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## פרשת תולדות

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פרק כו פסוק ה

עֵקֵב אֲשֶׁר-שָׁמַע אַבְרָהָם בְּקֹלִי וַיִּשְׁמַר מִשְׁמֵרֹתַי מִצּוֹתַי חֻקוֹתַי וְתוֹרֹתַי:

הז"ל

בן שלש שנים הכיר אברהם את בוראו, שנאמר עקב אשר שמע אברהם בקולי, חושבניה מאה ושבעין ותרין.

מושג

בן שלש שנים הכיר אברהם את בוראו.

### Translation:

When he was three years old Avrohom recognized his Creator.

### Explanation:

Avrohom Avinu was born with the ability to question and reject the beliefs of all those around him<sup>1</sup>. From the age of three many could already recognize his potential to be the one who one day prove that there was only one G-d, and convince the world to smash their idols. By the time he was 40 Avrohom had fully developed this potential and began his task of converting thousands to believe in Hashem.

### Looking in the Pasuk:

The use of the word עקב is rare in the Torah<sup>2</sup>, leading חז"ל to search for a deeper meaning. The Gemoroh from which our Musag is taken uses the Gematria of עקב to teach us this lesson. The Pasuk tells us that Avrohom listened to Hashem for עקב, or 172 years. Since Avrohom lived 175 years, the Pasuk is informing us that from the age of three Avrohom listened to Hashem. It is also possible that the word עקב also means a heel. Just like a heel is the limb on which the body stands, so too, from his very beginning Avrohom listened to Hashem.

### Musag Learning Outcomes:

Know: When he was only three years old Avrohom already questioned the belief in idols and began to search for truth.

Understand: Avrohom was gifted with the unique potential to understand the mistake made by all those around him who worshiped idols and to present the idea of a single, all powerful, G-d. This ability was recognizable even at the age of three. He developed this talent through an unrelenting search for truth and at age 40 was able to begin convincing thousands of idol worshipers to serve Hashem.

Think: The use of rare words always points towards hidden messages. Also, looking for additional definitions sheds light on meaning in all places.

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1 See note #1

2 See note #2

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## NOTES

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1. The first, and most obvious, challenge to understanding this Musag is the fact that it is highly unlikely that a three year old could come to a theological understanding of G-d's existence, especially at a time when the rest of the world thought differently. Secondly, even if we were to explain that this was the result of Avrohom's extraordinary abilities we would still question what חז"ל sought to teach us with this fact.

The source for this Musag is found in a number of places. The Gemoroh in (לב.) teaches: א"ר אמי בר אבא: בן ג' שנים הכיר אברהם את בוראו, שנאמר עקב אשר שמע אברהם בקולי, חושבניא מאה ושבעין ותרין.

The Gemoroh uses the Gematria of the word עקב, 172, to teach that the Pasuk is teaching us that Avrohom kept the word of Hashem for 172 years. Given that he lived for 175 years this leads us to the conclusion that during the first 3 years of his life he did not yet recognize Hashem.

While the Gemoroh does not provide much insight into the meaning of this fact the מדרש רבה (נח) does:

תמים היה בדורותיו: אמר רבי יוחנן כל מי שנאמר בו היה מתחלתו ועד סופו הוא צדיק, התיבון ליה (שאלו אותו) והכתיב (יחזקאל לג:כד) "אחד היה אברהם וירש את הארץ" מעתה הוא תחלתו והוא סופו? אמר להון אף היא לא תברא (קושיא) דהא רבי לוי בשם ריש לקיש אמר בן ג' שנים הכיר אברהם את בוראו. ור' חנינא ור' יוחנן תרוויהון אמרין בן ארבעים וח' שנה הכיר אברהם את בוראו, ומה אני מקיים היה? שהיה מתוקן להדריך כל העולם כולו בתשובה, הן האדם היה - מתוקן למיתה, נחש היה - מתוקן לפורענות, קין היה - מתוקן לגלות, איוב היה - מתוקן ליסורין, נח היה - מתוקן לנס, משה היה - מתוקן לגואל, מרדכי היה - מתוקן לגאולה.

The Midrash begins by רב יוחנן teaching that whenever the word היה is used it means the person was a צדיק for his entire life. The Midrash asks regarding the word היה used in a Pasuk regarding Avrohom, whereas we know that Avrohom grew up in a family of idol worshipers, and most probably worshiped idols as well in his youth. To answer this question the Midrash brings the words of ריש לקיש who was of the opinion that Avrohom was always a צדיק as he recognized G-d from the age of three. The Midrash continues and brings a dissenting opinion which opined that Avrohom was 48 (40)<sup>3</sup> when he first recognized G-d. According to the second opinion the word היה comes to teach that person was born for his role. Thus Avrohom was born to guide the entire world towards תשובה, אדם was born to die, the נחש was born to be cursed... Moshe was born to redeem.

