ב"ה

Torah Tidbits

ISSUE 1682

OCTOBER 31ST 2026
כ' מרחשון תשפ"ז

VAYEIRA - וירא



Rav Bronspiegel's Timeless Message
Rabbi Chaim Eisenstein
Page 80



What Do You Still Have?
Rebbetzin Dr. Adina Shmidman
Page 62

כי־ברך אברכך והרבה
ארבה את־זרעך בראשית כ"ב:י"ז

YERUSHALAYIM SHABBAT VAYEIRA ZMANIM
CANDLES **4:15 PM** • HAVDALA **5:28 PM** • RABBEINU TAM **6:07 PM**

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Table of Contents

04 Dear Torah Tidbits Family
Rabbi Avi Berman

10 Aliya-by-Aliya Sedra Summary
Rabbi Reuven Tradburks

16 "Reflecting on the Wonders of Nature"
Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

22 The Music of Ambivalence
Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, zt"l

30 Probing the Prophets
Rabbi Nachman Winkler

34 Avraham Avinu: The Dayan of Sedom
Rabbi Shalom Rosner

38 Reward's Reasoning
Rebbetzin Shira Smiles

42 Hashem's Problem
Rabbi Judah Mischel

44 Simchat Shmuel
Rabbi Sam Shor

48 Schedule
OU Israel

56 Echoes of Rashi
Rabbi Moshe Taragin

62 What Do You Still Have?
Rebbetzin Dr. Adina Shmidman

64 Birchot HaShachar: Recognizing Hashem's Gifts (Part III)
Rebbetzin Zemira Ozarowski

68 Judging Favorably Rav Kook on Pirkei Avot (1:6)
Rabbi Aaron Goldscheider

72 What One Can Take to the Hospital
Rabbi Daniel Mann

74 Did Avraham Go Far Enough? On the qualities required for Jewish leadership: Torah from the front room of a mid-century Tel Aviv hostel
Rabbi Joe Wolfson

76 The Impossible Math: Sarah's Unshakable Secret of Survival
Rabbi Elyada Goldwicht

78 A Nation of Chessed
Mrs. Michal Horowitz

80 Rav Bronspiegel's Timeless Message
Rabbi Chaim Eisenstein

84 SHAGRIRIM BALEV
Making Room for Connection
Ayelet Glatt

86 Holiness
Dr. Jacob Solomon

90 The Y-Files Comic
Netanel Epstein

92 NCSY
Torah4Teens by Teens
Gilad Chaim // Coby Nadel



COVER PAGE Photographed by **Daniel Santacruz**

This is a rare photo relating to Vayeira 19:23 & 12:28 where the cities of Sedom and Gomorrah are mentioned. Rarely photographed, the Apple of Sodom (Calotropis Procera), is a tree 3-5 meters tall, common in the area of the Dead Sea and the lower Jordan Valley. Due to its association with Sedom and Gomorrah, its fruit has been called "accursed." Its juice is poisonous.

CANDLE LIGHTING
AND HAVDALA TIMES



	VAYEIRA		CHAYEI SARA	
	Candles	Havdala	Candles	Havdala
Yerushalayim/Maale Adumim	4:15	5:28	4:10	5:23
Aza Area (Netivot, Sderot et al)	4:34	5:31	4:28	5:26
Beit Shemesh/RBS	4:34	5:29	4:29	5:24
Gush Etzion	4:32	5:29	4:26	5:24
Raanana/Tel Mond/Herzliya/K.Saba	4:32	5:29	4:26	5:24
Modiin/Chashmonaim	4:32	5:29	4:26	5:24
Netanya	4:32	5:29	4:26	5:24
Be'er Sheva	4:33	5:30	4:28	5:25
Rehovot	4:32	5:30	4:27	5:25
Petach Tikva	4:15	5:29	4:10	5:24
Ginot Shomron	4:31	5:28	4:25	5:23
Haifa / Zichron	4:21	5:28	4:14	5:23
Gush Shiloh	4:30	5:28	4:24	5:22
Tel Aviv / Givat Shmuel	4:32	5:30	4:26	5:24
Givat Zeev	4:35	5:28	4:29	5:23
Chevron / Kiryat Arba	4:32	5:29	4:26	5:24
Ashkelon	4:34	5:31	4:28	5:26
Yad Binyamin	4:33	5:30	4:27	5:25
Tzfat / Bikat HaYarden	4:22	5:26	4:16	5:21
Golan	4:28	5:29	4:22	5:20
Nahariya/Maalot	4:19	5:28	4:13	5:22
Afula	4:30	5:27	4:24	5:22

Rabbeinu Tam (Jerusalem): Vayeira - 6:07 PM • Chayei Sara - 6:02 PM

All Times According to MyZmanim (20 mins before Sunset in most Cities;
40 mins in Yerushalyim and Petach Tikva; 30 mins in Tzfat, Nahariya, Maalot and Haifa)

Daf Yomi: Bechoros 37

OTHER Z'MANIM



JERUSALEM
Ranges 11 days Wednesday - Shabbat
Oct. 28 - Nov. 7 | 7 - 27 marcheshvan

Earliest Tallit and Tefillin	5:00-5:08
Sunrise	5:52-6:00
Sof Zman Kriat Shema	8:37-8:41
Magen Avraham	8:00-8:04
Sof Zman Tefila (According to the Gra and Baal HaTanya)	9:32-9:35
Chatzot (Halachic Noon)	11:22
Mincha Gedola (Earliest Mincha)	11:52
Plag Mincha	3:44-3:37
Sunset (Including Elevation)	4:57-4:49

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DEAR TORAH TIDBITS FAMILY

RABBI AVI BERMAN
Executive Director, OU Israel | aberman@ouisrael.org

Every Friday, I have the privilege of broadcasting a radio show together with Rav Shmuel Eliyahu, Chief Rabbi of Tzfat, on Radio Galei Yisrael. Listeners call up to ask Rav Eliyahu about all kinds of *halachic* questions. One particular topic comes up almost every single week: names. Parents ask if this is an appropriate name, or how to deal with competing interests in naming a child, or looking for a deeper meaning in a name. Why? Because they know that a name is an identity, it helps form a personality, it means something, and parents hope that the name that they pick will be a blessing and bring success to their son or daughter.

This week's *parsha* tells us how Avraham and Sarah named their own son. At long last, with Avraham at 100 years old, and Sarah at 90, they were able to name their newborn child, and they chose the name Yitzchak. The Torah gives us Sarah's words: "God has made laughter (*tzechok*) for me; whoever hears will laugh (*yitzachak*) with me (Bereishit 21:6).

A thought that came to me last year when preparing my *drasha* for when I was going to speak to the wonderful *kehilla* at Mishkan Avraham is that if Avraham had been reading a book when he was told he would have a son, would he have named the baby Reading a Book? If Sarah had been walking, would they have named him Walk? So Sarah laughed. Why is that reason enough to name the baby Yitzchak?

I think about this question because my own Hebrew name is Avraham Yitzchak. Why did Avraham give his son the name Yitzchak, a name that has gone down from generation to generation, to my great-grandfather Avraham Yitzchak, and from him to me? What is so special about this word, Yitzchak?

To answer that, we have to ask ourselves what makes people laugh in the first place. My wife and I are very lucky to have a number of children who are really very funny. We can sit at the Shabbat table, and there is literally endless laughter and joking, because, *Baruch Hashem*, each one of them has a very unique way of thinking. They bring that uniqueness to the many great things they do in life. And so I have the ability, every week, to consider the philosophy of humor. What makes a great joke? Why do we laugh?

The answer is that it is something we did not expect. When the joke subverts expectations, when my son gets up and says something unexpected or surprising, we all laugh. That's what's funny about it. For that reason, the joke is never as funny the second time you hear it as the first. Clearly,

Mazal Tov to
OU Israel Board member
Mark & Ariane Schneider and family
on the birth of two granddaughters to:
Dvir & Tobi Miller
and to Aaron & Adina Schneider
Rabbi Avi Berman
and the OU Israel family

there is something about the element of surprise that makes something funny.

Avraham and Sarah knew that Yitzchak meant something to the future of the Jewish people. Avraham had been promised this son that would continue his spiritual legacy. If so, they must have known that their descendants from this child that carry that legacy would never follow the normal courses of history. This would be a nation that would outlast every superpower and survive exile and dispersion. This nation would surprise the world, over and over again, because *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* promised Avraham so.

Perhaps this is the reason they named Yitzchak after laughter - because they knew that the Jewish people would surprise the world, over and over again, and thereby make them laugh.

The world expected that after the destruction of the *Beit HaMikdash*, with exile not just once but twice, and after *Klal Yisrael* was dispersed around the world and spoke other languages, the Hebrew language would disappear and the Jewish people would completely assimilate. The world expected that after the pogroms, Jews would be afraid to get married, afraid to make *smachot*, and afraid to go to *shul*. After every kind of inquisition, massacre, and expulsion in our history, anyone would have said that there was no chance for the Jewish people to survive.

But we bring the surprise factor. After every pogrom, after every *churban*, after even the murder of six million in the Holocaust, we rise up with the determination to survive. *Klal Yisrael* continues to surprise the world with its resilience again and again and again.



Who would ever have imagined, 80 years ago, when the Jewish people were walking out of the concentration camps, that they would one day have a state of their own? Who would have imagined that the Jewish people would be providing so much technology and science to the world, that we would have a military so powerful and so creative, that we would be selling defense systems to Germany - now a firm ally of the Jewish state? Who would have imagined that the Jewish people would have such a high number of satellites in the world? Who would have imagined that Israel's army and Air Force would be fighting side by side with the American Air Force in attacking Iran, a nation more than ten times our size? Who would have imagined that almost half of the Jewish people would come to live in and build up the Land of Israel, that we would build *shuls*, cities, and communities across the country, and that in 78 years we would have such a flourishing country? That is the surprise we give to the entire world.

This week, we all went through elections, and each of us voted for what we believe is best for the Jewish people. But no matter what, let us remember: we are one nation. We are all the children of Avraham,

Yitzchak, and Yaakov. We have to remember that despite our many different opinions, we continue to surprise the world not because of our separation, but because we are united as one people.

I am writing these words before I know the results, and before I have even gone to vote. But I know in my heart that every Jew standing in line to vote this week is someone I love. That they are part of this amazing nation of *Klal Yisrael*. That we are all going to vote because we love the Jewish nation and want its state ultimately to be a beacon to the entire world. We want to continue surprising the world with inventions in medicine, agriculture, high-tech, and water, and to continue bringing to the world the good that *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* wills for this world.

Let us continue being messengers of Hashem, continue loving each other, and continue embracing each other, knowing that *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* is with us. And *b'ezrat Hashem*, we will very soon surprise the world with the building of the *Beit HaMikdash*, from which all the nations of the world will benefit.

Wishing you all an uplifting and inspiring Shabbat,

Rabbi Avi Berman
Executive Director, OU Israel
aberman@ouisrael.org

Dedicated L'iluy Nishmat

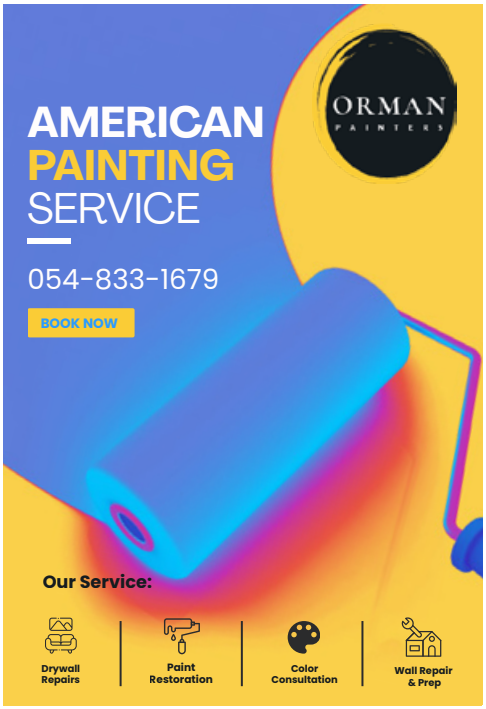
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Study Groups Schedule

Day	Topic	Start Date	End Date	Time	Location	Instructor
Monday	Torah of the Soul	2.11.26	12.7.27	10:00 AM–1:15 PM	7 Hartom St., Jerusalem	Mali Segal
Monday	Jewish Thought	2.11.26	26.7.27	4:00 PM–7:15 PM	7 Hartom St., Jerusalem	Tehila Shamir
Monday	Inner Growth Through the Teachings of the Baal Shem Tov	26.10.26	5.7.27	5:30 PM–8:45 PM	33 Jaffa St., Jerusalem	Yehuda Wilner
Tuesday	The Jewish Home	27.10.26	13.7.27	7:30 PM–10:45 PM	7 Aharon Propes St., Jerusalem	Hadar Sayles
Wednesday	Chassidut and In-Depth Torah Study	4.11.26	21.7.27	10:00 AM–1:15 PM	7 Hartom St., Jerusalem	Dafna Abadi
Wednesday	Living in Tune with the Times	14.10.26	23.6.27	5:30 PM–8:45 PM	33 Jaffa St., Jerusalem	Sima Ezra

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Contact **info@ouisrael.org**

**All sessions are conducted in Hebrew.*

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ALIYA BY ALIYA SEDRA SUMMARY

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PARSHAT VAYEIRA

Our parsha is the heart of the beloved stories of Avraham.

There are two parallel themes in the parsha: 1) Avraham as the exemplar of monotheism and generosity and 2) who will be the next generation to carry on this legacy.

The Torah will describe Avraham as a kind and generous soul, while at the same time a man of faith, of interaction with G-d and with His Name on his lips. Avraham teaches by example.

The second theme of the Jewish future is punctuated by the birth of Yitzchak and the banishment of Yishmael.

These two themes, Avraham the kind, and Yitzchak as the next generation clash in the great drama of the Akeida.

1ST ALIYA (18:1-14)

G-d appears to Avraham. 3 men are warmly welcomed by Avraham with lavish hospitality. They announce to him that by this time next year Sarah will have a child. She overhears this from the tent and laughs, for her ability to bear a child is a thing of the past. G-d protests – is anything too much for G-d – by this time next year you will have a child.

This story of the generosity of Avraham and Sarah is beloved, and for good reason. Avraham offers strangers water and bread. Running and involving the whole family in their generosity, they lavish these strangers with a feast of fresh bread and meat.

The original offer to them was water to wash their feet. Rashi comments that Avraham offered this so they would wash the dust of idol worship off of their feet.

This comment is to enhance Avraham's generosity. To whom is Avraham lavishing generosity? Not only are these strangers, they are idol worshippers to boot.

What a paradigm of kindness, generosity and hospitality; generosity, lavish generosity to complete idol worshipping strangers.

These men, it turns out, are angels, to tell Avraham and Sarah of their impending child. This is a faint echo of Breishit. G-d Creates by saying. Let there be light. And there was light. Sarah could have had her child without being told she was going to have the child.

Perhaps telling her was a hint to Creation, as if to say, this is the way I Create; I say and then it happens. I, G-d, am saying to you and then it will happen. Just so you



know, it is I Who is behind this.



2ND ALIYA (18:15-33)

The men leave for Sodom. G-d reasons that He may not withhold from Avraham, the champion of justice, of His plan to destroy Sodom. Avraham challenges Him: How can You destroy the righteous along with the wicked? And how can You destroy the place if there are righteous people present? Avraham presses his point.

Avraham's generosity is on display again. Avraham argues with G-d Himself to save Sodom. That is indeed generous and caring, besides being rather audacious.

But we must pay attention to not only what Avraham is doing but who he is doing it for. From the first mention of Sodom, when Lot chose to live in that region we were told about Sodom: the people are exceedingly wicked. That is how they are described.

Avraham is lobbying on behalf of wicked people. He himself knows they are wicked because he bargains all the way down to 10 righteous people. Because he himself knows there aren't 50 righteous. Or 40, or 20.

Avraham is pleading for a city of wicked people. That is his generosity, his kindness, his care and concern for others. Pleading with G-d for them.

Avraham is setting a pretty high standard of generosity of spirit and concern for others. Generosity is proffered regardless of to whom.



3RD ALIYA (10:1-20)

The men journey to Sodom. Lot prevails on them to stay with him. The men of the city object to the presence of these foreigners. It turns violent. The visitors tell Lot that Sodom is to be destroyed and he must leave quickly. His sons in law refuse. The morning dawns and Lot, his wife and daughters tarry but eventually, relent and leave Sodom, told not to look back.

While Lot is told that the city is to be destroyed, he is told that he can save himself by leaving immediately. He tells his sons in law that they must leave for G-d is to destroy the city. And he was like a joke, "mitzachek" in their eyes.

We have heard the word laugh already in the parsha. Sarah laughed at the word that G-d would give her a child. The sons-in-law of Lot laugh when told that G-d would destroy the city.

One is a laugh at good news, one a laugh at bad news.

The laugh of Sarah is an incredulous laugh, like "I can't believe this is happening to me; I am living a dream."

The laugh of the sons-in-law of Lot is a scoffing laugh. A laugh of denial. The city is not going to be destroyed. Leave us alone.

And in another parallel, Lot gets up in the morning and dallies. We highlight the word "vayitmama" with the musical note shalshelet, that is a dramatically lingering note.

When faced with destruction, Lot dallies. Or better, when faced with the possibility of saving his life and his family, he dallies.

This story can be seen as a foil, a contrast to the upcoming story of the Akeida. In both, a Divine command is given. Lot, say the angels, leave this city immediately. Avraham, take your son as a sacrifice.

The contrast is the response. Lot tarries, hesitates at the Divine Command. Avraham arises early in the morning at the Divine Command.

And the bitter irony. Lot was commanded to save himself and his family; go quickly before the city is destroyed and you and your family will survive. And he hesitated.

Avraham was told the opposite, the horrible opposite: sacrifice your son, destroy your family. And he jumped to obey the Divine Command.



4TH ALIYA (19:21-21:4)

Lot is told to flee Sodom. The cities of Sodom and Gemora are destroyed. Lot's wife looks back and turns to a pillar of salt. Avraham looks out from the hills and sees the destruction. Lot flees to the hills. The 2 daughters of Lot ply him with wine and become pregnant from him, reasoning that they are the only ones left in the world. They name their children Moav and Amon. Avraham goes to Gerar. Avimelech is told by G-d not to touch Sarah. Avimelech confronts Avraham as to why he hid Sarah's identity from him. Avraham responds: I saw there is no fear of G-d here. G-d fulfills what he promised to Sarah. She gives birth to Yitzchak. Avraham circumcises him as G-d commanded.

