

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
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Torah Wellsprings - Vayera

The Salvation is Prepared

In this week's parashah, the Torah elaborates on the story of Yishmael, how he almost died from thirst, and Hashem accepted his tefillos and saved him (see 21:15-19). Several pasukim are dedicated to this story. The Radak writes, "The Torah goes into detail with all of this to teach that a person shouldn't be afraid if *tzaros* come his way; rather, he should trust in Hashem that the end will be good."¹

The Chidushei HaRim zt'l takes notice of an amazing episode that occurred during this incident. It states (21:19) ויפקח אלקים את עיניה ותרא באר מים, ותלך ותמלא את החמת מים ותשק את הנער, "And Hashem opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. And she went and she filled the pouch with water and gave the lad to drink."

This seems to imply that while Yishmael was ill with a high fever and thirsty for water, the well was stationed there the entire time; only Hagar didn't see it until that moment. The Chidushei HaRim zt'l teaches that this is how it is with all of Hashem's salvations. It is right before us. All that is needed is for us to recognize it.²

This lesson encourages us. Sometimes we think that there is no hope for our situation, however, the *yeshuah* is already there. We just have to merit that Hashem open our eyes so we can find it and uncover it.

We say in Tehillim (121) אשא עיני אל ההרים מאין יבא עזרי, עזרי מעם ה' עשה שמים וארץ "I shall raise my eyes to the mountains, from where will my help come? My help is from Hashem,

the Maker of heaven and earth." Chasam Sofer zt'l explains that Hashem created heaven and earth from nothing, and therefore Hashem can bring salvation from nothing as well. Therefore, when it seems that there is no salvation possible, it isn't a problem for Hashem. Hashem created heaven and earth from nothingness, and He can create a salvation for you as well!

Pirkei Avos (5:6) states, "Ten things were created [at the beginning of creation] on erev Shabbos, during *bein hashmashos*... Some add that the ram of Avraham Avinu was created at that time."

Ra'v Bartenura explains that this doesn't mean that the ram lived for hundreds of years, from the beginning of creation until the Akeidah. Rather, it means that at the beginning of creation, it was decreed that when Avraham went to Akeidas Yitzchak, a ram should get caught in a bush. This saved Yitzchak's life because the ram was sacrificed instead of Yitzchak.

Says Reb Mendel Perlmutter zt'l, look how important it is to protect a Yid from danger and sorrow, that it is proper for his salvation to be prepared at the very beginning of creation. Yitzchak's salvation was ready from the beginning of creation; likewise, everyone's salvation is prepared from the beginning of creation.

So, you don't have to worry. Hashem will help you. Your needs are prepared and ready since *brias haolam*.

The Chofetz Chaim (Zechor l'Miryam ch.20) teaches:

1. If Hagar and Yishmael did not need to worry, we can certainly feel confident that Hashem will help us because we are His chosen nation, children of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov.

2. The Skulener Rebbe zt'l once told an older bachur, "You are already a chasan. Forty days before you were formed in the womb, a bas kol announced your shidduch. So you don't have to worry. All you have to do is to request הראני ה' חסדך, that Hashem reveal the chesed that He prepared for you."

"In the Torah, we find proof of the great potential of bitachon from the story of Lot and the two malachim who came to his home. When the residents of Sodom surrounded Lot's house wanting to kill the malachim, Lot came out of his house to tell them not to harm his guests (19:8) רק לאנשים האל, 'אל תעשו דבר כי על כן באו בצל קרתי, 'Only to these men do nothing, because they have come under the shadow of my roof.' Lot said, 'They trusted in me that I will save them from your hands, and therefore, I plead to you that they be rewarded for their trust, and you don't harm them.' Let us think about this: We know that Lot wasn't righteous, not at all. It states (Bereishis 13:11) ויסע קדמונו של עולם, and Chazal say that this means he traveled away from Hashem. Nevertheless, Lot understood that his guests should be saved because they trusted in him. Certainly, *kal vachomer*... when one trusts in Hakadosh Baruch Hu, the Source of compassion, Hakadosh Baruch Hu will certainly save him from his tzaros.

"Therefore, my brothers and friends, although there are many tzaros in our generation, nevertheless, if we will strengthen ourselves with bitachon and trust in Hashem with all our heart, Hashem will certainly save us..."

Miracles

Sarah laughed when she heard the malachim say she would bear a child, and Hashem rebuked her for laughing. The Ramban (18:15) explains, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu explained to Avraham what Sarah did wrong. Why does she think it is impossible [for her to bear children]? She should believe, or she should say, *אמן כן יעשה ה'*, 'Amen, may Hashem do so.'" But why did she laugh? Why did she think it was impossible?

The Chofetz Chaim zt'l (Kisvei Chofetz Chaim) explains that this is a significant story for us because there will be a time when we will be told that Moshiach is about to come. Some people will laugh. They will say that it can't be. This parashah teaches them that we must believe in the upcoming salvation and we must believe in miracles.

The Imrei Noam (Dzikov) zt'l teaches, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu performs miracles for tzaddikim, and He leads them above the rules of nature. This is because the tzaddik believes in Hashem's *hashgachah pratis* even when the world is run according to the rules of nature. So there is no reason to conceal from him."

The explanation is as follows:

Hashem leads the world according to the rules of nature. This is because if Hashem's presence were evident, there would be no test for a man to believe in Hashem. Hashem hides behind the guise of nature to enable free choice to exist. However, a tzaddik believes in Hashem even when His ways are concealed. Therefore, Hashem has no reason to conceal Himself from this tzaddik. For the tzaddik, the guise has been unveiled, so there is no reason for concealment. This is the reason miracles occur to tzaddikim.

