaqob is given the additional name of “Israel”. | The Bne Israel, free of Egyptian control, became a nation.[[31]](#footnote-31) |
|  |  |  |  |
| Brothers are reconciled |  | Yaaqob is reconciled with Esav. | Yoseph is reconciled with his brothers. |
|  |  |  |  |
| Conflict. | Abraham fought battles when the 4 kings fought the 5 kings. | Yaaqob encounters an armed brother with 300 men. | The Bne Israel encounter an armed Amalek who a descendant of Esav. |
|  |  |  |  |
| Succoth |  | Yaaqob builds succoth for his animals, in a place called Succoth soon as his exile ends. He stays there for a year and a half. | The Bne Israel stay at Succoth in their succoth at their first stop after leaving exile. |
|  |  |  |  |
| Sexual Immorality |  | Dina is raped by Shechem. | Daughters of Moab and Midian seduced some members of the tribe of Simeon, including Zimri the leader. |
|  |  |  |  |
| Circumcized sinners are killed |  | The males of the city of Shechem were circumcized and then killed by Simeon and Levi. | The immoral sinners of the tribe of Simeon are killed by a plague. |
|  |  |  |  |
| Carrying Yaaqob’s bier |  | When Yaaqob died, his sons carried his bier to Canaan with the same entouage that we will see in the exodus. | The Bne Israel were escorted by the Egyptian when they left. They carried the Mishkan in the same tribal order as they carried Yaaqob’s bier. |

**\* \* \***

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1. The winter solstice [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The summer solstice [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Avraham lived to 175 and Sarah to 127; they were only a 100 and 90 respectively when they had Isaac; that is to say middle aged [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Midrash Rabbah - Genesis 34:9, Midrash Rabbah - Genesis 38:13 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. To bring the narrative to the death of Terah. For Terah was seventy years old at Abram's birth (Gen. XI, 26), whilst Abram departed from Haran at the age of seventy-five (ib. XlI, 4); hence Terah, whose age at death was two hundred and five (ib. XI, 32), died sixty-five years after this command, and yet it is narrated before. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Hence Terah is already in his lifetime called dead. (Though it is stated supra, 38:12, that he repented, presumably this was much later.) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. This is deduced from the emphasis GET THEE (LEK LEKA), where lek (‘go’) alone would have sufficed. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Hakham Judah Loew ben Bezalel [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Chapter 5 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Tehilim 47:10 Rashi D”H Am & Malbim D”H Am; Yalkut Shimoni Tehilim Remez 754; Yalkut Shimoni Shir Hashirim Remez 992 and Machzor Vitri siman 287. See also Bava Batra 15A that identifies Eisan HaEzrachi as Avraham Avinu. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. All his previous sins are forgiven. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. see Bereshit (Genesis) 15:9–10 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Genesis 15:5 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Emunah = Faithfulness, faithful obedience. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Sota 37a [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. From: PIRQE ABOT (Chapters of the Fathers), Pereq Hei, Mishnah 5:4, By: Hakham Yitschaq ben Moshe Magriso. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Shemot (Exodus) 12:41 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Rashi to 29:11 and from Bereshit Rabbathi by Rabbi Moshe Hadarshan. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Bereshit (Genesis) 28:11-17 [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Bereshit (Genesis) 46:1-4 [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Bereshit (Genesis) 29:11 [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Bereshit (Genesis) 46:29 [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Bereshit (Genesis) 31:7 [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Bereshit (Genesis) 30:25 [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Sanhedrin 92b [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Shemot (Exodus) 1:22 [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. The Haggada [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Shemot (Exodus) 12:27-41 [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Meam Loez to Bereshit 13:2 [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Bamidbar (Numbers) 33:4 [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. The Maharal explains that Yetzias Mitzrayim was not merely a *physical* process, in which the Jewish People departed from the land of Egypt and traveled to a different physical location. It was a *spiritual* metamorphosis, an existential transition, the birth of a people. Prior to leaving Mitzrayim, Bnei Yisrael were a collective of individuals, but upon leaving, we became a nation, a single people, a unified whole.  [↑](#footnote-ref-31)