לעילו נשמת: **פייגה בת הרב אהרן** ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

Torah Wellsprings

Collected thoughts from Rabbi Elimelech Biderman Shlita

Lech Lecha

מכון באר האמונה

לזכות רפואה שלמה: מלכה בת רחל, מיכאל בן שולמית, יעקב משה בן דבורה שירה, ואברהם יהודה בן שרה רבקה.

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Torah Wellsprings

Lech Lecha

Emunah Peshutah

Hashem told Avraham לך לך, that he should leave his country, friends, and family and go, אל הארץ אשר אראך "to the land that I will show you." The Bas Ayin writes, "It was certainly very difficult for Avraham to leave his homeland, his father's home where he was raised and all he was accustomed to and go to a foreign land. Additionally, he didn't even know where he was going! But he placed his trust in Hakadosh Baruch Hu, knowing that His kindness is forever with him. He had *bitachon* [and he trusted that if Hashem is sending him, that is what's best for him]. This is what gave him the strength to pass this difficult test. As it states, ואברם בן חמש ושבעים שנה בצאתו מחרן, 'Avraham was 75 years old when he left Charan.' 75 is the *gematriya* of בטחון. The *pasuk* is hinting that Avraham had *bitachon*. This is how he had the courage to leave his family and homeland and to travel as Hashem commanded him. Because 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 the most difficult tests."

Once, a Tzedoki (non-believing Jew) watched Rava studying Torah. Rava was so immersed in his studies, he didn't realize that his feet were pressing on his hand and his fingers were bleeding. The Tzedoki said, "You are a wild nation. By Matan Torah you said, "*naasah venishma*." You accepted the Torah without knowing what it entails. You should have checked what the Torah is all about and whether you are able

to keep it. Why did you accept the Torah blindly without knowing its details?"

Rava replied, "We have *temimus*…We trusted that Hashem wouldn't trick us into something we can't do" (*Shabbos* 88.). When we acquire this belief and trust in Hashem, we won't ever complain about the mitzvos that they are too strenuous or expensive or difficult, etc. We trust in Hashem that His mitzvos are good for us. This awareness will help us keep all of His statutes.

The Rambam (*Avodah Zarah* 1:3) writes, "As soon as this strong one (Avraham) was weaned, his mind began to search. He was young, and he was thinking all day and night. He wondered, 'How can it be that the sun is always moving, and no one is turning it…? He didn't have anyone to teach him. He lived in Uhr Kasdim among stupid idol worshipers (בין עובדי כוכבים הטפשים). His father, his mother, and the entire nation worshipped the stars, and he worshipped the stars together with them. But his heart was searching…until he perceived the true path… He knew that there is one G-d; He directs the sun; He created everything, and there is no G-d other than Him. He knew that everyone in the world was mistaken. He was forty years old when he recognized his Creator. Avraham began…debating with the people of Uhr Kasdim. He told them, 'You aren't on the right path.' He broke their idols, and he told them that one should serve only the Creator of the world… Avraham brought many proofs, and the king wanted to kill Avraham. A miracle happened [and his life was spared]… Avraham announced loudly to everyone…that there is only one G-d and we should serve Him, alone… Tens of thousands followed

Avraham, and he planted in their hearts this great truth. He wrote *sefarim,* and he taught it to his son, Yitzchak…"

A careful reading of this section of the Rambam reveals that Avraham's initial awareness of Hashem came about through proofs, debates, and deep philosophical insights. He thought about the sun, about creation, asked questions, until he discovered Hashem. But (as we shall see), later in Avraham's life, he changed this way of thinking and believed in Hashem with *Emunah peshutah*. As it states (15:4, 6), לא ירשך זה כי אם היוצא ממעיך... והאמן בה', "[Hashem told Avraham], 'This one [Eliezer] won't inherit you, rather the child that will come from your loins…' And Avraham believed in Hashem…" When Hashem told Avraham that he would bear children, he changed mindsets. He followed the path of והאמן בה', *Emunah peshutah*.[1]

Avraham thought, "If I continue with my philosophical approach, my children will also study philosophy in order to find awareness of Hashem. If they are wise, they will succeed in recognizing Hashem through philosophy. But it is a risky route, because if their wisdom is limited, they might end up with philosophical questions, and they won't know the answers, and they will deny Hashem…' Therefore, when Avraham heard he would bear children, he

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1. והאמן is written without a יו"ד. The letter יו"ד represents *chachmah*, wisdom (*Zohar*). The Agra d'Kalah (Bnei Yissaschar) *zt'l* explains that the missing יו"ד in והאמן implies that Avraham believed in Hashem with *Emunah peshutah*, with simple faith, without needing wisdom to support it.

followed the path of *Emunah peshutah* – והאמן בה'.

Similarly, it states (*Tehillim* 37:18), יודע ה' ימי תמימים, when one believes in Hashem with *temimus*, with *Emunah peshutah*, ונחתלם לעולם תהיה, his belief will continue forever. But the philosophical approach doesn't guarantee continuity of belief through one's children and descendants.

Actually, *Emunah peshutah* is the highest level of faith, greater than recognizing Hashem through philosophical or intellectual proofs. As the Baal Shem Tov *zt'l* said to his students, "After all the perceptions that I perceived in the root of the Torah and the mitzvos, and after all the pleasures I had from my perceptions, I forgo them all, and I have *Emunah peshutah*. איך בין א נער און איך גלייב, 'I am a fool, and I believe.'" The Baal Shem Tov had attained *ruach hakodesh* and incredible levels of spiritual perceptions. He saw *malachim* and the *neshamos* in heaven. His connection with Hashem was at a very high level.