When Avraham is confronted, fairly, by Avimelech as to why he didn't tell him that Sarah was his wife, Avraham responds that he saw there is no fear of G-d here.

Avraham is advocating the second half of ethical monotheism. We have seen his interpersonal generosity, his ethics. Here, it is his beliefs.

He says to Avimelech: without deference to G-d, man acts capriciously, with self-interest, in an indulgent manner. Who knows what you would do to her, knowing she is my wife? We Jews, on the other hand, defer to the Divine command, complying with the Divine command.



5TH ALIYA (21:5-21)

Yitzchak grows and is weaned. Sarah sees Yishmael playing with Yitzchak. She tells Avraham to banish this boy, for he will not inherit on a par with Yitzchak. This troubles Avraham but G-d tells him to listen to Sarah. Avraham arises early, sends away Hagar and Yishmael. They go to the desert of Beersheva. The water runs out. Hagar cannot bear to see the death of her child and cries. An angel calls to her. Her eyes are opened, she sees a well and gives water to Yishmael.

Yishmael's banishment is another parallel story, a parallel to the Akeida.

Both stories feature: parent arising early, a journey, a child walking with a parent, the child's life in danger, an angel calls, the parent sees what they did not see before, the child is saved.

The parallel is apparent; but where is the contrast?

Avraham goes to the Akeida by Divine command. Hagar is banished by Sarah. Divine command versus human activity. This contrast informs the contrast of Yishmael and Yitzchak. Yishmael will be a great nation by the criteria of great nations. Yitzchak will be a great nation with a special covenant with the Creator. One will be of this world; one will be of an elevated world.



6TH ALIYA (21:22-34)

Avimelech initiates a pact with Avraham in Beersheva. They name the place Beersheva from the word to swear. Avraham calls out in G-d's name

in Beersheva.

Another parallel story; a covenant. Avimelech makes a covenant with Avraham. G-d Made a covenant with Avraham.

The nations work in the rough and tumble of this world. As such, when Avimelech sees Avraham's great success, he figures it is good to be with a winner. Let's make a deal.

The Jewish people march to the covenant with the Creator, a covenant of an entirely different sort.



7TH ALIYA (22:1-24)

Akeidat Yitzchak, the binding of Isaac. Avraham is told to take Yitzchak and offer him as an offering. On the way, Yitzchak questions Avraham. They arrive at the mountain. At the last moment, the angel calls to Avraham. Avraham has proven his loyalty to G-d's command. He sees a ram caught in the bush and offers it in the place of Yitzchak. They return to Beersheva.

The most dramatic story in the Torah.

A story of absolute loyalty to the Divine command but also one of pathos and irony. The man of generosity, who pleaded for the lives of the wicked of Sodom now prepared to take the life of his son. The one who challenged the injustice of the impending destruction of Sodom, now has no voice of objection. And the most obvious – the one who waited patiently for 25 years for the promise of a child – and a future – now prepared to destroy it all.

Why would Avraham have challenged the destruction of Sodom but here is so accepting?

Perhaps the difference lies in the Divine command. When G-d tells Avraham He intends to destroy Sodom there is no Divine command. They are talking. G-d is telling Avraham what He intends to do. Avraham challenges.

Here, at the Akeida, Avraham is commanded. Sacrifice Yitzchak. Not informed. Commanded. I can challenge the Divine intent. I can challenge His balancing of justice and generosity. Perhaps He will balance things differently.

But when He commands, there is but one response. Commands are non negotiable. There is no challenging the command. There is only acquiescence, compliance, deference.

We can challenge what He intends to do; we cannot challenge His Command.

HAFOTRAH: 2 KINGS , 4:1-37

This week's parsha famously tells us that although Avraham and Sarah were advanced in age they miraculously bear a child. Along these same lines the haftorah this Shabbat describes a similar incident in which the navi Elisha assures an elderly childless woman that she will bear a child.

Elisha would often pass through the city of Shunem. A couple who lived in the town offered a place for Elisha to stay. They even made a guest room that Elisha could use whenever he needed. Elisha became aware that the couple was childless. He blessed the woman that she would give birth. Indeed a year later a son was born to the couple.

The story does not end there. A few years later the son died suddenly. The woman called Elisha back to her home. Elisha quickly came and miraculously was able to bring the child back to life. ■

STATS

4th of the 54 sedras; 4th of 12 sedras in Bereishit.
Written on 252 lines in a Torah, rank: 5.
6 Parshiyot; 4 open, 2 closed.
147 pesukim - ranks 7th (4th in Bereishit).
2085 words - ranks 2nd (1st in Bereishit).
7862 letters - rank: 3rd (2nd in Bereishit).
Vayeira is actually the 2nd largest sedra in the Torah. (Naso, is #1 with no rival - Bamidbar, Pinchas, and R'ei all take up more lines than Vayeira, but those sedras each have many parshiyot, which means a lot of blank space between parshiyot, which adds to the line-count.)

MITZVOT

None of Taryag (the 613 mitzvot) are found in Vayeira (one of 17 sedras without entries on the list of 613) - however, there are Midot and values and other lessons.

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A SHORT VORT

BY RABBI CHANOCH YERES
Rav, Beit Knesset Beit Yisrael, Yemin Moshe

"And G-d appeared to him in Elonei Mamre." (18:1) - (וירא אליו ה' באלני ממרא (יח:א)
Why did G-d choose to appear before Avraham specifically at Elonei Mamre? What was the significance of this place?
Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki 1040-1105, France) answers that it was Mamre who gave Avraham counsel with regards to the decision to have a Brit Milah. For this gesture of encouraging and advising Avraham with his Divine challenges, G-d revealed Himself to Avraham in Mamre's land. Rashi's answer presents a difficulty in its understanding. Avraham is portrayed as the one who loyally follows G-d's command and its details. Avraham fulfilled the command of Brit Milah because G-d commanded and not because of Mamre's words of advice, why the need to honor Mamre?
The Vilna Gaon (Kol Eliyahu-Rabbi Eliyahu ben Shlomo, 1720-1797) answers that Avraham was devoting himself to rally others in forsaking idolatry and introduce them to the one and only G-d. Surely Avraham was to follow G-d's command to a circumcision, but he was concerned, not about the Brit itself, but rather the reaction of his neighbors. Perhaps hearing about this new condition to foster intimacy with G-d, the masses would no longer be drawn to the idea of monotheism. Eshkol and Aner tried to convince Avraham to abandon this physical condition on the body. It was Mamre who advised Avraham not to worry and not to waver from G-d's command. For this encouragement to follow G-d's word, G-d blessed his manifestation on Mamre's habitat.
Shabbat Shalom

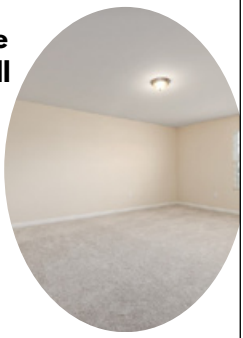
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THE PERSON IN THE PARSHA

BY RABBI DR. TZVI HERSH WEINREB
OU Executive Vice President, Emeritus

"Reflecting on the Wonders of Nature"

I'm a Brooklyn boy, born and bred. I had few, if any, opportunities to experience the wonders of nature. I grew up in a totally urban environment, except for an occasional visit to the Prospect Park Zoo and the adjacent lake and skimpy woods.

My teenage years, during which I was beginning to form my religious beliefs, were spent in a yeshiva in the Lower East Side of Manhattan. There I had even less of an opportunity to absorb the beauty of nature. The local Hester Street Park was a great place to play basketball and chat with aged Russian Jewish survivors of the Communist Revolution. But I do not recall a single blade, let alone a small patch, of green grass there.

In loving memory of
our beloved father and grandfather
Joachim Ignace Weindling z"l

May the Torah learning
from this issue be לעילוי נשמת
חיים יצחק בן נפתלי ז"ל
on his 20th yahrtzeit - כ חשון

Greatly missed by his children
and grandchildren
Marsha, Melissa, and Becky Pottash
Steven & Lizzie Weindling
Shoshanah-Ruth, Naftalia Maya,
and Yaira Rachel Weindling
Nan Abbot and Lee DiTullio

Fast forward to my post high-school years, during which I was exposed to the tutelage of several teachers who had studied in the prominent pre-Holocaust Lithuanian yeshivas.

One might say that I was more than exposed. Better said, I was indoctrinated into their teaching methodologies, which included intensive Talmud study along with heavy emphasis upon classic early medieval theological works. Those works included the opening chapters of *Mishneh Torah* by Rambam (Maimonides 1138-1204) and *Chovot HaLevavot* by Rabbenu Bahya ibn Paquda (1050-1120).

Viewed chronologically, it was Rabbenu Bahya who first shocked me into the recognition that the preferred manner with which to undertake a relationship with the *Ribbono shel Olam*, the "Master of the Universe," was to contemplate the wonders of nature.

In the second section of his *Chovot HaLevavot* (*Duties of the Heart*), he advocates for a careful study of the world around us. He entitled this section *Shaar HaBechinah*, the "Gate of Analysis." Through careful study of nature—mountains, forests, climate, animal behavior, and the remarkable workings of the human body—one can come to appreciate the Almighty and develop a relationship with

Him.

Even more powerful than Rabbenu Bahya were the words of Rambam:

"This revered and mighty God—it is a *mitzvah* to love and stand in awe of Him, as it written, 'And thou shall love the Lord thy God' (Deuteronomy 6:4), and 'of the Lord thy God thou shall stand in awe' (ibid. verse 13).


Rav Shlomo Aviner

"What is the path to His love and awe? The moment when a person beholds His actions and His wondrous great creations and discovers in them His immeasurable and endless wisdom, he will immediately love, and praise, and glorify, and profoundly desire to know His great name! As David said: 'My soul thirsts for God, the living God!' (Psalms 42:3).

"As he further meditates upon these very matters, he reflexively falls backwards with fear and trembling and realizes that he is but a tiny creature, lowly and dim, who stands with a trivial and puny intelligence before Perfect Intelligence. As David said: 'When I behold Your heavens, the work of Your fingers...what is man that You are mindful of him?' As our Sages have taught us, 'Only thus can you truly recognize He who spoke and created a world!'"

I must confess that, as a youth deprived of the opportunity to encounter raw nature, I was initially overwhelmed by these teachings. My earliest memories of communion with the divine were the times when my cousin and I observed our great-grandmother, Yitta Leah Kriegel, may she rest in peace, bake the challah for Shabbos every Friday morning. As she kneaded the dough, and more fervently as she turned on the oven, she would gaze heaven-ward and speak to the *bashefer*, the Creator, and plead with Him to assure that the *kinderlach*, her great-grandchildren, would have delicious challah for Shabbos!

That person-to-person connection with the *Ribbono Shel Olam* was reinforced in the various synagogues prevalent in our neighborhood. Men and women who had gone through displacement from the *alter heim*, their "old homes" in pre-holocaust Europe, knew how to "love God and stand in awe of Him." They knew how to pray to Him as they wept and sobbed, and even more so as they sang and danced. Ah, did they know how to sing!

I grew up with faith in the One Above that arose from watching humans who lived their faith. It was difficult for me to attempt to find faith by contemplating nature and its wonders. This difficulty troubled me for many years.

Much later in life, I came across a passage in the writings of Rav Shlomo Aviner, a contemporary Religious Zionist rabbi of great renown, may he be well. It is contained in his collection of sermons on the weekly Torah portions entitled *Tal Chermon*. In his sermon on this week's *Parashat Vayera* (Genesis 18:1-22:24), he writes:

"Abraham was the "knower-believer-lover"

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of the Lord, par excellence! It is by virtue of this knowledge-faith-love that he came to love other people, all creatures, and the beauty of nature itself. [It is o]ut of his ability to reveal the Light of the Almighty that he came to appreciate all of creation at its many levels."

I remember first coming across this passage and exclaiming to myself, "Wow! He is reversing the teachings of his medieval predecessors! It is not from nature that we learn to appreciate the Almighty, but it is from our connection to the Almighty that we come to appreciate nature!"

Rav Aviner bolsters his contention with an observation garnered from his experience with modern man. He writes, "There are those who think that reflection upon the wonders of nature can bring one to faith in the Creator. They therefore find great value in physics and biology and the like and thereby fail to discern that contemplation of nature without a basis in religious faith swiftly leads to paganism, heresy, and falsely deifying nature itself, a kind of pantheism... At best it leads to aesthetic pleasures, to the exclusion of true spirituality."

I recommend that you, the reader, consult the full passage in Rav Aviner's work. I didn't write this column to disabuse you of the great wisdom of Rabbenu Bahya and Maimonides. I merely suggest that by writing so long ago, they were not yet aware of the abuse of nature-worship which typifies our modern and postmodern world, the world in which we now live, and the world which Rav Aviner knows so well.

Food for thought, for sure. I look forward, dear reader, to your response. ■



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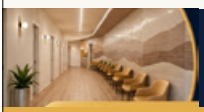
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The Music of Ambivalence

The Torah does not have a word for ambivalence (the nearest is Elijah's question to the Baal-worshipping Israelites: "How long will you waver between two opinions?"). It does, however, have a tune for it. This is the rare note known as the *shalshelet*. It appears three times in Bereishit, each time at a moment of crisis for the individual concerned.[1] In each case it signifies an existential crisis. The agent is called on to make a choice, one on which his whole future will depend, but he finds that he cannot. He is torn between two alternatives, both of which exercise a powerful sway on him. He must resolve the dilemma one way or another, but either way will involve letting go of deeply felt temptations or deeply held aspirations. It is a moment of high psychological drama.

The *shalshelet* is an unusual note. It goes up and down, up and down, as if unable to move forward to the next note. It was the 16th century commentator Rabbi Joseph Ibn Caspi (in his commentary to Bereishit 19:16) who best understood what it was meant to convey, namely a psychological state of uncertainty and indecision. The graphic notation of the *shalshelet* itself looks like a streak of lightning, a "zigzag movement" (*tenuah me'uvetet*), a mark that repeatedly moves backwards and forwards. It conveys frozen motion — what Hamlet called *the native hue of resolution sicklied o'er by the pale cast of thought* — in which the agent is torn by inner conflict. The *shalshelet* is the music of ambivalence.

One instance occurs in Genesis 24:12. Abraham has sent his servant (not identified in the text but taken by the commentators to be Eliezer) to find a wife for his son Isaac. He goes to the city of Haran where Abraham's family remained while Abraham himself went on to the land of Canaan. Arriving at the town's well, Eliezer proposes a test: the woman who comes to draw water, offers some to the traveller, and in addition gives water to his camels, will be the one chosen by God for his master's son. Over the "and he said" introducing his request of God that this test should

1. The *shalshelet* note does appear a fourth time in the Torah — in Vayikra 8:23, where its significance is less apparent — but we will be focusing on the implication of the three occurrences in Sefer Bereishit.

May the Torah learning from this issue of Torah Tidbits be in loving memory of our beloved brother

Rabbi Howard Rosner z"l

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succeed, the Masoretic tradition has placed a *shalshelet*.

The commentators identify multiple sources of ambivalence at this point. First, was the test permitted? Jewish law forbids relying on "omens" (Deut. 18:10, Hullin 95b), and Eliezer may have felt that his test was dangerously close to pagan practice.[2] Ibn Caspi himself suggests that Eliezer was unsure as to whether a single test like this was sufficient grounds on which to base so fateful a decision as the choice of a marriage partner for Isaac.

The Midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 59:9), however, offers the most insightful explanation. Eliezer had mixed feelings not about the test but about the whole mission itself. Until that point, says the Midrash, he had been 'sitting and weighing whether his own daughter was suitable for Isaac.' He had hoped, in other words, that one way or another, Abraham's estate would pass to him.

There are two cues that led the Midrash to this hypothesis. The first is that when Abraham first spoke to God about his childlessness, he said: 'My Lord God, what will You have given me if I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?' (Gen. 15:2). Eliezer, at that time, had reason to hope that he would be Abraham's heir.

The second is that when Abraham charges him with the mission to find a wife for his son, he replies, 'What if [*ulai*] the woman is unwilling to come back with me to this land?' As Ibn Ezra notes (Commentary to Psalm 116:16), the word *ulai* is not

2. Ran to Hullin 95b, however, states that Eliezer's conduct was legitimate; he sought not an omen but a sign of the woman's character.



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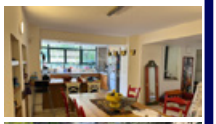
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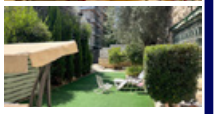
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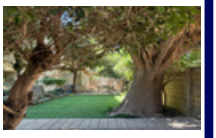


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always neutral. Sometimes it signifies an eventuality one does not want to happen, but at others it indicates an event one does wish for. Eliezer's "what if" may have been an unconscious expression of the fact that, with half his mind, he wanted the mission to fail. That would once again place him or his daughter in a position to be Abraham's heir.

It was therefore with profoundly mixed feelings that he prayed for a woman to appear who would be God's choice of Isaac's wife.

More dramatic still is the case of Joseph. Child of a shepherd (Jacob), an almost youngest son, hated by his brothers and sold by them into slavery, he finds himself in Egypt as head of household to one of its prominent citizens, Potiphar. Left alone with his master's wife, he finds himself propositioned by her:

Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, and after a while his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph. "Lie with me," she said. But he refused…

(Bereishit 39:6-8)

Over 'he refused', tradition has placed a *shalshelet*.

We can imagine the conflict in Joseph's mind at that moment. On the one hand, his entire moral sense said 'No'. It would be a betrayal of everything his family stood for: their ethic of sexual propriety and their strong sense of identity as children of the covenant. It would also be, as Joseph himself says, a betrayal of Potiphar himself: 'With me in charge, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?'

And yet, the temptation must have been intense. He was in an urban civilisation of a kind he had not seen before. It was his first experience of "bright lights, big city." He was far from home. No one could see him. After all the hostility he had suffered in his childhood, being propositioned by Potiphar's wife must have been flattering as well as seductive. It was a decisive moment. A slave, with no realistic hope of rescue, was he to become an Egyptian, with all the sexual laissez faire that implied? Or would he remain faithful to his past, his conscience, his identity?

The Talmud gives a graphic description of his inner torment:

The image of his father appeared to him in the window and said, "Joseph, your brothers' names are destined to be inscribed on the stones of the [High Priest's] *ephod*, and you will be among them. Do you want your name to be erased? Do you want to be called an adulterer?"