Therefore, it states (18:17) וַה' אָמַר הַמַּכְסֶּה אֲנִי מֵאַבְרָהָם אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי עוֹשֶׂה, "And Hashem said, 'Shall I conceal from Avraham what I am doing?'" Hashem was saying, "Why should I conceal matters from Avraham? Avraham knows that it is Me, concealed behind the guise of nature, so there is no purpose in hiding. And therefore, Avraham can enjoy open miracles, too."³

Chazal say, אין בעל הנס מכיר בניסו. Literally, this means that when Hashem performs a miracle for someone, the person generally

3. The Midrash states that the miracles that happened to Avraham were well-known in the world. Even gentiles, when they were on a ship and their lives were in danger, would say, "The G-d of Avraham should save us," and they would be saved. Avraham's high level of emunah effectuated miracles and salvations for the entire world.

doesn't realize it. He thinks that he was saved through natural means. Hashem performs great miracles for him, and he doesn't even know it.

The Kedushas Levi (Beshalach, 15:11) explains the words **אין בעל הנס מכיר בניסו** in another way. He explains that these words are counsel on how to merit miracles. He says that a miracle should be as wondrous to him as nature because they are both Hashem's doing. To explain, let us read the Kedushas Levi's words:

"When a person needs a miracle from His Creator, he should think that this isn't a miracle; rather, Hashem can do anything. Small and large matters are the same for Him. If he has this emunah and bitachon in Hashem when he needs something, he will receive it regardless of what it is. He will be helped from heaven. The condition is **אין בעל הנס מכיר בניסו**, which can mean that he can't recognize that it is a miracle. He shouldn't consider it a miracle or a change in nature; rather, it is according to the rules of nature that Hakadosh Baruch Hu performs miracles. When a person is wise and has understanding, he knows that just as Hashem can make oil give forth light, Hashem can also say that vinegar should bring light (see Taanis 25.) or whether the sea should be stormy or calm. Miracles are easy for Hashem *yisbarach*. Hashem doesn't need extra effort to perform a miracle."

When a person believes that nature is also part of Hashem's wonders, miracles and nature are one and the same. The only difference is that nature is more common, but they are both the performance of Hashem *yisbarach*. The wonders are equal. The Kedushas Levi explains that when a person has this emunah, he merits seeing miracles.

It states in *Az Yashir* (Shemos 15:11) **עשה פלא**, "performing wonders!" The Kedushas Levi explains that the wonder isn't so much the miracle itself because that is easy for Hashem to do, and that is the same wonder as every other aspect of creation. The wonder is that Hashem is in heaven, so exalted above us,

yet He loves and cares for the Jewish nation. Hashem's love to us, His *hashgachah pratis* on us, is the wonder!

The Kedushas Levi explains, "Every day, the sea, with its waters, flowed forcefully, and on this day [of kriyas Yam Suf], the sea split. This proves that Hashem loves Yisrael... Hashem's wonder is that He is in the upper worlds and loves physical human beings."

Recognizing the Miracles

It states (Tehillim 118:23) **מאת ה' היתה זאת היא**, "This was from Hashem; it is wondrous in our eyes." The Beis Aharon (rosh chodesh Nisan) explains that whatever happens to a person, he should say (or at least think) **מאת ה'**, "It was bashert. It is from Hashem." He shouldn't attribute anything to chance. He should repeatedly say, "It was from Hashem." And when one does so, **היא נפלאה בעיניו**, he will merit to see wonders with his eyes.

But many people are blind and don't recognize Hashem's wonders. It states (19:14) **ויצא לוט וידבר אל חתניו לקחי בנתיו ויאמר קומו צאו מן המקום הזה כי משחית ה' את העיר ויהי כמצחק בעיני חתניו**, "And Lot went forth and spoke to his sons-in-law, the suitors of his daughters, and said, 'Arise, go forth from this place, for Hashem is destroying the city,' but he seemed like a jester in the eyes of his sons-in-law." They didn't take the warning seriously. They thought it was all just a joke.

Just moments before, a great wonder and miracle occurred in Sedom, which everyone knew about, but apparently, people remained blind and didn't recognize the miracle. It states (19:4) **ואנשי העיר אנשי סדם נסבו על הבית מנער ועד זקן כל העם מקצה... ואת האנשים אשר פתח הבית הכו בסגורים**, "And the people of the city, the people of Sodom, surrounded the house, both young and old, the entire populace from every end of the city... And the men at the house's entrance were struck with blindness, both small and great, and they toiled in vain to find the entrance."

Lot's sons-in-law should have recognized this miracle and understood something unusual was happening. But apparently, they were smitten with *spiritual blindness*. They saw, and they thought it was natural. They didn't recognize Hashem's hand.

The Shem MiShmuel (5680) writes, "We can learn a lesson from this: There are times, and there are factors, that if a person thought about them, he would recognize Hashem's wonders, hashgachah pratis, and reward and punishment. But when a person chooses to turn away from thinking about these matters, he is smitten with blindness; he sees but doesn't see."

The Shem MiShmuel concludes, "In our time, everyone can see Hashem's wonders... There is hashgachah pratis in every detail; only a person must be cautious not to be blind."

Holding onto Emunah and Passing Tests

Hashem told Avraham (22:2) קח נא את בנך את יחידך אשר אהבת את יצחק ולך לך אל ארץ המוריה והעלהו שם לעלה על אחד ההרים אשר אמר אליך, "Please take your son, your only one, whom you love, Yitzchak, and go to the land of Moriah and bring him up there for a korban olah on one of the mountains, of which I will tell you."

Rashi writes, "קח נא, please take, is an expression of requesting." Hashem requested and pleaded with Avraham that he pass this test. Rashi writes, "Hashem said to Avraham, 'I beg of you, pass this test for Me, so people will not say that the first tests had no substance.'" The Akeidah was the tenth test. If he failed this test, it would discredit the first nine tests he succeeded in.

