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Report on the Rabbinic Dissertation Submitted by

Benjamin Levy

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Ordination

Ma'aseh Avraham Avinu

A Critical Study

This thesis entails the presentation of a critical text of the minor midrash Ma'aseh Avraham Avinu together with an English translation and a thorough study of the nature of the text's history, its sources, themes, and purpose. The text analysis is both literary in nature, focusing upon key themes repeated throughout the compilation, as well as source-critical. By tracing the primary sources used by the compiler and/or later redactors--both biblical and rabbinic--and by focusing upon the key themes, symbols and emphases in the text, the author has increased both the reader's understanding of the nature and purpose of Ma'aseh Avraham Avinu and its agenda.

After closely studying the extant printed editions found in J.D. Eisenstein's Ozar Midrashim (Vol. I, pp. 2-6) the author gathered the pertinent parallels found in the Bible, Midrash, Talmud, and liturgy. At the same time, he sought to collect all the other extant manuscripts and printed editions. After comparing the four basic printed editions of Ma'aseh Avraham Avinu available and the four manuscripts he was able to locate, he decided to present the version in Ozar Midrashim as his base text. Finally, he researched the various theories regarding the origin of this compilation and analyzed the text structurally and thematically.

The thesis is divided into four parts. Part One deals with the origins, publication history, and the nature of the text tradition. There is a glaring absence of any extant manuscript which predates the Constantinople edition of the Ma'aseh of 1593 which has led some scholars to feel that the midrash is quite late. After struggling with the possible Islamic origins of the Ma'aseh, the author described the four manuscripts he located--JTS Adler Ms 5049, Adler MS 4879 (known also as Stein-schneider 33), Schocken Institute MS 133 and the Valmadonna Trust MS 167, and the four basic printed editions available--Salonica (1593), Sefer Shevet Muser (1732), Bet haMidrash (1853) and the text found in Ozar Midrashim, published in 1915. The final section of Part One deals with the structure of the midrash and emphasizes the symmetry of the episodes found in the Ma'aseh and its various time sequences.

Part Two is a presentation of the critical text of the midrash. It entails the base text drawn from Eisenstein's Ozar Midrashim, a critical apparatus including alternative readings garnered from the extant manuscripts and other printed editions, a translation of the text and critical footnotes which cite rabbinic parallels, primary sources, and analytic comments on language and themes.

Part Three of the thesis explores the major themes of the Ma'aseh, as well as its meaning and purpose. The author isolates seven major themes most of which deal with the nature of the Divinity and our relationship to it. In addition, he focuses upon the text's connection to the High Holidays and how it illustrates various High Holiday themes. However, besides seeing the Ma'aseh as a piece which helps in the preparation for the High Holidays, the author emphasizes that the text embodies the rabbis' response to the challenges to Jewish survival. Nimrod represents all those who persecute the Jewish people and God's saving Abraham from the fiery furnace underscores their ability to survive due to their faith and acceptance of Torah.

Part Four is a summary of the major sources used in the construction of Ma'aseh Abraham Avinu. The first half deals with the biblical paradigms underlying the text, which include: the Exodus, the Akedah, the story of Joseph in the pit, I Kings 18 account of the battle between Elijah and the priests of Ba'al, the Books of Daniel and Esther as well as the story of Jonah. In the second half of Part Four, the author focuses on the possible midrashic sources utilized in this text, which includes sections of Bereshit Rabbah, Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer, chapters 24,26, Seder Eliyahu Rabbah, chapter 6 in addition to other talmudic passages.

Although it is very difficult to gain a clear sense of the purpose of a work like Ma'aseh Avraham Avinu and to determine its provenance and dating, the author nevertheless has helped us come to a greater appreciation of the nature of this compilation and its basic structure and themes. In addition, his analysis of the basic sources used by the compiler and how they were shaped into the document known as Ma'aseh Avraham Avinu is most instructive. The author has handled the material in a creative manner, while learning about lower textual criticism--manuscript comparison and the creation of a critical edition of a rabbinic text. He has clearly isolated its main sources and themes, and given us at the same time a good sense of the structure and flow of the text. Additionally, Mr. Levy has provided us with a plausible setting for this midrashic tradition--its use viv-à-vis the High Holidays, and its purpose as a statement of Jewish survival at a time of persecution. Although he may occasionally overstate individual points and there is some redundancy in his presentation, he has enabled us to appreciate the artistry of the compilation and its power.

Mr. Levy is to be highly commended for his text presentation, English translation and critical notes as well as his analysis of the text's structure, themes, and purpose. His summary of the publication history of the text and his description of the extant manuscripts is also helpful. He shows that he has the ability to deal in a sophisticated manner with rabbinic text material and brings a fair degree of creativity to the entire enterprise. Though more could be done regarding the manuscript material and the setting of the text in a historical context, this thesis provides us with the basic information, background and analysis to read the text in a sophisticated manner.

Mr. Levy deserves praise both for his diligence and his achievements.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Norman J. Cohen
Professor of Midrash

April 2, 1995

Thesis
1995
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Levy

MA'ASEH AVRAHAM AVINU:

A Critical Study

Benjamin Levy

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
Requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Graduate Rabbinic Program
New York, New York

March 13, 1995

Advisor: Rabbi Norman J. Cohen

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Acknowledgments

The completion of this thesis marks the culmination of five years of rabbinical study here at HUC - JIR. As such, I thank G-d for giving me life, sustaining me, and allowing me to reach this day!

My studies these past five years have consisted of much more than the mere processing of data. They have focused on the learning of Torah. In the learning of Torah, I have come to realize that one doesn't just go through the words, but the words go through the individual. These words of Torah have the power to change who you are. I once again, humbly acknowledge my Creator, Who has pushed me in this direction and brought me to this place in my life. I also humbly thank the administration of the Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion for the numerous opportunities and generous support they have afforded me.

In my study of Torah I have been blessed with many inspired and inspiring teachers. First and foremost amongst them, I would like to thank Rabbi Norman Cohen. As a Dean, his vision has driven the New York school along the path to spiritual growth, community, and Jewish life. As a teacher, it has been my privilege to sit at his feet. He has consistently imparted to me his love of sacred text, Judaism, and the Jewish people. He has demonstrated the tenets of the "living Torah," both through textual analysis, and by the example of his life. As a thesis advisor, I am sure there are few others who bring his level of commitment, caring, and energy to the task. Rabbi Cohen's comments have always proven cogent and timely. His office, despite his busy schedule, has always been open to me. I am grateful.

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Our library staff has been most helpful throughout the process of developing this thesis. I thank Dr. Philip Miller for his patience in answering my many questions, and Mr. Henry Resnick, for his active dedication to the ideals of Talmud Torah.

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I have also been blessed with a family which has been my strength and support. I thank my two beautiful sons, Elijah and Reuven, for encouraging their "Rabbi Daddy." I thank especially my wife Evelyn, for her continued and tireless support. I thank her for all her love and sacrifice. It was she who heroically endured the loneliness of "holding down the fort," while I was away in Israel. It was she who heroically has worked in an office each day, and made many changes in her life, so that I may study. Without her,

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I would like to thank my parents, Deborah and Samuel Levy עלין השלום, for bringing me into the world and passing on their strong sense of Jewish identity; and my Aunt Lisa Barocas for "being there" for me all these years. I wish to acknowledge my Nona Becky Levy ר'ל, who's inspiration still guides me.

Finally, I dedicate this thesis to the memory of my beloved sister, Ronda ר'ל. Her love, her example, and her pride in me, will always live in my heart.

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INTRODUCTION

Rabbi Norman Cohen often tells of his childhood experience, going to shul with his grandfather on Shabbat afternoons and learning Torah. Watching his grandfather's face radiate from the words of Torah, left an indelible mark upon Rabbi Cohen's heart and psyche.¹ This story illustrates that the study of Torah is not just an exercise in historical remembrance. But rather, it can be an experience of transformation in our lives.

To this effect, Rabbi Lawrence Kushner wrote: "Every generation finds new meaning in the Torah... Our people have never found a better way of learning about G-d and of coming close to G-d. Everything we learn and everything we are as Jews comes from Torah."²

But, how do we find this new meaning? How do we make this ancient text "live" for us and transform our lives? In the words of Ben Bag Bag: "Turn it, and turn it, for everything is in it..."³

I believe that "turning" is the process of Midrash. Like holding a diamond to the light, the Midrash holds up the Torah text and gently turns it so that we may realize its splendor in new and novel ways. For the Midrash is the vehicle which bridges the gap of meaning between the wisdom of the ancient sacred text and today's life circumstances.

Thus, if Torah is to remain central to our lives as Jews, as I believe it must, the Midrash looms large. It is through Midrash that we may connect with the sacred text. It

¹Norman J. Cohen, Self, Struggle & Change (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1995), 9.

²Lawrence Kushner, The Book of Miracles (New York: UAHC Press, 1987), 35.

³M. Pirke Avot 5:22.

is through Midrash that we connect with our heritage, the vast experiences of the Jewish people through the ages. It is through Midrash that we reach up to G-d.

From the Hebrew root (darash) meaning "to draw out" or "interpret," Midrash represents the Rabbinic enterprise, par excellence. I chose to write my thesis in Midrash, because it is within this Rabbinic tradition that I see my role and my work; the tradition of keeping Torah alive, vibrant, and vital for today's Jew.

I chose to work on Midrash Ma'aseh Avraham Avinu for the following reasons: First, on a purely cursory level, I read the midrash and very much enjoyed it. It brought together just about all the Abraham stories I had ever heard in a very powerful, colorful, and exciting way. Second, I have always held a fascination for the character of Abraham. He is, of course, a seminal figure, the first Jew. Shaped through the centuries by the Rabbinic enterprise, Abraham's character has become an exemplar of what it means to be a Jew. He was a man who had the courage of his convictions. At a time when everyone stood on one side of the issue G-d's Oneness and Presence in the world, he took a giant leap and stood all alone on the other. He then set about spreading word of the One G-d and, in effect, teaching Torah by the example of his life. I pray that, G-d willing, in my rabbinate I will be able to live up to what it means to be an exemplar of Torah. Third, the way in which Abraham was forced to break away from the influences of his father and his society, has always intrigued me. Perhaps, this is because in my own life I have discovered that to live a committed Jewish life often means to swim against the current of society. It has also meant that I, like Abraham, have chosen a lifestyle which is my own, and not my father's.

In working on this thesis, I first set about translating the text as it appeared in Ozar Midrashim,⁴ along with the shorter companion pieces located there. I next began gathering source material, Biblical, Midrashic, Talmudic, and liturgical parallels to the text. While accomplishing this task, I also sought to gather the extant manuscripts and printed editions of the text. This involved a world-wide letter writing campaign, as well as, several trips to the JTS Rare Book Room, where two of the extant manuscripts are located. The next step in writing the thesis was to integrate all the information I had gathered. In doing so, I put together a critical text which contained the original Ozar Midrashim text as a base text, the textual alternatives garnered from the other extant versions of the midrash, my English translation of the base text (emended occasionally by those alternative readings I felt to be more accurate), and a commentary. The commentary included the parallel material which I had gathered, as well as my analysis of it. Finally, I researched theories as to the origins of Ma'aseh Avraham Avinu, and included these in a separate chapter. I then analyzed the piece structurally, thematically, and source-wise, and included this information in separate chapters.

The thesis is divided into four main parts. Part I is entitled: "The Text: Its Origins, Publication History, and Nature." It consists of three chapters. The first of the three, "Origins of the Midrash" presents all the current theories as to the obscure origins of Ma'aseh Avraham Avinu. Following the presentation of the theories, I briefly discussed their viability. The second chapter of Part I is called "Text Witnesses" and is divided into

⁴J.D. Eisenstein, ed., Ozar Midrashim (New York: Eisenstein, 1915), 2-6.

two sections. The first describes the four extant manuscripts. The second describes the extant printed editions of the midrash. The third chapter of Part I, "The Structure of the Midrash," deals with the significance of the work's arrangement. It discusses the various time sequences of the midrash, the significance and symmetry of the order of the episodes of the Ma'aseh, and the significance of the narrative voice repeatedly identified by the phrase, "The Maggid said."

Part II of the thesis consists of the critical text. As mentioned above, the critical text consists of four parts. The first is the base text, the Hebrew text of the midrash as published in Eisenstein's Ozar Midrashim. My English translation constitutes the second part. Alternative readings garnered from the extant manuscripts and other printed editions, comprise the third part. The fourth and final section is a commentary which cites the parallel source materials to the midrash, and explains their significance.

The third Part of the thesis, entitled "The Themes of Ma'aseh Avraham Avinu and the Purpose of the Work," explores the midrash's sources, their parallels and significance. The Part is made up of two chapters. The first, "Essential Themes - G-d's Nature and Power," consists of seven sections. Each represents another of the seven major themes which I have discerned in the work. The seven major themes are: G-d's Unity, G-d's might versus earthly tyrannical power, G-d's Uniqueness, what it means to be G-d's servant, G-d's justice, teshuvah, and the efficacy of prayer and good intentions. Each of these themes is discussed and analyzed in terms of the overall flow of the narrative, as well as its meaning for the reader.

The second chapter of Part III is entitled, "The Meaning and Purpose of the

Midrash." In its first section, the midrash as a preparation for the High Holidays is discussed. The work's themes are reviewed in relation to those of the Days of Awe, along with the verbal cues which point to them. The second part of the chapter concerns the midrash's serving as a Rabbinic response to the challenges of Jewish survival.

Part IV is a summary of the major sources that went into the composition of Ma'aseh Avraham Avinu. This summary consists of two chapters. The first chapter lists and explains the nature and function of the Biblical materials used in the midrash. The second chapter cites the Midrashic sources which underlie the main episodes of the work.

The thesis hopes to demonstrate how Ma'aseh Avraham Avinu combines a wealth of sacred Jewish text to deliver a message that is as timely today as it was a thousand years ago. It is a message of hope to the Jewish people. Our actions can and do effect the world around us. But more than that, our actions have the power to effect G-d, to bring G-d and G-d's redemption down to earth. Parallelling the Passover Hagaddah, the midrash teaches that we, as did Abraham, our father of blessed memory, did before us, can move from the degradation of persecution and idolatry, to the praise of G-d in our own lives. By our efforts and example, we can bring about an age when the furnaces of idolatry, hatred, and murder, are transformed, with G-d's help, into pristine gardens of peace and spiritual harmony. "On that day, the L-rd shall be One, and His Name shall be One (Zc. 14:9)."

PART I:
THE TEXT: ITS ORIGINS
PUBLICATION HISTORY,
AND NATURE

A. Origins of the Midrash

The origins of Ma'aseh Avraham Avinu (מעשה אברהם אבינו ע"ה ממה שאירע לו) are obscure. Although one may detect the use of Biblical and exegetic midrashic source material, the Constantinople printed edition constitutes the earliest recorded appearance of the midrash. According to Jellinek, the Constantinople edition was published in 1519.⁵ Porges, however, argued for a 1580 publishing date of the Constantinople edition.⁶ Regardless of the exact date of this first printed edition, in the opinion of Rabbi Norman Cohen,⁷ one may assume an earlier manuscript tradition in regard to the midrash's origin. Of course, the absence of an extant manuscript which predates the Constantinople printed edition has given rise to some speculation concerning the origins of the Ma'aseh.

Adolph Jellinek, postulated the midrash to be a translation from an Arabic source.⁸ To corroborate this position he cited the use of the following loan words and phrases: "קולצני" ("kolitzni," the name of a disease), "טראבוקן" ("traboku," a type of catapult), "ה' הוא האלהים" ("The L-rd is G-d"), and "צלם שאין בו תועלת לא לעצמו ולא" ("An idol which has no use, not to itself, nor to anyone who would purchase it to worship it") Jellinek presented no evidence to prove the Arabic origins of

⁵ A. Jellinek, Bet Ha-Midrash (Leipzig: Nies, 1853), 1:16.

⁶ Porges, "Eine Bisher Unbekannte Ausgabe Von Ben Sira" ZfHB 10 (1924): 159.

⁷ Professor of Midrash, H.U.C. - J.I.R., New York. Mentioned in conversation to myself.

⁸ A. Jellinek, Bet Ha-Midrash, 1:16.

the first two terms listed above. Concerning, the phrase, "The L-rd is G-d," he merely claimed the phrase to be Mohammedan (Muslim). In the case of the phrase, "An idol which has no use...", Jellinek noted its similarity to a phrase attributed to the Arabic writer Abulfeda.⁹ Dr. Philip Miller translated the Arabic quotation presented by Jellinek as: "He who purchases that which can harm him and not do him benefit."¹⁰

Louis Ginzberg¹¹ agreed with Jellinek as to the Arabic origins of the midrash, citing the use of the phrase "אמר המגיד" ("The Maggid said"), as proof. He claimed the phrase to be a Hebrew translation of the Arabic "لأل أלקايل." He also purported the "frequent occurrence" of "many other Arabisms," as proof, but failed to specify any of them. Finally, Ginzberg supposed the appearance of the word, "נהר," or "river" in the text to be due to a faulty translation of the Arabic word, "wadi," which means both "brook" and "valley." He purported this supposition to be attested to by the phrase, "מערה אחד," "בזה הנהר," which Ginzberg translated to mean, "a cave in this river." Since it is impossible that a cave should be in a river, but a cave may be in a valley, he concluded the mistranslation from Arabic.¹²

Although both Jellinek and Ginzberg attributed the midrash to Arabic origins, they

⁹A. Jellinek, Bet Ha-Midrash, 1:15, cites Fleischer, ed., Abulfeda Hist. Anteisrl., 20. No other bibliographical information was available to me.

¹⁰Dr. Philip Miller, the Head Librarian of H.U.C. - J.I.R. in New York, translated the phrase orally.

¹¹Louis Ginzberg, Legends of the Jews (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1955), 5: 213.

¹² L. Ginzberg, Legends of the Jews, 5:209.

did differ on several points. While Ginzberg looked to the phrase "אמר המגיד" as proof of Arabic origins,¹³ Jellinek considered this phrase to be a reference to the Hebrew exegetic midrash which preceded it. He specifically mentions Genesis Rabbah, Chapter 17 in this regard.¹⁴ While Jellinek argued for a Mohammedan connection in relation to the midrash's origin,¹⁵ Ginzberg insisted that the original author was a Jew, because of the many parallels from rabbinic literature extant in the Ma'aseh. He observed in this regard that the scene in the furnace is most likely a reminiscence of the legend concerning the thee youths in the furnace (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego).¹⁶ In addition, the light at the birth of Abraham parallels the birth of Moses and other heroes as depicted in the Rabbinic Literature. Abraham washing before prayer proved to be genuinely Jewish and not Mohammedan. The appearance of Satan in human form is frequent in Jewish legends. The thick cloud which separated Abram from his enemies, according to Ginzberg, naturally goes back to Ex. 14:9. The description of G-d as "He who sees, but is not seen," though found in the Koran, Sura 6:100, is of frequent occurrence in Rabbinic Literature, for instance B.T. Hagigah 5b and Targum Yerushalmi to Gn. 22:14.

Joshua Finkel, in his article, "An Arabic Story of Abraham,"¹⁷ termed Jellinek's

¹³L. Ginzberg, Legends of the Jews, 5:213.

¹⁴A. Jellinek, Bet Ha-Midrash, 1:15.

¹⁵A. Jellinek, Bet Ha-Midrash, 1:16.

¹⁶L. Ginzberg, Legends of the Jews, 5:213.

¹⁷J. Finkel, "An Arabic Story of Abraham," HUCA, 12-13 (1937-38): 387-409.

claims that the midrash was a translation from an Arabic original based primarily upon the use of Arabisms, to be "a happy guess," as he himself asserted the origins of the Ma'aseh to be both Arabic and Mohammedan. Finkel based part of his argument upon the numerous Arabisms which occur in the text, such as, "שלום עליכם ועליכם שלום" ("Peace be unto you," "And unto you peace"), and "אמר המגיד" ("the Maggid said"). Finkel also cited Ginzberg's supposition concerning the faulty translation of the Arabic "wadi" as "further proof that most conclusively stamped the story of being Arabic in origin."

In attempting to prove his assertion of the midrash's Islamic origins, Finkel referred to the use of the term "כופר" ("denier") as "good Moslem fashion." He also indicated that the midrash made use of free translations of the Koran. For instance, "הוא" "האלקים אחד ואין שני והוא חי ולא ימות לא ינום ולא יישן" ("He is the one G-d, there is none other, and He lives and will not die, He neither slumbers nor sleeps."), is nothing but a free translation of Sura 2:256,¹⁸ and "הוא האלקים בשמים ממעל ועל הארץ" ("The L-rd is G-d in the heavens above and upon the earth below, One and there is no other, he causes death and gives life.") is a rendering of Sura 7:158. Finkel also alluded to the name, "Nimrod, son of Canaan," as further proof of a Mohammedan source. For contrary to the Biblical report that Nimrod was a son of Kush (Gn. 10:8), the appellation as "son of Canaan," Finkel wrote, was in accordance with Moslem records.

Regarding the recurring phrase, "The Maggid (or "storyteller") said" (אמר המגיד), Finkel cited Kisai's Vita Prophetorum, in which an Abraham-Nimrod story is

¹⁸Actually, it more resembles Sura 2:255.

attributed to Muqtal ibn Sulayman in the name of Ka'ab al Ahber, a well known seventh century Moslem convert from Judaism. Thus, Finkel conjectured the Maggid of our Ma'aseh to be Ka'ab. He sought to prove his conjecture through reference to a ten-page Geniza document discovered and published by Bernard Chapira.¹⁹ The document, written in Judeo-Arabic, tells a story similar to the Ma'aseh. It agrees with our midrash in terms of the order of events. Finkel postulated the Geniza document to be the original from which Ma'aseh was translated. One major difference between the documents occurs in the depiction of Abraham's debut as a prophet. Instead of Abraham meeting his mother and father, as in Ma'aseh, in the Geniza document, he meets his brother and father. Finkel attributed the difference to the Hebrew translator of the piece, who possibly made a switch from the Arabic original based upon Rabbinic traditions concerning the inclination of Abraham's brother, Haran's inclination toward the true religion of G-d and/or Haran's premature death. Most importantly, the Arabic Geniza document mentions Ka'ab al Ahbar as author. Finkel opined the Hebrew translator to substitute, "אמר המגיד" ("The Maggid said") for Ka'ab's name in order to "Judaize the story."

Despite the arguments of Jellinek, Ginzberg, and Finkel listed above for the Arabic and/or Mohammedan origins of "Ma'aseh," I must still regard their evidence to be inconclusive. For instance, Chapira ascribed the Judeo-Arabic Geniza document to the seventeenth century. This would place it chronologically after the publishing of the Constantinople edition. Perhaps, the Arabic version was a translation of the Hebrew (and

¹⁹B. Chapira, "Legendes Bibliques Attribuees a Ka'b al-Ahbar," REJ 70 (1920): 38-43.

not the other way around), written for those Jews who were more familiar with the Cairo vernacular than the Holy Tongue.

The attribution in the Arabic document to Ka'ab doesn't necessarily allude to the point of origin. Stories are often falsely attributed to those who have come earlier. What's more, it seems to me, that concerning the issue of the phrase, "אמר המגיד" ("The Maggid said"), Finkel contradicted himself. On the one hand, he termed the phrase, "an Arabism," indicating the Arabic origin of the midrash. On the other hand, he purported the phrase to be used by the translator to Judaize the story, i.e., as a device to mask Ka'ab as the author, and hence, to mask the true Arabic and Mohammedan origins of the midrash.

It should also be noted that many of the "Arabisms" identified by Ginzberg and Finkel are also typical Hebreisms. For example, "שלום עליכם ועליכם שלום" ("Peace be unto you," And unto you peace.") is a typical Hebrew greeting, and the term "בופר" ("denier") may be "good Moslem fashion," as Finkel asserted, but the term does occur in other clearly genuine Hebrew texts.²⁰ Even those words which prove to be legitimate loan words, do not necessarily point to an Arabic or Mohammedan origin. Loan words may actually serve as anti-Muslim polemic. For instance, Satan speaking Arabic would be quite powerful in this regard.

Also, free translations of Koranic passages do not guarantee Arabic and/or Mohammedan origins, but may merely point to a Mohammedan milieu. In fact, the earliest extant manuscripts and printed editions have emerged from regions of Moslem

²⁰For instance, see "Ma'aseh Yehudit" in A. Jellinek, Bet Ha-Midrash, 1:130.

dominance, as will be indicated in the following section. These Koranic passages all have Biblical antecedents. As such, their inclusion in the midrash may also function as anti-Muslim polemic, illustrating the source of Islam and the Koran to be Judaism and the Hebrew Bible.

Finally, although the name Nimrod ben Canaan may be historically incorrect, the name does provide certain midrashic implications. The Canaanites, of course, were powerful enemies of the Jews who were punished for their idolatry, and eventually conquered by the Jews. Nimrod's very name then proves not only descriptive of his strength and idolatry, but provides a measure of hope for an oppressed Jewish constituency.

B. Text Witnesses

1. Extant MSS

As mentioned above, all of the four extant manuscripts I was able to locate were written some time after the Constantinople edition was published (in either 1519 or 1580, as explained in the previous section). The earliest of the four manuscripts appears to be the J.T.S. Adler Collection MS. 5049R 1855. Written sometime between 1600 and 1699, the manuscript's scribe remains unknown. Judging by the style of the script, it was probably written in Kurdistan.²¹ The manuscript is a (now) unbound codex, fifteen 6" by 8" leaves, written on both sides, plus one leather cover. Ma'aseh Avraham Avinu is the sole work included in the manuscript. The text is not paragraphed. Lines of text appear curved, and the letters in them of different sizes. The margins tend to vary. The scribal convention of including the first word of the next page on the bottom of each page was followed. There is no punctuation except marks indicating quotations, abbreviations, and foreign loan words. The manuscript is in generally poor condition. Pages are faded, rotted, or missing. However, all of the episodes found in the other manuscripts and printed editions are preserved in it.

The next earliest of the four manuscripts is probably the J.T.S. Adler Collection MS. 4879, which has also been known as No. 33 Steinshneider.²² Judging from the style

²¹According to Dr. Seth Jershower, the Head Librarian of the J.T.S. Rare Book Room, who related the information to me verbally.

²²In fact, Ginzberg refers to this manuscript as No. 33 Steinshneider in Legends of the Jews, 5:212.

of the script, it was written sometime between 1600-1799, probably also in Kurdistan.²³ As the scribe signed the work, we know that his name was יעקב בן משה (Jacob son of Moses). Nothing else is known about him. However, we do know that the manuscript was owned at one time by a H.B. Cassel, who signed his name in 1888. The manuscript is bound in codex form, seventy-five 4" by 6" leaves, written upon both sides. The manuscript contains prayers and midrashim designed for year-round holiday use. The major portion of the manuscript is taken up by a version of Mishle Sandebar. Ma'aseh Avraham Avinu comprises fourteen leaves, and is located among the High Holiday material. The printing is of uneven size. The margins are not uniform. The lines of text are frequently curved. There are frequent scribal cross-outs. The text is continuous, not paragraphed. There is no punctuation, save quotation marks, and apostrophes used to mark abbreviations. Although there are approximately three leaves missing from the midrash, virtually all of the episodes found in every one of the other manuscripts and printed editions is present.

The Schocken Institute MS. 133 was written in the Orient, sometime in the eighteenth or nineteenth century.²⁴ Amongst a collection of midrashim and ma'aseyot, "Ma'aseh Avraham Avinu" comprises twelve leaves of this codex form manuscript. The scribe divided the text into paragraphs, with the beginning one or two words of each

²³This, again according to Dr. Seth Jershower, as mentioned to me verbally.

²⁴According to Benjamin Richler of the Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts of the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem. Related in a letter to me, dated September 29, 1994.

paragraph printed larger and bolder than the rest of the text. The scribe also provided quotation marks to indicate dialogue, abbreviations, and foreign loan words. The convention of writing the first word of the following page on the bottom of each page was adhered to throughout the work. The manuscript contains a complete version of the midrash, with all of the episodes found in the other manuscripts and printed editions present.

The fourth manuscript, the Valmadonna Trust MS. 167, was copied in Italy, in 1819. The scribe remains unknown, but the work was originally owned by someone named Moses Isaac Capua.²⁵ This codex form manuscript is a סדר ליל ר"ה (a collection of prayers and study designed for the evenings of Rosh HaShannah), of which Ma'aseh Avraham Avinu comprises both sides of seventeen leaves. The scribe printed instructions that the Ma'aseh should be said on the first night of Rosh Hashannah, and cites the Shevet Musar as the midrash's source, and actually claims to quote it. While bearing the closest resemblance to that of the Shevet Musar of any of the extant manuscripts or printed editions, the text is not the exact quotation it claims to be (at least, with regard to the 1732 Amsterdam edition available to me.) The text is elegantly proportioned, a series of straight lines, uniform in length. The scribe printed it in bold block letters resembling the Torah print with which we are familiar, minus the crowns. The text was laid out in three major paragraph sections, but colons (:) were supplied in those cases where one would usually expect a paragraph to end. Periods were also occasionally included. On the bottom

²⁵This, too, according to Benjamin Richler, as communicated in his letter to me of September 29, 1994.

of each page, the first word of the following page has been written. Punctuation marks indicating abbreviation and foreign loan words also appear. This is the only manuscript or printed edition which is vocalized. Thus, the pronunciation of loan words, קולצני" and טראבוק"קו, are given as "kolitzni," and "travoko," respectively. The manuscript is also distinctive in its notation of G-d's Name. While the other manuscripts notate the Name of G-d with 'ה, the Valmadonna MS. 167 uses, "י". According to Dr. Philip Miller, this is "an artistic and scribal convention," designed to indicate respect for G-d, as "even the letters are out of the ordinary."²⁶

²⁶The Head Librarian of the HUC-JIR Library conveyed this information to me verbally.

2. Printed Editions

There were four basic printed editions available to me,²⁷ the Salonica edition of 1593; the edition appearing in Sefer Shevet Musar, published in 1732; the Bet Ha-Misrash edition, originally printed in 1853; and edition appearing in the Ozar Midrashim, published in 1915.

The earliest edition of "Ma'aseh Avraham Avinu" available to me was found in a "Sefer Ben Sira" belonging to the J.T.S. Library (Fi 3006, ACC. 72157). Although no date appears in the book, Benjamin Richler, of the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem, thinks it to have probably been printed about 1593.²⁸ The actual title of the book is practically identical (the absence of the final anagram, בע"ה, "in this subject" or "along these lines" being the only exception) to that of the Constantinople edition.²⁹

ספר בן סירא עם מעשה גדול מחודש מאברהם אבינו ע"ה שלא נדפס עד עתה ועם מעשיות שבתלמוד ועם מעשיות אחרים שמצאנו עם פטירת משה רבינו ע"ה ועם פטירת אהרן ע"ה ועם דברים אחרים שיבאו בספר הזה בע"ה ("The Book of Ben Sira with a great, new legend of Abraham, our father, of blessed memory, that has never before been published, and with Talmudic legends, and other legends that we found, with the Death of Moses, our

²⁷The term, "basic" indicates the exclusion of reprintings. For instance, although A. Jellinek's Bet Ha-Midrash, 1 was originally published in 1853, and then reprinted in 1934, the texts are identical. Therefore they are listed as one basic edition, "the 1853 edition."

²⁸He expressed this opinion in a letter to me, dated January 10, 1995.

²⁹As reported by Porges, "Eine Bisher Unbekannte Ausgabe Von Ben Sira," in ZHB 10 (1924): 159.

teacher, of blessed memory, and with the Death of Aaron, of blessed memory, and with many others that have come into this book along these lines.") Ma'aseh comprises pages twenty-eight through thirty-five, both sides. Page thirty-four is missing. The title is printed in block print, the text in Rashi script. There is no paragraphing, and periods and abbreviation marks are the only punctuation included. Frequent spaces occur within lines of text to insure their uniformity of length. Virtually all of the material appearing in the later editions and manuscripts is found here.

Sefer Shevet Musar was compiled by Elijah haCohen of Smyrna, and originally published in Amsterdam, in 1732. A homiletical discourse on ethics, Shevet Musar consists of two-hundred 8" by 10" pages, printed on both sides. The Elijah haCohen divided the book into fifty-two chapters, each extolling a particular ethical virtue. "Ma'aseh" appears on pages 191-200, and comprises slightly more than half of Chapter 52. Chapter 52 extols the virtue of humility, of which, Elijah haCohen argues, Abraham was a prime exemplar. Although the editor indicated, by the use of, "עב"ל" ("this ends the quotation") at the end of the midrash and by placing the title of the midrash in parentheses, that he indeed is quoting the legend, he failed to cite his source. The text was printed in clear block print. Although no extensive punctuation nor paragraphing was provided, the continuous text does have series of colons (:), each placed at the end of what may be considered a paragraph. Below the main text a Yiddish translation was printed.

Bet Ha-Midrash is a collection of minor midrashim compiled by Adolph Jellinek. Volume One, of what eventually became a six-volume work, was published in 1853, in

Leipzig. "Ma'aseh comprises pages twenty-five through thirty-four (with each side numbered). In addition, Jellinek provides a short commentary on pages fourteen and fifteen. In this commentary, the editor cited the Shevet Musar as his source for the midrash, as well as discussing what he believes to be the Arabic origins of the work. Footnoted to the title, on the midrash's first page, is an indication that "Ma'aseh" was first published in Constantinople, in 1519. The text was divided into four paragraphs, the first two at least ten times the size of the final two. Punctuation marks were supplied to indicate the end of sentences, the end of paragraphs, abbreviations, and foreign loan words.

Ozar Midrashim is a two-volume collection of minor midrashim compiled by J.D. Eisenstein. "Ma'aseh Avraham Avinu" comprises pages two through six of Volume One. Eisenstein identifies his source as Jellinek's Bet Ha-Midrash, but the two versions are not identical. It seems that Eisenstein edited the text to insure that possessive endings and verb conjugations adhered to the gender conventions of Modern Hebrew grammar. He therefore, included readings which are not found in any of the previous manuscripts or printed editions of the midrash. He also sought to clarify certain terms by embedding explanations in parentheses within the text. For instance in the section concerning Abraham's mother's claim that she was not pregnant but suffering from the disease "kolitzni," Eisenstein added in parenthesis, "שם חולי" ("a name of a disease"), in order to clarify it for the reader who was unfamiliar with this rare loan word. The editor also provided punctuation, periods, question marks, exclamation points, abbreviation marks, and marks indicating foreign loan words. Eisenstein also divided the text into paragraphs.

On pages one and two of Ozar Midrashim, Volume One, Eisenstein presented notes regarding the Rabbinic antecedents, sources, and parallels, as well as the Arabic origins of the text. In terms of the latter matter, he merely repeated the opinions of Jellinek.

3. Similarities and Differences Among MSS and Printed Editions

All of the manuscripts and printed editions listed above prove to be remarkably similar. They all relate the same episodes, in the same order, with the same Biblical allusions and Rabbinic parallels. They all describe these episodes in essentially the same words. All the version make use of Biblical narrative language, that is, the conversive vay (וַיְהִיפּוֹד) to convey narrative.

There do exist, however, some minor disparities. These disparities are of seven main types: the conjugation of verbs, the rendering of G-d's name, the representation of foreign loan words, contractions, abbreviations, word reversals, and spelling.

The issue in regard to the conjugation of verbs concerns the use of masculine versus feminine conjugations, and the employment of the command form versus the future tense. An example of feminine versus masculine forms may be found in the section describing the midwives whom the king wants to appoint to be with the pregnant women to observe their births. While the Ozar Midrashim version reads in the feminine, "וַתְּהִינָה" "אֲצֵלָן" ("and they should be with them," that is, the midwives with the pregnant women), all the other manuscripts and printed editions utilize masculine verb and pronoun, "וַיְהִי" "אֲצֵלָם." An example of the command form versus future tense may be observed in the section of the midrash in which Satan instructs the king to "open the arsenals." While the Ozar Midrshim, JTS MS. 4879, Bet Ha-Midrash versions employ the command form to convey the instruction to open (פָּתַח), JTS MS. 5049, Shevet Musar, Salonica, Valmadonna MS. 167, and Schocken MS. 13316 versions all use the future tense (תִּפְתָּח) to convey the same instruction.

The differences regarding G-d's name concern a variance of אלקים as opposed to אלהים, and ה' versus יי'. The various manuscripts and printed editions tend to repeatedly and consistently favor one or the other to communicate the name of G-d. The exception to this model of consistency is the Schocken MS. 13316 which vacillates between אלקים and אלהים. To indicate the Tetragrammaton, however, this manuscript consistently employs "ה'."