The *shalshelet* is an elegant commentary to Joseph's crise de conscience. In the end, Joseph refuses, but not without deep inner struggle.

May the learning
in this week's Torah Tidbits
be לעילוי נשמת and
in loving memory of
our dear father
Ozer (Emanuel) Berger z"l
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The Berger Family

Which brings us to the third case (chronologically the first) in Vayera. Here the conflict is explicit. Two of the angels who had visited Abraham now come to Lot in Sodom. They tell him the city and its inhabitants are about to be destroyed. He and his family must leave immediately. But Lot delays:

The visitors said to Lot, "Who else do you have here — children-in-law, sons, or daughters, or anyone else in the city? Bring them out of here, because we are about to destroy this place. So great is the outcry against them before the Lord that He has sent us to destroy it." Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, the men who were betrothed to his daughters, and told them, "Get up and leave this place: the Lord is about to destroy the city!" But his sons-in-law thought him laughable. As dawn was breaking, the angels hurried Lot, "Get up!" they said. "Take your wife and your two daughters here, or you will be swept away amid the city's sin." Still *he hesitated*. So the men seized him, his wife, his two daughters by the hand, and led them safely outside the city, for the Lord had mercy upon him. (Gen. 19:12-16)

Over 'he hesitated' is a *shalshelet*.

Lot's hesitation goes to the core of his identity. We recall that earlier, when he and Abraham agreed to separate to end the quarrel between their herdsmen, 'Lot raised his eyes and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan up to Tzoar was well-watered. It was like the garden of the Lord... So Lot chose for himself the entire plain of the Jordan. He travelled eastward...' (Gen. 13:10-11). He chose to make his home in Sodom, despite the fact that - as the Torah states - at that point its inhabitants 'were evil, great sinners against the Lord' (Gen. 13:13).

When we see Lot in chapter 19, he and his family have already become profoundly assimilated. His daughters are set to marry local men. On the phrase at the beginning of the chapter, 'Lot was sitting in the city gate,' the Sages said that 'he had just been appointed as a judge' - the gate of the city being the place where, in Abrahamic times, the judges and elders sat to resolve disputes. Lot does not see himself, as did Abraham, as a 'stranger and temporary resident'. He has decided to put down roots in the Jordan valley and the cities of the plain. This is henceforth where he belongs — so much so that the visitors have to physically drag him away.

Lot's sense of belonging, however, is either naiveté or self-deception. The text makes this clear at three points. The first is the attempted sexual assault on Lot's visitors (Gen. 19:4-5). Evidently the people of Sodom do not take kindly to strangers. This is the first hint that perhaps Lot too is, in their eyes, a stranger. In fact, he is. The Torah, in its second indication, is brutally explicit:

"Get out of our way," they replied [to Lot, when he begged them to respect his visitors. Then they said,] "This fellow came here as a migrant, and now he is setting himself up as a judge! We'll treat you worse than them." (Gen. 19:9)

The third comes when he tells his daughters' husbands that they must escape because the city is about to be destroyed, 'But his sons-in-law thought him laughable' (Gen 19:14). Lot's elaborate new identity is about to come crashing down about him - not only because of the impending

destruction but because he has discovered in successive blows that he has not been accepted in this place. Sodom hates strangers, they still consider Lot 'a migrant', and his sons-in-law regard him as a fool.

Yet despite this, he hesitates. He has invested too much of himself in the project of making his home among the people of the plain. He is a prime example of what Leon Festinger called 'cognitive dissonance'. According to Festinger, the need to avoid dissonance is fundamental to human beings, otherwise it creates unbearable tension. It is this tension that Lot cannot resolve - and which is signalled by the *shalshelet* over 'he hesitated'. It was the ultimate existential question, 'Who am I?' Having tried so hard to become one-of-them, he finds it almost impossible to tear himself away. (There were, tragically, many Jews in Germany and Austria in the 1930s who refused to leave because they would not or could not believe the evidence around them, that Hitler was serious in his threats to destroy Jews).

Incidentally, Festinger's theory also explains the behaviour of Lot's wife who 'looked back', against the explicit instruction of the angels, 'and was turned into a pillar of salt.' Festinger called this syndrome 'post-decision dissonance'. He predicted that the more important the issue, the longer the person delays a decision and the harder it is to reverse, the more he or she will agonise over whether they have made the right choice. They have second thoughts; they need reassurance; they 'look back'.

The *shalshelet* over Lot's hesitation is no mere detail of the biblical text. It is, in a real sense, the story of the modern Jew. Entering mainstream society for the first time, and yet encountering overt or covert antisemitism, many nineteenth-century European Jews became ambivalent about their identity. They tried to hide it and to assimilate. They became secular Marranos. It did not work. The more they strove to be like everyone else, the more conspicuous they were, and the stronger antisemitism grew. They themselves lost much in the process - not only their Jewish heritage itself, but also the simple capacity to know and take pride in who they were.

The lives of Lot and Abraham exemplify for all time the contrast between ambivalence and the security that comes from knowing who one is and why. Lot, who tried to become someone else, found himself regarded by his neighbours as an alien, an arriviste, an interloper, a parvenu. To his own sons-in-law he was 'laughable'. Abraham lived a different kind of life. He fought a war on behalf of his neighbours. He prayed for them. But he lived apart, true to his faith, his mission and his covenant with God. What did they think of him? Early in the next sedra – Chayei Sarah - the Hittites call him 'a prince of God in our midst' (Gen. 23:6).

That equation has not changed. Non-Jews respect Jews who respect Judaism. They are embarrassed by Jews who are embarrassed by Judaism. Never be ambivalent about who and what you are. ■

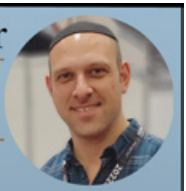
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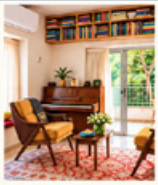
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PROBING THE PROPHETS
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Two Prophets; Two Purposes

This week's haftarah selection, taken from Sefer M'lachim Bet, shares with us two stories of the miraculous deeds of the navi, Elisha. As we have mentioned in previous articles, these two stories closely parallel the stories of Avraham and Sarah that we read in the parasha. In the first episode we learn of the widow of a G-d-fearing husband, who was saved from the loss of her two sons to servitude of her creditor, through Hashem's miracle (wrought by Elisha) of extending the small amount of oil she had, thus providing the money she needed to pay off her debt.

This story reminds us of the Torah portion where we read of the G-d fearing Avraham who stands to lose both of his sons: Yishma'el, whom he was told to send away, and Yitzchak, whom he was told to sacrifice, and yet was saved by G-d's word. In the second episode of the haftarah we are told of a righteous barren woman, miraculously granted a son from her elderly husband, a son who dies and is brought back to life. Similarly, the parasha tells the story of the righteous, barren Sarah who is granted a son from the elderly Avraham, a son who was almost killed but was miraculously saved.

But beyond the similarities to our parasha, these stories also bring us back to the miracles performed by Elisha's teacher and mentor, Eliyahu HaNavi. Just two prakim before these stories (in the second perek of M'lachim B), we learn of how Elisha spent the final moments of Eliyahu's life in this world with his teacher and how he succeeded his mentor as navi to the people. Interestingly, this bond between teacher and student endured throughout Elisha's life, as many of the wonders he performed bore a striking resemblance to those wrought by his master, Eliyahu.

We note that Eliyahu sustained a poor widow and her son throughout a period of famine by miraculously having the widow's small amount of flour last until the end of the famine, just as the miracle performed by Elisha in this haftarah, saving the poor widow by miraculously extending the small amount of her oil. Eliyahu brings a child back to life, a miracle duplicated in almost the exact way by Elisha - an event we read in our haftarah. And when Elisha dies, King Yo'ash cries out "Avi, Avi, rechev Yisra'el ufarashav", "My father, my father, the chariot and horsemen of Israel", the precise words that Elisha cried upon Eliyahu's departure from the world!

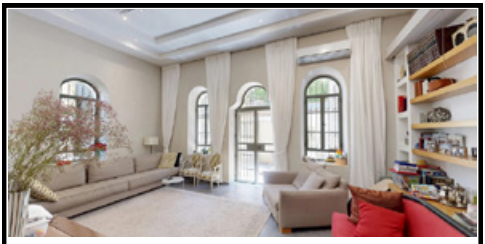
Yet, despite the many similarities shared by these two great prophets, the contrasts between them are even more stark. We know little of Eliyahu, neither his father's name nor his tribe is mentioned in the Tanach; Elisha is introduced to us with his father's name, the name of his city as

well as his profession. Eliyahu, on the other hand, was a mystical figure who fled from the people and hid from them for years, returning only at G-d's command, to admonish the King, while Elisha traveled to the people and often advised and helped the King. The first miracle performed by Eliyahu was his call for a drought, bringing severe scarcity of water to the people; the first miracle wrought by Elisha was providing potable water for the people.

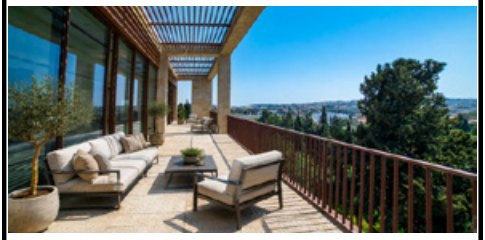
The differences between the two are powerful and we rightfully question why. I would suggest that Hashem chose those personalities that could most effectively bring His word to the nation. Eliyahu prophesied at a time when the powerful King Achav was leading the people astray. At that time there was a need for a powerful-even mystical – figure to impress G-d's message on the King and the nation. Elisha spoke to a different generation-one that needed to understand what Hashem wanted of them. For that reason, Hashem chose a navi who knew that teaching is most effectively done by one who was close to the people and not distanced from them; by a warm figure who understood their weaknesses and their needs; an individual who knew that, for that generation, Torah is best taught through education and not simple legislation.

Hashem has many agents to carry His message-and they are not all the same. Our challenge is to realize that the message is truly divine and, by doing so, follow G-d's directive. By doing so, we might no longer need His messenger! ■

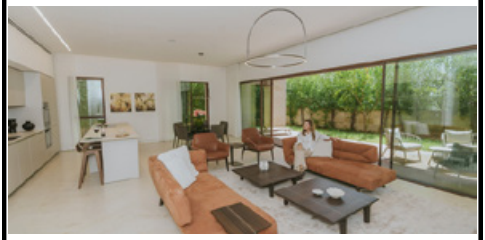
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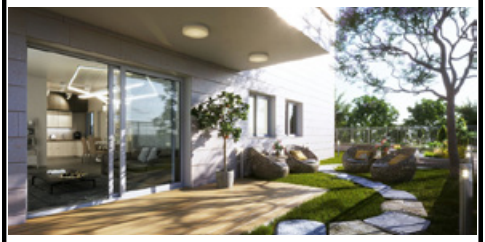
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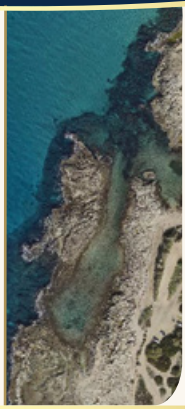
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Avraham Avinu: The Dayan of Sedom

The opening of *parashat* Vayeira describes one of the most mysterious encounters in the Torah:

וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו ה' בְּאֵלֹנֵי מַמְרֵא

Hashem appeared to him in the plains of Mamre.[1]

Rashi famously explains that Hashem appeared to Avraham Avinu in order to perform *bikur cholim* after his brit milah. Yet immediately afterward, the Torah states: "וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב פֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל" *And he was sitting at the entrance of the tent.*[2]



Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik zt"l

Rashi notes that the word "*yoshev*" (sitting) is written without the letter *vav,* and explains:

ביקש לעמוד, אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא שב ואני אעמוד.

Avraham wished to stand, but Hashem said to him: 'Sit, and I will stand.

Rashi then adds a striking comment:

"ואתה סימן לבניך, שעתיד אני להתייצב בעדת הדיינים והם יושבין."

This is a sign for your descendants, for in the future I will stand among the judges while they sit."

The source for this idea is the verse: "אֱלֹקִים נִצָּב בַּעֲדַת אֵל" - "God stands in the assembly of judges."[3]

At first glance, the comparison is difficult to understand. What connection exists between Hashem's visit to Avraham and the image of a Beit Din? Why does Rashi suddenly introduce the concept of judges and judgment?

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik[4] explains that Avraham was indeed functioning as a kind of "*dayan*" (judge) at that moment. The Gemara[5] in Yoma teaches:

"הלל מחייב את העניים, רבי אלעזר בן חרסום מחייב את העשירים, יוסף מחייב את הרשעים."

Hillel obligates the poor, Rabbi Elazar ben Harsom obligates the wealthy, and Yosef obligates those who struggle with temptation.

When a poor person claims that poverty prevented him from learning Torah, Heaven responds: "Were you poorer than Hillel?" When a wealthy person claims that wealth distracted him, he is asked:

1. Bereishit 18:1
2. Ibid
3. Tehillim 82:1
4. Rav Hershel Schechter, *Nefesh HaRav*
5. Yoma 35b

"Were you wealthier than Rabbi Elazar ben Harsom?"

The underlying principle is profound. Hashem never demands the impossible. If another human being succeeded under similar circumstances, then spiritual greatness was possible.

Accordingly, Rav Soloveitchik explains that Avraham Avinu served as the living rebuttal to the claims of Sedom. The people of Sedom might have argued: "We lived in a corrupt society. Kindness was impossible. Morality could not survive in such an environment." But nearby lived Avraham Avinu. His tent was open on all four sides. He embodied kindness, righteousness, hospitality, and moral courage. He demonstrated that holiness was possible even within a corrupt world. Thus: Avraham's very existence judged Sedom.

This explains why the angel sent to destroy Sedom first visited Avraham. The visit itself was part of the judgment. Before destroying Sedom, Heaven "looked" at Avraham Avinu as proof that another way of living was possible.

A TORAH FOR EVERY GENERATION

Rav Soloveitchik derived from this Gemara[6] a sweeping principle: *I believe with complete faith that the Torah can be lived in every circumstance.* Every generation claims unique challenges. Every era imagines that authentic Torah life has become impossible. Yet the existence of righteous individuals disproves that assumption. Avraham Avinu became the eternal symbol that holiness can flourish even within darkness.

One of the greatest dangers in spiritual life is the belief that our environment defines us. Society pressures us to conform, to compromise, and to surrender our ideals. Avraham Avinu teaches the opposite. A single individual can illuminate an entire generation. One home filled with kindness can challenge an entire culture of cruelty. One person who lives with integrity becomes a testimony that goodness remains possible.

We can each be an Avraham avinu in this regard. Our conduct silently teaches others what is possible. Our faith gives strength to those who feel weak. Our commitment becomes proof that holiness can still survive in a confused world. Perhaps that is why Hashem told Avraham to remain seated while He stood. Because the life of a true servant of God becomes itself a form of judgment, inspiration, and eternal testimony. ■

6. Ibid



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REBBETZIN SHIRA SMILES
Faculty, OU Israel Center

Reward's Reasoning

"Vayehi beshachet Elokim et arei hakikar ***vayizkor Elokim et Avraham vayishlach et Lot mitoch hahafechah*** – And it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God remembered Abraham, and He sent Lot out of the midst of the destruction..." *(Bereisheet* 19:29*)*

Rashi is troubled by the mention of Avraham; what does the remembrance of Avraham have to do with saving Lot? He therefore quotes *Bereisheet Rabbah*, "He (Hashem) remembered that Lot knew that Sarah was Avraham's wife, and that he had heard in Egypt that Avraham said about Sarah, "She is my sister," yet he did not reveal the matter because he [Lot] had pity on him [Abraham]. Therefore, the Holy One, blessed be He, had pity on him [Lot]." *(Rashi)* This good deed was the merit by which Lot was saved from the destruction of Sdom. Yet Rashi is difficult to understand. Why is this cited as the outstanding good deed that saved Lot? It seems that Lot's hospitality towards the angels that came to visit him was far greater, he received them with gracious attention at the risk of his own life!


Rav Eliyahu Dessler zt"l

One approach is offered by the *Beis Halevi zt"l*. There was a fundamental difference between the hospitality of Avraham Avinu and that of Lot. The angels who appeared to Avraham Avinu looked and acted as idol worshipping wayfarers. Nevertheless, Avraham Avinu treated them with tremendous respect and honor. However, the Torah tells us that Lot saw his guests as actual angels, and it is obvious that one would treat angels with respect and honor, regardless of the circumstance. Therefore, this mitzvah is not credited to Lot as enough of a merit to save him from the eradication of Sdom.

In his famous *Kuntrus Habechirah,* Rav Dessler *zt"l* offers a keen insight in understanding the mechanism of free choice. A person's *nekudat habechirah,* the threshold of tension where his choices happen, is based on his own personal circumstances and his personal development. This can be likened to the battlefield between two warring countries. Each nation has territory behind it; this is land that has already been conquered. Similarly, we all have areas that no longer pose a challenge for us, we make choices and act organically, without

Mazal Tov to
Herby & Debbie Dan and family
on the birth of a granddaughter

deliberation or struggle. However, there is more territory that has not yet been conquered, i.e., areas that feel beyond our natural capacity.

Here lies the point of challenge, the battleground between our inner, conflicting forces, between what we know to be true and what our baser selves crave. It is exactly in these areas of triumph that one gets the greatest rewards, since this is the arena where his *bechirah*, his power of choice is stretched to the fullest extent. For many people, it can be said that much of their mitzvah observance is really not to their personal credit, rather, the credit belongs to their education and their upbringing. Although there is reward for mitzvot that don't require struggle and effort, it cannot be compared to those mitzvot borne of inner conflict and true choice. Hence, quoting from the Saba of Slobodka *zt"l,* Rav Dessler teaches that for Lot, taking in guests did not require any sort of inner struggle. He was raised in Avraham Avinu's home where the mitzvah of *hachnasat orchim* became his second nature. However, Lot did have an area of weakness; the desire for money and material wealth. When he accompanied Avraham Avinu and Sarah Imeinu to Egypt, he experienced a true struggle. Should he expose the truth of Avraham and Sarah's relationship and perhaps receive a sizable financial gain or should he remain true to his mentor and caregiver? Lot's struggle here to choose kindness and protect Avraham thus acted as a true merit to save him from Sedom's destruction.

