

Go for yourself from your land. (12:1)....Then there came (the fugitive) and told Avram, the Ivri. (14:13)

When the Torah introduces Noach, it adds the word *b'dorosav*, in his generations. *Chazal* teach that this implies something special/specific about Noach's righteousness is in comparison to the others in regard to his generation. Some sages view this in his praise, i.e. he was a *tzadik* in such a morally profligate generation. Had he lived in Avraham *Avinu's* time, he would have been even more pious. Others contend that Noach's ability to rise above his generation was specifically because the society was so corrupt. Indeed, had he lived in Avraham's generation, he would not have risen to such spiritual stature. His righteousness was relative to the times. This well-known *Chazal* has allowed for ample commentary and homiletic expression.

We now meet Avraham, who became the first Jew, the father and Patriarch of our people. He, too, was a great *maamin*, believer in Hashem. He, too, manifested extraordinary righteousness. Why is it that no one seems to attribute Avraham's greatness as relative to his generation? Would he have been filled with such spiritual mettle and conviction had he lived in Noach's time? Perhaps he was great in comparison to the *dor haflagah*, generation of the dispersion, which occurred five centuries after the Flood. The members of the generation of the dispersal were denizens of a new world who used their newly-found technological skills to throw off the restraints that accompany religion. Veritably, their evil was dangerous – but not as egregious as the evil that precursed the Flood. Proof positive: they were dispersed – not destroyed. In such a spiritual climate, Avraham rose to prominence. Would we have said this five centuries earlier? Why does no one bring up the subject? Are we that certain that Avraham would have catapulted to the apex of dedication to Hashem even then?

Yes! The answer lies in one word: *Ivri*. Avraham *Avinu* is called Avraham *Halvri*, which is a title denoting much more than religious affiliation – or perhaps it might define his religious affiliation, his point of conviction. *Chazal* (*Bereishis Rabbah* 42:8) explain that *Ivri* means “from the other side.” This can be viewed geographically, but more importantly, spiritually. Yes, Avraham was from ever *hanahar*, the other side of the river, but he was also one alone in contradistinction to the world. *Kol ha'olam kulo mei'eiver echad, v'hu mei'eiver acher*; “The whole world was on one side, and he stood on another.”

Avraham feared only Hashem. One who fears Hashem, fears no one else. He did not fear standing alone in his beliefs, even if it meant standing up against evil rulers, perverted society, or even his own family. After he shattered his father's idols, he proclaimed monotheism to the entire world. Nimrod, the evil king who considered himself a deity and leader of the world, attempted to kill Avraham. Our Patriarch stood resolute and unwavering, even when in danger of losing his life. At least he would die for something for which it was worth living. He was not stubborn; he believed. His moral and spiritual clarity was founded in *emes*, truth, for which we have no substitute. While some individuals believe, but they do not have sufficient courage to live up to

their beliefs –especially when it means standing up against the world. That is the meaning of *Ivri* – a character trait imbued in the DNA of the Jewish People. (Sadly, some use this resoluteness for the wrong purpose.) We live in a world torn apart by moral confusion, a world in which values shift constantly. To be a Jew means to have the strength to say, “Even if the whole world disagrees, I stand with Hashem.”

Avraham did not isolate himself. He was a member of the community. He stood apart – not in isolation, but in inspiration. His home was open to all. *Ivri* does not mean aloof – it stands for being a beacon of moral clarity. Our Torah is the source of our moral clarity, sense of ethics, integrity, kindness and discipline. When a Jew acts in this manner, the world around him sees the Torah in action. To be a Jew means that one is ready to stand alone in opposition to the entire world – all for the sake of Hashem. Indeed, no debate exists concerning Avraham’s righteousness. The *Ivri* in him would have elevated him, even over the generation of the Flood.

Avraham broke his father’s idols. We do not have to break idols, but we do have to stand up for our convictions. Of what value is a faith for which one will not sacrifice? In a world that demands conformity, being an *Ivri* may be somewhat more difficult, but it is so much more meaningful. Everyone wants to be a leader. One who is an *Ivri* exemplifies the highest form of leadership. He is not afraid to stand alone.

An Israeli soldier, newly observant, returned home on *Erev Shabbos*. For his parents, seeing the *yarmulke* on his head was an anathema. Nonetheless, as “traditional” Jews, they did have a Friday night meal with *Kiddush* and *challah*. After *Kiddush*, the father banged on the table and screamed, “You have lost your mind! Is this how we raised you?” The son remained calm, looked his father directly in the eye, and replied, “*Abba*, you always taught us to stand for the truth – even if it is difficult. I discovered the truth, and I am living it.” That moment of courage penetrated the father’s sealed heart. Deafened and calloused by a lifetime of anti-*chareidi* rhetoric and sentiment, it took his son’s love, born of innocence, coupled with his fierce pride in his faith, to break through the dross that had closed his father’s heart and mind to Jewish observance.

An observant businessman had just closed a major deal with a non-Jewish client. In celebration, the client raised a glass of wine as a toast. The Jew declined, explaining that Jewish law prohibits drinking non-*mevushal* (uncooked, unpasteurized) wine poured by a non-Jew. The client was insulted and expressed his annoyance with a subtle threat: “Are you willing to risk a six-figure deal over a sip of wine?” The Jew replied, “If I compromise my values for money, how can you trust me with yours?” The client understood, and he immediately signed the deal. When one adheres to the *emes*, he will ultimately not lose out. If he sells the truth for a quick profit, he has already lost out.

An observant young woman, a student in a secular university, was subjected to listen to *kefirah*, heresy, from the professor of her philosophy class. The man had a serious problem acknowledging G-d. Obviously, he had other problems as well. One day, he challenged the class,

“Is anyone here still primitive enough to believe in a Creator?” The members of the class (fearing for their grade) remained silent. The young woman, however, stood up and said, “Yes, I do.” The professor was incensed, and he began to mock her. She held her ground and basically ignored his harangue. After class, a number of students approached her and said, “We agree with you. We just did not have the courage to take a stand.”

These short vignettes and so many others like them play themselves out every day. Some stand up for the truth; others just do not have it in them. One who truly believes, whose religious commitment runs deep, understands that *lvri* and *frumkeit* go hand-in-hand. One whose *frumkeit* vacillates with public opinion, whose heart is not anchored in truth, but rather in public approval and acceptance, forfeits the constancy of genuine faith and represents the opposite of the values which our Patriarch taught us.