בס"ד

FROM THE SHIURIM OF

Rabbi Daniel Glatstein

Lech Lecha: Secrets of Avraham's Decent to Egypt 🐪🐪🐪

Delivered 22 October 2026

HEAR THE SHIUR

https://youtu.be/gPL69YwLuDc

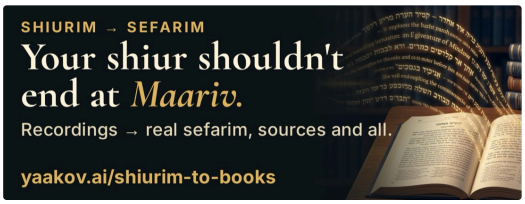
Sponsored by the Toubi Family

For Siyata D'Shmaya for all of Klal Yisrael:
Shalom Bayit · Parnassah B'Revach
Chinuch HaYeladim · Talmud Torah
and the Coming of Mashiach

You don't automate family, community or learning.
The busywork eating your week? That's my world.

Let AI do the *shlepping*, so you can do the *living*.

Yaakov.AI · Custom AI solutions for the Jewish world



Sponsorship Available

EMAIL

yaakov@yaakov.ai

Yaakov.AI

Yaakov.AI helps businesses automate their work with AI, so they run leaner and spend less. We also use AI to spread Torah, turning recorded shiurim into polished, fully sourced sefarim and weekly sheets like this one.

yaakov.ai/shiurim-to-books

Set 22 October 2026

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

When Avraham's journey to the Promised Land opens with famine, exile, and his wife's abduction, is this disaster or the hidden engine of Jewish destiny?

The setup. Hashem tells Avraham to leave everything for a land of blessing, and the moment he arrives there is famine — a famine that never existed before, found nowhere else on earth but Eretz Yisrael. Avraham must descend to Mitzrayim, where Sarah is seized by Pharaoh. The promises seem to collapse instantly.

The Ramban's pattern. Everything here is מעשה אבות סימן לבנים: Avraham's descent, Sarah's abduction, the plagues on Pharaoh, the forced release with wealth — all prefigure Klal Yisrael's own descent, oppression, plagues, and exodus. The Ramban adds a startling claim: Avraham sinned, both in telling Sarah to say she was his sister and in ever leaving Eretz Yisrael, lacking bitachon — and that sin seeded the later enslavement.

The pushback. The Maharal seeks to uproot the Ramban entirely, asking why Avraham repeated the same plan with Avimelech and why Yitzchak did likewise, if it were truly so grave a sin. Others trace the Ramban's chiddush to the Zohar. The Malbim offers a different read: Avraham's plan was never to have Sarah taken, but to price her beyond reach.

The reversal. Nothing Hashem promised at לך לך — nation, fame, children, wealth — had yet come true; Avraham arrived in debt, childless, unknown. Yet his descent and exodus from Mitzrayim became the pre-enactment of Klal Yisrael's future redemption, itself the pattern for the final geulah, down to the month and the date.

Where it lands. Avraham's first recorded words in the Torah, telling Sarah of her beauty, reveal him securing both the deepest chesed and the רכוש גדול that would one day become תורתנו הקדושה, the Torah itself. What looked like catastrophe was the first move toward the ultimate redemption and the giving of the Torah — before the story even began.

◆ *A Famine That Never Existed Before*

Hashem comes to Avraham Avinu with the epic command: לך לך מארצך וממולדתך ומבית אביך — go from your land, from your birthplace, from your father's house.[1] Where are you going? I'll let you know. And there I will make you into a great nation, I will bless you, I will make your name great, you will be a blessing.

So Avraham Avinu hits the road. And the moment he arrives in the Land of Israel, there is nothing to eat. Now you might say, why was there nothing to eat? There was food before. The answer is that there was a famine. A famine? Do you remember ever encountering a famine in Chumash before this event? There was

never a famine in history. The concept of famine did not exist. And where exactly was the famine? Only in the Land of Israel. Was there a famine back in Charan, where Avraham came from? No. Was there a famine in Ur Kasdim? No.