Foreign loan words are variously represented by the different versions of the midrash. For instance, the disease Abraham's mother tells her husband that she has is said to be "קולצני" in the Ozar Midrashim version. The JTS MS. 5049, however, reads "קולציני," and the Schocken MS. has "קולוניני," to denote the same disease.

Some versions will use a separate verb and direct object, while others will employ a contraction of verb and direct object to convey the same thought. For instance, the Ozar Midrashim version reads "ותוא שיחבהל," to express, "to declare him false." The JTS manuscripts, to express the same thought in the same point in the midrash, contract the verb and direct object to read, "להכחישו."

Abbreviations generally occur in the various versions due to spacing considerations. In order to maintain a consistent length of the line of text, the various versions will abbreviate various words. The most frequently seen are, "א"ל" standing for, "אמר לו." Often numbers are abbreviated. For instance, to relate the number "seventy," the Ozar Midrashim has "שבעים," while the Bet Ha-Midrash version abbreviates the number, "ע." Sometimes names are abbreviated to save space. The Salonica edition, for example, frequently abbreviates the name Abraham (אברהם) in the following manner:

"אברהם."

The spelling differences among the versions mostly concern the issue of including a "vav" (ו) or not (חסר מלא) versus (חסר) to convey certain words. For example, the name Nimrod may be spelled without a "vav" (נמרד), as the Ozar Midrashim version consistently does, or it may be spelled with the "vav," (נמרוד) as do all the other manuscripts and printed editions. In addition to the inclusion or exclusion of a vav, spelling differences also occur among the versions in words which contain two "yud"s (י). For instance, the word for "weapon" is spelled, "זין," (one "yud") in the Valmadonna manuscript and the Bet Ha-Midrash, but the Ozar Midrashim, and JTS manuscripts have the same word as, "זיין" (with two "yud"s).

Word reversals occasionally occur between versions. For example, in the Ozar Midrashim version, G-d tell the angels, "רואה ויודע אני," while in the JTS manuscripts, this same quote appears as, "רואה אני ויודע."

Despite the disparities in spelling, conjugation, abbreviation, contraction, word order, and G-d's name related above, for the most part, the versions do, tell the same story in much the same words. There do exist, however, three areas of slight divergence. The description of the guards to be placed by the house the king built for pregnant women differs among the various versions. Some versions contain entire sentences which do not appear in other versions. The second incident of divergence occurs in the episode which describes Abraham's discovery of G-d. The order in which he viewed, attested to the divinity of, and then disavowed belief in the heavenly bodies varies according to version. Lastly, the description of Abraham smashing the idols exhibits disparities from one version

to the next, in that the order of the idols' body parts effected by his blows varies.

3. Structure of the Midrash

The author (or authors) of this midrash has taken the various Rabbinic legends found in the exegetic midrashic tradition, concerning the early life of Abraham and weaved them together into a coherent narrative plot. The plot is related with Biblical and Rabbinic allusions, and written in the Biblical style. As the Torah tells us very little of Abraham's early life, before he receives G-d's call to "Go forth" (Gn. 12:1), the midrash might be thought of as filling in what the Torah would have said about Abraham's early life had these details been included. In doing so, the midrash parallels the Torah's report of the early life of Moses. Just as the early life of Moses is portrayed in two major time sequences, "early childhood" and "young adulthood," so, too, is the plot of our midrash divided into these two major time sequences.

Each major time sequence may then be thought of as being divided into two main phases of plot. The "early childhood" half of the midrash contains the incidents surrounding Abraham's miraculous birth, and Abraham's becoming a prophet. The "young adulthood" sequence includes the events associated with Abraham smashing the idols, and Abraham's imprisonment and being thrown into the fiery furnace.

Each of these main plot phases encompasses various legends and biographical details. As such, Abraham's miraculous birth, includes the declaration of Nimrod that he is a god, the foreseeing the birth of Abraham in the stars, the killing of the male babies, the miraculous pregnancy of Abraham's mother, Abraham's birth in a cave, the abandonment of Abraham in the cave, the nursing of Abraham by the angel Gabriel, his growing to a modicum of maturity in ten days (he grows to adult height, walks, speaks, and reasons).

The following episodes occur within the main plot phase of Abraham's becoming a prophet: Abraham discovers G-d, Abraham meets Gabriel and worships the true G-d, Abraham meets his mother and preaches the word of G-d to her, the king's army comes against Abraham, G-d saves Abraham from the army, G-d sends Abraham to Babylonia to preach His word, Abraham's first face to face confrontation with Nimrod.

After the confrontation with Nimrod, the midrash tells us that Abraham and his father went together to their city, and that Abraham grew up until he was twenty years old. Thus, the second major time sequence of the midrash, "young adulthood" begins. The first main plot phase of the "young adulthood" half of the midrash is Abraham smashing the idols. The following episodes are included under this rubric: Abraham publicly selling idols, the incident with the Old Woman, the king's feast, Abraham physically destroying the idols of the king.

The final main plot phase of the midrash involves Abraham's imprisonment and being cast into the fiery furnace. The episodes of this main plot phase ensue as follows: Abraham is thrown into the dungeon without food nor drink, Gabriel stays with him and feeds him, the conversion and attempted execution of the warden, the casting of Abraham into the fiery furnace, G-d's rescue of Abraham, the conversion of the masses.

In addition to the organization of the events of the plot, is that of the narrative voice which is introduced throughout the midrash with the words, "The Maggid said." This voice pushes the plot along, supplying the important details which set up the next incident or scene. Often the details proffered are of a miraculous nature. The fact that they are attributed to "The Maggid" lends authority to the tradition. This reference to a

tradent gives the impression that the author didn't make this up, but recieved this tradition from a teacher. This impression is reinforced by the first words of the midrash, as well, "They said," meaning the Sages.

As one reads the critical text that follows, parallel nature of the first and second halves of the midrash should become apparant. Each half begins with a threat to Abraham's life. In the first hlf this threat is to his physical life, as he was born in an age when Nimrod had killed seventy-thousand male babies with the intention of ending Abraham's life. In the second half, the threat is to his spiritual life. For the young Abraham found himself in the position of being an idol salesman for his father.

Each half ends with a face to face confrontation between Abraham and Nimrod. In the first half, it is the throne room confrontation, in which Abraham uttering G-d's Name rendered Nimrod and his ministers unconscious (and caused thier souls to flee from thier bodies), and caused thier idols to fall off thier pedestals to the floor. When Nimrod's soul was returned to him and he regained consciousness, he attested to the power of G-d. This proves to be an example of literary forshadowing, as in the midrash's second half Nimrod is rendered ineffectual, his ministers convert to faith in the true G-d, and Abraham smashes their idols. The second half of the midrash, concludes as the first, with a face to face confrontation between Abraham and Nimrod. This time the confrontation occured at the fiery furnace. As in the confrontation which concluded the first half, G-d saved Abraham, and all who witnessed G-d's power and redemption attested to the true G-d, "The L-rd, He is G-d in the heavens above and the earth below, there is none other!"

In addition, the reader of the critical text will note a sense of symmatry amongst

each of the episodes themselves. That is, the structure of each episode is such that the episode begins with a challenge, and concludes with words (or a visual indication) attesting to G-d. For instance, the episode concerning the birth of Abraham presents the challenge of having him born alive, despite the murderous rampage of Nimrod. The birth scene in the cave signifies the episode's conclusion. In that scene G-d is attested to by the light which shined from Abraham's face. The following scene presents the challenge of the baby's mother's ability to raise him. Out of fear, she abandoned him, but with a prayer, "May your G-d be with you..." G-d is then further attested to by the presence of Gabriel who suckles the baby Abraham. Most often, the various episodes end in verbal attestation to, and praise of G-d. For instance, the scene in which Abraham's mother, after engaging in the challenge of searching in the wilderness for her abandoned son, finally met him, concludes in attestation of, and praise to G-d, "Yes, that you should know, my mother, that there is in the world a great and awesome, living and enduring G-d...the entire earth is full of His glory."

In this way the structure of each episode constitutes a microcosm of the work as a whole. For the Ma'aseh, as a whole, begins with a challenge, that of a world steeped in idolatry. But the midrash ends with both visual and verbal attestation and praise. Visually, the attesting to G-d's Presence appears through the redemption of Abraham, the cooling of the fire, and transformation of the furnace into a garden. Verbally, all present resounded with familiar words of praise, "Th L-rd, He is G-d in the heavens above and

the earth below, there is none other!"³⁰

³⁰As touched upon in the introduction, each episode, as well as the work as a whole may thought of as paralleling the Passover Haggadah. Just as the Haggadah begins with degradation and moves to praise, so, too, do the episodes and the midrash itself (as each challenge may be thought of as the equivalent of a degradation). Just as the Haggadah examines the past, provides for an experience in the present, and then looks to a future redemption, so to does the midrash operate on all these levels.

PART II:

MA'ASEH AVRAHAM AVINU:

A CRITICAL TEXT

Sigla for Text Witnesses used in the Critical Apparatus

ד = Printed Editions

1ד = from the Shevet Musar, compiled by R. Elijah haCohen of Smyrna, Amsterdam ed.,
1732

2ד = from the Bet Ha-Midrash, compiled by Adolph Jellinek, Leipzig ed., 1853

3ד = Salonica edition, from the Jewish National and University Library, 1593³¹

Manuscripts

כא = J.T.S. Adler Collection 4879, Kurdistan 1600-1799.³²

ב = J.T.S. Adler Collection 5049 R1855, Kurdistan 1600-1699.³³

ג = Valmadonna Trust Library (London), MS. 167, Italy, 1819³⁴

ז = Schocken Institute for Jewish Research (Jerusalem), MS. 13316,

³¹This edition, in which "Ma'aseh" appears, bears the same title as the Constantinople 1580 (19?) edition: ספר בן סירא עם מעשה גדול: אבינו ע"ה קלא נדפס עד עתה ועם מעשיות שבתלמוד ועם "מחוגש מאברהם מעשיות אחרים שמצאשנו עם פטירות אהרן ע"ה ועם זכרים וחרים שיבאו בדפר הזה בע"ה"

³²MS. 4879 is missing the following material from the midrash: from page 19, "ותדעי אותו," until, "ז' ימים וכל איש ישמח בביתו," on page 31; from the middle of page 69, after, "בתוך," until the end of the midrash.

³³MS. 5049 is missing the following material: from page 11, "מהאנשים," on page 15; page 28, "ואני גבריאלי," to, "והלך הילד," until, "ויעבר אברום לפני הפחות," on page 36; from למועד המלך on pg. 66, until pg. 72, "אמר לה אמי," from pg. 86, until the end.

³⁴MSS 167 bears the name of its owner, Moses Isaac Capua. But, there is no information extant concerning its scribe. The manuscript is a סדר תקון ליל ר"ה, bearing instructions to read "Ma'aseh" on the first night of Rosh HaShanna. The scribe cites the Shevet Musar as the midrash's source.

Methods Used to Indicate Variants

The main Hebrew text of Ma'aseh Avraham Avinu appears at the top of each page. The version utilized for this main text is that of J. D. Eisenstein, Ozar Midrashim (New York: Eisenstein, 1915), 2-6. Beneath the main Hebrew text on each page are textual alternatives (in Hebrew) culled from the various sources listed above, under the heading "Sigla for Text Witnesses." Beneath the textual alternatives is my English translation of the midrash. Beneath the translation, are comments and notes to the English translation.

The lines of the main Hebrew text are numbered along its right-hand margin. In the critical apparatus, the number of the line which contains the word(s) to which the variants belong is indicated first. Next, the text word(s) with which the variants are associated appears, followed by a colon (:). The variants follow the colon, with the sign of the text witness(es) from which each is drawn. Double-spaces are used to separate variants in a particular lemma, and a slanted line (/) separates one lemma from another. A word or words lacking in any text witness is indicated by the Hebrew letter het (ה), meaning haser (missing), while additional words are noted by the letter nun (נ), indicating nosaf (addition).

Footnotes are organized in numerical order, and indexed according to numbers which appear within the English translation. The notes contain commentary, as well as, citations of Biblical and Rabbinic text parallels and sources.

מעשה אברהם אבינו ע"ה ממה שאירע לו עם נמרד

2 אמרו שקודם שנולד אברהם היה נמרד כופר באמונת האל ית', והיה מתנאה בעצמו ואמר

שהוא אלוה

1...מעשה: נ' בליל ראשון ואחר כך יאמר מעשה...ג/ ממה שאירע לו עם נמרד: כחוב בספר שבט מוסר וזה לשונו

ג/ 2. אמרו: אמר ב/ שקודם: שקידם ד1 קודם כ1 שקדם ב / שנולד: שנברא ד1 ד3 ב ג ז / אברהם: אא"א כ1/

נמרד: נמרוד כ1 ד3 ב ג/ האל ית': האל יתברך ד1 כ1 ב ג ז/ ואמר: ואומר ד1 ב ואמרו כ1/

A TALE OF ABRAHAM OUR FATHER, OF BLESSED MEMORY,

FROM WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM WITH NIMROD

They said³⁵ that before Abraham was born, Nimrod disavowed belief in G-d, may

He blessed,³⁶ and he exalted himself and said that he was god.

³⁵"They said," usually connotes the Sages. See Yitzhak Frank, The Practical Talmud Dictionary (Jerusalem: Ariel United Israel Institutes, 1991), 33.

³⁶Nimrod is first referred to in Chapter 10 of the Book of Genesis, as a son of Cush. Gn. 10:9 describes him as a "גִּבּוֹר צֹיֵד," or "mighty hunter," "...therefore it is said, 'like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the L-rd.'" This description echoes the description of Esau in Gn. 25:27, as an "אִישׁ יָדֹעַ צֹיֵד," or "a man who knows how to hunt." It is this connection which undergirds Genesis Rabbah 37:2's contention that the Torah's phrase, "like Nimrod," actually refers to Esau. That is, Esau is like Nimrod, and visa versa. Since Rabbinic Literature regards Esau negatively as a metaphor for "the nations," and Rome, in particular, the oppressor of the Jewish people, destroyer of the Second Temple and Jewish religion; so, too, is Nimrod regarded in the same light, an enemy of the Jewish people, Jewish religion, and G-d. The Zohar I 78b applies Job 38:15 ("And from the wicked their light is withholden, and the high arm is broken.") to Nimrod, because "he led astray the whole of humankind." Zohar I 73b informs that Nimrod's name comes from the verb "marad," which means to rebel, for Nimrod rebelled

ואנשי זמנו היו עובדים ומשתחיים לו. והיה זה המלך תוכן וחכם וראה בחכמת הכוכבים
 2 שיוולד אדם אחד בימיו שיעמוד כנגדו להכחיש אותו באמונתו ולנצחו, ויחרד חרדה גדולה.
 מה עשה שלח אחרי השרים והפחות שלו והגיד להם הדבר

1. זמנו: נ' הקדמונים ד' 3 ג' 1 כ' קדמונים ז' קין ב' / המלך: נ' נמרד כ' 1 נ' נמרוד ד' 3 ב' ז' / שילד:
 שילד כ' / 2. אחד: א' ד' 1 ד' 2 כ' 1 ב' ז' / שיעמוד: ויעמוד ד' 1 כ' 1 ב' / להכחיש אותו: להכחישו כ' 1 ב' ג' ז' / באמונתו:
 מאמונתו ד' 1 כ' 1 ב' / חרדה גדולה: נ' ומפחדו ד' 1 ד' 2 נ' ער מאד מפחדו נמרוד כ' 1 נ' המלך מפחדו ב' ד' 3 ז' / 3.
 אחרי: אחר כ' / השרים: נ' הסגנים כ' 1 ב' ז' נ' והסגנים והשחות ד' 3 /

And the people of his era used to serve and worship him. And this king was a skillful
 astrologer. And he predicted astrologically that a male would be born in his days who
 would challenge him to declare false his faith (Nimrod's religion), and be victorious over
 him.³⁷ And he was very afraid. What did he do? He sent for his ministers and high
 officers to tell them about this matter,

against the "most high King above, against the higher angels and
 against the lower angels." These points are reinforced by the
 inclusion in Genesis Rabbah 37:3 of Nimrod on a list of evil
 persons encountered in the Bible.

³⁷Sefer HaYashar, Chapter 4, describes a cosmic occurrence that
 took place the night of Abraham's birth: "One great star came from
 the east and shot across the heavens, swallowing up the four stars
 at the four corners of the heavens." Nimrod's ministers witnessed
 and interpreted the occurrence, then brought it to the king's
 attention. This same account (with some minor changes in wording)
 appears in Adolph Jellinek, Bet ha-Midrash, (Liepzig: Friedrich
 Nies, 1853), 2:118. It is titled, "Ma'aseh Avraham." See also,
Midrash Avot, Chapter 22.

ואמר להם מה תיעצוני לעשות בזה הילד שעתיד לבוא? אמרו לו העצה שאנו מסכימים על
 2 זה הוא שתבנה בית גדול ותשים שומר בפתחו ותכריז בכל מלכותך שכל הנשים שהן
 מעוברות שתבואינה לשם ואחרי בואן תבין אינה ג"כ החיות (מילדות) ותהינה אצלן לשמור
 4 את זמן לידתן, ובבואה האשה ללדת תראינה אם בן הוא תשחינה אותו על בטנה,

1. ואמר להם: וא"ל ב' / תיעצוני: נ' מה ב' / תיעצוים ב' / לבוא: לבא ד' ז' / אמרו לו: א"ל ב' / העצה:
 העיצה ב' / שאנו: אשר אנחנו ב' ב' ז' / על זה הוא: וזהו ב' / ותשים: נ' בו ד' ב' / בפתחו: בפתח שלו ד' ב' ב' ז' /
 בכל: נ' מדינות ב' ב' ז' / נ' מדינו' ד' / 2. מלכותך: מלכותיך ב' / שהן: שהם ב' ד' ב' ח' ז' / מעוברות: נ' הם ז' /
 שתבואינה: שיבואו ד' 1 ד' 2 יבאו ב' ז' יבואו ד' ג' ב' / ואחרי: ואחר ב' / בואן: בואם ד' 1 ד' 2 ד' 3 ב' ג' ז' יבואם ב' / תב
 אינה: יבואו ד' 1 ד' 2 ד' 3 ב' ג' ז' / ג"כ: גם כן ג' 1 ד' 2 ד' 3 ב' ג' ז' / (מילדות): ח' ד' 1 ד' 2 ד' 3 ב' ג' ז' / 3. ותהינה
 עצלן: ויהיו עצלם ד' 1 ד' 2 ד' 3 ב' ג' ז' / לשמור: נ' אותם ב' ד' 3 ב' ז' / את זמן: עד זמן ד' 1 ד' 2 ד' 3 ב' ג' ז' / בזמן ב' /
 לידתן: לדתם ד' 1 ד' 2 ג' לידתם ב' / לידתן ד' 3 ב' / ובבואה: ובבוא ד' 1 ד' 2 ד' 3 / ובבא ב' ג' ז' / ובבוא ב' / האשה: עת ב' /
 תראינה: יראו ד' 1 ד' 2 ד' 3 ב' ג' ז' / נ' המילדות ב' / תשחינה אותו: ישחטוהו ד' 1 ד' 2 ג' / וישחטו אותו ב' ד' 3 / ישחטו
 אותה ב' / ישחטו אותו ז' / 4. בטנה: נ' של אמו ב' /

and he said to them, "What do you advise me to do about this child who will be born?"

They said to him, "We all agree that you should build a great house, and place a guard at its entrance, and proclaim to all your kingdom that all pregnant women should come there. And after they come, midwives should also come and be with them in order to observe the moment of their birth. And when the woman is about to give birth, they will see if it's a son. If so, they should slaughter him upon her bosom."³⁸

³⁸Literally: "belly." These instructions to the midwives parallel the instructions given to the Hebrew midwives in Egypt. See Ex. 1:15-16.

ואם בת היא וחיה ויתנו מתנות לאמה וילבשה בגדי מלכות ויקראו לפנייה ככה יעשה לאשה
 2 אשר תלד בת. ויהי כשמעו עצתם שמח שמחה גדולה עד מאד, והבריו בכל מדינות מלכותו
 שיבואו כל האומנים לבנות בית גדול למלך, גבהו ששים אמה ורחבו שמונים אמה,

1. ויתנו: ותתן ד' 1 ד' 2 ב' 1 ג' ז' / ותחן ב' / מתנות: מתנ' ד' 3 / וילבשה: ותלבישנה ד' 1 ד' 2 ב' 3 ג' ז' / וילבישה כ' 1 /
 בגדי: בגד ז' / ויקראו: ותקרא ד' 1 ד' 2 ב' 3 ג' ז' / 2. כשמעו: כשמעו ד' 1 כשמעו כ' 1 / 3. מלכותו: מלכתו ב' / כל: ח'
 כ' 1 / אומנים: אומנין כ' 1 ב' ז' / גדול: ח' כ' 1 / ששים: ס' כ' 1 / אמה: אמת ב' / שמונים: שמוני' ד' 2 פ' כ' 1 ע' ב' שמונים
 / ז'

But, if it is a daughter, they should let her live,³⁹ and they should give gifts to her mother and dress her in royal clothing and declare before her, "Thus will be done to a woman who will give birth to a daughter."⁴⁰

When he heard their counsel he became very happy and decreed in all the provinces of his kingdom⁴¹ that all the artisans should come to build a great house for the king, sixty cubits high, and eighty cubits wide.⁴²

³⁹See Ex. 1:16, "ואם בת היא וחיה" . . .

⁴⁰This echoes Est. 6:9, 11, in which the royal honor offered by earthly kings is similarly described.

⁴¹This parallels Est. 3:13-15, in which a decree was sent to "all the king's provinces, to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women..."

⁴²See Gn.6:15, in which G-d instructs Noah as to the measurements of the ark that he is to build. See also, I Kgs. 5:26-32, 6:2-3, 6, in which the measurements of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem as well as the artisans employed in building it are described.

ואחר כלותו לבנות הבית הכריז שתבואינה כל הנשים המעוברות לבית ההוא להיות שם
 2 עד שתלדנה ויפקד פקידים להביאן שם גם הפקיד עליהן נשים מילדות להולידן, וגזר
 שהבן היולד ישחט על חזה אמו ואם בת היא שילבישו את אמה בגדי שש ומשי ורקמה

1. כלותו: כלות ד1 ד2 כ1 ב ג ז / שתבואינה: שיבאו ד1 ד2 ד3 כ1 ב ג ז / הנשים: האנשים ב ה / המעוברות:
 מעוברות כ1 / 2. שתלדנה: נ' שם ד1 ד3 כ1 ב ג / ויפקד: והפקיד ד1 ד2 ד3 כ1 ב ג ז / להביאן: להביאם ד1 ד2 כ1
 ב ג ז להביאה ד2 / שם: לשם ד1 ד3 ב ג ז / הפקיד: נ' על הבית שומרי' לשמור את הפתח לבלתי ילכו. גם
 הפקיד...ד1 נ' על הבית שומרים לשמור את הפתח לבלתי ילכו גם הפקיד עליהם ... ד3 ב ג ז נ' על הבית
 שומרים למו את הפתח לבלתי ינוסו. גם הפקיד...ד2 נ' לשם שומרים לשמור הפתח לבלתי ילכו גם הפקיד...כ1 /
 גם הפקיד עליהן נשים מילדות: גם הפקיד שם מילדות כ1 / וגזר: נ' עליהן ד1 ד2 ד3 ג נ' עליהם כ1 ז עליהא
 כ / 2. היולד: היולד כ1 היולד כ / ישחט: ישחטו אותו ד1 כ1 ב ג ז ישחטוהו ד2 / ואם בת היא: ושילדה בת ד1
 והבת כ1 ד3 ז ושילדה בת ג / שילבישו: ילבישו כ1 / את אמה: אותה כ1 / שש: ח' כ1 כ / ומשי: משי ד1 כ1 /

And after they had finished building the house, he announced that all pregnant women should come to this house, and remain there until they give birth. And he appointed officers⁴³ to bring them there. He also appointed women as midwives to birth them. And he decreed that the son who will be born should be slaughtered upon its mother's bosom. But if it's a daughter, they should dress her mother in cloths of fine linen and silk and embroidered work,⁴⁴

⁴³This proves reminiscent of Est. 2:3, in which King Ahasuerus "appointed officers" to bring "all the fair, young virgins to Shushan the capital, to the house of women, to the custody of Hegai the king's chamberlain, keeper of the women..."

⁴⁴See Ez. 16: 13, in which G-d in describing what He has done for Israel, makes mention of dressing Israel in cloths of fine linen, silk, and embroidered work ("שש ומשי ורקמה"). See also Ex. 28:6,

יוציאוה משם ויעשו לה כבוד הרבה, כי כן צוה המלך, ויוליכוה לביתה בכבוד. אמר המגיד

2 שנהרגו על הדבר ההוא יותר משבעים אלף זכרים. ובראות מלכי מעלה הריגת אלו

הילדים אמרו לפני הקב"ה, הלא ראית מה שעשה הרשע הכופר נמרד בן כנען

-
1. ויוציאוה: יצואו ב / ויוציאנה ג / משם ויעשו לה כבוד הרבה: כבוב בכבוד גדול ב / כבוד: נ' אמר המגיד ב /
 בכבוד: נ' הרבה ב / 2. ההוא: הזה ב / ובראות: וברות ב / 3. הילדים: הילד ב / הקב"ה: הק"בה נ' רבונו
 של עולם ד 3 נ' רבש"ע ד 1 ב / נ ז / שעשה: עשה זה ב / ז / הכופר נמרד: נמרוד הכופר ב / נמרד: נמרוד ד 2
 ד 3 ב נ ז /
-

and take her out from there and accord her much honor, for thus commanded the king,
 and they should lead her to her house in honor.

The Maggid said⁴⁵ that more than seventy-thousand males were killed as a result
 of the [king's] command. And when the angels on high saw the killing of these children,
 they said before the Holy One, Blessed Be He, "Have you not seen what this evil
 blasphemer Nimrod, the son of Canaan, has done?"

in which the priestly ephod is described as being made with "fine
 linen" ("שש משזר"). Just as G-d's priests are meant to minister
 unto Him in vestments of "fine linen," so, too, are those who serve
 Nimrod (who considered himself a god). Thus, the language here
 indicates one more example of Nimrod overstepping his mortal
 bounds.

⁴⁵According to Louis Ginzberg, Legends of the Jews
 (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1955), 5:213, "The
 Maggid said," is a translation of an Arabic expression, and thus
 proves that this midrash is a translation from the Arabic. He cites
 Jellinek, Bet HaMidrash, 1:14, as his source. Jellinek, however,
 provides no source to support his claim.

שהרג כמה ילדים על לא חמס בכפיהם, אמר להם מלאכים קדושים! ידעתי וראיתי, כי לא
 2 אנום ולא אישן, ורואה ויודע אני הנסתרות והנגלות, אבל אתם תראו מה אעשה לרשע
 הכופר הזה כי אשים ידי עליו ליסרו.

1. שהרג: אשר הרג ד' כ' ב ג ז / כמה ילדים: ג' ושפך דמם ארצה ד' ד' כ' ב ג ז / על לא חמס: על חמס ב /
 בכפיהם: בכפיה' ד' / אמר להם: א"ל כ' אמר הקב"ה להם ז' מלאכים: מלאכי' ד' / 2. כי לא אנום ולא אישן: כי
 לא איש אנכי כ' / ורואה ויודע אני: ורואה אני ויודע ד' ד' כ' ב ג ז / והנגלות: נ' והנגלות ב' / אתם תראו: אתם תרעו
 ותראו כ' אתם ראו ז' / 3. הזה: ח' ז' / אשים: אשיח ב' / ליסרו: ליסרהו כ' /

He has killed so many innocent children!"

He said to them, "Holy angels! I have known and I have seen. For I neither
 slumber nor sleep.⁴⁶ And, I know and see all hidden and revealed things.⁴⁷ But, you
 shall see what I will do to this evil blasphemer, for I will use my power to punish
 him."⁴⁸

⁴⁶This reflects Ps. 121: 3-4, "...your Guardian does not slumber. Behold, your Guardian, Israel, neither slumbers nor sleeps." See also Koran, Sura 2:255, "Allah - there is no god but He, the Ever-kiving, the Self-subsisting by Whom all subsist. Slumber overtakes Him not, nor sleep. To him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth."

⁴⁷This echoes Dt. 29: 28, "The hidden things belong to the L-rd our G-d, but the revealed things belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this Torah."

⁴⁸The theme of the angels challenging G-d, and G-d asserting His supreme authority (and thus affirming the theological tenets of G-d's unity, omniscience, and omnipotence) is common in Rabbinic Literature. For example, see B.T. Berachot 61b, where as Rabbi

אמר המגיד שבזמן ההוא הלכה אם אברהם אע"ה ולקחה איש תרח שמו ותהר ממנו, ויהי
 2 שלש חדשים ותגדל בטנה ופניה מוריקות, אמר לה תרח בעלה מה לך אשתי פניך מוריקות
 ובטנך גדולה,

-
1. אברהם אע"ה: אברהם אבינו ע"ה כ' ג' ז' אברהם אבינו עליו השלום ד' / ולקחה: ולקח' ד' / תרח: ג' היה
 כ' / 2. אמר לה תרח בעלה מה לך אשתי פניך מוריקות ובטנה גדולה: ח' כ' ובטנה גדולה כ' /
-

The Maggid said that at that time the mother of Abraham, may he rest in peace, went and married a man named Terah, and conceived with him. At about the third month, her belly became enlarged and her face grew pale.⁴⁹ Terah, her husband, said to her, "What's the matter with you, my wife? Your face is pale and your belly enlarged."

Akiba was being tortured to death, the ministering angels challenge, "Is this how you, L-rd, reward those who teach your sacred Torah?," and G-d immediately asserts, "Happy are you Akiba, for you are destined for the world to come."

⁴⁹That pregnancy becomes noticeable after the third month is attested to in Rabbinic Literature. For instance, see Gn. 38:24, T. Niddah 1:7, and Genesis Rabbah 85:10.

אמרה לו בכל שנה ושנה אירע לי זה החולי שיאמרו לו (שיקרא אותו) קולצני (שם החולי).
 2 אמר לה תרח הראיני בטנך שנראה לי שאת מעוברת, ואם כך הוא אין ראוי לעבור את
 מצות אלקינו נמרד.

1. אמרה לו: אמר לתרח כ/1 (שיקרא אותו) ח' ד' 1 ד' 2 ד' 3 כ' ב' נ' ז' / קולצני: קולצני' ד' קולצני' כ' קולצני' ב'
 קולצני ד' 3 קולצני' נ' קולצני' ז' / (שם חולי) ח' ד' 1 ד' 2 כ' ב' ג' / 2. הראיני: הראני כ' ב' / בטנך: בטינך כ' / שנראה
 לי: שנראה שמא כ' שאורה לי ב' שיראה לי נ' ז' / שאת: שאתה כ' / אין: אינו כ' / אלקינו: אלהינו ד' 1 ד' 2 ג' / 3.
 נמרד: נמרוד ד' 1 ד' 2 ד' 3 כ' ב' נ' ז' /

She said to him, "Every year this sickness happens to me, which is called 'kolitzni'." ⁵⁰

Terah said to her, "Show me your belly, because it seems to me that you're pregnant, and if so, it is not proper to transgress the commandment of our god, Nimrod." ⁵¹

⁵⁰ "קלצני". Eisenstein (Ozar Midrashim, 1:2) and Jellinek (Bet HaMidrash, 1:2) consider this term to be borrowed from Arabic. They offer no sources to corroborate their view. Ginzberg states (Legends of the Jews, vol. 5, pg. 209), "The same is קולצני (but the manuscript reads קולליני), which seems to be Spanish." He offers no additional source information to corroborate his claim either. Grunbaum (Neue Beitrage, 128) compares it to the Italian, "calcinaccio," indicating a "hardening of the belly."

⁵¹ Throughout the Bible and Rabbinical Literature the term "commandment" (מצוה) usually refers to a religious obligation to the One G-d. For instance, see Ezr. 10:3, in which the term "commandment of our G-d," clearly refers to the will of the L-rd. Therefore, in its place here, referring to the instructions of Nimrod it points to the irony of a human being attempting to stretch beyond the healthy limits of his mortality and be a god.

וכאשר שם ידיו על בטנה עשה לה הקב"ה נס והלך הילד למעלה תחת החזה ויפשפש בידו
 2 ולא מצא שום דבר, אמר לה צדקת במה שאמרת, ולא נראה הדבר ולא נודע עד שנשלמו
 חדשי הילד, ומרוב פחדה יצאת מן העיר והלכה דרך המדבר קרוב לנהר אחד ומצאה שם
 4 מערה גדולה

1. וכאשר: ח' ד' 2 כ' 3 ב' ג' ז' / בטנה: בטנ' ד' / עשה: ועשה ב' / הקב"ה: הק"ב ד' 3 / למעלה: למעל' ד' /
 ויפשפש: ופשפש ד' 1 כ' 2 ג' ז' / בידו: בידיו ד' 1 ד' 2 ג' ז' / ידיו ב' / 2. במה: מה ד' 1 ג' / שאמרת: שמאמרת שאמרת
 כ' / חדשי: חדשיה כ' / ומרוב: ח' כ' / 3. פחדה: ומפחדה כ' / יצאת: יצאה ד' 1 כ' 2 ג' ז' / והלכה: והלך ז' / אחד:
 א' ד' 2 כ' /

But when he put his hand upon her belly, the Holy One, Blessed Be He, performed a miracle for her and the (unborn) boy rose higher in her chest (cavity). He felt with his hand, but did not find a thing.⁵² He said to her, "You are right in what you said." So the pregnancy was neither noticeable, nor known until the gestation period was completed.

But, due to her great fear, she went forth from the city, and walked in the wilderness near a river.⁵³ She found a large cave there,⁵⁴

While G-d's "commandments" are good, sacntifying, spiritually elevating, Nimrod's are murderous.

⁵²This may be thought to parallel Ex. 2:2, which reports the hiding of the infant Moses by his mother.

⁵³This reflects Ex. 2:3, which reports that when Moses' mother could no longer hide him, she went down by the river.

⁵⁴Pirkei d'R. Eliezer, Chapter 26 reports that Abraham was hidden "beneath the ground." This reflects a legend found in Exodus Rabbah 1:12 concerning the babies that the Hebrew women gave birth to in Egypt. The Midrash teaches that when the Egyptians came to

ונכנסה לשם. למחר אחוזה חבלי לידה ותלד בן, ותראה את המערה כולה מאירה כשמש

2 מאור פני הילד ותשמח שמחה גדולה,

1. למחר: ולמחר ד' 2 ב' 1 ג' / לידה: יולדה ד' 2 ב' 1 ג' / ותראה: ותר' / כולה: כלה ד' 2 ב' / מאירה: מאיר'

ד' 1 ח' 1 ב' / ותשמח שמחה: ושמחה שמחת ד' 1 ושמחה שמחה ד' 2 ג' ושמחה בו שמחה ב' 1 ז' /

and entered it. The next day, birth pangs gripped her, and she gave birth to a son. And she saw the entire cave illuminated as if by the sun from the light of the face of the child.⁵⁵ And she was very happy.

look for the infants, to kill them, G-d performed a miracle and the infants were swallowed up by the ground until which time the Egyptians had left. Abraham being protected by the cave also echoes the tradition that R. Simeon bar Yohai hid in a cave for thirteen years from the Romans. See Esther Rabbah 3:7. The incident of Abraham in the cave echoes, as well, Is. 2:19-20, which describes the day when the tables will be turned on the idolaters of the world, when it will be the idolaters who will hide in caves "from before the terror of the L-rd... In that day a man shall cast away his idols of silver and his idols of gold, which they made for themselves to worship, to the moles and to the bats." Ex. 33:17-23 indicates that G-d used a "crag in the rock" to protect Moses from the intensity of His Presence ("...no person shall see Me and live."). B.T. Pesachim 54a maintains that this protective crag which allowed Moses to experience G-d, was actually a cave, it was part of the original plan of Creation, and was created on the sixth day before twilight. This was the same cave that Elijah entered after the incident with the priests of Baal (I Kgs. 18), and experienced G-d's revelation there (I Kgs. 19:9-18). See also I Sam. 24:2-23, which describe the role played by a cave in saving David's life when King Saul sought to kill him.

