

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
from
Rabbi Elimelech
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Lech Lecha



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Torah Wellsprings - Lech Lecha

Gratitude without Complaints

In this week's parashah, Avraham Avinu says (18:27) וְאֶנֶּכִי עָפָר וָאֵפֶר, "I am earth and ashes." Rashi explains, וכבר הייתי ראוי להיות עפר על ידי המלכים, ואפר על ידי נמרוד, לולי רחמיך אשר עמדו לי, "I should have become dirt from the kings [who tried to kill Avraham in the war, see chapter 14], and I should have become ashes from Nimrod [who threw Avraham into a furnace, see Rashi 11:28], if it weren't for Your compassion that helped me." There is a great lesson here, and we will explain it by first telling the following story:

Reb Asher Freund zt'l was once sitting together with his son-in-law, when his son-in-law noticed that he was very troubled about something. He asked his father-in-law what was going on, and why he appeared to be in turmoil. His father-in-law, Reb Asher Freund, replied, "There was a poor boy who once came here with tattered clothing, hungry, and with no money to buy food. He didn't have family to help him, so I let him live in my house. I fed him and gave him clothes. I also appointed him to oversee the tzedakah distributions. He gave envelopes with money to the poor people in the community. The tzedakah distribution caused him to become an important and renowned person in the community. I literally raised him and gave him a lot of honor. But now he is complaining to me that I don't honor him enough. It is a total lack of *hakaras hatov*. After everything I did for him, he thinks that if I don't give him what he wants, I didn't give him anything at all."

The son-in-law said, "*Shver*, tell me the name of this person. I will teach him a lesson or two. Such chutzpah! You pulled him out of the gutter. He should feel indebted to you. But instead of appreciation, he complains and accuses you of not honoring him and of not giving him enough."

Reb Asher Freund replied, "You asked who it is. I will tell you. His name is Asher Freund."

In other words, Reb Asher Freund was giving a mashal, but was really speaking about himself. He was rebuking himself for not recognizing Hashem's kindness, and for complaining that he doesn't have more. This is how it is for most people. They focus on what they lack, and they complain, "Why did Hashem forget me? Why doesn't He help me?" They totally forget all the good Hashem gives them.

Every day, Hashem provides us with food and drink, a roof over our heads, and so much more. Why do we complain to Hashem, like we have nothing? The Or HaChaim HaKadosh (Devarim 8:18) writes that a person must always remember Hashem's kindness. He adds that ותחילת תחבולות יצר הרע היא להשכיחו דבר זה, "The yetzer hara's first plan is to cause a person to forget this."

Avraham Avinu made sure to remember Hashem's kindness. Therefore, he said וְאֶנֶּכִי עָפָר וָאֵפֶר, meaning that naturally, he would be dust or ashes now, but Hashem saved him. With this awareness, he knew never to complain. Hashem gave him so much; he can only have gratitude.

Even What We Do is from Hashem

It states at the beginning of the parashah (12:1) לְךָ לְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ, that Avraham should leave his land and go אֶל הָאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֶרְאֶה, to the land that Hashem will show him. The Divrei Yisrael explains that אֶרֶץ represents *hishtadlus* in this world. Hashem said to Avraham, לְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ, go away from the notion that your financial successes and your accomplishments are אֶרְאֶה, your own doings. (The letter ך at the end of the word אֶרְאֶה implies that when one thinks the hishtadlus and the successes are all his own.) Know that everything is from Hashem. Know אֶל הָאֶרֶץ

אֲשֶׁר אֶרְאֶךָ, that Hashem shows the person what to do. Everything is in Hashem's hands.

At the *Bris Ben HaBesarim*, Hashem said to Avraham (15:7) וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֲנִי ה' אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאוּר קַשְׁדִּים, "He said to him, 'I am Hashem Who brought you out of *Ur Kasdim* to give you this land...'."

But was it Hashem Who took Avraham out of *Ur Kasdim*? Wasn't it Avraham's father, Terach, who took Avraham out of *Ur Kasdim*, as it states (at the end of parashas Noach, 11:31) וַיִּקַּח תֵּרַח אֶת אַבְרָם בְּנוֹ וְאֶת לוֹט בְּנוֹ הָרֶוֶן בֶּן בְּנוֹ וְאֶת שָׂרִי בְלָתוֹ אִשְׁתֵּי אַבְרָם בְּנוֹ וַיֵּצְאוּ אֹתָם מֵאוּר קַשְׁדִּים לָלֶכֶת אֶרֶצָה כְּנַעַן, "Terach took his son Avram... and departed with them from *Ur Kasdim* to go to the land of *Canaan*..."

Rabbeinu Meyuchas (from the Rishonim) answers that although Avraham's father took him out of *Ur Kasdim*, the Torah can write that Hashem took him out of *Ur Kasdim* because who placed in Terach's mind to leave *Ur Kasdim*, if not Hashem? Rabbeinu Meyuchas writes, המקום נתן בלבו של תרח לצאת, "Hashem placed it into Terach's heart to leave."

The Torah reveals to us that אֲנִי ה' אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאוּר קַשְׁדִּים, "I am Hashem Who brought you out of *Ur Kasdim*." It was from Hashem. Hashem leads every person. One thinks he does things on his own, but it is Hashem Who leads us, as it states (Tehillim 37:23) מִה' מַצְעָדֵי נֶגֶר, "From Hashem are man's footsteps..."

This week's parashah tells the story of the war Avraham fought against the four mighty kings and their armies. Avraham won the

war with miracles. Chazal tell us that Avraham threw dirt, which became arrows, which killed the enemies. An indication of this is the pasuk (Yeshayah 41:2) יְתֵן קַעֲפָר חֲרִבּוֹ כְּקֶשֶׁשׁ, "Who made his enemies like dust before his sword, like straw blown above his bow." The pasuk is referring to Avraham Avinu, and it tells us that the earth turned to swords, and the straw became arrows and killed the enemies.