So, wow — this listening to G-d is really working out. We're off to a really good start. Hashem tells me to leave my house, my family, my livelihood, everything familiar, and everything will be good: you'll be wealthy, you'll be successful, you'll be blessed. And Avraham gets there and he can't put a stale piece of bread on the table. Wow, this religion is really wonderful. Very positive. And all the people back home who told Avraham he was delusional in his religion must have been laughing. **How's that working out for you?**

◆ *The Ramban: Maaseh Avos Siman LeBanim*

So Avraham goes down to Mitzrayim. Did he do the right thing? You'll say, what else was he supposed to do? He had no choice. The Ramban addresses this with an epic comment. Avraham went down to Mitzrayim because of the hunger, to sojourn there, to keep himself alive in the years of famine. And when he got there, did the Mitzrim shower him with honor? No — they oppressed him for nothing. What did they do? They kidnapped his wife.

Picture it. Avraham Avinu's first day on the job, so to speak, the first day after he formally agreed to listen to Hashem. He goes down to Egypt because there's nothing to eat in Eretz Canaan, and the first day he's there the authorities knock on the door and take his wife away. Very nice. And then what happens? הקדוש ברוך הוא נוקם נקמתם בנגעים גדולים — the Ribono Shel Olam avenged them with great plagues. Sound familiar? ויוציאהו משם — and Hashem extricated Avraham from there, במקנה בכסף ובזהב, with cattle, with silver, with gold. And Pharaoh even commanded his men to escort him out; he forced Avraham out.

What is all this about? It is all built on the Ramban's great principle, which he advances at the beginning of the parsha: מעשה אבות סימן לבנים. Whatever happened to Avraham Avinu was a portent, a paradigm, a pre-enactment of what would happen to the Jewish people. Hashem alluded to Avraham כי בניו ירדו מצרים — that his children would go down to Egypt because of famine, to live there temporarily, and that the Egyptians would harm them.

And then the Ramban reveals something stunning. Everybody knows that the Mitzrim made a decree: כל הבן הילוד היאורה תשליכוהו וכל הבת תחיון — throw every boy into the river and let every girl live. The Ramban is saying that because this whole episode was generated by what happened to Avraham and Sarah, the reason the Egyptians wanted the women to live was not out of kindness to the ladies. It was because they wanted to take the women, exactly as Pharaoh did. And then Hashem plagued the Egyptians the same way He plagued Pharaoh when Avraham and Sarah came down. Until they let us out — מקנה כבד מאד, בכסף ובזהב ובצאן ובבקר — and they pressed us to leave. לא נפל דבר מכל מאורע האב שלא יהיה בבנים. Not one detail that happened to

Avraham failed to repeat itself in his descendants. The whole thing rests on the idea that Hashem told Avraham: go and כבוש את הדרך לפני בניך, conquer the path before your children.

This is a famous approach of the Ramban, and he uses it throughout Sefer Bereishis — Yitzchak at the wells, Avraham's war with the four kings, Yaakov Avinu's descent. Every event in Bereishis gets read through this lens.

◆ *Two Earth-Shattering Chiddushim*

Now, according to most Midrashim, Avraham's arriving in Eretz Yisrael, encountering famine, and being forced down to Mitzrayim was one of the ten tests of Avraham Avinu. The Ramban does not learn that way. Check this out. וְדַע כִּי אַבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ חָטָא חֵטְא גָּדוֹל בִּשְׁגָגָה — Avraham Avinu inadvertently committed a great sin. Why? שהביא אשתו הצדקת במכשול עון — he brought his righteous wife to a stumbling block of sin, מפני פחדו פן יהרגוהו, out of his fear that they would kill him.

Meaning, Avraham Avinu tells Sarah: Sarah, you're a lovely wife, it's been great. Here's the deal. If we show everybody our kesubah, they'll kill me. So just tell everyone we're brother and sister. That way they can abduct you, they will violate you, and my skin will be saved. You hear what he's telling her? Sarah, I'm going to feed you to the dogs, they're going to violate you, and I'll survive. Why? Because he feared for his life.