⁵⁵This parallels the "flooding of the whole house with light" at the birth of Moses, as depicted in B.T. Sotah 12a and Exodus Rabbah 1:20. These sources derive the illuminated face of Moses at birth through the use of a gezera shava based on Ex. 2:2, "And when she

והוא היה אברהם אע"ה, ופתחה פיה ואמרה אני שילדתיך בזמן הזה שמלך נמרד והרג
 2 בעבורך שבעים אלף זכרים, ואני אפחד עליך מאד שאם ידע בך יהרגך ועל זה יותר טוב
 שתמות במערה הזאת ולא יראוך עיני שחוט על חזה שלי,

1. פתחה פיה: ח' ב' /1/ אני: אוי ד' ג' ז' /אוי לי ב' /1/ שמלך: שהמלך ב' ז' /נמרד: נמרוד
 ד' ב' 1 ג' ז' /והרג: הרג ד' 1 ב' ז' /בעבורך: נ' יותר ב' ז' /שבעים: ע' ד' 1 ג' ז' /מע' ב'
 משבעים ז' /מאד: ח' ב' /1/ שאם: שמא ב' /1/ בך יהרגך: ויהרג אותך ב' /1/ 2. ולא: ואל ז' /

And the child was Abraham our father, of blessed memory. She cried out and said, "I am the one who has given birth to you at this time when King Nimrod reigns.

He has killed seventy-thousand males because of you. And I am very afraid for you, for if he knows of you, he will kill you. So because of this, it is better that you die in this cave so that my eyes will not see you slaughtered upon my bosom."⁵⁶

saw him that he was good," compared with, Gn. 1:4, "And G-d saw the light that it was good." Abraham's shining face also echoes Ex. 34:24, describes how Moses' face shined with beams of light after having experienced G-d on Mount Sinai.

⁵⁶This is similar to the story of Hagar and Ishmael (Gn. 21: 15-16). Like Abraham's mother, Hagar takes Ishmael to the wilderness, places him under one of the shrubs and said, "Let me not look upon the death of the child." As is the case with the baby Abraham in our midrash, G-d hears the boy's (Ishmael's) crying and saves him (Gn. 21: 17). In both cases, water is found in the wilderness, a well in Gn. 21: 19, and a fountain in our midrash. Both boys survive by drinking by the hand of Divine intervention; Ishmael from the above mentioned well, and Abraham from Gabriel's lactating finger.

ולקחה מלבוש אשר עליה והלבישהו ועזבה אותו במערה, ואמרה יהי אלקיך עמך לא ירפך
2 ולא יעזבך והלכה לדרכה.

1. מלבוש: מן הלבוש כ' ז/ והלבישהו: והלבישה אותו ד' כ' ג' ז/ ועזבה אותו: ועזבתו ד' ג' ז' ועזבתהו כ'/
ואמרה: אמרה כ'/ אלקיך: אלהיך ד' ה' כ'/

So she took from the clothing that was upon her and dressed him, and left him in the cave. Then she said, "May your G-d be with you, may He not fail you, nor forsake you,"⁵⁷ and she went on her way.⁵⁸

⁵⁷This parallels Dt. 31:6,8 in which Moses first charges all Israel and then Joshua to fulfill their mission (march on to conquer the land promised to the seed of Abraham, Gn. 15:18), "Be strong and of good courage, fear not nor be affrighted at them; for the L-rd your G-d, He is the One who goes with you, He will not fail you, nor forsake you," "The L-rd, He is the One who goes before you, He will be with you, He will not fail you, nor forsake you, fear not and do not be dismayed." See also I Ch 28:20 in which King David charges his son, Solomon to complete the mission of building the Temple, "... 'Be strong and of good courage and do it, fear not and do not be dismayed, for the L-rd G-d, my G-d, is with you, He will not fail you, nor forsake you, until all the work for the service of the house of th L-rd will be finished.' "

⁵⁸This parallels Exodus Rabbah 23:8 which relates that when a Hebrew woman in Egypt was about to give birth, she went out into the fields and gave birth there. She would then leave the infant in the field, saying, "L-rd of the world! I have done my part; now you do yours!" Then G-d would immediately come down and cut the umbilical cord, wash and anoint the infant with oil.

אמר המגיד שאברהם אע"ה בעודו במערה לא היה לו מינקת שתניקהו, בכה ושמע השי"ת
 2 בכייתו ושלח לגבריאל המלאך לחיות אותו ולתת לו חלב, כי היה מוציא לו חלב מאצבעו
 הימין והיה יונק ממנו

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1. אברהם אע"ה: שא"א ע"ה כ' אברהם אבינו ע"ה ג' ז' / במערה: נ' ילד קטן ולא... ד' כ' ג' ז' / היה לו: היתה
 כ' / השי"ת: השי"ת ד' ד' ד' ד' הקב"ה כ' השם יתברך ג' ז' / בכייתו: בכייתו נ' כאשר הוא שם ד' כ' נ' כאשר הוא שם
 ג' ז' / 2. לגבריאל: גבריאל כ' ז' / המלאך: ח' כ' ז' / לחיות: להחיות כ' ז' / כי היה מוציא לו חלב: ח' ד' / והיה:
 נ' תינוק כ' ז' / 3. ממנו: ח' כ' ז' /
-

The Maggid said that while Abraham our father, may he rest in peace, was still
 in the cave, he had no wetnurse to suckle him. He cried and the L-rd, may He be blessed,
 heard his crying and sent Gabriel the angel to keep him alive and give him milk; in that
 he brought forth milk from his right forefinger.⁵⁹

⁵⁹In "Ma'aseh Avraham" (Bet HaMidrash, 2:118-119 and Ozar Midrashim, 1:6) G-d creates two windows (חלונות) to sustain Abraham. Out of one flows oil, and out of the other, fine flour. Genesis Rabbah 34: 3 presents a figurative interpretation, indicating that "no breasts suckled him in piety and good deeds." Sefer HaYashar records the tradition that Terah hid Abraham in the cave for twelve years along with his mother and wetnurse. The suckling of Abraham by the male Gabriel parallels the suckling of Esther by Mordecai. See Genesis Rabbah 30:8 in this regard. These versions are paralleled by Exodus Rabbah 23:8 which reports the opinion of Rabbi Yohanan that after the Hebrew women in Egypt would leave their infants in the fields to G-d's care, G-d would place two stones in the child's hand. From one he could suckle oil, from the other honey. In the version of this legend related in B.T. Sotah 11b, instead of stones, G-d placed cakes in the infants' hands from which flowed oil and honey. In Exodus Rabbah 1:12 G-d sent angels to accomplish these tasks. This Divine care is considered a form of revelation, as at the Reed Sea the children at once recognize G-d and exclaim, "This is my G-d and I will glorify

עד שהיה אברהם בן עשרה ימים, והתחיל ללכת בארץ ויצא מהמערה וילך על שפת הנהר
 2 ובשבא (כששקע) השמש ויצאו הכוכבים אמר אלו הם האלהים, אח"כ כשעלה עמוד השחר
 לא ראה הכוכבים, אמר לא אעבוד את אלו כי אינם אלהים.

-
1. אברהם: אע"ה ב1 / עשרה: י' ב1 / מהמערה: מן הארץ המערה ב1 / וילך: והלך ב1 / על: אך ב1 / 2.
 (כששקע): ח' ד1 ד2 ב1 ז / האלהים: האלקים ד2 ב1 ז / כשעלה עמוד השחר: עלה עמוד השמש ז / 3. אמר: נ' אנו
 הם הכוכבים אלקים לא... ב1 / אלו: אילו ד1 / אלהים: אלקים ד2 ז /
-

And he suckled from it until he was ten days old. And he began to walk about and went out of the cave⁶⁰ and walked along the river's edge. When the sun set and the stars came out, he said, "These are the gods."

Afterwards, when dawn broke, he did not see the stars. He said, "I will not serve these (stars) because they are not gods."

Him" (Ex. 15:2). The Tz'enah Ur'enah to Gn. 15:7 applies the legend of the stones to Abraham's sustenance, claiming that one stone flowed with oil, and out of the other came honey and meal.

⁶⁰ Although a cave tradition appears in many sources, the various accounts differ concerning how old Abraham was upon his emergence from the cave. Sefer HaYashar, Chapter four, (entitled, "Nimrod and Abraham"), reports that Abraham emerged at ten years of age. Pirke de R. Eliezer, Chapter twenty-six, and Yalkut Shimoni, vol. I remez 67, state that he was thirteen years old.

אח"כ ראה השמש אמר זה אלי ואעבוד אותו, ובשחשיך אמר אין זה אלוה - יש להם מניע.

1. אח"כ: אחר כך ד' ואחר כך ג' / ואעבוד אותו: ואנוהו נ' ובשבא השמש אמר אין זה אלוה ראה הירח אמר זה אלי ואעבוד אותו בשחשיך... ד' 17 ו' 27 ואנוהו נ' ובשבא השמש אמר אין זה אלוה ראה הירח אמר זה אלי ואנחהו ואעבוד אותו בשחשיך... כ' 17 ואנוהו נ' ובשבא השמש אמר אין זה אלוה יש להם מניע ז' /

Afterwards, he saw the sun. He said, "This is my god,⁶¹ and I will serve it."

But when it became dark he said, "This is not G-d. They have a force that moves them."⁶²

⁶¹This obvious allusion to Ex. 15:2 is attested to in the Adler Collection, MSS 4879, the Shevet Musar and Bet Ha-Midrash's printed editions, which include the next words of the verse, "and I will glorify Him."

⁶²Parallel accounts of Abraham's discovery of G-d exist. "Ma'aseh Avraham" (Bet HaMidrash, 2:118, Ozar Midrashim, 1:7) presents an account similar to ours, in that Abraham studies the sky to realize that none of the heavenly bodies is G-d. But instead of intuiting a moving force behind them, he asks his father, Terah, who created them. When Terah informs him that his idols did, Abraham twice offers the idols cooked dishes. After the second time, G-d reveals Himself to Abraham. Genesis Rabbah 39:1 presents the view of R. Isaac, that just as a person passing a burning building enquires as to its owner, Abraham enquired as to the world's Guide. At that point, G-d identified Himself to Abraham and assigned him a mission. Genesis Rabbah 38:13 presents the tradition that Abraham discovered G-d, and the folly of worshipping the elements of nature, by observing how one element subdues another. "Midrash Aseret Ha-Dibrot," Chapter 2, siman 18 (Ozar Midrashim, 453) indicates that G-d's miraculous rescue of Abraham from the fiery furnace effected His recognition. That is, by rescuing Abraham from Nimrod's fiery furnace, G-d demonstrated mastery over the element of fire which moved the people of the kingdom to recognize and praise the true G-d. Sefer HaYashar, Chapter four reports two versions. First,

that upon Abraham's emergence from the cave he went to the house of Noah and Shem and received instruction concerning G-d. Second, that Abraham looked at the stars, sun, and world, and concluded that there must be a Creator for all that exists. "Ma'aseh Avraham" (Ozar Midrshim, 6-7) presents a version in which after observing the sun, moon, and stars Abraham concluded that there must be a lord over them. So, he asked his father who created heaven and earth. When his father answered that his idols did, Abraham sought to test this claim. He had his mother prepare delicious dishes as offerings to the gods of his father to no avail. There was no acceptance, no voice. So, he tried again the next day. Still nothing. Suddenly, G-d's Holy Presence rested upon Abraham and called out, "They have a mouth, but will not speak; they have eyes, but will not see."

There exist varying traditions concerning the age when Abraham discovered G-d. While here in Ma'aseh he is ten days old, in Sefer HaYashar he is pictured as being ten years old. Genesis Rabbah 95: 3 presents two views: R. Hananiah opines Abraham to have been one year old. R. Levi in the name of R. Simeon b. Lakish said that Abraham was three. He bases this on the verse, (Gn 26:5) "Because (לך) Abraham hearkened to My voice." Since the gematria of the word לך equals 172, and the span of Abraham's life was 175 years, one may deduce that Abraham recognized and began "hearkening" to G-d's voice at the age of three. The same interpretation appears in Esther Rabbah 6:3 in the names of R. Hanina and R. Johanan. Genesis Rabbah 30: 8 presents, in the names of R. Hanina and R. Johanan, that Abraham was forty-eight when he recognized his Creator.

עודנו מדבר והנה בא המלאך גבריאל ואמר לו שלום עליך אברהם, א"ל עליך שלום,

1. עודנו: ועדינו כ' / והנה: ח' כ' / ואמר לו: וא"ל כ' / א"ל עליך שלום: עליך שלום ד' / אמר לו עליך שלום ז' /

While he was still speaking, Gabriel the angel⁶³ came and said to him, "Peace unto you, Abraham."

He said to him, "Unto you, peace."⁶⁴

⁶³The angel Gabriel first appears by name in the Bible in the Book of Daniel 8: 16; 9:21 where he interprets Daniel's visions. In subsequent Rabbinic Literature, Gabriel is considered a master of power and courage, as his name implies. Genesis Rabbah 78:1 informs us that it was Gabriel who wrestled with Jacob (Gn. 32), an event which afforded Jacob the courage to face his brother Esau. Exodus Rabbah 2:5 relates the opinion of R. Hanina that it was Gabriel who appeared to Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3:2). Genesis Rabbah 78:1 dubs him, along with Michael, a "king of angels," part of G-d's permanent retinue. B.T. Pesachim 118a refers to him as the "Prince of fire."

⁶⁴This is a typical Hebrew greeting and response. ("שלום עליכם"; "עליכם שלום") As such, this parallels the tradition reflected in Pirke d'R. Eliezer, Chapter 26, which states that Abraham emerged from the cave speaking the "holy tongue."

א"ל מי אתה, א"ל אני גבריאל המלאך שליח הקב"ה. בעת ההיא הלך למעין אחד שמצא

2 שם ורחץ פניו ידיו ורגליו

-
1. א"ל מי אתה: אמר לו מי אתה ז/ א"ל: אמר לו ז/ אני: ח' כ1/ שליח הקב"ה: שליח מן הקדוש ברוך הוא ד1
 ב ג נ' אני כ1 שליח מן הקב"ה ז/ בעת ההיא: בשעה ההיא ד1 ב ג ז באותה שעה כ1/ למעין: למעין ד1 ד2 כ1
 ב ג ז/ 2. אחר: א' ד2 כ1 ב/ שמצא שם: שיוצא מן שם כ1/ ידיו ורגליו: ורגליו ידיו כ1/
-

"Who are you?"

He said to him, "I am Gabriel, the angel, messenger of the Holy One, Blessed Be He."

At that moment he went to a spring that he came upon there, and washed his face, hands, and feet.⁶⁵

⁶⁵Ablutions before prayer are consistent with the system of Jewish law. See B.T. Berachot 15a; Mishnah Torah, Hilchot Tefillah, Chapter 4, halachot 1-3; Shulchan Aruch, Orah Hayyim, Siman 4, Saif 22. This section echoes M. Yoma, Chapter 5, in which the procedure for the many ablutions required of the priest during Yom Kippur service are laid out. Genesis Rabbah 46:5, 55:6 and B.T. Nedarim 32b maintain that Abraham was indeed a priest. Pirke d'R. Eliezer, Chapter 29 reinforces this connection between Abraham and Yom Kippur, as the text states that Abraham was circumcised on Yom Kippur by Shem, the son of Noah, "and every year the Holy One, Blessed Be He, looks down upon the blood of the covenant of our patriarch Abraham's circumcision and forgives all our sins."

והתפלל לשם ית' בכריעה והשתחויה. אמר המגיד אם אברהם אע"ה זכרה אותו ובכחה

2 בכיה גדולה

1. והתפלל לשם ית': והתפלל שם לאל יתברך ד' והתפלל להם יתברך כ' והתפל ושמ
האל יתברך ב' והתפלל שם לאל יתברך ג' והתפלל לשם לאל יתברך ז' / אם אברהם אע"ה:
אמו של א"א ע"ה כ' שאם אברהם אבינו ב' /

Then he worshipped the L-rd, may He be blessed, by bowing down and prostrating [himself].⁶⁶ The Maggid said: The mother of Abraham, our father, of blessed memory, remembered him and cried profusely.

⁶⁶Ablution and prostration echo the Yom Kippur service as laid out in M. Yoma, Chapters 5 and 6, the Yom Kippur synagogue service (see Philip Birnbaum, ed. High Holiday Prayer Book (New York: Hebrew Publishing Co., 1951) 813-827, and the prostration of the "Alenu" during the "Musaf" service of Rosh HaShannah (see High Holiday Prayer Book, 333-335). The text of the "Alenu" parallels our midrash in that after recognizing G-d as Creator it continues, "We bow down, and prostrate our selves, and acknowledge before the supreme King of kings, the Holy One, Blessed Be He..."

ויצאה מן העיר לבקש את בנה במערה שעזבהו שמה ולא מצאתו, והרבה לבכות עוד עליו,

2 והיתה אומרת אוי לי כי ילדתיך טרף לחיות השדה לדובים ולאריות ולזאבים, והיתה
הולכת על שפת הנהר ומצאה את בנה ולא ידעתהו כי גדל מאד בקומה, אמרה לו שלום

4 עליך

1. ויצתה ג/ שעזבהו: שעזבתו ד1 אשר עזבתהו כ1 / שעזבתהו ב ז/ מצאתו: מצאתהו כ1 ב ז/ והרבה: והרב' ד1
והרבתה כ1 והרבתה עליו ז והרבת ג/ עוד עליו: עוד ז/ 2. טרף: לטרף ד1 / לדובים: ולדובים כ1 / ולאריות: או
לאריות ד1 ב ג ז/ ולזאבים: או לזאבים ד1 ב ג ז/ 3. גדל: גדול ב ג ז/ בקומה: ח' כ1 / אמרה לו: ואמרה כ1
ח' לו ב/

So, she went forth from the city to seek her son in the cave in which she had abandoned him. But she did not find him. So, she cried much more over him and said, "Woe is me that I gave birth to you to be torn apart by wild beasts, by bears, and by lions, and by wolves."⁶⁷

But as she was walking along the river's edge, she found her son. However, she didn't recognize him, because he had grown very tall. She said to him, "Peace unto you."

⁶⁷This echoes Gn. 37:33-35, in which Jacob, also assuming his son to be "torn" by a beast, grieves profusely.

והשיב לה עליך שלום למה את הולכת באלו המדבריות, אמרה לו יצאתי מן העיר לבקש

2 את בני. אמר לה ובנך מי הביאו הנה. אמרה לו הייתי הרה מתרח אישי ובעת הלידה פחדתי על בני שהיה בבטני שלא יהרגנו מלכנו נמרד בן כנען כמו שהרג מספר שבעים אלה ילדים, ובאתי אל מערה אחת בזה הנחר ואחוזני צירי יולדה וילדתי בן ועזבתיהו במערה והלכתי לביתי, ועתה באתי לבקשו ולא מצאתיו.

1. והשיב לה עליך שלום: והשיב לה ועליך שלום ז/ למה: מה ד' 2 ב' מה לך ז/ המדבריות: המדברות ד' 1 ב' / 2. אמרה לו: 'נ' אני ד' 1 ג' אמרה ב' / יצאתי: ויצאתי ב' / העיר: עירי ב' / אמר לה: ח' 1 ב' ז' / מי: 'נ' הוא ב' / הביאו: ש' הביאו ב' / הנה: לכאן ב' / מתרח אישי: מאישי תרח ב' / ובעת: ובזמן ד' 1 ב' ב' ג' ז' / הלידה: הילד ב' / 3. נמרד: נמרוד ד' 2 ב' 1 ב' ג' / שבעים: ע' ד' 1 ד' 2 ב' 1 ב' ג' / ילדים: זכרים ג' / והלכתי לביתי ובאתי... 1 ב' / אל מערה: אל המערה ד' 1 למערה ב' / 4. אחת: אחד ד' 1 ד' 2 א' 1 ב' / אחד בזה הנחר ב' / ואחוזני: ואחוזני ב' 1 ואחוזני ג' / יולדה: יולדה ב' / וילדתי: ילדתי ב' / ועזבתיהו: ועזבתי אותו ב' 1 ב' ז' / במערה: 'נ' ועזבתי ב' /

And he answered her, "Unto you, peace. Why are you walking in these wildernesses?"

She said to him, "I have gone forth from the city to seek my son."

He said to her, "And who brought your son here?"

She said to him, "I was pregnant by Terach, my husband. But, at the time of the birth I was afraid for the son who was in my womb, lest our king, Nimrod, son of Canaan, kill him as he had killed some seventy-thousand male infants. And when I came to a cave by this river, birthpangs gripped me, and I gave birth to a son. But I abandoned him in the cave, and returned to my house. And now I have come to seek him, but I have not found him."

אמר לה אברהם אלה הדברים שאמרת לי שעזבת לילד כמה ימים? אמרה לו כמו עשרים
 2 יום, אמר לה וכי יש בעולם אשה שתעזוב את בנה קטן במדבר לברו ותבא לבקש אותו אחר
 עשרים יום? אמרה היא אולי יחנן האל, אמר לה אני בנך שבאת לזה הנהר בעבורו,

1. אמר לה אברהם: א"ל א"א ע"ה כ' נ' אבינו ב' ז' / אלה: אלו כ' ב' ג' הדברים: דברים כ' / ל': ח' ד' כ' ב'
 ז' ג' / שעזבת לילד: שעזבת את הילד כ' ז' שעזבת ילד נ' / כמה ימים: נ' יש לו ד' כ' ג' כמה יש לו כ' ז' נ' שלו כ' /
 לו: ח' כ' / עשרים: כ' כ' / אמר לה: א"ל כ' אמר ב' / 2. יש: נ' אדם כ' / אשה: שאשה כ' / שתעזוב: תעזוב
 כ' / קטן: הקטן כ' / עשרים: שעשרים כ' סוף כ' / יום: ימים כ' ח' כ' / 3. אמרה היא: נ' לו ז' / האל: ה' נ' ובאו כ' /
 אמר לה: א"ל כ' / בנך: נ' אברהם כ' ב' ז' / בעבורו: בעבורי כ' /

Abraham said to her, "How many days ago did the events of which you spoke concerning your abandoning the boy occur?"

She said to him, "About twenty days."

He said to her, "Can it be possible that a woman would abandon her small son in the wilderness by himself, and then come to seek him twenty days later?"

She said, "Perhaps G-d will have mercy."⁶⁸

He said to her, "I am your son, for whose sake you have come to this river."

⁶⁸This term, "חן," used here for "mercy," is associated with and rife within penitential prayer. The term is especially prominent on the High Holidays, serving in the culmination of the "Avinu Malkenu" prayer. See Daily Prayer Book, 103, 105; and the High Holiday Prayer Book, 275, 453, 569, 699.

אמרה לו בני גדלת מאד כ"ב והלכת על רגליך ודברת בפיוך וכל זה בעשרים יום? אמר
2 לה בן, שיודע לך אמי שיש בעולם אל גדול ונורא חי וקיים רואה

-
1. אמרה לו: א"ל בן אמרה אמרה לו בן / מאד: ח' בן / כ"ב: כל כך נ / על רגליך: על שנילך רגליך בן / וכל:
ובכל בן / בעשרים: בע' בן / בן: ח' בן / בעולם: ח' בן / ונורא: נ' אל בן /
-

She said to him, "My son, you have grown so very much. And you have walked upright, and spoken intelligibly; and all this in twenty days?"

He said to her, "Yes, that you should know, my mother, that there is in the world a great and awesome,⁶⁹ living and enduring G-d;⁷⁰ who sees,⁷¹

⁶⁹This reflects Dt. 10:17 and Ne. 9:32 which describe G-d as, "the Great, the Mighty, and the Awesome." This phrase also receives liturgical expression in the "Amidah" prayer, recited at least thrice daily. See the Daily Prayer Book, 87, 183, 219. See also Ex. 15:11, which describes G-d as "awesome in praises." This phrase receives liturgical expression in the daily, Sabbath and holiday morning and evening service. See the Daily Prayer Book, 67, 81, 195.

⁷⁰This phrase represents more than mere theological speculation, but rather indicates G-d's demonstrable power in the world. For instance, see Dan. 6:27, in which Darius, King of Persia, after witnessing the miraculous rescue of Daniel from the lion's den, decrees that all the people of his kingdom should "...tremble and fear before the G-d of Daniel, for He is the living G-d, enduring forever..." In Je. 10:10 the prophet, in distinguishing the true G-d from idols, refers to G-d as "the living G-d, and the everlasting King." See also Jos. 3:10, in which Joshua assures the Children of Israel that "the living G-d" is among them and will effect the driving-out of the various peoples who at that point occupied the Promised Land. In II Sam. 22:47 and Ps. 18:47 King David, after G-d had effected his rescue from Saul, declared, "The L-rd lives, an blessed be my Rock; and exalted be the G-d, my Rock of salvation." This phrase ("living and

ואינו נראה והוא בשמים ומלא כל הארץ כבודו.

1. נראה: אראה ב/ בשמים: נ' ממעל ב/ ומלא: מלא ד' ב' ג' מלוא ז' ומלוא ב' כל: ח' ב' הארץ: נ' הארץ

ב/

but is not seen because He is in the heavens,⁷² but the entire earth is full of

His glory."⁷³

enduring") also finds liturgical expression in the "Modeh Ani" prayer. The prayer is uttered daily upon waking up. It gives thanks G-d for acting to return the soul of the worshipper, thus renewing the gift of life (see Daily Prayer Book, 1). The expression is also associated with the concept of G-d as Creator in the "Yotzer Ohr" prayer (Daily Prayer Book, 73).

⁷¹This echoes Ex. 3:7,9 in which G-d charges Moses with his mission at the Burning Bush, "I have surely seen the affliction of My people that are in Egypt...", "...I have seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them." In both verses, the phrase connotes G-d's Providence.

⁷²This reflects Dt. 4:39 and Jos. 2:11, "...He is G-d in the heavens above and on the earth beneath..." Dt. 4:39 also finds liturgical expression in the "Alenu" prayer of the daily worship service (Daily Prayer Book, 135, 185, 213), as well as the "Musaf" for Rosh HaShanah (High Holiday Prayer Book, 377).

⁷³This phrase first appears in Is. 6:3, in which Isaiah relates his vision of the heavenly seraphim praising G-d, calling to one another "Holy, holy, holy, is the L-rd of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory." Known liturgically as the "Kedusha," this phrase is included in the morning afternoon, and Musaf "Amidah" (see Daily Prayer Book, 84, 161, 393, 575, 587), in the morning "Yotzer Or" (Daily Prayer Book, 73), and in "Uva l'Tzion Goel" (Daily Prayer Book, 131, 439).

אמרה לו בני יש אל אחר מבלעדי נמרד? אמר לה בן אמי אלוהי השמים אלהי הארץ

2 ואלהי נמרד בן כנען, ועל זה תלכי לנמרד ותודיע אותו הדבר הזה.

1. אמרה לו: אשרה לו ב' / י:ש' נ' לך ב' / נמרד: נמרוד ד' 2 ב' 1 ב' ג' ז' / אמי אלוהי השמים אלהי הארץ ואלהי נמרד בן: ח' ב' / אלוה השמים: אלהי השמים ז' / אלקי ד' 2 ב' 1 / אלהי הארץ: ואלהי הארץ ד' 1 ג' ז' ואלקי הארץ ד' 2 ב' 1 / ואלהי נמרד: ואלהי נמרוד ד' 1 ג' ז' ואלקי נמרוד ד' 2 ב' 1 / ועל: על ב' / לנמרד: לנמרוד ב' ג' ז' / ותודיע: ותודיעי ד' 1 ב' 1 ג' ז' / תודיעי ב' / הדבר הזה: כזה הדבר ד' 1 ב' ג' ז' /

She said to him, "My son, is there really another G-d besides Nimrod?"⁷⁴

He said to her, "Yes, my mother, the G-d of the heavens, the G-d of the earth, and the G-d of Nimrod, son of Canaan."⁷⁵ And because of this, go to Nimrod and inform him of this matter."

⁷⁴According to Jastrow (Dictionary of the Talmud, 41) the word the text utilizes to indicate "another," אחר, in Rabbinic usage is a euphemism indicating idolatry and/or swine. Its appearance here then is ironic, and indicates just how misguided the people of the age were. For in actuality it is Nimrod who is the idol, not G-d.

⁷⁵See Gn. 24:3, "...L-rd, G-d of the heavens and G-d of the earth..." See also Ex. 3:6, in which G-d identifies Himself to Moses at the Burning Bush as, "G-d of Abraham, G-d of Isaac, and the G-d of Jacob," a pattern similar to the one found in our text. The expression from Ex. 3:6 has been incorporated into the daily "Amidah" prayer (Daily Prayer Book, 81, 159, 199).

והלכה לעיר ואמרה לתרח אישה איך מצאה את בנה. ותרח היה שר וגדול בבית המלך
 2 נמרד והלך לבירה מקום אשר המלך שם והשתחוה למלך ופניו ארצה, ובזמן ההוא כל
 המשתחוה למלך לא היה מרים ראשו עד שיאמר לו הרם ראשך. א"ל המלך הרם ראשך
 4 ושאל חפצך,

והלכה: הלכה ד' ג' ז' לתרח אישה: לאישה תרח ב' ז' / איך: אין ב' / את: ח' ז' / וגדול: גדול ב' / המלך: ח' ז' 2. נמרד:
 נמרוד ד' 1 ב' 2 נמרוד המלך ז' / כל: וכל ב' / 3. המשתחוה: מי שישתחוה ב' ז' / עד: בשעה ב' / הרם: תרים ד' 1 ב'
 ג' ז' / ראשך: ג' / ותשאל חפצך ב' / א"ל המלך הרם ראשך ושאל חפצך: ח' ב' אמר לו המלך הרם ראשך ושאל חפצך
 ג' אמר לו המלך הרם ראשך ותשאל חפצך ז' /

So she went to the city and told Terach, her husband, how she found her son.
 And Terach was a prince and leader in the palace of the king, Nimrod.⁷⁶ And he went
 to the capitol, the place where the king was, and prostrated himself before the king with
 his face to the ground. For at that time everyone who prostrated before the king would
 not raise his head until he would say to him, "Raise your head."⁷⁷ The king said to him,
 "Raise your head and state your request."

⁷⁶This parallels Sefer HaYashar, Chapter 4: "And Terah, son of Nahor, minister of Nimrod's host, was very great, in those days, in the eyes of the king, and the eyes of his servants..." See also II Sam. 3:30, in which David refers to the slain Abner as a prince and a great man.

⁷⁷This echoes Est. 3:2, which describes all the king's servants bowing down to Haman.

א"ל יחי אדוני המלך, באתי לבשר אותך על מה שראית בחכמת הכוכבים שיוולד ילד
 2 במלכותך שיפסיד אמונתך והרגת בעבורו ע' אלף זכרים אבשרך שהוא בני ואמו היתה הרה
 ולא ידעתי בהריונה כי אמרה חולה אני מחולי הקולצני, ובקשתי בטנה ולא מצאתי שום
 4 עובר.

1. א"ל: אמר לו ז / באתי: ובאתי ג / בחכמת: תחכמה ב / ילד: נ' כהוכח ב / במלכותך: במלכותך ג / 2. ע' אלף:
 נ' אלף (50,00) ב / שבעים אלף ג / זכרים: זכרי' ד2 / הרה: נ' ואנכי ב ז / 3. ולא: לא ז / כי: ח' ב / אמרה: נ'
 לי ד1 ב / אמר נ' לי ג / אני: הייתי ד1 ג ז היתי ב / מחולי: מחולי ב / הקולצני: הקולצ'ני ד1 / הקולצנים ב / קלצני'
 ג / הקול'ניס ז / בטנה: בטנ' ד1 / בטנת ב / מצאתי: נ' לה ז /

He said to him, "May the king, my lord, live. I have come to relate news to you concerning what you saw through astrology, that a male would be born who would cause the loss of faith in you, and for whose sake you have killed seventy-thousand males. I bring you news that he is my son, and his mother was pregnant, but I did not know of her pregnancy because she said, 'I am sick from koltzeni sickness.' And I examined her belly, but I did not find any embryo.

ויהי כאשר נשלמו חדשי הילד הלכה מן העיר לנהר ומצאה שם מערה ותלד שם בן ועזבה
 2 אותו לחיות השדה ואחר עשרים יום הלכה אליו ומצאתהו מהלך על שפת הנהר ומדבר
 כאדם גדול ואומר שיש אלקים בשמים רואה ואינו נראה אחד ואין שני. וכשמוע נמרד אלו
 4 הדברים חרד חרדה גדולה עד מאד ויאמר ליועציו ושריו מה לעשות מזה הילד.

-
1. כאשר: כאישר ב/ נשלמו: נשלמה ב/ בן: ח' ד' ז/ 2. מהלך: הולך ב' ז/ כאדם: כמו אדם ב' כמו אדם ז/
 3. אלקים: אלהים ד' ב/ אחד: א' ד' / נמרד: נמרוד ד' 17 ב' ג' ז/ אלו: אלה ב' ז/ 4. עד: ח' ב/
-

And it happened, when the gestation period was completed, she went from the city to a river and there found a cave. And she gave birth to a son there, and then abandoned him to the wild animals. But after twenty days she went to him and found him walking along the river's edge and speaking like an adult person; and saying that there is one G-d in the heavens (who) sees, but is not seen, and there is no other.⁷⁸

When Nimrod heard these things, he became very afraid and said to his counselors and ministers, "What is there to do with this boy?"

⁷⁸This represents a major theme of Biblical and Rabbinic Literatures:

G-d's Oneness. For instance, see Dt 6:9, "Hear O Israel, the L-rd is our G-d, the L-rd is One." Deuteronomy Rabbah 2:33 cites Ec. 4:8,10 which contain the exact phrase found in our midrash, "(There is) one (who is alone), he has no other, he has neither son nor brother...", and applies it to G-d's Oneness as an anti-Zoroastrian polemic. Liturgically, Dt. 6:9 is recited at least twice daily (Daily Prayer Book, 75, 193). The exact phrase of our midrash is also repeated daily as part of the hymn, "Adon Olam," which appears in the "Morning Blessings" section of the liturgy (Daily Prayer Book, 11).

אמרו מלכינו אלקינו מה תפתר מילד קטן ויש בכל מלכותך אלף אלפי אלפים שרים, שרי
 2 אלפים ושרי מאות שרי חמשים ושרי עשרות ושוטרים אין מספר, הקטן שבשרים שלך ילך
 יביאהו וישימהו בבית הסהר. אמר להם הראיתם מימכם ילד מעשרים יום הולך על רגליו
 4 ומדבר בפיו ובלשונו מבשר ואומר שיש אלוה בשמים אחד ואין שני לו והוא רואה ואינו
 נראה?

1. אמרו: נ' לו אתה ב ז / אלקינו: ואלהינו ד 1 ד 2 נ אלהינו ב / מה: כיצד ד 1 ב ג ז / מילד: מן זה ילד ז / ויש:
 יש ב / 2. ושרי מאות: שרי מאות ז / שרי חמשים: נ' ושרי מאות ז / ושרי עשרות: ושרי עם עשרות ב / עשרות: עשר
 ד 2 / שלך: ח' ד 1 ב ג / יביאהו: ויביאנו ד 1 ד 2 ב ג ז / וישימהו: וישימנו ד 1 ד 2 ב ג / 3. הסהר: הסהר ב ג /
 הראיתם: הראית' ד 2 / מעשרים יום: ממעשקים ב / רגליו: רגלו ז /

They said, "Our king, our god, why should you fear a small boy when you have in all your kingdom thousands upon thousands of ministers; ministers of thousands, ministers of hundreds, ministers of fifty, ministers of tens,⁷⁹ and officers without number. The least of your ministers should go and bring the boy, and put him in the prison."

He said to them, "Have you ever seen in all your days a child twenty days old walk upright, or speak intelligibly, or bring tidings and say that there is one G-d in the heavens, and there is none other than Him, and He sees but is not seen?"

⁷⁹This echoes Ex. 18:25 in which Moses appoints "rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens," to help judge the people. This appointment is again discussed in Dt. 1:15. See also I Sam. 8:12, in which Samuel warns the Children of Israel that the king they request would take their sons and "appoint them unto him for captains of thousands, and captains of fifties," to do the king's bidding.

אמר המגיד שכל השרים שהיו שם תמהו תמיה גדולה מאלו הדברים, ובין כך ובין כך בא
 2 השטן בדמות אדם לבוש משי שחור והלך והשתחוה לפני המלך נמרד עד שאמר לו המלך
 הרם ראשך ושאל חפצך,

-
1. שם: שמה ד' 2 ב/ גדולה: גדול ז/ 2. שחור: נ' וה"ל ב/ המלך: נ' הא ב/ נמרד: נמרוד ד' 1 ד' 2 ב' ז/
 שאמר: שאמ' ד' 2/ הרם: תרים ב' מרים ז/ 3. ושאל חפצך: ושאל בא חפצך ב' ושאל נא חפצך ז/
-

The Maggid said that all the ministers who were there were astonished by these words. Meanwhile, Satan came in the guise of a man dressed in black silk.⁸⁰ And he went and prostrated before the king, Nimrod, until the king said to him, "Raise your head and state your request."

