

# Home is Where the Mind Is

## [PDF Avraham Homeland](#)

The question that I sent out earlier this week read: “After telling Avraham that he should go to a nondescript land, G-d appears to the great patriarch and validates his choice of Canaan as the correct land. However, G-d soon makes a famine, forcing Avraham to choose between his new special land and departure. Why would G-d do such a thing? If Avraham has reached his much-anticipated destination, why would G-d do something seemingly contradictory?”

Several people answered the question by noting that this is considered one of Avraham’s ten tests. Yes, it is a test, but it is important to explore possible reasons for the test. It can be fruitful to search beyond the basic lesson in faith in G-d’s plan and the importance in tolerating difficult circumstances. In addition, it also strikes me as quite strange that the test is essentially a contradiction between a command of G-d and an affliction sent by G-d.



I will give the answer in a nutshell and then the longer version.

Nutshell: Israel is not just a physical place in which to seek refuge; it is a mental state of homeland and belonging, an idea which is reflected in contemporary psychological theories. This idea is reflected in the Torah in Avraham’s life, once again demonstrating that the Torah includes all true ideas in their purest form, and that they are spelled out by the subtext of the Torah’s narrative.

Longer version: It would be logical to assume that there is a lesson for or constructive impact on Avraham each step of the way in his journey. It would also be nice to find a similar theme or connected set of ideas in each step, as well. I think that the overall concept and meaning for our lives of Avraham’s story is one of leaving one’s home of origin and establishing a new home, in the healthiest way. The great Patriarch’s life is parallel to the flow of the *middot* of *chesed*, which is the beginning of the development of any process in the Universe (A storyline, Creation, building of a structure).

Decidedly leaving one’s home place and family – both physically and emotionally – is called “differentiation” by psychologists(1) (I have a very eye-opening class on this, entitled "Leaving Charan" click [here](#)). This is parallel to the dynamic of Avraham decidedly leaving the stagnant ways of his family. After one differentiates or is “launched” by his or her caretakers, one needs to find a new place to call home; it should, in its most constructive form, be a place that reflects the positive and familiar aspects of one’s place of origin, but contain new elements that are necessary for the individual to fully actualize his or her self and develop beyond their initial family unit. G-d set this place up to be the Land of Israel and Avraham’s new relationship with his wife (which was different than the previous relationship, as that was before they received new names, identities, and destinies).



Once Avraham left home, G-d wanted to make sure that he developed into the greatest possible person, as well as serve as a paradigm for our own personal development. According to Rashi at the beginning of the Parsha (12:2), G-d mentioned Israel to Avraham several times in order to make the land beloved in the great Shepherd's eyes. Even a cursory reading of the sentences reveals that Avraham did not know his indented destination. It would seem quite strange that G-d would make Avraham excited about a new land, send prophecy to the Patriarch that he is in the correct place upon arrival (12:7), and, rather quickly, create a famine, thereby seemingly signaling to him that he should leave the land.

The reason that G-d did this is in order to instill in Avraham that Israel is not a physical place, but a mental state of being; it is not a place of refuge from one's troubles, it is a beloved sought-after homeland that must be cherished mentally, not solely physically. Avraham differentiating represents *chesed-chesed-chesed*(2), the very beginning of his independent existence and new desire to make Israel the homeland of his new people. However, as we all know, *gevurah* comes after *chesed*. *Gevurah* comes to refine and whittle away any unnecessary elements of the item that was presented. The analogy is the necessary trimming of a rosebush in order to preserve its essential parts. The immediate *chesed-chesed-gevurah* challenge to Avraham is the famine in Canaan. The idea that the Land of Israel is the ideal goal is whittled away, but the *idea* of a Jewish homeland, a land of belonging and independent existence has been created in his mind.



A similar idea is presented in contemporary psychological theories. In their comprehensive but notably politically biased work on the family life cycle, McGoldrick, Carter, and Preto (2011) discuss the psychological and emotional importance of having a "home", a physical place of "acceptance and belonging" that is "essential to our development" (p. 12). In addition to the physical home, it is healthy to one's development to build a psychological state wherein one feels comfortable and finds safety, what Hooks (1999) refers to as a "homeplace". The homeplace is an important part of one's cultural and personal identity. Giamatti (1998) referred to such a state as "a place of self-definition and belonging, a place where people find resilience to deal with the injustices of society or even their families."

Avraham and his subsequent offspring benefitted from a homeplace; it was a part of their healthy psychological development. Though Israel often lives physically out of the Land of Israel, what has remained in the nation's mind throughout the centuries are the immutable psychological traces of the location as a homeland. No other nation has survived for so long without national demarcations and it has happened because of what G-d and Avraham imbued in us long ago.



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(1) For avid *The Seven Ways* readers, see Ari's statement, page 5, paragraph 3, line 4.

(2) See *Ths Seven Ways*, page 239.

Addendum:

My high school principle mentioned that G-d may be preventing something negative from developing in Avraham's life. Often, when people are deeply involved or psychologically attached to someone or something and they detach from it, they develop new attachments to compensate. G-d may have been trying to stop this by preempting Avraham's theoretical attachment to the Land of Israel as surrogate for his family or origin (you can read the idea [here](#)).

I am not attempting to say that Avraham is specifically an unhealthy person or that he was particularly susceptible to such attachment; I mean to say both that G-d wanted to do kindness to Avraham and preempt such an unhealthy development and that the Torah provides lessons and paradigms for our own lives. When one definitively moves away from home, one must finish the job by making her or his own home.

References:

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**Bailey, I.**, (2011) *The Seven Ways*, Baltimore: Createspace.