

Lech Lecha, get you out, Rashi interprets for your benefit. But in what ways does Avram benefit? Perhaps in comparison to his life in Haran his life in Canaan is better but he certainly experiences a series of unpleasant trials.

The land itself falls into famine so nature fails him. He is forced to go to Egypt where he engages in deception. He declares Sarai his wife to be his sister to protect his life. Opposition at this point is not from nature but from an alien ruler. He emerges a rich man, so rich that his nephew Lot fights with him and they must separate. Then Lot is kidnapped and he must raise an army to save him.

Meanwhile the whole point of coming to Canaan – that G-d would make him a great nation- is not working out. Though G-d has promised him that his offspring would be like the stars in heaven, his body and that of his wife do not work in harmony. They do not give birth to any children. Sari suggests that her handmaiden Hagar can produce offspring. Avram takes her up on the offer only to alienate Sari when Hagar gets pregnant.

Hagar who cannot take Sarai's abuse flees to the desert where an angel comes and asks her -- where have you come from and where are you going? The angel comforts her that she too will have abundant offspring. The son she will bear to Avram will be like a wild ass.

Then G-d gives Avram a new promise -- he shall be a father of a multitude of nations, his name will now be Avraham and Sari's Sarah. He and his entire male following must have a brit milah.

As Jews we often have been told to get out. The Assyrians and Babylonians kicked us out of the land of Israel. The Romans kicked us out of the land of Israel. The English threw us out. The French threw us out. Many German city states threw us out. But was it to our benefit?

Perhaps the biggest leaving was when the Spaniards and then the Portuguese forced our departure. We were truly at home on the Iberian Peninsula and we thrived. When forced out of Spain the Jewish historian Graetz recounts that we were a third of the population -- 300,000 Jews, 300,000 Christians, and 300,000 Muslims.

But we did not take up arms and fight the decree of expulsion. On Tisha a Bav of 1492 we sadly left Spain. Many of us found temporary refuge in Portugal but we were quickly thrown out of this country as well. Sephardic Jewry never recovered.

How many Avrahams are there in shul today? Raise your hand.

I want to recount the story of one of the expelled Jews from Spain, a man named Avraham Zacuto, another forced wanderer like Avraham Avenu. He probably was the greatest astronomer of his era. Abarbanel, court Jew in Portugal and then adviser to Ferdinand and Isabella, who ultimately expelled the Jews, recommended that the Spanish monarchs support Columbus' trip based on the celestial almanac and advanced astrolabe that Zacuto developed. With these tools Abarbanel assured the Spaniards that Columbus was much less likely to get lost on his voyage.

Zacuto provided the software – the GPS system -- that made Columbus' trip of discovery possible. On leaving Spain the day of the Jewish expulsion Tisha a Bav 1492, Columbus, who had with him Zacuto's celestial almanac – Yesod Haolam – and Zacuto's astrolabe -- noted in the first line of his diary that he was leaving on the same day the expulsion was being carried out.

Zacuto next went to Portugal where he became for a short period court astronomer and met with Vasco da Gama before that explorer's voyages down the African coast. The Jewish stay in Portugal was very short. The Portuguese monarchy wanting to intermarry with the Spanish royal family knew that it would have to get rid of the Jews if it was going to carry out its plan.

Zacuto next landed in Tunis. Then he went on to Damascus and visited the land of Israel. He knew that the land that belonged to the Jewish people was the land that G-d had promised the original Avraham. It was not Spain, it was not Portugal, it was not North Africa, and it was not Syria.

In his life's work Zacuto was trying to answer the question that the angel posed to Hagar -- where have you come from and where are you going. His astronomical work as a Jew, aware of our people's wanderings, was designed to answer as precisely as possible the question of where are we in space. Perhaps like me he

was perpetually lost. We need to precisely identify where we are in space. St. Louis Park. I assume. Across the street from Flatbush I imagine.

Zacuto's celestial almanac which he called Yesod Olam, the Foundation of the World, enabled the discovery of new worlds. Without the discovery of these new worlds where would we be today? In Europe we were never welcome.

What is of great interest is that when Zacuto went to Tunis he also tried to answer the question of where we are in time. He wrote one of the first Jewish histories, Sefer Yuchsin. After the Bible, subsequent Jewish literature – with exception of Josephus – forgot history. The Talmud has no real historical references. The only way to recapture our peoplehood was to discover where we were in time. By rediscovering where we were in time we might be able to again gain control over our destiny; we might become less a wandering nation and less exposed to the vicissitudes of fortune. So Zacuto set the table for us to stop being perpetual victims, to forge a national identity based on our knowledge of history.