We too can embrace our challenges and inner struggles with fortitude and resolve, knowing that it is here that we will find real growth and reward. ■



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Hashem's Problem

Reb Yosef Friedensohn, z'l, was a man of faith, Jewish hero and a Holocaust survivor. He had metaphorically "earned seven diplomas from seven German universities of murder and atrocity" — having survived seven camps, and embodied the indestructibility of Klal Yisrael. As the editor of "Dos Yiddishe Vort", a publication of Agudas Yisroel, Reb Yosef represented Torah values and Yidishkeit to the world for close to 70 years.

Reb Yosef recounted his memories as a young man in the Warsaw Ghetto, a harrowing description of suffering and hunger, with children roaming the streets, crying out for food. He and his siblings also suffered privation, and knowing the cupboards were empty, always wondered what, if anything, they would eat in the morning. However, this was the context for a precious instruction in Emunah and *mesirus nefesh*. "*Oif morgen, vet G-tt zorgen*," his father would say, "Tomorrow is Hashem's concern." Within their cramped apartment looking down on the pitiful scene street below, Reb Yosef's father would sometimes take the family's small ration of bread, cut it into little pieces, wrap them individually in paper, and drop them from the window to starving Jews.

In this week's sedra, at the *Akeidas Yitzchak*, the test of all tests, the Ribono Shel Olam continued to measure our forefather's faith and *mesirus nefesh*, inner and outer sacrifice. Employing the same language as when Avraham embarked on his original journey, Avraham Avinu's *temimus*, simplicity and wholeheartedness, is put to the test: "*Lech lecha*, go to the Land of Moriah, *veha'alehu sham le'olah*, and offer him there as an *olah*, a burnt offering, on one of the heights that I will show you" (Bereishis, 22:2).

Of all the *korbanos*, the offerings brought in the Beis haMikdash, the *olah* was unique, in that when placed on the altar, it was to be fully consumed in fire. Nothing was to be left. An *olas tamim* is a 'whole' offering; a perfect, unblemished gift to Hashem in which not a trace is left over. Reb Shlomo Carlebach, zy'a, explained in the name of the Beis Ya'akov of Ishbitz, that for Avraham Avinu there was no difference between the first test, leaving his birthplace, and the last one, taking his son up to the altar. It was all one continuous *lech lecha*, a single process of cultivating *temimus* wholeheartedness with Hashem. When summoned to holiness, Avraham Avinu responded to each calling with his '*lecha*', his entire self.

When Yitzchak asked, *Ayeh ha-seh l'olah*, "Where is the lamb for the *Olah* offering?" it is clear that the search for *temimus* had been transmitted, for *vayel'chu shneihem*

yachdav, "Avraham and Yitzchak walked together," with all their hearts, fully engaged, completely present. Together, Avraham and Yitzchak went 'all in' on the altar of sacrifice, without making *cheshbonos*, calculations or letting their own feelings and opinions get in the way.

Rebbe Simcha Bunim of Peshischa imagines the internal debate of Avraham Avinu on the way to Akeidas Yitzchak, and paints a picture of the conversation between our forefather and his *yeitzer ha-ra,* evil inclination.

The *yetzer ha-ra* appears to Avraham Avinu with the following claim: "Hashem promised that a great nation would arise from you through Yitzchak your son. After years of waiting, the promise was fulfilled and Yitzchak was born by a miracle. If you go through with the Akeida, and sacrifice Yitzchak, Hashem's promise won't be fulfilled, and then what will become of the Jewish story? What about tomorrow?"

Avraham answered the *yetzer ha-ra*: "The Ribbono shel Olam told me to sacrifice my son, and so that is what I will do. The fact that He made a promise that from Yitzchak there would rise a great nation is His problem, not mine."

Rebbetzin Henny Machlis, a'h, was a modern Jewish hero, a *tzadeikes* renowned for her incredible Emunah, boundless giving and acts of *chesed* and *hachnasas orchim*, hosting guests. There were many Friday afternoons when the Rebbetzin knew that they would be hosting more than one hundred guests for Shabbos meals, and did not have the money to buy the food and cover expenses. But the Machlis family was 'all-in', and Hashem provided.

Over the years I had the great privilege of spending time with the Rebbetzin, and *yibadel l'chaim*, the great teacher of Torah, Rav Mordechai Machlis, *shlit'a*. In our last conversation, I shared the feeling of being overwhelmed with balancing professional obligation and family commitments, the desire to give to others and personal aspirations in *avodas Hashem.* It was becoming more difficult and unrealistic to keep up the pace of giving which he and the Rebbetzin had modelled, and which I had hoped to achieve.

"Emunah means that we believe Hashem is *hakol yachol*, He can do everything and anything," replied Rebbetzin Machlis. "If you have done your best and reached your limit in whatever way, it is Hashem's job to take care of the rest of the situation. He has infinite ways to get the job done"

Mesirus nefesh is in our National and spiritual DNA, and we all feel we have our part to do. We just need to remember that we are called upon simply to fulfill Hashem's will as we understand it, to go 'all in', with *temimus*, today, and do our best — while knowing that the rest is "Hashem's problem".

Excerpt from newly released **Baderech: Along the Path of the Torah**, (Mosaica Press). ■

Rav Judah Mischel is executive director of Camp HASC, the Hebrew Academy for Special Children. He is the founder of Tzama Nafshi and the author of the "Baderech" series. Rav Judah lives in Ramat Beit Shemesh with his wife Ora and their family.

רפואה שלמה
Peleg Shabtai ben Chaviva Leah



SIMCHAT SHMUEL

RABBI SAM SHOR
Director, Torah Initiatives, OU Israel

Our *sedra* contains the account of the birth of *Yitzchak*, the fulfillment of one of the most extraordinary promises in the entire *Torah*. After years of waiting, *Avraham* and *Sara* are blessed with a child, and *Sara* exclaims, צְחֹק עָשָׂה לִי אֱלֹקִים — "Hashem has brought me laughter" (Bereish*eet* 21:6). The joy surrounding *Yitzchak's* birth is so profound that it becomes part of his very identity. His name will forever remind us of the wonder, gratitude, and joy that accompany the fulfillment of what once seemed impossible.


Rabbi Moses Sofer Schreiber zt"l

Yet the *Torah* records another celebration associated with *Yitzchak*: וַיַּעַשׂ אַבְרָהָם מִשְׁתֶּה גָּדוֹל בְּיוֹם הִגָּמֵל אֶת יִצְחָק — "Avraham made a great feast on the day Yitzchak was weaned" (21:8). The ***Chatam Sofer***, building on an interpretation found in earlier sources, offers a remarkable reading of the word *higamel*. Rather than referring simply to the day *Yitzchak* was weaned, the word may be read as: ה' ג' מל. ה' and ג' represent five and three, totaling eight, while מל alludes to circumcision. The verse thus hints at *Avraham's* celebration of *Yitzchak's brit milah* on the eighth day. This interpretation is rooted in the teaching cited by ***Tosafot*** in *Masechet Shabbat* (130a), based on ***Pirkei DeRebbi Eliezer***. The *Chatam Sofer* takes this idea a step further, explaining that *Avraham Avinu* not only celebrated the *brit* itself with a festive meal, but also commemorated its anniversary each year with a celebration.

There is something deeply meaningful about the *Torah's* association of this milestone with a *mishteh gadol*, a great feast. A *brit mila* is an intensely personal and meaningful moment for a family, yet its significance extends far beyond the individual child. It marks his entry into the covenant of *Avraham Avinu* and his place in the unfolding story of the Jewish people. The celebration gives expression to the joy of that sacred moment, transforming a family's gratitude into a shared experience.

Indeed, ***Rabbeinu Bachya*** points to this verse as a source for the enduring Jewish custom of celebrating a *brit mila* with a *seudat mitzva*. Such a meal is more than an opportunity to gather and rejoice. It gives expression to the *simcha* of fulfilling a *mitzva*, inviting family and community to share in the gratitude and holiness of the occasion. The fulfillment of a *mitzva* becomes not only an individual or familial milestone, but an opportunity to bring others into its joy.

Perhaps this is one of the lessons of *Yitzchak's* birth and the celebrations surrounding him. The fulfillment of a divine

promise is not meant to remain a private experience of gratitude. Its joy can - and should - be shared. The *mitzvot* of the *Torah* shape our lives, but they also create moments in which we pause, gather, and recognize the privilege of living within the covenant of *Hashem*. In this way, *simcha shel mitzva* becomes something greater than personal happiness: it becomes a source of connection, strengthening our bonds with one another and with the generations that came before us.

As we recall the birth of *Yitzchak Avinu* and the celebration of his *brit mila*, may we each merit to experience the enduring joy of *simcha shel mitzva*, to recognize the many blessings woven into our lives, and to find meaningful opportunities to express our gratitude with joy and share that *simcha* with others. ■





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8:30 pm	Semichat Chaver Program	**Rav Elyada Goldwicht**	Bet Knesset Ohel Yitzchak, Keren Hayesod St. (The Bais)

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 3

9:15 am	**Women's Division** Torah Tapestries	**Shira Smiles**	Beit Knesset HaNassi, 24 Ussishkin St., Rechavia
9:20 am	Understanding Tefillah	**Rabbi Yossi Goldin**	**Community Beit Midrash Program** Kehilat Nitzanim, 3 Asher St., Bakaa
10:10 am	Rambam: Letters and Introductions	**Rabbi Yitzchak Breitowitz**	
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9:15 am	Rav Soloveitchik on the Parsha	**Rabbi Dr. Aaron Adler**	**Community Beit Midrash Program** Beit Knesset HaNassi, 24 Ussishkin St., Rechavia
10:20 am	From Text to Tachlis	**Rabbi Jeremy Perlow**	
11:25 am	Building Character and Midot: Rav Kook on Pirkei Avot	**Rabbi Aaron Goldscheider**	
12:30 pm	The Turbulent Nineteenth Century of European Jewish History	**Dr. Deborah Polster**	

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 5

9:15 am	**Rabbi Kahn** is scheduled to resume November 12th		**Community Beit Midrash Program** Bet Knesset Shai Agnon, 11 Leib Yaffe St., Arnona
10:30 am	Parshat Hashavua	**Rabbi Baruch Taub**	
11:25 am	Trailblazing the Text of Tanach	**Rabbi Neil Winkler**	
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HUMILITY OF DUST AND ASHES

וַיַּעַן אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמַר הִנֵּה נָא הוֹאַלְתִּי לְדַבֵּר אֶל אֲדֹנָי וְאָנֹכִי עָפָר וָאֵפֶר: (י"ח:כ"ז)

Avraham spoke up, saying, "Here I venture to speak to my Sovereign, and I am but dust and ashes....

רש"י: "וְאָנֹכִי עָפָר וָאֵפֶר" - וּכְבָר הָיִיתִי רָאוּי לִהְיוֹת עָפָר עַל יְדֵי הַמְּלָכִים, וְאֵפֶר עַל יְדֵי נִמְרוֹד, לוּלֵי רַחֲמֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר עָמְדוּ לִי....

"And I am but dust and ashes." – I would long ago have been reduced to dust by the kings and to ashes by Nimrod had it not been that Your mercies stood by me....

Avraham challenges HaKadosh Baruch Hu about divine justice toward the people of Sedom. There is much to discuss here, and at some point, we may contrast Avraham – who is portrayed favorably for questioning Hashem – with Iyov, who is not. But before comparisons, there is a more basic question.



What does it mean to challenge Hashem, and when is such a challenge legitimate? If a person never asks *how could this happen* and never struggles with divine justice, that does not necessarily reflect faith. It may reflect indifference to human suffering, or to *Am Yisrael*. Or it may reflect the belief that Hashem is arbitrary; that events are random and therefore not worth questioning.

When something like October 7 occurs and a person is genuinely shaken, the question is not *whether* to ask, but how to ask. If you do not care, you will not question. If you believe Hashem is arbitrary, you will also not question. But if you love *Am Yisrael* and believe that HaKadosh Baruch Hu acts with purpose and justice, then you are disturbed, and you struggle.

We are meant to be *mekabel ohl malchus Shamayim*. Hashem's ways are not our ways. So how does a person occupy the space between crying out to Hashem with questions and maintaining reverence? How do you ask *why* without crossing into – *chas v'shalom* – arrogance or disrespect?

Look at the *pasuk* itself. When Avraham presents his first request, to save Sedom for the sake of fifty righteous people – ten per city, a measured and reasonable number – Hashem responds that if fifty are found, the cities will be spared. Avraham then says: "*Hinei na ho'alti l'daber el Hashem, v'anochi afar va'efer*." Despite

his willingness to challenge divine justice, Avraham humbly describes himself as mere dust and ashes.

On the simple level, Avraham frames his plea with humility. He knows he is speaking to HaKadosh Baruch Hu and challenging a divine decision. Yet he remains deeply conscious of the distance between himself and Hashem. Avraham is saying: I am asking, but I know who I am and who You are. I am mortal. I am limited. You possess *chochmah elyonah*, wisdom beyond my reach. Even the greatest human being is still bound by time, partial vision, and moral blind spots. Even if a person were the Vilna Gaon, he would still be human. And we are not the Vilna Gaon. Our moral judgments are shaped by our experiences, by exposure to others, by compromise, and by values absorbed without noticing. That alone should generate humility.

Imagine if someone could see the full sweep of history. Imagine being sent back to Vienna in 1920 knowing exactly who Adolf Hitler would become. The moral calculus would look entirely different. But human beings never have that vantage point. Only HaKadosh Baruch Hu does. That is why Avraham's posture matters. He asks as *afar va'efer*, with the humility born of recognizing the limits of human understanding.

Rashi adds another layer. He asks: why these words? Why "*afar va'efer*" – dust and ashes? Why not describe himself as Dovid HaMelech does, "*anochi tola'as v'lo ish*"[1] – I am a worm and not a man?

Rashi explains that by conjuring the imagery of dust and ashes Avraham invokes two moments when he should have

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died. *Afar* – he should have been buried during the war of the kings, outnumbered and overpowered in a muddy, swamp-like battlefield where defeat meant being swallowed by the earth. *Efer* – he should have been reduced to ashes in Nimrod's furnace.

Avraham is not expressing abstract humility. He is grounding humility in remembered vulnerability. He is returning to moments when his existence was fragile, when survival was not guaranteed.

And here Rashi subtly shifts the meaning of the phrase. *Afar va'efer* is not only humility but also gratitude and identification. Avraham is saying: I once stood on the brink of destruction. You saved me. Please extend that same compassion to others.

That is why gratitude and humility are inseparable here. It is very difficult to be genuinely grateful without humility. A person who feels entitled does not thank; he expects. The more humble a person is, the more gratitude flows naturally. And the more gratitude a person cultivates, the more humility it generates. They are not separate traits; they are two expressions of the same inner posture. That is why *afar va'efer* works on two levels at once. It is humility born of gratitude.

Avraham chooses this language in this context, not at the *Akeidah*, not after

1.Tehillim 22:7.

blessing or victory, but specifically while davening for others. On a technical level, Avraham is saying: "You saved me, now save them." But something deeper is happening. Avraham is not reminding Hashem of anything. Hashem does not need reminders. Avraham is shaping his own inner stance before davening.

When you daven for someone else, there are two ways to do it. You can daven from a place of distance. *Baruch Hashem*, I am healthy, secure, comfortable, and I will altruistically ask on behalf of someone who is suffering. That *tefillah* matters, but it is limited.

You can also daven from a place of identification. And that requires vulnerability.

Most people resist vulnerability. We prefer the quiet fantasy that life is stable, and that tragedy happens elsewhere, to other people. Vulnerability unsettles us because it exposes how thin the walls really are. That is why many people instinctively avoid contact with suffering.

You see this even in the world of *chesed*. There is easy *chesed* and there is hard *chesed*. Easy *chesed* matters: volunteering once a week, driving food for *tomchei Shabbos*, collecting *tzedakah*. But hard *chesed* is connecting with people whose lives expose fragility: the elderly, the sick, people with special needs. These acts are harder because they force us to confront our own vulnerability and recognize how easily we could find ourselves in similar circumstances. In essence, it forces you to stare into your own frailty and mortality. Avraham does not avoid that confrontation. He deliberately returns to his most fragile moments. He remembers when he stood one step away from death. He remembers how close he came to becoming *afar* and *efer*. He says: I am comfortable now, but I was not always. And I could be there again.

That is how he connects to the people of Sedom. He does not say: I am different from them. He says: I was almost like them.

This move appears again with Moshe Rabbeinu, when Miriam is stricken with *tzara'as*[2]. The Midrash[3] comments that Moshe's *tefillah* was especially heartfelt because he knew firsthand what *tzara'as* entailed. At his first encounter with Hashem at the burning bush, his hand had temporarily turned white. Moshe reaches back to the closest experience he has – however limited – to feel her pain, so that his *tefillah* is not abstract. He is not claiming equivalence; he is searching for proximity.

That is what Avraham is doing here.

When you daven for someone in a hospital, ask yourself: What would it take for our positions to switch? One diagnosis. One accident. When someone needs *tzedakah*, consider how easily you could find yourself in their position. Do not create distance between yourself and suffering; try to narrow the gap.

That is *afar va'efer*: the humility born of remembering our own vulnerability.

2.Bamidbar 12:13.
3.Devarim Rabbah 6:6.



Avraham draws upon his own experiences of suffering to identify with others, while recognizing the limits of his understanding as he questions divine justice.

That is Avraham's greatness, and why his *tefillah* is heard.

THE IMPORTANCE OF DISCRETION

וַיְהִי בְּשַׁחֵת אֱלֹקִים אֶת עָרֵי הַכִּכָּר וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹקִים אֶת אַבְרָהָם וַיְשַׁלַּח אֶת לוֹט מִתּוֹךְ הַהֲפֵכָה בַּהֲפֹךְ אֶת הֶעָרִים אֲשֶׁר יָשַׁב בָּהֶן לוֹט: (י"ט:כ"ט)

Thus it was that, when God destroyed the cities of the plain and annihilated the cities where Lot dwelt, God remembered Avraham and removed Lot from the midst of the upheaval.