The Midrash Tanchuma (22) elaborates:

"It can be compared to a king confronted with many wars. He had a mighty warrior who won all the wars. One day, an extremely

difficult war started. The king said to his mighty warrior, "Please, I beg you that you win this war. Otherwise, the generals of my army will say that the first wars I succeeded in have no value. Similarly, Hakadosh Baruch Hu said to Avraham, 'I tested you nine times, and you were successful, and you passed these tests. Now, succeed in this test, שלא יאמרו ראשונים לא היה בהם ממש, so they won't say that the first tests didn't mean anything."

Reb Shimon Shwab zt'l once made a dinner to raise money for his yeshiva. He spoke at this dinner and mentioned this Midrash. Reb Shwab asked, "Why should failing one test disprove the first nine tests that Avraham successfully passed? If a person receives a 90% on a test, does that mean he got all the answers wrong? He didn't answer one of the questions correctly, but that doesn't discredit the fact that he answered nine correctly!

Reb Shwab answered that the tenth test, the Akeidah, wasn't only to test Avraham; it was also a test for his son, Yitzchak. If Yitzchak wouldn't agree to the Akeidah, this would mean that Avraham failed in passing on the emunah to the next generation. And then all the other tests, although successfully passed, have no value.

Reb Moshe Feinstein zt'l was at this dinner, and after the drashah, he told Reb Shimon Shwab that there is another answer to his question. He explained that there are no compromises when it comes to emunah. Either you believe or you don't. Therefore, 90 percent emunah is nothing at all!

The Mishnah (Avos) states, "Avraham was tested ten times, and passed them all." The Meor Einayim (Va'era) says that every Yid is tested with ten major tests in his life. The Ahavas Shalom also writes, "A person doesn't attain a לב נאמן, believing heart, before he is tested with ten tests like Avraham."⁴

4. Reb Gad'l Eizner zt'l said, "People think that since they are going through a hard time, a time of *hester panim*, they must strengthen their emunah. The opposite is true; Hashem wanted to reinforce your emunah,

The Meor Einayim explains that at the time of a person's test, Hashem takes his emunah away, and his belief isn't as clear and perfect. This is because if he had perfect emunah, it wouldn't be a test at all. A person's mission is to maintain as much of his emunah as possible during those times so that he can pass the test.⁵

The ultimate test of Avraham Avinu was the *akeidah*, which begins with the words, והאלקים נסה את אברהם, "And Hashem tested Avraham".

The Baal Shem Tov *zt'l* explains that at the *akeidah*, Hashem took away all of Avraham's *madreigos*. As a result, he didn't feel any connection to Hashem which made the test much greater.

The Avodas Yisrael *zt'l* (*Vayikra* ד"ה ויקרא) says that this is alluded to in the words (22:4), וירא את המקום מרחוק. The word מקום hints to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, the מקומו של עולם. He saw Hashem מרחוק, from a distance. He didn't feel close to Hashem. All of his lofty levels left him. Nevertheless, he remained loyal to Hashem and was prepared to do the *akeidah*, which was the will of Hashem.⁶

The Yesod HaAvodah *zt'l* (vol.4, 2:7) writes that המקום also refers to Yaakov Avinu, about

whom it states (*Bereishis* 28:11), ויפגע במקום (he came to Har HaMoriah). And, as we wrote, המקום hints to Hashem, the מקומו של עולם.

The *pasuk* alludes to the questions that popped into Avraham's mind unwillingly as he went to the *akeidah*. Hashem had told Avraham that Yitzchak would bear a son, Yaakov Avinu. How would Yaakov be born if Yitzchok was now to be sacrificed? This is the meaning of the words וירא את המקום. He had questions on Hashem, Who told him that Yitzchak would become a great nation.

So, what did Avraham do? The *pasuk* answers, מרחוק, "distance." He pushed these thoughts far away from his mind. He refused to think about these questions, and with *emunah peshutah* he performed Hashem's will.

Akeidas Yitzchak Today

It states (22:13), והנה איל אחר נאחז בסבך בקרניו, "And behold another ram was caught in the bushes by its horns," and Avraham sacrificed this animal instead of Yitzchak. The *miforshim* try to understand the word אחר, "another." Wasn't there only one ram?⁷

The Or LaShamayim (חוקת ד"ה עלי באר) answers in the name of the Chozeh of Lublin *zt'l* that

so He sent you the test. So, strengthening yourself through emunah isn't merely the way to deal with difficult times; your improved emunah is the reason for the tests, to begin with (Chibas HaAvodah).

5. This is the meaning of Chazal חבל על דאבדון ולא משתכחין (see Rashi beginning of Vaera). This can mean על דאבדון that even when they lost their emunah, ולא משתכחין, they didn't forget their emunah. They remained with as much emunah as they could, enabling them to successfully pass the tests that came their way.

6. The Targum Yonason (22:10) writes that during *akeidas Yitzchak*, "Avraham looked into Yitzchak's eyes, and Yitzchak looked up at the *malachim* in heaven, but Avraham didn't see the *malachim*."

Why did Yitzchak see the *malachim* and not Avraham?

The Targum Yonason (*ibid.*) writes that Yitzchak asked his father to tie him down firmly on the *mizbeiach* so he wouldn't jump from pain and disqualify the *korban*. So, Yitzchak was tied down, and there was nothing he could do to prevent the *akeidah* at that point. His part of the test was already completed. Therefore, he was permitted to see the great revelations at that time. But Avraham was in the middle of his test. Therefore, he couldn't see the *malachim*. There would be no test if he saw all that was transpiring in shomayim.

7. Rashi translates אחר as "after." He saw the ram *after* the *malach* addressed him, instructing him not to harm Yitzchak.

there is more than one *akeidas Yitzchak*. Whenever a person overcomes his *yetzer hara*, it is considered an *akeidas Yitzchak*.

The Chozeh explains the pasuk as follows:

והנה איל אחר, there are other *akeidas Yitzchaks*.

