

Lech Lecha Torah study 5787, I Want to see you be Brave

“A ship in harbor is safe, but that's not what ships are built for.” — **G.T. Shedd** (or often attributed to Albert Einstein)

1) Berehit Rabbah 38: 13

Haran died in the presence of Teraḥ his father in the land of his birth, in Ur of the Chaldeans” (Genesis 11:28).

“Haran died during the lifetime of Teraḥ his father” – Rabbi Ḥiyya grandson of Rav Ada of Yafo: Teraḥ was an idol worshipper [and a seller of idols]. One time, he went away to some place, and he installed Abraham as salesman in his stead. A person would come seeking to buy. He [Abraham] would say to him: ‘How old are you?’ He would say to him: ‘Fifty or sixty years old.’ He would say to him: ‘Woe to this man who is sixty years old and seeks to prostrate himself before something that is one day old.’ He would be ashamed and leave. One time, a certain woman came, carrying a dish of fine flour in her hand. She said to him: ‘Here, offer it before them.’ He arose, took a club in his hand, shattered all the idols, and placed the club in the hand of the largest among them. When his father came, he said to him: ‘Who did this to them?’ He said to him: ‘I will not lie to you, a certain woman came, carrying a dish of fine flour in her hand. She said to me: Here, offer it before them. I offered it before them. This one [idol] said: I shall eat first, and another one said: I shall eat first. This big idol, who was standing among them, got up and took the club and shattered them.’ He [Teraḥ] said to him: ‘What, are you mocking me? Are they sentient at all?’ He said to him: ‘Do your ears not hear what your mouth is saying?’

He [Teraḥ] took him and handed him over to Nimrod. He [Nimrod] said to him [Abraham]: ‘Let us bow down to fire.’ Abraham said to him: ‘Let us better bow down to water, that extinguishes fire.’ Nimrod said to him: ‘[All right,] let us bow down to water.’ He said to him: ‘If so, let us bow down to the clouds, that bear the water.’ He said to him: ‘[All right,] let us bow down to the clouds.’ He said to him: ‘If so, let us bow down to the wind, that scatters the clouds.’ He said to him: ‘[All right,] let us bow down to the wind.’ He said to him: ‘Better let us bow down to a person, who can withstand the wind.’ He said to him: ‘You are saying mere words. I bow down only to fire. I will cast you into it, and let that God to whom you bow down come and rescue you from it.’ Haran was there and he was conflicted. He

said: ‘Either way [I will know what to do]; If Abraham is victorious, I will say: I am with Abraham, and if Nimrod is victorious, I will say: I am with Nimrod.’ When Abraham descended into the fiery furnace and was rescued, they said to him [Haran]: ‘With whom are you?’ He said to them: ‘I am with Abraham.’ They took him and cast him into the fire and his innards were scorched. He emerged and died in the presence of Teraḥ his father. That is what is written: “Haran died in the presence of Teraḥ...”

2) Bereshit Rabbah 39:1

“The Lord said to Abram: Go you, from your land, and from your birthplace, and from your father’s house, to the land that I will show you” (Genesis 12:1).

“The Lord said to Abram: Go you, from your land...” – Rabbi Yitzḥak began: “Listen, daughter, see, and incline your ear. Forget your people and your father’s house” (Psalms 45:11). Rabbi Yitzḥak said: This is analogous to one who was passing from place to place, and saw a building with a [candle] burning in it. He said: ‘Is it possible that this building has no one in charge of it?’ The owner of the building looked out at him and said: ‘I am the owner of the building.’ So, because Abraham our patriarch was saying: ‘Is it possible that this world is without someone in charge?’ The Holy One blessed be He looked at him and said to him: ‘I am the owner of the world.’

Bravery: ometz or ometz lev, literally means “strength” or “heart-strength”

3) Psalm 27: 14

קִּוְיָה אֶל־יְיָקֹק חֲזַק וַיֵּאמֶר לִבִּי קִוְיָה אֶל־יְיָקֹק: {פ}

Look to GOD; be strong and of good courage! O look to GOD!

4) Marc Margolius: The Hasidic master Rabbi Nachman of Breslov is known for his famous teaching: *Kol haolam kulo gesher tzar me’od, vechaikar lo lefached klal*. “The whole world is a very narrow bridge, and the main thing is not to fear at all.”

But Nachman’s actual recorded teaching is far subtler and closer to our experience. Rather than use the Hebrew word *lefached* (“to be afraid”), he uses the reflexive form, *l’hitpached* (“to cause oneself to be afraid”). For Nachman, courage is not about denying or repressing fear. Rather, the fundamental principle of courage is

choosing not to frighten ourselves beyond the fear we already experience. Fear is unavoidable, perhaps even required. Courage involves moving forward despite our fear, and not exacerbating our anxieties.

