

RADIO PROGRAM
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

Shalom. When Abraham left Mesopotamia for the Land of Israel G-d commanded him in this fashion: "Go for yourself from your land, from your birthplace, and from the house of your father to the land which I will show you. And I will make you for a great nation, and I will bless you, and I will make your name great, and you be a blessing." Why did G-d had to command Abraham in these terms? Why did He have to tell him he was leaving Mesopotamia not for G-d's sake but for his own sake? And why did G-d have to promise to make him great, to bless him, to make him rich? And, finally, why did He tell Abraham only one thing and give him basically only one commandment, which is, "You be a blessing." I will make you rich. I will make you great, but you, you be a blessing.

It seems to me that in these few words we have explained why so many people here in Lafayette are so unhappy. You know, Lafayette is one of the finest cities in the United States. We really have everything in this town. In fact, the Census Bureau said that we, in Lafayette, live in one of the best places in the country. We are rated way up there, but, yet, there are so many people who are unhappy here. They seem to have made it, achieved the American dream, but, yet, they are still very restless. Something is still troubling them. I think that what is going on is that people have forgotten G-d's injunction to Abraham. Abraham was told to leave Mesopotamia, to get out of his rut, to go and spread the word to all the peoples in the world that there was a G-d Who cared for them and loved them, and Abraham accepted this obligation. G-d told Abraham, "Don't worry whether you are rich or famous. These things are really ephemeral. They come and go, but you have one charge. There is one thing you have to do and should do which will give all your efforts

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meaning, and probably will make you eventually rich and famous but you are not doing it for this reason. What you are to do is be a blessing.

So many people here in Lafayette are trying so hard to be rich or famous, but what is being rich or famous? Can someone tell me who the richest man was in Lafayette in 1970? Who can name the Nobel Prize winners of 1912? Who made great discoveries in various veterinary or agricultural sciences in 1922? People who received all sorts of honors, their name may be recorded in some musty book, but their fame is ephemeral. The same is true of riches. Riches come and go, and, yet, even these people who make great discoveries and great fortunes, they, in themselves, are not really making any lasting contribution to the world as far as the moral fiber of the world is concerned. They are doing something important, something great, but every discovery can be used for good and bad. The more progress we make in genetics, the more power a dictator may soon have to make a sub-race to be slaves. The more progress we make in physics, the better we will be able to blow ourselves up. The more riches we acquire may also allow us more power to ravage our environment and ourselves. Yes, all these things are important and we should continue because they are also a blessing as well as a curse, but they are both. They are not absolute. G-d will give us the riches and see to it that we are famous, see to it that discoveries are made if we continue to be a blessing.

What do I mean by continue to be a blessing? What does blessing mean in Hebrew? The word "Brocha" in Hebrew does not mean just the same thing as in English, "blessing", but has many meanings. It means "to greet", "to congratulate", "to praise", "to thank". It means to enhance the moral

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base of the world. It means to create a society in which no one would ever think of using riches or advancement or discoveries for harm. It means to be a warm personality, to feel with people, to empathize with them. It means to congratulate them, to be with people, to be happy for their happiness and to be sad in their sorrow. It means to take an interest in someone else, to learn how to praise. Brocha in Hebrew also means to praise, to take an interest in your children, not to just pay for what they do but to take an interest in what they do, to praise, to be concerned, and to show gratitude, to thank people. This was Abraham's mission in life, to be that kind of a blessing, to be concerned about other people, to be a warm personality, to be with people in their sorrows and happiness, to take a personal interest in what went on, especially with the members of his own family, to show gratitude because gratitude is one of the bases of morality.

Yes, this was the mission of Abraham, and this is the mission we should all try to fulfill as well so that our great discoveries and wealth should not turn into a curse but should remain a blessing. That's why in the next sentence it says, "And I will bless you and those that bless you I will bless, and those that curse you I will curse, and they shall be blessed by you, all the families of the world. Those who follow you will be blessed." Those people who realize that in this world the most important thing for everyone to be is a blessing, is a warm, nice personality who is concerned and empathizes with others. These people will not suffer the curses of new discoveries or riches but will truly be blessed, but those people who undercut the moral fiber of society will find that all their riches and all their discoveries will only be a curse. Let us hope that we all will be, as Abraham, a blessing, and our

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whole society will be blessed.