נאחז בסבך, when one is trapped in the lure of temptation and bad habits, and he overcomes them, it is another *akeidas Yitzchak*.

בקרני, the Or LaShamayim explains, can also mean "shine" (as in *Shemos* 34:35, *כי קרן עור פניו*, Moshe's face shone). When one passes his tests תהל אורו עד כסא הכבוד, "His light shines up to Hashem's throne."

It is encouraging to know that we can perform an *akeidas Yitzchak* even in our times. Whatever level you are on, when you overcome your nature and take a step forward, it is a sacrifice, an *akeidas Yitzchak*.

In *Shemoneh Esrei* of *Rosh Hashanah*, we say, ועקדת יצחק לזרעו היום תזכור, "Remember *akeidas Yitzchak* today..." We can explain that we ask Hashem to remember the *akeidos* that happen today, and every day, when we overcome the *yetzer hara*.

The *Shlah Hakadosh* (וירא דרך חיים תוכחת מוסר אות מ"ב) elaborates on how to perform an *akeidas Yitzchak* in our times. He writes:

"When we think about the self-sacrifice Avraham and Yitzchak displayed at the *akeidah*, we derive *mussar* that we, too, should be *moser nefesh* for Hashem. Certainly, one should be able to break a *taavah*. For example, to wake up early for Torah and tefillah or to refrain from pleasures, idle talk, and so on. One should forgo his will to do Hashem's will. If an *aveirah* comes his way, or a mitzvah, he should think, 'Perhaps Hashem is testing me now, similar to the test that Hashem gave Avraham. Because when a person knows that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is testing him, he will be cautious. Whenever a test arises, remember that it is Hashem that

is testing you. Fortunate is the person who always keeps Hashem in his thoughts."

How to Measure the Value of Avodas Hashem

The holy sefarim write that one can determine the importance of a mitzvah based on how much opposition he experiences. Because when a mitzvah is very important, the *yetzer hara* will try harder to prevent him from performing it.

For example, how did Avraham know it was a mitzvah to sacrifice the ram? We do not find that Hashem commanded him to do so. It's because when the ram ran to him, it got caught in the bushes (22:13 בקרניו). It was hard for the ram to come to Avraham. That's a sign that sacrificing the ram was a great *avodah*, and the *yetzer hara* was trying to prevent it.

Similarly, in *Megillas Rus*, Naomi tried to convince Rus to return to Moav. But then she changed her mind. This occurred when she saw that the young Rus struggled to keep up with her pace. As it states (*Rus* 1:18), ותרא כי מתאמצת היא ללכת אתה ותחדל לדבר עליה, "[Naomi] saw that Rus was struggling with all her might to walk beside her, and she stopped speaking with her." The *Gra* explains that Naomi understood from Rus's struggles to walk with her that her resolve was complete. Because when the *yetzer hara* tries to stop you, that indicates how special the mitzvah is.

The *parashah* begins with וירא אליו ה', And Hashem came to visit Avraham when he was ill (after the *milah*, see *Rashi*). The *Imrei Emes zt'l* explains that Hashem came to see how Avraham was serving Him even while sick. Because some people only serve Hashem when everything goes well for them. Hashem wanted to see Avraham serve Him when he was going through hard times.

It states (21:33) ויטע אשל, and *roshei teivos* for אכילה שתיה לווייה, referring to Avraham's

hachnasas orchim for tired and hungry travelers who benefited immensely from Avraham's kind service. However, the elaboration of Avraham's hospitable deeds is explicitly written at the beginning of the *parashah*, when he served the three *malachim* who didn't need to eat or drink!

Reb Shlomo Zalman Auerbach *zt'l* explains that the Torah wanted to elaborate on how Avraham's *hachnasas orchim* when he was weak, on the third day after his *milah*, because a *mitzvah* is measured according to how hard it is to perform.

Do As Much as You Can

Someone came to the Chofetz Chaim *zt'l* and said he wanted to take his son out of yeshiva to learn a trade. The Chofetz Chaim asked, "Does your son succeed in Torah? Does he learn well in the yeshiva?"

The father replied, "He studies quite well, but he won't become a Reb Akiva Eiger or the Pnei Yehoshua."

In other words, the father was saying that he doesn't think his son will turn out to be anyone more than a regular, good Jew. He won't be an outstanding *gadol* in Torah. So, he might as well learn a trade and earn a good *parnassah*.

The Chofetz Chaim changed the subject and spoke about some other matters. Then he asked the man what he does for *parnassah*. The man said, "I buy vegetables in the large market and sell them in my town. But I earn very little. Some produce becomes ruined while traveling, and some fall on the road and get lost. I barely make a living; I make just enough to buy bread and water for my home."

The Chofetz Chaim told him, "In my opinion, you should stop your business altogether. Anyway, you won't become a

Rothchild. You won't be wealthy, so what is the purpose?"

The man replied, "Yes Rothchild, not Rothchild, but I have to bring home some food for my children." The Chofetz Chaim replied, "Listen to what you are saying. You have to live (by selling vegetables), but your *neshamah* also has to live (by studying Torah), and every drop of Torah that your son learns will give you and your son life – spiritual life." The Chofetz Chaim explained to him that, like by a *parnassah*, one doesn't say, "I will only work if I can become very wealthy," because a drop of success in *parnassah* is also necessary, so, too, when it comes to Torah, one shouldn't say, "Either I become a genius in Torah, or I won't study at all." Even if you won't become a *gadol* in Torah, even if all your studies will just grant you one or two *masechtos*, it is still worthwhile.

The same applies to all aspects of *avodas Hashem*. The *yetzer hara* comes to a person and says, "I don't see that you will be from the greatest *tzaddikim*. It doesn't look like you will become a great *oved Hashem*. So why do you invest in *avodas Hashem* so much? This isn't a valid claim because every small accomplishment is needed and worthwhile.

