



RABBI DOVID SPETNER

## And He Called Out in the Name of G-d...

In his *Antiquities of the Jews*, Josephus describes Abraham as “a man of great sagacity” who had “higher notions of virtue than others of his time.” He therefore “determined to change completely the views which all then had about God.”

One way of summing up 4,000 years of Jewish history is to ask ourselves what would have happened to the human race if Abraham had not been a man of great sagacity, or if he had stayed in Ur and kept his higher notions to himself, and no specific Jewish people had come into being. Certainly the world without the Jews would have been a radically different place. Humanity might eventually have stumbled upon all the Jewish insights. But we cannot be sure. All the great conceptual discoveries of the intellect seem obvious and inescapable once they have been revealed, but it requires a special genius to formulate them for the first time.

The Jews had this gift. To them we owe the idea of equality before the law, both divine and human; of the sanctity of life and the dignity of the human person; of the individual conscience and so of personal redemption; of the collective conscience and so of social responsibility; of peace as an abstract ideal and love as the

foundation of justice, and many other items which constitute the basic moral furniture of the human mind. Without the Jews it might have been a much emptier place.

(Epilogue, Paul Johnson's *History of the Jews*)

THE “GIFT” OF THE JEWS THAT JOHNSON refers to, we know comes from the wisdom that G-d related to us through His Torah. This relationship began with Abraham and his discovery of the new and true concept of G-d.

In order to properly understand Abraham's new view of G-d, we need to ask: What was the commonly held view of God that Abraham determined to change?

I struggled with this issue for many years.

Rambam (Maimonides), at the beginning of his *Laws Concerning Idolatry*, describes a scenario where mankind had completely forgotten the existence of the One G-d of Adam and Noah, until Abraham enlightened them.

I had difficulty believing that mankind could so quickly forget Who had created the world and Who had made the Flood—to the extent that they were now worshipping stars and stones. I debated this with my rebbi, Rav Yaakov Weinberg, ז"ל, who supported the Rambam's position. (Regarding the worship of idols, he wisely told me, “Never underestimate people's potential for

stupidity.”) I developed an alternative scenario, but I hesitated in accepting my own idea. Although Rambam did not build his position based on the words of our holy Sages in the Talmud, I nonetheless withheld my own judgment of the matter, knowing Rambam to be incomparably wiser than me and having no other giant of Torah on which to hang my hat.

That is, until I discovered the words of Rabbeinu Nissim in his *D'rashos* (Va'es'chanan, #9). Unlike Rambam, who believed idolatry to have no real power, Rabbeinu Nissim maintains that idolatry was a real spiritual force that G-d had created—a kind of “dark energy” that idolaters could channel for their benefit if they rejected a direct relationship with G-d. He also disagrees with the Rambam's assertion that the world before Abraham had forgotten G-d. Rather, he writes, they mistakenly believed that G-d had removed Himself from direct interaction with humanity. People believed that they were expected to control their own destinies by calling upon the spiritual energies that G-d made available through idolatrous practice.

After the sin of Adam, mankind felt that it had been rejected from a direct relationship with G-d. People felt exposed to the chaotic forces of nature, and many chose to utilize the forces of idolatry to try to control their lives and fortunes. (Think Indian rain dances.)

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# At the Kollel

**KEY:** 🖐️ Beginners 🖐️🖐️ Intermediate 🖐️🖐️🖐️ Advanced 🚺🚻 for men and women

**Looking for a chavrusa?** See Coordinator Rabbi Chaim Heinemann!  
Chavrusos are available noon–1 PM on weekdays, and 8–9:45 PM Sun.–Thurs.

## Sunday *Free brunch!*

🖐️🖐️ **America Runs on Torah**  
(Jewish Law & Parasha)  
Rabbis Dani Schon  
and Yisroel Kaufman.....10 AM  
*Grand Deluxe breakfast served*

## Tuesday

🚺🚻 🖐️ **Partners in Torah  
at the Mayerson JCC**  
Rabbi Binyamin Teitelbaum.....8 PM

## Wednesday

🚺🚻 🖐️ **Torah Treasures for  
Seniors at the Mayerson JCC**  
Rabbi Yitzchok Preis..... 10:30–11:15 AM

🚺🚻 🖐️ **Downtown Lunch-n-Learn  
at Strauss & Troy**  
Rabbi Yitzchok Preis..... 12–1 PM

## Thursday

🖐️🖐️ **Halacha** (based on the parasha)  
Rabbi Chaim Heinemann.....9:10–10 PM  
*Homemade refreshments served.*

## Minyanim Daylight Time

**Shacharis**  
Sunday .....8:15 AM  
Monday–Friday .....7:20 AM  
Shabbos .....N/A

**Mincha**  
Sunday .....5:45 PM  
Monday–Thursday .....5:45 PM  
Shabbos .....2:45 PM

**Ma'ariv**  
**In the Beis Midrash:**  
Sunday–Wednesday .....9:45 PM  
Thursday .....10 PM  
Shabbos .....N/A

## Every Day

🖐️ **“Dirshu” Gemara Shiur**  
(Maseches B'choros)  
Rabbi Yitzchok Preis.....  
Sunday 7:15–8:15 AM  
Monday–Friday 5:50–6:45 AM

🖐️🖐️ **Kollel Yisgaber K'ari**  
(amud-a-day of Mishnah B'rurah)  
Rabbi Chaim Heinemann.....  
Monday–Friday 6:55–7:20 AM

🖐️🖐️ **Kitzur Shuchan Aruch**  
Live video conference!  
Rabbi Dani Schon.....  
Monday–Friday 12:05–12:20 PM

🖐️ **Daf Yomi**  
Rabbi Meir Minster.....  
Sunday–Thursday 8–8:45 PM  
Shabbos (at CZE) 1:00 pre-mincha

🖐️🖐️ **Nightly Halacha Chabura**  
Rabbis Dani Schon  
& Binyamin Teitelbaum .....  
Monday–Thursday 9–9:45 PM

**Chavrusa Learning**  
(private & small groups).....times vary

## And He Called Out in the Name of G-d... CONTINUED

Abraham, however, saw a world of goodness, of *chesed* (kindness). He saw a G-d still intimately involved in the good, and that even the bad was under the control and direction of G-d. This was Abraham's truly revolutionary idea, an idea that still challenges us and our world today. We see evil perpetrated by both man and nature and want to know, “Where is G-d?” Abraham challenged us to believe—nay, to incorporate into our very being—the idea that everything that occurs to us is part of G-d's plan for us, personally, both the good and the bad. To be true to Abraham's vision, we need to each believe that the Creator of this vast universe is interested in a relationship with us, like a parent to a child.

The prophet Isaiah captured this idea in his closing prophecy:

So says the L-rd: “The heavens are My throne, and the earth is My footstool... But to this one will I look: To one poor and of crushed spirit, who hastens to do My bidding.” (Isaiah 66) 🙏