⁸⁰Satan, or "the adversary" serves as the celestial prosecuting attorney who gathers evidence, and even entraps human beings. He first appears as a distinct persona in the Book of Job (1:1-12). In Rabbinic Literature, Satan is equated with the Evil Impulse and the Angel of Death. For example, see the statement of Resh Lakish in B.T. Baba Batra 16a.

אמר לו מה אתה דואג וכלכם תמהים מילד קטן איעצך עצה מה לעשות. אמר לו המלך:
 2 מה עשתך? א"ל פתח אוצרות כלי המלחמה ותתן לכל השרים והסגנים והפחות ולכל אנשי
 המלחמה ותשלחם אליו שיבוא לעבוד אותך ויהיה תחת ידיך.

-
1. אמר לו: א"ל ב/ מה: מי ב/ דואג: ח' ב/ וכלכם: וכולכם ז/ מילד: נ' אחד ד' 1 ד' 2 ז' מחילד א' ב/ 2. המלך:
 מהמלך ב/ 2. מה עשתך: מה היא עשתך ז/ פתח: תפתח ד' 1 ב' ג' ז/ כלי: כל ג/ 3. המלחמה: נ' יש ז/ ותשלחם:
 ותשלם ב/ ידיך: ירך ב/
-

He said to him, "What are you worried about? And why are all of you astonished
 by a small boy. I will advise you as to what to do."

The king said to him, "What is your advice?"

He said to him, "Open the arsenals, and give (weapons) to all the ministers, and
 the deputies, and the governors, and to all the men of war. Then send them against him
 so that he should come to serve you and be under your control."

אמר המגיד שצוה המלך לכל השרים ולכל אנשי מלחמה שיבואו ויקחו כלי זיין מאוצרות
 2 המלך וילכו להביא לאברהם. ובראות אברהם אבינו שבאו אליו עם רב אחזו רעד ופחד
 גדול מפניהם

1. זיין: זין ד' 2 ג' ז' / 2. לאברהם: אברה' ד' 1 א"א ב' אברהם אבינו ד' 3 ז' / ובראות: ובראות ב' / אברהם אבינו:
 אברהם אע"ה ב' נ' עליו השלום ד' 3 נ' ע:ה / אחזו: אחזוהו ב' ד' 3 ז' / רעד: רעדה ב' ד' 3 ג' ז' / מפניהם: מפניה' ד' 2 /

The Maggid said that the king commanded all the ministers and all the men of war
 that they should come and take weapons from the king's arsenals, and capture Abraham.
 And when Abraham our father saw that a multitude of people came against him, great
 trembling and fear gripped him because of them.

ויצעק לאלהי השמים שיצילו מידם כי הוא המציל עני מחזק ממנו ואתה תצילני מהם.
 2 וישמע אלהים את צעקתו וירא את דמעותיו וישלח לו מלאך גבריאל להציל אותו מידם.

1. ויצעק: נ' ויצעק ז/ לאלהי: לאלקי ד'2 / 2. אלהים: אלקים ד'2 / צעקתו: צעקו ב/ לו: נ' את ד'1 ב' ג' ז/ מלאך:
 המלאך ב' ד'3 ז/ גבריאל להציל אותו מידם: ח' ב/ להציל אותו: להצילו ד'3 ז/

He cried to the G-d of the heavens to save him from their hand, "Because He is the savior of the weak⁸¹ from one stronger than he."⁸² Now, may You save me from them."

G-d heard his cry and saw his tears,⁸³ and sent the angel Gabriel to him, to save him from their hand.

⁸¹The term, "עני," translated above as "weak," is of the same root as the term for "affliction," "afflicted," and "afflict." These terms are frequently used to refer to the experience Children of Israel's suffering beneath the yoke of Egyptian slavery. For instance, see Ex. 1:11,12; 3:7.

⁸²This echoes Je. 31:11, a verse citing G-d's redemption which is recited nightly in the liturgy (Daily Prayer Book, 195). See also Ps. 35:10, which praises G-d as the One "Who delivers the weak from him that is too strong for him..."

⁸³This parallels Ex. 2:24-25, "And G-d heard their groaning...And G-d saw the Children of Israel;" and Ex. 3:7-8, "I have surely seen the affliction of My people that are in Egypt and have heard their cry...and I am coming down to rescue them." Also note that many of the terms used in this midrashic passage, "weak," "save," "cry," "tears," all appear in the daily "Tachanun," a prayer for forgiveness of sin (Daily Prayer Book, 103-104).

אמר לו המלאך מה לך אברהם ומה אתה בוכה? א"ל פחדתי מאנשים האלה הבאים עלי

2 להרגני. א"ל לא תירא ולא תפחד האלקים עמך והוא ויצילך מן כל אויביך.

1. אמר לו המלאך: ח' ב' / א"ל: אמר לו ד' ג' ז' / מאנשים: מהאנשים ב' ד' / האלה: האלו ד' 1 ד' 2 ד' 3 ג' / מאנשים

האלה: מאלו האנשים ז' / הבאים: הבאי' ד' 3 / 2. א"ל: אמר לו ג' ז' / תפחד: נ' כי ד' 1 ג' 2 ד' 3 ז' / האלקים: האלוהים

ד' 1 האלהים ד' 3 ג' / ויצילך: יציל ד' 3 / מן: מכך ד' 1 ד' 2 ד' 3 ג' ז' /

The angel said to him, "What's (the matter) with you, Abraham, and why are you crying?"

He said to him, "I was afraid of these men who are coming against me to kill me."

He said to him, "Do not be frightened and do not fear. G-d is with you,"⁸⁴ and He will save you from all your enemies."⁸⁵

⁸⁴This echoes the words of G-d to Abram in Gn. 15:1, "... 'Fear not, Abram, I am your shield...' " See also the charge of Moses to Joshua, as depicted in Dt. 31:8, "...fear not, nor be dismayed.' " Similarly, the charge of David to Solomon concerning the building of the Temple, I Chron. 22:13. See also Ex. 18:19, in which Moses' father-in-law gives him counsel as how to delegate authority, and says, "...I will give you counsel, and G-d be with you; be for the people before G-d, and bring the causes unto G-d."

⁸⁵This reflects Ex. 23:20-22, in which G-d informs, "Behold, I send an angel before you, to keep you by the way, and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. Take heed of him, and hearken unto his voice... then I will be an enemy unto your enemies, and an adversary unto your adversaries." See also Ps. 18:18, "He saved me from my enemy most strong, and from them that hated me, for they were too mighty for me."

Ex. 18:4 presents the rationale for Moses' second son being named Eliezer as, "for the G-d of my father was my help, and saved me from the sword of Pharaoh."

אמר המגיד שהקב"ה צוה לנבריא'ל שישים ענן וערפל בינו וביניהם. בראותם הענן והחשך
 2 והערפל פחדו פחד ושבּו אל נמרד מלכם ואמרו לו נסעה ונלכה ממלכות זו, וכשמוע המלך
 בן נתן מעות לכל שריו ועבדיו ונסעו משם למדינת בבל.

1. שהקב"ה: שקב"ה ד' שהקדוש ברוך הוא ד' / והחשך: והחש' ד' / 2. נמרד: נמרוד ד' 1 ד' 2 ג' ז' / נסעה: נ'
 אל ז' / ממלכות זו: מה המלכות ד' 3 ממלכות זה ג' מזה המלכות ז' / בן: כך ד' 1 ג' ז' /

The Maggid said that the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded Gabriel to place dense clouds between him and them.⁸⁶ When they saw the dense clouds, they became frightened and returned to Nimrod, their king. And they said to him, "Let us get away from this kingdom."

And when the king heard this, he gave money to all his ministers and servants and they moved from there to the city of Babylonia.⁸⁷

⁸⁶This parallels Ex. 14:19-20 in which the cloud protects the fleeing Israelites from the pursuing Egyptians. The "dense clouds" are also accoutrements to the Revelation at Sinai. See Dt. 4:11 and 5:19. In Ex. 40:34-38 the cloud represents G-d's Glory and Providence. Ps. 97:2 depicts the "dense clouds" as part of the environment of the heavenly abode of G-d, "Dense clouds are round about Him, righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne." See also Ez. 34:12 in which the dense clouds represent redemption for the scattered "sheep" of G-d's flock. In Jo. 2:2, one of the terms for the great judgement day of G-d is, "a day of dense clouds."

⁸⁷This parallels Jonah's vain attempt to flee from the presence of G-d. See Jon. 1:3. Just as Jonah is unable to escape G-d's influence and will, so, too, will the ministers and servants of Nimrod ultimately be unable to outrun G-d's influence and will.

ויהי אחרי נסעם ויאמר אלקים למלאך גבריאל לך אמור לאברהם שילך אחרי האויב נמרד
 2 לבבל. אמר לו אברהם אע"ה אין לי צידה לדרך ולא סוס לרכוב עליו ולא אנשי חיל כדי
 לעשות עמו מלחמה. א"ל גבריאל המלאך אין אתה צריך לשום דבר מאלה, לא לצידה
 4 לדרך ולא לסוס לרכוב עליו ולא אנשי חיל לעשות עמו מלחמה, ולא רכב ולא פרשים

-
1. נסעם: נוסעם ד' 1 ד' 2 / אלקים: אלהים ד' 1 ד' 3 ג' ז' / למלאך: ח' ד' 1 ד' 3 ג' ז' / אמור: אמר:
 אמר' ד' 2 / נמרד: נמרוד ד' 1 ד' 2 ד' 3 ג' ז' / לבבל: למדינת בבל ד' 3 ז' / 2. אמר: אמר' ד' 2 / אברהם אע"ה: אברה' ד' 3
 אברהם ג' ז' / צידה: צדה ז' / כדי: ח' ד' 1 / 3. א"ל: אמר לו ד' 3 ג' ז' / אין אתה: אינך ז' / מאלה: ח' ג' / לא לצידה:
 ולא צדה ז' / 4. לרכוב: לרכו' ד' 3 / מלחמה: מלחמ' ד' 1 / ולא פרשים: וגם פרשים ד' 2 ג' גם פרשי' ד' 3 גם פרשים ז' /
-

And after they departed, G-d said to the angel Gabriel, "Go, say to Abraham that he should go after the enemy, Nimrod, to Babylonian."

Abraham our father, of blessed memory, said to him, "I have no provisions for the way, nor a horse to ride upon, nor soldiers⁸⁸ with whom to wage war."

Gabriel, the angel, said to him, "You don't need to have any of these things: neither provisions for the way, a horse to ride upon, nor soldiers with whom to wage war, and no chariot, and no riders.

⁸⁸Or: "men of valor, "אֲנָשֵׁי חַיִּל." See Ps. 20:8, "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will make mention of the name of the L-rd, our G-d."

כי על כתפי תרכב ואני אשאך ואניעך עד בבל. ויקם אברהם וירכב על כתפו של גבריאל
 2 כתרף עין. באותה שעה מצא עצמו בשערי מדינת בבל וא"ל המלאך כנס למדינה ותקרא
 בקול גדול

1. כי על: כי אם ד3 ז/ ואניעך: ואניע' ד3/ כתפו: כתף ז/ של: ח' ז/ באותה: תאות' ד3/

מדינת: מרעת ד1/ 2. וא"ל: ואמר לו ד3 ויאמר לו ג/ כנס: יכנס ד1 הכנס ד3/

For upon my shoulders will you ride, and I will lift you,⁸⁹ and I will bring you to
 Babylonia."

In a flash Abraham got up and rode upon the shoulder of Gabriel. And at that
 moment he found himself at the gates of the city of Babylonia,⁹⁰ and the angel said to
 him, " Enter the city and proclaim in a loud voice,⁹¹

⁸⁹Or: "I will carry you, " אשאך." This echoes Ex. 19:4, in which G-d describes His rescue of the Israelites, "You have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I carried you on eagle's wings, and brought you unto Myself."

⁹⁰This parallels the Book of Daniel, the plot of which also takes place in the city of Babylon, and also features a fiery furnace reserved for those who do not share the king's idolatry, see Dan. 2:48-49, 3:6.

See also Gn. 10:10, in which Babylonia, "in the land of Shinar," is identified as the "beginning" of Nimrod's kingdom.

⁹¹This echoes Jon. 3:2, in which Jonah is bidden by G-d to enter the city of Nineveh and make a proclamation which would lead to the people's recognition of G-d and repentance.

ה' האלקים בשמים ממעל ועל הארץ מתחת אין עוד אחר, אחד ואין שני, אין לו דמות הנוף
2 ואינו גוף, והוא אלקי האלקים ואלקי נמרד ואני אברהם עבדו נאמן ביתו.

1. ה': י"י ד3 ג/ האלקים: האלהים ד3 ג ז/ שני: נ' [והוא אלהי השמים] ג/ 2. אלקי האלקים: אלהי האלהים
ד3 ד3 ג ז/ ואלקי: ואלהי ד3 ד3 ג ז/ נמרד: נמרוד ד3 ד3 ד3 ג ז/

"The L-rd, He is G-d in the heavens above and upon the earth below. There is no other.⁹² He is One, there is none beside Him. He has no physical semblance, and no body.⁹³ And He is the G-d of gods,⁹⁴ and the G-d of Nimrod. And I, Abraham, am His servant, the faithful one of His house."⁹⁵

⁹²See Dt. 4:39: "Know this day, and turn it into your heart, that the L-rd, He is G-d in the heavens above and upon the earth below, there is no other." This verse finds liturgical expression in the "Alenu" prayer, which is recited thrice daily, as well as in the Musaf of Rosh HaShanah, where it introduces the "malchuyot" section of verses attesting to G-d's kingship. See Daily Prayer Book, 135, 185, 213; and High High Holiday Prayer Book, 377.

⁹³That G-d bears no physical semblance and has no body is the third of Maimonides' Thirteen Principles of Faith, see Daily Prayer Book, 151. The Principle is expressed liturgically in the hymn "Yigdal." See Daily Prayer Book, 12, in this regard.

⁹⁴This echoes Dt. 10:17, in which Moses, charging the Children of Israel to follow G-d's commandments, proclaims that He is the "G-d of gods, and the L-rd of lords."

⁹⁵The same phrase is used in the Sabbath morning "Amidah" prayer with reference to Moses. See Daily Prayer Book, 353. The appellation is derived from Nu. 12:7, in which G-d declares the eminence of Moses to Aaron and Miriam.

הלך אברהם אבינו ע"ה ונכנס בתוך המדינה והכריז בקול גדול לכל אנשי המדינה "ה' הוא
 2 האלקים אחד ואין שני והוא אלקי האלקים ואלקי נמרד! העידו כלם אנשים ונשים ומשפחה על
 זה שהוא אמת וגם תעידו שאני אברהם עבדו נאמן ביתו!"

1. ע.ה: עליו השלום ד'3 / בתוך: לתוך ד'3 / ה': י"י ד'3 / 2. האלקים: האלהים ד'1 ד'3 / שני: נ' והוא אלקי השמים
 ד'1 ד'2 ד'3 / אלקי האלקים: אלהי האלהים ד'1 ד'3 / ואלקי: ואלהי ד'3 / נמרד: נמרוד ד'1 ד'2 ד'3 / ואלקי: ואלהי ד'1

Abraham our father, may he rest in peace, went and entered the city and
 announced in a great voice to all the people of the city, " The L-rd, He is the one G-d,
 there is no other, and He is the G-d of G-ds, and the G-d of Nimrod! Witness this, all
 men, women, and children that He is true.⁹⁶ And also you shall witness that I, Abraham,
 am His servant,⁹⁷ the faithful one of his house!

⁹⁶The calling of all "men, women, and children" echoes Dt. 31:12, in which Moses calls for everyone to attend the reading of the Torah every seven years, "...that they may learn, and fear the L-rd your G-d, and observe to do all the words of this Torah." See also Dt. 29:9-14, in which Moses brings "all the men of Israel, your children, your wives, and the stranger that is in the midst of your camp" to stand before G-d and "enter into the covenant of the L-rd, your G-d, and into His oath...as He swore unto your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob..." Thus, the calling of "men, women, and children," is characteristic of a call to know G-d and enter into His covenant.

⁹⁷That Abraham is known as G-d's "servant," is a tradition from the Bible. For instance, see Ps. 105:42: "For He remembered His holy word unto Abraham His servant."

ויהי הוא הולך בשוקים וברחובות ומכריז מצא אביו ואמו וגם מצא למלאך גבריאל אמר
 2 לו המלאך אברהם תאמר לאביך ולאמך שיאמינו גם הם ויעידו בזה שאתה מכריז שה' הוא
 האלקים אין עוד מלבדו. ויהי כשמוע אברהם את דבר המלאך אמר לאביו ולאמו אתם
 4 עובדים לאדם כמובכם ותשתחוו אליו לצלם דמות נמרד, הלא ידעתם כי יש לו פה ולא
 ידבר עין ולא יראה און ולא ישמע ולא ילך ברגליו

1. בשוקים: בשווקים ד3 ז/ אביו: לאביו ז/ ואמו: ולאמו ז/ למלאך גבריאל: לגבריאל המלאך ג/ 2. בזה: על זה
 ז/ שה': י"י ד3 ש"י ג/ האלקים: האלהים ד1 ד3 ג/ 3. אברהם: אברה' ד3/ 4. לצלם: צלם ד1 לדמות ג' דמות
 ג/ נמרד: נמרוד ד1 ד2 ג נמרד' ד3/ ידעתם: ידעת' ד3/ און: און ג/ עין ולא יראה: ח' ז/

And, while he was going through marketplaces and streets making his proclamations, he found his father and mother, and he also found the angel Gabriel. The angel said to him, "Abraham, tell your father and mother that they should also believe and attest to that which you announce; that the L-rd, He is G-d, there is no other besides Him."⁹⁸

When Abraham heard the word of the angel he said to his father and his mother, "You worship a human-being like yourselves, and bow down to him, to an idol in the image of Nimrod. Do you not know that it has a mouth, but will not speak; an eye, but will not see; an ear, but will not hear; and it does not walk on its feet;

⁹⁸See Is. 46:9, "I am G-d and there is none else; I am G-d and there is none like Me."

ולא יש בו תועלת לא לעצמו ולא לאחרים. ויהי כשמוע תרח את דבריו לקח אותו בדברים
 2 והביאו אל ביתו ויספר לו כל המאורע שביום אחד הלך מהלך ארבעים יום, וכשמעו זה
 הלך אצל נמרד וא"ל תדע אדוננו המלך שהנער בני אשר היית בורח מפניו הנה בא
 4 ושאלתיו כמה זמן יש שהוא הולך בזה הדרך א"ל אמש נסעתי משם והיום הנעתי הנה,

1. ולא: לא ד3 / אחד: א' ד1 / 2. ארבעים: מ' ד1 / וכשמעו: וכשומעו ד1 ד2 / 3. הלך אצל: הלך למלך ד3 ז /
 נמרד: נמרוד ד1 ד2 ד3 ג ז / וא"ל: ואמר לו ג ז / אדוננו: אדונינו ד1 ד2 ז אדוני ג / 4. א"ל: אמר לו ד3 אמר
 לי ג / משם: ג' הנני ד3 ז /

and does not have any usefulness to itself or to others?"⁹⁹

When Terach heard his words, he persuaded him to enter his house. He told him
 all that had happened, that in one day he traveled a distance of forty days.

⁹⁹This echoes Ps. 115:4-8, 135:15-18. The passage also parallels Exodus Rabbah 46:4 which states, "The idol has eyes, but cannot see; ears but cannot hear, and since it cannot feed itself, then how can it feed others." See also, Is. 46:7, "It (idol) is borne upon the shoulder, it is carried and set in its place, and it stands, from its place it does not move; though one cries to it, it cannot answer, nor save him out of his trouble;" and Je. 10:5, "...they must be carried because they cannot go...they cannot do evil, neither is it in them to do good." Jellinek, (*Bet HaMidrash*, 1:15), however, considers the final part of the phrase to be Arabic in origin. To support this claim he cites a saying he attributes to the Arabic writer, Abulfeda, which appears in *Abulfeda Hist. Anteiisl.*, Fleischer, ed., 20, "He who purchases that which can harm him and do him no benefit."

ויהי בשמעו ככה ויחרד חרדה גדולה עד מאד ויאמר לפני כל השרים והיועצים והחכמים

2 להביא לו עצה על זה הילד מה לעשות עמו?

1. בשמעו: בשומעו ד' 2/ והיועצים: והיועצ' ד' 1/ 2. עמו: עליו ד' 3/

When [Terach] heard this, he went to Nimrod and said to him, "You should know, our lord the king, that the boy, my son from whose presence you have fled here, behold has come. And I asked him how much time the trip took him. He said to me, 'Last night I traveled from there, and today I arrived here.'" ¹⁰⁰ When he heard this he became very afraid. He requested his ministers, counselors, and wise-men to bring him counsel concerning what to do with this boy.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰This parallels Rashi's comment to Gn. 24:42, that in order to speed Abraham's servant, Eliezer, in his mission to find a suitable wife for Isaac, G-d actually shrunk the earth, so that he set out and arrived in the same day. This same comment also appears in Genesis Rabbah 59:1, and is attributed to R. Berekiah in the name of R. Isaac.

¹⁰¹This echoes Ex. 7:11, in which Pharaoh calls upon his wise-men, sorcerers, and magicians to determine how to deal with G-d's messengers, Aaron and Moses.

ויענו לו פה אחד יחי המלך נמרד לעולם! ויצוה וברזו שיברזו בכל המדינה משתה ושמחה

2 שבעת ימים וכל איש ישמח בביתו וילבש ויצא בכל מיני לבושים ומשכיות

1. נמרד: נמרוד ד' 2 ג' נמרד' ד'3/ ויצוה: יצוה ג' המלך ד'3/ וברזו: ויברזו ד'1 ג' לברזו ד'3/ שיברזו:

שיברזו ד'1/ שבעת: ז' כ'1/ 2. מיני: ח' כ'1/ לבושים: לבושין ד'3/ ומשכיות: ג' ואקמון ואיקונין כ'1 ג' ותקונין ד'3/

They answered him in one voice, "May King Nimrod live forever! Let him command and announce a proclamation that there be a seven day feast¹⁰² throughout the province; and every person should rejoice in his house and dress up and go out in all kinds of clothing and ornaments.¹⁰³

¹⁰²The calling of a royal feast echoes Est. 1:2-12.

¹⁰³The term, "משכיות," may also be translated to indicate, "images," or "figures," and thus, "clothing with ornaments," bears a connotation of idolatry. For examples of clothing as idolatrous objects, see Genesis Rabbah 81:3. See also Zohar I 73b, which states that Nimrod clad himself in the garments of Adam. Through these garments he "laid snares for humankind." In the words of R. Eliezar, "Nimrod used to entice people into idolatrous worship by means of those garments, which enabled him to conquer the world and proclaim himself its ruler, so that humankind offered him worship." According to the statement of R. Judah, which appears in Pirke d'R. Eliezer and Midrash HaGadol to Genesis, this garment of Adam caused the animals to bow down to whomever wore it. Nimrod, then, used this power to deceive people into thinking that his own divine qualities brought about this reaction from the animal kingdom.

ושתהיה כל המדינה צהלה ושמחה, וגם תעשה בחצר בית המלך החיצונה והפנימית ובכל

2 מדינות מלכותך ועוצם יכולתך הגדול יביא כל אדם ויעבוד אותך,

1. ושתהיה: ושהיה ד' 2 ד' 3 ותהיה כ' 1 ושהיה ג' / תעשה: תשתה כ' / בית: ח' כ' / 2. מלכותך: ממשלתך כ' /

יביא: יבוא ד' 1 כ' יבא ד' 2 ג' ובא ד' 3 /

And (in) all the province there should be shouting and joy.¹⁰⁴ And it should even be done in the outer and inner courts of your palace,¹⁰⁵ as well as in every district of the kingdom. And your great power and capability¹⁰⁶ will affect every person and each one will worship you."

¹⁰⁴This parallels Est. 8:15, in which Mordecai went from the king's presence dressed up in "royal apparel of blue and white, and with a great crown of gold, and with a robe of fine linen and purple; and the city of Shushan shouted and was happy."

¹⁰⁵This reflects the Book of Ezekiel, Chapter 40, which repeatedly employs the terms "inner court," and "outer court" in relation to the prophet's vision of the Temple in Jerusalem.

¹⁰⁶The mention of Nimrod's great power and capability echoes the power battles between G-d and idolaters as related in the Book of Exodus, Chapter 7, represented by Moses and Pharaoh, and the Book of First Kings, Chapter 18, represented by Elijah and the Prophets of Baal. See also Dan. 2:47, in which G-d is described as "capable."

וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לַעֲשׂוֹת כֵּן, וְחָנְתָן דָּת בְּבָבֶל בַּשּׁוּקִים וּבִרְחוֹבוֹת וּלְבַשׁוּ כָל־אִישׁ יוֹפִי וַיִּתְּקֵנוּ
 2 אוֹתָם בְּכָל לְבוּשֵׁי שֵׁשׁ וּמוֹשֵׁי וְרִקְמָה וְכָל מִינֵי מַשְׁכִּיּוֹת כֶּסֶף אִישׁ אִישׁ כְּאִשֶּׁר תִּשְׁיָג יָדוֹ וַיַּעֲשׂוּ
 כֵּן.

1. המלך: ח' ב' / לעשות: להעשות ב' / בשוקים: ובשוקים ב' / בשווקים ד' / וברחובות: וברחוב' ד' / כלם: בולם
 ב' / ויתקנו: ויתקנו ב' / 2. ורקמה: ורקמ' ד' / 3.

The king said, "Do thusly. You shall decree in Babylonia,¹⁰⁷ in the markets and the streets that everyone shall wear fine apparels and arrange them with all (types of) clothing of fine linen and silk, and embroidery, and all kinds of silver ornaments; each person according to his ability."¹⁰⁸

And they did thusly.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷This parallels the royal decrees given out in Es. 2:8, 3:15, 9:14.

¹⁰⁸This hints at Dt. 16:16-17, in which G-d commands the people to appear before Him for three feasts a year, and "every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the L-rd your G-d which He has given you."

¹⁰⁹This phrase is typical of the style of the Torah to indicate a commandment of G-d had been accomplished as commanded. For instance, see Ex. 12:28.

ויהי אחרי כן כשבת המלך נמרד על כסא מלכותו שלח אחרי אברהם ויבא אליו ואביו תרח

2 עמו ויעבור אברהם לפני הפחות והסגנים עד שהגיע לכסא המלך אשר הוא יושב עליו
ויתפוש בכסא והניע אותו וקרא בקול גדול כרברים האלה: אי נמרד הנגעל הכופר בעיקר

1. נמרד: נמרוד ד' 1 כ' 2 ד' 3 נ' / שלח: וישלח כ' / אברהם: נ' אע"ה כ' נ' / אבינו עזיו השל' ד' 3 / ואביו תרח:

תרח אביו כ' / עמו: ח' כ' / 2. ויעבור אברהם: ויעבור אברהם ותרח אביו כ' / ויתפוש: ויתפוס ד' 2 כ' 3 ב' /

3. וקרא: ויקרא נ' א"א ע"ה כ' ויקרא נ' אברהם אבינו ב' ד' 3 / האלה: אלו כ' / אי: או ג' / נמרד: נמרוד כ' ד' 3

ב ג ז / הכופר: והכופר כ' 1 /

Afterwards, as the king, Nimrod, sat on the throne of his kingdom,¹¹⁰ he sent for Abraham to come to him, with his father, Terach. And Abraham passed before the governors and the officers¹¹¹ until he reached the royal throne upon which he was sitting. He grasped the throne and shook it and cried out in a great voice, words approximating these: "Alas, Nimrod, the loathesome, the blasphemer,

¹¹⁰This phrase ("כשבת המלך... על כסא מלכותו") is also found in Est. 5:1 in which Esther comes before the king as an agent of G-d to save the Jewish people. The phrase is also used to describe the seat of royal power, as in Est. 1:2. That royal power is no match for Divine power is expressed by Ex. 11:5, 12:29, both of which describe the path of the final plague in Egypt, the killing of the first-born, as beginning with "the first born of Pharaoh, who sits upon his throne."

¹¹¹This parallels Ez. 23:5-7, in which the prophet in depicting Israel's idolatry describes Israel as doting on her Assyrian lovers, "clothed in blue, governors and officers, handsome young men all of them...with all their idols she defiled herself." See also Je. 51:23, in which the term, "governors and officers," is used as a metaphor for the sinners of Babylonia who will be shattered by G-d.

וכופר באל חי וקיים ובאברהם עבדו נאמן ביתו, תעיד ותאמר כמוני שה' הוא האלקים
 2 אחד ואין שני ואינו גוף והוא חי ולא ימות לא ינום ולא ישן, ותעיד על עצמך שאתה אדם
 ותאמין שאני אברהם [עבדו] והוא ברא את כל העולם כדי שיאמינו בו.

-
1. ובאברהם עבדו: ואברהם עבדו ב/ תעיד: תמיד ד' ג' תעוד העוד לא ב/ העיד ב/ ותאמר: תאמר ב/
 - שה': שיי ד' 3 שיי"ג / האלקים: אלהים ד' האלהים ב' ג' ד' 3 / אחד: א' ב/ ואין: א' ב/ שני: ב' ב/ ואינו: ואינו ב/
 2. יישן: ישן ד' 1 / 2 / 3. שאתה אדם: ח' ב' 1 ד' 3 ב' ג/ שאני: כי אני ב' 1 שאין ב/ [עבדו]: ח' ד' 1 ד' 2 ב' ב' ג/
 - ברא: נ' שמים ב/ 1 / את כל: וכל ב/ 1 / שיאמינו בו: שיאמרו בן ב/
-

the denier of the living and enduring G-d and of Abraham, the faithful servant of His house. Attest and declare like me that the L-rd, He is one,¹¹² there is none other. And He has no corporeality. And He lives, and will not die. He will neither slumber nor sleep.' And you shall admit that you are a mortal, and you shall believe that I, Abraham, am His servant. And He created the entire world in order that they would believe in Him."

¹¹²Or: "The L-rd is G-d!" See I Kgs. 18:39, in which the people shout this phrase upon witnessing the power of G-d. An exclamation of Divine recognition, it also constitutes the victory of G-d and His prophet, Elijah over the idolatrous priests of Baal. These words appear liturgically as one of the closing phrases of the entire High Holiday period, uttered upon the conclusion of the Yom Kippur "Ne'ilah" service. See High Holiday Prayer Book, 1017.

וישא את קולו באלו הדברים והנה הצלמים שהיו שם עומדים נפלו על פניהם. ובראות
 2 המלך והשרים במפלתם וגם צעקת אברהם נפלו כלם על פניהם ארצה עם מלכם נמרד
 (וימס לבו) ונשאר כמו שתי שעות [וחצי] ארצה, וימס לבו בקרבו גם פרחו נשמתו ממנו

1. את: ח' ב' / באלו הדברים: בדברים אלו ב' כ' בדברים אלו ד' / הצלמים: הדמותם ג' / שהיו: אשר היו ב' כ'
 ד' / שם: שמה ב' / 2. במפלתם: במפלתן כ' ד' ב' / וגם: גם ד' / אברהם: א"א ע"ה ב' / כלם: כולם ב' / כלם
 על פניהם ארצה: על פניהם כולם ארצה כ' כלם על פניה' ד' / נמרד: נמרוד ד' ד' כ' ב' ג' / (וימס לבו): וימס
 לבו ד' ד' כ' ב' ג' / 3. ונשאר כמו שתי שעות וחצי ארצה וימס: ח' ב' / [וחצי]: וחצי ד' ד' כ' ב' ג' / ארצה:
 ופניו ארצה כ' / ופניו ארצה ד' / גם פרחו נשמתו ממנו ואחר שתי שעות שב רוחו ונשמתו אל גופו: נס נשמתו אל
 גופו ב' / פרחו: פרחם ג' שתי: ב' כ' / רוחו: ג' אליו כ' /

And when he raised his voice with these words, the idols that were standing there
 fell on their faces.¹¹³ And when the king and the ministers saw how they had fallen, and
 also (heard) the shouting of Abraham, they fell on their faces to the ground, including
 their king, Nimrod.¹¹⁴ And he remained on the ground for about two [and a half] hours.
 His heart (Nimrod's) melted within him,¹¹⁵ his soul also took flight from him.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ See Louis Ginzberg, The Legends of the Jews (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1954), 165, which relates how King Solomon topples idols by pronouncing the Divine Name.

¹¹⁴This echoes the Yom Kippur service of the Temple. See M. Yoma 6:2, which describes how when the High Priest uttered the Divine Name, the power of the Name caused all present to "fall upon their faces." Passages recalling this event are also included in the "Musaf" service for Yom Kippur. See the High Holiday Prayer Book, 815, 816.

¹¹⁵This parallels Ez. 21:12 in which the prophet assures, "...and every heart shall melt..." in reaction to the great power of G-d. See also Is. 19:1: "Behold, the L-rd rides upon a swift

ואחר שתי שעות שב רוחו ונשמתו אל גופו ויקץ משנתו ויאמר המלך הקולך זה אברהם או

2 קול אלקיך? ויאמר לו קול זה קול ברי קטנה מכל בריות שברא הקב"ה.

1 שב: נס ב/ אל גופו: ח' ב/ ויקץ: וייקץ ד' 3 כ' ב/ ויאמר: ויאמ' ד' 2 הקולך: הקולו ב/ קול: קולו ב/ 1
אלקיך: אלהיך ד' 3 ב/ 2. ויאמר לו: וא"ל ב/ הקב"ה: קב"ה ד' 1 ד' 2 ב/ נמרד: נרדתי ד' 1 נמר' 2 נמרוד ב/ 3 ד' ב' ב/

And after two hours his breath and his soul returned to his body and he awoke from his sleep. The king said, "Is this your voice Abraham, or the voice of your G-d?"

He said to him, "This voice is the voice of the smallest of all the creatures that the Holy One Blessed Be He created."¹¹⁷

cloud, and comes unto Egypt; and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at His presence, and the heart of Egypt shall melt within it."

¹¹⁶ There are many examples of the use of this term in connection to the death of Sarah after hearing of the Binding of Isaac, thus forging an association of the term with the New Year. See Pesikta d'R. Kahana, Piska 26:3; and Ecclesiastes Rabba 9:7. This connection to Rosh HaShannah is reinforced by the version of the story related in Pirkei d'R. Eliezer, Chapter 32, which states that before Sarah's soul flew from her, she emitted cries corresponding to the calls of the shofar. The term is also used in B.T. Ketubot 62b to indicate a fainting from shock and joy.

¹¹⁷ R. Elijah haCohen of Smyrna, the compiler of the Shevet Musar, states that he is publishing Ma'aseh Avraham Avinu to illustrate the great humility of Abraham which should serve as an example to us as we face the High Holiday period. Perhaps, this is an example of the humility of which R. Elijah haCohen wrote.

בשעה ההיא אמר המלך נמרד באמת אלקיך אברהם אלוה גדול וחזק מלך מלכי המלכים,

2 ואמר לתרח אביו שישא את בנו ויסר מעליו וילך לעירו, וילכו שניהם יחדו.

1. אלקיך: אלהיך ד' ב' ג' אברהם: נ' והוא כ' / אלוה: אלוך כ' / וחזק: נ' והוא כ' / ואמר: ויאמר כ' / שישא:

וישא ב' / יחדו: יחדיו ד' ד' / 2

At that moment King Nimrod said, "In truth, your G-d, Abraham, is a great and powerful G-d, the King of Kings."¹¹⁸

And he said to Terach, his father, that he take his son and remove him from his presence, and he should go to his city.¹¹⁹ So the two of them went together.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸This seems to echo Chapters 8-10 of the Book of Exodus, which describe how after Pharaoh acknowledged the power of G-d through the plagues, wrought by G-d through His servant Moses, his heart was hardened and he stubbornly returned to his idolatrous ways. Here, although Nimrod acknowledges the power of G-d following the near-death experience wrought by G-d through His servant Abraham, the following episodes of the midrash illustrate that Nimrod also stubbornly returned to his idolatrous ways.

¹¹⁹Although the text does not specify which "his city" is, Gn. 11:31 does identify Abraham's birthplace as "Ur of the Chaldees." B.T. Baba Batra 91a presents the opinion of R. Hisda that Ur of the Chaldees is actually "the small side of Kuta," a city along the Euphrates River.

¹²⁰This echoes the Biblical account of the Binding of Isaac, Gn. 22:6,8, in which the text twice states of Abraham and Isaac that "both of them went together."