The Chasam Sofer zt'l explains that the simple reading of this pasuk teaches us another important lesson. The translation of the pasuk tells us that Avraham *considered* his sword to be like dust, and he viewed his arrows as straw. He didn't rely on them, only on Hashem, alone. This is because Avraham knew that Hashem wins wars, and that the weapons he has don't have strength without Hashem.

The Chasam Sofer explains that if the literal meaning of the pasuk is that the earth (which Avraham threw) became swords and the straw (he threw) became arrows, it would have written יתן עפרו כחרב וקש נדף כקשת, "his earth became swords, the straw became arrows". However, as the pasuk is written, we understand that Avraham battled with real weapons, with bows and arrows and with sharp swords. But Avraham didn't trust in them. In his mind, these weapons were nothing more than dust and straw. They wouldn't help him win wars. He won the war solely because Hashem helped him.

The Chasam Sofer adds that this is as the pasuk (Mishlei 21:31) states, סוס מוכן ליום מלחמה וְלֹהֶ, הַתְּשׁוּעָה, "The horse is readied for the day of battle, but salvation is Hashem's."¹

1. Reb Moshe Goldklang was once a very successful man. He lived in a large home and enjoyed abundant parnassah. At one point, however, he fell on hard times and experienced severe financial difficulties, to the extent that he barely had enough food to eat.

His friends advised him to sell his house, rent a smaller home, and invest the proceeds from the sale in a business venture.

Under normal circumstances, Reb Moshe would consult his rebbe, Rebbe Chuna of Kalishitz zt'l, who lived in the same city, before making such an important decision. However, at the time he needed to decide, Rebbe Chuna was away on a trip. As a result, Reb Moshe acted on his own. He followed his friends' advice,

After the war against the four mighty kings, the king of Sodom offered Avraham to take the spoils of war. Avraham replied (14:21-23), *הִרְמַתִּי יָדִי אֶל ה' קָל עָלַיִן קִנְיָה שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ, אִם מִחוּט וְעַד שָׁרוּךְ נָעַל וְאִם אֶקַּח מִכָּל אֲשֶׁר לָךְ וְלֹא תֹאמַר אֲנִי הִעֲשֵׂרְתִּי אֶת אַבְרָם*, "I lift up my hand to Hashem, the exalted G-d, Maker of heaven and earth, if so much as a thread to a shoe strap or if I shall take from anything of yours! So you shall not say 'It is I who made Avram rich.'"¹¹²

The Malbim explains that Avraham knew that Hashem won the war, because everything is from Hashem. He didn't want to take the spoils, because he didn't win the war; Hashem did.

We quote the Malbim:

"Avraham recognized and understood that he didn't win the war against the four mighty kings because of the strength of his hand. Hashem fought and won the war. So, Avraham said, how can he take anything from the spoils? Although it is proper that spoils of war should go to the one who won the war, Avraham didn't win the war. He didn't do anything. Hashem fought and won the war. This is the meaning of *הִרְמַתִּי יָדִי*, 'I lift my hand to Hashem'. He was saying, 'This war, which was won, I raise my hand to Hashem, for He won the war and He fought the war for me. My hand didn't do anything. My hand was like a sword in Hashem's

hands. He is *קָל עָלַיִן קִנְיָה שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ*, the exalted G-d, Maker of heaven and earth. As I didn't fight the war, and since I didn't do anything, therefore, *אִם מִחוּט וְעַד שָׁרוּךְ נָעַל וְאִם אֶקַּח מִכָּל אֲשֶׁר לָךְ*, I don't want to take anything from this war. If I take something, *אֲשֶׁר לָךְ*, I will be taking that which is Yours, because the spoils don't belong to me."

The next words of the pasuk are *וְלֹא תֹאמַר אֲנִי הִעֲשֵׂרְתִּי אֶת אַבְרָם*, "So you shall not say 'It is I who made Avram rich.'" The simple meaning of the pasuk is that Avraham didn't want to take the spoils, so the king of Sodom won't say he made Avraham wealthy. According to the Malbim, the pasuk is referring to Avraham's *hand*. His hand shouldn't claim he made Avraham wealthy, because it wasn't Avraham's hand that won the war, only Hashem. The Malbim writes, "The word *תֹּאמַר* is feminine, meaning 'she... says'." It refers to the hand (*יד*, which is always in feminine tense). Avraham said, 'If I take from the spoils of war, it will appear that I won the war. My hand will tell me, 'I made Avraham wealthy.' As it states (Devarim 8:17) *וְאָמַרְתָּ בְּלִבְךָ בָּהִי וְנַעֲצָם יָדִי עָשָׂה לִי אֶת הַחֵיל הַזֶּה*, 'You may say in your heart, 'My strength and the might of my hand made me all this wealth!' How can my hand say that it made me wealthy if Hashem did all this, and not my weak hand?"

sold his home, moved into a small apartment, and invested the money from the sale in a business.

When Rebbe Chuna returned, he heard that Reb Moshe Goldklang had sold his house. He told Reb Moshe that he had not acted wisely and should not have sold it.

Rebbe Chuna explained that if it were *bashert* for him to endure financial hardship, selling his home would not help him. When something is decreed from Heaven, nothing can alter that decree. Conversely, if Heaven had decreed that his situation would improve, he could have remained in his home, and his *parnassah* would have improved regardless.

We share this story only to illustrate the concept. In practice, every person should consult his own *rav*, because there are times when appropriate *hishtadlus* is required. The lesson, however, is important to understand: *parnassah* is decreed by Heaven, and no amount of *hishtadlus* can change Hashem's ultimate plan.

2. According to the simple meaning of these pesukim, Avraham refused to take any of the spoils of war so that the king of Sodom would not be able to claim that he had made Avraham wealthy. Avraham wanted it to be clear that his wealth came solely from Hashem.

Parnassah is from Hashem

The Be'er Mayim Chaim (Bereishis 58:5) writes, "The amount of money decreed for a person to earn on any given day will certainly occur. Even if he hides in a room within a room, the money will pursue him and reach him. The chacham (Sefer HaPnanim, Shaar HaEmunah) writes, 'If a person runs away from his parnassah like someone running from death, his parnassah will run after him even quicker and catch up to him.' So, why should you work so hard, with all your strength, the entire day, from sunrise until sundown? Even if you work part of the day, you will certainly earn the same amount of parnassah as if you worked all day."