Did Avraham Avinu do the right thing? No, says the Ramban. He sinned egregiously. He did the wrong thing. What should he have done? They would have killed him! He should have had bitachon that Hashem would save both him and his wife. He should have said: Pharaoh, meet my lovely wife, Sarah. We're married. We've been married a long time. Don't lay a hand on her. And he should have trusted that the Ribono Shel Olam can save Sarah and Avraham from Pharaoh.

And the Ramban is not finished. You know what else was a sin? The fact that he left the Land of Israel in the first place. גם יציאתו מן הארץ, שנצטווה עליה בתחילה. Hashem told him לך לך מארצך ואברכך — I'll bless you, which Rashi explains refers to money. So he should have had bitachon and stayed. Hashem can redeem a man from famine.

If you ever wondered why the Jewish people deserved the Holocaust that was Egypt — where eighty percent of our people were decimated, where more Jews perished than in the Holocaust — what did they do to deserve it? Here's the answer: it was a punishment for Avraham Avinu's treatment of his wife and for his lack of bitachon in going down to Mitzrayim. He shouldn't have told Pharaoh they were brother and sister. If he was going down, he should have said they were married. And the truth is, he shouldn't have gone down at all. Because he sinned with Pharaoh in Mitzrayim, the Jewish people were punished by Pharaoh in Mitzrayim.

That is a very strong statement. Mitzrayim was not a nice place. It would be like saying: why did the Holocaust happen? Because one of our forefathers exhibited a slight lack of bitachon. We could never say such a thing — but that is what the Ramban is saying.

◆ *Where Did the Ramban Get This From?*

So we have two monumental chiddushim, and the Mefarshim struggle with both. Where did the Ramban get this? No other Mefaresh explains that Avraham Avinu did the wrong thing here. Does it say anywhere in the Chumash that he lacked bitachon? It does not. All the Rishonim learned that it was one of the ten tests of Avraham Avinu — Hashem says go to Eretz Yisrael, he goes, and immediately he has to leave. Says the Ramban: no, he did not have to leave. Nobody told him to leave.

Comes the Maharal in Sefer Gevuros Hashem and says he is going to ask questions on the Ramban עד שנעקר פירושו מכל וכל — I will uproot his explanation entirely from its source. There is nowhere else in the writings of the Maharal where he writes so sharply that he intends to be עוקר the teaching of the Ramban.

First of all, asks the Maharal, if it is true that it was decreed upon Avraham's descendants to go down to Mitzrayim because Avraham sinned by saying they were brother and sister — could you tell me why, shortly afterward, when Avraham came to Gerar and Avimelech asked who the lady was, Avraham said again, she's my sister? If it was such an egregious sin, why repeat it? And guess what Yitzchak did when he went down with Rivka. Avraham was at least polite about it — he said, Sarah, here's the deal, when we go down you'll say we're brother and sister. Yitzchak took no chances. He didn't even discuss it with her in advance; they asked and he said, she's my sister. So if it was such an egregious sin, why did Avraham repeat it, and why did Yitzchak do it?

In the writings of Rabbi Yosef Shaul HaLevi Natanzon there is an approach to explain why Avraham did not stay in Eretz Yisrael and rely on Hashem: in his great humility, Avraham was concerned that perhaps he was not worthy of a miracle. So he had to do hishtadlus; he had no choice, and he did not want to lean on a miracle. In the Mossad HaRav Kook edition of the Ramban — the classic edition, with the annotations of Rav Chaim Dov Shavel, or as you may remember him from the English edition, Rabbi Dr. Charles Chavel — he writes that this answer would also resolve the Maharal's question. The Maharal asks why Avraham said that Sarah was his sister, and the answer is that Avraham was concerned that he was not worthy of a miracle. But as we pointed out, does that really answer it? He repeated it again by Avimelech, and Yitzchak did it too.

The Ramban is also difficult because all the Midrashim identify this episode as one of the nisyonos of Avraham — just as the Akeidah was a nisayon and לך לך was a nisayon, so too the fact that he came to Canaan and that was the only land in the world with a famine. See Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer, chapter 5.[2] The moment Avraham Avinu stepped off the plane, so to speak, and kissed the ground — right then, for the first

time in history, there was a famine. And if you looked at the map, it was only where Avraham was. The test, says Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer, was that he should go down to Mitzrayim.

