

The Covenant with Abraham

by [Petr Chylek](#) (November 2023)



The Creation of Man, Marc Chagall, 1958

Abraham is a patriarch recognized by all three major Western religions, Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Abraham appears on the stage of the Old Testament in Genesis Chapter 12, where God said to Abram: "Go to yourself from your land, from your relatives, from your father's house to the land which I will show you." (Genesis 12:1) This sentence has, as most verses in Old Testament, several different interpretations. The literal level of understanding is that God induces Abram to move on from the city of Charan where his father Terra stopped over on the trip from Ur. Thus, it is God's nudging Abram to resume the trip, even when he must leave his father and other members of his family behind.

In Hebrew, the verse Gen. 12:1 is introduced by two words: LECH LECHA. The LECH is an imperative form meaning "go." LECHA means "to yourself." Since: "Go to yourself" does not make too much sense to most translators and interpreters, the second part of the phrase is usually omitted and the whole phrase is simply translated as "go," which is a translation of the first Hebrew word, LECH. For those of us who have at least some experience with meditation, the whole phrase LECH LECHA meaning "Go to yourself" makes sense.

The interpretation offered by Kabbalists^[1] is that the words of God are directed to each of us, to leave comfort in our present situation to move us in our spiritual development to a higher level of consciousness. Such a move may require leaving behind the comfort of your home, the security of your parents' house, and the support of your relatives. This motion of consciousness to higher spiritual worlds is later referred to in the Torah (Old Testament) as leaving the land of Egypt, the land of slavery.

Finally, a mystical interpretation of Genesis 12:1, according

to Zohar, [2] is that God is speaking to the Soul of Abraham which is presently situated somewhere in Heaven, to induce it to leave the comfort of Heaven and come down to the land He would show him, to come down and incarnate into a physical body and become a living person called Abram, which name God later changed to Abraham.

It is understandable that regardless of which interpretation you accept, Abram is not enthusiastic about the offered adventure. He is familiar with and likes his present situation where he is, and is not eager to trade it for an unknown future. Thus, God includes in his offer additional features by which He hopes to induce Abram to take the offer. "I will make of you a great nation. I will bless you and make your name great, and you shall be a blessing." (Genesis 12: 2) And so, finally, Abram went as God had spoken to him.

Some religious sources consider the above-cited verse (Genesis 12:1) to be a complete covenant between God and Abram. Abram agreed to go and God promised all these rewards. In this understanding, Abram already fulfilled his part of the covenant by moving to a specified location and nothing more is expected from him. Thus, the fulfillment of the Covenant is now up to God. He is expected to sustain and protect us. This interpretation is favored in many Christian circles.

Later, when Abram reached the land called Canaan (an area within today's Israel) God added "To your offspring I will give this land." This promise has also a few different interpretations. In one interpretation this means the "World to Come" called YETZIRAH in Kabbalah, where the Souls of people go after the death of their bodies. In another, it means the physical land in the Middle East.

Many scholars disagree with the interpretation that Genesis 12 contains the covenant between God and Abram, and instead, they consider Genesis Chapter 17 as a place that specifies the covenant.

However, even here the covenant between God and Abraham described in Old Testament (Torah) Genesis chapter 17 has been misunderstood and misinterpreted by commentators, teachers, Rabbis, and priests. It is difficult to assess whether it has been an intentional misinterpretation committed by people of influence or an unintentional error. In any case, the words of the Torah are clear to one who can read them without prejudices and without being a subject of early childhood indoctrination.

Original Torah in Hebrew is written in such a way that it can be read on different levels by people who are on different levels of their spiritual path. It has a different meaning for people involved predominantly with their physical well-being and with their material possessions, and a different meaning for people searching for spiritual treasures. This multilevel Torah meaning is well demonstrated by the words of Moses in the first sentence of Chapter 32 of Deuteronomy: "Give ear, O Heaven and I will speak; and may the Earth hear the talk of my mouth." Clearly, two levels of instruction. One as a whisper to your ear for those who can hear, and the other one as a talk of my mouth for those who are preoccupied with their physical well-being. [\[3\]](#)

A spiritual level of the covenant between God and Abraham can be seen when God says: "Walk before me and be perfect (TAMIM in Hebrew) and I will set My covenant between Me and you ... and your offspring ... and I shall be a God to them." (Genesis 17:1-8) Finally, God finished by saying: "You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin, and that shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you." (Genesis 17:12)

Please, note that circumcision will be a sign of the covenant; like a signature on documents and contracts in our days. The circumcision is a sign of the covenant, it is not a covenant itself. This is a common misinterpretation, which also leaves all women out. Contract specifies the agreement of two parties, it specifies what each party is obliged to do as a

part of the contract. The Divine would be a God to them, He would sustain them, and guide them through their lives, and they, as part of the covenant, would become perfect, they would walk and be perfect before His face. While circumcision is only a sign of the contract it has been interpreted by many teachers and religious leaders as being the covenant itself. This removes all responsibility from people for changing their behavior from inborn selfishness (caring predominantly for my own well-being) to selflessness (caring for my neighbors as well). On the other hand the original wording: "walk perfect before Me" requires control of your actions, words, thoughts, and feelings, which is a never-ending process.

The Zohar, the third inspired Jewish scriptures, says, that those who decided to enter, they already entered. This means that once you decide to change your way of life, you are already counted as if you had already accomplished that. All divine help is there to help and guide your steps.

"Walk before me and be perfect" is an analog of the statement "You shall be holy for holy am I," (Leviticus 19:2), which also appears in the New Testament, in the first Peter 1:16: "Be you holy, for I am holy." Here it is a call to Jews and Christians to live a holy life to become in the likeness of God.

A few years ago, I visited a service at a Catholic Church. The priest presented a sermon on the creation of man on the sixth day of creation. He claimed that God created man in his image and his likeness. After service, I told him that I had not seen this statement anywhere in the Bible. He referred me to Genesis 1:26. He was quite surprised when I told him that at that place it is only a thought "Let us make man in our image and our likeness." What God really did is stated in the following verse, in Genesis 1:27: "So God created man in His image." There is no likeness mentioned, only in His image.

God left the rest of the task to us. To become in the likeness

of God. It looks like God has not finished the creation. We are just made in His image; we can become in His likeness only if we put out an effort to change our behavior. We are still living in the seventh day of creation.

[\[1\]](#) Daniel Matt, *The Essential Kabbalah*, Harper-Collins Publishers, New York, NY, 1996

[\[2\]](#) Zohar with Commentary by Yehuda Ashlag, The Kabbalah Center, Los Angeles, CA, 2003

[\[3\]](#) My Children Have Defeated Me. *New English Review*, March, 2022

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