What is more significant proof of belief in Hashem there than the perceptions he had? But he didn't use these as the root and as a proof for his *Emunah*. He believed in Hashem with *Emunah peshutah* (*Baal Shem Tov al HaTorah, parashas Shemos*).

The Zera Kodesh explains that *Emunah peshutah* is preferred because knowing Hashem with the intellect is limited to the extent of one's mind. But to believe in Hashem with *Emunah peshutah* is boundless.

Rebbe Yissachar Dov of Belz *zt'l* adds that Avraham also recognized that the highest level of *Emunah* is *Emunah peshutah*. As it states (15:1-5), היה דבר ה' אל אברהם במחזה לאמר.... ויצא אותו החוצה ויאמר הבט נא השמימה וספור הכוכבים, "Hashem spoke to Avraham in a vision… and Hashem took Avraham outside and

he said, look at the heaven and count the stars… 'So shall be your children.'" Rashi says that ויצא אותו החוצה means, "Hashem took Avraham out of the boundaries of this world. Hashem raised him above the stars. As it states, הבט, which means to look from above below."

Avraham had a very exalted vision at this time. Yet Avraham didn't want to believe in Hashem because of his experience. As it states immediately after this vision, והאמן בה, "Avraham believed in Hashem." Rebbe Yissachar Dov of Belz *zt'l* explains that Avraham said to Hashem, "Ribono Shel Olam, I don't need to see prophetic visions and other great matters to believe in You. I want to believe in You with *Emunah peshutah*."

Bitachon

Someone said to his rebbe, "Please bless my wife to find a good job so we can have *parnassah*." The rebbe replied, "As for your request that your wife finds a good job, I give you my blessings, but what does that have to do with *parnassah*? Hashem gives *parnassah*." When one thinks that *hishtadlus* brings *parnassah*, his mind is always searching for new ideas on how to earn money. But when one believes that *parnassah* is from Hashem, he will employ himself with the *parnassah* that Hashem prepares for him.

The Igra d'Kalah writes, "One shouldn't passionately search for means to earn *parnassah*. Rather, whichever financial opportunity comes his way, he should trust in Hashem who arranged this source of *parnassah* for him …"

The Igra d'Kalah writes that אברם stands for (*Mishlei* 19:21), רבות מחשבות בלב איש "a person has many thoughts," for he has many ideas on how he can earn *parnassah*.

עצת ה' היא תקום, "Hashem's counsel will succeed." He should follow the counsel and *hishtadlus* for *parnassah* that Hashem prepared for him.

The Igra d'Kalah says that this is the meaning of the *pasuk*, לך לך מארצך... אל הארץ אשר אראך. The words ארצך and ארץ allude to the physical *hishtadlus* people do to earn their *parnassah*. Hashem tells Yidden, לך לך מארצך, walk away from your plans, from your ideas of how you can earn *parnassah*. אל הארץ אשר אראך, and follow My plan. Hashem arranges *parnassah* for each individual, according to his talents, strengths, and needs. One should observe that and not seek to find *parnassah* in other ways.

The Shlah (*Shaar HaOsiyos* 1:46) writes, "For everything one does, be it something small or big…say, אם ירצה ה'. The hint is (ibid.) עצת ה' הי"א תקום, and הי"א is *roshei teivos* for אם ירצה ה'." Hashem added a ה' to Avraham's name. The name אברם represents רבות מחשבות בלב איש. People have many thoughts and ideas how to earn *parnassah*. When the ה' was added, it stands for ועצת ה' הי"א תקום and הי"א means אם ירצה ה', to remember that your success is in Hashem's hands.

Due to the famine in Eretz Yisrael, Avraham and Sarah headed southward, towards Mitzrayim. The trip lasted several days. They stopped at various inns at night. Avraham was poor at the time and couldn't pay for their stay, but promised the proprietors that he would return to pay up his debts. The innkeepers trusted Avraham and let Avraham and Sarah stay in their inns. Indeed, in Mitzrayim, Avraham became wealthy, and he returned to the inns to pay up his debts (see *Rashi* 13:3).

As a child, the Pnei Menachem *zt'l* asked his father, the Imrei Emes *zt'l*, "How did Avraham borrow money when he didn't know how he would pay it

all back? Isn't it forbidden to borrow money when you don't have a logical plan of how to pay up?"

The Imrei Emes replied, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu promised Avraham that he would make him wealthy (see *Rashi* 12:1). Avraham believed in this promise, so he knew he could borrow money on that account."

The Pnei Menachem asked, "But why did the innkeepers trust Avraham? How did they know that Avraham would soon be wealthy?"

The Imrei Emes replied, "Avraham Avinu's *Emunah* and *bitachon* was so strong, it influenced everyone he spoke to. When Avraham told them about Hashem's promise, they too believed that Hashem would soon give wealth to Avraham."

We study the lives of the Avos so we can learn how to act. From this story, we learn to have *bitachon*, to trust in Hashem that He will help us in times of need.

One might ask: "If Hashem would promise me money and wealth, I would also trust in Hashem. But what can I do? I didn't receive that promise!"

But you should know that when one has *bitachon*, it is even more certain that his needs will be provided for than someone who received a direct promise from the Creator. The Divrei Yisrael of Modzhitz *zt'l* proves this from the following Midrash:

On the night Sarah was captured and held captive in Pharaoh's home, she lay on the ground, on her face, all night long, and prayed. She said, "Ribono Shel Olam, Avraham is saved because of Your promise, and I am saved with *Emunah* and *bitachon*. And now Avraham is outside (and he isn't in danger), and I am captured." Sarah said that she should certainly be saved, because she has *bitachon*, and *bitachon* is a

greater guarantee for divine salvation than Hashem's promise itself.