ויהי אח"כ ויגדל אברהם עד שהיה כבן עשרים שנה ותרח אביו חלה, ויאמר אל בניו הרן

2 ואברהם בחייכם בני תמכרו אלו השני צלמים שאין לי מעות להוצאותיו,

הלך חרן ומכר את הצלמים והביא מעות להוצאות אביו,

-
1. אח"כ: אחרי בן ד' 2 ד' 3 ב' / אחרת בן ב' / כבן: בן ב' 1 מבן ג' / עשרים: עשר' ד' 2 ד' 3 ב' / חלה: חולה ג' / ויאמר: ויאמ' ד' 2 / אל בניו: לבניו ב' 1 / בחייכם: בחיכון ב' 1 / תמכרו: נ' לי ב' ד' 3 / אלו השני צלמים: לי צלמים ב' 1 האלו השני צלמים ב' אלו הב' צלמים ד' 3 אלו השני דמותם ג' / להוצאותיו: להוצאותיו ד' 1 ד' 2 ד' 3 ב' 1 ג' / 3. חרן: הרן ד' 1 ד' 2 ד' 3 ב' 1 ג' / הצלמים: הדמותם ג' /
-

It happened after this that Abraham reached the age of twenty years old, and Terach, his father, became sick. He said to his sons, Haran and Abraham, "By your lives, my sons, sell these two idols because I don't have money to pay for our expenses."¹²¹

Haran went and sold the idols and brought the monies to cover his father's expenses.

¹²¹The tradition that Terach was an idolator is apparently of ancient origin. See Jos. 24:2, "Your fathers dwelt of old time beyond the River, even Terach, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nahor, and they served other gods." This passage appears in the Pesach Haggadah in a section which discusses the ignominy of slavery as being equivilant to the degrdation of idolatry.

וילך אברהם ויקח שני צלמים אחרים למכרם וישם חבל על גרונם ופניהם ארצה והוא היה
 2 סוחר אותם וצועק ואומר מי הוא זה שיקנה צלם שאין בו תועלת לא לעצמו ולא למי שקנהו
 לעובדו, וגם יש לו פה ולא ידבר עין ולא יראה רגלים ולא ילך אזנך ולא ישמע.

שני: ב' כ1 ב/ שני צלמים: שני הדמותם ג/ אחרים: אחרי ד1/ למכרם: למוכרם כ1/ וישם: ושם ד1 ד2 ד3 כ1 ב ג/
 ופניהם: ופניה' ד1/ אותם: ח' כ1/ 2. וצועק: וצעק ג/ ואומר: לאמו כ1/ הוא: ח' ב/ שיקנה: אשר יקנה כ1/
 צלם: דמות ג/ תועלת: תועלת ב/ לעצמו: נ' ולא לאחרים כ1/ שקנהו: שיקנהו ד1 ד2 ב/ שיקנה אותו כ1/ 3.
 לעובדו: לעבדו ב/ פה: נ' לדבר כ1/ אזנך: אזן ד1 ד2 ד3 אזן כ1/ ולא: אינו ד3/ ישמע: שומע כ1 ד3/

Abraham went and took two other idols to sell. He put a rope around their throats and put their faces to the ground, and he dragged¹²² them and shouted, "Who wants to buy an idol that serves no purpose, neither to itself nor to one who would buy it in order to worship it. And it has a mouth, but will not speak, an eye, but will not see, legs, but will not walk, an ear, but will not hear.

¹²²See Je. 22:19, 49:20, 50:3, which present "dragging" as a punishment for sin, and those who cause others to sin. Hence, Abraham provides the idols, impediments to righteousness, with the treatment they deserved. See also Je. 15:3, in which the prophet warns that the idolatrous and evil behavior of Manasseh, the king of Judah, will bring "dogs to drag...beasts of the earth, to devour and destroy." Significantly, on page 55 of our midrash, Nimrod is referred to as "this dog." As our Patriarch, Abraham, through his righteous conduct, in partnership with G-d, defeats the designs of Nimrod; so, too, is it Israel's task, through its righteous behavior, in partnership with the One G-d, to keep at bay the "dogs" that would drag down humanity.

ובשמוע אנשי המדינה את דברי אברהם תמהו עד מאד, והוא הלך ובא ופגע זקנה אחת
ותאמר לו בחיך אברהם תבחר לי צלם אחד טוב מאד וגדול לעבדו ולאהבו,

-
1. ובשמוע: ובשמע ב/ המדינה: מדינה ב/ אברהם: נ' אע"ה ב' נ' ע"ה ב' נ' אבינו עליו השל' ד'3/ הלך:
הולך ד'1 ד'2 ד'3 ב'1/ ופגע: פגע ב'1/ זקנה: זקנ' ד'1 בזקנה ב'1/ אחת: א' ב'1/ ותאמר: ואמרה ב'1/ 2. אברהם:
אברה' ד'1/ תבחר: בחר ב'1/ צלם: דמות ג' אחד: א' ב'1/ מאד: עד מאד ב'1 ד'3 ב'1/ לעבדו: שנעבדו ב'1
לעובדו ב'1/ ולאהבו: ונהבדו ב'1/
-

And when the people of the country heard the words of Abraham, they were very surprised. While he was walking he met an old woman, and she said to him, "By your life, Abraham, choose for me a very good and large idol¹²³ to worship and love it."¹²⁴

¹²³Various versions of Abraham's encounters with prospective idol buyers exist. Genesis Rabbah 38:13 relates the following version: A prospective customer sought to buy an idol. "How old are you?," Abraham asked him. "Fifty years," was the reply. "Woe to such a man!," he exclaimed, "you are fifty tears old and would worship a day-old object!" At this the customer became ashamed and departed, never to worship idols again. A similar version alluding to the age of the idols compared to that of the purchaser may be found in the Tana D'bei Eliyahu, Chapter 6 (appearing in Ozar Midrashim, pages 8-9, as "Aggadat Avraham"), in which the prospective customer is depicted as being thirty years old. In Midrash HaGadol to Genesis 28, the customer is depicted as being sixty years old. In this version, in addition to comparing their ages to illustrate the folly of idol worship, Abraham asks the customer to consider the height differential, and the disparity in the ability to walk that exists between himself and the idol.

¹²⁴Both of these terms echo the duties of the Jew towards G-d as specified in Dt. 6:5, "You shall love the L-rd your G-d," and Dt. 11:13, "...to love the L-rd your G-d, and to serve Him with all your heart and all your soul." Both of these verses are recited liturgically on a daily basis, and comprise parts of the "Shema." See the Daily Prayer Book, 76-77, 193.

אמר לה אברהם זקנה זקנה איני יודע בהם תועלת לא בנדול ולא בקטן לא לעצמם ולא
 2 לאחרים. אמר לה והצלם הגדול אשר לקחת מאחי הרן לעבדו היכן הלך? אמרה לו באו
 גנבים בלילה החזא וגנבו אותו בעודי בבית המרחץ.

-
1. אמר לה: א"ל ב' / איני יודע בהם: אני יודע בנם שאין בהם ב' / תועלת: תועלת ב' / לעצמם: לעצמ' ד' /
 2. אמר לה: א' לה ב' / והצלם: ודמות ג' / הרן: ח' ב' / לעבדו: לעובדו ב' / הלך: הוא ב' ב' / אמרה: אמרו ד' וא"ל
 ב' / בלילה החזא: ח' ב' / בלילה הוא ד' ד' 2 ב' / 3. בעודי: בעוד ב' / בבית: נ' ים ב' /
-

He said to her, "Old woman, old woman, I don't know of any usefulness in them;
 not in a large one nor a small one, neither for themselves, nor for others."

He (further) said to her, "The large idol that you bought from my brother, Haran,
 what happened to it?"

She said to him, "Thieves came that night and stole it while I was still in the
 bathhouse."¹²⁵

¹²⁵The term "bathhouse" may connote idolatry. See B.T. Avodah Zarah 44b for a discussion concerning a bathhouse with a statue of Aphrodite in it. B.T. Shabbat 33b presents an agaddah which includes a statement attributed to R. Simeon b. Yohai criticizing the Roman government for having built bathhouses "only for their own sensual pleasure." B.T. Berachot 60a prescribes that one entering a bathhouse say: "May it be Your will O L-rd, my G-d, to deliver me from this and from the like of this, and let no humiliation or iniquity befall me; and if I do fall into any perversity or iniquity, may my death be an atonement for all my iniquities." The text goes on to report that upon leaving, R. Aha said: "I give thanks unto You, O L-rd, my G-d, that You have delivered me from the fire."

- אמר לה אם בן כיצד תעבודי לצלמו לא הציל מן הגנבים כל שכן שלא יציל לאחרים
- 2 מרעתם ולא לך הזקנה השוטה. וכיצד תאמרי שהצלם שעבדת שהוא אלוה אם הוא אלוה למה לא הציל את עצמו מיד הגנבים, אלא שהוא צלם אין בו תועלת לא לעצמו ולא למי
- 4 שיעבוד אותו. אמרה לו הזקנה אם בן אברהם בדבריך למי אעבוד?

-
1. אם בן: א"ב ד'1/ תעבודי: יעבוד כ'1/ תעבוד ב' / לצלמו: לצלם נ' כי אף לעצמו... ד'1 ד'2 ד'3 ב' אותו כ'1 לרמות נ' כי אף לעצמו...ג' / לא הציל...: העובד שאינו יכול להוציא עצמו מיד הגנבים כל שכן...כ'1/ כל שכן: כ"ש ד'1/ שלא: ח'1 ד'1 ד'2 ד'3 ב'1 ב' / יציל: ח'1/ לאחרים: לאחר' ד'3/ ולא: ח'1 ד'1 ד'2 ד'3 ג' / 2. לך: את כ'1 ולך ד'3/ הזקנה: הזקנה ב' / השוטה: ח'1 כ'1 / השוטיהו ב' / שהצלם: שהדמות ג' / שעבדת: אשר עבדת כ'1 / למה: ח'1 כ'1 / את: ח'1 כ'1 / 3. מיד: מן כ'1 / אין: שאין כ'1 / לעצמו: נ' ולא לאחים כ'1/ אמרה לו: א"ל כ'1 / 4. אם בן: א"ב ד'1 ב' ח'1 כ'1
-

He said to her, "If this is so, how could you serve the idol?! It could not even save itself from the thieves, all the more so will it not save others from their evil.¹²⁶ And it will not save you, foolish old woman! And how, tell me, can the idol which you served be G-d? If it is G-d, why did it not save itself from the hand of thieves? Rather, it is an idol which has no purpose, not for itself nor for one who would worship it."

The old woman said to him, "If this is as you say, Abraham, whom should I serve?"

¹²⁶This parallels Exodus Rabbah 16:2 which pictures G-d saying, "Since it (an idol) is like a mute stone (Hb. 2:19) and mere make-believe, and others have to guard it from being stolen, how can it possibly give new life to those who are suffering?"

אמר לה תעבודי לאלקי האלקים ואדוני האדונים בורא שמים וארץ הם וכל אשר בהם, והוא
2 אלקי נמרוד אלקי תרח ואלקי מזרח ומערב דרום וצפון.

1. תעבודי: תעבוד כ/ לאלקי: לאלדי ד' לאלהי ב ג/ האלקים: האלהים ד' ג השמים כ/ הם: הים ד' ד
כ ג/ אלקי: אלהי ד' ג/ 2. אלקי תרח: ואלהי תרח ד' כ ב ג/ ואלקי: ואלהי ד' ב ג/ נמרוד: נמרוד ד' ב
ג/ דרום וצפון: ח' כ ב/

He said to her, "Serve the G-d of G-ds; the L-rd of L-rds; the Creator of heaven
and earth,¹²⁷ them and all that is in them;¹²⁸ and He is the G-d of Nimrod; G-d of
Terach; and G-d of East, West, South, and North."¹²⁹

¹²⁷This recalls the first verse of the Torah, Gn. 1:1, "In the beginning G-d created the heavens and the earth."

¹²⁸That G-d created everything that is in heaven and earth is the subject of Chapter 1 of the Book of Genesis. This is again emphasized in Ex. 20:12 (the Book of Exodus' version of the Ten Commandments), as a rationale for the observance of the Sabbath, "For in six days the L-rd made the heavens and the earth, and the sea, and all that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day..." The allusion to this verse is strengthened by the reading "the sea, and all that is in them," which appears in the Shevet Musar, Bet HaMidrash, Valmadonna MSS 167, and J.T.S. Adler Collection MSS 4879 versions (as opposed to "them, and all that is in them," which appears in the Ozar Midrashim version). See the "textual alternatives" section above. See also Is. 45:6-7, which depicts G-d as Creator of everything, "I am the L-rd and there is none else, I form the light, and create darkness, I make peace, and create evil..." Is. 45:7 receives liturgical expression daily (with the minor emendation of changing the word "evil" to "everything") as the beginning of the "Yotzer Or" prayer, to which it gives its name. The "Yotzer Or" praises G-d as Creator.

¹²⁹This echoes Ps. 107:2-3, which praises G-d for having redeemed His people "from the hand of the tormenter and gathered them out of the lands, from the east and from the west, from the

ומי הוא נמרד הבלב שיעשה עצמו אלוה

1. נמרד: נמרוד ג/

And who is Nimrod, the dog,¹³⁰ who would make himself a god¹³¹

north and from the sea." The Targum adds the word, "Southern" before "sea."

¹³⁰The term, "dog," in the Bible as well as Rabbinic Literature has a negative connotation. Ex. 22:30 commands Israel to desist from eating flesh that is torn by beasts in the field for "you shall be holy people unto Me." Rather, torn flesh should be "cast to the dogs," which one may then assume not to be holy. Dt. 23:19 uses the term "dog" to describe male-homosexual prostitutes, and insists that they are "an abomination unto the L-rd, your G-d." In I Sam. 17:43 and II Sam. 3:8, the term is used as a derision, a form of insult. Rev. Dr. S. Goldman, in his commentary to the Book of Samuel (The Soncino Samuel, London: The Soncino Press, 1951, pg. 201) explained: "In the East dogs were chiefly found prowling about town in a half-wild condition, living on offal and garbage. Hence 'dog' was a term of reproach and contempt." In II Kgs. 8:13, the Aramaen Hazael calls himself a "dog" to indicate that he is a "nothing," incapable of doing what the Prophet Elisha said he would. B.T. Shabbat 114a relates the teaching of Resh Lakish that a person who breeds a dog in his house "keeps lovingkindness away from his house." The Talmud then illustrates this point with a story that indicates that even if a dog has had his fangs and claws extracted, his wild and negative nature persists. B.T. Kiddushin 40b presents the teaching of the Rabbis who interpret the Mishnaic statement, "One who lacks Bible, Mishnah, and secular pursuits does not belong to civilization," to apply to someone who eats in the market-place, because such a person is "like a dog." Such a person (a person who is like a dog) is not permitted to testify as a witness in court. Midrash HaGadol, in commenting upon Ex. 20:2, pictures the "nations of the world" as a dog, incapable of supporting the burden of Torah and Mitzvot, or even the seven Noahide commandments. The term "dog" may even evoke a hint of idolatry, as B.T. Baba Kama 23a reports that there were, at one

לעבוד אותו! אמרה הזקנה מכאן ולהלן לא אעבוד כי אם אלקיך אלקי אברהם, ואם

2 אעבוד אותו מה תועלת יהיה לי? אמר לה כל מה שגנבו ישוב לך וגם תציל נפשך

מגיהנם.

1. אותו: ח' ב/ כי אם: אלא אם כן ב/ אלקיך: אלהיך ד' ב ג/ אלקי: אלהי ד' ג ואלהי ב/ שגנבו: ג' מומך כ

ב/ תציל נפשך: יציל עצמך ב/ אומר: אומרי ב/ א"ל: אמר (לה) ב/

so that others would serve him?"

The old woman said, "From now on I will not serve anyone except your G-d, the G-d of Abraham.¹³² And if I serve Him, what benefit will there be for me?"

He said to her, "Everything that they stole will be returned to you, and also your soul will be saved from Gehinnom."¹³³

time, people who worshipped the image of a dog.

¹³¹This parallels the tradition concerning Pharaoh, that he also declared himself a god. See Exodus Rabbah 8:2, 9:8. Note also that the term, "לַעֲבֹד," "to serve," is a form of the same term that the Torah uses in relation to Pharaoh and the Egyptians. For instance, see Ex. 1:13, 14:5, 12. The term is also used to indicate service to G-d. See Ex. 10:26, Nu. 3:7, 8, Dt. 11:13. Thus, the use of the term not only alerts one to the parallel with Pharaoh, but reinforces the idea that idolatry is the offering of "service" that should be the reserve of G-d alone.

Dt. 11:13, which contains the commandment to "love the L-rd, your G-d, and serve Him....," forms part of the "Shema," and is thus repeated twice daily. See Daily Prayer Book, 77, 193.

¹³²The phrase, "G-d of Abraham," is also found in Gn. 24:48, 26:24, 31:42. In all of these instances the term bears the connotation of G-d's Providence.

¹³³Exodus Rabbah 7:4 depicts Gehinnom as a place of weeping and fires, where only the wicked will be consigned.

אמרה הזקנה מה אומר כדי להציל את נפשי משחת? א"ל תאמרי ה' הוא האלקים בשמים
 2 ממעל ועל הארץ מתחת אחד ואין שני ממות ומחיה, הוא חי ולא יראה מות וגם אני אברהם
 עבדו נאמן ביתו. אמרה הזקנה מכאן ולהלן אני אומרת בדבריך

-
1. ה': י"י ג/ האלקים: האלהים ד' 1 ג/ 2. אחד: א' ד' 1 ב' 1/ שני: ב' כ' 1/ הוא חי: מחיה הוא ב/ אני: נ' אומרת כ' 1/
 3. נאמן: נאמן כ' 1 ב/ ולהלן: ואילך ב/ אני: אומרת ב/ בדבריך: בדבר ב/
-

The old women said to him, What shall I say in order to save my soul from destruction?" He said to her, "Say, 'The L-rd, He is G-d in the heavens above and the earth below; He is one, there is none other; he brings death and gives life,'¹³⁴ He lives and will not see death,¹³⁵ and also that I Abraham am the trusted servant of His house." The old woman said, "From now on I will declare these words of yours,

¹³⁴See I Sam. 2:6, in which this phrase appears as part of Hannah's prayer to G-d. The phrase receives liturgical expression in the "Amidah" prayer, which is repeated at least three times daily. The phrase is part of the "Amidah's" second blessing, praising G-d's might and power. See Daily Prayer Book, 83, 161, 201. See also the Koran, Sura 7:158.

¹³⁵This reflects Je. 10:10, "...He is the living G-d, and the everlasting King...", in which the prophet points to the distinctions between the true G-d and idols. See also Ps. 89:49, where the phrase is used to show human mortality: "What man is he that lives n shall not see deth, tht shl deliver his soul from the power of the grave?"

ואעיד על עצמי שה' הוא האלקים בשמים ממעל ועל הארץ מתחת ואתה אברהם נביאו

2 ואאמין בשי"ת ובך.

1. שה': שיט ב שי"ג / הוא: ג' הוא ב/ האלקים: האלהים ב ג/ בשמים ממעל והארץ מתחת: בורא שמים וארץ

כ1 ב/ ואאמין: אמין ב/ בשי"ת: באל יתברך כ1 ב בשת ג/ נביאו: ג' ואהבו ואני כ1 ג' אהבו ואני ב/

and I will attest that the L-rd, He is G-d in the heavens above and the earth below,¹³⁶
and you are Abraham, His prophet. And I will believe in the L-rd, may He blessed, and
in you."¹³⁷

¹³⁶That one can bear witness to the One G-d by reciting certain words has long been part of the liturgical of the "Shema." In the Torah scroll, Dt. 6:4, "Hear O Israel, the L-rd, our G-d, the L-rd is One,"

("שמע ישראל ה' אלהינו ה' אחד"), is written with the ayin (ע) of the first word enlarged, and the dalet (ד) of the final word enlarged. Sefer Rokeach explains that together these two enlarged letters spell "ayd" (עד), the Hebrew word for "witness." Because whenever one recites these words (Dt. 6:4), he or she is bearing witness to G-d's existence and Unity.

¹³⁷This parallels Ex. 14:31, which states that after having experienced G-d's salvation at the Reed Sea, "...they believed in the L-rd, and in Moses, His servant."

אמר המגיד ששבא בתשובה ונתחרטה על שעבדה את הצלמים, ואמרו שגם מצאה הננבים
 2 והשיבו לה הנניבה וגם הצלם, מה עשתה זאת הזקנה? לקחה אבן בידה והכתה על ראש
 הצלם ואמרת אוי לך ולמי שיעבוד אותך עוד,

-
1. בתשובה: ו' שלימה כ1/ ותחרטה על שעבדה את הצלמים: ונתנחמה על מה שעשתה ועבה הכבודת הצלמים כ1
 ונתחרטה על שעבדה את הדמות ג/ ואמרו שגם מצאה הננבים: גם כן מצתה הננבים כ1/ 2. והשיבו לה הנניבה:
 והשיבו כל מה שנבנו כ1/ וגם הצלם: וגם כן הצלם אשר היה לה בראשנה כ1 וגם השיבו לה הצלם אשר היה
 בראשונה ב וגם הדמות ג/ מה עשתה: מה עשת' ד' מה עשה עשתה כ/ אכן: ו' א' כ1/ ראש הצלם: ראשו כ/
 3. ואמרת: ואמרה להצלם כ1/
-

The Maggid said that she repented¹³⁸ and regretted having served the idols. And they said that she even found the thieves and they returned to her all the stolen property, including the idol. What did this old woman do? She took a stone in her hand and hit the idol's head, saying, "Woe to you and to whomever shall serve you in the future.

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 BROOKDALE CENTER
 1 WEST 4TH STREET
 NEW YORK, NY 10012

¹³⁸Repentance looms as one of the major themes of the High Holiday period. See Shmuel Agnon, Days of Awe (New York: Schocken Books, 1948), 16.

כי אין כך תועלת ולא למי שיעבוד אותך, ויצאה מביתה בשוקים ברחובות והיא צועקת
 2 ואומרת מי שרוצה להציל נפשו משחת ויצליח בכל מעשיו ועבוד לאלקי אברהם.

1. ולמי שיעבוד אותך עוד: ואוי לעובד אותך עוד כ/ תועלת ולא למי: תועלת ולא כמי כ/ אותך: לך ג/
 מביתה: נ' והיתה מכרזה כ/ בשוקים: בשוק' ד/ ואומרת: ואמר' 2/ נפשו: את עצמו כ/ ועבוד: ויעבוד כ' יעבוד
 כ/ לאלקי: לאלהי ד' ג' את אלהי כ/

For you have no purpose, and give none to one who would serve you."¹³⁹ And she went forth from her house into the markets and town squares, and she shouted, saying, "Anyone who wants to save his soul from destruction and be successful in everything he does,¹⁴⁰ let him serve the G-d of Abraham."¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ The Old Woman's behavior vis a vis the idol echoes Ex. 23:24, in which G-d commands Israel concerning the idolatry of Canaan, "You shall not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do after their doings; but you shall utterly overthrow them, and break in pieces their pillars." The Old Woman's behavior may be thought to constitute a conversion to true religion. As such this episode echoes Genesis Rabbah 39:14 which interprets Gn. 12:5 to indicate that Abraham made converts.

¹⁴⁰ This reflects the teaching of I Chron. 22:13, in which David explains to Solomon that the key to being successful is to "observe to do the statutes and the ordinances which the L-rd charged Moses with concerning Israel..." See also Nu. 14:41, which informs us that if one transgresses the commandment of G-d, "...it shall not prosper."

¹⁴¹ Both, the public proclamations of the Old Woman and those of Abraham, call to mind Jon. 3:4, in which Jonah entered Nineveh and publicly proclaimed that the people of the city repent before they are overthrown. The Book of Jonah is the Haftarah reading for the afternoon of Yom Kippur. See the High Holiday Prayerbook, 889-896.

אמר המגיד שהזקנה בכל יום היתה צועקת עד שהשיבה בתשובה אנשים ונשים הרבה. שמע

2 המלך שמועה זאת שלח אחריה והביאה לפניו, אמר לה מה עשית כי שטית מאחרי

עבודתי למה לא תעבדי אותי שאני אלקיך ואני יצרתך

1. שהזקנה: נ' התיא כ1 ב/ ונשים: תאנשים ב/ 2. שמע: שמתו ב/ זאת: זו ד1 ד2 נ' הזקנה ב/ אמר לה: א"ל ד1/

מה: נ' זאת כ1/ 3. תעבדי: תעבדו ד1 ד2 כ1/ אותי: אני כ1/ אלקיך: אלהיך ד1 ג/

The Maggid said that every day the old woman would shout until many men and women repented.¹⁴² The king heard news of her¹⁴³ and he sent for her and brought her before him. He said to her, "What have you done that you have mocked my service behind my back. Why will you not serve me, for I am your god. And I have formed you,¹⁴⁴

¹⁴²This parallels Jon. 3:5, "And the people of Nineveh believed in G-d..."

¹⁴³This is similar to Jon. 3:6, in which news of Jonah's activities reached the king of Nineveh. However, in the Book of Jonah, when the news reached the king of Nineveh, he repented, unlike Nimrod in our midrash. Thus, the reader is confronted with the fact that it is not enough to hear the truth. Having heard the truth, one must then decide how to act upon it. The choice to repent ultimately lies with the individual. See also Dt. 30:15-19.

¹⁴⁴This calls to mind Is. 44:21, in which G-d reminds Israel that He "formed" Israel to be His servant." See also, Gn. 2:8, Is. 43:7, 45:7, 45:18, Je. 10:16, Am. 4:13, all of which attribute the act of "forming" exclusively to the One Creator, G-d. The idea that G-d is the "former" of human beings is expressed liturgically in the "Asher Yatzar" blessing, recited daily in the "Morning Blessings" section of the morning service, and upon emerging from the bathroom. See Daily Prayer Book, 13.

אף תמכתיד בימיני. השיבה ואמרה אתה מן הכוזבים ואתה כופר בעיקר באל אחד ואין שני

1. אף: ואני כ/1/ תמעיתך: נ' לך ז/ השיבה: נ' תזקנה כ/ ז/ ואמרה: נ' למלך ז/ באל אחד: באל חי ג 2. אחד:

א' ד/ שני: ב' לו כ/ נ' לו ז/

I have even supported you with my right hand."¹⁴⁵

She answered, saying, "You are one of the liars."¹⁴⁶ And you are a denier of the principle of 'There is one G-d and none other!'

¹⁴⁵See Ex.15:6, which praises G-d for the mighty redemption which He brought Israel at the Reed Sea with His "right hand." This phrase finds liturgical expression daily in the "Pesuke d'Zimra," the warm-up section of the morning service (Daily Prayer Book, 67). See also

Ps. 118:14,15, which offers praise for G-d's support and deliverance, "The right hand of the L-rd does valiently. The right hand of th L-rd is exalted." This psalm makes up part of the "Hallel," psalms of praise read on Rosh Hodesh and holidays. See Daily Prayer Book, 571. Ps. 60:7, 108:7 contain an appeal to G-d's power, "Save with your right hnd and answer me." This appeal is expressed liturgically in the mditation which follows the "Amidah." See Daily Prayer Book, 95, 175, 211. See also Hb. 2:16, in which the prophet warns of G-d's action against evil being taken with His right hand; and Is. 41:10: "Fear not, for I am with you. Be not dismayed, fro I am your G-d. I strengthen you, I help uou, I uphold you with My victorious right hand."

¹⁴⁶See Pro.19:22, 30:6-8, in which the lowliness of liars, and undesirability of lying are expressed. Pro. 30:6 defines a liar as one who adds to G-d's words. While people may sink to lying, G-d is true (Je. 10:10), and "every word of G-d is tried..." (Pro. 30:5).

ואתה אוכל משובו ותעבוד אל אחר ותכפור בו ובתורתו ובאברהם עבדו. ויהי כשמוע

2 המלך את דבריה צוה להרוג אותה, ויהרגו אותה ופחד ורהב לבבו מדבריה,

1. ובתורתו: ובשובו כ1/ כשמוע המלך: כראות המלך וכומעו כ1/ 2. צוה: נ' על אשר לפניו כ1/ ויהרגו: והרגו

17 ד 27 כ1/

And you eat from His goodness, but you would worship another;¹⁴⁷ and you would deny Him, and His Torah,¹⁴⁸ and Abraham, His servant."

And when the king heard her words, he gave the command to kill her. They killed her, but he, in his heart, became afraid but defiant on account of her words.

¹⁴⁷This echoes the "Grace After Meals," which states that G-d "feeds the world through His goodness..." and, "He gives food to all living creatures..." See Daily Prayer Book, 759. The "Grace After Meals" is said in accordance with the commandment of Dt. 8:10, "When you have eaten and are satisfied you shall bless the L-rd, your G-d..." According to B.T. Berachot 48b, this blessing was composed by Moses. Genesis Rabbah 54:6 depicts the "Grace After Meals" as central to Abraham's mission. After wayfarers had eaten and drank to satisfaction in his inn, Abraham taught them the "Grace After Meals." Thus, bringing them to faith in G-d, and the practice of true religion.

¹⁴⁸Although this episode chronologically precedes the giving of the Torah at Sinai, tradition has it that G-d actually created the Torah before He created the world, and used it as a blueprint for Creation. See Genesis Rabbah 1:1, Yalkut Shimoni, I: Remez 2. Not only did the Torah already exist in Abraham's time, but the tradition that Abraham already observed all of its precepts is well attested. For instance, see B.T. Yoma 28b, B.T. Kiddushin 4:14, and B.T. Nedarim 32a.

ותמה על עצמו ולא ידע מה יעשה עם אברהם שהפסיד אמונתו, כי רוב המון העם האמינו

2 באלקי אברהם. ובראות השרים שלו היגון אשר שם בלבו וכשמעם דבריו אמרו לו קום

מהרה והלכת אל המקום אשר היית הולך פעמים אחרות ותבריו שכל אנשי המדינה יעשו

4 ז' ימים משתה ויו"ט

1. יעשה: לעשות כ/ אברהם: א"א ע"ה כ/ שהפסיד אמונתו: שהפסיד דת ואמונתו כ/ שהפסיד דעתו דתו

ואמונתו ב/ המון: ח' כ/ אמון ג/ 2. באלקי: באלהי ד' ב ג/ השרים: השמים ג' ראנך ב/ בלבו: אל לבו כ' ב/

וכשמעם: וכשומע ד' וכשומעם ד' כ' וכשומעם ב/ דבריו: את דברו כ' 3. מהרה: ח' כ' והלכת: וגלכת כ' 4.

היית: היתה כ' שכל: בכל ג/ ז' ימים משתה: משתה ז' ימים ג' ושמחה כ' ג' ושמחה ב' שבעת ימים משתה ג/

וי"ט: ויום טוב ד' כ' 1/

And he was surprised at himself for he didn't know what he would do with Abraham, who had caused the loss of (the people's) faith in him; for the majority of the multitudes of the people believed in the G-d of Abraham.

When his ministers saw the sadness that was in his heart, and as they heard his words, they said to him, "Arise quickly and go to the place which you customarily go at other times and proclaim that all the people of the province should observe a seven day feast and holiday."¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ "יום טוב" is the term used to designate a Jewish holy day. See Marcus Jastrow, A Dictionary of the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature (New York: Pardes Publishing House, 1950) 569.

וישימו עליהם כל החפצים ובגדי משי ורקמה ואבנים טובות ואבנים יקרות שהם וישפה וכל
 2 כלי זהב וכסף ומאכל ומשתה וכל מיני מגדים, ובראות אברהם את גודל העושר ותוקף אנשי
 המדינה ורוב עשרם יבוא ליכנס תחת אמונתך.

-
1. וישימו: ושימו ד' 1 כ' 1 / שימו: החפצים: החפצי' ד' 2 / ואבנים: ואבני' ד' 2 / ואבנים יקרות שהם: ח' 1 כ' / שהם:
 שוהם ד' 1 / ושהם כ' / וישפה: נ' ודברים אחרים ד' 1 כ' ג' ז' / וכל כלי זהב וכסף ומשתה ח' 1 כ' / וכל כלי כסף וזהב ז' /
 2. ובראות: ובראות ד' 1 ג' ז' / את: אל ז' / גדול: גדולת כ' / ותוקף: והתוקף כ' / אנשי: נ' / רוב ג' / 3. עשרם: עושרם
 ד' 2 כ' / יבוא ליכנס: יבא להיכנס כ' / יבוא להיכנס ז' / אמונתך: אמונתך ד' 2 ג' ז' /
-

And they shall place upon themselves all their finery; and silk and embroidered clothing;
 and precious stones, and jasper, and vessels of gold and silver, and food, and drink, and
 all kinds of sweets.¹⁵⁰ And when Abraham sees the greatness the wealth, and power¹⁵¹
 of the people of the country and the extent of their riches, he will re-enter your faith."

¹⁵⁰This echoes Ex. 25:1-7, which describes the things to be donated to build the Tabernacle, its vessels, and priestly garb, so that G-d may be appropriately worshiped, and that He dwell among the people.

¹⁵¹The term employed here for "power," "תוקף" echoes one of the prayers of the Rosh Hashannah Musaf service, "U'ntaneh Tokef," "Let us declare the power of the holiness of his day..." See the High Holiday Prayer Book, 361.

ויהי בשמוע נמרד השמועה שמח שמחה גדולה וצוה שיכריזו אל כל אנשי המדינה ללכת אל

2 המקום אשר היו רגילים לבוא שם שנה בשנה בנן ויביאו שם הצלמים

1. בשמוע: נ' הדבר הזה כ/ נמרד השמועה: השמועה נמרוד ד2 ג/ נמרד: נמרוד ד1 כ/ גדולה: נ' ויבא עצה

ד1 ג' נ' עד מאד ויבוא עצה כ1 נ' עד מאד ויבא עצה כ/ המקום: מקום כ/ 2. היו: ח' כ/ רגילים: רגילין ד1

ד2 ג' רגילין כ1 כ/ לבוא: לבא ד1 ד2 ח' כ/ שנה בשנה: שנה ושנה כ/ הצלמים: צלמים ד1 הצלמי' ד2 הדמותם

ג/

When Nimrod heard this advice he became very happy and he ordered that they announce to all the people of the country to go to the place to which they were accustomed¹⁵² to go every year, to the garden,¹⁵³ and bring the idols there

¹⁵²This may be a word-play, as in Hebrew, "accustomed" or "רגילין," sounds like, and even shares the root of "רגלים." "רגלים" is a term indicating the holy Jewish pilgrimage festivals, Pesach, Shavuot, and Succot, when Jews traveled to Jerusalem to worship in the Temple. See Ex. 23:14-17.

¹⁵³This echoes Gn. 13:10, "an Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of the Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the L-rd destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, like the garden of the L-rd, like the land of Egypt, as you go to Zoar." Both, the situation in our midrash and the above verse juxtapose the purity and goodness of G-d's garden with the eventual pollution and perversion of that garden through the sins of humanity. See also B.T. Hagigah 14b, in which the cognate term, "orchard," connotes the "idol worship" of esoteric Greek philosophy.

ויעשו שם משתה ושמחה ויו"ט יותר ממה שהיו רגילים מקודם. ויהי בתוך ימי המשתה
 2 ויאמר המלך לתרח אבי אברהם להביא את בנו לראות גדולתו ועושר כבוד מלכותו ורוב
 שריו ועבדיו, ויאמר תרח לבנו: בני אברהם!

1. שם: נ' ימי ד' ב' / משתה: נ' גדול כ' / ויו"ט: ויום טוב ד' ב' נ' / שהיו: נ' שם ב' / רגילים: רגילין ד' ב' / 2.
 אבי אברהם: אביו כ' אברהם ב' / כבוד: כבוד נ' כבוד כ' / מלכותו: ממלכתו כ' / 3. בני אברהם: אברהם
 בני כ' בני אברה ד' 3/

and make a bigger feast, and more festive occasion, and holiday there than they ever had before. During the feast, the king told Terach, the father of Abraham, to bring his son, Abraham, to see the greatness and vast riches and glory of his kingdom,¹⁵⁴ and the multitude of his ministers and his servants. Terah said to his son, "My son,¹⁵⁵ Abraham!

¹⁵⁴See Est. 1:4, which describes the great feast held by King Ahasuerus, "...he showed the riches of his glorious kindom..."

¹⁵⁵This echoes the Book of Genesis, Chapter 22, in which the term, "my son," appears as a leitvort connoting the relationship between father and son, and the great pathos of the situation (the Binding of Isaac).