Today where are we? An important question.

I recall going to the shtiebl of the Talner Rebbe, olav hashalom, Professor Isadore Twersky great Maimonidean scholar at Harvard in Boston for Friday night services about 15 years ago. In 1969 when he was on sabbatical in Israel I took his course on Rambam. In graduate school in Harvard I consulted him about a career in Jewish history and he dissuaded me telling me how long it would take. That Friday night at his shtiebl after much singing and dancing all the congregants greeted him. Rabbi Twersky looked into my eyes and asked "so where are you now" a question about my physical location or my spiritual condition?

After another war in Gaza, after the Pew Report, after the new anti-Semitism in Europe, after the rise of ISIS, where are we now? The first time I went to Israel in 1969 I met a first cousin of my mother's, a woman who had been her playmate in Europe before my mother came to the U.S. She had her own journey. On her arm was a tattoo, a memento from Auschwitz, her first family was murdered in the Holocaust, her husband in Israel, another survivor, dead from leukemia she was a

widow with two daughters about my age, an inspiring woman full of life and spirit, living each day to its fullest.

That is where we should be. Like Vali living each day to the fullest.

Though we can and should aspire to achieve the certainty about space and time to which Zacuto aspired, we cannot really know for sure where we are.

Though we cannot be sure where we are we must be like the original Avraham and believe that we have a future.

As G-d said to Avraham, "Gaze now toward the heavens and count the stars if you are able to count them. So shall your offspring be?"

Avraham Avenu and Avraham Zacuto both looked upward to heaven and counted the stars. They both had faith in the Jewish future.

SHABBAT SHALOM

martius

aprilis

Tabula ascēditis et duodecim domorum

dies mēsum	bre minuta							dies mēsum	hora minuta							
	1	2	3	4	5	6			1	2	3	4	5	6		
	7	8	9	10	11	12			7	8	6	10	11	12		
	g ^o cācer	leo	leo	virg	scor	sagi			leo	leo	virg	libi	scor	capc		
	g ^o	g ^o	g ^o	g ^o	g ^o	g ^o		g ^o								
1	0	0	12	3	26	20	0	7	1	1 53	5	29	25	21	28	1
2	0	4	13	4	27	21	1	8	2	1 56	5	30	26	22	29	2
3	0	8	13	5	28	22	2	9	3	2 0	6	1	27	23	30	3
4	0	11	14	6	29	23	3	10	4	2 4	7	2	28	24	30	4
5	0	15	15	7	30	24	4	11	5	2 7	8	3	29	25	1	5
6	0	19	16	8	1	25	5	12	6	2 11	9	3	30	26	2	5
7	0	22	17	8	2	26	6	12	7	2 15	9	4	1	27	3	6
8	0	26	17	9	3	27	7	13	8	2 18	10	5	2	28	4	6
9	0	30	18	10	4	28	8	14	9	2 22	11	6	3	29	4	7
10	0	33	19	11	4	29	9	14	10	2 25	12	7	4	30	5	8
11	0	37	19	12	5	30	9	15	11	2 29	12	8	5	1	6	9
12	0	41	20	12	6	1	10	16	12	2 33	13	9	5	2	7	9
13	0	44	21	13	7	2	11	17	13	2 37	14	9	6	3	8	10
14	0	48	22	14	8	3	12	18	14	2 41	14	10	7	4	9	11
15	0	52	22	15	9	4	13	18	15	2 44	15	10	7	4	9	11
16	0	55	23	16	10	5	14	19	16	2 48	15	11	8	5	10	12
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24	1	24	29	22	17	13	21	25	24	3 19	21	18	16	13	16	18
25	1	28	30	23	18	14	22	26	25	3 23	22	19	17	14	17	18
26	1	31	30	24	19	15	23	27	26	3 26	23	20	18	15	18	19
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28	1	38	2	25	21	17	24	28	28	3 34	24	22	20	17	19	21
29	1	42	3	26	22	18	25	29	29	3 38	25	23	21	18	20	22
30	1	46	3	27	23	19	26	29	30	3 41	26	24	22	19	21	23
31	1	49	4	28	24	20	27	30	0	0 0	0	0	0	0	0	0



Cristóvão Colombo, o descobridor da América, visita Zacuto
no seu gabinete de trabalho