Hashem promised Avraham wealth, success, etc., while Sarah had *bitachon*. She trusted that Hashem would provide for her needs. *Bitachon* is a greater guarantee than a promise.

The Midrash concludes that Hakadosh Baruch Hu replied to Sarah, כל מה שאני עושה בשבילך אני עושה, "Everything I do it is because of you." This means, all the promises that Hashem made to Avraham, and all the good that will come from them, are all in Sarah's merit because she trusted in Hashem.

This is an important lesson, and it encourages us to have sincere *bitachon*. Everyone carries their *pekel*, be it *shidduchim*, *parnassah*, health, marital harmony, etc. How joyous and calm would one be if Hashem would tell him, "There's nothing to worry about. Your *shidduch*/*parnassah*/ other needs are coming to you… You won't be lacking." He would joyously dance in the street.

But we have something even more significant than this promise, and that is bitachon, to trust in Hashem's care, compassion, and love. Bitachon is an even more potent guarantee that Hashem will grant you your needs.[2]

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2. Once, the Bardichover Rav *zt'l* was ill and his students were in the next room saying *Tehillim*, praying that he live and be well. Suddenly, the students heard a crashing sound, and they rushed into the Bardichever's room to find out what happened. They found him on the floor. Apparently, he fell out of his bed. They helped him back in his bed, and they went back to their *Tehillim*. Soon afterwards, the Bardichever asked his students for tea. That was a good sign. Soon, the Bardichever Rav was standing up, healed and well.

Contemplating the Miracles

The Midrash (*Bereishis Rabba* 39:1) tells the following mashal: "A traveler once passed a beautiful building that was on fire. He says, 'Could it be that this edifice doesn't have an owner? [If there's an owner, why isn't he extinguishing the fire?]" הציץ עליו בעל הבירה, the owner of the edifice peeks out on him and says, 'I am the owner of this house.' This is what happened to Avraham Avinu. [After the destruction of the *mabul* and *dor haflagah*] Avraham said, 'Could it be that this edifice doesn't have a leader taking care of it. הציץ עליו הקב"ה, Hakadosh Baruch Hu peeked out to Avraham and said 'I am the owner of the world.'"[3]

He told them, "As I lay in bed, somewhere between life and death, the *pasuk*, הבוטח בה' חסד יסובבנו, 'The one who trusts in Hashem, will be enveloped in kindness,' popped into my mind, and I understood that this was a message from heaven. I remembered that I heard from my Rebbe, the Magid of Mezritz *zt'l*, that *bitachon* isn't a *segulah*, not even something super-natural. The Magid of Mezritz said that Hashem planted into the rules of nature that when one trusts in Him, Hashem will help him. So, I began focusing on *bitachon*. I trusted that Hashem will give me a *refuah sheleimah*. I tried getting out of bed, but I fell to the ground. I realized that my *bitachon* wasn't yet perfect. I focused on *bitachon* some more until I felt better. And now, as you see, I'm up and about."

3. It seems the Midrash should have stated, הביט עליו בעל הבירה, "The owner of the edifice *looked* at him." What is implied by הציץ, peeked?

In *Shir HaShirim* (2:9) it states, משגיח מן החלונות מציץ מן החרכים, "[Hashem] looks after you from the windows; peeks at you through the cracks…"

When one looks through a window, he has a broad range of vision. The detriment is that he doesn't focus on anything in particular.

The first lesson from this Midrash is that we should go in Avraham's ways, to notice what is happening in the world. As it states (*Yeshayah* 40:26), שאו מרום עיניכם וראו מי ברא אלה, "Raise your eyes to heaven and see who created all this!" It is important to notice things, to see the wonders around us. People tend to

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When peeking through a crack, it's just the opposite, because the range of vision is minimal, but whatever one sees, is with greater focus.

Hashem says that He looks at us both ways, because Hashem sees everything, and everything is in great focus.

We can explain that the Midrash says מציץ עליו בעל הבירה, "the owner of the edifice peeked out to him" indicating to Hashem's immense *hashgachah pratis* over us.

When did Avraham merit that Hashem peek at him? It was when the "mansion was on fire," when he saw that there were troubles in the world. This hints that Hashem's *hashgachah* increases and intensifies when there are troubles, *chalilah*. We can explain this with a parable:

A parent loves all his children equally, but if *chalillah* one of them is ill and in the hospital, all his thoughts is on that child. Similarly, when we go through hard times, *keviyachol* Hashem's eye are more focused on us, with extra love and care, to help us.

If the child's stay at the hospital is for a prolonged time, there will be times that the parents cannot be with the child. But if the ill child will plead with his parents and say, "I need you to be with me" the parents will do whatever they can so they can be with their child.

The *nimshal* is that when we go through hard times, Hashem is with us. And if we add a *tefillah*, requesting that Hashem be with us, He will certainly be with us, looking through the windows, and peeking through the cracks, with *hashgachah pratis* to help us.

go about with their eyes closed. They don't recognize and appreciate the miracles that Hashem performs each day for their benefit.

It states (14:14) that Avraham, with only 318 servants, waged and won a war against four mighty armies. This, in itself, is miraculous, but the Midrashim and commentaries reveal even greater miracles that occurred during this war. Rashi writes that Avraham and Eliezer alone fought this war. (318 servants mean אליעזר, because אליעזר is *gematriya* 318). How did they fight this war? With weapons and swords? Chazal teach us that Avraham threw earth, which turned into arrows.