בא עמי למועד המלך נמרד אלקינו, אמר אברהם איני יכול לצאת לשם, א"ל תרח א"ב
 2 תשב עם הצלמים עד בואנו משם, ויעש כן וילך תרח, וישב אברהם עם הצלמים וגם צלמי
 המלך היו שם,

1. בא עמי למועד המלך נמרד אלקינו, אמר אברהם: ח' כ1 / עמי: עמנו ד1 ד3 / נמרד: נמרוד ד1 ד2 ד3 ג/
 אלקינו: אלהינו ד1 ד3 ג/ איני: אינך כ1 / א"ל: ויאמר לו כ1 אמר לו ד3 / א"ב: ג' בני כ1 / 2. הצלמים: הגמותם
 ג/ משם: שם כ1 / וילך תרח: תרח וילך כ1 / אברהם: ח' כ1 / הצלמים: הדמותם ג/ וגם צלמי המלך היו שם: עם צלם
 המלך היושב ד1 וגם דמות המלך היו שם ג ועם צלמי המלך אשר היו'ם כ1 עם צלמי המלך היו שם ד3 /

Come with me to the festival¹⁵⁶ of the king, Nimrod, our god."

Abraham said, "I am not able to go there."

Terah said to him, "If that is so, you stay with the idols until we return."¹⁵⁷

And he did so. So, Terah went and Abraham remained with the idols. And the
 king's idols were also there.

¹⁵⁶The term, "חַג", or "festival," is also used to denote the festivals of G-d and the Jewish people. For instance, see Lv. 23:2, 4, 37, 44.

¹⁵⁷This parallels Gn. 22:5, in which Abraham orders his servants to, "... Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go there, and we will worship, and return to you."

וירא אברהם כי הלך המלך אל בית הועד אשר לו ויקח בידו גרזן וכראותו צלמי המלך
 2 יושבים אמר "ה' הוא האלקים" וישליכם מעל כסאם ארצה ויך בהם מכה גדולה בגדול החל
 ובקטן בלה, לזה קטע וריו ולזה כרת ראשו ולזה שבר עיניו ולזה שבר את רגליו,

1. כי: אשר ד1 ד3 כ1 ג/ הלך: נ' שם כ1/ הועד: הועד כ1/ ויקח: ויקח כ1/ וכראותו: וכראותו ד1/ צלמי:
 צלם ד1 ח' כ1 דמות נ/ יושבים: יושב כ1/ 2. ה': יי ד3 י"י נ/ האלקים: האלהים נ' ה' הוא האלהים ד1 נ' ה'
 הוא האלקים ד2 כ1 האלהים נ' יי הוא האלהים ד3 י"י הוא האלהים נ/ ארצה: אל הארץ כ1/ מכה: נ' רכה כ1/
 גדולה: וגדולה כ1/ ובקטן: ובקטן ד3/ 3. קטע וריו: קטע רגליו ד1 ד2 כיתת רגליו כ1 כחת רגליו ד3 קטע רגליו
 ג/ ולזה ברת ראשו: לזה כיתת ידו כ1/ ולזה שבר עיניו: ולזה שבר ראשו כ1/ שבר עיניו: שבר את עיניו ד3/ שבר את
 רגליו: שיבר את רגליו ד1 ד2/

When Abraham saw that the king went to his meeting place¹⁵⁸ he took an axe
 in his hand and as he saw the idols of the king sitting he said, "The L-rd, He is G-d," and
 pushed them off their thrones to the ground, and he smote them with mightily. He began
 with the large ones, and he finished with the small ones. He lopped off this one's arm,
 he cut off this one's head, he broke that one's legs,¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸The term, "בית הועד," may also refer to a "temple." The use of
 this term therefore parallels the frequent use of, "אהל מועד," to
 indicate the Israelites' portable temple in the wilderness. See,
 for instance, Ex. 27:21; 28:43; 29:4, 10, 11, 32, 42, 44; 30:16,
 18, 20, 26, 36.

¹⁵⁹As the "Textual Alternatives Section" indicates various
 readings exist to describe what Abraham did to the idols. Ginzberg
 (Legends of the Jews, vol. 4, pg. 212) maintains that the original
 and best reading parallels M. Baba Kama 8:1, "...blinded his eye,
 cut off his hand, broke his leg..."

וכלם נשברו ויצא אברהם. וישלמו ימי המלחמה ויבא המלך אל ביתו. (וקודם זה כששיבר

2 אותם שם הגרזן ביד גדול הצלמים).

-
1. וכלם: וכולם כ' ז' / נשברו: נשברים ד' ד' 2 ד' 3 כ' 1 ג' / אברהם: אברה' ד' 3 / המלחמה: המשתה ד' 1 ד' 2 ד' 3 כ'
 - ג' ז' / (וקודם זה כששיבר אותם שם הגרזן ביד גדול הצלמים): וקודם זה כששיבר אותם שם הגרזן ביד גדול הצלמים
 - ד' 1 ד' 2 וקודם ששיבר אותם שם הגרזן בידה גדול הצלמים כ' וקודם זה כששיבר אותם שם הגרזן ביד גדול הצלמים
 - ד' 3 וקודם זה כששיבר אותם שם הגרזן ביד גדול הדמות ג' וקודם ששיבר אותם שם הגרזן ביד הגדול הצלמים ז' /
-

and when all of them were broken, Abraham went out.¹⁶⁰ When the days of the feast¹⁶¹ were completed, the king returned home. [Before this, when he was smashing them, he put the axe in the hand of the largest of the idols.]¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰The term "went out" ("יצא") is of the same root as the term the Torah frequently employs to describe the exodus from Egypt. For instance, see Ex. 6:6, 20:2. In Mishnaic Hebrew, the term, "went out" refers to fulfilling one's obligation to G-d. For instance, see B.T. Berachot 8b 13a. Not only was Abraham redeemed by this act of iconoclasm, but he fulfilled his obligation to G-d.

¹⁶¹While the Eisenstein version (Ozar Midrashim, 1:5) reads, "the days of the war," virtually all of the other versions have, "the days of the feast." In addition, contextually, "feast" makes more sense. Hence, the translation, in this case, follows the majority.

¹⁶²Many version of Abraham's destruction of the idols exist. Genesis Rabbah 38:13 depicts that a woman came to Abraham, handed him a plate of flour, and requested he offer it to his father's idols. So Abraham put the plate before the idols, and took a stick and broke them. He then put the stick in the hand of the largest idol. When his father seeing the broken idols demanded to know what happened, Abraham told him that when he put down the plate of flour, they all began fighting over it, and the large one picked up the stick and broke the others. His father replied, "Why do you make sport of me? Have they then any knowledge!" Abraham answered, "Shouldn't your ears hear what your mouth is saying?" Terah became

וכראות המלך את צלמיו שבורים אמר מי היה כאן, ומי הוא אשר מלאו לבו לעשות כן?

2 ויענו כל העם בוכים ויאמרו אדונינו המלך תדע לך שאברהם היה יושב אצלם

1. כאן: בבאן כ' ד' 3 ז / 2. כל: קול ג / העם: נ' יחדו כ' ד' 3 ז / אדונינו: אדונינו כ' ד' 3 ז / שאברהם: שאברה' ד' 3 ז

And when the king saw his idols were smashed, he said, "Who was here? And who is it that has filled his heart to do thusly?"

And all the people answered, crying, and they said, "Our lord the king, you should know that Abraham stayed with them,

so enraged at this that he turned his son over to Nimrod. Sefer HaYashar, Chapter 4, presents a similar version with the exceptions: Abraham of his own initiative set the food before the idols, and Abraham smashed the idols with an axe (as in our midrash, as opposed to the stick used in the Genesis Rabbah version). In "Ma'aseh Avraham" (Ozar Midrashim, 6-7) after G-d called out to Abraham that the idols are false, Abraham immediately set fire to them. He took out the largest idol, however, and placed the torch in its hand. When Terah demanded to know why he had set fire to his gods, Abraham replied that the large idol did it, not he. Terah answered him, "My son, fool, do they have power, or do they possess the breath of life that they would be able to do this? And didn't I make them out of wood?" Abraham told him, "Your ears should hear what your mouth is saying." The Book of Jubilees 12:12-15 depicts Abraham, waking up in the middle of the night and burning the entire "house of idols." At seeing the house and all its contents on fire, Abraham's brother, Haran, attempted to save the idols, but was killed in the process. This legend of Abraham somehow destroying the idols was apparently so well known that "Midrash D'Avraham Avinu" (Ozar Midrashim, 7-8) begins with a confrontation between Abraham and Nimrod concerning the incident, which the author of the piece obviously assumes the reader already knows.

ושמענו שהיה משבר להם, ויצו המלך להביא את אברהם לפניו, ויביאו אותו, ויאמר לו
 2 המלך ושריו למה שברת את אלקינו, אמר אני לא שברתי אותם, לא שבר אותם כ"א הגדול
 שבהם, הלא תראה היות הגרון בידו,

1. משבר: שובר כ1 / להם: אותם כ1 / ויצו: וצוה כ1 / להביא: להבי' ד3 / את: ח' כ1 / ויביאו אותו: נ' אל המלך
 נמרוד ושריו כ1 / 2. ויאמר לו המלך ושריו: אל המלך נמרוד כ1 ויאמר לו המלך נמרוד ושריו ד3 / אלקינו: אלהינו
 ד1 ד3 נ/ אמר: ויאמר כ1 ד3 / אני: ח' כ1 / לא שבר אותם: ח' כ1 / כ"א: כי אם ד1 ד2 ד3 כ1 / 3. שבהם: נ' שבר
 אותם כ1 / הלא: נ' חדע כ1

and we heard that he broke them."¹⁶³

The king commanded that Abraham be brought before him. And they brought him.

The king and his ministers said to him, "Why did you shatter our gods?"¹⁶⁴ He said
 to them, "I didn't break them, no. Rather, the large one of them smashed them. Don't you
 see that the axe is in his hand?"

¹⁶³This echoes Dan. 3:8-12, in which a group of "certain Chaldeans" tell the king that there are "certain Jews," Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, who have not complied with the decree concerning mandatory idol worship. See also Est. 3:8, in which Haman spoke to the king, "There is a certain people...their laws are diverse from those of every people, neither do they keep the king's laws, therefore it does not profit to suffer them."

¹⁶⁴This parallels Dan. 3:13-15, in which Nebuchadnezzar, amidst his rage, had Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego brought before him. He then questioned them as to why they had failed to worship his idol.

ואם לא תאמינו שאל ממנו והוא יגיד, וכשמעו דבריו חרה לו ער מות ויאמר להוליכו לבית

2 הסהר ויצו אל שר בית הסהר לבלתי תת לו פת לאכול ולא מים לשותות.

1. תאמינו: תאמיני ד' 1 ג תאמיין כ' תאמיין בי ד' 3/ שאל: כי תשאל כ' תשאל ד' 3/ יגיד: ג' לך כ' 1 ד' 3/ וכשמעו:

וכשמעו ד' 1 כ' 1 וכשמעו ד' 2/ מות: מאד כ' 1/ ויאמר: ויאמ' ד' 3/ לבית: אל בית כ' 1/ הסהר: הסהר ד' 2 ג 3 סהר כ' 1/

אל: על כ' 1/ 3. הסהר: הסהר כ' 1/ לבלתי: לבלחו ד' 1/

And if you will not believe it, ask him and he will tell."

And as they heard his words they became angry to the point of killing him. And he (the king) said to imprison him (Abraham).¹⁶⁵ He commanded the prison warden to refrain from giving him bread to eat or water to him.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵Varying traditions concerning the imprisonment of Abraham exist. B.T. Baba Batra 91a presents two opinions on this matter: R. Hanan b. Raba stated that Abraham was imprisoned for a total of ten years, three in Kuta, and seven in Kardu. R. Dimi of Nehardea, however, taught that Abraham was imprisoned in Kardu for three years, and seven in Kuta. See also Pirke D'R. Eliezer, Chapter 26, which reports that Abraham was imprisoned for ten years, three in Kuti, and seven in Kudri.

¹⁶⁶This echoes Gn. 37:24, in which Joseph was cast into an empty pit "in which there was no water." See also Neh. 13:1-2, which describes the reading of Dt. 23:5 to the assembled Children of Israel, "On that day they read in the Book of Moses in the hearing of the people; and therein was found written, that an Ammonite and a Moabite should not enter into the assembly of G-d forever; because they did not meet the Children of Israel with bread nor with water...but G-d turned the curse into a blessing."

אמר המגיד שאברהם אע"ה בעודו בבית הסהר נתן עיניו לשמים ויאמר ה' אלקי אתה יודע
 2 הנסתרות ואתה ידעת כי לא הגעתי עד הנה כ"א על עבודתך, והקב"ה שמע את תפלתו
 ושלח לו המלאך גבריאל להושיעו מיד זה הכלב וא"ל שלום עליך אברהם אל תירא ואל
 תחת כי ה' אלקיך עמך.

-
1. אע"ה: אבינו ע"ה כ' ד' 3 ג' / הסהר: הסהר כ' ד' 3 ג' / ה': יי' ד' 3 יי' ג' / אלקי: אלהי ד' 3 ג' / 2. כ"א:
 כי אם ד' 2 כ' / עבודתך: לעבודתך כ' / אח: ח' כ' / 3. זה: ח' כ' / וא"ל: ואמר לו ג' / תחת: תחת כ' / ה': יי'
 ד' 3 יי' ג' / 4. אלקיך: אלהיך ד' 3 ג'
-

The Maggid said that Abraham, or father, of blessed memory, while (still) in prison, turned his eyes to the heavens and said, "L-rd, my G-d, You know the hidden things, and You know that I did not come this far except through worship of You." ¹⁶⁷

And the Holy One, blessed be He, heard his prayer and sent the Angel Gabriel to save him from the hand of this dog. And he said to him, "Peace be unto you, Abraham. Do not be afraid, and do not dread, because the L-rd, your G-d, is with you."

¹⁶⁷This parallels I Kgs. 18:36, in which Elijah, while engaged in his battle against the priests of Baal, came near and prayed, "O L-rd, the G-d of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Israel, if it be known this day that You are G-d in Israel, and that I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word." See also B.T. Megillah 3a, which depicts Jonathan ben Uzziel reminding G-d that all that he did in revealing the Targum of the Prophets was done only "for Your honor, that dissention may not increase in Israel."

בשעה ההיא נראה לו מעיין מים חיים ושתה מהם, והביא לו המלאך כל מיני מאכל לאכול

2 וישב עמו שם כדי ללוותו שנה תמימה.

1. בשעה: בשע' ד2 / נראה: נרא' ד1 / מעיין: מעין ג / חיים: נ' א' ד1 ג / מהם: מהן ד2 ג / המלאך: ח' כ1 / 2.

עמו שם: שם עמו כ1 / לאכול: ח' כ1 /

At that moment a fountain of fresh waters appeared to him,¹⁶⁸ and he (Abraham) drank from it. Then for an entire year the angel stayed with him, and brought him all kinds of food to eat.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸See Je. 2:13, 17:13, which refer to G-d as "the fountain of living waters (מֵי־חַיִּים)." See also Zc. 14:8, in which the prophet described the onset of the Messianic Age as being characterized by "living waters" perpetually streaming forth from Jerusalem. (This in turn echoes Is. 2:3, which envisions the end of days, "...for out of Zion shall go forth the Torah, and the word of the L-rd from Jerusalem.") According to the Ramban's commentary to Gn. 26:19, "living waters" are a metaphor for G-d "who is their source," and even offers a hint of the Temple erected to worship G-d. "Living waters play an important role in the Torah's processes of purification. For instance see, Lv. 14:5, 50, 51, 52, 15:13.

¹⁶⁹According to Ginzberg (Legends of the Jews, vol. 5, 212) the provision of food by the angels parallels many Christian legends which "tell of angels frequently bringing food and drink to needy saints." For instance, see James 8:1.

ויהי אחרי השנה ההיא באו שרי המלך ויועציו לאכול ולשתות עם המלך, ויאמרו למלך
 2 לבנות לו גדר גדול ולהכריז בכל עירו שכל מי שהוא חפץ בעבודת המלך שיביא אל הבית
 הזה עצים הרבה עד שימלא כל המקום עצים מפה לפה, ואח"כ יבעירו העצים באש עד
 4 שתעלה השלהבת לשמים,

1. ולשתות עם המלך: עם המלך ולשתות ד' כ' ב' / לו: ח' כ' ב' / ויאמרו: יאמר ב' / 2. עירו: מדינתו ד' ג'
 מדינות המלך כ' מלכותו ב' / חפץ: נ' לעבוד ד' כ' ב' / 3. המקום: מקום כ' ב' / מפה: פה ד' ד' כ' ב' ג'
 לפה: פה ב' / ואח"כ: ואחר כך ד' ד' כ' ב' /

At the end of this year, the king's ministers and counselors came to eat and drink with
 he king,¹⁷⁰ and they said to the king to build for himself a great fence and to announce
 in all his city that everyone who delights in the service of he king should bring to his
 much wood until the entire place is filled with wood. And afterwards, the wood should
 be ignited with fire until the flame rises to the heavens.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰This proves reminiscent of the hard-hearted sin of Joseph's brothers, who sat to eat bread while thier brother lay at the bottom o the pit without food or water. See Gn. 37:25.

¹⁷¹This calls to mind Gn. 11:4, in which the builders of the Tower of Babel urge, "Come let us build us a city, and a tower, with its top in heaven..." According to Pirke d'R. Eliezer, Chapter 24, it was actually Nimrod who made this statement to urge the people of his kingdom to build the tower because, as he put it, "for the power of the Holy One, Blessed Be He, is only in the water." B.T. Sanhedrin 109a presents the opinion of R. Shila that the tower's builders wanted to reach the heavens to destroy the heavens with axes; the opinion of R. Jeremiah b. Eleazar that one faction of the builders wanted to dwell in the heavens, another sought to go to heaven and serve idols, while a third faction intended to wage war on G-d! The sugia concludes with the statement of R. Nathan that the builders of the Tower of Babel were bent only on idolatry.

ותשלך בתוכה לאברהם, ובוזה יאמינו בך לעולם ולא תפסיד אמונתך. וישמח המלך על
 2 העצה הזאת היעוצה שמחה גדולה מאד, ויצו לכל העם לאמר כל איש ואשה נער וזקן
 אשר בכל מדינות המלך יביאו עצים אל הבית ההיא, כי נתן להם זמן עד ארבעים יום,

-
1. לאברהם: לאברה' ד1 אברהם ב1 ד3 ב אברהם אע"ה ז/ לעולם: לעול' ד3/ ולא: ואל ז/ אמונתך: אמונתך
 - ז/ 2. היעוצה: שישח ב1/ מאד: הזה ב1 ח' ז/ 3. מדינות: מדינ' ד1 ד2 מדינ' ד3 מדינת ז/ המלך: נ' גמרוד
 ד3 ב גמרוד ז/ אל הבית: לבית ב1 ד3 ב ז/ ההיא: הזה נ' הגדול אשר בנה עד מלאת אותו ויעשו כן כל העם וימהרו
 להביא את העצים אל הבית ההוא ד1 ב ד3 ג ז ההוא ד2 הגדול הזה אשר בנה נ' עד מלאת אותה ויעשו כן כל
 העם וימהרו להביא עצים חבית הזה כי נתן... ב1/ להם: ח' ב1/ עד: ח' ב1 ד3 ב ג/ ארבעים: מ' ד1 ד3 ב1 ב/
-

"Then you should cast Abraham into its midst. And by this they will believe in
 you forever, and faith in you will not be undermined."

The king greatly rejoiced concerning this advice given [him]. He commanded the
 entire people, saying, "Every man or woman, child or elder who, in all the districts of the
 king, shall bring wood to this house,"¹⁷² and gave them up to forty days [to do it].¹⁷³

¹⁷²The "wood," or literally, "trees" (עצים) in the midrash, echos the "wood" (עצים) of Gn. 22:6, 7, 9, which is to be burned in the sacrifice of Isaac. See also I Kgs. 18:23, 33, 34, in which wood to be ignited and burned played a role in the sacrifice that served as the focal point of the contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal. This also echoes Est. 5:14, in which Haman, acting according to the advice of his wife and "all his friends," causes a gallows to be made (presumably, out of wood) in order to hang Mordecai in retribution for the offense of not bowing down to him.

¹⁷³This parallels the forty days Moses spent on Mt. Sinai receiving the Torah. See Ex. 4:18, 34:28, Dt. 9:9, 11, 18. Here, however, instead of the forty days producing a "tree of life," (the Torah), the forty days are used to collect trees of death. This forty days may also be thought to echo the forty days of the flood waters, see Gn. 7:4, 12; as well as forty years of Israel's

ובכל זאת אברהם עומד בבית הסהר, ויצו המלך לעשות כבשן גדול בתוך הבית אשר בנה
 2 וידליקו את העצים בתוכו והנה עלה השלהבת עד לשמים עד שכל העם פחדו מרוב האש,

-
1. הסהר: הסוהר ד2 ד3 ב1 ב ג/ בנה: בנהו ב/ 2. את: ח' ז/ העצים: העצים העצים ב1 העצי' ד3/ עלה:
 נ' אשר ב אשר ד3 ז/ השלהבת עד: נ' שהגיעה שהגיעה ב1 ושלהבת עד ב/ לשמים: לשמ' ד2 השמים ב/ העם:
 העולם ב1/ האש: נ' ובין כך ובין כך ב1 ד3 נ' כיון כך ובין כך ב נ' ובין כך בין כך ז/
-

Through all this, Abraham remained in the prison. The king ordered a great furnace be made in the midst of the house that he had built.¹⁷⁴ They ignited the wood inside it and behold the flame rose to the heavens, until all the people were afraid from the size of the fire.

wandering in the wilderness wandering in the wilderness, see Nu. 14:33-34. Both the flood and the wandering being the result of and metaphors for sin, indicate the sinful, imperfect nature of humankind at this point, as does Nimrod's gathering of the wood.

¹⁷⁴Gn. 15:17 describes a smoking furnace as part of the vision accompanying the Covenant Between the Pieces that G-d makes with Abraham. See also Ex. 19:18, which describes the smoke accompanying the Covenant at Sinai as rising "like a smoking furnace." A furnace also serves as a metaphor for the great power of G-d. In Gn. 19:28, G-d makes Sodom and Gomorrah smoke "like the smoke of a furnace." Is. 32:9 depicts "G-d's fire in Zion and His furnace in Jerusalem," as consuming His enemies and radiating light and warmth to His beloved. In Ex. 9:10, G-d creates the plague of boils upon the Egyptians from the soot of a furnace.

ושלח אל שר בית הסהר לאמר לו תביא לי את אויבי אברהם והשליכהו לתוך זה הכבשן

2 של אש, ויבא שר בית הסהר לפני המלך להשתחוות לפניו

1. ושלח: שלח כ' ז' ושל' ג' אל שר: לשר ב' אל כ' ז' / הסהר: הסהר ד' 2 כ' 1 ב' / לאמר: ואמר ד' 1 ד' 3 וא"ל

כ' ואמר לו ב' ז' / ל: ח' כ' / אויבי אברהם: אברהם אויבי כ' / והשליכהו: ואשליכהו כ' / ואשליכו ז' / לתוך: בתוך

כ' ב' ז' / 2. ויבא: ויבוא ז' / בית: בית ב' / הסהר: הסהר כ' 1 ד' 3 ב' ג' ז' / להשתחוות: להשתחוות כ' /

And he sent a message to the prison warden, saying to him, "Bring me my enemy, Abraham, and throw him into the fiery furnace."¹⁷⁵

The prison warden came before the king, bowing down before him.

¹⁷⁵That Abraham was thrown into a fiery furnace by Nimrod is a well documented legend of apparent ancient origin. Targum Yonatan to

Gn. 11:28, and 15:7 relates a version of the legend, basing it upon the translation of "Ur of the Chaldees" ("אור כשדים") as "fire of the Chaldeans." See also Genesis Rabbah 34:9, 38:13, 39:3, 39:8, 42:3, 42:4, 43:5, 44:4; Exodus Rabbah 23:4; Pirke d'R. Eliezer, Chapters 26 and 52; Sefer HaYashar, Chapter 4; B.T. Eruvin 57a; B.T. Pesachim 118a; Tz'enh Ur'enh to Gn. 12:15 in this regard. The legend also echoes the Book of Daniel, Chapter 3, which describes how Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylonia, set up a golden idol and decreed that anyone refusing to bow down to the idol would be thrown into a fiery furnace. Three Jews, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, refused to bow down, and were thrown into a fiery furnace. G-d, however (B.T. Pesachim 118a,b identifies the role of the angel Gabriel in this) saved them from the flames and they emerged unscathed.

ויאמר לו איך תשאל ממני אדם שזה לו עבשיו שנה תמימה שעמד בבית הסהר ולא הביא

2 לו שום אדם לא לחם ולא מים ולא שום מאכל בעולם, אמר לו עב"ז תלך בבית הסהר

ותצעק אליו אם ישיבך תביאנו ואשליכנו באש, ואם מת יותר טוב ותקברו אותו ולא יזכר

4 שמו עוד.

1. ויאמר לו: וא"ל ב/ איך: את ב/ שזה: הזה ב/ שזה ב/ אדם ב/ לו עבשיו: יש לו ב/ לא ב/ ז/ 2. תמימה:

תמימ' ד/ הסהר: הסוהר ד/ 2 ב/ 3 ב/ ג/ ז/ 2. לחם: ג' לאכול ב/ מים: ג' לשחות ב/ בעולם: לעולם ב/ 1/

אמר לו: א"ל ב/ עב"ז: עם כל זה ב/ 1 ב/ 3 ז/ בבית: בב' ד/ 3/ הסהר: הסוהר ד/ 2 ב/ 3 ב/ ג/ ז/ 3. תביאנו: ג'

אלי ב/ 1 ב/ ז/ ואשליכנו: ואשליכנו ב/ 1 ז/ ואשלוכנו ב/

He said to him, "How can you request of me this man who has now remained in the prison for an entire year without any person bringing him any bread or water, or any food whatsoever?!"

He said to him, "Nevertheless, go to the prison and call out to him. If he answers you, bring him, and I will hurl him into the fire. And if he is dead, even better! You should bury him, and his name will be remembered no more."

הלך שר בית הסהר לפתח הבור ויקרא בקול גדול וחזק אברהם! אתה חי או מת? ויען

2 אותו אנכי חי. א"ל מי נתן לך אכילה ושתייה עד הנה.

1. הסהר: הסוהר ד' 3 כ' 1 ב' ג' / אותו: ח' 1 כ' / אנכי: אני ג' / 2. א"ל מי: אמר לו מי ד' 1 ד' 2 ד' 3 ג' / ושתייה:

ושתייה כ' / הנה: עכשיו ב' /

The prison warden went to the entrance of the dungeon¹⁷⁶ and called in a powerful voice, "Abraham! Are you alive or dead?"¹⁷⁷

He answered him, "I am alive."¹⁷⁸

He said to him, "Who has given you food and drink all this time?"

¹⁷⁶This echoes Gn. 37:24, and 41:14, in which the term "ג'ל" is first used to describe the pit into which Joseph is thrown, and then the dungeon into which he is placed in Egypt. See also Je. 38:6, in which the prophet, like Abraham, is sent to a pit without water as punishment for his speaking the word of G-d.

¹⁷⁷In Je. 41:9, the term, "ג'ל," is identified as a place to put the dead bodies of one's enemies.

¹⁷⁸See Zc. 9:11, "...because of the blood of your covenant I (G-d) send forth your prisoners out of the dungeon wherein is no water."

א"ל האכילני והשקני מי שהוא יכול על כל, הוא אלקי האלקים ואדוני האדונים, עושה
 2 נפלאות לברו, וגם הוא אלקי נמרד ואלקי תרח, אלקי כל העולם, הוא זן ומפרנס לכל,
 רואה ואינו נראה, הוא בשמים ממועל ונמצא בכל מקום ומשגיח בכל הפרטים.

1. א"ל: אמר לו ד' ד' 2 ד' 3 ב' ג' כל: ג' אלקים כ'1/ הוא אלקי האלקים: ח' כ' הוא אלהי האלהים ב' ג' הוא
 אלהי האלהי ד'3/ ואדוני: והוא אדוני כ'1/ נפלאות: נפלא ד'3/ 2. וגם הוא: וגם כ'1/ אלקי נמרד: אלקי נמרוד
 ד'1 ד'2 כ'1 אלהי וד' ב' אלהי נמרוד ד'3 ג' ואלקי תרח: אלהי תרח ב' ואלהי תח ד'3 ואלהי תח ג' אלקי כל העולם:
 ואלקי כל העולם כ'1 ואלהי כל העולם ב' ד'3 אלהי כל העולם ג' הוא זן: והוא זן ד'1 ד'3 כ'1/ ומפרנס: ומרנח ופרס
 ב'3/ הוא בשמים: והוא בשמים כ'1/ ונמצא: ג' בכל העולם כ'1/ בכל מקום: ובכל מקום כ'1 בכל ב' ומשגיח:
 משגיח ג' טובו כ'1/

He said to him, "The One who is 'capable of everything' fed me and gave me
 drink. He is the G-d of G-ds, the L-rd of L-rds, who alone does wonders.¹⁷⁹ And He
 is the G-d of Nimrod, and the G-d of Terach, and the G-d of the entire world. He feeds
 and sustains all.¹⁸⁰ He sees, but is not seen. He is in the heavens above, but is found
 everywhere,¹⁸¹ and watches over every detail."¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹See Ex. 15:11, "Who is like You, O L-rd among the mighty (or
 "gods that are worshipped")? Who is like You, majestic in
 holiness, awesome in praises, doing wonders?" This verse from the
 Song of the Sea is repeated daily as part of the morning and evening
 services, praising G-d's power to save. See Daily Prayer Book, 67,
 81, 195.

¹⁸⁰This phrase is also found in the "Grace After Meals." See
Daily Prayer Book, 759.

¹⁸¹This echoes I Kgs. 8:27, in which King Solomon declares after
 finishing the building of the Temple, "But will G-d in very truth
 dwell on the earth? behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot
 contain You; how much less this house that I have builded!"

ויהי כשמוע שר בית הסהר את דבריו ויאמן גם הוא באלקי אברהם, ויאמר אלקיך אברהם
 2 הוא האלקים ואני אעיד על זה וגם אתה עבדו ונביאו באמת ונמרד הוא משקר. ויהי כאמרו
 כך ויגידו למלך לאמר הנה שר בית הסהר מעיד על אלקי אברהם שהוא אמת ואברהם
 4 עבדו אמת, ותמה המלך מאד וישלח אחריו ויאמר לו מה לך שר בית הסהר איך כפרת בי
 ואמרת שאלקי אברהם אמת

1. הסהר: הסוהר ד1 ד2 ד3 כ1 ב ג/ הוא: נ' אלקי כ1/ באלקי: באלהי ד3 ב ג/ אלקיך: אלהיך ד3 ב ג/ 2.
 האלקים: האלהים ג/ אעיד: ג' לך כ1/ עבדו: יעבדו ב/ ונמרד: ונמרוד ד1 ד2 כ1 ב ג/ משקר: שקר כ1/ כאמרו:
 כאמרו ד1 ד2 כ1 ב ג/ 3. הסהר: הסוהר ד1 כ1 ב ג/ הסוה' ד3/ אלקי אברהם: אלהי אברהם ד3 ב ג/ שהוא
 אמת: שהוא אמ' ד3/ ואברהם: ואברה' ד3/ עבדו: ח' כ1 ב/ ותמה: ויתמה כ1 ב ג/ ותמ' ד3/ 4. מאד: ח' כ1/
 ויאמר לו: ויאמ' לו ד2 וא"ל כ1/ הסהר: הסוהר ד1 ד2 ד3 כ1 ב/ שאלקי: אלהי כ1 ד3 שאלהי ג/

It happened, as the prison warden heard his words, he also believed in the G-d of Abraham. He said, "Your G-d, Abraham, He is G-d. And I will attest to this. And also that you are in truth his servant and his prophet. But Nimrod deceives."

And when he spoke thusly, they told the king, saying, "Behold, the prison warden is attesting to the G-d of Abraham, that He is true, and Abraham is His true servant."

And the king was surprised and sent for him, and said to him, "What is with you, prison warden? How could you deny me and say that the G-d of Abraham is true,

¹⁸²See Ps. 33:14, "From the place of His habitation He watches intently upon all the inhabitants of the earth." See also the first blessing of the "Amidah" prayer, in which, just as in this and the previous phrase of our midrash, G-d's transcendence is first declared and then His immanence and concern for humanity (Daily Prayer Book, 81).

וגם אברהם עבדו אמת. אמר לו שכן הוא האמת ואתה המלך נמרד כופר באמת, וכשמוע
 2 המלך את דברי השר נתעצב אל לבו מאד וימלא חמה ויצו לפגוע בו להמיתו, ויצעק שר
 בית הסהר בפגוע בו ויאמר ה' הוא האלקים הוא אלקי כל העולם ואלקי נמרד הכופר.

-
1. אברהם עבדו: אברהם כ1 עבדו אברהם ג/ אמר לו: וא"ל כ1/ האמת: באמת כ1/ נמרד: נמרוד ד1 ד2 ד3
 כ1 ב ג/ וכשמוע: וכראו ד1 וכראות ד2 כ1 ב ז וכראות ד3 ג/ את: ה' כ1 ב/ השר: שר בית הסהר ד1 ד2 ד3 כ1
 ב ז/ 2. בו להמיתו: הזה תהמית ב האיש הזה להמיתו ד3 ג/ וימלא: ונתמלא כ1 ז/ חמה: חימה כ1 ז/ ויצו: נ'
 עליו ז/ לפגוע בו: לפגוע אותו באש הזה כ1 כאיש הזה ז/ הסהר: הסוהר ד1 ד2 כ1 נ ז/ בפגוע: בפוגעים כ1/ בו:
 באיש הזה ד1/ 3. ה' הוא האלקים: נ' ה' הוא האלקים כ1 ד3 ה' הוא האלהים ב יי" הוא האלהים ד3 יי" הוא
 האלהים ג/ הוא אלקי כל העולם: ה' כ1 הוא אלהי כל העולם ד3 ג/ ואלקי נמרד: ואלקי נמרוד ד1 ד2 כ1 ואלהי
 נמרוד ד3 ב ג/ הכופר: כופר כ1/
-

and that also Abraham is His true servant?"

He said to him, "Because He is The Truth,¹⁸³ and you are truly a blasphemer."

And when the king heard the words of the warden, he became very grieved and full of wrath. He commanded that they strike him dead.

The prison warden cried out when they struck him, and said, "The L-rd, He is G-d, He is the G-d of all the world, and the G-d of Nimrod, the blasphemer."¹⁸⁴

¹⁸³Or, "the true G-d." See Ps. 31:6, "Into Your hand I commit my spirit; You have redeemed me, O L-rd, G-d of truth."

¹⁸⁴This parallels B.T. Berachot 61b, which relates that as the Romans tore Rabbi Akiba's flesh with hot combs, he sanctified the Name of G-d by reciting the "Shema." According to Seder Eliyahu Rabbah, Chapter 6, the reason Abraham merited "a life with no distress, with no inclination to evil," was because he was willing to "give up his life for the sake of Heaven," in the fiery furnace. To give up one's life in such a circumstance is considered a "sanctification of the Divine Name." See B.T. Sanhedrin 74a,b.

אמר המגיד שהסייף לא היה חותך בצוארו ויתר שהיה מכה בסייף היה משבר הסייף.

2 תמה המלך ויצו להביא את אברהם ולהשליכו בתוך כבשן האש. הלך אחד מן השרים

והביאו לפניו ואמר לו המלך השליכוהו לתוך האש הגדולה ויקם להשליכו ותצא אש מן

4 הכבשן ותשרוף אותו, ויקם שר אחר מלפני נמרד להשליך אותו באש וגם הוא נשרף.

-
1. שהסייף: שהסייף ד3 / בצוארו: צוארו כ1 / ויתר: וכל מה כ1 / בסייף: בסייף ד3 / משבר: שובר כ1 / הסייף: הסייף ד3 /
 2. ויצו: נ' המלך ד2 / ולהשליכו: נ' באש ז / כבשן האש: הכבשן ז / אחד: א' ד1 ח' ז / מן השרים: מהשרים כ1
 - נ' אחד ז / ואמר לו: וא"ל כ1 / השליכוהו: השליכוהו כ1 / תשליכו ד3 / לתוך: בתוך כ1 / הגדולה: הגדול ב' הגדול הזאת ד3 ז / ויקם: ויקם ד1 / 3. ויקם: ויקם ד1 / אחר: א' ד1 ג / נמרד: נמרוד ד1 ד2 ד3 ב ג ז / נמרוד המלך כ1 / להשליך אותו: להשליכו כ1 ב ז / וגם הוא: וג"כ ב ז / וגם כן ד3 / גם כן ג / נשרף: שורפת אותו ד1 /
-

The Maggid said that the sword could not cut his neck. And the more that he struck him with the sword, the more he broke the sword.

The king was astonished and commanded that they bring Abraham in order to cast him into the fiery furnace. One of the ministers went and brought him (Abraham) before him y(the king), and the king said to him, "Throw him into the midst of the great fire."

When he (the minister) began to throw him (Abraham), fire from the furnace came forth and burned him (the minister). So another of Nimrod's ministers took up the task of casting him (Abraham) into the fire, but he also was burned.

וכל מי שהיה לוקח אותו להשליכו באש היה נשרף עד שמתו רבים אין חקר ואין מספר.

2 ויבוא השמן בדמות איש וישתחוו למלך ויאמר לו המלך מה לך שאל מה שתרצה,

1. שהיה: שיהיה ב/ היה נשרף: האש היתה שורפת אותו כ/ ד3 היה שורפת אותו ג/ אין: לאין כ/ ואין: ולאין
 כ/ ויבוא: ויבא ד1 ד2 כ/ השמן: שמן כ/ וישתחוו: וישתחו ד1 ד2 כ/ ג/ למלך: לפני המלך ד1 ד3 כ/ ב/ ויאמר
 לו: וא"ל כ/ שאל: תשאל ד1 כ1 כ3/ מה שתרצה: ומה תרצה ד1 כ1 ג מה תרצה ד3 ב/ אמר לו: וא"ל כ1 אמר
 כ/

And everyone after him who tried to cast him (Abraham, into the fire) was burned by the fire. (This went on) until there were countless dead.¹⁸⁵ Then Satan appeared in the image of a man and prostrated himself before the king. The king said to him, "What's with you? Ask what you would like."

¹⁸⁵This parallels Dan. 3:22, which indicates that the men who cast Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego into the fiery furnace were themselves killed by the flames, while the three Jews emerged unharmed. See also Lv. 10:1-2, which describes how Aaron's son's, Nadav and Abihu, offered "strange fire" which G-d did not command upon their incense pans, and "a fire came forth from before the L-rd and devoured them, and they died..." Samson Raphael Hirsch (cited by Nehama Leibowitz, Studies in Vayikra, Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, 1980, 68.) understands their offense of "strange fire" as an idolatrous approach to religion.

אמר לו איעצך עצה להשליך לאברהם בתוך כבשן האש, הבה לי עצים הרבה ומסמרות
 2 וחבלים ואני אעשה לך טראבוקו (מין מכונה) שמתוך תנועתו תשליכהו לתוך כבשן האש
 מרחוק ולא ישרוף האש לאיש ההוא. וישמח המלך מאד על העצה הזו, ויצו לעשות כן

-
1. אצה: עיצה ב1 אעצה ב/ לאברהם: את אברהם ב1 אברהם ב/ בתוך: לתוך ב1 ב/ האש: נ' תעשה תחבולה ד1
 ב1 ג' נ' תשה תחבול ב' תעשה תחבול' ד3/ הבה: והבה ד1 ד3 ותביא ב1 הבא ב/ ל: ח' ב1/ ואני: שאני ב1/
 2. אעשה: עושה ב1/ טראבוקו: טראבו"קו ד1 ג' טראבוק"ו ד2 תראבוקות רלשופה ב1 טר אבוקו ב/ (מן מכונה):
 ח' ד1 ד2 ב1 ב/ שמתוך: מתוך ג' בן ב/ לתוך: בתוך ד3 ג/ 3. מרחוק: ח' ב/ ישרוף: ישרף ד1 ד3 ב' ג/ האש:
 כאש ב1/ וישמח: וישמחה ב/ על העצה הזו: ח' ב1 על העצה השאת ב' על העצה הזאת ד3/ ויצו: נ' המלך
 ב1/ לעשות: לעשו' ד2/
-

He said to him, "I will give you counsel (concerning how) to throw Abraham into the fiery furnace. Bring me many trees, nails, and ropes, and I will make a catapult¹⁸⁶ for you; [a type of machine] that because of its movement will throw him to the midst of the furnace of fire from afar, so that the man (who throws him in) will not be burned."

The king was very happy about this counsel, and he commanded that it indeed be done.

¹⁸⁶The word used to indicate a "catapult," "טראבוקו," is apparently some sort of loan word. This accounts for the use of a quotation mark (") in the rendering of this term on the parts of the Bet HaMidrash and Shevet Musar editions, and the disparate spelling of the term in MSS 4879. See "textual alternatives" above. According to Jellinek (Bet HaMidrash, pg. 16) it is derived from Arabic. He offers no source to corroborate this.

ויעשו הטרבוקו ואחר אשר השלימוהו לעשות נסו אותו בפני המלך שלשה פעמים עד

2 שמרחוק השליכו בו אבנים לתוך האש, והוא הנקרא טראבוקו.

1. ויעשו: ויעש ג/ הטרבוקו: הטרבו"קו ד1 ג הטרבוק"ו ד2 טראבוקות כ1 הטר אבוקו ב/ ואחר: ואחרי ד3/ אשר: ח' כ1/ השלימוהו: השלימו ד1 ד3 כ1 ב/ לעשות: עלשותו ד3/ נסו: ניסו כ1 ונסו ב/ שלושה פעמים: ג' פעמים כ1 ג"פ ב/ 2. שמרחוק: שממרחק ד3/ בו: כן ב/ לתוך: ג' כבשן כ1/ טראבוקו: טראבוק"ו ד1 ד2 ג טראבוקות כ1/

They made the catapult and after they had completed making it, they tested¹⁸⁷ it in the king's presence three times,¹⁸⁸ until they were able to throw stones into the fire from afar (and it is called a Taraboku).¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁷This echoes Gn. 22:1, which, before relating the incident of the Binding of Isaac, states that "G-d tested Abraham." Indeed, an ancient and well attested tradition exists which concerns the testing of Abraham by G-d. Although there is disagreement as to exactly what the tests were, there seems to be general agreement that their number was ten. For instance, see M. *Avot* 5:3; *Avot d'R. Natan*, Chapter 33; *Book of Jubilees*, Chapter 12; *Genesis Rabbah* 56:11. Many midrashic sources consider the events surrounding Abraham's birth (how Nimrod sought to kill him) and the incident with the fiery furnace to be among the ten trials. Examples may be found in *Pirke d'R. Eliezer*, Chapter 26; *Yalkut Shimoni to Genesis*, *Remez* 67. *Avot d.R. Natan*, chapter 33, and *Exodus Rabbah* 15:27 depict G-d bringing the ten plagues upon Egypt corresponding to the ten tests of Abraham.

¹⁸⁸This reflects Dan. 3:19, in which Nebuchadnezzar stoked up the furnace's fire seven times in preparation for the killing of the Jews. See also I Kgs. 18:34, in which Elijah, in preparation for the sacrifice that was the focal point of his battle against the priests of Baal, ordered jars of water poured over the bullock and the wood upon which it was placed, three times.

¹⁸⁹This phrase is placed in parentheses because, according to R. Dr. Norman Cohen, it is probably not original to the text, and "breaks up the flow."

ויקחו את אברהם וקשרו זרועותיו ידיו ורגליו בקשר חזק וישמו אותו בתוך הטרבוקו
 2 להשליכו, וכראות אברהם אע"ה איך קשרו אותו נשא עיניו לשמים ואמר ה' אלקי אתה
 רואה את אשר עושה בי הרשע הזה, גם מלאכי מעלה אמרו לפני הקב"ה רבש"ע מלא כל
 4 הארץ כבודך, הלא ראית מה עשה נמרוד הכופר בעבדך ונביאך אברהם,

1. אברהם: אברה' ד1 ד3 / וקשרו: וקשרו כ1 ד3 ז ויקשר ב / זרועותיו: זרועיו ד1 ד3 כ1 / בתוך הטרבוקו...איך
 קשרו אותו: ח' ב / הטרבוקו: הטרבוקו"ק ד1 ג הטרבוקו"ק ד2 טראבוקות כ1 / 2. וכראות: וכראות ד2 / וכראות
 אברהם אע"ה איך קרו אותו נשא עיניו: ח' כ1 / אע"ה: אבינו עליו השלום ד3 ג / ואמר: ויאמר כ1 / ה': יי' ד3 יי' ג /
 אלקי: ג' השמים אתה רואה ואינו נראה כ1 אלחי ד3 ב ג ז / אתה רואה: רואה אתה כ1 / אשר: ג' הוא ד1 ד3 ג
 ז מה כ1 / עושה: עשו כ1 / מלאכי: ג' מלאכי ז / 3. בי: לי כ1 / הרע הזה: זה הרשע כ1 / רבש"ע: רבנו של
 עולם ד2 רבנו של עול' ד3 / כבודך: כבודך כ1 / 4. נמרוד: המלך נמרוד ד1 ד3 כ1 ב ג ז / הכופר: ח' ד1 כ1
 ז / בעבדך: ח' כ1 / ונביאך: לנביאך כ1 /

They took Abraham and tied his arms, hands, and legs with a strong knot, and placed him
 in the Taraboku to hurl him [into the fire].¹⁹⁰ But, when Abraham, our father, of blessed
 memory, saw how they tied him, he raised his eyes to heaven and said, "L-rd, my G-d,
 You see what this evil one is doing to me."

Also the angels on high said before the Holy One, blessed be He, "Master of the
 Universe, have you not seen what Nimrod, the blasphemer, has done to your servant and
 your prophet, Abraham?"

¹⁹⁰This echoes Gn. 22:9, in which Abraham bound his son and laid him upon the alter and wood to be sacrificed. This also parallels Dan. 3:21, which describes the tying of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego before their being thrown into the fiery furnace.

אמר להם הקב"ה איך לא אדע ואנכי יודע כל הנסתרות אבל אראה אני לכם נקמה
 2 בנמרד הכופר ואציל את אברהם עבדי. אמר המגיד שהשמן בא אצל אברהם בדמות אדם
 ואמר לו אברהם אם תרצה להנצל מאש נמרד השתחוה אליו והאמין בו.

1. אמר: א' ב/ להם: ח' ד' 1 ב' ג/ אדע: אידע ג/ נקמה: ג' שאעשה כ' / בנמרד: בנמרוד ד' 2 ב' 1 ב' ג/ 2.
 ואציל: והציל ג/ את אברהם: לאברהם כ' / עבדי: ח' כ' / אמר המגיד: א' המגיד כ' / בדמות אדם: ח' כ' כראות
 אדם כ' / 3. ואמר לו: וא"ל ד' 1 ב' / אם: אחה כ' / להנצין: להציל ד' 2 ב' 3 ב' ג/ נמרד: נמרוד ד' 2 ב' 3 ב' 1
 כ' ג' ז/ השתחוה: השתחוה ד' / והאמין: והאמן ד' 2

The Holy One, blessed be He, said to them, "How is it possible not to know when I know all the hidden things? But I will show you revenge upon Nimrod, the blasphemer, and I will save Abraham, My servant.

The Maggid said that Satan appeared to Abraham in the likeness of a man and said to him, "Abraham, if you want to be saved from Nimrod's fire, prostrate yourself before him and believe in him."¹⁹¹

¹⁹¹Satan's temptation of Abraham to abandon his highest principles in order to save himself parallels a story told in Midrash Aseret HaDibrot, Dibur 2; B.T. Gitten 57b; and Lamentations Rabbah 1:50. The story concerns a woman and her seven sons (in some versions the woman's name is Mieiam bat Tanhum, in others, Hannah, and in others, she is identified only as a woman), who were brought, one by one, before a king and told to bow down to an image. When the first six sons refused, they were murdered. Finally the last and youngest child was brought before the king. The king politely asked him to bow down to the image. The boy refused. The king asked him why. The boy quoted Dt. 4:39: "The Lord, He is G-d in the heavens above and upon the earth below, there is none else." The king tempted him, saying that his brothers had experienced happiness in their lives, but he, at his age had not yet. Therefore, if he would bow down the king promised to bestow favors upon him. But the young boy still refused. The king again

ויהי כשמוע אברהם את דברי השמן ויאמר לו יגער ה' בך השמן, פחות נבזה ארור כופר!
 2 ויצא מלפניו, ותבא אמו של אברהם לנשק אותו קודם שישליכו אותו לכבשן האש, ותאמר
 לו בני השתחוה לנמרד ותכנס תחת אמונתו ותנצל מכבשן האש.

1. ויאמר לו: וא"ל וא"ל כ1 / ה': יי' ד3 יי' ג / 2. ותבא: ותבוא ז / אמו: אם כ1 ז / של: ח' כ1 ז / לנשק אותו:
 לנשק לבנה ד1 כ1 ז / לנשוק אח בנה כ1 / שישליכו אותו: שישליכוהו כ1 / לכבשן: תוך כבשן כ1 / לתוך כבשן האש
 ב תוך כבשן אש ז / לו: נ' אמו כ2 / השתחוה: השתחוה ד1 / 3. לנמרד: לנמרוד ד1 ד2 ד3 כ1 ב ג ז / ותכנס:
 ותכפה כ1 / מכבשן האש: מן כבשן אש כ1

And as Abraham heard the words of Satan, he said to him, "May the L-rd rebuke you, Satan, inferior, contemptible, and accursed blasphemer!"¹⁹²

He (Satan) left him (Abraham) and Abraham's mother came to kiss him before they threw him into the fiery furnace. She said to him, "My son, bow down to Nimrod and convert to his faith, and you will be saved from the fiery furnace."

tempted him, offering to merely drop his ring and have the boy pick it up to lend the appearance of bowing down. But the boy, true to his G-d, like Abraham, refused. The boy was then martyred.

¹⁹²This echoes Zc. 3:2, in which G-d rebukes Satan, and describes the high priest in the prophets vision as "a brand plucked from the fire." That is, something precious snatched from destruction.

אמר לה אברהם אמי תלכי מעלי ורחפה אותה מעליו, ויאמר לה אמי אש נמרד תכבה
 2 אותו המים אבל אש אלקנו לעד לעולם אינו מכובה ומים לא יוכלו לבבותו. וכששמעה אמו
 דבריו דברים מצודקים אמרה לו האלקים אשר אתה עובד הוא יצילך מאש נמרד.

-
1. אמר לה: וא"ל ב1/ אברהם: ח' ב ז/ אמי: נ' אמי ד1 ב1 ג ז/ ורחפה: ורחפה ד1 ד2 ג ורחף ד3 ב1 ב ז/ 4.
 ויאמר לה: וא"ל ב1/ נמרד: נמרד ד1 ד2 ד3 ב1 ג ז/ 2. אותו: אותה ב1 ז/ המים: מים ז/ אלקנו: אלקי ד1
 אלהי ד3 ג ז/ אלקים ד2 ב1/ אינו: אינה ב1 לא נ/ מכובה: תכבה ב1/ וכששמעה: וששמה ב1 וכשמעה ז/ אמו: ח'
 ד1 ד3 ב1 ז/ 3. דברים מצודקים: דברי צדיקים ד1 ד3 ז/ דברי צדיק ב1/ אמרה לו: א"ל ב1/ לו: נ' ח' הוא ב1/
 האלקים: האלהים ד3 ג ז/ עובד: נ' אותו ב1/ נמרד: נמרד ד1 ד2 ד3 ב1 ג ז/
-

Abraham said to her, "My mother, leave me," and he pushed her from him. And
 he said to her, "My mother, water can extinguish Nimrod's fire; but the fire of our G-d
 will never be extinguished, till the ends of time,¹⁹³ and (surely) water is not able to
 extinguish it."

And when his mother heard his words which were true, she said to him, "May
 the G-d Whom you serve, save you from the fire of Nimrod."

¹⁹³See Dt. 33:2, which describes the Torah as fire: "...at His right hand was a fiery law unto them." Significantly, Pirke d'R. Eliezer, Chapter 26 describes G-d as saving Abraham from the fire of Nimrod with His right hand.

ויהי אח"כ וישימו אותו בתוך הטרבוקו להשליך אותו בתוך הכבשן. ומלאכי השרת בקשו
 2 רחמים מלפני הקב"ה לרדת להצילו מאש נמרד. ויבא אליו המלאך גבריאל ויאמר לו מה
 אברהם האצילך מזה האש, ויאמר לו אברהם האלקים אשר אני בוטח בו אלקי השמים
 4 ואלהי הארץ הוא יצילני,

1. אח"כ: אחרי כן ד' 3 ג' ויקחו את אברהם ז' אחרי כן כן ד' 2 ג' ויקחו את אברהם כ' / בתוך: בכף ד'
 ד' 3 ג' / הטרבוקו: הטרבוק"ו ד' 1 ד' 2 הטרבוקות כ' / הטרבוק"ו ג' / בתוך: לתוך ז' / הכבשן: כבשן האש כ' ז'
 ומלאכי: ובאו מלאכי כ' / מלאכי ד' 3 / השרת: שמים ד' 3 ז' / 2. מלפני הקב"ה: מזהקב"ה כ' ד' 3 / להצילו: ח' כ'
 מאש: מכבשן האש של כ' / נמרד: נמרוד ד' 1 ד' 2 ד' 3 כ' ג' ז' / אליו: ח' כ' / המלאך: ח' ד' 1 ד' 3 כ' ז' / לו: ח' כ' / מה:
 ג' לך כ' ז' / 3. האצילך: אצילך ד' 1 ד' 3 כ' / ויאמר לו: אמר ליה ד' 1 אמר לו ד' 3 ז' א"ל ג' אלקי כ' / אברהם:
 ח' ד' 1 ד' 3 כ' / האלקים: האלהים ד' 3 ג' ז' / בוטח: כופח כ' / אלקי השמים: ח' כ' / אלהי השמים ז' אלהי שמים ד' 3
 ג' / 4. ואלהי הארץ: וארץ ד' 1 ד' 3 ג' והארץ ז' ואלקי הארץ ד' 2 ח' כ' /

And when they placed him inside the catapult to throw him into the
 midst of the furnace, the ministering angels sought mercy from the Holy One, blessed be
 He, to descend (to earth) and rescue him from the fire of Nimrod. And the Angel Gabriel
 came to him and said to him, "Abraham, should I save you from this fire?"

Abraham said to him, "The G-d in whom I trust, the G-d of the heavens and the
 G-d of the earth, He will save me." ¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁴B.T. Pesachima, b relates a slightly different version, still emphasizing, however, G-d's unity and omnipotence: When the angel Gabriel requests of G-d that he be allowed to go down and save the righteous Abraham from the fiery furnace, G-d replies, "I am unique in My world, and he is unique in his world; it is fitting for Him who is unique to deliver him who is unique." But, because G-d does not withhold the merited reward of any creature, He awarded Gabriel the privilege of saving Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego's Hebrew names) from

וכראות הקב"ה כוונתו הטובה פנה אליו ברחמים ויאמר לאש ההיא קרה ולו על עבדי

2 אברהם. אמר המגיד שהאש נכבה בלא מים

1. כוונתו: כוונתו ד' /ז/ ההיא: תהיא כ' ההי" ד' /3/ עבדי אברהם: אברהם עבדי ז' /2. נכבה: כבתה כ' נכבית ד'

/ז

When the Holy One, blessed be He saw his sincere intention, He turned to him in mercy¹⁹⁵ and said to the fire, "Be cool and tranquil upon my servant, Abraham."¹⁹⁶

The Maggid said that the fire was extinguished without water,

Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace, in the future. When the time came, G-d ordered Gabriel to go down. Gabriel, the Prince of Fire, went down and performed a "miracle within a miracle." That is, he cooled the fire within the furnace, saving the Jews, while at the same time, causing the heat and flames to leap outside the furnace and kill those who cast the Jews into the fire. See also Genesis Rabbah 44:13, which reports the opinion of R. Eliezer b. Jacob, that the angel Michael rescued Abraham from the furnace.

¹⁹⁵Pesikta Rabbati 44:9, in commenting upon Ho. 14:2 ("Return O Israel unto the L-rd, your G-d.") informs, that as soon as a person harnesses his good intention and resolves in his heart to repent, his intention (repentance) soars up until it stands before G-d's throne of glory. Pesikta d'R. Kahana 23:8 teaches that our acts of repentance can actually move G-d from His throne of justice to His throne of mercy. See also Mal. 3:7, "Return (or "turn") unto Me, and I will return (or "turn") unto you."

¹⁹⁶This parallels the Koran, Sura 21:69, which states that when idolators wanted to burn Abraham in a fire, Allah cooled the fire with the command: "O fire, be coolness and peace for Abraham." In the version related in Seder Eliyahu Rabbah, Chapter 6, G-d, "in tribute to Abraham's righteousness" caused the day to turn cloudy, and brought down a rain of such intensity, that Nimrod's men could not get the fire started in the furnace. The version in our midrash parallels Chapter 1 of the Book of Genesis, in which G-d creates the "heavens and the earth" by the power of His word.

והעצים הציצו ציץ ובולם הוציאו פירות כל עץ נתן פריו ושב הכבשן כמו גינת ביתן המלך,
 2 והמלאכים יושבים עם אברהם בתוכו, ויפן המלך וירא את הגן ואת המלאכים יושבים עם
 המלאכים בתוך הגן, ויאמר המלך לאברהם כשף גדול אתה יודע שהאש אינה שולטת בדך

-
1. ובולם: וכל' ד3 / נתן: יתן ד1 ד3 ג ז / הכבשן: כבשן כ1 / גינת: גנת ד1 ד3 כ1 / ביתן: בתן ד3 הביתן ז /
 2. אברהם: נ' אע"ה כ1 / בתוכו: בתוך כ1 / ואת המלאכים: ואת המלאכ' ד3 / 3. עם המלאכים: עם אברהם ד1
 ד2 ד3 ג ז / המלך: ח' ד1 ד3 ז / לאברהם: לאברה' ד1 / כשף: כישוף ד1 / כשוף ד2 ד3 ג ז / יודע: נ' לעשו' ד3
 לעשות ז / אינה: נ' איה ז /
-

and the trees flowered and all of them brought forth fruit.¹⁹⁷ Every tree gave forth
 its fruit and the furnace returned to being like the palace garden. And the angels sat with
 Abraham in its midst. The king turned and saw the garden, and the angels sitting with
 Abraham¹⁹⁸ in the midst of the garden.

The king said to Abraham, "Great magic."¹⁹⁹ You know that the fire has no
 power over you;

¹⁹⁷This echoes Nu. 17:23, in which the budding and bearing fruit of Aaron's wooden rod indicates Divine choseness and favor.

¹⁹⁸In Ozar Midrashim we read, "the angels sat with the angels." The translation, in this case, reflects reading found in the Salonica, Shevet Musar, and Bet HaMidrash editions. See the "textual alternatives" section, above.

¹⁹⁹This parallels the version told in the Targum Yonatan to Gn. 11:28: "When all the people who were there saw that the fire had no power over Abram, they said to themselves, 'Is not Haran, the brother of Abram, full of divination and sorcery? It is he who uttered charms over the fire so that it would not burn his brother.' Immediately, fire fell from the heavens on him and consumed him, and Haran died in the sight of his father..."

ולא עוד אלא שאתה מראה לעם שאתה יושב בתוך גינת ביתן. ויענו כל שרי נמרד יחדו
 2 למלך לא אדונינו אין זה כשוף כי אם יכולת אלוה גדול אלקי אברהם ואין אלוה אחר
 מלברו ואנחנו מעידים על זה וגם אברהם עבדו באמת. ויאמינו בשעה ההיא כל שרי נמרד
 4 וכל עמו בה' אלקי אברהם ויאמרו כלם ה' הוא האלקים בשמים ממעל ועל הארץ מתחת
 אין עוד.

1. אלא: ה' ד1 ד3 ג/ יושב: ה' ד1 ד3 ג/ גינת: גנת ד1 ד2 ג/ ביתן: הכיתן ז/ נמרד: נמרוד ד1 ד2 ד3 ג ז/ יחדו:
 יחדיו ד1 ד2 ד3 / 2. אדונינו: אדוננו ד3/ אלקי: אלהי ד1 ד3 ג ז/ 3. וגם אברהם: ודם שאברהם ד3 וגם שאברהם ג/
 נמרד: נמרוד ד1 ד2 ד3 ג ז/ 4. בה: ביי' ד3 ביי' ג/ אלקי: אלהי ד1 ד3 ג ז/ כלם: ה' ד1 ד3 ג ז כולם ד2/ ה':
 יי' ד3 יי' ג/ האלקים: האלהים ג ד1 ד3 / עוד: נ' עב"ל ד1 ג/

and at the same time, you show the people that you are sitting in the midst of the palace garden." All the ministers of Nimrod answered to the king in unison, "No, our lord. This is not magic. But rather, the ability of a great G-d, the G-d of Abraham. And there is no other G-d except Him. And we attest to this and also that Abraham is His true servant."

And at that moment, all the ministers of Nimrod, and all his people believed in the L-rd, the G-d of Abraham; and they all said, "The L-rd, He is G-d in the heavens above and the earth below, there is none other."²⁰⁰

²⁰⁰The midrash's ending parallels that of the episode of Elijah versus the priests of Baal, in that everyone proclaims the L-rd as G-d. See I Kgs. 18:39 in this regard. See also Ex. 15:18, in which the exodus from Egypt "ended" with the proclamation, "The L-rd will reign forever and ever." In Dan. 3:28, Nebuchadnezzar addressed the gathering around the fiery furnace subsequent to the rescue of the three Jews, saying: "Blessed be the G-d of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, who has sent His angel, and delivered His servants that trusted in Him, and have changed the king's word. He has yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any

god, except their own G-d."

PART III:
THE THEMES OF MA'ASEH AVRAHAM AVINU
AND THE PURPOSE OF THE WORK

A. Essential Themes - G-d's Nature and Power

The overarching themes of Ma'aseh Avraham Avinu deal with the nature of G-d and G-d's actions in the world. Given that, one may discern seven major themes which run throughout "Ma'aseh." They are: G-d's unity, G-d's might versus earthly (tyrannical) power, G-d's uniqueness, what it means to be G-d's servant, G-d's justice, teshuvah, and the efficacy of prayer and good intentions.

1. G-d's Unity.

The theme of G-d's unity is manifested in the many roles played by the One G-d throughout the entire midrash. The text illustrates G-d as Creator, Revealer, Redeemer, and Supreme Commander. That the One G-d is Creator is evident at the beginning, in the middle, and end of the compilation. G-d as Creator is implied by the midrash's opening line:²⁰¹ "They said: Before Abraham was created, Nimrod disavowed belief in G-d, may He be blessed, and he exalted himself and said he was god." The root of the word for "created," "בָּרָא," is the same as that employed in the first verse of the Torah, "In the beginning, G-d created (בָּרָא) the heavens and the earth." This root, in the Bible and Rabbinic literature is applied only to G-d. G-d alone "creates." Human beings merely "make" things out of what G-d has created. Thus, the use of this root (בָּרָא), to the Jewish reader, implies G-d as Creator. The midrash again implies G-d as Creator at the beginning of Abraham's prophetic career. It is then that he emerged from the cave to discover G-d by observing the heavenly bodies and realizing that there exists a Creator behind all creation. As the midrash progresses, more and more people specifically attest to G-d as

²⁰¹According to the Salonica, JTS MS. 5049, Shevet Musar, and the Schocken MS. 13316 versions.

Creator, by repeating the words of Abraham. For in his first encounter with Nimrod, Abraham urged Nimrod to repeat after him within the hearing of his entire court: "The L-rd, He is one, there is no other... He created the entire world...." Later, in the incident with the Old Woman, Abraham instructed her: "Serve the G-d of G-ds, the L-rd of L-rds; the Creator of heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them." Finally, at the end of the midrash everyone witnessed the creative power of G-d, as He created a garden replete with blooming trees and life-sustaining fruit, where a raging furnace had stood only moments before. This looms as a true act of creation, because not only did G-d transform already existing materials, but He imbued them with life.

The theme of G-d as Revealer also runs throughout the midrash. It is evident at the beginning of the Ma'aseh, at the time of Abraham's birth. For it is then that G-d revealed His Presence through the light of Abraham's face. Upon Abraham's emergence from the cave, G-d revealed His providence through His messenger, Gabriel. As the midrash progresses, the text explains that G-d sent Abraham to Babylon to preach a prophetically revealed message. Finally, at the midrash's conclusion, at the calming of the fire and the creation of fruit, G-d revealed His aspects of power and mercy.

The role of Redeemer or deliverer is also attributed to G-d throughout the midrash. In the opening scenes of the Ma'aseh, G-d saved the baby Abraham from Nimrod's plans to murder him. Subsequently, when Nimrod learned of the twenty-day-old Abraham and sent an army after him, G-d saved the "weak" Abraham from the savage multitude. Then, upon Abraham's first encounter with Nimrod, G-d rendered the king unconscious, thus saving Abraham from harm. In the second half of the midrash, when Abraham was imprisoned without any food or drink, G-d saved him from physical and emotional

starvation by sending Gabriel to be with him there. After the prison warden's conversion, G-d saved him from death. Finally, G-d saved Abraham from the flames of the fiery furnace, and converted this instrument of death back into the palace garden. The garden itself then became a symbol of G-d as Redeemer. What had once been a garden of idolatry (and then a furnace of idolatry) had now been transformed into a symbol of G-d's present redemption, and a model of G-d's future redemption.

The Ma'asch presents G-d as the Supreme Commander on earth, as well as in heaven. As Abraham noted upon his emergence from the cave, G-d commands (and thus moves) the heavenly host (stars, moon, sun). G-d also maintains complete control over the heavenly angels. At the beginning and end of the midrash, when the angels questioned His justice regarding the killing of innocent babies and the casting of Abraham into the fiery furnace, respectively, G-d put them in their place. He assured them that He sees and knows everything, and that as Supreme Commander He will act when He deems fit! The fact that G-d is supreme commander in the heavens is also evidenced throughout the midrash by His sending the heavenly angel Gabriel as a messenger on His behalf.

The midrash also depicts G-d as the Supreme Commander on earth through His commanding of the forces of nature. This is evidenced in the beginning of the midrash by G-d's moving Abraham (while still an embryo) into his mother's chest, and at the midrash's end by His quieting of the fire, transforming matter, and making dead trees bloom. G-d also commands (or inspires) the people of the earth to change their lives, forsake idolatry, and give themselves over for the sanctification of His name, as did the multitudes in the midrash. Finally, G-d as Supreme Commander is implied by the fact that in Abraham's initial confrontation with Nimrod, the power of His name uttered on earth

toppled the royal throne and idols, and rendered those who thought themselves to be in charge, completely unconscious. As Nimrod admitted immediately after that experience, "In truth, your G-d, Abraham, is a great and powerful G-d, the King of Kings."

As mentioned above concerning the human recognition of G-d's Unity, there exists within the midrash, a definite line of development. At the beginning of the text, only Abraham recognized the One G-d, everyone else worshiped idols, and the armed multitudes attacked Abraham. By the midrash's end, everyone, except Nimrod, recognized the One G-d, and the text declares that Nimrod was afraid because the multitudes believed in the One G-d. The attesting to the One G-d on the part of everyone, with the exception of Nimrod, constitute the final words of the text and underscores the thematic thrust of the compilation.

Highlighting this development in the human recognition of G-d's Unity are allusions, within the midrash, to the Alenu prayer. The prayer and the midrash share a similar thematic flow. At the beginning of the prayer, only the Jewish people recognize Him as L-rd and Creator, and bow down to the One G-d. This is analogous to Abraham's sole recognition of the One G-d as L-rd and Creator and bowing down to Him. The end of the prayer speaks of the day when, "Every tongue will swear to and every knee bow down to G-d..." and, "On that day the L-rd shall be One and His Name One" (Zc. 14:9). This parallels the end of the midrash in which the masses accept G-d and attest to His Unity: "He is One and there is none other." In addition, Zechariah's vision of the End of Days is mirrored by the midrash's vision of everyone sitting in peace, among angels, in the recreated, flowering garden.

What's more, if one examines the theme of G-d's Unity from the perspective of

the roles assigned to the One G-d at those point which one may consider highlights or critical moments, it is possible to discern a pattern which resembles the flow of the Jewish worship service the Shema and it's blessings. This seems to be a pattern, whether or not th author intended it to be so on a conscious level. Abraham's discovery of G-d, which recognizes G-d as Creator, may be considered the highlight of first portion of the midrash. This recognition of G-d as Creator corresponds to the first one-third of the morning and/or evening prayer service, the morning Yotzer Or and evening HaMa'ariv Aravim" prayers, which recognize G-d as Creator. The highlight of the text's middle portion may be thought of as being Abraham's prophetic activity. Abraham's spreading the word of G-d, calls to consciousness G-d's role as Revealer. The second part of our prayer service, Ahavah Rabbah and/or Ahavat Olam, and the Shema also underscore G-d's role as Revealer. The final third of the Ma'aseh, which concerns G-d's rescue of Abraham from the fiery furnace, features G-d in the role of Redeemer. So, too, does the final portion of the liturgical rubric of the Shema and its blessings, the Emet v'Yatziv prayer of the morning, and the Emet v'Emunah of the evening, feature G-d in the role of Redeemer.

2. G-d's Might versus Earthly (tyrannical) Power.

In addition to G-d's Unity, the theme of G-d's might versus earthly (tyrannical) power looms large, throughout the midrash. In the Ma'aseh earthly power is represented in the person of Nimrod, the earthly king who would defeat the designs of G-d. In this power struggle between Nimrod and G-d, the midrash depicts Nimrod's power as the power to kill, destroy, and amass physical wealth. G-d's power, on the other hand, is the

power to create, give life, inspire, forgive, administer justice, and redeem.

As the power struggle ensues, the balance of power continually flows to the side of the Divine, and away from Nimrod. In the beginning of the midrash, before Abraham's birth, when no one yet recognizes G-d, Nimrod's power is great (except in his ability to prevent the life and mission of Abraham). This is evidenced by his murder of seventy-thousand innocent babies. As the midrash develops, and more and more people attest to G-d, Nimrod's power diminishes. By the last part of the midrash, Nimrod can still physically kill the Old Woman (the text implies that her soul will enjoy eternal reward), but at this point he began to fear her attesting to G-d. When Nimrod next tried to kill the prison warden, he failed. The sword broke, not the warden's neck. Nimrod's final attempt to exercise his power, the casting of Abraham into the fiery furnace, also met with utter failure. In fact, those who do the casting were themselves burned to death, while Abraham emerged unscathed.

Another indication of the comparison of Nimrod's earthly power and G-d's power may be discerned from the fact that at no time in the midrash, does Nimrod exercise his power over Abraham, who is part of G-d's plan. We see this in the first part of "Ma'aseh," in which Nimrod tried to kill the baby Abraham. G-d defeated his purpose without violence by pushing Abraham up into his mother's chest, inspiring her to go to the cave, sending Gabriel (whose name means "Power of G-d") to feed Abraham, and by causing Abraham to "mature" in the span of ten days. Nimrod then mobilized his army, and distributed weapons of war against Abraham. But G-d defeated this attempt with dense dark clouds which sent the army running in retreat. Later in the midrash, Nimrod threw a gaudy, idolatrous, drunken feast in order to solidify his power base. He then summoned

Abraham to the palace. The mere mention of G-d's Name toppled the king, his ministers, and his idols onto the floor, rendering the former unconscious. Once again, G-d had thwarted Nimrod's evil designs against Abraham, without resorting to violence. Next, Nimrod attempted to starve Abraham in prison. G-d defeated this by sending Gabriel to feed and keep Abraham company for an entire year. Lastly, Nimrod tried to destroy Abraham in the fiery furnace. G-d Himself rescued Abraham, by cooling the fire.

In this comparison of power, fire serves as a powerful metaphor. As Abraham explained to his mother, just before he was to be cast into the furnace, "Nimrod's fire (the fire of destruction), can be extinguished with water..." That is, Nimrod's fire is necessarily limited. He is a mere mortal, as Abraham earlier exclaimed to his parents, "You worship a mortal like yourselves!" Abraham continued to his mother, "...But, G-d's fire will never be extinguished, and surely not by water." G-d's fire, like G-d, is eternal. G-d's fire, does not destroy, rather it refines and purifies. G-d's fire is Torah,²⁰² which radiates spiritual warmth, inspiring the hearts of people to transcend the snares of violence, drunkenness, and lewd materialism.

Finally, this power struggle may be thought of in terms the forces of good versus evil. G-d, of course, represents good and life,²⁰³ while Nimrod represents evil and death. In this struggle, G-d possesses the ability to transform Nimrod's fire of death and evil into a life-giving garden bearing the fruit of goodness.

²⁰²See Dt. 33:3, "At His right hand was a fiery law (יִתְּוֶן) unto them."

²⁰³See Dt. 30: 15-20, "I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil...choose life."