רש"י: "וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹקִים אֶת אַבְרָהָם" - מַהוּ זְכִירָתוֹ שֶׁל אַבְרָהָם עַל לוֹט? נִזְכַּר שֶׁהָיָה לוֹט יוֹדֵעַ שֶׁשָּׂרָה אִשְׁתּוֹ שֶׁל אַבְרָהָם וְשָׁמַע שֶׁאָמַר אַבְרָהָם בְּמִצְרַיִם עַל שָׂרָה אֲחוֹתִי הִיא, וְלֹא גִלָּה הַדָּבָר, שֶׁהָיָה חָס עָלָיו, לְפִיכָךְ חָס הַקָּבָ"ה עָלָיו (בראשית רבה):

"God remembered Avraham." – What bearing has God's remembering Avraham upon the rescue of Lot? He remembered that Lot knew that Sarah was Avraham's wife and that when he heard that Avraham said in Egypt regarding Sarah, "She is my sister," he did not betray him because he had sympathy on him. For this reason, God had mercy upon him (Lot).

After Lot is saved, the Torah concludes with a striking summary: "*Vayehi b'shaches Elokim es arei hakikar…vayizkor Elokim es Avraham, vayishalach es Lot mitoch hahafeichah*."

Hashem remembers Avraham and saves Lot. On the surface, this seems simple. Lot is Avraham's nephew, so Avraham's merit protects him. But Rashi pushes further. He says that Lot himself possessed a specific *zechus* connected to Avraham – and that is why he was spared.

That itself is surprising. Lot is a deeply flawed figure. His choice to separate from Avraham and settle in Sedom, his moral blindness there, and later the disturbing episode with his daughters, makes him a very troubling character. What possible merit could outweigh all of that?

Rashi answers: Lot had one decisive *zechus*. When Avraham and Sarah descended to Mitzrayim and Avraham said that Sarah was his sister, Lot knew the truth, yet remained silent. He could have exposed Avraham instantly. He could have said, "She's not his sister, she's his wife." But he didn't. He kept Avraham's confidence. He was discreet.

Rashi reads the *pasuk* very precisely: When saving Lot, Hashem *kaviyachal* remembers Avraham, and remembers that Lot knew Sarah was Avraham's wife and did not reveal it.

This highlights an often-overlooked trait, and that is discretion. When we speak about *shemiras halashon*, people usually focus on tone: harsh language, sarcasm, aggression, negativity. But there is another dimension: what you choose *not* to say. Onkelos defines *tzelem Elokim* as *nefesh memalela* – the capacity for meaningful speech. We are the only creatures who can convey abstract ideas, emotions, and values. That gift defines us. And one of the ways we honor that gift is by knowing

when silence is the moral choice.

Not every misuse of speech is *lashon hara* in the technical sense. Sometimes it's simply unnecessary talk about people. A saying commonly attributed to Eleanor Roosevelt captures this well: "Small minds talk about people, average minds talk about events, and great minds talk about ideas." But beyond that, there is a more subtle test: private information. Not dramatic "secrets," but personal facts someone would not want broadcast. Someone confides in you. Do you protect that trust, or do you pass it along?

Why is it so tempting to share? Because information confers status. Being "in the know" elevates you. You become the source. People listen. But divulging information comes at someone else's expense. You gain attention by revealing personal information that someone trusted you to keep private.

Lot's silence in Mitzrayim reflects the opposite trait. He does not build himself up by exposing Avraham. He does not gain stature by revealing private truth. He steps back. He restrains himself. And that restraint becomes the one thread of merit that saves him.

Lot is far from being a *tzaddik*. But that single moment of discretion mattered. It mattered enough that when the cities are overturned, Hashem remembers it.

Sometimes the greatest moral acts are not what we do, but what we choose not to say.

KNOWING WHEN TO STOP

וַיֹּאמֶר אַל תִּשְׁלַח יָדְךָ אֶל הַנַּעַר וְאַל תַּעַשׂ לוֹ מְאוּמָה כִּי עַתָּה יָדַעְתִּי כִּי יְרֵא אֱלֹקִים אַתָּה וְלֹא חָשַׂכְתָּ אֶת בִּנְךָ אֶת יְחִידְךָ מִמֶּנִּי: (כ"ב:י"ב)

He said, "Do not send your hand against the boy, or do anything to him. For now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your favored one, from Me."

רש"י: "אַל תִּשְׁלַח" - לִשְׁחֹט; אָמַר לוֹ אִם כֵּן לְחִנָּם בָּאתִי לְכָאן, אֶעֱשֶׂה בּוֹ חַבָּלָה וְאוֹצִיא מִמֶּנּוּ מְעַט דָּם, אָמַר לוֹ "וְאַל תַּעַשׂ לוֹ מְאוּמָה". אַל תַּעַשׂ בּוֹ מוּם:

"Do not send" – [your hand against the boy] to slay [him]. Then he (Avraham) said to God, "If this be so, I have come here for nothing; let me at least inflict a wound on him and draw some blood from him, God replied "Do not do anything to him. Do not cause any blemish (מום).

At the climax of the *Akeidah*, a *malach* calls out to Avraham and says: "*Al tishlach yadcha el hana'ar ve'al ta'as lo me'umah*" – "Do not send your hand against the boy, or do anything to him." The repetition is striking. If Avraham is already told not to *shecht* Yitzchak, what does "*ve'al ta'as lo me'umah*" add? Why does the Torah feel the need to say it twice?

Rashi, quoting Chazal, opens up the dialogue beneath the surface. "*Al tishlach*" – do not slaughter him. Avraham responds, almost instinctively: If so, "*lechinam bati l'kan?*" Did I really come all this way for nothing? I walked for three days. I summoned every ounce of faith, discipline, and devotion. I stood ready to give up everything. And now I am supposed to do nothing?

So, Avraham proposes a compromise. If I cannot sacrifice him, then "*e'eseh bo chavalah, ve'otzi mimenu me'at dam*" – let me at

least draw a little blood. Let me give some expression to this devotion.

Hashem responds through the *malach*: "*Ve'al ta'as lo me'umah*" – "Do not do anything to him at all." Do not cause even the slightest injury. Rashi explains *me'umah* as *mum* – no blemish, no wound, no blood. Avraham shouldn't do anything at all.

This Rashi teaches two profound lessons. The first is obvious, but too important to overlook. The *Akeidah* is the Torah's unequivocal rejection of human sacrifice. Hashem brings Avraham to the brink of the most extreme religious act known in the ancient world not because He desires it, but precisely in order to abolish it forever. Judaism is not a religion of blood, nor a religion of suffering. Judaism does not sanctify death or suffering. Hashem is "*mechalkel chayim b'chesed*"[1] – the giver and sustainer of life. The rejection of human sacrifice is so absolute that even Avraham's suggestion of drawing a small amount of blood is forbidden. Hashem does not want Yitzchak to suffer any injury, however minor.

But there is a second, subtler lesson in this Rashi, and in many ways, it is the harder one. Sometimes the challenge in religious life is to generate passion. We struggle with apathy, exhaustion, and distraction. We try to awaken commitment and urgency. But sometimes the greater challenge is not creating religious passion but knowing how to contain it.

Avraham has reached the peak of religious intensity. He has mobilized absolute obedience, absolute devotion, and absolute readiness. And now Hashem tells him to stop - to stand down and express nothing. Avraham wants an outlet: at least let me draw blood. At least let something happen. Hashem says, "No, hold it inside."

Which is harder – to climb the mountain prepared to sacrifice, or to descend without doing anything at all? Which demands more discipline – to act decisively, or to restrain yourself at the last moment? This is a challenge many religious people face, especially young people filled with sincerity and zeal. Passion that is not disciplined can become harsh, judgmental, absolutist, and insensitive. Religious energy must be guided, not merely unleashed. Sometimes *avodas Hashem* demands action, and sometimes it demands silence and restraint.

I once heard a story from Rav Aharon Lichtenstein that captures this beautifully. Rav Aharon was an *avel* at the time of his son Rav Moshe Lichtenstein's wedding. He sought a *heter* from Rav Shlomo Zalman to attend, but none was given. He came only briefly and did not participate in the celebration. Later, Rav Aharon reflected that he remembered feeling more love for his son that night because he had restrained himself than he would have had he expressed it freely. Repression, he explained, does not negate emotion. Sometimes it deepens it.

That is the final test of the *Akeidah*. Not only obedience, but restraint; not only readiness to act, but readiness to stop. Hashem tells Avraham: I see your faith. I do not need your blood. Hold your devotion, and live with it. That, too, is *avodas Hashem*. ■



Rabbi Moshe Taragin's latest sefer entitled: **Echoes of Rashi** is available at: taraginbooks.com.



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What Do You Still Have?

MELACHIM II 4:1-37

When someone turns to us in distress, our attention naturally goes to how we can fix the problem. What does this person need? What can we do to ease their burden?

In this week's haftorah, Elisha asks a question that opens another possibility for helping. A widow approaches him in desperation. Her husband has died, leaving debts she cannot repay, and a creditor threatens to take her two sons as servants. Her words convey both grief and urgency: "Your servant, my husband, has died ... and the creditor has come to take my two children as his servants" (Melachim II 4:1).

Elisha responds: מָה אֶעֱשֶׂה־לָּךְ הַגִּידִי לִי מַה־יֶּשׁ־לָךְ בַּבָּיִת, *What can I do for you? Tell me, what do you have in the house?* (4:2). There are two questions here. The first expresses his readiness to help. The second turns her attention toward what she still possesses.

Her answer begins with emptiness: אֵין לְשִׁפְחָתְךָ כֹּל בַּבַּיִת, *Your maidservant has nothing in the house.* Then comes a qualification: כִּי אִם־אָסוּךְ שָׁמֶן, *except a flask of oil.* That small exception becomes the beginning of her salvation.

The Malbim explains why Elisha asks what she has: אין הברכה שורה על אין, רק על דבר יש, *blessing does not rest upon nothingness, but upon something that exists.* Elisha seeks something upon which Hashem's blessing can take hold, and the remaining oil provides that foundation. At his instruction, she borrows empty vessels and begins to pour. Miraculously, the oil continues to flow, providing enough to repay her debt and sustain her family.

The Malbim's explanation describes how the miracle unfolds, but it also invites us to consider how we respond to a person in difficulty. Pain can make loss all-consuming. A person may struggle to see beyond the job that ended, the relationship that fractured, or the plan that fell apart. The difficulty is real, and practical assistance may be essential. Yet alongside what has been lost, something remains: an ability, a relationship, knowledge acquired over years, or the willingness to try again. Sometimes another person can help us recognize what we can no longer see for ourselves.

Elisha does not minimize the widow's distress. His first words are, "What can I do for you?" His question about her home grows out of that concern. Before giving

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her instructions, he helps her identify a starting point.

Helping someone find that starting point requires attentiveness: listening long enough to understand the difficulty and looking carefully enough to recognize the person's resources. It may also require lending our own time, knowledge, or support so those resources can be used.

"What do you have in the house?" becomes a question we can carry into our encounters with others. What remains that we can build upon? What possibility needs encouragement? What first step can we help make possible?

The widow's flask was small, but it held the beginning of a future she could not yet imagine. Sometimes our task is to help another person see that beginning—and stay close as they take the next step. ■

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Birchot HaShachar: Recognizing Hashem's Gifts (Part III)

In this issue, we will continue exploring the meaning and significance of Birchot HaShachar, the morning blessings, and the profound messages they contain.

ברוך אתה ה' אלוקינו מלך העולם רוקע הארץ על המים

Blessed are You, Hashem, our God, King of the universe, Who spreads the earth over the waters.

Rav Elihayu Munk in Olam HaTefillot explainss that in this bracha, we thank Hashem for spreading the earth over the waters. The fact that land and water can coexist without the water flooding the land or the land sinking beneath the water is truly remarkable. Every morning, we wake up and step onto solid ground, rarely stopping to appreciate what an incredible gift this is.


Rabbi Shimon Schwab zt"l

As the **Olat Tamid** points out, the earth rests above the water, supporting millions of people, enormous buildings, and entire cities, all while remaining stable beneath our feet. We walk around feeling grounded and secure, taking this remarkable reality for granted.

Rabbi Shimon Schwab explains that we can begin to appreciate the stability of the ground beneath us when we experience something that disrupts our usual sense of security, such as an earthquake or the feeling of landing after a long airplane journey or stepping off a boat after a long voyage. Only then might we recognize just how extraordinary it is to have solid ground beneath our feet.

This bracha reminds us to pause each morning and appreciate something so fundamental to our lives that we rarely even notice it.

שעשה לי כל צרכי
ברוך אתה ה' אלוקינו מלך העולם

Blessed are You, Hashem, our God, King of the universe, Who has provided me with

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all my needs.

Chazal originally instituted this bracha to be recited after putting on one's shoes (**Berachot 60b**). On a basic level, then, we thank Hashem for providing us with shoes. Without shoes, it would be difficult to go about our daily activities and provide for ourselves and our families. Shoes enable us to walk comfortably and take care of our needs (**Avudraham**).

On a deeper level, **Rabbi Shlomo Kluger,** in his sefer ***Chochmat Shlomo***, explains that this bracha expresses our recognition that whatever Hashem does is ultimately for our good. We don't feel every day that Hashem is providing for our needs, there are some days that we really feel that things are not going right, our needs are not being provided for, and we are even suffering. Yet we recite this bracha every single day. When we thank Hashem for providing us with all our needs, even on days when we feel that something essential is missing, we are acknowledging that Hashem sees the bigger picture. He knows what we truly need, even when His plan is difficult for us to understand. Sometimes, a challenge may lead to personal growth, bring about something positive, or serve a purpose that we cannot yet see. Only Hashem, with His infinite wisdom, knows what we truly need and how each experience fits into His plan.

The **Olat Tamid** quotes a famous explanation of the **Kli Yakar** on the word **כל** (all). When Yaakov and Esav meet as Yaakov returns to Eretz Yisrael, Esav tells Yaakov, **יש לי רב**, "I have plenty." Yaakov, by contrast, says, **יש לי כל**, "I have everything." The Kli Yakar explains that these statements reflect two very different outlooks on life. A person who constantly focuses on what is missing will never feel that he has enough, no matter how much he possesses. A tzaddik, however, can recognize the blessings in his life and feel that he has everything he needs, even when he has relatively little.

When we recite **שעשה לי כל צרכי**, we remind ourselves to look at our lives through this lens of gratitude. Rather than constantly focusing on what we lack, we recognize the gifts Hashem has given us



and learn to appreciate what we have.

The **Alei Shur** shares a beautiful story that illustrates this idea. Rabbi Naftali Amsterdam once said to his rebbe, Rabbi Yisrael Salanter: "If I had the mind of the Shaagat Aryeh, the heart of the author of Yesod VeShoresh HaAvodah, and the middot of my rebbe, Rav Salanter, then I would be able to serve Hashem properly." Rav Salanter answered him that his task was to serve Hashem with *his own* mind, *his own* heart, and *his own* middot. That was how he could truly fulfill his purpose.

The message is powerful. Hashem does not expect us to be someone else. He gives each of us our own unique strengths, talents, challenges, and circumstances, with which we can fulfill our particular mission in this world. When we recite **שעשה לי כל צרכי**, we thank Hashem not only for our physical needs, but also for the individual gifts and abilities He has given us. Our task is to recognize those gifts and use them to serve Him to the best of our ability.

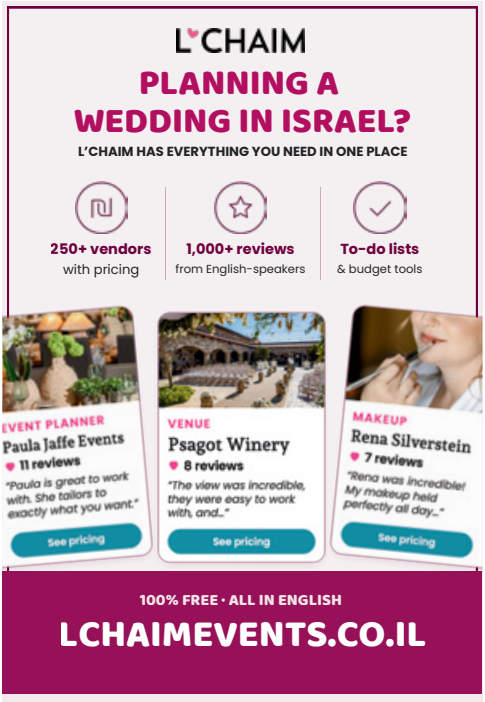
המכין מצעדי גבר
ברוך אתה ה' אלוקינו מלך העולם

Blessed are You, Hashem, our God, King of the universe, Who directs the steps of man.

On a basic level, this bracha expresses gratitude for the remarkable way Hashem created our feet, enabling us to move, walk, and remain active throughout the day. Each foot contains 26 bones, 33 joints, and more than 100 muscles, tendons, and ligaments, all working together to provide movement, balance, and stability. The soles of our feet also have thicker skin than many other parts of the body, helping protect them from the pressure and friction of walking. The complexity of this system allows us to take thousands of steps each day, often without giving any thought to the incredible coordination involved.

On a deeper level, **המכין מצעדי גבר** reminds us that Hashem guides our steps not only physically, but also throughout our lives. Every person has a unique path, and Hashem's hashgacha accompanies us along the way. We may not always understand why we are led in a particular direction or why certain opportunities and challenges arise, but we can trust that our steps are not insignificant.

As we recite this bracha each morning, we can remind ourselves that the day ahead is not simply a series of places to reach and tasks to complete. Each step offers an opportunity to fulfill our purpose, make meaningful choices, and move closer to the person Hashem created us to become. ■



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RABBI AARON GOLDSCHEIDER
PIRKEI AVOT SERIES
Editor, Torah Tidbits

Judging Favorably

Rav Kook on Pirkei Avot (1:6)

"Yehoshua ben Perachya says: ...judge everyone favorably." (Avot 1:6)

Rav Kook felt a deep affinity for the teachings of the Chassidic master Rebbe Nachman of Breslov. It is reported that Rav Kook once said that his soul contained the light of Rebbe Nachman. In this spirit, let us explore a teaching of Rebbe Nachman that undoubtedly influenced Rav Kook's approach to his fellow Jews.


Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook zt"l

JUDGING OTHERS AND ONESELF COMPASSIONATELY

Judging others compassionately and favorably, even those who appear guilty of sin, is a central ethos of the Chassidic tradition. One of its most exquisite expressions appears in the writings of Rebbe Nachman.

In a celebrated lesson in *Likutei Moharan* (282), Rebbe Nachman cites a verse from Psalms: "Just a bit more and there will be no wicked one; you will contemplate his place and he will not be there" (Psalms 37:10).