The nations that Avraham saved – Sedom and others – recognized the miracles that happened to Avraham, and they crowned his as king over them (see *Rashi* 14:17). The Midrash (*Bereishis Rabba* 43:5) describes the victory celebration: "The nations cut down cedar trees and built a large stage. Avraham was seated on top, and they were praising Avraham. They said, 'You are our king! You are our leader…!"

Logic dictates that after seeing these wondrous miracles, the world's nations would come under Avraham's influence and follow his ways. Yet, the Torah tells us that shortly thereafter, Sedom was overturned and destroyed because of their sinful ways. Reb Elyah Lopian *zt'l* said that this tells us that seeing miracles doesn't change a person. One has to internalize them. Only then is there hope for change and improvement.

Reb Yitzchak Yeruchem Burdiyanski *shlita* (*mashgiach* of Yeshivas Kol Torah, Yerushalayim) tells that he was once riding in a taxi, and the non-religious taxi driver shared with him the following story:

"When I was a teenager, I camped out with friends in the desert, in the south of Eretz Yisrael. In the middle of the night, one of my friends woke us up with his shouting and screeching. We immediately saw the problem: A poisonous snake was wrapped around his body. The snake's head was cocked, ready to strike. Everyone fell silent, not knowing what to do.

"One of us had a rifle. He said, "I will shoot the snake in the head. Perhaps I will miss it, and I will hit our friend. And even if I aim correctly, the bullet may go right through the snake and into the body of our friend, but I don't see any other choice. If I don't kill the snake, the snake might attack us, too. All of our lives are in danger.'

"There was one religious boy in our group – the only one who kept Shabbos. He asked the young man with the rifle to wait just a moment. Then he went over to our friend in danger and said, 'Repeat after me: Shema Yisrael…' When they said ה' אחד, the snake fell to the floor and slithered away."

Reb Burdiyanski asked the taxi driver, "What happened to that boy who was saved? Did he do *teshuvah* after witnessing such a miracle?"

"He did," the taxi driver assured. "And now he studies in yeshivas Or HaChaim in Yerushalayim."

"And what about you? Did you do *teshuvah*?"

"No."

"Why not? You also witnessed the miracle. "

"True, but the snake wasn't around *my* body..."

Reb Burdiyanski repeated this story to his uncle, Reb Shalom Shwadron *zt'l,* and Reb Shalom would often repeat it in his *drashos*. This story demonstrates that one can see a miracle, but he won't

feel obligated to change if he doesn't feel connected to it.

Avraham was different. He contemplated the happenings of the world. He thought about the sun's cycle (as we quoted above from the Rambam). He thought about the chaos and the destruction that he saw in the world, and he wondered, "Could it be that there is no leader to this world?"

"I'm the Leader of the World"

Avraham looked at the world, and it appeared to be utterly chaotic, like there was no one in charge. It was the same feeling one would have when he passes a house on fire, and no one is there to put out the fire. It seems like no one lives there!

When Avraham was forty-eight years old, he witnessed the דור הפלגה, when Hashem dispersed the nations. It was a global calamity, which shook up the entire world. Before Avraham was born, there was another destruction – the *mabul*. There was so much devastation and destruction in the world, and it appeared to Avraham that, *chas veshalom*, no one is taking care of it.

Hashem peeked out at Avraham and told him, אני בעל הבירה, "I created the world, and I am taking care of the world."

Many people consider the present era a time of immense chaos and confusion. Consider the health crisis, the economy, government instability, antisemitism, and the list goes on. Perhaps the world today can be compared to a house on fire with no one putting it out! It looks like no one is in charge, *chalilah*. But don't forget, אני בעל הבירה, Hashem is behind everything that is happening, and there will come the time when we will find reason and logic

in everything that's happening.

The Rambam (*Hilchos Avodas Kochavim* 1:2) writes, "Avraham was forty years old when he recognized the Creator…"

The Raavad writes, "There is a Midrash that says he was three years old."

Another Midrash states that Avraham recognized Hashem when he was 48.

The Sar Shalom of Belz *zt'l* said that the opinion that Avraham recognized Hashem at age 48 needs explanation. The view that Avraham recognized Hashem when he was three years old tells us that when Avraham was at the age of minimal comprehension, he was already able to recognize Hashem. The opinion that he was forty years old is because Chazal say, בן ארבעים לבינה when one turns forty, he becomes wise. But what's the significance of recognizing Hashem at age 48? And we can't say that it was a coincidence, without significance, because everything that happens in the world is for a purpose. Even more so, when we are discussing the avos, and the beginning of their Emunah. So, what is the explanation? Why did Avraham recognize Hashem specifically when he was forty-eight-years-old?

When Avraham was 48, the infamous Tower of Bavel was completed, which purpose was to rebel against Hashem. The spirit of the time was denial of Hashem. It was a generation of immense heresy. It wasn't easy to have Emunah at such a time. However, the rule is: when one acquires *Emunah* at a time when it's difficult to acquire it, his *Emunah* becomes very deeply engrained on his mind and soul. This is the significance of the fact that Avraham acquired *Emunah,*

particularly at this time. He was strong and didn't let himself be influenced by the spirit of the times, and therefore attained a very high level of Emunah.[4]

So, when Avraham was 48 years old, the spirit of the time was heresy, and the chaos in the world roused Avraham to wonder, "Where is the creator?" Nevertheless, Avraham succeeded in recognizing Hashem at this time. When one recognizes Hashem in a time of immense confusion and *hester panim* (concealment),

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4. The Jewish nation are compared to the stars, as it states וספר הכוכבים.. כה יהיה זרעך, "Count the stars… Your children will be like them."

The Yismach Yisrael *zt'l* explains stars are always in heaven. Even when the sun is shining, there are stars, but we don't see them. We only see the stars when it's dark. Similarly, the Jewish nation shines from the darkness.

