

# Rav Kook Torah

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## Yaakov Rescued Avraham

Adapted from Midbar Shur, pp. 289-292

According to an intriguing Midrash (Tanchuma Toldot 4), Avraham would not have made it out of his hometown of Ur Casdim alive were it not for the intervention of his grandson Yaakov. King Nimrod ordered Avraham to be thrown into a fiery furnace because of Avraham's rejection of idolatry. But Yaakov came to the rescue, as it says:

"So said God to the House of Yaakov who redeemed Avraham: Yaakov will not be ashamed, nor will his face become pale." (Yeshayahu 29:22)

[The simple reading of the verse interprets the phrase "who redeemed Avraham" to refer back to God, not to Yaakov]

Even given the poetic license of Midrashic literature, Yaakov could not have literally rescued his grandfather in an incident that took place before Yaakov was born. Rather, the Sages wanted to teach us that Avraham was saved due to some special merit or quality his grandson possessed. What was this quality?

### Two Paths of Change

There are two paths of spiritual growth that one may take. The first

path is one of sudden, radical change, usually the result of some external catalyst...

The second path is one of slow, deliberate growth. We attain this gradual change through our own toil; it does not require an external stimulus and thus is always accessible.

But why are there two different paths of change available to us? If God provided us with two paths, then clearly both are needed. We should first prepare ourselves and advance as much as possible through our own efforts. After we have attained the highest level that we are capable of reaching, we may then benefit from unexpected inspiration from the inner recesses of our soul.

Avraham was a spiritual revolutionary, initiating a revolt against the idolatry of his generation. Abraham is the archetype of radical change...

Future generations, however, cannot rely solely on Avraham's style of radical change. As a normative path for all times, we need the method of gradual spiritual growth. The model for this type of change is Yaakov. Unlike his grandfather, Yaakov never underwent sudden transformations of personality or direction. Rather, the Torah characterizes him as "a quiet, scholarly man, dwelling in tents"

### Yaakov to the Rescue

The Kabbalists explain that the goal of humanity - the reason why the soul is lowered into this world - is so that we

may perfect ourselves through our own efforts. This way, we will not need to partake of nehama dehisufa (the "bread of shame"), a metaphor for benefiting from that which we did not earn.

Why bother with the slower path? By growing slowly through our own efforts... nehama dehisufa... honorable gift which we have utilized. 