And in the commentary on Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer, the Radal, Rav Dovid Luria, notes that this is not like the Ramban, who holds that Avraham Avinu sinned by going to Mitzrayim — and he points out that the Ramban got it from the Zohar HaKadosh, where the Zohar says that because Avraham went down to Mitzrayim without permission, the Jewish people were enslaved in Egypt. Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer, however, follows the view in the Zohar that Avraham Avinu was required to go down.

In the footnotes on the Ramban, Rav Chaim Dov Shavel brings sources for both chiddushim. Where did the Ramban get that Avraham sinned egregiously by telling Sarah to say she was his sister? From a different Zohar. The Zohar in Tazria opens with Rabbi Elazar questioning how Avraham, who was so G-d-fearing, could stoop to say that she was his sister. So the Zohar is משמע that Avraham Avinu sinned by employing this plan. And where did the Ramban get that it was an aveirah for Avraham to leave Eretz Yisrael? Also the Zohar.

More than thirty years ago our rebbi, Rav Moshe Proberg, taught us this Ramban. I remember him saying that it is a tremendous chiddush that the Ramban holds Avraham Avinu committed an aveirah by going down to Mitzrayim, and that it is a big question where the Ramban got it from — and I believe he referenced this very note in Rav Shavel's annotations. Because I remember the way he would say it: boys, the best Ramban to get is the Shavel Ramban. I don't do imitations — though if I did, I think I could do a pretty good job right now. Anyway, I got the Shavel, and there he says it: the source of the Ramban is the Zohar HaKadosh.

◆ *The Malbim: What Avraham's Plan Actually Was*

Now let's learn what exactly Avraham's plan was. He says to Sarah: please say that you are my sister. Why? למען ייטב לי בעבורך — so that they should give me presents, as Rashi explains — וחיתה נפשי בגללך, and we'll survive.[3]

It's a little odd. Avraham is saying: dear wife, here's the plan. We'll say you're my sister, this way they'll abduct you and violate you, and then they'll give me a lot of nice presents, and we'll save our skin. So what was Avraham Avinu most concerned about — the gifts? That's the first thing he mentions! And how exactly would their giving Avraham presents save their lives? The pasuk should have simply said וחיתה נפשי בגללך — say you're my sister so that we survive. Why insert the gifts in the middle?

There is an incredible Malbim here. And before we get to it, notice something else. How does Pharaoh even enter this story? We haven't been introduced to him yet. The pesukim say that when Avraham came down to Mitzrayim, the Mitzrim saw the woman כי יפה היא מאד, that she was very beautiful. Okay — so what did they do? It doesn't say! The next pasuk simply says ויראו אותה שרי פרעה ויהללו אותה אל פרעה — the officers of

Pharaoh saw her and praised her to Pharaoh. So why does the previous pasuk bother telling us that the Egyptians saw she was beautiful? There's no "therefore." It starts: the Egyptians saw she was very beautiful — and then nothing. And then the officers of Pharaoh see her, praise her to Pharaoh, and she's taken.

The Malbim has an ingenious approach. Avraham Avinu never asked Sarah to say she was his sister so that she would be taken and abducted. The plan was the opposite. Tell everyone that I'm the boss, I'm the big brother, and nobody takes your hand in marriage without my permission. You're like an orphan girl, and I'm the mafia boss — and everybody knows what that means. If they want to marry you, they have to buy me off. And when they hear the price I ask, they'll say never mind. A woman you have to pay a fortune for — nobody will be interested. I'll ask an exorbitant price and they'll all back off.

That is precisely why the pasuk says that the Egyptians saw that she was very beautiful — and then nothing happened. They asked how much, they didn't get the answer they wanted, and they moved on. But Avraham Avinu never imagined that word would reach the king that Sarah was available. The officers of Pharaoh saw her and praised her to Pharaoh. Pharaoh asked how much, and when he heard the price, Avraham couldn't very well change it. And Pharaoh said: no problem. How do you want it — gold or cash? Avraham Avinu was stuck. And indeed, ולאברם היטיב בעבורה — he did well by him; they gave him a fortune.