The עץ יוסף explains that the Midrash is teaching that all those by whom the word היה is used were destined for that role. For example, we usually understand that if אדם הראשון had not sinned he would have remained immortal. However, the עץ יוסף explains, the sin of אדם הראשון was not the reason he died; rather, he was destined to die. His sin was simply the means by which he was sentenced to death. So too, Moshe was not chosen because he was the best man available, rather he was born for this specific role<sup>4</sup>. So too, we may infer, Avrohom was born to be a believer and to convince others to believe. He was thus born with the innate ability to question and reject prevailing pagan beliefs<sup>5</sup> and to come to a recognition of a single, all powerful creator. Avrohom's challenge was to realize this innate potential and bring it to fruition.

We may thus understand that the two opinions mentioned in the Midrash are not necessarily arguing<sup>6</sup>. Rather the opinion which speaks of Avrohom recognizing Hashem at the age of 3 does not mean that Avrohom at such a tender age was able to reason at a high philosophical level and

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3 The text of our Midrash reads 48. It is hard to understand from where the Midrash got this number. Therefore many change the text to read 40. This would make perfect sense as the Mishnah in Avos (פרק ה) teaches: בן ארבעים לבינה, one reaches the age of understanding only at 40. (Perhaps 48 was chosen as it is the Gematria of מוח)

4 Which would explain the Gemoroh (סוטה יב.) which teaches that when Moshe was born the house filled with light.

5 Perhaps for this reason he is called אברהם העברי as the Midrash teaches:

ויגד לאברהם העברי: רבי יהודה אומר כל העולם כולו מעבר אחד והוא מעבר אחד (בראשית רבה לך לך פרשה מב)

6 This approach would solve an obvious contradiction in the Midrash itself. For the Midrash began with the opinion of ר' יוחנן who claimed that the word היה means that the person was always thus. When challenged by the Pasuk in יחזקאל he answered by using the opinion of ריש לקיש that Avrohom recognized G-d when he was 3. The Midrash continues with a different approach which stated that Avrohom recognized G-d at the age of 40 (48). The problem is that the second approach was also authored by ר' יוחנן! How can he at once agree with ריש לקיש and also claim that Avrohom was 40?

fully develop monotheistic theology. Rather it speaks of the very first stirrings of his innate ability to question and challenge prevailing beliefs and to seek truth. Through tremendous effort Avrohom developed this ability to the extent that by the time he was 40 he was able to turn his efforts to teaching and convincing others as well.

This approach is clarified in the words of the מאירי (בהקדמה לפרקי אבות) who writes:

עד שהגיע הזמן לאברהם אבינו ע"ה הוקדש מרחם ומלידה ומבטן ומהריון מבית אסורים יצא למלוך ומאור כשדים ניצול להציל עם עצום עושה דברו לכפר על עם ה' ולהשיב את נדחו. בתחילת למודו נגלה טוב מזגו ונתפרסם יושר הכנתו עד שכל יודעיו יקוו לו הבינו לאחריתו והוא אצלי אומרם ז"ל עליו בן שלש שנים הכיר אברהם את בוראו, רומז על פרסום הכנתו והיות כל העולם מכירים אחדותו הצליח בלימודו והשיג עד תכלית מה שאפשר לפי טבעו והיה אז אברהם אע"ה בן ארבעים שנה והוא אומרם ז"ל במקום אחר בן ארבעים שנה הכיר אברהם את בוראו. וכשראה את עצמו שלם עם ראותו קלקול בני דורו לבשתהו רוח ה' וקנא בחכמתו בשם ה' וקבץ אלפים ורבבות לעבוד את ה' וליחד את שמו בעולם לבער אלילים מן הארץ.