The Agra d'Kalah writes that this lesson is hinted at in the first pasuk of our parashah. He writes, "A person shouldn't say my strength and my many hishtadlus helped me. This would be serving avodah zarah with purity.³ Furthermore, his mind is constantly thinking about the foolishness of this world, considering how he can earn his parnassah and meet his needs. Whereas when one trusts in Hashem, he is calm, and his thoughts are relaxed. He turns his mind away from thinking about the love of this world and its pleasures because he understands that his thoughts won't grant him more or less than what Hashem decreed.... The wise king (Shlomo HaMelech) said (Mishlei 19:21) רבות מחשבות בלב איש. This means a person is foolish, and he thinks many thoughts of hishtadlus, of how he can attain the love of this world, which is wealth and honor, but he won't get anything from these thoughts. He won't gain, and he won't lose; rather, ועצת ד' היא תקום, he will receive in

accordance with Hashem's plan, and through the means that the Creator prepared for him."

"The Torah hints at this when it states ...ויאמר ה' אל אברהם, and ויאמר ה' אל אברהם is roshei teivos for רבות מחשבות בלב איש; people have many thoughts about how they can earn wealth. Hashem tells the person... לך לך מארצך, leave your ארציות, worldly temptations that you are attached to... Don't think about these matters because you won't gain anything from these thoughts... Rather, אל הארץ אשר, אל הארץ אשר, whatever means of parnassah I [Hashem] give you, do that, according to Torah."

אברהם's name was changed to אברהם. A ה' was added to his name. A ה', when written out in full, can be written in three ways: Either ה"ה, ה"י, or ה"א. The filler letters (called מילוי) spell ה"א. The Shlah HaKadosh (Shaar HaOsiyos 46) explains that it comes from the pasuk עזת ה' היא תקום. The roshei teivos of ה"א are אם ירצה ה', "If Hashem wills it."

When a *heh* was added to Avraham's name, instead of רבות מחשבות בלב איש, which indicates the attitude of many who have many thoughts of how to earn parnassah, follow עזת ה' היא תקום. Say ה"א, *im yirtzeh Hashem*, תקום, that will be your parnassah.

It states (Shemos 17:12) וַיְהִי יָדָיו אֶמּוּנָה. We know that emunah is in the heart, or in the mind. Why does the Torah say וַיְהִי יָדָיו אֶמּוּנָה that his emunah was in his hands? ישא ברכה of Modzhitz zy'a replies that the pasuk is discussing a person who works for his living. Even then, he must know that parnassah is from Hashem, and not the work of our hands.⁴

3. A subtle form of avodah zarah, but negative all the same. He attributes his parnassah to his work and abilities, losing sight of the fact that all sustenance comes from Hashem alone.

4. The Yerushalmi (quoted by Tosafos, Shabbos 31a) states, "אמונה זה סדר זרעים", that the word *emunah* mentioned in Yeshayah 33:6 alludes to Seder Zeraim. Seder Zeraim deals with the laws of agriculture, including *terumah*, *ma'aser*, and other mitzvos connected to farming. How are these halachos related to emunah?

The answer is that true emunah means working the land, planting, sowing, and laboring with one's own hands, while recognizing that success ultimately comes only from Hashem. A farmer invests tremendous

Emunah and Bitachon

The Midrash relates that when Sarah was taken captive in Mitzrayim, she fell on her face and prayed throughout the night. Repeatedly, she cried out: רבונו של עולם, אברהם, אברהם מבחוזי ואני בתוך יצא בהבטחה ואני יצאתי באמונה, אברהם מבחוזי ואני בתוך הסירה. Sarah was arguing that her salvation should be even more certain than Avraham's. Hashem had explicitly promised Avraham that He would protect him. Sarah had received no such promise. Yet she possessed something even greater: unwavering emunah and bitachon in Hashem. She firmly believed that Hashem would save her.

In a sense, Sarah was saying: Avraham went forth sustained by a Divine promise, while I went forth sustained by emunah. If Avraham, who relied on Hashem's promise, is safe and free, then I, who place my complete trust in Hashem, should certainly be saved as well.

Yet the reality appeared to be the opposite. Avraham was outside, free and secure, while she was "inside the pot," trapped and in distress. This formed the essence of Sarah's tefillah. She pleaded that the merit of her emunah and bitachon should bring about her deliverance.

The Divrei Yisrael zt'l writes that we see from this Midrash the amazing strength of emunah and bitachon. Hashem promised He would take care of Avraham, but even greater than that is the protection and the help one receives when he has emunah and bitachon in Hashem.⁵ Because of this concept, Sarah didn't understand why she was suffering more than Avraham. Hashem told Sarah that indeed because of her emunah and bitachon, she would receive Hashem's help. Hashem told her, כל מה שאני עושה בשבילך, אני עושה "Everything I do, I do it for you."

Rabbeinu b'Chayei writes, כאילו, "When one has bitachon, it is like Hashem promised him." When he has bitachon, he can feel confident that Hashem will help him. He can consider it as though Hashem told him everything will be good.

In this week's parashah, Hashem commands Avraham to perform bris milah, and with this mitzvah (17:1) וְהָיָה תְּמִימִים, Avraham will attain temimus. The Ramban explains that the concept of temimus is to know that everything is from Hashem, and nothing happens by chance. The obligation to have temimus is also written in (Devarim 18:13) תְּמִימִים, 'You shall be wholehearted with Hashem, your G-d.' The Ramban writes, "This [latter] pasuk is written after

effort in his crops, yet he knows that no amount of work can guarantee a harvest. Rain, growth, and blessing are all in Hashem's hands. Thus, Seder Zeraim embodies the ideal form of emunah: doing the necessary hishtadlus while understanding that everything ultimately comes from Hashem.