We practice ometz lev whenever we leave our comfort zone, take an unpopular stand, expose our vulnerabilities, speak the truth, confront others, risk embarrassment or personal loss, or intervene on behalf of those unable to do so for themselves.

5) Genesis 15: 1

אַחֲרַי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה הָיָה דְּבַר־יְיָ אֶל־אַבְרָם בְּמַחְצֵה לַאיֹמֶר אֶל־תִּירָא אַבְרָם אֲנִכִּי מִגִּן לִי שְׂכָרִי
הַרְבֵּה מְאֹד:

Some time later, the word of GOD came to Abram in a vision:

“Fear not, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great.”

6) Maimonides lists the 10 trials of Abraham as follows:

1. God tells him to leave his homeland to be a stranger in the land of Canaan.
2. Immediately after his arrival in the Promised Land, he encounters a famine.
3. The Egyptians seize his beloved wife, Sarah, and bring her to Pharaoh.
4. Abraham faces incredible odds in the battle of the four and five kings.
5. He marries Hagar after not being able to have children with Sarah.
6. God tells him to circumcise himself at an advanced age.
7. The king of Gerar captures Sarah, intending to take her for himself.
8. God tells him to send Hagar away after having a child with her.
9. His son, Ishmael, becomes estranged.
10. God tells him to sacrifice his dear son Isaac upon an altar.

7) Rabbi Ovadiah of Bertinoro lists the 10 trials of Abraham as follows:

1. He is thrown into a fiery furnace.
2. God tells him to leave his homeland to be a stranger in the land of Canaan.
3. Immediately after his arrival in the Promised Land, he encounters a famine.
4. The Egyptians seize his beloved wife, Sarah, and bring her to Pharaoh.
5. He faces incredible odds in the battle of the four and five kings.
6. He is told by God that his children will be strangers in a strange land.

7. God tells him to circumcise himself at an advanced age.
8. The king of Gerar captures Sarah, intending to take her for himself.
9. God tells him to send away Hagar and her son, Ishmael.
10. Abraham is told by God to sacrifice his dear son Isaac upon an altar.

8) Edith Brotman, PhD, *Mussar Yoga*, “A quotation attributed to James Neil Hollingsworth, a beatnik writer and musician, says, "Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the judgment that something else is more important than fear." The other impediment fear brings to our spiritual journey is its tendency to eclipse the Divine Presence and feed the illusion of separateness. Consider what Mahatma Gandhi said about the enemy (of goodness and light). Fear of others divides us and feeds our worst impulses. When we are afraid, we are defensive and prone to fall into the traps of discrimination and prejudice. Fear justifies and embellishes our suspicions and distrust of the motives of others. When we presume that someone is a threat to our well-being we cut ourselves off from recognizing the divine spark in that person. The more fear, the less light and the darker the perspective.”

9) AT TIMES OF DISTRESS, strengthen your heart, Even if you stand at death's door. The lamp has light before it is extinguished. Wounded lions still know how to roar. Shmuel ha Maggie 993-1055

10) EVERY SIN CAUSES a special anxiety on the spirit, which can only be erased by repentance, which transforms the anxiety itself into inner security and courage.
—RABBI ABRAHAM ISAAC KOOK (1865-1935)

11) ONLY HE WHO HAS the courage to face up to his own wrongdoing and determines to change his ways will find divine mercy. -RABBI SOLOMON BREUER (1850-1926)

12) JUDAH THE SON OF TIMA would say: be bold as a leopard, light as an eagle, swift as a deer, and mighty as a lion to do the will of your Father in Heaven.
—PIRKEI AVOT 5:20

13) KNOW THAT TRUTH and righteousness are the ornaments of the soul, and they provide the individual with everlasting courage and confidence. —RABBI MOSHE BEN MAIMON, THE RAMBAM (1135-1204)

14) WHEN YOU take the field against your enemies, and see horses and chariots—forces larger than yours—have no fear of them, for the ETERNAL your God, who brought you from the land of Egypt, is with you. —DEUTERONOMY 20:1

15) WHEN I ASKED for Your help, You answered my prayer and gave me courage. —PSALMS 138:3

Questions for you to chew on

- When in the past have you exercised braveness? What risks have you taken? What was the outcome?
- When was the last time you took a big risk?
- Where in your life - work, relationships, leisure - is fear holding you back?
- What would you do if you knew you could not fail?
- How will you address courage and fear this week?
- What specifically can you change about your life to act with more bravery?

“Inaction breeds doubt and fear. Action breeds confidence and courage. If you want to conquer fear, do not sit home and think about it. Go out and get busy.” —
Dale Carnegie