The source of the מאירי may be found in the writings of the רמב"ם<sup>7</sup>:

א כיון שנגמל איתן זה התחיל לשוטט בדעתו והוא קטן והתחיל לחשוב ביום ובלילה והיה תמיה היאך אפשר שיהיה הגלגל הזה נוהג תמיד ולא יהיה לו מנהיג ומי יסבב אותו, כי אי אפשר שישבב את עצמו, ולא היה לו מלמד ולא מודיע דבר אלא מושקע באור כשדים בין עובדי כוכבים הטפשים ואביו ואמו וכל העם עובדי כוכבים והוא עובד עמהם ולבו משוטט ומבין עד שהשיג דרך האמת והבין קו הצדק מתבוננתו הנכונה, וידע שיש שם אלוה אחד והוא מנהיג הגלגל והוא ברא הכל ואין בכל הנמצא אלוה חוץ ממנו, וידע שכל העולם טועים ודבר שגרם להם לטעות זה שעובדים את הכוכבים ואת הצורות עד שאבד האמת מדעתם, ב ובן ארבעים שנה הכיר אברהם את בוראו, כיון שהכיר וידע התחיל להשיב תשובות על בני אור כשדים ולערוך דין עמהם ולומר שאין זו דרך האמת שאתם הולכים בה ושיבר הצלמים והתחיל להודיע לעם שאין ראוי לעבוד אלא לאלוה העולם ולו ראוי להשתחוות ולהקריב ולנסך כדי שיכירוהו כל הברואים הבאים.

It is clear, therefore, that this Musag is teaching us that the achievements of Avrohom (and of Moshe, etc.) were not the results of his efforts alone. Rather, he was invested with unique talents at birth that he then developed and which allowed for incredible achievement. This should *not* be taken to mean that Avrohom should not be credited for his accomplishments, nor that he had no other option but to realize this potential. This is obviously not true. In the end, man is given choice, בחירה הפשית, to do as he pleases. Avrohom is credited for choosing to fulfill the mission he was chosen for at birth and for the significant effort he invested to do so. What the Musag *does* teach is that Hashem gives man the tools he needs to successfully complete his mission in life. A person should realize that he or she is invested with tremendous potential to accomplish incredible things. In the end of the day, he or she will be judged by the extent to which they fulfilled that potential<sup>8</sup>.

2. The word עקב only appears 5 times in Chumash where it is defined as 'because'. It is only used with 2 individuals; by Avrohom twice and by Calev once: (במדבר ו: כד) וְעַבְדֵי לֵבָב עֲקַב הָיְתָה רוּחַ אַחֲרַת עֲמוֹ (במדבר י: כד) It is interesting to note that the use of the word by Calev also refers to an incident (the מרגלים) when Calev went against the current as did Avrohom, and was praised in the Pasuk for having a אחרת, a different spirit. The Gemoroh in (לד:) explains the Pasuk וַיְעַלּוּ בְּנֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּבְּאוּ עַד־חֶבְרוֹן (במדבר יג: כב) and teaches:

מלמד, שפירש כלב מעצת מרגלים והלך ונשתתח על קברי אבות, אמר להן: אבותי, בקשו עלי רחמים שאנצל מעצת מרגלים. יהושע כבר בקש משה עליו רחמים, שנאמר: (במדבר יג) ויקרא משה להושע בן נון יהושע, י-יה יושעך מעצת מרגלים. והיינו דכתיב: (במדבר יד) ועבדי כלב עקב היתה רוח אחרת עמו<sup>9</sup> וגו'.

7 While the Rambam doesn't mention the age of three, we can understand that this is what the Rambam had in mind when he said כיון שנגמל איתן on the רמב"ם on the Rambam. See also the הגהות מיימוני.

8 Additionally one may correctly infer from this Musag that no one is judged on an absolute scale, but rather on a relative one. That is to say that just because one accomplishes great things that does not necessarily mean that they are to receive great reward. For it is possible that most of what they accomplished was easy for them due to the talents they were given. And, one who accomplishes much less may receive great reward, due to the fact that even their small accomplishment required tremendous effort. One is judged by the effort they invest to develop their innate capabilities to maximum fulfillment. This is what the Mishnah in Avos (פרק ה משנה כג) teaches: לפום צערא אגרא, according to the pain (effort) is the reward.

9 The Gemoroh is explaining why the Pasuk only credits Calev and not Yehoshua. They answer that Yehoshua had received the blessing of Moshe and was thus protected. Only Calev needed to daven in Chevron for the assistance of the Avos. Perhaps Moshe recognized that Calev possessed this trait and therefore did not feel that he required his intervention.

How appropriate for Calev to go to חברון the city of Avrohom and to daven there to be saved from the influence of the מרגלים. (Additionally, It is possible that when the Torah speaks of a רוח אחרת it refers to an inborn trait that Calev possessed, a trait that could have been corrupted by the other מרגלים, if not for his Tefilah.)

3. Questions for further thought:

- a. Do you think that Avrohom's מידה of חסד was also innate or what is something he created?
- b. Yaakov's name is rooted in the word עקב due to his grasping Eisav's heel. Can we explain this according to the ideas presented above?