Chazal teach that when a person comes before the Heavenly Court, one of the first questions he will be asked is whether he conducted his business affairs with emunah, נשאת ונתת באמונה. This may be understood to mean that he will be asked whether he recognized that the business opportunities and successes he experienced came from Hashem, and not from his own wisdom, talent, or efforts. Did he view himself as the source of his success, or did he acknowledge that all blessing and prosperity ultimately come from Hashem?

5. Let us elaborate so that we will understand this important lesson:

How would you feel if a great tzaddik told you that everything would be good, you will have an abundance of parnassah, and everyone in your family will be healthy and well? You would certainly be very happy! How would you feel if Eliyahu HaNavi gave you this promise? How would you feel if Hashem, Himself, promised this to you? Everyone would be thrilled to hear these encouraging words. Nevertheless, emunah and bitachon are an even stronger guarantee! When you have emunah and bitachon, Hashem will certainly help you.

Hashem commanded that there be no witchcraft etc. among the Jewish nation, as it states (ibid. 18:10) **לֹא יִמָּצֵא בְךָ קִסָּם קְסָמִים מְעוֹנִין וּמְנַחֲשִׁים**, 'There shall not be found among you... one who practices divinations, an astrologer, one who reads omens, a sorcerer...' [So, twice the Torah commands us to have *temimus*.] The point of both commandments is that a person should believe in his heart that Hakadosh Baruch Hu alone has strength; from the beginning to the end, He can do everything, and He can annul. A person shouldn't pay attention to what the witches and sorcerers say, and he shouldn't believe that what they say will occur. It should be clear to him in his heart that everything is from Above, from Hashem..."

The Mishnah (Avos 5:3) states, **עשרה נסיונות**, "Avraham was tested ten times, and he passed all of them."

The Bas Ayin says that Avraham passed the ten tests because he had *bitachon*.

The Bas Ayin writes:

"It was certainly difficult for Avraham to leave his birthplace and his father's home, where he was raised and was accustomed to his entire life, and to go to a foreign land. He didn't even know where he was going! But he trusted that Hashem only does kindness. His trust in Hashem gave him the strength to pass this difficult test. It states, **וְאַבְרָם בֶּן חָמֵשׁ**, 'Avram was 75 years old when he left Charan.' 75 is the *gematriya* of **בְּטָחוֹן**. The *pasuk* is hinting that Avraham was able to pass this test and leave Charan because he had *bitachon*. With *emunah* and *bitachon* in the Creator of all worlds, that everything He does is for the good, one has the strength to keep the mitzvos and to pass even the most difficult tests."⁶

This is implied in the words (Tehillim 37:3) **בְּטַח בָּה' וַעֲשֵׂה טוֹב**, "Trust in Hashem, and do good." When you trust in Hashem, you will be able to do many good deeds.⁷

6. The Ra'v Bartunura (Avos 5:3) enumerates Avraham Avinu's ten principal tests. When one reflects on them, he realizes that they are only difficult for someone who is not fully convinced that Hashem guides him in the best possible way. For a person who truly believes that everything comes from Hashem and that everything He does is for the good, all tests become much easier to endure.

Reb Yehudah Dunner shlita, Rav of Beis Medrash Divrei Shir in Bnei Brak, noted that when people are worried or distressed, they often ask, **"לָמָּה?"** ("Why did this happen?") or **"מָה יְהִי?"** ("What will be?"). Interestingly, the *gematria* of **לָמָּה** is 75, and the *gematria* of **מָה יְהִי** is also 75. The answer to both questions is **בְּטָחוֹן**, whose *gematria* is likewise 75. When a person strengthens his *bitachon*, he no longer needs to be troubled by why something occurred or what the future will bring, because he trusts that everything is in Hashem's hands and that Hashem is leading him toward what is best.

7. Someone who traveled extensively for his *parnassah* once told a friend about a trip he took to China. While there, he saw a giant Ferris wheel, but he refused to ride it because he was too afraid. Later, when he visited England, he rode an even larger Ferris wheel without hesitation.

His friend was puzzled.

"If you were afraid to ride the Ferris wheel in China, how did you have the courage to ride an even larger one in England?"

The man replied, "I don't trust the Chinese. They may cut corners to save a few pennies, and I don't fully trust the management of the amusement park to maintain the highest safety standards. But I do trust the British. I am confident that their Ferris wheel is built and operated safely."

The lesson is that life can sometimes feel like a giant Ferris wheel. Everything appears uncertain, hectic, and even frightening. Yet there is no reason to fear. This "Ferris wheel" was designed and is operated by Hakadosh Baruch Hu. We can place our trust in Him, knowing that we are in the best of hands.

Zera Kodesh (from Rebbe Naftali of Ropshitz zt'l, fifth night of Chanukah) writes, "A person might say, 'If I were a tzaddik, I could have bitachon ... But I know my deeds. I haven't done enough before Hashem yisbarach. How can I trust that Hashem will perform kindness for me? I don't deserve it.' This thought is the yetzer hara. The truth is the exact opposite. Hashem is good and kind to all, הטוב ומטיב לרעים ולטובים... טוב ה' לכל. Therefore, בטח comes from the word טיה, cement that connects. A person should connect himself to the path of bitachon and not leave it."

We add that this is alluded to in this week's parashah (15:6) וְהָאֱמֹן בֵּה' וַיִּהְיֶשְׁבֶּה לוֹ צֶדֶקָה. Hashem promised Avraham that he would bear children, and Avraham believed that

this would occur, as it states, וְהָאֱמֹן בֵּה'. But he didn't think that he deserved to bear children because of his good deeds. Avraham was very humble, and he didn't think he deserved anything. As Avraham said (Bereishis 18:27) וְאֵנִי עָפָר וָאֵפֶר, "I am dust and ashes." Avraham thought he would merit children solely because of Hashem's kindness. This is the meaning of וַיִּהְיֶשְׁבֶּה לוֹ צֶדֶקָה. This can be translated to mean that Avraham considered Hashem's promise to be charity, kindness, not something he deserved.

If You are Inspired, Take Action

During the era of Communism, when the resha'im of Russia forbade Torah and mitzvos performed in public, there was a

The Pittsburgher Rebbe zt'l explained the phrase we recite in Kedushah: מִשְׁרָתֵינוּ שְׂוָאִים... לעומתם משבחים ואומרים.