Rebbe Nachman explains that this verse teaches us to look for the good in others. Even when someone appears to have no redeeming qualities, we must search further. We will surely discover some element of goodness that affirms the person's worth. This point of goodness is what the verse means when it says, "there will be no wicked one." "You will contemplate his place"—that is, your previous negative perception of him—"and he will not be there." By judging the person favorably, you have already transformed your perception of him.

Rebbe Nachman adds another beautiful dimension to this teaching: we must view ourselves in the same way. Rather than falling into despair over our shortcomings, we should seek out the positive elements within ourselves and judge ourselves favorably on that basis. Such an attitude brings us the joy necessary to serve God.

RECOGNIZING THE *SEGULAH* IN OTHERS

Rav Kook highlighted a concept first articulated in the Torah in the lead-up to the giving of the Torah at Sinai. God describes the Jewish people as an *Am Segulah*, His treasured people (Shemot 19:5). This suggests a quality intrinsic to every Jew, irrespective of personal choices. We

are born precious, and this distinctive inner purity remains with us throughout our lives. (*Igrot HaRa'aya*, p. 186)

Rav Kook drew on this concept of *segulah* to explain his support for the Zionist pioneers (*chalutzim*), even though many were nonreligious or even antireligious. He argued that their love for the Land and their willingness to sacrifice for the Jewish nation were clear expressions of their *segulah* qualities coming to life. Indeed, Rav Kook went further, maintaining that the *segulah* dimension of Judaism is more potent than an individual's decision to observe mitzvot.

THE WAY OF A JEW

Rav Kook reminds us of a Talmudic teaching (Shavuot 30a) based on the Torah's command, "Judge with righteousness" (Vayikra 19:15). One interpretation applies this verse to court proceedings, requiring judges to treat both sides fairly. The Talmud also understands it as a broader directive: we should give others the benefit of the doubt and interpret situations in the most favorable light.

According to Rav Kook, this is the way of a Jew who seeks to live ethically and help establish a peaceful, harmonious community. (*Ein Ayah*, Berachot, Chapter 3, piska #24)

JUDGING RABBIS FAVORABLY

Rav Kook comments on a Talmudic passage that emphasizes the importance of judging Torah scholars favorably. The Talmud states: "If one sees a learned person sin at night, one should assume that this person has done teshuvah by the time morning has come" (Berachot 19a). The obligation to judge favorably is especially relevant when we know someone to be good and committed to the Torah.

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In the same section, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi declares:

"Whoever makes derogatory statements about Torah scholars after their death will be cast into Gehinnom" (Berachot 19a).

Rav Kook cites the Rambam, who codifies the gravity of denigrating rabbinic authority in his *Mishneh Torah*. Such a sin is particularly difficult to repair. By belittling Torah scholars, one effectively removes potential teachers and guides from one's life. Without rabbinic figures to inspire religious growth, the path toward repentance and spiritual progress becomes much harder.

Rav Kook makes a related point: we may encounter a teaching in the writings of a sage who has passed away that seems defective or unconvincing. To give that sage the benefit of the doubt is to remain open to the possibility that the teaching contains a truth we have yet to grasp. Through deeper analysis and patient reflection, we may come to recognize its validity. (*Ein Ayah*, Berachot, vol. 1, pp. 94–95)

JUDGING FAVORABLY IN THE LAND

The Talmud (Makot 7a) describes a striking case involving a person convicted by a court outside the Land of Israel who escapes and makes his way into the Land.

The question is whether his case should be reopened and he should be tried again.

At first glance, there would seem to be no reason for a retrial: he was tried, found guilty, and even attempted to evade his punishment. Yet the Talmud distinguishes between the two directions of travel. If someone convicted in the Land of Israel escapes abroad, his sentence stands. However, if someone convicted outside the Land enters Israel, "due to the merit of Eretz Yisrael," he receives a new trial. The Rambam codifies this ruling as standard practice (*Hilchot Sanhedrin* 13:8).

Remarkably, the Land of Israel itself is associated with a willingness to reconsider a person's case and allow another opportunity for judgment. In Rav Kook's thought, there is a broader social imperative to view one another compassionately. When building a nation and sharing a homeland, it becomes all the more important to give our fellow Jews the benefit of the doubt.

NO HATE

Rav Kook cites the Rambam (*Mishneh Torah*, *Hilchot De'ot* 6:5), who emphasizes that one violates the prohibition against hating another Jew simply by harboring enmity in one's heart. No outward action is necessary.

Thus, Rav Kook explained that when people who needed his help had acted disrespectfully toward him, he made an even greater effort to attend to their needs. He wanted to ensure that he did not transgress the prohibition against "hating another Jew in one's heart."Rav Kook would often say: "I am not concerned that I failed to fulfill the dictum of hating someone I should have hated; rather, I am concerned lest I fail to properly love a person as I am commanded to love them." (*Heichal HaAhava*, Cohen, p. 248)

MOSHE HELD ACCOUNTABLE

Whom does the Talmud cite as a Torah figure who transgressed by judging others too harshly? Strikingly, it is Moshe, and the incident concerns his words to God at the burning bush.

When God tells Moshe that he will lead His people out of Egypt, Moshe responds that "they will not believe me." God is angered by Moshe's lack of faith in the people. The famed Talmudic sage Reish Lakish identifies this as an example of *choshed be'kesharim*—"suspecting [sin] of one who is upstanding." It is for this reason that Moshe's hand becomes leprous. The episode illustrates the consequences of judging and speaking negatively about others (Shabbat 97a).

The Talmud thus issues a stark warning about the seriousness of casting negative judgments on others.

FINDING ONLY THE GOOD

The following inspiring anecdotes capture Rav Kook's loving heart and his remarkable desire to see the good in others.

Rav Kook traveled to Rechovot to be present for the grape harvest. During his stay, he learned that some young farmers regularly lit bonfires on Friday nights and gathered around them. Rav Kook publicly urged them to refrain from violating Shabbat. The young people were unhappy with his admonition.

A large group decided to confront Rav Kook and voice their opposition. They resolved to walk to the home where he was staying and express their anger over his pronouncement.

Rav Kook was sitting on the *mirpeset* (balcony), napping, when he heard the group approaching. Seeing a large group of young Jews walking together moved him deeply. With his heart filled with love, he rose to his feet, calling out to them with fervent words of praise and blessing. (*Heichal HaAhava*, Avraham Cohen, p. 24).

* * *

Following a particularly unpleasant incident in which some of Rav Kook's most radical adversaries harshly criticized and maligned him, several of his close students asked how he could endure such attacks without becoming despondent or retaliating. Rav Kook explained his perspective in the following exquisite way:

"I know in my heart, and in all honesty, that the position of Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem is far beyond what I deserve. I am unworthy of this title and honor. Who am I to hold this position when so many other scholars and righteous individuals grace this Holy City?"

"I hold this position like someone wearing shoes that are much too large." Rav Kook invoked the law of *chalitzah*, according to which a shoe that is too large can be made suitable for use by filling it with straw or other materials so that it fits securely enough to walk in.

The Rav continued: "When someone walks in such a shoe, they will inevitably feel some of its sharp edges and protrusions. Yet this is what makes the shoe fit.

So too, the rabbinate of Jerusalem is like a shoe far too large for my foot. Those who malign and vilify me, are in effect, helping my foot fit the shoe through their sharp and pointed edges. In this way, the rabbinate of Jerusalem became a better fit for me". (Ibid.)

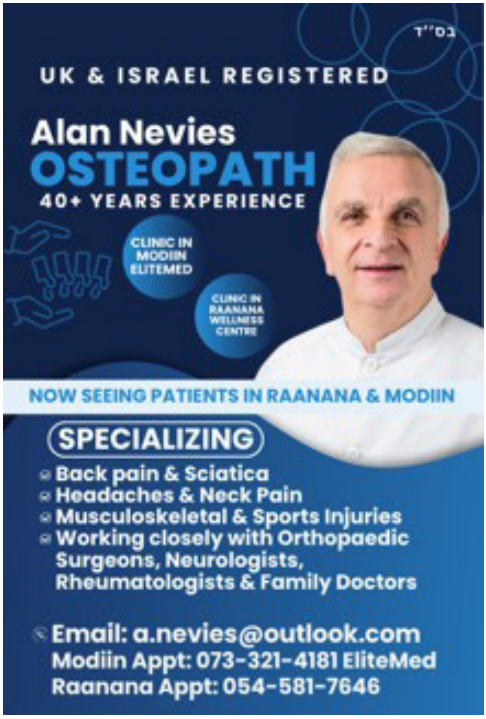
THE WHOLE PERSON

Rav Zvi Yehuda Kook, Rav Kook's eminent son, often quoted an insight of the Gerrer Rebbe on the Mishnah in Avot concerning judging others favorably. The Mishnah uses the expression *kol ha'adam* - "the whole person."

When we consider the whole person and remain sensitive to the many factors that shape someone's life - their background, upbringing, and personal challenges - we become more inclined to find merit in them and judge them compassionately. (*Sichat Avot*, p. 70; cited in *Sichot HaRav Zvi Yehuda*, Shemot, p. 88) ■



Rabbi Goldscheider's most recent OU Press Publication, **"Torah United"** on the weekly Parsha, can be ordered directly from Rabbi Goldscheider at aarong@ouisrael.org at a special price for Torah Tidbits readers.



לעילוי נשמת **יואל אפרים בן אברהם עוזיאל זלצמן ז"ל**

What One Can Take to the Hospital

Question: If my wife needs to go to the hospital to give birth on Shabbat, what am I allowed to take with me? Does it make a difference how we get there?

Answer: We will suffice with an overview of the issues and possibilities, for reasons we will explain later. We begin by answering your second question – it is significant how you get there. There are advantages, especially regarding the trip itself, to use a local *goy shel Shabbat* or arrange going with a reliable non-Jewish car service, if these are available. (If a need to get to the hospital quickly arises, such considerations are irrelevant.) Being taken by a non-Jew can also help in regard to what you can take.

Certainly, you can take whatever might aid having a safe, smooth birth, including necessary documentation. Beyond that, let's explore the potential halachic problems for things that are useful beyond a healthy birth. As a general guideline, actions that are twice removed from an *issur d'orayta* (*shvut d'shvut*) are permitted for several **significant** needs, and the preferred "second removal" is using a non-Jew (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 307:5).

Carrying outside an *eiruv* (uncommon in Israel) – To permit carrying non-*pikuach nefesh* (=*pn*) objects, one needs a *shvut d'shvut* and a *mitzva* use or serious need. Some *poskim* (see Minchat Yitzchak VIII:30) rely on the important opinions that our streets are not *reshut harabim d'orayta* (see Shulchan Aruch, OC 303:18) to remove it one level. Another possibility is to put together the non-*pn* with *pn* objects, so that one does not do an additional *melacha* but is just *marbeh b'shiurim* (adding to the quantity); there is a *machloket* whether this is forbidden *mid'orayta* or *miderabanan* (see Ran, Beitza 9b of Rif's pages; Mishna Berura 318:13). If one cannot use a non-Jew, there might be other possibilities, including carrying uninterrupted between two *reshuyot hayachid* (e.g., building, car) through a



karmelit, having two people share the carrying, or carrying in an unusual way (see Torat Hayoledet 17:4). Even if the car goes out of the *eiruv*, the objects while in the car remain in a *reshut hayachid* (Shemirat Shabbat K'hilchata 40:(161)).

Techum (movement between living clusters) – Usually, two places in the same city are in the same *techum*, but from rural areas (e.g., *yishuv*) to a city or city to city (e.g., Beit Shemesh to Yerushalayim), there is a violation. The violation applies both to people moving and to moving objects (Beitza 37a). Ostensibly, even a non-Jew moved it, it will be forbidden to move it in its new place (Shulchan Aruch, OC 405:9). One important leniency is that the permission for the people to go out of the *techum* due to *pn* will apply to his objects, whose *techum* mirror him (Minchat Shlomo I:15).

Impact on car – Some raise an issue that putting something extra in a car causes more gas to be burnt (Torat Hayoledet 18:1). Many are not concerned about that because any change is unimportant and imperceptible (Teshuvot V'hanhagot V:89).

Muktzeh – One may take a *kli shemelachto l'issur* if there is a good chance he will need it on Shabbat (see Living the Halachic Process III, C-18). Regarding full *muktzeh*, there is some logic to putting it, before Shabbat, among non-*muktzeh* objects; on the other hand, we are supposed to remove *muktzeh* if we can (see ibid. II, C-21; Pninei Halacha, Shabbat 27:6). (Taking a cell phone is permitted on multiple grounds.)

After presenting this synopsis, we elect not to render a clear-cut ruling. While all agree when faced with the problems of out of *eiruv*, *techum*, or *muktzeh*, one should not take that which is not somewhat important, this is quite dependent on the individual. There is also a wide gamut of halachic approaches on these matters. (See the quite lenient Peninei Halacha ibid. and the strict Torat Hayoledet, ch. 17-18. Shemirat Shabbat K'hilchata 40:77-78 falls somewhere between them.) This type of question benefits from discussion with a personal rabbi who is better equipped to make halachic determinations and applications that fit the individual's situation. ■

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RABBI JOE WOLFSON
Rabbi and Co-Director of JLIC TLV

Did Avraham Go Far Enough?

On the qualities required for Jewish leadership: Torah from the front room of a mid-century Tel Aviv hostel

If you walk down Lillenblum Street today in the centre of Tel Aviv you will find financial institutions alongside French delicatessens and expensive gyms.

But if you had ventured that way from the 1930s to the 1960s, you may have come across a small hotel restaurant owned by Rav Yosef Zev Lipovitz and his wife Bayla. It sat at a short distance from the location during the 1940s of the Haganah high command headquarters.

Rav Lipovitz was born in Trastina near Bialystok in 1889 and studied in the great yeshiva of Slobodka becoming a leading disciple of both rashei yeshivot, the Talmudist Rav Mordechai Epstein and the mussar master Rav Natan Tzvi Finkel, better known as the Saba of Slobodka. Alongside many others who would go on to be luminaries of the Jewish 20th century, he went on to study at the University of Berlin, before moving with his wife to Tel Aviv in 1924.

He was not an ambitious figure and did not assume positions of public leadership. Instead after teaching Talmud for a few years at Yeshivat Tel Aviv the Lipovitzs opened their small hotel-restaurant on Lillenblum St. For the next thirty years or so their front room became a kind of salon, a gathering place for everyone from simple labourers, to intellectuals and *gedolei Torah* to learn Torah with the Eastern European master and have them illuminate the momentous events of the world around them.

Today he is largely forgotten. He died childless in 1962 with the only work published in his lifetime being a beautiful commentary on Megillat Ruth, Nahalat Yosef. After he died his wife sold all of her possessions, down to her wedding ring to be able to finance the publication of three further volumes of his writings.

We will revisit the remarkable commentary on Megillat Ruth a number of times throughout this series, especially in advance of Shavuot. For this week's column however we will focus on a section of the introduction to Nahalat Yosef in which Rav Lipovitz sketches a model of Jewish leadership.

In Rav Lipovitz's scheme, Hashem looks for leaders with an unshakeable empathy for those around them - even, and perhaps

רפואה שלמה מהרה
לליעם יעקב ניסן בן אורה

especially, when the behaviour of that population leaves much to be desired.

Noach in this sense is a tragic figure - able to save himself and his family but unwilling to argue with God on behalf of the doomed people around him.

It is Avraham, in this week's parsha, who is the first to demonstrate this model of leadership when he pleads to save the inhabitants of corrupt Sedom.

Quoting the midrash, Avraham argues, 'if it is a world you desire there can be no strict justice, but if it is strict justice you desire then there can be no world' (Bereishit Rabba 49). It is for such heroic hutzpa that Avraham is chosen by God to become the progenitor of Am Yisrael.

Avraham argues that if fifty righteous people are to be found then Sedom must be saved. When that number cannot be found Avraham eventually reduces the minimum number all the way down to ten. When ten are not to be found then Avraham concedes the argument. In the usual version of this approach, ten represents some threshold below which Sedom cannot be saved. Perhaps ten - a minyan - are a minimum kernel to influence the overall society in a positive direction.

At this point Rav Lipovitz takes this well-known overall approach to Avraham to a surprising conclusion that I have not found elsewhere.

Upon hearing that not even this number of righteous people existed in Sedom, 'Avraham should have continued his prayer rather than bringing it to an end. For when he heard that there were not even ten righteous people in Sodom, he fell silent. Scripture states: "The Lord went His way when He had finished speaking to Abraham" (Genesis 18:33). Rashi explains: "Once the advocate fell silent, the judge departed."

The Holy One, blessed be He, as it were, was waiting for Abraham to say something more. Abraham should have added: "Master of the Universe, let me be their atonement," but he did not say this.

For Rav Lipovitz Avraham never should have stopped at ten!

It will eventually be Moshe Rabbeinu who will take the radical final steps that Avraham did not, demanding that God 'erase me from Your book' if He will not save Israel.

No plaque marks the building where Rav Lipovitz lived and taught on Lillenblum Street. But the words of the righteous are their own memory. In a week of momentous elections, may we merit that his Torah not only be remembered but that his demanding vision of Jewish leadership be embodied by those we elect to lead us. ■

Rabbi Joe Wolfson is the rabbi and co-director of JLIC TLV — a new, vibrant community serving young religious olim in Tel Aviv, generously supported by the Mayberg Foundation. He and his wife, Corinne, both grew up in the UK and served as directors of JLIC NYU in downtown Manhattan from 2015 to 2022.

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The Impossible Math: Sarah's Unshakable Secret of Survival

Parshat Vayeira is packed with iconic narratives, from the angels visiting Avraham to the destruction of Sodom, the birth of Yitzchak, and the *Akeidah*. Yet, hidden inside the episode where Hagar and Yishmael are sent away lies a fascinating textual problem, and a revolutionary insight that reveals the secret superpower of the Jewish people.

THE IMPOSSIBLE MATH

When Sarah sees Yishmael acting inappropriately, she demands that Avraham send him away. Avraham complies, placing a flask of water and young Yishmael on Hagar's shoulders. When the water runs out in the desert, Hagar throws the boy under a bush in despair.

Throughout the passage, Yishmael is called a *yeled* (toddler/child), carried on a shoulder, and tossed under a bush. But do the math:

- **Avraham was 75** when he arrived in Canaan.
- **Yishmael was born 11 years later**, when Avraham was 86.
- **Avraham was 100** when Yitzchak was born (making Yishmael 14).
- **Yitzchak was weaned at age 2**.