An example is seen in this week's parashah:

When Avraham and Sarah came to Eretz Canaan there was a famine in the land. It was a moment of darkness for Avraham and Sarah. Avraham and Sarah went to Mitzrayim to wait out the hunger, and they became very wealthy over there. As it states (13:2), ואברם כבד מאד במקנה בכסף ובזהב, "Avram was very wealthy, with cattle, silver, and gold." Because light emanates from darkness.

The Rabbeinu Yonah (*Shaarei Teshuvah* 2:5) writes:

"The person who has *bitachon* should hope, even in the midst of the hardships, that this darkness will bring about light. As it states (*Michah* 7:8), אל תשמחי איבתי, 'Don't rejoice, my enemies. כי נפלתי קמתי כי אשב בחשך ה' אור לי. If I fell, I got up again. Though I sit in darkness, Hashem will make it bright for me.' Chazal explain, 'If I had not fallen, I wouldn't have gotten up. If I didn't sit in darkness, it wouldn't become light for me.'"

the Emunah that emerges is strong and clear.

Tzaddikim tell us that before Moshiach comes, it will be extremely difficult to believe in Hashem. Rebbe Yisrael of Ruzhin *zt'l* compared this era to someone trying to climb up a straight wall.

Rebbe Elimelech of Lizensk *zt'l* described the hardship to have *Emunah* in the era before Moshiach arrived in the following way: Imagine a gigantic rope, spread out in heaven, and it is shaking and turning rapidly. One has to hold on with all his might, or he will fall into the abyss below. This describes how tightly we have to hold on to our Emunah in the days before Moshiach comes.[5]

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5. The Gemara (*Avodah Zarah* 9.) teaches that the world will exist for six thousand years. The first two thousand years are called תהו, void, because there was no Torah in the world. The next two thousand years are called the years of Torah. The final two thousand years is the era of Moshiach, because Moshiach will come then. "

The two thousand millennia of Torah began when Avraham Avinu was 52 years old. Why doesn't the two thousand years begin from the time Avraham recognized Hashem (which is at the age of 3, 40, or 48, as discussed above)?

The Satmar Rebbe *zt'l* answered that when Avraham was 52, Nimrod threw him into the fiery furnace at Uhr Kasdim because he refused to worship idols. The value of Torah is when it's kept and studied with *mesirus nefesh*. Avraham believed in Hashem earlier, but when he was 52 years old, he kept the Torah with *mesirus nefesh*. That's the beginning of the two thousand years of Torah.

During the Communist regime, it was difficult to find a *mohel* in Russia. One Russian family somehow contacted a *mohel* from Eretz Yisrael, and requested that he come and make a *bris milah* for their

Over history, there were times when false prophets performed miracles, and they said that G-d sent them to tell people to worship *avodah zarah*. The Torah (*Devarim* 13, 4-6) warns us that we shouldn't be impressed by them, and we mustn't fall off track because of them. The Torah says: "If a *navi* or a dreamer stands up among you and he gives you a sign or a miracle, and the sign and the miracle occur, and he says worship idols… Don't listen to this *navi*… Kill him."

Rebbe Yehoshua of Belz *zt'l* asks that the sentence between the words "Don't listen to this *navi*…" and "kill him," seems to be out of place. Because the pasuk states (ibid. 13:5), אחרי ה' אלקיכם תלכו ואותו תיראו ואת מצותיו תשמרו ובקולו תשמעו ואותו תעבודו ובו תדבקון, "After Hashem your G-d you shall go, fear Him, keep His mitzvos, listen to

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child. The *mohel* agreed. When he arrived, he discovered that the "baby" was a six-year-old boy. The *mohel* wasn't prepared to make a *milah* on a six-year-old child, but the parents pleaded with the *mohel* to do it.

"How can I?" the *mohel* asked. "The child will move around. It's dangerous."

The six-year-old child said, "Tie me down with ropes, if you have to. I want a *bris milah*. I want to be a Yid."

After the *bris milah*, the mother kissed her child. She said, "For the past six years, I never kissed you, because I didn't want to kiss a goy. Now, I can kiss you."

Think about the *mesirus nefesh* this mother had. For six years, she wouldn't kiss her own son, because he didn't have *milah*. Let this example of *mesirus nefesh* serve as a model, to keep the Torah with *mesirus nefesh*.

His voice, serve Him, and adhere to Him."

These words seem out of place, as they aren't related to the episode of a false prophet.

The answer is, when there are tests in *Emunah* that is when one can grow immensely in his belief in Hashem. Therefore, when there are false prophets who are performing miracles, the Torah encourages us to strengthen ourselves in His service, because when there are tests, it is the best time for growth.

One Good Deed Leads to Others

The Torah says, ויוצא אותו החוצה, Hashem took Avraham outdoors, ויאמר הבט נא השמים וספר הכוכבים... כה יהיה זרעך, "Hashem said, 'Look up at the heaven and count the stars… So shall be your children" (15:5).

Reb Meir Shapiro *zt'l* explained that when Hashem told Avraham to count the stars, Avraham tried to count them. It was an impossible feat; there are so many stars. But he tried. Hashem said, כה יהיה זרעך, this is how your children will be. They will never say a task is impossible. They will always try to do what they can. And when they do the most they can, Hashem will help them succeed.