מִשְׁרָתֵינוּ refers to Hashem's servants, those who place their trust in Him. Even if לעומתם, across the street from them, a competitor opens a store, they are not afraid. On the contrary, משבחים ואומרים, they praise Hashem for providing another Yid with parnassah. They trust that another person's success cannot diminish what Hashem has decreed for them.

We bow four times during Shemoneh Esrei, and each time we straighten up before pronouncing Hashem's Name. For example, at the beginning of Shemoneh Esrei, we bow at the words ברוך אתה, and before saying ה', we stand upright. The Gemara (Brachos 12a) explains that this practice is based on the pasuk (Tehillim 146:8), ה' יִקֵּם כָּפוּפִים, "Hashem straightens the bent."

Rabbeinu Yonah explains that standing upright symbolizes a person's bitachon that Hashem will do what is best for him in every area of life. When a person is burdened by worries and troubles, it is natural for him to walk bent over and broken. However, when he remembers that Hashem is caring for him and guiding his life, he stands tall.

Therefore, when we daven and mention Hashem's Name, we straighten ourselves to demonstrate that we have a Father in Heaven Who continually watches over us and provides all that we need. Why, then, should we walk around bent beneath the weight of our concerns?

The pasuk states (Shir HaShirim 7:8), וְזֹאת קוֹמָתְךָ דְּמִיתָהּ לְתֵמָר, "Your stature is like a palm tree." The Jewish people can be compared to a palm tree, which grows straight and tall. So too, a Yid stands upright. He is not bent over by his tzaros, because he trusts that Hashem is caring for him. His bitachon gives him strength and stability.

The pasuk states (Tehillim 55:23), הִשְׁלַךְ עַל ה' יְהִבְךָ וְהוּא יִסְמְכֶךָ, "Cast your burden upon Hashem, and He will sustain you." The Gemara (Rosh Hashanah 26b) relates that the chachamim were uncertain about the meaning of the word יְהִבְךָ. Rabbah bar Chanah recounted that he was once carrying a heavy package when a merchant riding a camel said to him, שְׂקוּל יִהְיֶה וְשָׂדִי אֶגְמֹלָא, "Take your package and place it on the camel." From this, they understood that יְהִבְךָ means a burden or load.

This burden alludes to the heavy package of worries and anxieties that people carry on their shoulders. Such a load causes a person to become hunched over beneath its weight. But the pasuk teaches us to place that burden on Hashem: הִשְׁלַךְ עַל ה' יְהִבְךָ וְהוּא יִסְמְכֶךָ. Give your concerns to Hashem and trust in Him. Stand tall. Walk upright. Hashem will take care of you.

brave and holy group of Lubavitcher chassidim who would gather with the chasid Reb Chat'zhe zt'l (the secretary of the Rayatz of Lubavitz zt'l). They would speak deep concepts of chassidus, emunah, and avodah. They appointed a bachur to stand outside the house. If the bachur saw danger approaching, he would come into the house and warn the men inside the house to be cautious.

Once, the group was singing songs of *deveikus*, and the bachur came in and told them that the *resha'im* were walking about near the house. The men became very afraid. They knew that if they were caught, they would be sent to Siberia. They quickly hid the holy sefarim, and they took out newspapers and such so that the goyim wouldn't suspect them. There were some who tried to escape. Sometime later, the bachur returned and told them that the coast was clear; the danger had passed. They immediately took out the holy sefarim, once again.

Reb Chat'zhe asked them, "What is more important to you? *Ruchniyus* or *gashmiyus* (spirituality or this world)?"

They told him that *ruchniyus* was far more important to them.

Reb Chat'zhe asked them, "If so, when you heard the *resha'im* were nearby, why didn't you act in the manner of *ruchniyus*, to pour out your hearts before Hashem, that He save you?"

They replied, "We were in grave danger. If the *resha'im* would come in and see us with our holy sefarim, the fact that we were crying and praying wouldn't convince them to save us."

Reb Chat'zhe said, "We see that even when it comes to *ruchniyus*, it isn't enough to be inspired and to cry. One has to act."

The point is that being inspired is a wonderful matter, but the inspiration must be followed with actions. Inspiration without deeds isn't enough.⁸

8. There is a well-known Yiddish song: "אז ס'דאוונט זיך... וואס זאל מען טוהן אז ס'לערענט זיך נישט..." "We are able to eat and sleep without much effort, but what can we do if we are unable to learn Torah and daven properly?"

The song laments how difficult it can be to attain success in matters of *ruchniyus*. *Gashmiyus* often comes naturally, while spiritual growth requires great effort. The song expresses a yearning and desire to succeed in Torah and avodas Hashem.

A wise man once asked: What if the situation were reversed? What if *ruchniyus* came easily, but eating and sleeping were difficult? What if a person struggled to perform these basic and essential functions? Would he merely sing about the problem, or would he do everything possible to solve it? Wouldn't he run to doctors? Wouldn't he spend substantial amounts of money in search of a cure?

This teaches us an important lesson. When a problem truly troubles a person, he does not merely lament it. He takes action. He does whatever he can to resolve it. The same attitude should apply to our spiritual struggles. We should feel a genuine urgency to overcome them and be prepared to do whatever is necessary to improve our situation.

Certainly, if a person finds it difficult to learn Torah, he should pour out his heart during the brachah of *והעריבנו* in *Birchos HaTorah*, and he should recite *אדבת עולם* with deep concentration and sincerity. But prayer alone is not enough. He must also pick up a Gemara and begin to learn. Action is required as well.

The test of *לך לך* is recorded explicitly in the Torah. Avraham was commanded to leave his homeland, where he had family, friends, prestige, and a respected spiritual standing. He had to leave everything behind and journey to a foreign land, Eretz Yisrael. This was a tremendous test.

