

LECH LECHA
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

The question has been asked many times, why doesn't the Torah start with the first commandments that were given to the Jewish people in the Torah portion Bo in the Book of Shmos? Why does G-d have to give us the first book, Bereishis, of the Chumash? The answer given by Rashi in the first sentence of the Torah is because G-d wants to prove to everyone that He is the Creator and Ruler of the World, and He can give the lands of the world to anyone He wants. He first gave the land of Israel to the Canaanites, and then because they were not worthy, He gave the land of Israel to the Jews. But that doesn't answer the more fundamental question. Why doesn't the Torah begin with one sentence, which says that G-d created the world and gave the land of Israel to the Jews because the Canaanites were not worthy, and then teach us about Abraham? The Torah should just start when Abraham was born after this first sentence.

The Sefas Emes says that before we can even get the Torah we have to become menschen. We have to learn to learn the story from Cain and Abel to teach us the evils of jealousy. We have to learn the lesson of the flood to teach us the evils of lusting after things and people, and we have to learn the story of the Tower of Babel to teach us that we should not pursue honor excessively.

That may be true, but I feel there is another explanation why the Torah had to teach us the story of the two first Torah portions in the Torah before teaching us about Abraham. If you notice, after Eve there are no women that are mentioned in the Torah, with the exception of two women, who are only mentioned to teach us about the wife of Noah, Naama. Actually, the Torah doesn't say Naama was explicitly the wife of Noah. The Talmud teaches us that, but with these two exceptions, women are not mentioned in the first two Torah portions after Eve.

This is to teach us that if you do not consider women and their points of view, the world will end in destruction. We learn that Abraham married his niece Sara or, Iska, who in English is known as Jessica. She was called Iska because she was a good-looking woman, and she also had Ruach Hakosh. She could see things that Abraham could not see. In fact, the rabbis say that she had a higher level of prophecy than did Abraham. She was one of the seven prophetesses and forty-eight prophets mentioned in the Talmud. When problems came up, Abraham had to consult her. He could not order her to do anything. He was a great teacher, but she knew how to implement the teachings of Abraham. She was endowed with Chesed, kindness, intuition, and empathy. She was not always right, but she was right a great deal of the time. She sent Hagar away after she had urged Abraham to impregnate her, and then Sarah would adopt the baby. This was the ancient surrogate motherhood. She later took her back, and she rectified her mistake, but the rabbis say that one of the reasons for the exile in Egypt was because Sarah treated Hagar. Badly. Also, to prove that Sarah was Abraham's equal, when G-d told Abraham to circumcise himself and to change his name by putting a Hay in his name, which signifies G-d's name, He also told Abraham to put a Hay in Sarah's name since she also was a prophetess. They were equal partners in the covenant.

It is impossible for Judaism to spread without a man and a woman. The mistake of the generations before Abraham was that they did not include women and women's opinions in their discussions. When Sarah died, it says, "These are the days of Sarah." In other words, this was more the era of Sarah than the era of Abraham, and when Abraham came to bury her, it says that he mourned her first and then he cried. He wanted to tell the whole world first how important Sarah was before he, himself, personally mourned. It is interesting to note that Abraham live 38 years after Sarah died, but, according to the Torah, G-d never spoke with him again, although some rabbis interpret that after Sarah died when the Torah says Abraham was blessed B'Chol, it means that he was blessed with Sarah's Chesed. When Sarah was alive, her residence was Beersheba, which means an overflowing well. Abraham's residence was Chevron, which stands for friendship. Abraham was a great teacher, but Sarah knew how to implement the teachings.

Today we are celebrating an oof ruf, the forthcoming marriage of a handsome young man and a beautiful young woman. We hope they will continue the traditions of Abraham and Sarah and will always consult each other before arriving at a conclusion, because that is the way of the covenant. The covenant demands that both parties' opinions be taken into account. The generations before Abraham and Sarah did not do that.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a flood. A rescue helicopter came and dropped a rope down, and ten men and one woman grabbed onto the rope. The helicopter pilot called down and said that one person had to let go of the rope, otherwise the helicopter would crash. The woman shouted, "I've always sacrificed for my husband and children, so I'll let go of the rope," but before she could do so, all the men clapped.

We should always take into account each other's opinions. Women are not meant to just sacrifice for their husbands and children. They are not always right, but they add much to the deliberations and are right a great deal of the time.