This means Yishmael was **16 years old** when he was sent away! How could Hagar possibly carry a 16-year-old on her back and toss him under a bush?

This brings us to a second question: What was the true *nisayon* (test) of the Akeidah? When Hashem explicitly commands a person directly, refusal isn't an option. Where was Avraham's test?

SARAH'S RADICAL FAITH

Rabbeinu Bachya answers the first question with four revolutionary words: *"Ein mukdam u'meuchar baTorah"*, there is no chronological order in the Torah.

This episode of Yishmael being thrown out of the house actually occurred when Yishmael was a toddler and able to be carried by Hagar, years before Yitzchak was even conceived!

Re-read the story through this lens: Sarah wakes up and tells Avraham to banish



Yishmael because he will be a bad influence on "my son". Avraham looks around bewildered, they don't even have a child yet! Sarah responds with absolute *Emunah*: "Hashem promised us a child, so we will have one! I am preparing our home for that reality right now."

This answers the Akeidah question as well. Hashem gave Avraham two completely contradictory statements: *"Through Yitzchak your seed will continue"* versus *"Offer him as a sacrifice."* The test wasn't simply to listen to the commandment of *"Aleiho L'olah"* (*"עלהו לעולה"*); it was to hold both divine truths simultaneously with pure, perfect *Emunah*.

BIRTHED BEYOND DESPAIR

Rav Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin explains why our nation was birthed through such humanly impossible circumstances, a 100-year-old father and a 90-year-old mother. Hashem intentionally built the Jewish nation "*acharei ha-yeush ha-gamur*" (after total natural despair) to embed a permanent spiritual truth into our DNA: A Jew never despairs, because Hashem's salvation is unlimited.

On January 1st, 2000, *The New York Times* published a mock cover page for January 1st, 2100, filled with futuristic guesses like flying brooms and robot rights. Yet, tucked in the corner was a tiny ad listing the exact Shabbat candle-lighting time for New York in 2100. When asked why, the editor explained that among all the fiction, he needed one absolute certainty: *"In 100 years, Jewish women will still be lighting Shabbat candles."*

THE SEGULA OF *EIN OD MILVADO*

In *Nefesh HaChaim*, **Rav Chaim Volozhin** reveals the ultimate *segula* for overcoming any trial: firmly internalizing that Hashem is the only true power in existence, *Ein Od Milvado*. When a person anchors their mind on this absolute truth, all opposing forces in the world naturally dissolve. As the hijacked Flydubai plane began to plummet, a young Jewish woman recorded herself repeating "Ein Od Milvado" over and over, with unwavering *Emunah*.

Our Matriarch Sarah taught us that *Emunah* is not just reacting to reality, it is creating space for Hashem's promises before they even materialize. Whatever challenges we face, let us lock into that eternal DNA, live with unshakable faith, and remember: *Ein Od Milvado*! ■

For more shiurim by **Rav Elyada Goldwicht** seach YouTube and Spotify.
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MRS. MICHAL HOROWITZ
Torah Educator
Presenter for OU Women's Initiative

A Nation of Chessed

As *Parshas Vayeira* opens, we meet Avraham *Avinu*, at the age of ninety-nine years old, three days after his *bris milah*. By the command of Hashem, Avraham circumcised himself and his household, thereby entering the Divine covenant (Bereishis 17). With the beginning of *Vayeira*, the Torah introduces us to Avraham, on the third day after his bris - which, as the Sages note - is the day of greatest pain, sitting at the entrance to his tent.

While there are *many* events that occur over the course of the *parsha* (the visit of the angels, the destruction of Sodom and rescue of Lot, Avraham and Sarah in the territory of Avimelech, the birth of Yitzchak, the sending away of Hagar and Yishmael, the *Akeidah* and the family of *Nachor*) the opening *pasuk* narrates one of the most dramatic teachings that becomes the hallmark of our nation: chessed.



We learn of Hashem's visit to Avraham, as the *pasuk* tells us: וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו ה' בְּאֵלֹנֵי מַמְרֵא וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב פֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל כְּחֹם הַיּוֹם - *And Hashem appeared to him in the plains of Mamre, and he was sitting at the entrance of the tent in the heat of the day* (Bereishis 18:1).

Interestingly, the first words of the parsha (and pasuk) read: וַיֵּרָא **אֵלָיו** ה - "*And Hashem appeared **to him***." Every other communication from Hashem to Avraham contains a message - be it a command, a promise, or a covenant. Here there is nothing else that follows! We are only told of a Divine appearance. Why would the Torah record this visit, in which nothing is said from Hashem to Avraham?

Rashi explains that the purpose of the visit was: לְבַקֵּר אֶת הַחוֹלֶה - *to visit the sick. It was the third day after his circumcision, and Hashem came to inquire after his welfare* (Rashi to Bereishis 18:1).

Hence, we now understand that *the visit itself was the message*.

The Torah is teaching us that *being present* for someone else in their time of need is as important as having something to say (and sometimes, even more important than saying words that should not be said!). From this pasuk, Chazal learn the mitzvah of *bikur cholim* (visiting the sick): we visit the sick because Hashem Himself did, and we are commanded to go in His ways (Sotah 14a). We do not visit the sick to amass information, to be "in the know,"

or to say "I was there." We visit because being there is itself the mitzvah.

Furthermore, it is interesting to note that the verse tells us Avraham was sitting at the entrance to his tent כְּחֹם הַיּוֹם - "*in the heat of the day*." Why does the Torah report this seemingly unnecessary detail? Why does it matter that it was hot and sunny at that moment?

Rashi explains *that Hashem took the sun out of its sheath, so that the heat was super intense, so as not to trouble the tzaddik with passersby* (Rashi to Bereishis 18:1).

Since it was scorching hot, surely no traveler would be on the road in such heat, which would allow Avraham to rest and recuperate.

However! Rashi continues: *when Hashem saw that Avraham was troubled by the absence of passersby, He brought the angels to him in the likeness of men*.

This is fascinating and paradoxical. On the one hand, it is Hashem Himself Who arranges the prescribed rest for Avraham, and yet, He then overrides His own plan!

Perhaps the Torah is teaching us that while Avraham's body needed rest, his spiritual self needed to give.

For our forefather Avraham, the pain of not being able to give was greater than the physical pain of the *bris*. Hence, Hashem acceded to Avraham's longing to do chessed: first rest for the body, then guests for the soul.

Here Hashem is teaching us a most important and fundamental aspect of chessed: true kindness is not giving what we assume someone else needs. It is seeing, understanding, giving and doing what they actually truly need.

These lessons have powerful implications for how we care for each other.

In this monumental act of Divine chessed - which preceded the chessed that Avraham did for the *malachim* - the Torah gives us Hashem's model of visiting. When someone we love is sick or struggling - be it a child, parent, spouse, or friend R"L - one of the most important things we can give them is not answers. It is, rather, our presence.

And like Hashem did, we must look with a discerning and concerned eye, at what the person before us truly needs. For chessed that is not tailored to its recipient is not truly chessed. It may be fulfilling our own needs, while neglecting - or trampling upon, may Hashem spare us - the needs of the other.

The Sages teach that there are three hallmarks of a Jew: *ha'rachmanim, ha'bay'shanim, v'ha'gomlei chassadim* - we are merciful and compassionate, we are modest, and we are a people who perform acts of loving-kindness for one another (Yevamos 79).

May we live up to our potential, and emulate the model of chessed that Hashem teaches us. May our chessed be done with mercy, compassion, understanding, sensitivity, and grace, thereby doing for others what they truly need, elevating the Name of Hashem in the world, and bettering ours - and their - lives as *ovdei Hashem*.

בברכת בשורות טובות ושבת שלום

Michal Horowitz is a Torah educator who lectures nationally throughout the United States, as well as internationally. Thousands of her shiur recordings are available online. She is a regular presenter for the OU Women's Initiative and the author of Abled: Living With a Disability, a Torah View (Mosaica Press). Michal lives in Woodmere, NY, with her family.



RABBI CHAIM EISENSTEIN

GUEST DVAR TORAH

Maggid Shiur at the RIETS Israel Kollel

Rav of Beis Midrash Mevakshei Emes, Mishkafayim, Beit Shemesh

Rav Bronspiegel's Timeless Message

Adapted by Rabbi Tzvi Goldstein

My rebbi, Rav Bronspiegel, zt"l, used to highlight the abduction of Sarah in Parashas Vayera to convey a message that has impacted the lives of so many.

DEBATING AVIMELECH

In Parashas Lech Lecha, Sarah was abducted by Pharaoh after Avraham lies about the nature of their relationship. Once Hashem intervenes to save Sarah, Pharaoh questions Avraham's deception, but the Torah doesn't record Avraham having responded. In Vayera, when Sarah was once again abducted, this time by Avimelech, Avimelech also challenges Avraham — but this time, Avraham responds. His response is difficult to understand: Avraham answered, "Rak ein yiras Elokim ba'makom ha'zeh — There is no fear of heaven in this place."11 Not only does this not seem to explain why Avraham chose to lie about being married to Sarah, it even smacks of a chillul Hashem — "I lied because people here aren't frum." What was Avraham saying?



Rabbi Abba Bronspiegel zt"l

Even more striking, Avimelech merits a conversation from Hashem Himself, whereas Hashem didn't speak to Pharaoh at all.

An additional question that I noticed when learning these passages relates to a nuance in Avimelech's conversation with Hashem. Avimelech claims that he shouldn't be punished for abducting Sarah, because he did so "with a pure heart and clean hands," not realizing that Sarah was married. Hashem responds, "I know that you did this with a pure heart." Rashi points out the omission: Hashem does not grant Avimelech's claim that he acted "with clean hands." What is the significance of this detail?

Finally, the phrase "pure heart and clean hands" appears in another context in Tanach — but reversed. David Hamelech asks, "Who can ascend the mountain of Hashem? Who can stand in His holy place? One with clean hands and a pure heart..."12 Why did David reverse the order of these phrases, and how does their presence grant a person access to "the mountain of Hashem and His holy place"?

HUMAN MORALS

Rav Bronspiegel was a child survivor

of the Holocaust. At the start of the war, he had six siblings; by the end, he had only two. He saw part of his mission as a mechanech to be teaching his students, American-born bachurim, the values that used to pervade the European shtetl and warning against those values of

modern American society that were negative and corrosive to the Jewish soul. He shared with us that when he was a child, Germany was considered to be the pinnacle of culture and ethics throughout the world. They held this reputation for hundreds of years. Yet because their ethics were built on human foundations, rather than Divine command, they crumbled within just a few decades. What had been the heights of culture and moral repute morphed into the cruelest extermination campaign the world has ever seen. This, Rav Bronspiegel asserted, is what Avraham was pointing out to Avimelech: Rak ein yiras Elokim, there is no fear of God here — so your protestations of morality are empty.

This response wasn't necessary in Egypt, which had a reputation for moral laxity. As much as Pharaoh protested, he knew why Avraham had to lie, and Avraham knew that he knew, so he didn't need to respond. Hakadosh Baruch Hu, as well, knew the score in Egypt, so there was no point in him dialoguing with Pharaoh to explain the situation. But Gerar had a reputation for being a civilized locale; Avimelech expresses serious indignation over Avraham's lack of trust in their moral character. For that reason, Avraham had to explain that if your ethical commitment is based on a human moral sense, then you could conceivably justify killing me to permit abducting my wife. Without a Divine anchor, even the most civilized society can justify genocide.

Rav Bronspiegel turned to us, his students, any of whom were in college as well as yeshiva, and said: "I have no problem with you being in college, whether for parnassah or as a religious value. But make sure that every single one of your values come from the Torah Ha'kedoshah, not from your secular classes!"

CLEAN HANDS YIELD PURE HEARTS

Hakadosh Baruch Hu made a related point to Avimelech by affirming his "purity of heart" but omitting his "clean hands." Avimelech was undoubtedly sincere; the purity of heart was emes. But because he wasn't connected to a mesorah of how to actualize that sincerity, his feeling did not necessarily translate into action. Purity of heart does not automatically lead to clean hands. We live in a culture that teaches that if a person is sincere, they can decide for themselves what is right and what is wrong. While this may sound nice in theory, it leads to the most degenerate conclusions — even to the extent that out of a desire to be sensitive to certain movements, a man is no longer a man and a woman is no longer necessarily a woman!

David Hamelech took Avimelech's two pronouncements and reversed them: "Neki kapayim u'var leivav — Clean hands and pure hearts." One must begin by following the rules that define for us how to maintain clean hands — and by working on that for years, a person will eventually develop a pure heart. The pure heart comes from the clean hands, not the other way around.

This idea is foundational to raising Jewish children. Every morning, there's a child who climbs into their parent's bed just a



bit before the parent was going to get up, and the parent will hug them and ask, "Avremele, did you wash negel vasser?" The child won't understand tumah and taharah for many, many years — I'm 49, and I still don't understand them — yet he's already being taught that they exist as a reality in the world. Tumah and taharah exist. Emes and sheker exist. Kasher and pasul, muter and asur — these concepts exist, even without understanding them. By internalizing these holy instincts over time, a person can eventually develop a pure heart.

REB ANSCHEL TESLER'S INSPIRATION

The person who epitomizes this for me is a Holocaust survivor named Reb Anschel Tesler. He was one of many survivors who attended the shul my father had our family davening at when I was growing up; to him, those with numbers on their arms were koshei kodashim. During the week, we often davening in the same minyan factory in Flatbush, known as Frankel's. As a teenager, I used to come to the 8:45 or 9:00 minyan (on a bad day, 9:15 or 9:30). Reb Anschel, on the other hand, had davened at the 6:00 minyan and had already finished daf yomi — at least once, sometimes twice — by the time I rolled into shul. He used to work around the later minyanim holding the pushka, collecting tzedakah.

Reb Anschel's grandson once told me a story that his grandfather told him. After liberation, the first few days were consumed by survival and returning to some semblance of normalcy — just being able to eat a little. At some point, Reb Anschel got a pair of tefillin. But just a few days later, a realization hit him like a ton of bricks. He was angry. He was angry at the Germans, sure, but he was also angry at Hakadosh Baruch Hu. His entire family had been killed in the Holocaust! So Reb Anschel decided that he wasn't putting on tefillin that morning. He sat down and read the newspaper instead. He finished around 10:00 and realized that he was hungry for breakfast — but he heard his mother's voice admonishing him in Yiddish, "Anschel, we don't eat before davening." He couldn't eat — but he didn't want to daven! So he went for a walk, made it to 11:00, and couldn't hold out any longer. He put on his tefillin, screamed at Hakadosh Baruch Hu, and ate — and he never missed a day of tefillah.

HOLY INSTINCTS

That is the power of holy instincts, of investing in "neki kapayim" and developing "bar leivav." Even if it doesn't make sense to you, even if you don't understand

it, it doesn't matter; the commitment is naaseh v'nishma, we do even before understanding.

This point extends beyond strict halachah. I was once walking out of a shul in Ramat Beit Shemesh and a young Israeli Charedi teenager approached me and asked to borrow my phone to make a call. I pulled out my phone — a smartphone without a browser — and handed it to him. Now, he didn't expect this; seeing my beard and outfit, he expected a flip phone. When he realized that he was holding a smartphone, his hand began to tremble — I say that without exaggeration. Softly, he said, "Ani lo yachol — I can't," and handed it back to me.

Every person should have their areas of ani lo yachol — gedarim, fences that ensure their neki kapayim, even if others won't understand or respect them. Creating holy instincts, like those of Reb Anschel, is one of the most powerful forces in living a life of consistent avodas Hashem.

Rav Bronspiegel taught us that which was so foreign to Avimelech. Ethics rooted in human intellect are shaky; without a Divine anchor, they can easily be twisted to justify the cruelest perversion of morality. Similarly, a person who only practices those values that they understand, placing their pure heart before their clean hands, will struggle to live a moral life. Only by committing to clean hands, to following halachah and learning the Torah that informs the halachic system, can a person eventually develop an authentically pure heart. ■

This dvar Torah is an excerpt from **Rav Eisenstein**'s upcoming sefer being published by RIETS Press.





Shagririm Balev
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AYELET GLATT
Deputy CEO Shagririm Balev

Shagririm Balev
Friends set up friends

לעילוי נשמת **מאיר יצחק בן יוסף אליהו הכהן ז"ל**

Making Room for Connection

We're all looking for a connection. But how often do we actually give one a chance to happen?

We spend so much time thinking about dating as a process: The right person, the right timing, the right first impression. We analyze conversations, wonder whether there was enough chemistry, and sometimes decide far too quickly that someone isn't for us.

But maybe we've forgotten something important: the power of simply being interested in another person.

Recently, Shagririm Balev was honored to be a part of a beautiful event initiated and hosted by Ariella and Jonathan Eltes at their home. The evening, that brought together over 100 men and women, was created in memory of Ariella's father, Michael Weisz - Meir Yitzchak ben Yosef Eliyahu HaKohen, on his seventh yahrtzeit.

Michael grew up in Cleveland, Ohio, the son of Holocaust survivors, and later moved to Columbus, where he worked tirelessly to build the Jewish community. But the quality Ariella chose to highlight when speaking about her father wasn't just his leadership. It was his ability to connect with people.

He was curious about others, he loved making introductions. He didn't wait for someone else to bring people together; he took the initiative himself.

Ariella shared three lessons she learned from him: Be curious about others, don't sweat the small stuff, and KIS: Keep It Simple.

It's hard to imagine a better philosophy for dating.

Be curious about others. Not every person you meet will be your next date, let alone your spouse. But every person has a story worth hearing. What happens when we stop evaluating someone long enough to actually get to know them? When we ask another question instead of deciding we've already figured them out?

Don't sweat the small stuff. A slightly awkward conversation, a difference in taste, a first impression that wasn't quite what you expected. We all have our preferences, and some things genuinely matter. But sometimes, in our search for the right person, we give the wrong things too much weight and the right things too little room



to grow.

Keep it simple. You don't need every interaction to be extraordinary. You don't need to know where something is going before you've given it a chance. Sometimes, you just need to show up, be yourself, and let things unfold.

The evening included supper, conversations around rotating tables, a fun, laughter-filled activity that brought everyone together and a hilarious comedy show with Yair Jacobi and Yossi Gavni. BH there was something really special about the atmosphere, and more importantly, it led to a remarkable number of dates and new connections. We can't know exactly what made the difference, but we'd like to think Michael's spirit played an important part.