However, there was another famous test. Nimrod cast Avraham into a fiery furnace because Avraham refused to worship idols. According to some Rishonim, this was the first of Avraham's ten tests. Others

Guarding the Eyes

It states (16:7) וַיִּמְצְאָהּ מַלְאָךְ ה' עַל עֵין הַמַּיִם בַּמִּדְבָּר "An angel of Hashem found her by a water fountain in the desert, by the fountain on the road to Shur." The Divrei Shmuel zt'l teaches that Hagar was born and raised in Mitzrayim, which was a very impure land (and therefore called עֲרֻת הָאָרֶץ), but she had one special merit: She was cautious to guard her eyes. She didn't look where it was forbidden. Therefore, she merited to marry Avraham Avinu, and also, she merited to see malachim. This is the meaning of the pasuk וַיִּמְצְאָהּ מַלְאָךְ ה' she was able to see malachim, and this was in the merit of עַל הָעֵין

בְּדֶרֶךְ שׁוּר, she was cautious with her eyes, and she was cautious where she looked. (שׁוּר means to look. And הָעֵין is the eyes.)

When a person awaits salvation, he is recommended to guard his eyes. This will grant him immense bounty.

A person shouldn't say, "I am not a navi, I am not very spiritual. I can never reach high spiritual, holy levels!" There isn't a Yid in Yisrael who has a yichus that is less than the yichus of Hagar. Nevertheless, she merited all the above because she guarded her eyes. Certainly, when we guard our eyes, we will attain great levels and much kedushah.⁹

maintain that it is not counted among the ten primary tests at all. Either way, an obvious question arises: Why is this episode not stated explicitly in the Torah? Furthermore, according to those Rishonim who do not count it among the ten tests, why is it omitted?

One explanation is as follows.

When people lie in bed at night, many are prepared to die al Kiddush Hashem. The Noam Elimelech writes in Tzetel Katan (1): "Whenever one is not studying Torah, especially when he is sitting idle in his room or lying in bed unable to sleep, he should contemplate the mitzvah of וַיִּקְדַּשְׁתִּי בְתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (Vayikra 22:32). He should imagine a great and awesome fire burning before him, reaching the heavens, and in order to sanctify Hashem's Name, he should picture himself overcoming his nature and throwing himself into the fire."

Many people can sincerely entertain such thoughts while lying comfortably in bed. In their minds, they are fully prepared to be moser nefesh for Hashem. But then morning arrives, the alarm clock rings, and it is time for לך לך, to get up and get moving. Suddenly, the person turns over and goes back to sleep.

This teaches us that, in a certain sense, being prepared to die for Hashem can be easier than getting up and doing for Hashem.

Nor is this challenge limited to the early morning hours. Throughout the day, people may sincerely desire spiritual greatness and may even feel willing to sacrifice everything for Hashem's honor. Yet when actual action is required, they become sluggish and unmotivated. They find it difficult to move forward.

The Kotzker Rebbe zt'l explained that the first words Hashem ever said to Avraham were לך לך. The message is that a person must not remain where he is. He must move forward.

Every individual knows what obstacle is preventing him from growing in avodas Hashem. The Torah's message to each of us is לך לך. Move forward. Leave your place. Overcome the barrier that is holding you back and take the next step in serving Hashem.

9. It states several times, וַיִּאמֶר לָהּ מַלְאָךְ ה', "The angel of Hashem said to her." Seemingly, the Torah could have mentioned this once, and that would have sufficed.

Rashi (16:9) explains:

על כל אמירה היה שלוח לה מלאך אחר, לכך נאמר מלאך בכל אמירה ואמירה

"For each statement, a different malach was sent to her. Therefore, the word מַלְאָךְ is mentioned with each statement."

The Importance of Good Neighbors

The Torah tells us that Lot went to live near Sodom, although they were great *resha'im*, as it states (13:13) וְאֵנָשִׁי סְדֹם רָעִים וְחָטָאִים, "The people of Sodom were very evil and sinful against Hashem." The Radak writes, "Even though they were bad and sinful, Lot wasn't afraid to live there. He wanted to live there because the place suited his needs. [He wasn't afraid of the bad influence because] he was very solid and firm with his emunah and with his straight ways. He thought he wouldn't learn from their bad ways." Lot had lived with Avraham Avinu, and he reached high levels. He even met with malachim. Therefore, he trusted that he wouldn't be influenced by the *resha'im* of Sodom. He thought he would remain with his emunah and with his righteousness, just like before. But we know what happened to him.

The Chofetz Chaim zt'l teaches a similar lesson from the pasuk (12:8) וַיֵּצֵאֵם מִשָּׁם הָהָרָה מִקְדָּם לְבֵית אֵל וַיֵּט אֶהְרֶלָה בֵּית אֵל מִזֵּם וְהָעִי מִקְדָּם, "[Avraham] moved from there to the mountain, east of Beis El, and he pitched his tent. Beis El was to the west, and Ai was to the east..." The pasuk specifies where Avraham moved. Why are these details important for us to know?

The explanation is that when a person wants to move someplace, he must check the place well. Who lives there? Who will be his neighbors? When Avraham wanted to move, he checked out all the surrounding neighbors. He wanted to know who his children would befriend. The Torah tells us

the exact location to teach us that we should be cautious where we live, and who the surrounding neighbors are.

Toras HaMincha, from Reb Yakov Sakli, a student of the Rashba zt'l says that Hashem told Avraham לֵךְ לְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ וְעַמְּךָ וּמְוִלְדֶּיךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ, "Go forth from your land and from your birthplace and from your father's house..." to save him from bad influences. He writes, "Why was he required to leave this place? So that he shouldn't dwell among *resha'im*, who will cause him to stumble with their bad ways. Bad neighbors can cause a lot of trouble [to cause spiritual descent]. Avraham was a perfect tzaddik; his heart was to Heaven. Nevertheless, when one is among *resha'im*, it is natural to be drawn after them. A person doesn't even realize it at first, until he leaves behind his righteousness and attains the natures of the *resha'im*. Therefore, every person who wants to serve Hashem should attach himself to truth and distance himself from falsehood. This means to distance himself from people who follow falsehoods, and then he won't be drawn after their ways. Hashem told Avraham Avinu that he should leave his home, birthplace, and his father's home. He should distance himself from them so that he won't be drawn after their influences."