The Malbim points to the precise wording. Avraham said למען ייטב לי בעבורך וחיתה נפשי בגללך. There is a difference between בעבור and בעבורך. בגלל means in exchange for you — meaning, I am putting you up for bid. I'm selling you, but at a price nobody can pay. And since they can't pay it, I'll live on your account, because nobody will buy you and they'll send us on our way.

Then the Malbim adds something fascinating. It is known that in ancient times, when they saw a woman of exceptional beauty, they assumed she must be a deity, a goddess. Avraham Avinu would then be in grave danger — what right would an ordinary man have to be living with a goddess? So Avraham says: don't say you're married to me, because they'll kill me. Say I'm your brother — and if I'm the brother of the goddess, they'll honor me and pay me homage. The trouble was that in ancient times they also believed the king was a god. So they took Sarah, with her exceptional beauty, straight to Pharaoh.

◆ *Pharaoh and the Art of Cross-Examination*

Here is another Ramban that I get a real kick out of. Nowhere did Sarah ever tell Pharaoh that she was Avraham's sister. And nowhere did Sarah tell Pharaoh that she was Avraham's wife. Yet when Pharaoh is stricken with great plagues, ויקרא פרעה לאברם ויאמר מה זאת עשית לי, למה לא הגדת לי כי אשתך היא.[4] Why didn't you tell me she was your wife? So how did Pharaoh know she was his wife? Sarah never told him, and we don't find anywhere in the Chumash that she did.

The Ramban offers one answer: on the night Pharaoh took Sarah, he was suddenly in terrible pain, rolling in misery, being smitten by an angel over the head. He says to himself, what has G-d done to us? So he turned to her and asked what in the world is going on here — and she had no choice but to tell him, he is my husband. According to this first pshat, she divulged it, and that is why Pharaoh summoned Avraham and confronted him: למה לא הגדת לי כי אשתך היא.

But then the Ramban gives a second pshat. Pharaoh was no fool. What was the plague he was stricken with? רעתן — a disease that causes pain in marital relations. So Pharaoh put two and two together: I just took this woman, and suddenly I have this disease. Maybe I shouldn't be taking this woman.

And now Pharaoh teaches us the art of cross-examination. Pharaoh had no clue that Avraham was married to Sarah or even related to her, but he wanted to extract the truth because he was uncertain. If she's the sister, she becomes his new wife. If she's the wife, he knows he can't touch her. So what does he do? He asks: **why didn't you tell me that she's your wife?** This is the art of the leading question. He set him up. Because if she were not his wife, Avraham Avinu would instantly have said, what are you talking about, she's my sister. And what did Avraham Avinu say? He didn't open his mouth. And Pharaoh said: gotcha. I wasn't sure — but now that you didn't deny it, I've got my answer.

So the first training course in cross-examination comes from Pharaoh. He took a shot in the dark; he had nothing to lose. It's the same technique people use when they're asking around for shidduchim — and by the way, you're really not allowed to do this, but I know people who are very good at it. You have no reason whatsoever to think the boy smokes. You call up and say, "So, he smokes every week?" If the person answers, "Well, only socially" — there you go, you've found out exactly what you wanted to know. But if the person says, "What are you talking about? I never heard such a thing" — then you know too. That is the art of yenta information-gathering for shidduchim, and where do you learn it from? From Pharaoh. I find it amazing how the Ramban read into Pharaoh's question in order to answer how Pharaoh knew. That's the Ramban for you.

◆ *The Nisyonos That Paved the Path*

Now let's return to the view of most Rishonim, that Avraham passed a test here — that Hashem said go to Eretz Yisrael, and the moment he arrived he had to leave.