The *parashah* elaborates on the great war in Avraham's time: four nations fought against five nations, and the minority, the four countries, won the war. Og escaped from the war and told Avraham that his nephew, Lot, was captured, so Avraham went out to battle against the four mighty armies. Rashi (14:9) writes that the Torah tells us that the four kings won the war against five kings so we should understand that they were mighty. And nevertheless, לא נמנע אברהם מלרדוף אחריהם,

"Avraham didn't refrain from running after them…"

How did Avraham have the courage to battle against four mighty countries? The answer is that a Yid does what he can, and then Hashem helps him.

There was a *bachur* who was addicted to cigarettes, to the point that he was *mechalel* Shabbos, *r'l*. Reb Azriel Tuaber *zt'l* brought the *bachur* to a *gadol*. The *gadol* told him, "When you smoke a cigarette on Shabbos, don't put out the fire because extinguishing a fire is also a prohibition. Just let it burn out on its own."

The *bachur* accepted that. In a short time, he was keeping Shabbos entirely. Once again, we see that a person does a small deed, as much as he can at the moment, and then Hashem helps him accomplish so much more.

The parashah begins with Avraham's first test, to leave his father's home, and the Torah writes the words לך לך. These words are used again by Avraham's tenth test, the akeidas Yitzchak. As it states, קח נא את בנך... ולך לך אל ארץ המוריה, "Take your son…and go to Eretz HaMoriah…" The Midrash (*Bereishis Rabba* 39:9) states, "It says twice לך לך; we don't know which is more beloved, the second or the first?"

The Midrash concludes that the second לך לך, of the *akeidah* was a greater test and is more beloved to Hashem. But we wonder, what was the Midrash's *hava amina* (original thought)? Isn't it evident that sacrificing one's child on the altar is a far greater test than leaving one's homeland?!

The answer is, the most challenging part of a test is the beginning of it. After one becomes accustomed to doing good and passing the tests Hashem puts before us, the tests become easier. Therefore, the

Midrash thought that perhaps the first test of לך לך might have been a greater one.

Hashem says (*Shemos* 19:4), ואשא אתכם על כנפי נשרים, "I carried you on an eagle's wings…" An eagle carries her children on her wings. As the eagle flies high in the sky, the children can look down and see the world below. But how do the birds climb up onto the eagle's wings? The eagle doesn't help them. The young birds have to hop on. This hints to us that Hashem can raise us to very high levels, but we have to take the first step.[6]

Appreciate Your Deeds

The Ropshitzer Rav zt'l says that if Avraham thought about his origin, that his father who gave birth to him was an idol

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6. The following *din Torah* came before Reb Nissin Korelitz *zt'l*: In an apartment building in Bnei Brak there's an elevator, which can only carry four people at a time (as the sign on the elevator clearly states). Four people were already on the elevator, and two more people climbed in. As the elevator headed up to the next floor, the elevator broke. The question is, who is responsible to pay for the repairs? Some said the two people who came must pay, because they overloaded the elevator. Others claimed that all six are responsible, because when they saw two people insisting to come in, they should have left the elevator. (See *Bava Kama* 10:, regarding ten people sitting on a bench and the bench broke, which discusses a similar scenario.) Reb Nissin Korelitz wisely said it isn't the two and it isn't the six. The one who pressed the elevator button to send the elevator to the next floor must pay, because he caused the elevator to overwork and collapse.

Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Succos passed, and baruch Hashem, we are 'loaded' with holiness. But that isn't sufficient. We have to "press the button" and to go up to the next level. We have to continue growing. We shouldn't be complacent with our level.

worshiper, he would be broken. He would think, "How can a person like myself serve Hashem?" Similarly, if Avraham would think about his idol-worshipping during his youth (as the Rambam tells us), he would feel deficient and unworthy of serving Hashem. Therefore Hashem told him, לך לך... מביתך אביך, don't think about your past and your origin. Go away from those depressing thoughts because only then will you be able to serve Hashem.

In the *Tzetel Kattan* of Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk *zt'l* it states, "Every moment that one isn't learning Torah, especially when one is sitting idle in his room or lying on his bed and he can't fall asleep, he should be cautious to think about the mitzvah (*Vayikra* 22:32), ונקדשתי בתוך בני ישראל. He should imagine a great, awesome fire, burning up to heaven, and for Hashem's honor, he breaks his nature and throws himself into the fire to honor Hashem. Hashem considers a good thought like a deed. In this way, he was not sitting idle. He performed a mitzvah of the Torah." A person may have these thoughts of *mesirus nefesh* at night. However, when morning comes, and the alarm clock rings and the test he is facing is לך לך, to go and get out of bed, the challenge is much more challenging. This is because people want to do great deeds, and they don't value "mediocre deeds." They are ready to be *moser nefesh* and throw themselves into a fire for Hashem, but they aren't prepared to wake up in the morning to learn Torah or to daven.

When Avraham lived in Uhr Kasdim, Nimrod gave Avraham an ultimatum: Either he bows down to the idols, or he will be thrown into the fire. Avraham chose the furnace. This seems to be a far more remarkable accomplishment than

leaving one's homeland. So why isn't the test of Uhr Kasdim counted among Avraham's ten primary tests? And why isn't this story stated explicitly in the Torah?

One answer is that it isn't all that spectacular that Avraham chose the furnace over worshipping idols because many good Yidden, throughout history, did the same. Many people are ready to be *moser nefesh* for Hashem. A more significant test is to keep the daily mitzvos, those that we think are mediocre and not so important.

The Beis Aharon (p.2:) writes, "Be very happy and let it be very precious in your eyes everything you do for Hashem's service. Think, 'I won't sell this merit for all the money in the world!' This is also in regard to one good word or one good thought or one good deed. Perhaps it was done in just a moment, but it won't be lost, and it will accomplish great things for you, and perhaps for the entire Jewish nation. Is there any greater joy than fulfilling the purpose of creation? Do whatever you can; be it small or big, as people say, 'Whatever you grab by the market is worthwhile.'"