3. G-d's Uniqueness.

G-d's Uniqueness (which along with His Unity, is an aspect of His Oneness) looms as another of the major themes of Ma'aseh Avraham Avinu. The phrase "there is none other" like G-d is oft repeated throughout the midrash. At the outset, Abraham's mother mentioned this to Nimrod. In the middle of the midrash, Abraham proclaimed this fact to the people of Babylonia. Towards the end, Abraham expressed this to the Old Woman. Finally, at the conclusion, everyone proclaims it. In fact, these are the final words of the piece ("אין עוד," "There is none other!").

The text presents various aspects of G-d's Uniqueness. For instance, G-d's eternity is presented as a unique quality of G-d. Nimrod, as previously alluded to, is a mere mortal. Only G-d is omniscient. He alone knows all secret and revealed things, and does not ever need to be reminded of anything, not even by the angels. On the other hand, Nimrod must repeatedly ask his ministers for advice.

Ultimately, only G-d is G-d. For a human to claim to be a god, is not only self-exaltation, but patently false. The text reinforces this through the devices of the Old Woman and the Prison Warden calling Nimrod a liar, and by Nimrod's becoming frightened when he heard the truth about the true G-d. The midrash again reinforces this theme by not only continually alluding to Nimrod's arrogance, but by constantly mocking his attempts to be godly. In order to accomplish this, the midrash employs the language of the Torah to describe Nimrod and his actions, which in its original context refers to G-d. For example, Nimrod's order to murder innocent abies is referred to as a "מצודה" (just as are G-d's commandments in the Torah), which his loyal worshippers, like Terah, are careful not to "transgress." Nimrod's drunken feasts are referred to as "יום טוב" (as

are G-d's Jewish holy days), and the place they occur is referred to as "בית הועד," which proves reminiscent of G-d's desert sanctuary, the "אהל מועד."

4. What It Means to be G-d's Servant.

The fourth of the seven major themes of Ma'aseh Avraham Avinu is that of "What it means to be G-d's servant." First, being G-d's servant means having to face danger. This is evidenced by Nimrod's ongoing intentions and attempts to kill Abraham. In facing danger, the true servant of G-d must be willing to give his or her life over for G-d, for the sanctification of G-d's Name. This, of course, requires a high level of commitment, faith and a huge modicum of courage. This brand of commitment and courage was displayed in the midrash by Abraham, the Old Woman, and the Prison Warden.

To be G-d's servant means displaying courage in areas other than the sanctification of G-d's name, as well. G-d's servant must stand alone for what one knows is right, just as Abraham stood alone in his service to G-d, at the beginning of the midrash. Being G-d's servant means possessing the courage to smash the idols of the day. Abraham, as depicted in the Ma'aseh, demonstrated this breed of courage by not only physically smashing the idols, but smashing them by force of reason, by example, by persistence. G-d's servant needs the courage to stand up against the formidable representatives of evil. Abraham indicated that he possessed this type of courage when he stood up to the political power of the day, Nimrod, the evil social pressures of the day, as represented by his family, and against internal temptation, represented by Satan.

Despite the dangers abounding, and the courage required, being G-d's servant also means to live under Divine Providence. That G-d watches over and cares for His servants proves to be a much emphasized theme in the Ma'aseh. The text indicates that G-d

"neither slumbers, nor sleeps." Rather, He continually watched over His servant, Abraham, and saved him from Nimrod's clutches time and again. The text relates that the Divine Providence was also spread over His other servants, the Prison Warden and the Old Woman. In the case of the Prison Warden, the sword broke upon his neck as the practitioners of evil tried to kill him, and although the Old Woman passed from this life when executed, the text leads us to believe that her soul is saved from Gihinnom.

Finally, being G-d's servant means living with humility. One must be aware of one's own human limitations, and be willing to abide by the laws of G-d. The character of Abraham is characterized, in the midrash, by humility. In the beginning of the midrash Abraham displayed humility in his bowing down to G-d. Towards the middle of the narrative, Abraham demonstrated humility by heeding G-d's command to proclaim His message in Babylonia. When the king asked him if the voice that caused him to lose consciousness was the voice of G-d, Abraham answered that it was just the voice of one of the smallest creatures in creation, his. The text further emphasizes the humility of G-d's servant, Abraham, by placing him in contradistinction to Nimrod, whom the midrash paints with the broad brush of arrogance, a self-exalter who obeys no law but his own.

5. G-d's Justice.

The fifth major theme which runs throughout Ma'aseh Avraham Avinu is that of G-d's justice. Although, at times G-d's justice may seem arbitrary to those who lack G-d's perspective (this group includes everyone, even the angels), the midrash teaches that, in actuality, it is not. The text depicts the angels twice questioning G-d over matters of His justice, once, in the beginning of the piece, concerning the punishment of Nimrod, and once at the end, concerning Abraham's fate as he was about to be cast into the fire. On

both occasions, G-d assured them that His justice is indeed true, and that they should wait for the denouement of events and they would understand. The understanding conveyed by the Ma'aseh is that G-d punishes and rewards measure for measure. The guilty bring G-d's punishment through their own actions. For example, those who cast Abraham into the fire were themselves burned. By the same token, the righteous are rewarded, as was Abraham, whom, at the midrash's conclusion, G-d personally rescued from the fiery furnace to sit in peace with angels in the garden.

While G-d's justice is true and fair, Nimrod's justice is arbitrary and bloodthirsty. Nimrod is a figure who would do anything to maintain power. The mass murder of innocent children and the execution of people for their religious beliefs are indigenous to Nimrod's justice.

6. Teshuvah.

Teshuvah, or repentance is the sixth overarching theme of the Ma'aseh. The midrash teaches that people can change for the better. The text illustrates this through the examples of the Old Woman who repented for her idolatry and became a force to bring others closer to G-d, and the Prison Warden who repented for his service to the king and gave himself over for the sanctification of G-d's Name. In the end, everyone, except Nimrod, regretted their idolatrous behavior and service to the murderous king, and then enjoyed the peaceful fruits of the garden. Teshuvah brought salvation and peace.

7. The Efficacy of Prayer and Good Intentions.

The efficacy of prayer and good intentions is the final major theme of the midrash. This is illustrated by the three times in the midrash that Abraham prayed directly to G-d. At the outset, Abraham prayed to G-d as he saw Nimrod's army attacking him. He

again prayed to G-d when imprisoned without food nor drink. Finally Abraham prayed before being thrown into the fire. The text informs us that upon each occasion G-d heard and responded. In the third instance, the text indicates that G-d saw Abraham's good intentions and turned to him in mercy. Thus, not only does G-d listen to prayer, but human prayers possess the power to move G-d to mercy.

In conclusion, the thematic thrust of Ma'asch Avraham Avinu paints a vivid picture of metaphysical reality. There is one G-d in heaven and earth. G-d plays many roles. G-d created, and is completely in charge of the universe. Anyone arrogant enough to challenge G-d, to place his law above that of G-d's, will ultimately meet with failure. For G-d's power, the power of Torah, the power to create, the power to redeem is far greater than any human power.

Because G-d is so far beyond us, we cannot really know His essence. This remains hidden by the dense clouds. In the language of the Midrash, "He sees, but is not seen." But evidence of G-d's works are all around us, His glory fills the earth.

G-d is concerned with our actions. At the time of His choosing, G-d may make an incursion into the world of human affairs. G-d protects, redeems, and inspires to greatness those who do His work on earth.

His ways are characterized by true justice, even though it may not always seem so to us, because of our limited vantage point. G-d repays goodness and evil measure for measure. But G-d also allows human beings the opportunity for repentance. That is, unless they, like Nimrod, harden their hearts and sin to the point of no return.

Our repentance, good deeds, and even good intentions can move G-d to mercy, and move us closer to G-d. Our repentance, good deeds, and good intentions can bring,

along with G-d's help, an era of peace and harmony.

B. Message and Purpose of the Midrash

1. High Holiday Model.

Ma'aseh Avraham Avinu bears an association to the High Holidays. This is evidenced by its characterization in the Valmadonna Trust Library MS. 167 as a piece to be studied aloud on the first evening of Rosh HaShanah (part of a סדר התקון לליל ר"ה). In the JTS MS. 4079, a manuscript which includes prayers and readings for the yearly cycle, "Ma'aseh" is placed among the High Holiday materials. The compiler of the Shevet Musar used the midrash as the centerpiece of his chapter highlighting the ethical virtue of humility. One may think of humility as particularly appropriate to the Days of Awe. It would seem then that this midrash has been used by Jews to prepare for and/or immerse themselves in the High Holidays experience.

Bearing in mind this High Holiday connection, it is not surprising that the midrash illustrates various High Holiday themes. For instance, the Ma'aseh features among its themes, the notion of G-d as Creator. This proves particularly appropriate to Rosh Hashanah, since that holiday is traditionally regarded as the time of the world's creation. That G-d is the "King of Kings" is a declaration oft repeated throughout the midrash. This is also very appropriate to Rosh HaShanah, as that holiday celebrates the annual recoronation of G-d. This theme is evident in the musical motifs of the day, as well as the liturgy. In particular, the Musaf for Rosh HaShanah contains the Shofar Service which expresses G-d's Kingship. G-d's judgement is another theme indigenous to both Ma'aseh and the High Holiday liturgy. Tradition has it that on Rosh HaShanah G-d judges every

single living creature and determines its fate for the following year.²⁰⁴ The midrash also illustrates the themes of the efficacy of prayer, teshuvah, and good intentions. The High Holidays, of course, are a time of intense prayer, teshuvah, and resolutions to improve during the New Year. A legend reflected in the Un'tane Tokef prayer speaks of G-d's books of life and death remaining open throughout the Days of Awe, so that if one was inscribed for a harsh decree as a result of G-d's judgement at Rosh HaShanah, that decree may still be tempered through "prayer, repentance, and charity."

Allusions to, and reminders of these High Holiday themes are found throughout "Ma'aseh." Various liturgical motifs of Rosh HaShanah are reflected in the midrash. As previously discussed, the work contains verbal hints of the Alenu prayer ("He is G-d, there is none else," "The L-rd is G-d in the heavens above and on the earth below, there is no other."), as well as mirroring the prayer's flow. As mentioned above, the call of the Un'tane Tokef prayer to "tefillah, teshuvah, and tzedakah," plays a prominent part of the thematic content of the Ma'aseh. In addition, the prayer is hinted at by the midrash's use of the word tokef (תֹּכֵף), which means "power." While the prayer speaks of the great and awesome power of the judgement day of Rosh HaShanah, the midrash uses the term ironically, even mockingly to describe Nimrod's intention to have others worship him as a god as a result of the "power" he will display by throwing a drunken feast. To the Jewish reader the irony points to what and Whom is really "powerful" in life. The midrash also features the phrase, "The L-rd, He is G-d." Originally found in I Kgs. 18:39, the phrase constitutes the final words of the High Holiday liturgy, uttered at the closing moments of Yom Kippur. Their inclusion in the midrash connects the reader to

²⁰⁴See M. Rosh HaShanah 1:3.

the liturgical moment.

In addition to the liturgical allusions to the High Holidays inherent in the text, motifs and verbal hints from the High Holiday Scriptural readings are also in evidence. For instance, the phrase, "The two of them went off together," found in the midrash is also twice found in Chapter twenty-two of the Book of Genesis, in the account of the Binding of Isaac. The Binding of Isaac is one of the Rosh HaShanah Torah readings. The Binding of Isaac is also reflected in Abraham being bound and about to be sacrificed in the fiery furnace. The Book of Jonah is the Haftarah for the afternoon of Yom Kippur. "Ma'aseh" includes thematic parallels which remind the reader of the Haftarah. The theme of attempting to flee the presence of G-d appears in both Jonah and "Ma'aseh." The motif of the prophet entering the city of his enemy, preaching the word of G-d, and the people doing teshuvah as a result is present in both the midrash and the Yom Kippur Scriptural reading.

On the High Holidays we stand before G-d, not only as individuals, but as members of the Jewish people, people of the received tradition of Judaism. The phrases, "They (the Sages) said" and "The Maggid said," which appear in the midrash point to this received tradition, as do stories of Abraham, who was the first link in this great chain of tradition. Part of the High Holiday liturgy asks G-d to deal with us mercifully for the sake of the merit of the Patriarchs, of whom Abraham was the first. "Remember the kind deeds of Abraham, let his righteousness plead for us..." are the words of a Rosh HaShanah piyyut (liturgical poem). The same piyyut alludes to Ps. 18:31, "The word of the L-rd is tried." Midrash Tehillim to Psalm 18 teaches that this verse refers to Abraham and the ten trials he underwent for the word of the L-rd. The first trial, Midrash Tehillim informs,

took place in the fiery furnace. So we see that the tradition of the fiery furnace itself has a place in the consciousness, as well as the liturgy of the High Holy Day period.

2. Rabbinic Response to the Challenges of Jewish Survival

In addition to serving as a preparation for and a companion piece to the High Holidays, Ma'asch Avraham Avinu may also be seen as having the purpose of serving as a rabbinic response to the challenges to Jewish survival. In this light, Nimrod functions as a symbol for all those who have placed themselves above G-d's law, and have persecuted and would have destroyed G-d's chosen servants, the Jewish people. Through Jewish history as this material came to be applied to different contexts, the referent to which Nimrod was a symbol probably changed. As the core of this material is probably ancient,²⁰⁵ in its original context the figure might have represented Antiochus Epiphanes or Caligula, both of whom declared themselves to be gods. Perhaps, in a later age, he represented Hadrian, who outlawed the study of Torah, rabbinical ordination, and savagely murdered the greatest Torah scholars of the day. In a still later period, the character of Nimrod may have been used to allude to the persecutions carried out by the Christians medieval Europe or the Moslems of the Middle East. The fact remains that through history there have existed those tyrants who made the Jews, and especially the Rabbis, suffer for continuing to be Jewish and continuing to study Torah. The character of Nimrod symbolizes them.

Just as G-d saved Abraham, who symbolizes Jewish adherence to faith, Torah, and

²⁰⁵See A. Margolies, *A Gathering of Angels* (New York: Schocken Books, 1993), 54.

G-d's commandments, from the flames of Nimrod's fire, the midrash offers hope that He will save the Jewish people from the destruction of the latter-day persecutors. Thus, the redemption of Abraham, and its parallel, the Exodus from Egypt, serve as models for future redemption. This future redemption is further symbolized by G-d's turning the raging furnace back into a garden, bearing the fruits of peace. This imparts a vision of the "end of days" akin to the turning of spears into pruning hooks,²⁰⁶ a return to the pristine state of the Garden of Eden.

That human beings have the power to increase G-d's influence in the world through righteous behavior, is another message of the midrash that addresses the challenges to Jewish survival. Just as, in the text, Nimrod's tyrannical power in the world diminished proportionate to the number of people who attested to G-d in their lives, so, too, does the attesting of each and every Jew help defeat the power of evil in the world. It was not Abraham's military prowess or violent strategy which sent Nimrod's army running. Rather, it was the dense cloud of G-d's Torah and Providence which repelled their brute savagery. It was the "living water," another symbol of Torah, which saved Abraham's life while imprisoned without food nor drink. The midrash thus imparts the message that it is the Jewish people's dedication to Torah and the righteousness and Providence it brings, which will turn the tide against the savage persecutors of this world.

The midrash intimates that not only is this the path to Jewish survival but that spreading G-d's message of righteousness is part of the role of the Jewish people. Just as Abraham, in the midrash, was "created" (נברא) by G-d, implying a purpose, so, too, was the Jewish people chosen by G-d for a purpose. The text depicts Abraham's purpose as

²⁰⁶As depicted in Is. 2:4 and Mi. 4:3.

defeating evil by spreading G-d's message of righteousness, so, too his descendants.

The suffering of the Jewish people is therefore placed into this larger context of its purpose and mission. The Midrashic tradition teaches that G-d tested Abraham (made him undergo a series of trials and suffering) in order to refine his character and hold him up as a positive example to the world. This is what it means to be G-d's servant. Therefore, the Jewish people, as G-d's servants, can expect to be tried, as well. To be G-d's servant, as alluded to above, is not easy, and may involve suffering and persecution. It may even involve resisting the efforts of others to have us abandon our cherished principles and convert to other faiths. The temptations posed by Abraham's mother and Satan as he is about to be cast into the fiery furnace represent the arguments of the assimilationists.

And yet despite all the troubles of this world, the evil, the violence, and the unjust persecutions, the midrash ends on a note of hope. Being G-d's servants, serving G-d's purpose may not be easy, but it is necessary and ultimately rewarding. Our efforts can and will make a difference in this world. Our prayers are heard. G-d is watching us. His justice is continually operative. Our suffering has meaning. Goodness will prevail and peace will be achieved in the end.

PART IV:
THE SOURCES
OF MA'ASEH AVRAHAM AVINU

A. Bible

In composing Ma'asch Avraham Avinu, the author followed the tradition of every generation retelling the Biblical story according to its own experiences. In doing so, he drew upon Biblical and Midrashic material, weaving them with skill and some imagination into a coherent narrative form. This is not to say that the Ma'asch is a complete fabrication; on the contrary, everything that appears is based upon Biblical and/or Rabbinic precedent. That is, the author carefully utilized Biblical and Midrashic motifs and language. While the author does not cite his sources, it is clear to the reader that he made use of a considerable array of Biblical material. Some of this material finds expression in the quotations of the piece. For instance, the repeated declarations of G-d's greatness and unity are, for the most part, Biblical quotations, as has been noted in detail in the commentary beneath the critical text of Part II. Beyond the dialogue, the midrash makes use of certain Biblical motifs, which not only lend the work a stamp of legitimacy, but shape the story of Abraham as its presented. By drawing parallels between the story of Abraham and the Biblical motifs, the author is actually shedding light upon the already existing Biblical and Midrashic material concerning Abraham, and making the relevance of that material better understood for his own constituency.

1. The Exodus from Egypt

One of the major Biblical sources employed is that of the Book of Exodus, Chapters one through thirty-four. The author used this Biblical source in such way as to draw five basic sets of parallels: He draws a parallel between Moses and Abraham, between Pharaoh and Nimrod, between the "dense clouds" of the Exodus and the protection of Abraham, between G-d's role in the redemption from Egypt and G-d's role

in the delivering of Abraham from the fiery furnace, and between the fire of the Burning Bush and that of the fiery furnace.

The references to and comparisons between Moses and Abraham are many. Both Biblical figures led freedom movements. Moses was the leader of the physical exodus from Egyptian bondage, which proved instrumental in the development and identity of our people. Abraham was the leader of a spiritual departure from the bondage of idolatry, which also proved instrumental to the development and identity of our people.²⁰⁷ Moses was a prophet whose face shone with light reflective of the Presence of G-d (Ex. 34:24). This is paralleled by the midrash's depiction of Abraham as having been born a prophet, his face shining with light reflected by the Presence of G-d. Moses as a baby was hidden by his mother until she could no longer hide him, and then miraculously saved by the combination of the basket in which he was placed and his adoption by Pharaoh's daughter (Ex. 2:1-10). Ma'aseh Avraham Avinu presents Abraham as a baby hidden by his mother until she could no longer hide him, and then miraculously saved by the combination of the cave in which she hid him and his "adoption" by the angel Gabriel, who actually suckles him. Another parallel that the piece draws between Moses and Abraham is that they, as G-d's servant, both stood up to the most powerful, and most evil powers of the day. In this regard, Moses opposed Pharaoh in a series of confrontations, and through the plagues wrought devastation upon the gods of Egypt (Ex. 7-12). Abraham, in the midrash, defied Nimrod throughout a sequence of events, and through his persuasiveness, example,

²⁰⁷Note the parallel language appearing the Torah to describe the Exodus at the Sinaitic Covenant (Ex. 20:2), and the Covenant Between the Pieces (Gn. 15:7). In the instance of Sinai, "I am the L-rd your G-d who brought you out of the land of Egypt..." In Gn. 15:7, "I am the L-rd, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldees..."

and actions, smashed the idols of his day.

The Ma'aseh's author also used the Exodus source material to draw parallels between Pharaoh and Nimrod. Both were absolute monarchs who declared themselves to be gods.²⁰⁸ Both embarked upon plans involving the mass murder of male babies in order to maintain their stranglehold on absolute power.²⁰⁹ Both were involved in power struggles with G-d, and both lost. In this process, both hardened their hearts to the reality of G-d's superior power, and to G-d's demands. In the case of Pharaoh, the Torah text directly states ten times that he hardened his heart.²¹⁰ This hardening of the heart propelled him along an evil path of no return, which eventually led to his destruction (Ex. 14:28). In Nimrod's case, the midrash represents his hardening of the heart in a few ways. Just as the plagues of the Book of Exodus alerted Pharaoh to the reality of G-d, so, too, did the incident of Nimrod being rendered unconscious. In fact, after G-d returned his soul to his body, Nimrod actually attested to G-d's greatness, declaring Him to be "the King of Kings." In the following scenes, however, we see that Nimrod continued along his immoral, idolatrous, murderous path. He had obviously hardened his heart to G-d's reality. Again, when the Old Woman affirmed G-d and dubbed Nimrod a liar, Nimrod

²⁰⁸Although Pharaoh's exalting himself as a god is not specifically mentioned in the Book of Exodus, this fact certainly underlies the Torah text. See Nahum Sarna, Exploring Exodus (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), 65: "The theology and political history of ancient Egypt stressed the literal divinity of the living pharaoh. His will was law, his word absolute."

²⁰⁹Regarding Pharaoh's plan, see Ex. 1:15-16.

²¹⁰See Ex. 7:13, 14, 22; 8:11, 15, 28; 9:7, 34, 35; 13:15. In addition to these instances of Pharaoh hardening his own heart, the text also states ten times that G-d hardened his heart.

was touched by the reality of G-d. But again, instead of heeding this message, he obviously hardened his heart for he continued to pursue his murder spree. Even the killing of his ministers before the fiery furnace (a parallel to the plague of the killing of the first born, Ex. 12:29) did not soften Nimrod. In the end, Nimrod remained as the only one not to attest to G-d. The midrash implies that while the Old Woman's soul would be saved, Nimrod's soul would suffer destruction.

Both the Book of Exodus and Ma'aseh Avraham Avinu make mention of a "dense cloud." In Ex. 14:19-20, the dense cloud is used to protect the Children of Israel from the advancing Egyptian army. In Ex. 40:34-38, the cloud indicates G-d's Glory and Providence. This parallels the appearance of the "dense cloud" in the midrash, where it was utilized to protect Abraham from Nimrod's attacking army. The cloud not only protected Abraham, but the Glory of G-d sent them fleeing in the opposite direction.

Just as it was G-d Himself who rescued the Children of Israel out of Egypt (Ex.12:12), so, too, was it G-d Himself who effected the rescue of Abraham from the fiery furnace. In both cases, He is the One G-d who needs no intermediaries; there is none other like Him.

The use of fire constitutes another parallel drawn by the author of the Ma'aseh between the story of Moses in the Book of Exodus and the story of Abraham. In Ex. 3:2-22, Moses was tested at the Burning Bush. By noticing it and accepting his mission, he passed the test. So too, was Abraham tested in and around the fiery furnace. Despite all the temptations to the contrary, Abraham remained true to his convictions, true to his G-d. Soon G-d would send him away on a mission. Like Moses, Abraham passed the test and proved himself worthy of leadership. The fire in both cases also has a parallel symbolic

value. The Burning Bush not being consumed served as a symbol that the Jewish people, despite their slavery, would not be consumed, but live. So, too, does the fiery furnace, in which neither the trees nor Abraham were consumed, serve as a symbol that the Jewish people would not be devoured, but continue in vitality.

2. The Binding of Isaac

The Ma'aseh author also drew parallels between Abraham's early career, as depicted in the midrash, and the Binding of Isaac, as depicted in the Book of Genesis, Chapter Twenty-two. As previously mentioned, the midrash includes linguistic allusions to the Akedah. For instance, the phrase, "The two of them went off together," appears in Gn. 22:6, 8, and in the midrash. The instructions given by Abraham in Gn. 22:5, "Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go there, and we will worship, and return to you," parallels the point in the midrash when Terah went to the feast of the king to worship and instructed Abraham, "You stay here with the idols until we return." What's more, the Ma'aseh author drew parallels between the sacrificing of Isaac on Mt. Moriah and the sacrificing of Abraham in the fiery furnace. The "wood" ("עֵצִים") taken for the sacrifice in Gn 22:6-7, parallels the "wood" ("עֵצִים") taken for the fiery furnace in the midrash. Just as Isaac was bound as a sacrifice (Gn. 22:9), so, too, was Abraham bound to be cast into the fire. Just as Isaac was prepared to give his life over for G-d, so was Abraham at the fiery furnace. Finally, G-d's messenger saving Isaac at the precise moment he did (Gn. 22:11,12) parallels G-d's cooling of the flames of the fiery furnace and saving Abraham alive.

All of these parallels to the Akedah of Chapter twenty-two of the Book of Genesis have the effect of enhancing Abraham's character. From the linguistic allusions referred

to above, one may garner that Abraham understood relationship, particularly that of father and son, and their relationship with G-d. The fact that Abraham willingly gave his life over to G-d in a situation in which he was bound and about to be sacrificed, again enhances the character of Abraham. For this means that in the taking his son up to the mountain, and binding him for sacrifice, he was not asking Isaac to do anything that he hadn't already done himself.

3. The Story of Joseph

Another of the Biblical sources which Ma'aseh Avraham Avinu draws upon is that of the story of Joseph and the pit, as depicted in the Book of Genesis. The midrash parallels the experience of Joseph with that of Abraham. Just as Joseph was thrown into a "pit" without water (Gn. 37:24), Abraham was thrown into prison (referred to as a "pit" by the midrash) without food or water. Just as Joseph's brothers sat down to eat while he was yet in the pit without water (Gn. 37:25), so, too, did the king and his ministers eat and drink while Abraham was imprisoned without food or drink. Just as Joseph was saved from death in the pit to serve G-d's purpose (Gn. 37:28), so, too, was Abraham saved from death in his "pit" to serve G-d's purpose. In Gn. 39:21-23, the text informs us that Joseph eventually gained the high regard of his jailor.²¹¹ This would prove to be a necessary link to all that would happen to him in the future. In the midrash, Abraham also won the respect his jailor, the Prison Warden, and this also served as an important factor in the eventual outcome of the piece.

The Joseph cycle in the Book of Genesis consists of a chain of events. All the links in that chain were necessary. For if any one of them was missing (even if the event,

²¹¹His jail is also referred to as a "pit" in Gn. 41:14.

at first, seems to our human vantage point to be negative), G-d's plan for the redemption of Israel would not have happened and the entire history of the world, as we know it, would be changed. By paralleling the experiences of Abraham to those of the Biblical Joseph cycle, the Ma'asch teaches that all of Abraham's experiences were in fact necessary links in a chain leading to G-d's redemption and the eventual rule of G-d on earth. Since, in the midrash, Abraham serves as a symbol of the Jewish people, the parallels drawn between Abraham and Joseph point to the fact that although what was happening to the Jewish people in the time of the author, may seem arbitrary and unrelated, they are actually necessary links in G-d's chain of redemption. To our human vantage point, many of these events may seem to be negative; yet G-d actually means them for good.²¹² Thus, Jewish suffering has meaning, and is actually a prelude of better things to come.

4. I Kings 18

The author of Ma'asch Avraham Avinu also made use of Chapter Eighteen of the Book of Kings as source material for the midrash. In doing so, the author draws a parallel between the battle of the prophet Elijah and the priests of Baal, as depicted in the Book of Kings, and the battle between the prophet Abraham and Nimrod. The prophets in both situations display great courage in standing alone, and putting themselves on the line for G-d. In both texts, the falseness and powerlessness of idolatry, as opposed to the power of the true, living G-d, characterize the battle. In both texts, the prophet prays to G-d, and G-d answers. In both instances, after witnessing G-d's power over fire,

²¹²See Gn. 50:20, in which Joseph explained this principle to his brothers.

everyone attests to the One G-d. In both texts, the attestation, "The L-rd, He is G-d," appears.²¹³

In making use of the Book of Kings, the author of the Ma'aseh not only illustrated the dynamics of the battle between Nimrod and Abraham around the fiery furnace, but enhanced Abraham's character by informing the reader that he was, even at this early point in his career, every bit as much a prophet as Elijah. At the same time, G-d's character is also enhanced. That is, the strength of the prophet, in both instances, resided merely in his closeness to G-d. G-d emerges as the worker of miracles, the supreme commander of the forces of nature. In both cases, G-d was willing to manipulate these forces for the sake of His servant. Since the Jewish people are G-d's servants who are close to Him, the text presents a message of hope to the reader.

5. The Book of Daniel

In writing the Ma'aseh, the author used Chapter Three of the Book of Daniel as source material. Specifically, the author drew parallels between Abraham's experience in the fiery furnace and that of the three Jews in the Book of Daniel. In the Book of Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar, an idolatrous king, cast Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego into a fiery furnace for not worshipping idols. This of course parallels Nimrod's casting Abraham into the fiery furnace for his refusal to worship idols. In both texts, those who threw the Jews into the fire were themselves burned and killed, while the Jews emerged unscathed.²¹⁴ In both texts, the Jews were bound immediately before being cast into the furnace.²¹⁵

²¹³I Kgs. 18:39.

²¹⁴Dan. 3:22, 27.

²¹⁵Dan. 3:21.

The major difference between the two fiery furnace incidents is that in the case of the Book of Daniel, an angel executed the rescue of the three Jews, while in the midrash G-d Himself saved Abraham.

The Daniel source not only functions to provide a model for the scene at the fiery furnace, but by contrast, again enhances the importance of Abraham. That is, for the three Jews in the Book of Daniel, an angel sufficed in their rescue, but for Abraham, no one less than G-d Himself would do. For in Abraham, the entire future of the Jewish people resided.²¹⁶

6. The Book of Esther

The Ma'aseh author also drew parallels between the story of Abraham and that of the Book of Esther. The author used the Biblical descriptions of the feasts, decrees, and behaviors of Ahasuerus and Haman as models of self-exalting, materialistic royalty. Thus, Nimrod's feasts, decrees, and behaviors in the midrash resemble those of the Book of Esther. For instance, the honor to be done to one whom the king wishes to honor (Est. 6:9-11), parallels the honor to be afforded a woman who gives birth to a girl in our midrash. The demands of Haman that the people bow down to him (Est. 3:2) parallels the demands of Nimrod to be worshipped, and the actual prostration to him which occurs in the midrash. Mordecai's refusal to bow down to Haman (Est. 3:2), parallels Abraham's refusal to worship Nimrod. Est. 9:14,15, depicts Haman being punished measure for measure. That is, the death he had prepared for Mordecai, became his own. His plans concerning the extermination of the Jews, were foiled. So, too, were the tables turned

²¹⁶This distinction is consonant with the ancient midrashic tradition mentioned in B.T. Pesachim 118a.

upon those who attempted to cast Abraham into the fire. The death they had planned to deal Abraham, became their own. In addition, Nimrod's plans to exterminate the Jews (in the person of Abraham) and the influence of G-d in the world, were foiled. His raging orgy of death, turned into a tranquil celebration of life. His garden of materialism and idolatry was returned to a pristine Garden of Eden.

7. The Book of Jonah

The midrash also counts the Book of Jonah as one of its sources. The theme of Jonah's unsuccessful attempt to flee G-d's Presence (Jon. 2:11-13) is paralleled by Nimrod's ministers, who after having experienced the dense cloud's of G-d's Glory, endeavor to flee G-d's Presence. Like Jonah's attempt, the ministers' endeavor proved unsuccessful. Jonah's role as prophet was used by the author of the midrash as a model for the early prophetic career of Abraham.²¹⁷ Just as Jonah upon being commanded by G-d, had entered Nineveh, the city of Israel's enemy, to deliver the word of G-d, so, too, did Abraham, in the midrash, enter Babylonia, the city of Israel's enemy, and deliver the word of G-d. In the Book of Jonah, the people and their king repented (Jon. 3:4), while in the Ma'aseh, the people repent, but King Nimrod does not. This, emphasizes the intense evil represented by Nimrod, and its effect upon human beings as individuals and as societies.

²¹⁷As discussed above, his prophetic role would come to resemble that of Elijah, during the latter phase of the midrash.

B. The Midrash

The Torah presents very few details concerning the early life of Abraham (that is, before he received G-d's call to "Go forth," in Gn. 12:1). The Biblical text never explains just why it was that Abraham was chosen to be G-d's prophet. Therefore, midrashic traditions grew up around the figure of Abraham which sought to fill in these details.

Unlike the Biblical material discussed above, which was gathered and then adapted to the story of Abraham, drawing parallels between the original Biblical personages and their situations, the vast majority of midrashic material presented in Ma'aseh Avraham Avinu is exegetic and narrative midrashic material originally concerning Abraham. This material fills in the details absent from the Torah text, but it is still tied to the actual verses of the Book of Genesis which refer to Abraham. In Ma'aseh, these details (or legends) have been removed from their connection to the verses of the Book of Genesis (as they are presented in the exegetic midrashim) and serve as the basis for the work. They form the skeleton of the plot of our text which the Biblical parallel material then filled in.

In the following list of midrashic sources, I have tried to indicate the earliest sources for the specific legends that appear in Ma'aseh. Many of these legends are found over and over again in various sources compiled throughout the millennium.

Probably the most ancient of the midrashic sources drawn upon by the compiler(s) of Ma'aseh Avraham Avinu is that of Genesis Rabbah. From Genesis Rabbah, the author of Ma'aseh drew the legend of Abraham discovering G-d (38:13, 39:1). The tradition of Terah being an idol manufacturer was also taken from Genesis Rabbah 38:13. The story of Abraham selling idols for his father and in the process convincing others of the folly

of idol worship may also be based on Genesis Rabbah 38:13.²¹⁸ The legend of Abraham destroying the idols is presented in Genesis Rabbah 38:13. Finally, the legend of Abraham being cast into the fiery furnace appears in Genesis Rabbah 38:13, in explication of Gn. 11:28.²¹⁹

The Ma'aseh also drew upon Pirke-d'R. Eliezer. The legend of Nimrod exalting himself as a god is extant in Pirke-d'R. Eliezer, Chapter twenty-four. The legend of Abraham's birth, comes from Chapter twenty-six of Pirke d'R. Eliezer. The hiding of the infant Abraham in the cave is from Chapter twenty-six of Pirke d'R. Eliezer. This same chapter also contains mention of the fiery furnace.

Seder Eliyahu Rabbah also serves as a major midrashic source for Ma'aseh Avraham Avinu. A variation of the birth legend, may be found in Chapter six of Seder Eliyahu Rabbah. A version of the story of Abraham selling idols, and in the process convincing other of the folly of idol worship, is also present in Chapter six of Seder Eliyahu Rabbah, as is a version of the fiery furnace legend.

The text also used Midrashic sources concerning the birth of Moses and applied them to Abraham. These legends of Moses' birth come from Exodus Rabbah 1:20, and B.T. Sotah 12a.

When it comes to the Jewish understanding of the character of Abraham, the

²¹⁸Another version of this legend is also found in Exodus Rabbah 16:2.

²¹⁹The legend is also presented in Targum Yonatan to Gn. 11:28 and 15:7. In both instances, as in Genesis Rabbah, the legend is based upon the city the Torah lists as Abraham's birthplace, Ur of the Chaldees (אֲרַם כַּלְדָּא), translating the word Ur (אֲרַם) as fire. Therefore, in Gn.15:7 G-d identifies Himself as "The L-rd who brought you out of the fire of the Chaldeans."

Biblical text constitutes only part of the story. The Rabbinic interpretation and expansion of the Biblical text make up the rest. In Ma'aseh Avraham Avinu, these Rabbinic interpretations, as found in earlier midrashic sources, have themselves been explicated and expanded using the Biblical models alluded to above. These source materials have been combined to create a work that at once is Biblical and Rabbinic. It is a weaving of sources from different parts of Jewish tradition.

There is a Rabbinic saying that the deeds of the Patriarchs are repeated by their children.²²⁰ Bearing this in mind, clearly, the story of Abraham in Ma'aseh is our story. It not only explains the missing links in the Abraham story of the past. But, describes the history of the Jewish people's love for, and attestation of G-d, despite the brutal hardships and persecutions involved for doing so. It describes a relationship that is not one way. Time and again G-d has redeemed His chosen servant. This process and this relationship continues in the present. The Jewish people are still G-d's servant. G-d's Providence is over us, just as it was over Abraham. What we do still effects G-d, and still effects the world. Just as the courage of Abraham's dedication to G-d brought redemption, so, too, will our efforts move G-d to bring the ultimate redemption. May we all sit, like Abraham amongst the angels, in the garden of peace and life.

²²⁰See the Ramban's commentary to Gn. 26:1-12.

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