The Beis Aharon (p.2:) writes, "Be very happy. Everything you do in *Avodas Hashem* should be very precious to you. Think: 'I won't sell this merit for all the money in the world!' Even if it is merely just one good word, thought, or deed. Nothing will be lost, and great things will come from it, for you and perhaps for the entire Jewish nation. Do whatever you can – be it big or small. As people say, 'Whatever you grab in the market is worthwhile.'"

There's a tale about the Golem of Prague. Once, someone gave him a large bag, sent

other time is in Bereishis (2:8) וַיִּטַּע ה' אֱלֹקִים גֶּן עֵדֶן. This teaches us that those who engage in *hachnasas orchim* will merit Gan Eden.

him to the sea, and told him to return home when the bag was filled with fish.

Many hours passed, and the *golem* didn't return, so people went to see what happened to him.

They found him standing on the edge of the sea, up to his knees in the water, trying to catch fish with his hands. His sack was half full.

"Come home," they called to him.

The *golem* showed them that his bag wasn't full yet.

They said, "We don't need any more fish."

The *golem* heard they didn't need fish, so he turned the sack over, and all the fish were returned to the sea.

This story is an excellent example of the "all or nothing" approach. We must cherish whatever we accomplish, even if it is a little.

We emulate Avraham's ways and try to pass all the tests Hashem sends us. However, as everyone knows, there won't be 100% success. We will fail sometimes. Perhaps we will fail most of the time. But that doesn't excuse us from trying our best. As Chazal (*Avos* 2:16) say, לא עליך המלאכה לגמור ולא אתה בן חורין, "לפטר ממה", "You are not obligated to finish, but you are also not permitted to raise your hands in despair." We must do what we can.⁹

Chazal (*Avos* 4:1) say, איזהו עשיר השמח בחלקו, "Who is happy? It is the person who is happy with his portion." The holy sefarim (*Sfas Emes*, *Tiferes Shlomo* [Ki Savo ושמחת ד"ה], and in *Menuchah v'Kedushah* [written by a student of Reb Chaim Vital, in the section *Shaar HaTorah* vol.2 23 quoting the *Vilna Gaon* zt'l]) say that also in *ruchniyus* matters one should be שמח בחלקו, happy with his portion. One should always strive for more, for better, but simultaneously, one should be happy with

his accomplishments, with whatever good deeds he succeeds in doing.

Joy In Serving Hashem

The *Arizal* (*Shaar HaKavanos*, *Tefilas HaShachar*) teaches, "Tefillah should be said with a lot of joy, as much as possible, like a servant who serves his master with a lot of joy. If he serves his master with sadness, the service will disgust the master." The same applies in all aspects of *avodas Hashem*, we should serve Hashem with immense joy.

The *Rambam* (*Hilchos Lulav* 8:15) writes, "The happiness that a person feels when he performs a *mitzvah*, with love to Hashem Who commanded him, is a great *avodah*."

The *Chareidim* writes, "Reb Yitzchak Ashkenazi zt'l (the *Arizal*) revealed to a close friend that everything he attained, the gates of wisdom and his *ruach hakodesh*, was his reward for performing *mitzvos* with unlimited joy."

The *Arizal* (*Shaar HaKavanos*) writes, "The ultimate perfection and *ruach hakodesh* is almost entirely dependent on this."

Reb Chaim Vital (*Introduction to Shaar HaMitzvos*) writes, "Many people perform *mitzvos*, and we don't see that they receive reward for the *mitzvos*, not even the rewards that should come to them in this world. This is because when performing a *mitzvah*, it shouldn't be like a yoke that one wants to finish quickly. When performing the *mitzvos*, one should understand that it is like he is earning millions of gold coins. He should be extremely and endlessly joyous with the *mitzvos*. It should be to him as if he received millions of gold coins for keeping just one *mitzvah*."

The *Chareidim* (*Introduction*) says that the *Arizal* taught this lesson when learning the

9. Rashi in last week's *parashah* (14:9) writes, "The war was four kings against five, and nevertheless, the four kings won the war. This proves that the four kings were extremely strong. Nevertheless, Avraham didn't refrain from chasing them." Because a person must do what he can, and then Hashem will help him.

words (Devarim 28:47) תחת אשר לא עבדת את ה' אלקיך בשמחה ובטוב לבב מרוב כל, "Because you did not serve Hashem, your G-d, with happiness and with gladness of heart, when [you had an] abundance of everything." The Arizal says that מרוב כל means "more than all pleasures of the world, more than gold and precious diamonds and gems." The pasuk is saying that a person must be happy with the mitzvos, even happier than a person who receives רוב כל, all the wealth and pleasures of the world.¹⁰

The pasuk is saying that the galus and yesurim came because we didn't serve Hashem joyfully. The Sfas Emes (5643, Ki Savo, ד"ה בפסוק) writes, "We should learn from this that certainly when Bnei Yisrael serve Hashem in galus with joy, although they lack so much, this will bring the geulah closer, with Hashem's help. The pasuk tells us the reason for the galus, so we can know how to rectify it – by doing the opposite. So be strong and serve Hashem with joy, even when one suffers yesurim."

Once, the Chafetz Chaim zt'l returned home from the mikvah on erev Shabbos and danced joyously. His family didn't know what it was about. He explained to them that he had just paid for the taxi (who drove him to his home in his horse and buggy), and by paying him, he had fulfilled the mitzvah of בימו תתן

שכרו, paying a worker on the day the service was performed. The Chofetz Chaim rejoiced that he was able to perform this mitzvah.