The following tale is told about the Golem of Prague:

Once, fishermen weren't successful in catching fish for Shabbos, so the Golem of Prague was sent out to the sea to fill up a large sack with fish. After a long while, people went to the sea to see what happened with the Golem. They saw him standing in the ocean, struggling against the waves, trying to catch fish. They signaled for him to return home. The Golem showed them that the sack was only half full. They told him, "We don't need any more fish." The Golem heard that they don't need fish, so he turned the sack

over and let all the fish free.

This story can be used as a *mashal* to show the foolishness of people who think "All or none." They want perfection, and anything less than that isn't valuable. Whatever you have is precious, even if it is a little, and you want to accomplish more.

The Midrash (*Bereishis Rabba* 38) states:

Terach manufactured idols. Once, Terach had to be away, so he asked his son Avraham to sell the idols that day. Someone arrived and asked to buy an idol. Avraham asked him, "How old are you?"

The man replied that he was about sixty years old. Avraham said, "Woe to someone who is sixty years old and is going to bow down to something that was made just today. The man left, embarrassed. Then a woman came to the shop. She had a large bowl filled with flour, and she told Avraham, "Sacrifice this to the idols." Avraham took a hammer, smashed all the idols, and then put the hammer in the hand of the largest idol. When Terach arrived, he asked, "Who did this?"

Avraham replied, "I will tell you the truth. A woman came and asked me to give a bowl of flour to the idols. I did so, and the idols began to bicker. One said, 'I will eat first,' and another said, 'I will eat first.' Then, this big idol took an ax and smashed them all."

Terach said, "Why are you lying to me? These idols don't know anything. And they can't do anything?"

Avraham told him, "Just listen to what you are saying."

Terach brought Avraham to Nimrod. Nimrod said, "Bow down to fire."

Avraham replied, "We should bow to water because water puts out the fire."

Nimrod said, "Bow down to the water."

Avraham replied, "We should bow to the clouds because they carry water."

Nimrod: Bow to the clouds.

Avraham: We should bow to the wind because the wind blows the clouds.

Nimrod: Bow to the wind.

Avraham: We should bow to a human being because he carries wind within him.

Nimrod: You're speaking foolishness. I worship fire, and I am going to throw you into the fire. Let's see the G-d, who you bow to, save you.

Haran (Terach's son) was also present, but he was undecided. He said to himself, "If Avraham is successful, I'm with Avraham [and with his G-d]. And if Nimrod wins, I'm with Nimrod and his gods." Avraham was saved in the furnace.

They asked Haran, "Whose side are you on?"

"I'm with Avraham."

They threw him into the fire. His innards were burned, and he died.

The Sfas Emes (תרל"ז ד"ה מעם) says that Haran was rewarded immensely for his good deed. His deed wasn't perfect, and therefore he was burned in the furnace, but nevertheless, he went into fire *al kidush Hashem*, and he deserves a reward.

The Sfas Emes says that his reward is that Dovid HaMelech and Moshiach come from him. (As we know, Dovid HaMelech and Moshiach come from Haran's son, Lot.)

As we wrote above, Lot was captured in the war,

and Og told Avraham about it. Rashi (21:34) tells us Og's intention. ומתכוין שיהרג אברם וישא את שרה, Og wanted that Avraham should go and die in war so that he could marry Sarah. Nevertheless, despite his bad intention, Og did a good deed. Avraham's nephew, Lot, was saved (and from Lot will come Dovid HaMelech and Moshiach).

Every good deed is rewarded, and also Og was rewarded. As the Midrash (*Bereishis* Rabba 42:8) states, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu said, 'I swear, you will be rewarded for coming [to Avraham]. You will live long.'"

Also, it states (*Bamidbar* 21:34) that Moshe Rabbeinu was afraid to wage war against Og. Rashi writes, שהיה ירא להלחם שמא תעמוד לו זכותו של אברהם, "He was afraid to fight against him, lest the merit of Avraham will help him."

We see that every good deed gets rewarded – even the good deeds of *reshaim*. We can be certain then, that all our good deeds will also be rewarded. We shouldn't consider any of our good deeds small because, as the Chovas Halevavos writes, "What's small to you is great in Hashem's eyes."

Merivah

It states in this week's *parashah* (13:7-8), ויהי ריב בין רעי אברם ובין רועה מקנה לוט... ויאמר אברם אל לוט אל נא תהי מריבה ביני וביניך, "There was an argument between Avram's shepherds and Lot's shepherds… Avram said to Lot, "Let there not be a dispute between us…"

There are several counsels to help stop machlokes. We will state some of them.

One good counsel is to end the machlokes as quickly as possible.

The Beis HaMikdash was destroyed because of *sinas chinam*, unwarranted,

baseless hatred. What does *sinas chinam* mean? Isn't there always a reason for the ill feelings between people?

The answer is, all disputes should dissipate and disappear after a few moments, or at most after a few days. Clinging to an argument is *sinas chinam*. Sometimes, because of a single dispute people grow distant from each other for years. This is *sinas chinam*, as there is no logical reason for that.[7]

The Shlah HaKadosh notes that the *pasuk* (ibid.) begins with the word ריב and ends with מריבה. Both words mean dispute. The difference between the two words is that מריבה is in feminine, implying that the dispute can *chalilah* increase in intensity and multiply, while ריב is masculine, which implies it will not grow out of proportion. There was a ריב between the shepherds, and Avram requested אל נא תהי מריבה, let's be careful that this dispute doesn't turn into something greater. Let's stop this *machlokes* now, so it doesn't bear fruit, and create a great rift between us.