The Radak's lesson teaches us that everyone must be cautious. One can't say that he is a tzaddik, his emunah is perfect, and nothing bad will happen to him if he is among people who follow bad ways. If Avraham had to be cautious, if Hashem wanted Avraham to be away from bad

Why was this necessary? Why could one malach not convey all the messages?

The Chiddushei HaRim zt'l answers that even malachim are included in the teaching of Chazal (Avos 1:5), אַל תִּרְבֶּה שִׁיחָה עִם הָאִשָּׁה, that one should not engage in excessive conversation with a woman. Therefore, after delivering a single message, the malach did not continue speaking, and another malach was sent to convey the next message.

From this we can learn how careful a person must be to guard himself from aveiros. If even malachim conduct themselves with such restraint, certainly human beings must exercise caution and take care to avoid situations that can lead to wrongdoing.

influences, certainly, everyone must be cautious.

At this time, when Hashem told Avraham לך לך, that he should leave the bad influences, he was already a great tzaddik. He was called אברהם העברי, because the entire world was on one side, and he was on the other side (עבר השני). His thoughts were totally different than the rest of the corrupt world. Also, at this time, he had already allowed himself to be thrown into the fiery furnace in Ur Kasdim rather than bow down to an idol. He also had already brought much emunah into the world. It states (12:5) וַיָּקַח אֲבָרָם "Avraham took... the souls they had acquired." Rashi explains that these were the people who Avraham and Sarah trained to believe in Hashem. Rashi writes, שֶׁהֵבִיאוּ תַחַת כְּנָפֵי הַשְּׁכִינָה; אֲבָרָם מִגֵּר אֶת, הָאֲנָשִׁים וְשָׂרָה מִגֵּרָת הָאֲנָשִׁים "They brought them under the wings of the Shechinah. Avraham converted the men, and Sarah converted the women." They had a following of people whom they taught to believe in Hashem and to serve Him. Nevertheless, Avraham was at risk of being influenced by his bad neighbors.

This is as the Rambam (Hilchos Deios 6:1) tells us, דֶּרֶךְ בְּרִיתוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם לְהִיטֵב נַפְשׁוֹ בְּדַעֲיוֹתָיו וּבְמַעֲשָׁיו אַחֵר, רָעִיו וְחֻבְרָיו וְנוֹהֵג בְּמִנְהַג אֲנָשֵׁי מְדִינָתוֹ "It is the way of man that his thoughts and deeds will be drawn after his friends, and he will act like the people of his country."

This lesson is very important. Many people are cautious that their children be around good influences. They understand that their children are still not secure in their emunah and in their path, so the parents are careful that their children be among proper influences. However, the parents think that, for themselves, whoever they are associated with is okay, and nothing negative will take place. But even adults must be cautious.

Refraining from listening to the news is an example of where one can be cautious. The news is filled with apikursus. Those who speak on the news think that everything is in man's hands, and that Hashem isn't part of what goes on. This is a bad influence

that we don't want to have. The internet is even worse, as all the bad influences in the world are there. I know that people will say that they don't have to worry. Their emunah is solid and strong, and nothing can cause them to think differently, but as we have seen, this isn't a valid claim. The greatest of people become influenced by the ideas of those around them.

Chesed

Chazal (Tana d'Bei Eliyahu) says that everyone must say, מתי יגיעו מעשי למעשי אברהם יצחק ויעקב, "When will my actions be like the deeds of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov."

The Ramchal (Derech Eitz Chaim) writes, "A person should ask himself and search in his heart, 'The tzaddikim of years ago, the fathers of the world, what did they do that Hashem loved them so much? What did Moshe Rabbeinu, Dovid Hamelech, and all the gedolim of the past do?' Then he should think, 'How good would it be for a person to live in this manner throughout his life?' Then he should check his ways and see whether he is acting in their ways or not... If a person thinks these thoughts, he is very close to attaining *sheleimus* [perfection in avodas Hashem].... At least, one should think a drop about these thoughts... and he will succeed in all his ways."

Therefore, as we read the parshiyos of Sefer Bereishis that tell us about the exalted ways of the holy *Avos*, we should seek to emulate them. One should contemplate the kindness of Avraham Avinu and ask himself, "How am I with the middah of chesed? What can I do to improve my ways so that they will resemble those of Avraham Avinu?"

The Shlah HaKadosh (Vayeirah 30) writes, "When you do favors for others, do it in a manner that the person who receives the favor will feel that he is doing *you* a favor. Avraham did this. He made his guests feel that they were doing him a favor when they came to his home."¹⁰

Hashem told Kayin (Bereishis 4:7) הָלוֹא אָם תֵּיטִיב שְׂאֵת וְאִם לֹא תֵיטִיב לִפְתָּח חַטָּאת רִבִּין. The Ruzhiner translated it as הָלוֹא אָם תֵּיטִיב, if you are a good person, a person with good middos, שְׂאֵת, you can tolerate your fellow man. Some people are bothersome, inconsiderate, irritating, etc., but a kind person will be able to tolerate them. A kind person can even like them and focus on their good qualities. However, וְאִם לֹא תֵיטִיב, if you aren't a kind, good person, לִפְתָּח חַטָּאת רִבִּין, you have complaints and bad feelings towards others.¹¹

The Zohar (vol. 1, 205b) discusses the reason why the Torah begins with the letter בְּ.

(בראשית), and not with the letter א. The Zohar explains that the letter בְּ stands for בְּרוּךְ, a blessing, and it is proper for the Torah to begin with a brachah. א stands for אָרוּר, a curse. The Torah doesn't begin with an א, because it alludes to a curse.

We can offer another explanation as to why the Torah begins with a בְּ. The letter בְּ is gematria 2 to tell each person that he must remember that he isn't alone in the world. There is always someone else, and he should seek to help him. If the Torah were to begin with an א, gematria 1, a person might be self-focused and forget about everyone else.