Grandchildren of the Chofetz Chaim once heard their grandfather making a cheshbon hanefesh. He said, "Yisrael Meir, it is true that you learn Torah and that you daven and keep the mitzvos, but where is your joy for the mitzvos?" He repeated this several times, and then the Chofetz Chaim said, "Yisrael Meir, you are still alive, and you can still keep the mitzvos with joy. Make a kabbalah that now you will begin serving Hashem with joy."¹¹

The Power of Tefillah

It states (22:7) ויאמר יצחק אל אברהם אביו ויאמר אבי, "Yitzchak spoke to Avraham, his father, and he said, 'Father.'"

The Divrei Yisrael zt'l teaches, "When Yitzchak called out to his father אבי, and Avraham replied הניני בני, 'Here I am, my son,' this made an impression in heaven, for all generations. Whenever a Yid cries out to his father in heaven and says אבי, 'Father!' from the depths of his heart, it will arouse Hashem's immense compassion, and Hashem will reply, הניני בני, 'Here I am, my son, ready and prepared to answer all your requests.'"¹²

10. It states תחת אשר לא עבדת את ה' אלקיך בשמחה ובטוב לבב, and is followed with the words ועבדת את אויבך. Reb Chaim Volozhiner zt'l explained that the pasuk is saying that ועבדת את אויבך, if you are going to do service with sadness, that is how you should serve your enemies. But, Hashem your G-d, you should serve with immense joy.

11. Reb Yisrael Dov Kastel zt'l studied in Novardok under Reb Yosef Yoizel Horowitz, the Alter of Novardok, zt'l. From time to time, Reb Yisroel Dov would travel to the Divrei Shmuel of Slonim zt'l. Once, after returning from an uplifting Shabbos with the Slonimer Rebbe, the Alter of Novardok asked him, "Please tell me clearly, what do you lack here, in yeshiva, that you go to Slonim?"

Reb Yisrael Dov replied, "In Novardok, the focus is on Olam Haba. We study Torah, and we daven intently in order to attain Olam HaBa. But I am not on this high level, to live solely for Olam HaBa. I am a baal taavah and want to enjoy this world, too. Therefore, I go to Slonim because I experience immense enjoyment when we say נשמת כל חי with a lot of kavanah, a pleasure that cannot be replicated. Also, the brachah אהבה רבה is so pleasurable and sweeter than anything in this world. קה אכסוף, too, is sung with so much joy and feeling."

12. Reb Avrahamele was a stone cutter in Yerushalayim. His parnassah was to smoothen the edges of

The Rebbe of Toldos Aharon zt'l was once swimming in the sea for health reasons. Suddenly, a strong current pulled him deep into the sea, distant from the shore. His life was in danger. With Hashem's miracles, he was saved. He told his grandson, Reb Asher Anshil HaKohen Katz Shlita, "What do you think I did at that time, when my life was in danger? Do you think I said viduy? Perhaps you think I shouted Shema Yisrael? Not at all. I shouted with all my strength, 'Tatte! Father! Only You can help me. Save me!' And then an undercurrent wave pushed me to the shore."

When one davens, he should feel that no one can help him except Hashem alone. Reb

Shimshon Pincus (Sha'arim b'Tefillah p.96) teaches that when a person davens with that thought in mind, Hashem will certainly answer his tefillos. But when he thinks he can be helped in other ways, keviyachol, Hashem doesn't feel the need to take full care of this person. He is looking to others to help him, so Hashem says let them try to help.

This can be compared to when a poor man comes to a wealthy person for help, and the wealthy person understands that the poor man doesn't have anyone else to go to other than him. He will likely help him. But when the wealthy person knows that the poor person plans to go to many people for financial help, he thinks, "I will help him

stones used for construction. Once, a heavy stone fell on Reb Avrahamele's legs, seriously injuring them. The doctors of his time in Yerushalayim weren't able to treat him, so they advised him to travel to Vienna. But he didn't have money for the trip or medical bills.

Reb Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld spoke to gabbai tzedakah in Yerushalayim and asked them to raise money for Reb Avrahamele. The gabaim managed to raise enough money to pay for the ship to Vienna, but not more than that. Reb Avrahamele traveled to Vienna, trusting that Hashem would help him come up with the money needed for his treatments.

In Vienna, he looked for someone he knew, someone who could help him, but didn't find anyone.

Reb Avrahamele sat down and cried bitterly. A person passed by and asked him why he was crying. Reb Avrahamele replied that he had arrived from Yerushalayim to cure his legs, but he didn't have money to pay the doctors. He went to hospitals, but no one agreed to treat him without payment.

The man immediately wrote some lines on a piece of paper and said, "Go to the best hospital in Vienna and give them this paper; they will treat your legs."

Reb Avrahamele, who didn't speak the language, had no idea what was written on the paper, but he sensed that somehow, Hashem had just answered his tefillos. He went to the best hospital in Vienna, and they immediately treated him with the greatest honor.

That same day, they operated on his legs, and they were completely cured. He received the best treatment. They kept him in the hospital until he was totally healed.

When he was ready to leave, he asked what was written on the paper. They told him, "The person who gave you the paper was Franz Josef, the emperor of Austria. For some reason, he took pity on you and commanded us to care for you as if you were his own, precious son."

Reb Avrahamele returned to Yerushalayim, where everyone was happy to see him healthy and well, walking on his own two feet. But Reb Avrahamele, himself, was slightly sad. Reb Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld asked him why he wasn't happy. Reb Avrahamele replied, "For some reason, Franz Josef had compassion on me and wrote a letter to the hospital to take good care of me. However, I am upset that I missed an opportunity to ask Franz Josef for more help. If I already found favor in his eyes, I could have asked him to cover all my debts. I could have asked for so much more."

My brothers and friends, when we find favor in Hashem's eyes, let us ask Him all of our needs, and Hashem will give us everything we need with great abundance.

a drop, but why should I help more than that? He is going to many people. Let them help him."

The same occurs when one comes to tefillah, feeling that others can help him other than Hashem. If he thinks so, Hashem can say, "Let them help him." But when one knows that no one can help him but Hashem, Himself, Hashem will certainly help him.¹³

Counsels to Daven with Kavanah

Everyone should pursue techniques that will help him daven with kavanah.

