

"And the soul(s) that they had gotten in Haran." (12:5)

Chazal teach us that the world will exist for six thousand years. These years are divided into three, two thousand year periods. The first is the period of "uvcu uv," - nothingness. The second period is the *Torah* era. The third is the Messianic period. The Rabbis indicate that the initial period of "*Tohu V'Vohu*" lasted from Creation until Avraham *Avinu* successfully reached out to the masses to convert their idolatrous beliefs to monotheism. This is the meaning of the words, "*the souls they had gotten in Haran.*" Avraham brought these itinerant souls under the protective wings of Hashem. This is a powerful condemnation of the two thousand years prior to Avraham. There were undoubtedly other righteous people who reached out to the people. Indeed, Shem and Ever maintained a *Yeshivah* to transmit the precepts of *Torah*. What was so unique about Avraham's orientation that it became the harbinger of the millennium of *Torah*?

This question is raised by many commentators. In his notes on the *Rambam* in *Hilchos Avodah Zarah*, the *Raavad* indicates the reason that Avraham is credited with wielding such a high level of influence. He explains that Avraham succeeded in smashing the idols, while his predecessors did not. Others moralized and taught positive precepts, but Avraham eradicated the evil from their midst. One has the obligation to involve himself with those who are estranged from the *Torah* way of life. He must realize, however, that complete success in reaching the unaffiliated will be achieved only when the evil is completely eradicated from their midst. Introducing the uninitiated to the positive aspects of *Torah* life, the beauty of *Shabbos*, the serenity of the observant Jewish home, and the stability of *Torah* education, is effective only when one exerts a simultaneous effort to focus upon the elimination of their prior misconceptions. The "idols" must be broken in order to effect a lasting return to *Torah* observance.

The *Raavad* continues to explain that other *tzaddikim* did, in fact, rebuke and influence the masses. They were not able to destroy the idols, however, since the idol worshippers hid them. Only Avraham was able to locate and actually break these idols. The *Kesef Mishnah* notes that the *Raavad's* answer is perplexing. Did Avraham possess a unique technique by which he detected the idols which had eluded the others before him? Idol worship was not clandestine in those days; on the contrary, it was publicly flaunted.

We suggest that the answer lies in the manner in which the idolators concealed the idols. The idols themselves were not physically hidden. Rather, the people denied their ownership. When an individual was accused of possessing an idol, he would immediately deny his relationship to it. He protested either that he was holding it for someone else, that he had just borrowed it, or that it belonged to his wife. These disclaimers provided a diversion from the superficial search for idol-worshippers. Avraham, however, maintained a relentless effort to eradicate every vestige of idol worship from the masses. His success was a reward of his total dedication to this goal.