Rav Chaim Volozhiner, in Nefesh HaChaim, addresses the Mishnah that teaches there were ten generations from Noach until Avraham and that Avraham was tested with ten tests, and he asks why he is called אבינו specifically in the context of his tests. And he says something foundational. Throughout history, even simple Jews, even unlearned Jews, were willing to be thrown into the fire for the Ribono Shel Olam. Where did they get that spiritual strength? How were they able to summon the commitment to be מוסר נפש על קידוש השם? It

was ingrained in them. It is in their DNA, from Avraham Avinu, who was willing to be thrown into the fire. All ten of Avraham's tests paved the way for Klal Yisrael.

Anytime a Jew suddenly has the urge — I've got to get out of here, I've got to get out of the Five Towns, what is going to be here in America, only in Europe could such things happen, it will never happen here, we live in a civilized country — anytime a Jew gets it into his head, we're going to Eretz Yisrael, that comes from Avraham Avinu. It's programmed into our DNA. And anytime a person meets difficulty in life and says, it must be for the good — where do we get that from? Avraham Avinu is sent to Eretz Yisrael, and the moment he arrives it's a catastrophe. And what does he do? כל מה דעביד רחמנא לטב עביד. He doesn't question Hashem. He doesn't protest. He accepts the gezeirah.

Just picture it. Avraham Avinu is seventy-five years old. Not ancient, but no youngster either. He's comfortable, he's settled, Hashem has saved his life. And Hashem comes to him and says: leave everything familiar, go to Eretz Yisrael. And the day he arrives there is a disaster the likes of which the world has never seen — and only in that one place. And Avraham Avinu does not question Hashem. He says גם זו לטובה.

◆ *The Toivah He Never Saw*

But it dawned on me — do you know how good it actually ended up for Avraham? Think about it. Hashem said לך לך מארצך וממולדתך ומבית אביך, and Rashi explains that Hashem was promising him: you will become a great nation, you will become famous, you will have children, you will become wealthy. How many of those things came true when he arrived in Eretz Yisrael? Not one. He had no money — Rashi even says that on the way back he had to go pay off his debts. So he arrives, he's in debt, he has no children, and nobody knows who he is. Nothing came true.

So Avraham Avinu says גם זו לטובה. But I wonder whether Avraham Avinu ever knew what that טובה was. Because it dawned on me that his going down to Mitzrayim was **the best thing that ever happened in the history of the world**.

How so? Because of the first Ramban we learned. Avraham Avinu's descent to Mitzrayim is the pre-enactment of the Jewish people's descent to Mitzrayim — which means his coming out of Mitzrayim is the pre-enactment of Klal Yisrael's coming out of Mitzrayim. And there is another layer. Just as everything that happened in Bereishis created the future destiny of the Jewish people, so everything that happened in Mitzrayim created the next era of Jewish history. We have learned many times that the מעשה אבות סימן לבנים of the גאולה העתידה, the final redemption, is Yetzias Mitzrayim. The way Hashem took us out of Mitzrayim was the pre-enactment of the coming of Mashiach. כימי צאתך מארץ מצרים.

We have brought many sources on this — in Rabbeinu Bachaye, and in the sefer on the Haggadah, Ma'aseh Nissim, of Rabbi Yaakov Lorberbaum — that the geulah will be כפולה ומכופלת, that all the events of Yetzias

Mitzrayim were doubled: they created the future redemption. The ten makkos that struck Mitzrayim will have their counterpart in ten makkos against our enemies at the end of days; there will be a Krias Yam Suf; and the events of Yetzias Mitzrayim, which took place in the month of Nisan, on the fifteenth of Nisan, will repeat themselves when the geulah comes, in the month of Nisan, on the fifteenth of Nisan.

So Avraham Avinu is presumably thinking: Ribono Shel Olam, You told me to leave my hometown, You told me to leave Charan, and I arrive in Eretz Yisrael and it is an epic disaster. There is nothing to eat. There is food everywhere else in the world and none here. I have no children. I have no success. None of Your promises have come true. This is an abysmal failure.

And in truth it was the greatest thing that ever happened. Because Avraham Avinu going down to Mitzrayim and coming out created the redemption of Klal Yisrael. It created the גאולה העתידה.