Perhaps that's the real lesson: we can't control when or how we meet our person, but like Michael and his family, who continue his legacy, we can create opportunities, approach people with genuine interest, and be the ones who make room for meaningful things to begin. ■

Want to set up your friends? Become their ambassador - join Shagririm Balev!

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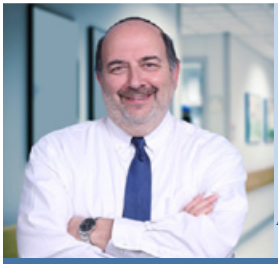
Holiness

An angel of G-d called to him from heaven, and said: "Avraham, Avraham" and he replied: "Hear I am". He said: "Do not harm the young man; do nothing to him. For now I know that you are a G-d fearing person; you did not withhold your son... from Me" (22:11-12).

The Ramchal explains the ultimate midda – virtue – that a person can aspire to reach in a lifetime is the midda of kedusha, holiness. He places kedusha above tahara – purity. Tahara, explains the Ramchal is selecting what is good and worthy from what is bad and worthless. Kedusha involves deveikut: unswerving loyalty and commitment to serving the Almighty, including positively activating that tahara. Kedusha may be observed in the ways such the way an individual eats at the table, spends his or her money, or deals with provocating situations and people. Those with developed kedusha also interact with worldly activities in such a way that spiritually raises them as though they "were walking before G-d in the World-to-Come" while still in this world (Mesilat Yesharim, 26).

The Ramchal explains that G-d helps the genuine striver to kedusha to attain higher levels of kedusha: G-d leads that individual along the path he or she wants to travel. In walking on the way by engaging with life, He makes the way appear. Sometimes the way appears as nisyanot: as frightening, unpleasant, and awkward situations. But it is the pro-actively comping with such challenging situations that can help the individual achieve the ultimate level of shleimut: being a complete, balanced person, individuality and potential being developed to the full.

Let's look things that can frighten in traveling on the way. One of them is the optical illusion. You have probably walked along a mountainous footpath, suddenly gripped with fear as ahead plunges to certain death over the cliff. Or you have driven along a road that is going to smash the car with you in it into the oncoming brick wall. Scary, yes. But you reason: I've been walking all my life. Footpaths lead on interesting and enjoyable walks that yield safety and civilization. They are not designed as trails of death. Roads get you from A to B and are designed by civil engineers. They are not there to slam you into the wall of death.

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(And whilst putting this piece together, I looked through my Jerusalem window westwards towards Moshav Aminadav, on the side of the Refaim Valley. The early morning mists gave it the appearance of a very wide blue river bound by two sets of mountains, getting to the sea. Can't be, I thought. Long way from the sea, Jerusalem is.)

Yes, all three views are clear. But what you see does not exist. All are optical illusions. The footpath and the road both change direction, but the turning and route continuation are invisible from where you're standing. And as the morning mist reflecting the sun-illuminated blue sky begins to lift, the sea of Jerusalem starts to fade

This is the experience of Avraham Avinu. He knew G-d loved humanity: as the Sforno repeatedly emphasizes in his commentary Yismach HaShem BeMa'asav, G-d takes great pleasure in His Creation (Tehillim 104:31). He does not want to cause harm to people, least of all to Avraham, His friend (Yehshayahu 41:8). Avraham, G-d's friend, knows that. He does not lead them on paths to their death or to the death of their children. Understanding that is bitachon, trust in G-d. We trust footpaths. We trust roads. There are made to lead us, not to kill us. We do not trust because the path-makers and roadbuilders force us to sign a contract of engineering infallibility. We trust because we have a lifetime of experience, and we allow that understanding of experience to emerge from it: namely footpaths and roads are there to effectively get us to where we want to get to.

This principle gives us background to understanding the Akeida. Avraham Avinu knew G-d. G-d tells him to take his son Yitzchak to the Land of Moria, and sacrifice hu, meaning either him or it, as burnt offering. Avraham complied. As G-d commanded him. He asked no questions, but like the walker and the driver went forward along the way; nearer and nearer to over the cliff, nearer and nearer the brick wall. As G-d commanded him. His lifetime of experience taught him that G-d was committed to his interests and to his son's interests. He had no idea in detail how the Akeida would turn out, just like the walker didn't know what the footpath would do. But his experience of G-d, unique to him, told him that He was watching out for him. And as the story tells us, He did. The hu that he sacrificed, meant 'it', the ram, the stand-in for Yitzchak. And G-d, it turned out, was not just looking out for him, but for all his descendants and through them, looking out for the the whole of humanity: "Through your descendants, all nations shall be blessed, for you listened to My voice" (22:18).

We all have our nisyanot. We all have our challenges. So perhaps the Akeida gives an insight into living today. At times we have approached despair. Yet in contrast to our carefully laid plans, we have experienced



unexpected outcomes. We have our own stories. It is those that build up our life's experience of Hashgacha Peratit, in this case that G-d gives us our nisyanot for a reason. Like the Avraham Avinu's Akeida, we at our own level have our own Akeidot. That is opportunity to follow his example that as long as act in ways compatible with the Torah teaching, G-d is looking out for our ultimate interests.

(And on writing this, I look out of the window and behold, the blue sea occupying the Refaim Valley is no more. It was an optical illusion. The mist has lifted. It returns to its green wooded slopes.) ■

I write this piece in honour of the Chatona of my eldest child, Yehonatan to Elisheva Gur, this Thursday. A Bayit Ne'eman Be-Yisrael!

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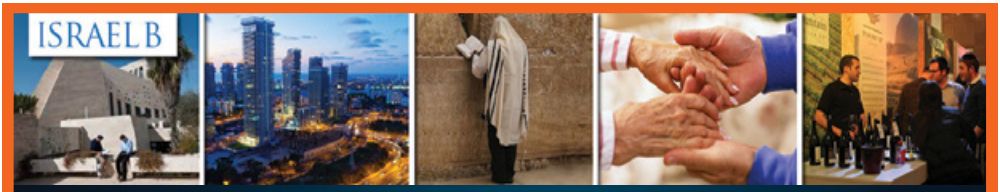
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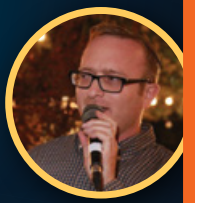


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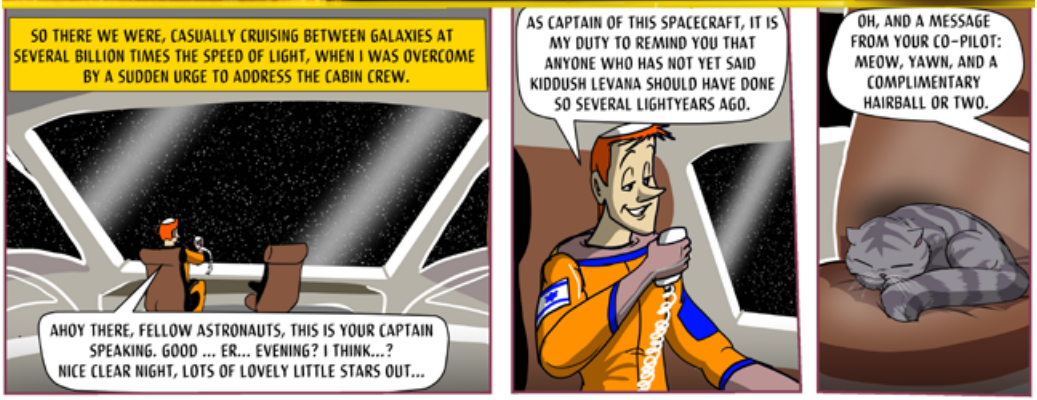
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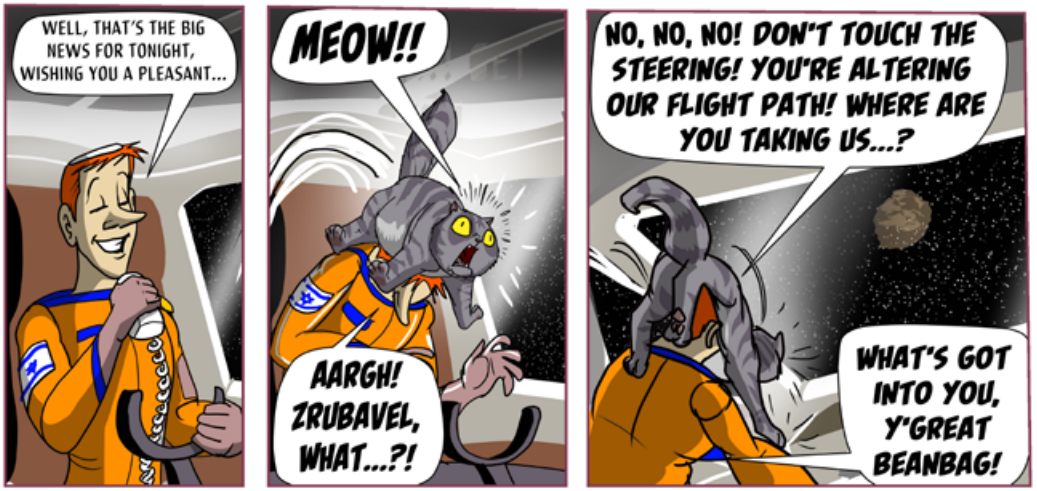
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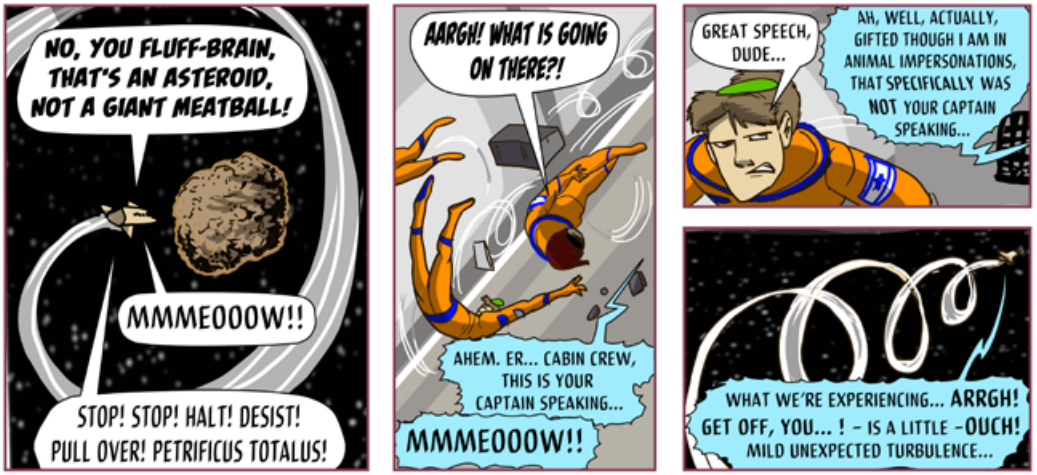
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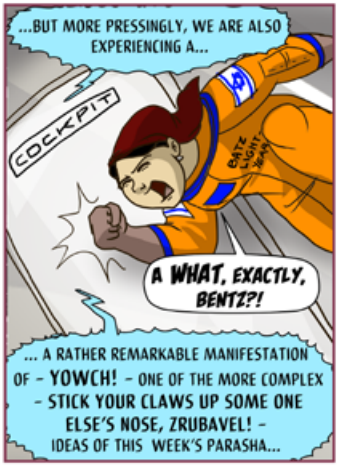
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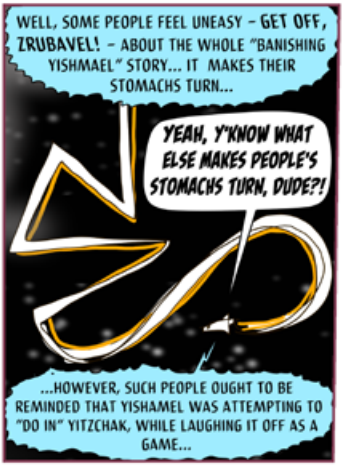







...BUT MORE PRESSINGLY, WE ARE ALSO EXPERIENCING A...
COCKPIT
A WHAT, EXACTLY, BENTZ?!
... A RATHER REMARKABLE MANIFESTATION OF - YOWCH! - ONE OF THE MORE COMPLEX - STICK YOUR CLAWS UP SOME ONE ELSE'S NOSE, ZRUBAVEL! - IDEAS OF THIS WEEK'S PARASHA...


SERIOUSLY?! WE'RE HURTLING THROUGH SPACE TO OUR DOOM, AND YOU'RE FINDING INTERESTING PARALLELS TO THE PARASHA?!
UNCANNY, ISN'T IT? WHO'D HAVE THOUGHT THE PARASHA COULD BE RELEVANT EVEN TO A SITUATION LIKE THIS?
YOU'RE UNCANNY, CAPTAIN!!


WELL, SOME PEOPLE FEEL UNEASY - GET OFF, ZRUBAVEL! - ABOUT THE WHOLE "BANISHING YISHMAEL" STORY... IT MAKES THEIR STOMACHS TURN...
YEAH, Y'KNOW WHAT ELSE MAKES PEOPLE'S STOMACHS TURN, DUDE?!
...HOWEVER, SUCH PEOPLE OUGHT TO BE REMINDED THAT YISHAMEL WAS ATTEMPTING TO "DO IN" YITZCHAK, WHILE LAUGHING IT OFF AS A GAME...


AND SO, ON THE MOST BASIC - AARGH! LEVEL OF UNDERSTANDING, THE MORAL OF THE - YOWCH! - STORY IS:
ZERO TOLERANCE FOR THOSE ATTEMPTING TO ANNIHILATE US, THEY CAN ALL - AARGH!!! - JOLLY WELL GET LOST...
BUT ON A DEEPER LEVEL - HELP!! - THE ALTER REBBE SAYS IN THE TANYA THAT THIS IS ALSO A - AARGH! - PROTOTYPE OF HOW TO HANDLE OUR "INNER YISHMAEL", THE "WILD ANIMAL SOUL" WE HAVE INSIDE...


LIKE YISHAMEL, IT'S FULL OF ENORMOUS ENERGY AND POTENTIAL, BUT IF IT OVERCOMES US, GOES MAD, HIJACKING OUR "INNER STEERING WHEEL", SO TO SPEAK, AND DRAGGING US DOWN AFTER IT...
IT'S A DANGER AND A LIABILITY AND MUST BE SHUNTED ASIDE FOR A BIT!
HOWEVER, IF IT KNOWS ITS PLACE AND GIVES "YITZCHAK" - THE GODLY SOUL - THE DRIVING SEAT, IT'S A WELCOME PARTNER IN SERVING G-D AND REDEEMING THIS WORLD!


LIKE THAT, ZRUBAVEL, SEE? GOOD CAT...
AND JUST LIKE HISTORICALLY, YISHMAEL, AND HIS MOTHER, HAGAR, BOTH REPENTED AND REJOINED AVRAHAM'S SIDE...
...YOUR CO-PILOT IS BACK IN HIS POSITION IN THE FRONT PASSENGER SEAT, AND I, THE BRAINS OF THE TEAM, CAN NOW SAFELY STEER YOU FORWARD TO...


SMASH!!!
WHAT?! WHERE DID THAT MOON COME FROM, AND WHY DIDN'T IT HAVE ITS HAZARD LIGHTS ON?!
...AND THEN I WOKE UP...
CUT, DUDE, CUT!!


...WELL, NOT "CUT", I WISH WE COULD "CUT"... WE'RE LIVE ON A POST-ELECTION SPECIAL OUTSIDE THE KNESSET!
HOW IS THAT DREAM OF YOURS RELEVANT AT ALL?!
I... ER.. WELL..
I DUNNO...
I WAS OVERCOME BY A SUDDEN URGE TO TELL IT...
"OVERCOME"?! THEN OVERCOME IT BACK, DUDE! YOU CAN'T JUST LET THESE THINGS TAKE OVER, MAN!
YOU'RE RIGHT, I JUST MOMENTARILY...


...SPACED OUT...



GILAD CHAIM
RA'ANANA CHAPTER DIRECTOR

WHY "ZERIZIM MAKDIMIN" IS SO ANNOYING (AND WHY IT MATTERS)

"Zerizim makdimin le-mitzvot"—those who are eager to do things early. Honestly, what an annoying phrase. Why make me feel bad? But it's not only about rushing to do mitzvot. It's about the power of getting things done without falling into comfort.

When Avraham got up for the Akeidah, the Torah says, "Abraham rose early in the morning." Rashi explains that he hurried to do the mitzvah. Avraham knew this was the hardest thing he'd ever do, and he still got up quickly and went. So, what does that teach us?

Many things in life are hard, and we have zero energy for them, even when we know they'll help us. "Ugh, I don't feel like cleaning my room," even though we know we'd be more comfortable in a clean one.

That's how the human brain works. It likes comfort, so it hates moving. But when we break out of that comfort, we force it to work overtime and build self-discipline. It starts with cleaning your room when you don't want to and grows into studying for the career that will help you become your best self.

Personally, I use the "five-second rule." The moment I think of something I need to do, I count to five and go do it. That way, my brain can't talk me into resting "just for a minute," and three hours later, I'm still lying on my bed.

The Torah gives us lessons for everyday life, and that's a great way to connect to the parsha: see how it relates to your own life.

From Avraham, we learn what helps us grow most: get up, act, and hurry, even when it's hard.



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HOW MUCH IS THE GOOD WORTH COMPARED TO THE BAD?

When God tells Avraham He's about to destroy Sodom and Gomorah, Avraham doesn't stay silent. He asks, "Will You sweep away the righteous along with the wicked?" (Genesis 18:23). What if there are 50 righteous people in the city? Then 45, 40, 30, 20, and just 10.

In the end, Sodom is destroyed anyway, but not before Lot and his family are saved. So how much is the life of one good person worth compared to a crowd of bad ones?

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The answer: a lot. When there's good hiding inside the bad, it's hard to give up on it. Abraham fights to bring out whatever good Sodom might have before everything is lost.

The Gemara tells a similar story about Resh Lakish, who was a bandit and a brawler. After one meeting, Rabbi Yochanan saw a small spark of good in him and convinced him to use his strength for Torah. Resh Lakish went on to become one of the great Sages and Rabbi Yochanan's chavruta.

So what do we learn? If you have a friend who does bad things, but you can see good in him, try to bring it out before you give up on him. We're responsible for helping every Jew bring out the good inside.

Look closely at the wording: Avraham says "tzaddik im rasha," putting the righteous first. That's what he sees in everyone. He believes people can always change, and that everyone has a good spot that can shine and make them better. ■



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