There was a Karliner chasid who lived in Brisk. The custom of Karliner chasidim is to daven loudly, and this chasid followed this way. The *litoishe* residents of Brisk didn't appreciate his loud tefillos and they wanted to rebuke him, but the Brisker Rav told them not to.

Once, the Brisker Rav was going to a hot-spring resort for his health, and he asked the Karliner chasid to come with him. As they traveled to the resort, the Brisker Rav said to the chasid in a very loud voice, "How are things!? How are you feeling!?"

The chasid replied, "Fine, Baruch Hashem, but why is the Rav shouting? I am standing right next to you."

The Brisker Rav replied, "Why do you shout during the tefillah? Hashem is right next to you."

The chasid replied, "I don't shout so Hashem can hear me. I shout, so I will hear myself. It helps me say the words with kavanah."

In contrast, it states (Tehillim 81:8) אֶעֱנֶה בְּסֵתֶר רָעַם, "I answered your call in secret, with thunder." Rebbe Mendel of Vorke zt'l said that the pasuk means a person can daven secretly and quietly, but it is a loud,

thunderous shout to heaven. Because although his words are silent, the heart is burning with emotion. אֶעֱנֶה, Hashem answers such tefillos.

There are various paths for tefillah, and a person should seek the path that works for him to help him daven with all his heart and soul. Some find that davening out loud helps them daven with kavanah, and some find it easier to daven in silence. Each person should desire to daven with kavanah because the importance of tefillah is so great, and he should seek the best approach to arouse his heart for tefillah.

Yaaras Devash (*Drush* 1) writes, "By the *brachah* of *Shma Koleinu*, one should request all his needs for the minor and significant matters of his life. There should be nothing that he doesn't pray for in this *brachah*. If he, his son, or his daughter needs a *shidduch*, it should be mentioned in this *brachah*. If he is a businessman, he should pray to Hashem that He lead him in the best way. He should pray to Hashem for success and direction for everything he plans to do that day.

"It goes without saying that if there is a *tzarah* (sorrow, strife) in his home, he should request [a salvation by this *brachah*]. If he has a *simchah*, he should pray that he shouldn't sin by the *simchah*, so this happy time shouldn't turn sour. He should pray in his own words for everything he has to do. Although his words aren't perfect and he doesn't know *lashon hakodesh* well, it will be precious to Hashem as if he prayed with beautiful and clear words. Hashem will listen to his words because this *tefillah* is said with *kavanah*...since every day, he says new words for the issues that he needs for that day. He is praying in his own words...and it is impossible to say such a prayer without *kavanah*. In this manner, he will have a perfect *tefillah* because it is ideal when it comes from the depths of the heart. As it

¹³. Even when he engages in hishtadlus, he knows that tefillah is ultimately the only way through which he can receive his needs.

says 'שיר המעלות ממעמקים קראתיך ד', 'from the depths, I call to you, Hashem' (*Tehillim* 130:1), this means from the depths of one's heart."

This is another way one can daven with kavanah. He can add to the tefillah personal requests,¹⁴ Because those requests are always said from the depths of one's heart.¹⁵

Hachnasas Orchim

The story of Avraham Avinu's *hachnasas orchim* and the three *malachim* is written in the past tense: "He took... He went... He hurried... etc. The exception is at the words (18:8), "והוא עומד עליהם תחת העץ ויאכלו, "[Avraham] stands above them..." These words are written in the present tense because, until today, when Yidden do *hachnasas orchim*, Avraham stands there and partakes in the mitzvah. As Rebbe Moshe of Kobrin *zt'l* teaches, when a Yid performs *hachnasas orchim*, Avraham comes and participates in the mitzvah.

Reb Chaim Brisker *zt'l* was once very ill as a child, and the doctors lost hope. Rebbe Moshe Kobriner was visiting Brisk at the time, and he stayed in the home of Reb Chaim's grandfather (Reb Itche Efron *z'l*, the father-in-law of the Beis HaLevi). The grandfather asked the Rebbe, "What will be with my Chaimke? He is so ill."

Rebbe Moshe Kobriner told him the *vort*, אברהם עומד, indicating that Avraham is present at every *hachnasas orchim*. He added, "Chazal (*Bava Basra* 16:) say, 'A precious stone hung from Avraham Avinu's neck. Whoever saw the

stone was healed.' Since you are hosting me and performing *hachnasas orchim*, Avraham Avinu is here, in this home. And Avraham wears the gem that brings *refuah*. Your Chaimke will surely have a *refuah sheleimah*."

And indeed, he did. (This story is written in *Machsheves Nachum*, by Reb Nachum Mikontikoziva-Chaifa. He adds that he told this story to Reb Chaim Brisker, and Reb Chaim said he also knows this story. He heard it from his father, the Beis HaLevi.)

Once, Rebbe Moshe Kobriner was a guest in the home of Rebbe Aharon Karliner *zt'l*, and Reb Aharon told him that his daughter was ill. Rebbe Moshe Kobriner said the sick girl, "Your father is performing *hachnasas orchim*. This means right now, he has the stone of healing hanging on his neck. Look at your father, and you will be healed."

Rebbe Moshe Mordechai of Lelov *zt'l* once spoke to his chassidim about a certain Yemenite tzaddik who fed hundreds of refugees who lost their homes in World War I.

One of the chassidim said, "I heard that this tzaddik was a *chavrusah* with one of the Kabbalah giants." He was implying that in addition to his *chesed*, this tzaddik was a scholar in the hidden parts of the Torah.

The Rebbe replied, "Why are you mentioning that? Right now, we are discussing that he fed hundreds of homeless Yidden..." As if to say the merit of feeding Yidden is so great, it isn't necessary to add anything else.