So ask yourself: from the moment Hashem told Avraham לך לך — I choose you for the great journey, for the great rendezvous with Me, I will be your G-d and you are chosen to Me — how long did it take for the Ribono Shel Olam to start turning the wheels to bring Mashiach? **It was the very first thing He did.** Hashem says לך לך, Avraham arrives in Eretz Yisrael, and the first thing that happens is that he goes down to Mitzrayim and comes out — which sets in motion the Jewish people going down to Mitzrayim and coming out, which sets in motion the ultimate redemption.

At first glance it looks like a failure, a disaster, a catastrophic relationship, and Avraham Avinu has no idea how or why. But in truth his descent to Mitzrayim is the most wondrous narrative in the history of the world. His going down and his salvation created the future redemption of the Jewish people. Hashem says: listen, I can't explain it right now, just take My word for it — you're going to Eretz Yisrael and it will be very good. And Avraham says: I don't see any good, but I have faith in You, and this will end well. Can you imagine? Avraham Avinu walking forward with absolute faith, having no idea that this disaster — his wife abducted, the plagues, his departure — would ultimately produce the redemption of the Jewish people.

It is as if the story is over before it begins. That is how the story of the Jewish people opens. Hashem says: Avraham, are you with Me? Avraham says, I'm with You — and will it be good in the end? And the Ribono Shel Olam says: I take care of the end before I take care of the beginning. First I will set in motion the end of the story, and then you'll see how the rest of it plays out.

◆ *The First Words Avraham Ever Spoke*

Now I want to add something else. This is a thought that struck me, and I think it is a great treasure.

We are introduced to Avraham Avinu already at the end of Noach. We know he has a father, a brother, a wife, a nephew. But how many words did Avraham Avinu say in Noach? Nothing. And when Hashem says,

Avraham, go — what did Avraham say? "Sure thing, G-d"? No. He said nothing at all. He just went.

So I was thinking: what were the very first words ever uttered by Avraham Avinu in the Torah? Because there is a principle in the writings of Rav Tzadok HaKohen that the first time something appears in the Torah sets the tone for its entire essence. So it must be significant. And the first words are: הנה נא ידעתי כי אשה יפת מראה את.[5] Now I know that you are a beautiful woman.

What is Avraham Avinu's defining middah? Chesed. He is the greatest baal chesed who ever lived. Now, who bears the greatest claim on your chesed? Complete strangers? No — your relatives. And of all your relatives, your greatest responsibility of chesed is to your wife. And what is more valuable, kindness done with money or kindness done with words? Words.

So what is the greatest chesed a person can do in this world? To say to your wife the words that Avraham Avinu said to Sarah. And those are the first words ever uttered by Avraham Avinu in the Torah. **Think about that one.**

Who is Avraham Avinu? The greatest baal chesed who ever lived. Really? To whom? To everyone — even to the criminals of Sodom, even to passing wayfarers. And what about his own family? You want to know who Avraham Avinu is? Look at the first words ever recorded from his mouth. You want to know the greatest act of kindness you can do in this world? It's right there.

Yes, there is a Midrash that he first noticed her beauty when he saw her reflection in the water. I'm speaking about the first recorded words in the Chumash. And yes, there is the famous question of how he could have married her without having seen her, and there are many well-known answers, including the Ramban's; Rashi explains that he knew before, but it never concerned him until now. But all of that is on the human level. I searched to see whether anyone points this out, and I found in a sefer, Daas Mikra, that these are indeed his first words — but nobody explains why.

◆ *Locking In the Rechush Gadol*

Now let's explain it on a holier level, because Avraham Avinu continues. What is Avraham Avinu's first request in the entire Torah? Please say you are my sister, so that my bank account should grow. That's a strange first request. The Malbim, as we saw, explains that he intended to name a price nobody could meet.

But I have seen elsewhere, and I was able to find it for this shiur in the writings of Rabbi Eliyahu HaKohen of Izmir, that Avraham Avinu had an inkling that his going down to Mitzrayim and coming out would portend the Jewish people's going down and coming out. And he knew that the Jewish people needed to leave ברכוש גדול, with great wealth. So he tells Sarah: it is crucial that when we leave here, we don't walk out with only

the shirts on our backs. We have to come out with a fortune. So say that you are my sister, so that in the future the Jewish people will come out with great wealth.