The Gemara says, דעה קנית מה חסרת. This can be translated, as someone with *daas*, wisdom, מה חסרת, will take the letters מ"ה out of מריבה. When the letters מ"ה are taken out of מריבה, it becomes ריב, the masculine word for dispute. The wise

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7. It can be compared to a lit match that goes out after a few seconds. But if you put papers, wood, and other combustibles near the match, the fire will burn for longer. If you continue stoking the fire, the fire can burn for a very long time. That is the essence of *sinas chinam*. The fight could have been long forgotten, but people continued adding more wood to the fire, and then it got out of hand. This is *sinas chinam,* which destroyed the Beis HaMikdash.

are cautious that a fight remains masculine and doesn't grow and develop and get out of hand.

As it states (*Mishlei* 17:14), פוטר מים ראשית מדון, "Like water gushing through an opening, is the beginning of a dispute." Rashi (*Sanhedrin* 7.) explains, "When a river swells, it flows to the fields along the banks. The flow goes through narrow furrows and channels. If the flow isn't stopped immediately, it will become stronger and wider until it can't be stopped. This is how a dispute works…" If it is not stopped at the onset, it becomes larger and overpowering.

The Shlah said that this is alluded to in the word מחלקת. The מ׳ has a tiny opening, which represents a still small and narrow *machlokes*. The opening of the ח׳ is wider, for the argument has become greater. ל׳ is the tallest letter, going upwards, and ק׳ is long downwards. This suggests that the *machlokes* is growing in all directions. And finally, ת׳, the machlokes stands firmly and securely on its own two legs.

All of this could be avoided if you stop the *machlokes* at the very beginning when it's still merely a small opening in the מ׳.[8]

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8. The Maharal (*Tiferes Yisrael* 7) writes that there is *shalom* כאשר ישאר כל אחד בגבול שלו, "When everyone remains inside his boundaries." The *malach* Gavriel is fire and the *malach* Michael is water. How does Hashem עושה שלום במרומיו, make peace in the heavens? The answer is, each *malach* has his own boundary and knows his place. Therefore, they are at peace.

Similarly, in this week's *parashah* Lot and Avram parted ways, as the Torah says, 13:11) ...הפרדו איש מעל אחיו אברם). The final letters of these words spell שלום. Because when everything is in its place there is *shalom*.

Another counsel is to guard your speech and not answer back when someone speaks harshly. It isn't easy, that's for sure, but remember that Chazal (*Chulin* 89.) say, אין העולם מתקיים אלא במי שבולם פיו בשעת מריבה, "The world stands in the merit of those who are silent in a *machlokes*."

Yet another counsel is to think about how much you lose from a *machlokes*. You lose peace of mind, but that's not all. The Shlah HaKadosh (*Yoma Derech Chaim* 44) writes, מחלוקת אחת דוחה מאה פרנסות, "One *machlokes* drives away a hundred *parnasos*."

The word כנען can mean poverty, as it states (*Zecharyah* 14:21), ולא יהיה כנעני עוד בבית ה' צבאות, "There will be no more poverty…" Thus, the *pasuk* tells us, ויהי ריב... והכנעני... אז יושב הארץ, "there was a *machlokes*…and poverty… was then in the land." Because *machlokes* causes poverty. In contrast, peace, *shalom*, brings *parnassah* in abundance.

Another counsel to overcome *machlokes* is to pretend that you are at peace and in good terms

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The Gemara (*Brachos*) says that if one sees a pot in his dreams it is a sign that he will have peace. Commentaries explain that a pot makes peace between the water and fire. Fire and water are opposites, but when they are separated by a pot, they work together to cook food.

The Ahavas Yisrael of Viznitz *zt'l* would say, "One must be good *to* all, but not good *with* all." You are kind to everyone, but boundaries are necessary. If there is a bad influence, the counsel is often that you should be kind to them, but don't be close with them. Keep your distance, so you don't learn from them. When we say עושה שלום at the end of *Shemonah Esrei* we back up three steps, and bow in all directions. Because often the path for *shalom* is to back off from your position, bow down and agree to others, and let them have their way.

with your fellow man. Your heart may still be steaming with anger, but you can greet your fellow man and pretend that everything is well. As the Chozeh of Lublin *zt'l* said, "A false friendship is better than a true *machlokes*."

Another counsel is to drop, somewhat, your passion for truth. This might seem like strange advice, but it is necessary. Consider the major fights that happen between communities. It is often about "truth." This group says that they have the truth, and they can't tolerate that the other group is distant from "truth." The other group says the exact same words, only they think they have the correct path, and the other group is off. If they could somewhat drop their passion for "the truth", they could make peace with everyone.

The Midrash (*Bereishis Rabba* 8:5) tells us that when Hashem wanted to create the world, Chesed and Tzedek encouraged Hashem to do so, "because people will do *chesed* and *tzedakah*." But Emes and Shalom advised Hashem that He shouldn't create the world. They said, כולו שקרים... כולו קטטה, people's nature is to lie and to fight, and it isn't worthwhile to create the world under these circumstances. Hakadosh Baruch Hu threw Emes into the ground, as it states (*Daniel* 8:12), ותשלך אמת ארצה. Now that Emes wasn't protesting, Hashem created the world.

The Kotzker *zt'l* asks, Hashem silenced Emes by throwing it into the earth, but what was done with Shalom's claim? Behold Shalom is still shouting that Hashem shouldn't create the world because people make *machlokes*.

The Kotzker answered, after Emes was thrown to the ground, there can be peace. When people drop, somewhat, their passion for truth, there can be peace in the world.

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