10. There is a well-known expression: לֹא מְדוּבָשֶׁךְ וְלֹא מְעוֹקֵץ, "I want neither your honey nor your sting." One says this to a bee: "Do not give me your honey, and do not sting me."

At times, a person receives a favor from someone else, but the embarrassment and humiliation that accompany it are so painful that he feels he has been stung. Often, he would rather forgo the favor entirely than accept it together with the shame that comes with it.

This may explain the dove's words: "May my sustenance come from Your hand, even if it is as bitter as an olive, rather than from the hand of man, even if it is as sweet as honey" (see Rashi, Bereishis 8:11).

The dove specifically chose the example of honey. Honey is sweet, but it can come with a sting. Likewise, a plentiful and enjoyable parnassah that comes through dependence on others may be accompanied by embarrassment and humiliation. By contrast, even a modest and "bitter" parnassah that comes directly from Hashem is preferable.

11. Rebbe Henoch of Alexander zt"l related the following story:

There was a simple, unlearned villager who lived in a place where there was no minyan. Once, he spent Shabbos Chol HaMoed in the city. Since he was unaccustomed to davening with a minyan, he assumed that the Shemoneh Esrei for Shabbos Chol HaMoed was the same as that of Yom Tov. Accordingly, at Shacharis he recited the Yom Tov Shemoneh Esrei.

When he listened to the chazaras hashatz, however, he heard the chazzan reciting the Shemoneh Esrei of Shabbos. Realizing his mistake, he thought to himself, "Of course. It is Shabbos, so the tefillah must be that of Shabbos."

Therefore, when Mussaf arrived, he recited the Shemoneh Esrei of Shabbos. But during the chazaras hashatz, he heard the chazzan reciting the Yom Tov version. He said to himself, "So I was right the first time. The tefillah should be Yom Tov."

At Minchah, he once again davened the Yom Tov Shemoneh Esrei. Then he heard the chazzan recite the Shabbos Shemoneh Esrei during chazaras hashatz.

Finally, the villager exclaimed, "I see that the chazzanim here are simply out to get me. Whatever I do, they do the opposite!"

The lesson is that people often blame others for their problems. They fail to realize that they may have no one to blame but themselves. The same applies when we feel that others are disturbing or frustrating us. Instead of focusing on the faults of others, we should first look inward. Often, if we improve ourselves and refine our own character, we will find that it becomes much easier to get along with those around us.

The Midrash (Bereishis Rabba 1:10) states, "For twenty-six generations, the letter א was complaining before Hashem's throne. It said, 'Ribono Shel Olam, I am the first letter. Why didn't you create the world with me?' Hakadosh Baruch Hu replied, 'The world with everything in it was created in the merit of Torah. Tomorrow, I will give the Torah on Har Sinai, and I will begin with you, as it states (Shemos 20:2) אנוכי ה' אלוקיך."

The Aseres HaDibros begin with an א. But how can that be? As we wrote above, the א represents ארור, curse!

Reb Shlomo Kluger (Imrei Shefer, beginning of Bereishis) answers that Torah can turn curses into blessings. The world had to be created with a ב, not with an א. There had to be ברכה in the world, and not the opposite. But when the Torah was given, it began with an א. The Aseres HaDibros indeed begins with an א. This is because when there is Torah, there are no curses. The ארור is turned around, and it becomes ברוך, blessings to the Jewish nation, blessings to the world.

Chazal tell us that the reward for mitzvos is solely in Olam HaBa. However, the reward for chesed is given in this world as well. As we say after Birkas HaTorah אלו דברים שאדם אוכל פירותיהם בעולם הזה, "These are the deeds that a person enjoys their fruits in this world..." and it lists deeds of chesed. We see that Avraham was rewarded, also in this world, for his chesed. In this week's parashah, Hashem said to Avraham (13:14-15), שֵׁא נָא עֵינֶיךָ, וּרְאֵה מִן הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אָתָּה שָׁם צָפְנָה וְנִגְבְּהָ וְקִדְמָה וְיָמָה, כִּי אֶת כָּל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אָתָּה רֹאֶה לְךָ אֶתְנַנֶּה וְלִזְרֹעֲךָ עַד עוֹלָם, "Please raise your eyes and see, **from the place where you are**, northward, southward, eastward and westward. For all the land that you see I will give to you and to your

children for eternity." The Torah emphasizes that Avraham should see the entire land מן המקום אשר אתה שם, "from the place where you are". What do we learn from this? The Or HaChaim HaKadosh answers, "A great miracle happened to Avraham at this time. He was able to see from the north to the south and from west to east while standing in one place, without needing to turn around."¹²

Why was this miracle necessary?

We can answer as follows:

Avraham Avinu's tent had four openings, one from each side, so that from whichever side a wayfarer was traveling, he would be able to enter Avraham's tent immediately and wouldn't have to go around the tent to reach the entrance. Avraham cared about his guests, and he didn't want to cause them discomfort. *Midah k'neged midah*, Hashem rewarded Avraham with comfort. When Hashem wanted to show him the four sides of Eretz Yisrael, miraculously, Avraham was able to see all sides of Eretz Yisrael without needing to turn around.

The Torah tells us this for us to know the reward for *gemilus chasidim*. Just as one seeks to help others, Hashem will help him.

The Gemara (Bava Basra 9b) says, "Whoever is accustomed to giving tzedakah, he will have children who are wise, wealthy, experts in Agadah (midrashim) and in chachmah."

The Chasam Sofer found this lesson in the pasuk (Tehillim 37:26) כָּל הַיּוֹם חֲנוּן וּמִלֵּוָה וְנֹרֵעַ, "All day long he is gracious and lends, and his seed is due for a blessing." The Chasam Sofer teaches that this means that, through the merit of doing chesed to others, one merits good children.¹³

12. The following are the Or HaChaim's holy words: טעם שהוצרך לומר מן המקום אשר אתה שם. כאן עשה לו נס עצום שיוכל לראות מצפון לדרום ומערב למזרח ממקום אחד מבלי שיוצרך לסובב

13. We can also learn from this that tzedakah possesses a special segulah to help one merit children.