14. Two weeks before Reb Moshe Minder passed away, he told a young man, "Whenever you need a *yeshuah*, salvation, go to a private place, say a chapter or two of Tehilim, and then express before Hashem in your own words exactly what you need, and you will be helped."

15. At the end of the tefillah, we say עושה שלום במרומיו הוא יעשה שלום עלינו ועל כל ישראל. B'derech tzachus, it can be said that when a person returns from a trip abroad, people greet him and welcome him with a "shalom aleichem!" But when returning from a nearby city, the shalom aleichem isn't said with the same energy and warmth as when returning from a distant land. When we see someone who finished davening, we don't know where he is returning from, how far he traveled in his imagination and thoughts, whether he traveled far away or was relatively nearby. Therefore, we say to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, "You know where he went, and thus, הוא יעשה שלום עלינו, You should wish the person shalom aleichem. Because only Hashem knows how far the person went, and what style of greeting is appropriate upon his return."

The Sar Shalom of Belz *zt'l* built a majestic shul in Belz. Two generations later, his grandson, Rebbe Yissachar Dov of Belz *zt'l*, added on the Groiyse Shtub, a large room where the *tishen* were conducted, and food was served to Yidden. When the construction was complete, Rebbe Yissachar Dov said, "A thousand years ago, on this spot, there lived a Yid who excelled in the mitzvah of *hachnasas orchim* – like Avraham Avinu. When my grandfather built the shul, this Yid thought it was time for *techiyas hameisim*. He got out of his grave and came to my grandfather. The Sar Shalom told him it wasn't *techiyas hameisim* yet, and the *niftar* returned to his grave. In the merit of his *hachnasas orchim*, which he kept with all his might right at this spot, he merited that the Groiyse Shtub be built on this location."

The Maharil Diskin *zt'l* excelled in the mitzvah of *hachnasas orchim*. Many people ate in his home, and he would often learn at the side of the room. Once, the Maharil Diskin suddenly stopped his in-depth studies and went over to the table to help an old man pull the soft parts of the bread away from the crust because it was hard for this man to eat the crust.

People asked the Maharil Diskin, "You were immersed in your studies. How did you notice that this elderly man was struggling with his bread?"

The Maharal Diskin answered, "How did Avraham see the three malachim approaching? He was speaking with Hashem, totally engrossed in the conversation. How could he recognize the guests? The answer is that when a person is devoted to a mitzvah, he is alert and aware of everything associated with this mitzvah – at all times." The Maharil Diskin was dedicated to *hachnasas orchim*. Therefore, even when he was learning, he was aware of a guest's needs.

The Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 103:) states, גדולה לגימה, "It is a great deed to feed other people," and the Gemara describes the rewards and benefits that go to those who perform *hachnasas orchim*. One is ומעלמת עינים מן הרשעים, "Hashem doesn't look at the inequities of the *resha'im*." When one performs the mitzvah of *hachnasas orchim*, Hashem doesn't think about his aveiros.

The proof is Michah. The *Navi* (*Shoftim* 17) tells us that Michah made an idol and a temple for its worship. The Gemara states, "Migrav (where Michah's temple stood) was just three *mil* from Shilo (where Mishkan Shilo stood). The smoke of Michah's altar mixed with the smoke from Mishkan Shilo's *mizbeiach*. The *malachim* wanted to kill Michah. Hakadosh Baruch Hu said, 'Let him live, because פתו מצויה לעוברי דרכים, he gives bread to passing travelers.'" Michah had a *hachnasas orchim* stop on the road, and in that merit, Hashem overlooked his sins.¹⁶

16. The Avnei Nezer *zt'l* once served a guest who protested, "I'm a simple person. I don't deserve this honor."

The Avnei Nezer opened the window. There was a tannery across the street. The Avnei Nezer said, "In the tannery, they process hides. But when these hides become tefillin, they become holy. Similarly, regardless of your level, now you are a *chafetz shel mitzvah* (an item used for a mitzvah), so now you are holy.

The Chofetz Chaim *zt'l* was taking care of a guest. The guest protested, "You don't have to do this for me. Really, I can set up the room myself..."

"Really?" the Chofetz Chaim replied. "And tomorrow, will you wear tefillin for me?" *Hachnosas orchim* is a mitzvah, and the Chofetz Chaim insisted in performing the mitzvah himself.

As a *bachur*, Reb Chaim Brim *zt'l* would often travel to Bnei Brak to speak in learning with the Chazon Ish *zt'l*. After their conversation, he would return home to Yerushalayim. One night, he missed the last bus

Avraham told the guests (18:5), ואקחה פת לחם, "I will take bread..." It seems that he should have said, ואתנה פת לחם, "And I will give you bread." The Ahavas Yisrael zt'l replied that when one gives bread to the hungry, he is the one who "takes." As Chazal

say, "More than the wealthy do for the poor, the poor do for the wealthy," as he provides the opportunity to do the mitzvah, which has many segulos and brings many blessings. So, the one who gives is the one who receives.¹⁷

back, so he had to spend the night in Bnei Brak in the Chazon Ish's home.

Reb Chaim said he felt very uncomfortable that night because three great people doted over him: the Chazon Ish, the Steipler (the Chazon Ish's brother-in-law), and the Steipler's *rebbe*tzin. The Chazon Ish gave the orders; one brought *negel vasser*, one brought food, another prepared a bed... Reb Chaim pleaded, "Please don't do this for me." The Chazon Ish replied, "Since when does an *esrog* tell the person holding him how to be handled? Now you are a mitzvah, and you can't tell the people obligated to do this mitzvah how to perform it."

17. Avraham asked Sarah to prepare שלש סאים קמח, which is an awful lot of flour just for three guests. The Ben Ish Chai zt'l explains that Avraham wanted there to be *sharayim*, leftovers, because Avraham wanted to feed his household holy food.