

Lech Lecha

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

This week we read about Avram, emerging as the first monotheist, the founder of our tradition. He is the first character in the Torah whose relationship with God seems to make him a better, more caring person. It is this that distinguishes him from, say, Noach.

There is a well-known tradition, not in the Torah itself, that Avram's father, Terach, was an idol maker, and that one day Avram smashed the idols and put the hammer into the hand of the largest idol. When Terach returned, Avram said that the idol with the hammer must have done it, and Terach realized how ineffectual his job was!

Maimonides says that they were not that stupid. After all, both in Ur and Egypt massive engineering projects and sophisticated calculations were common, even before this period. The error was in the symbolism, not the reality. Even making a symbol for God can be misleading, just as endowing humans with supernatural power, the Superman Syndrome, can be dangerously illusory. So was Terach a goodie or a baddie?

If you look at the text, it seems that he, rather than Avram, started the migration out of Ur and moved up the great rivers towards Charan, which was where he dies. This is all mentioned before God appears to Avram and tells him to go to the new land he will show him. Indeed, at the end of the previous chapter it actually says that Terach left in order to go towards Canaan, and that he took his son and nephew Lot with him.

Yes, you can say that the Torah does not go in chronological order. But you can also say that although Terach might not have been as great as Avram, he did have some merit. He did start the process. And Avram does want to back to his roots for a wife for Isaac. Maybe Terach was not so bad after all and even inadequate fathers can still have a positive impact on their kids.