Now, the promise of ואחרי כן יצאו ברכוש גדול appears later in Lech Lecha, at the ברית בין הבתרים. But the ברית בין הבתרים actually happened before this episode. According to most authorities, Avraham Avinu came to Eretz Yisrael when he was seventy, and then made a yeridah, and then Hashem told him to go back. The Malbim says it, Rashi says it; we once gave a shiur on it called "Double Lech Lecha."

So Rabbi Eliyahu HaKohen of Izmir says that Avraham Avinu reasoned: it is not enough to go down to Mitzrayim and come out. We must create the future destiny that the Jewish people will leave with great wealth.

Now why the emphasis that when we left Mitzrayim we left with a lot of money? We were in Mitzrayim for two hundred and ten years, but the good news is that when we came out we were loaded — gold, silver, donkeys, clothing, jewelry. Many seforim write — we bring many sources in the shiur, including the Alshich and the Ksav v'Hakabbalah — that the רכוש גדול the Jewish people took out of Mitzrayim was really something else entirely. What was the greatest wealth we took out of Mitzrayim? Not physical wealth. The spiritual wealth. **The Torah.** In fact, it is written that the gematria of ויצאו ברכוש גדול is the gematria of זו התורה.

So think about it. Why did we merit the רכוש גדול when we left Mitzrayim? Because when Pharaoh sent Avraham and Sarah out, they left with great wealth. That was the מעשה אבות. And the סימן לבנים is that when we left Mitzrayim, we left with the Torah. When Avraham and Sarah were sent out of Pharaoh's house laden with wealth — and you would have to explain how that wealth itself carried some spiritual dimension, but let's leave that for now — they were laying the groundwork for Kabbalas HaTorah.

So it emerges that the very first words of Avraham Avinu ever recorded in the Torah are: Sarah, I know our lives are on the line, but we have to arrange that one day the Jewish people will receive the Torah. So do me a favor — say you are my sister, so that when Pharaoh sends us out he will give us a fortune, so that when the Jews leave Mitzrayim they will receive the Torah.

So in addition to the enormous chesed that Avraham Avinu's first recorded words express — he did not forget the chesed owed to the one who needed it from him most — he was simultaneously locking in the greatest and most important treasure Klal Yisrael would ever need: that Klal Yisrael should be מקבל התורה. What was concerning him in למען ייטב לי? The רכוש גדול. And what is the תורתנו הקדושה? רכוש גדול.

So Hashem says: go, it will be good for you. And Avraham Avinu arrives and it's an epic disaster. No — it is not a disaster. He wins one lottery after another. The moment he reaches Eretz Yisrael he secures the גאולה העתידה. The moment he goes down to Mitzrayim he secures תורתנו הקדושה, all the great gifts the Ribono Shel Olam has in store for Klal Yisrael. Hashem says לך לך — go for your benefit, לַהֲנָאָתְךָ וּלְטוֹבָתְךָ — and Avraham Avinu is thinking to himself: this is tragic, this is catastrophic. No. It was better than anything he

could have imagined. The moment he set foot near the land of Egypt, the Ribono Shel Olam set into motion the entire destiny of the Jewish people — the גאולה העתידה and תורתנו הקדושה.

Sources

1. Bereishis 12:1. ויאמר י-ה-ו-ה אל־אברם לך־לך מארצך וממולדתך ומבית אביך אל־הארץ אשר אראך:
2. Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer, chapter 5 (not in Sefaria). The test of Avraham: that he came to Eretz Canaan and there was a famine, in order to test him and to bring him down to Mitzrayim.
3. Bereishis 12:13. אמרי־נא אחתי את למען ייטב־לי בעבורך וחיתה נפשי בגללך:
4. Bereishis 12:18. ויקרא פרעה לאברם ויאמר מה־זאת עשית לי למה לא־הגדת לי כי אשתך הוא:
5. Bereishis 12:11. ויהי כאשר הקריב לבוא מצרימה ויאמר אל־שרי אשתו הנה־נא ידעתי כי אשה יפת־מראה את: