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Rabbi Michael Rosensweig

Avraham Avinu and the Concept of Emunah

Rabbi Michael Rosensweig Avraham Avinu and the Concept of Emunah
The Rambam (Hilchos Yesodei ha-Torah 1:1) opens his magnum opus, the Mishneh Torah, by articulating the obligation to know (leida) Hashem's existence. In his Sefer ha-Mitzvot (aseh 1) and in his enumeration of the thirteen tenets of faith (Perush ha-Mishnayot, Introduction to perek Cheilek), he apparently formulates this central principle somewhat differently, accenting belief (le-haamin) instead of knowledge. R. Hayyim Heller (Sefer ha-Mitzvot, aseh 1) posits that there is no discrepancy between the various sources, as the original arabic term employed in Sefer ha-Mitzvot may connote either knowledge or belief. While this may resolve the potential conflict between Mishneh Torah and Sefer ha-Mitzvot, it does not address the context of the thirteen principles of faith, which surely emphasizes belief.

We may suggest based on R. Hayyim Heller's insight that the Rambam in all contexts demands a particularly rigorous standard of emunah that transcends the conventional definition of either knowledge or belief. Emunah conveys both affirmation and deep-seated conviction - "amen" - as well as unshakeable loyalty, trust and reliance - "neemanut" (see Rabbeinu Bachya, Kad ha-Kemach, Emunah). Intellectual awareness or even reasoned demonstration of Divine existence is insufficient if it is unaccompanied by unwavering dedication and commitment to the Divine Will. Superficial or uncritical belief that is not rooted in inquiry and introspection and that does not inspire one to channel all of one's faculties to manifest Hashem's presence ("kol azmotai tomarnah Hashem mi chamocho") is also inadequate. In Sefer ha-Mitzvot, the Rambam utilizes an intentionally ambiguous term in order to convey both cognizance and belief in a maximal and integrated manner. In fact, the Rambam (Shemot 20:2) explicitly requires both knowledge and belief ("sheyeideu ve-sheyaaminu"). The knowledge-belief implicit in this mitzvah must redefine man's purpose.

This intense and multifaceted notion of emunah stems from the earliest sources in Jewish history. The term emunah first surfaces in connection

with the Avraham Avinu, the father of the Jewish nation. It is surely significant that Avraham's pivotal theoretical odyssey in which he discovers monotheism goes undocumented in the Torah. The term emunah appears only in the context of Avraham's perspective on belief in the face of serious challenges and only after he has already established himself as a quintessential oved Hashem. When Hashem reaffirms that Avraham's legacy will be secured by his progeny even as impending fatherhood seemed inconceivable, the Torah informs us that Avraham exhibited extraordinary emunah - "ve-he-emin ba-Hashem vayachsheveha le-tzedakah" (Bereishit 15:6).

Rashi and other mefarshim interpret that Hashem was impressed with Avraham's extraordinary emunah, considering it a tzedakah. What was so singular about this particular act of belief? Had not Avraham previously established his credentials as a man of faith and belief (see Radak 15:3,6)? The Ramban dismisses Rashi's reading because Avraham was already a recognized prophet. Moreover, if he was willing to sacrifice his only and beloved son as an act of faith, why does his acceptance of good tidings constitute his quintessential belief moment? Rashi seems to address this question when he comments that Avraham did not ask for a confirming sign. The Radak and Seforno add that Avraham's absolute conviction was unique. This sense of unwavering certainty was especially significant given the near impossibility of the task. Rav Hirsch (Bereishit 15:6) notes the difference between "emunah ba - belief in" which implies a depth of conviction and "emunah la" (see Shemot 4:1) which can be more limited and tentative. Perhaps this usage also accentuates that the faith exhibited relates not merely to a particular promise or aspiration but to the totality of the relationship with Hashem.

One might further explain that Avraham was commended in this case precisely for the depth and profundity of his belief, not merely his responsiveness. This particular achievement was one of pure emunah-belief rather than bitachon-reliance. In describing Avraham's performance in the akeidah, the Torah underscores his yirat Shamayim ("attah yadati ki yerei Elokim atah..."), not his belief or faith (although these were obviously a sine qua non, as well). In this respect, we may address the Ramban's critique. The fact that Avraham's absolute conviction was divorced from the need to motivate towards a course of action, that there was no test or need to rise to a particular challenge was singular. Absent any particular objective, Avraham simply accepted Hashem's remarkable vision of Klal Yisrael's destiny as a concrete reality. Moreover, Avraham recognized that he would never experience the total prophecy that his descendant's would proliferate, and yet he was permeated with unwavering emunah ba-Hashem that it would occur.

Avraham Avinu's special capacity for emunah was implanted in the nation. It is instructive to examine a parallel report of Klal Yisrael's emunah in the aftermath of keriat Yam Suf (Shemot 14:31). In this context, as well, the Torah reports the attainment of "vayaminu ba-Hashem". It is noteworthy that this level of emunah does not result directly from witnessing keriat ha-yam ("vayar Yisrael et ha-yad hagedolah asher asah Hashem be-Mitzrayim"), but only after the nation had fully absorbed the profound implications of this event ("vayeerui ha-am et Hashem. Vayaameenu ba-Hashem..."). As in the case of Avraham, this emunah is not a necessary motivation for meeting a particular challenge, but stands independently as a shining moment and pivotal achievement of avodat Hashem. Indeed, this attainment inspires the shirah that follows! Following the paradigm of Avraham, the themes of yirat Hashem and emunah ba-Hashem for Klal Yisrael are related, but also distinct.

Avraham Avinu's concept of emunah was foundational to his other accomplishments. Undoubtedly, his great stature in the realm of chesed-tzedakah was also shaped by his unique capacity for emunah ba-Hashem. This conclusion is supported by an alternative reading of the verse ("ve-heemin ba-Hashem va-yachsheveha le-tzedakah") according to which Avraham's emunah was consequential to his tzedakah.

Although the Torah does not document Avraham's initial discovery of Hashem's existence, the subsequent description of his character and actions proves that the experience was spiritually transforming. The overflowing love for Hashem that motivated Avraham to seek to inspire others to embrace a life of avodat Hashem (see Sefer ha-Mitzvot, aseh 3) evidently had its source in this intense emunah experience. When Avraham accepts Hashem's reassurance about the immediate and distant future with total conviction, perhaps his impressive specific act of belief-faith also triggers a retrospective appreciative acknowledgement of his initial and broader emunah quest, as well. "Ve-heemin ba-Hashem va-yachsheveha le-tzedakah" may then refer also to Avraham's original achievement. This approach to emunah that integrates knowledge and faith was exhibited by Klal Yisrael prior to the shirat ha-yam, is articulated in the first of the ten commandments, and is codified by the Rambam as the first and foundational mitzvah of the Torah.

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Rabbi Frand on Parshas Lech Lecha

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape #610, The Widow and the Divorcee – How Long Must they wait to remarry?

Things Start With An Argument, And They Go Downhill From There
The pasuk [verse] in this week's parsha says, "And also with Lot who accompanied Avraham there was flock and cattle and tents" [Bereshis 13:5]. Rashi explains that through his association with the Patriarch Avraham, Lot was also blessed with great wealth. But the Torah continues "And the land was not able to bear them that they might dwell together; for their substance was great so that they could not dwell together." [ibid. 13:6] This last pasuk apparently contains a glaring redundancy. The fact that the land was not big enough for both of them is mentioned both at the start and the end of the pasuk! What is the repetition teaching us? The Shemen HaTov provides us with a very true insight:

There was a two-stage development here. First because of the abundance of cattle each owned, they got into a dispute regarding grazing rights. As a result of this dispute "they were unable to live together". This is the nature of arguments. There may be valid and understandable reasons for the original dispute. But once people begin to argue, the reason why they started arguing might almost become immaterial. They will eventually get to the point where each party cannot stand to be in the presence of the other.

This is exactly what the pasuk is telling us. It started out as a fight over grazing rights. Ostensibly, the fight began because there was not enough room. But once they began to argue over grazing rights, the argument escalated. Things got out of hand. The parties got to a point where it did not matter anymore why they started arguing. Simply, "they could not dwell together" anymore!

We see the same idea in Parshas Toldos when Yitzchak's shepherds fought with the shepherds in Gerar [Bereshis 26: 19-22]. Each side claimed: "The water is ours". Therefore they called the name of the well Striving (Esek) because they fought over it (hisasku imo). Then they dug another well and they fought over it as well. They called the second well 'Conflict' (Sitnah). By the second well, the Torah already does not state the reason for the fight; it merely states they called the name of the well 'Sitnah'.

The idea is exactly as we said before. Initially, the conflict was over water rights, but once the controversy took place, then the people could not stand each other anymore. By the second well, they were prepared to argue with one another for no reason at all.

Rabbi Frand on Parshas Lech Lecha

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion:

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EMES LIYAAKOV

Weekly Insights from MOREINU

HORAV YAAKOV KAMENETZKY ז"ל

Weekly Insights from Moreinu HaRav Yaakov Kamenetzky ז"ל

And there was a famine in the land. And Avram descended to Egypt..."

Rashi comments on this pasuk "The whole test of Lech L'Cha was that Avraham should go down to Eretz Canaan just because Hashem had said so. Now, that right after Avraham had come down to Canaan, the new test was that Hashem would ask him to move his whole household again, and go down to Mizrayim."

The explanation of Rashi seems to be that what the pasuk is saying is that this was all a test to see whether Avraham would be able to listen to the words of Hashem and not ignore them by staying in Eretz Canaan. However, the pshat of the Ramban seems to be that Avraham did not perfectly pass this test. The aveira that Avraham did was that if he was on a great enough level, he would have been able to rely totally on Hashem, even in a time of crisis like this famine, and would have had the inner strength to stay in Eretz Canaan. Instead he needed to descend to Egypt, and didn't fully trust in Hashem. Therefore, as a punishment according to Hashem's system of justice of midah kineged midah, Avraham's descendants, the bnei yisroel, were forced to go down to Egypt as well. According to these ways of learning, however, the Ramban seems to argue completely with Rashi. Where Rashi says that Avraham was given and passed a difficult test, the Ramban says he was given a different type of test together and that he failed! How can they argue in such a way?! So HaRav Yaakov Kamenetzky ז"ל gives the following answer. In truth, Rashi and the Ramban aren't really arguing. They were just talking about different levels that Avraham was on at that time in history. Rashi says he was given an easier test, since he was on an ascertain lower level, and therefore he passed with flying colors. Whereas the Ramban says that he was really on a high level, and the test was whether he would totally rely on Hashem or not, and apparently he wasn't on a lofty enough level to see the truth that he should have just trusted in Hashem instead of going down to Mizrayim. So they really are just saying he was on different levels of greatness at that time.

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Long Term Investment by Rabbi Josh Kahn

One of the more cryptic personalities in Sefer BeReishit is Haran, Avraham Avinu's brother. The Pesukim do not tell us much about Haran and a few Midrashim include only brief stories. Yet, it is from Haran that David HaMelech was destined to descend (through Lot who had a son, Moav, who had a descendant, Rut who was David HaMelech's grandmother). What was it about Haran that merited such a great descendant? The most famous episode of Haran is described by the Midrash (BeReishit Rabbah 38:13) and recounts Haran's tragic death. After Avraham destroyed the idols of his father, Terach, King Nimrod threw Avraham into a burning furnace. With Divine assistance, Avraham managed to emerge from the furnace unscathed. While Avraham was in the furnace, Haran made a calculated decision that if Avraham miraculously emerged alive, Haran too would believe in God. But if Avraham would die in the furnace, Haran would reject the beliefs that Avraham had espoused. Consequently, when Avraham came out of the furnace, Haran declared his loyalty to Avraham and was then himself thrown into the furnace by Nimrod. But because Haran did not have the same absolute faith in God, he did not merit being saved, as Avraham had. Interestingly, the Matnot Kehunah, a commentary on the Midrash, notes that Haran's deficiency in Emunah was not in waiting until he saw Avraham return safely from the furnace to declare his belief in Hashem. Rather, when Haran allowed himself to be thrown into the furnace, it was with confidence that Hashem would perform a miracle for him and return him alive. Avraham had no such demands on Hashem, but rather believed that G-d would deal with the situation appropriately and for the best. This provides two fundamental insights into Emunah and the impact it has on our wishes. Specifically, trust in G-d means deferring to what He thinks is best, even if that is not what we had in mind. Secondly, as soon as doubt creeps in, we become lacking in complete faith and so become susceptible to natural consequences. The Sfat Emet suggests that Haran's merit can be attributed to the Mesirat Nefesh (willingness to sacrifice) he displayed by risking and ultimately losing his life in service of Hashem. Although this episode may be seen as Haran making a safe, calculated decision, the Midrash does not mention others who were willing to do what Haran did. Haran displayed incredible faith in siding with Avraham. However, how does this story relate more specifically to the merit of David HaMelech being a descendant of Haran? Although Haran may have been confused, the one concept he grasped was the need to attach himself to a Tzaddik such as Avraham. The loyalty that Haran ultimately displayed to his brother, Avraham, was a unique characteristic, especially during those times, to the extent that Haran risked his life to stay loyal to Avraham. This loyalty was passed down to Lot, who traveled with Avraham to Eretz Yisrael, again based on loyalty to Avraham. Lot, like his father, Haran, had a confused sense of loyalty but Lot remained quiet when they went to Egypt and Avraham said Sarah was his sister. This is another example of the loyalty of Lot to Avraham. Haran's loyalty was bequeathed to Lot. However, the difference between Avraham and Haran was too significant, leading to the ultimate split that would happen between Avraham and Haran's son, Lot. The Slonimer Rebbe points out a fundamental difference between Avraham and Lot. When the two split, Lot chose to go to Sedom, the paradigm of physical pleasure, whereas Avraham chose the spiritual path. This description of Lot as confused between the spiritual and physical, began a generation before, with his father Haran. Avraham survived the burning furnace because anything all-spiritual is not consumed by fire. But Haran was killed by the fire as a result of his physical interests. This duality of Haran was shared by Lot. Ultimately, the descendant

who broke the legacy of Haran and Lot was Rut. Rut retained the loyalty of her ancestors, remaining connected to Naomi a descendant of Avraham, much as Haran and Lot were loyal to Avraham. However, Rut was willing to sacrifice everything in order to remain with Naomi. Rut rose to the next level, resulting in her being the progenitor of the royal house of David. The seeds planted by Haran began to grow with Lot, but ultimately were realized thousands of years later by Rut. It is important for us to focus on both Avraham and Rut, emulating their model of Emunah, and not Haran and Lot's example of lacking absolute belief.

Walking Before Hashem by Nachi Farkas

Noach and Avraham share many distinct attributes. Each of them became the father of a great people, all of humankind in Noach's case and the Jewish nation in Avraham's. The linguistic parallels between the Pesukim that describe Noach and those that describe Avraham establish an even deeper connection between them. The Pasuk which describes Noach, "Noach Ish Tzaddik Tamim Hayah BeDorotav Et HaElokim Hithalech Noach," "Noach was a righteous man, perfect in his generations, Noach walked with God," (BeReishit 6:9) starkly resembles the Pasuk in which Hashem commands Avraham, "Hithaleich Lifanai VeHyeih Tamim," "Walk before Me and be perfect" (17:1). Similar though they may be, certain discrepancies between their actions clearly distinguish the natures of Avraham and Noach. Noach was the type of man who followed Hashem no matter what; he did not act without being commanded. Conversely, when he lacked directives, he remained motionless, as evidenced by his remaining aboard the Teiva until Hashem commanded him to leave. Noach did not question Hashem's judgment but rather completely accepted Hashem's decisions, as the Pesukim indicate by never noting an appeal from Noach to Hashem to save the world. Avraham, on the other hand, assumes an opposite approach. He does not wait for Hashem to give him a command before taking the initiative. For example, he sets out to rescue Lot before receiving the command. Avraham is also not afraid to question Hashem, doing so on multiple occasions. On one instance, Avraham questions how Hashem intends to make him the father of a great nation as he lacked children. In another instance, he challenges Hashem's decision to destroy Sedom, pleading until he is forced to concede that the city is corrupt. The essence of their differences lies in the fact that Noach walked with G-d while Avraham was to walk before God. Walking with G-d connotes always being on the same page as G-d and having no qualms or problems with following Hashem's commands to the letter. Walking in front of G-d does not allow for the same trust as walking beside Him, as the person walking in front does not know exactly what is transpiring behind him. Walking in front of G-d leaves room for questioning and challenging.

Avraham was chosen as the patriarch of the Jewish nation because even though he walked in front of God, he "followed" Hashem just the same. As Bnei Avraham, we must learn from Avraham to follow Hashem's will, even while we occasionally question that which we do not understand. Through this, we will be able to walk before Hashem and become "Tamim," perfect.

Sacrificing Spiritual Growth by Yakir Forman

After defeating the alliance of the four kings and releasing his nephew Lot from captivity, Avram receives a vision from Hashem, who reassures him saying, "Al Tira Avram Anochi Magein Lach Secharecha Harbeih Me'od," "Fear not, Avram, I am a shield for you; your reward is very great" (BeReishit 15:1). Rashi explains that this vision was necessary because Avram was afraid that during the war he had already received rewards for all his merits and was going to be punished for killing the kings' armies. Therefore, Hashem gave him a two-part assurance: "Anochi Magein Lach," "I am a shield for you," protecting Avram against the punishment that was due to him, and "Secharecha Harbeih Me'od," "Your reward is very great," telling Avram that he does not have to fear the depletion of his merits as

Hashem still has much reward in store for him. Rav Moshe Shternbuch, in his *Sefer Taam VaDaat*, asks why Avram had any reason to be afraid. He fought the war with the good intention of saving his nephew, and as a result he shouldn't have deserved punishment; he should have gained merits and increased his future reward! Rav Shternbuch answers that although Avram knew that attempting to save his nephew was a good action, he was afraid he chose the wrong means to do so. Avram could have tried to bribe the four kings to release Lot, which would have saved many lives. However, he chose to fight a war in which he was vastly outnumbered (the Midrash claims that only Avram and Eliezer fought the four kings), so that Hashem would perform a miracle and his victory would demonstrate publicly that everything was dependent upon Hashem. The outcome of the war would influence others to serve Hashem. Nevertheless, Avram was afraid after the war that the reward of Nisim Geluyim, obvious miracles, had depleted too many of his merits in Olam HaZeh. Additionally, he was afraid his reward in Olam HaBa would be diminished as well because the Nisim Geluyim would influence him so much that he would no longer have Bechirah Chofshit, free choice, in a test whether or not he believes in Hashem. After seeing Hashem's miracles, it wouldn't be possible for Avram not to believe in Him. Due to Avram's worries, Hashem reassured him stating, "Anochi Magein Lach" – I will not punish you for asking for Nisim Geluyim, and your merits in Olam HaZeh will remain intact – and "Secharecha Harbeih Me'od" – you will keep your great reward in Olam HaBa even though you have depleted your Bechirah Chofshit. Rav Shternbuch then quotes the Chafetz Chaim's explanation of the Pasuk in Kriat Shema that states, "VeAhavta Eit Hashem Elokecha BeChol Levavecha U'VChol Nafshecha U'VChol Me'odecha," "You shall love Hashem, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your Me'od" (Devarim 6:5). The word Me'od means "very much," and in this context is usually translated as money, which is something people love very much. The Chafetz Chaim interprets Me'od as something else which people love very much: their spirituality. It is important to be ready to give up even a spiritual sense of accomplishment to love Hashem. Combining this with Rambam's view (*Sefer HaMitzvot Mitzvat Aseih 3*) that influencing others to serve Hashem is included in loving Him, Rav Shternbuch suggests that this is why Avram did not lose Sechar in Olam HaBa. By asking for Nisim Geluyim and diminishing his Bechirah Chofshit, Avram lost a large amount of personal spiritual satisfaction he would have experienced after making the right decision in future tests of Emunah. Now, after seeing the Nisim Geluyim, Avram wouldn't see it as so great to pass those tests. This should have diminished his Sechar for passing those tests. However, since Avram's goal in asking for those Nisim Geluyim was to influence others to worship Hashem, which according to Rambam is part of Ahavat Hashem, he received Sechar for sacrificing that spiritual satisfaction to love Hashem. In the vision, Hashem reassured him that that sacrifice had not caused a depletion of his Sechar, and this is why "Secharecha Harbeih Me'od." Although we may not be able to reach the level of Avraham Avinu, we must remember that we should be ready to help others in their relationship with Hashem and not just focus on ourselves. Even though it may seem that we are diminishing our own spiritual accomplishments in doing so, our Sechar remains intact, and we fulfill the important Mitzvah of "VeAhavta Eit Hashem Elokecha...BeChol Me'odecha."

Avraham's Eternal, Grueling Test by Shlomo Klapper

Hashem commands Avraham Avinu, "Lech Lecha MeiArtzecha," "Go for yourself from your land" (BeReishit 12:1), which, according to Rashi, means that Avraham should leave his land for his own benefit. However, if Hashem told Avraham to leave his land and birthplace for his own benefit, why is this command numbered among Avraham's ten tests? The Panim Yafot explains that to fulfill Hashem's command LiShmah, for Heaven's sake, is not an easy task; moreover, doing something completely LiShmah

is exponentially more difficult if the person who does it benefits directly from his duty. Albeit Hashem told him that Eretz Yisrael will bring him personal benefit, Avraham trekked to Israel with no intentions other than to obey Hashem's command, a task far harder than simply obeying Hashem's command. The Torah records that "KaAsher Dibeir Eilav Hashem," "(Avraham went) as Hashem had spoken to him" (12:4), exemplifying how Avraham's personal gain played no role in his fulfillment of Hashem's command and his only goal was to obey Hashem. Rav Chaim of Volozhin suggests an alternative, though similar, approach based on a teaching of Antignos Ish Socho (Avot 1:3). The Mishnah teaches that one should serve Hashem not out of a desire to be rewarded but rather out of love, yet the Gemara (Sotah 14a) teaches that Moshe Rabbeinu longed to enter Israel in order to fulfill and get reward for the Mitzvot HaTeluyot BaAretz, the commandments that can be fulfilled only in Israel. How can the Mishnah teach thus in light of Moshe's motive? Rav Chaim explains that God, as the Ultimate Good, desires to inundate others with His kindness; however, favors are humiliating to the beneficiary if not properly earned. Thus, Hashem created Mitzvot to be fulfilled so He could properly bestow His kindness, and one who ideally performs Mitzvot wants to enable Hashem to fulfill His wish of bestowing kindness upon others. Perhaps Chazal intend this when they state in Pirkei Avot (4:2), "The Reward of a Mitzvah is a Mitzvah," since allowing Hashem to have pleasure by doing a Mitzvah and obtaining His compassion is a Mitzvah in itself. This ideal Mitzvah-doer would thus not care if his reward went to someone else. Since, however, most of us are not on this level, Antignos felt it necessary to warn us not to serve Hashem as a servant who seeks reward. Only Moshe, who was totally dedicated to Hashem, legitimately could do Mitzvot and receive reward, in order that Hashem's desire to bestow kindness be satisfied. Thus, we can understand Avraham's test. Even though immigrating to Israel was for Avraham's good, Hashem was testing Avraham whether his motives for fulfilling the Mitzvah were ideal, and Avraham fulfilled the Mitzvah to facilitate Hashem's wish, or whether Avraham would fulfill the Mitzvah for the enticing materialistic rewards. Avraham passes the test, as the Torah writes, "KaAsher Dibeir Eilav Hashem," "(Avraham went) as Hashem had spoken to him" (12:4). Rav Pinchas Horowitz of Frankfurt, the author of the *Haflaah*, explains that the test was solely about Avraham's motivation to leave his land. Would Avraham go to Israel because of the material gains, or would he leave to fulfill Hashem's command? Avraham's motivation was the latter, as the Torah writes "KaAsher Dibeir Eilav Hashem," "(Avraham went) as Hashem had spoken to him" (12:1). Facing the test to determine if he was worthy of fathering a nation that will inherit Israel, Avraham disregarded his physical and financial needs and jumped at the opportunity to make Aliyah, as Hashem commanded. From these three approaches we see about a modulated version of Avraham's test in our own lives. This test of uprooting himself and moving, the Midrash HaGadol teaches, was the hardest test posed to Avraham, who disregarded financial needs and made Aliyah to fulfill Hashem's will. Nowadays, we are blessed that Jews control much of the land of Israel, but uprooting oneself and making Aliyah is still a grueling test, as it was in Avraham's time. Jews, however, belong in Israel. No other nation banished from their native land for two millennia has prayed thrice daily for return or kept the nation's name the same as the land's (the etymology of 'Jews' is Judea, another name of Israel). One does not have to look far in the Torah to realize that it is Hashem's will for His children to be in the land He promised to them, Israel. Perhaps after more fully understanding Avraham's test and that the same test applies today, we, children of Avraham, should strongly consider following in his footsteps.

Opening Refrigerators on Shabbat - Part 1 of 1 by Rabbi Chaim Jachter

The question of opening refrigerator doors on Shabbat has been a matter of debate for many decades. In this essay we will outline the various approaches taken by the eminent Halachic authorities on this issue. We will discuss the situation in which the refrigerator light has been extinguished

and thus does not pose a Halachic challenge. Our focus will be the concern that opening the refrigerator door causes the motor (known as a compressor) to start earlier than it would have, had the door remained closed. Opening the refrigerator door allows warm air to enter, thereby causing a rise in temperature which will inevitably cause the motor to go on sooner.

It is important at the outset to delineate which specific Halachic issues we are concerned with, and whether the issue involves violating a Torah or rabbinic level prohibition. Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, in an incredibly brilliant responsum (Teshuvot Minchat Shlomo 1:10) distinguished by incisive Halachic insights and mastery of the mechanics of how a refrigerator operates, demonstrates that the possible concern is of violating a rabbinic prohibition and not a biblical transgression. He notes that, in most refrigerators, metal is not heated until it glows. He explains that even though there are gases that are heated in the refrigeration cycle, heating these gases does not constitute an act of Bishul (cooking). Among his reasons are that the gases are not heated by a fire source (see Rambam's Commentary to the Mishna, Shabbat 4:1) and that heating a gaseous substance does not constitute Bishul. Rav Shlomo Zalman continues to explain that even those (see Chazon Ish Orach Chaim 50:9) who rule that completing an electric circuit which powers an appliance constitutes a Biblical prohibition of Boneh (building) or Makeh B'patish (completing an item) would concede that causing the refrigerator motor to go on earlier does not violate these prohibitions. This is because Boneh or Makeh B'patish is violated only when turning on the electric appliance. The Chazon Ish (see letter published in Minchat Shlomo no. 11) explains that turning on an electric appliance constitutes Boneh because one brings the appliance "from death to life." However, once the refrigerator is plugged in, the action cannot be described as bringing it from death to life by making the motor go on earlier. Moreover, since the motor will turn off by itself shortly after it goes on, only a rabbinic prohibition is violated. An action is biblically forbidden only if the resulting product is a lasting one (Shel Kayama). Thus, the only possible prohibition involved in causing the motor to go on earlier is the rabbinic prohibition to cause a current flow (see Teshuvot Beit Yitzchak 2:31). Accordingly, the issue of opening a refrigerator is a question of whether a rabbinic prohibition is violated, not a biblical prohibition. Therefore, the possibility of a lenient ruling is considerably greater since there is no concern in this situation of violating a biblical prohibition.

Opening the Refrigerator Door While the Motor is Running Rabbi Jachter

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach argues that opening the refrigerator while the motor is running is unquestionably permissible despite the fact that the motor will remain on longer because the refrigerator door was opened. He reasons that opening the door merely preserves the status quo. It is analogous to the Halacha (Shulchan Aruch O.C. 277:2), that one may close the door that is opposite a fire. This is not considered extinguishing because in the words of the Mishnah Brurah (277:11) "even though the wind would have magnified the fire [had the door remained open] one does not violate the Melachah (forbidden category of labor) of Mechabeh (extinguishing a fire) since he did not perform any action, and if the fire will become extinguished as a result it, is of no concern to us." The Shulchan Aruch HaRav (277:1) explains that this action is not considered even an indirect one (Grama), since he merely prevented the introduction of an impediment to maintaining the status quo (Mene'at Mone'a). Similarly, opening the refrigerator door while the motor is running, merely removes an impediment to the motor continuing to run. Almost all Poskim believe that it is permissible to open the refrigerator door while the motor is running (Teshuvot Har Zvi O.C. 1:151, Teshuvot Igrot Moshe O.C. 2:68, and Teshuvot Yabia Omer 1: O.C. 21).

Opening the Door When the Motor is not Running - Rav Shlomo Zalman's Approach The question of opening the door when the motor is not running, however, has engendered much debate. Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach rules that it is entirely permissible to do so. In fact, he writes that it is not right to be strict on this matter, as it will limit his Oneg Shabbat, enjoyment of Shabbat. The lenient ruling is based on the fact that opening up the door will not immediately cause the motor to turn on. The inevitable time delay between the opening of the door and causing the motor to go on leads Rav Shlomo Zalman to classify this as a "Grama" - "Koach Sheini" (indirect action, secondary reaction). It is analogous to the following classic case discussed in the Gemara (Sanhedrin 77b). An individual ties up another in front of a powerful stream of water stopped by a dam and releases the dam and thereby kills the victim. If the water killed the person immediately (see Rashi s.v. Girei), then the perpetrator is to be punished with death because he killed directly (Koach Rishon). However, if the water didn't kill him immediately (i.e. there was a significant time delay between the action of releasing the dam and the rushing waters killing the victim), the perpetrator is not subject to the death penalty because he has killed indirectly (Koach Sheini). Similarly, the opening of the doors and allowing the warm air to flow into the refrigerator will take at least a few seconds before it will affect the motor and cause it to go on. Grama alone is insufficient reason to permit an activity, since the Rama (O.C. 334:22 and see Biur Halacha ad. locum. s.v. DeGram Kibui) rules that Grama is permitted only in situations of great need. Rav Shlomo Zalman asserts, however, that since one's intention is merely to open the door and not to turn on the refrigerator's motor, Grama would be permissible in all situations even absent any unconventional needs. Moreover, he writes that since he is only causing the motor to go on earlier than it would have gone on without his opening the refrigerator door, (also see Teshuvot Minchat Shlomo 1:91:10) one may treat the act of opening of the door even more leniently than Grama. Thus, opening the refrigerator door would be permissible in all situations. Rav Zalman Nechemia Goldberg (a leading Halachic authority who is the son-in-law of Rav Auerbach) told me that it is not necessary to close the refrigerator door as soon as possible after opening it according to the approach of Rav Shlomo Zalman. The reasoning behind the lenient approach applies even if one does not rush to close the door soon after it is opened.

Opening the Refrigerator Door when the Motor is not Running- The Strict Approach Many Poskim concur with Rav Shlomo Zalman's lenient approach. Indeed, Rav Aharon Lichtenstein told me that Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik agreed with the lenient approach. Rav Moshe Feinstein (Teshuvot Igrot Moshe O.C IV: 74- Bishul -28) seems to fully accept Rav Shlomo Zalman's ruling (also see Teshuvot Igrot Moshe O.C. 2:68), as does Rav Eliezer Waldenburg (Tzitz Eliezer 8:12 and 12:92). Encyclopedia Talmudit 18:663 note 13 lists other authorities who subscribe to the lenient approach. Many eminent authorities, on the other hand, either rule strictly (Teshuvot Har Zvi O.C. 1:151, Teshuvot Chelkat Yaakov 3:179, and Teshuvot Minchat Yitzchak 2:16) or at the least recommend that one to be strict if possible (Rav Yosef Henkin, Eidut LeYisrael p. 122 and Rav Ovadia Yosef, Teshuvot Yabia Omer 1:O.C. 27). The problem is that once an action is performed routinely it cannot be classified merely as Grama (see Shabbat 120b and Rabbeinu Chananeil ad. loc. s.v. Rav Ashi and Bava Kama 60a and Rosh Bava Kama 6:11). Rav Shlomo Zalman responds that this applies only when one intends to create the resultant action. When opening the door one does not intend to turn on the motor.

Conclusion – Caution Necessary Common practice is to be lenient on this practice, although some people adopt the strict approach. In fact, the Shemirat Shabbat Kehilchata (10:12) counsels one who wishes to be strict to set the refrigerator on a timer, so that the motor shuts off entirely at certain times and to open the refrigerator only during those times. The Shemirat Shabbat Kehilchata (10:14) cautions that all opinions agree that it is forbidden to open a refrigerator in which a fan goes on when one opens the door and shuts when he closes the door, just as one cannot open a

refrigerator if it will cause a light to go on. A remedy to this problem is to tape the switch or otherwise disconnect the fan before Shabbat and Yom Tov. In addition, Rav Shlomo Zalman cautions that his lenient ruling applies only to a refrigerator that works on a compressor system and not to refrigerators that have a heating element. This concern is relevant to refrigerators used in many recreational vehicles which are gas powered. Rav Shlomo Zalman also expresses concern regarding the defrosting systems of refrigerators. Some models have incorporated an adaptive defrost feature which is triggered by the opening of the refrigerator door. Moreover, more expensive models have features such as sensors and illuminated digital readouts that introduce Halachic complications. Accordingly, one must exercise caution when purchasing a refrigerator that it not be source of Halachic problems for use on Shabbat and Yom Tov. For further discussion and guidance regarding potential Halachic problems with certain models as well as potential solutions, see the essay in Kashrus Kurrents available at www.star-k.org/kashrus/kk-cooling-keepcool.htm.

Postscript A primary basis of the lenient opinion is that no biblical prohibition is involved in the opening of a refrigerator door. However, opening an oven door is potentially a more severe issue because opening the door causes cool air to enter the oven causing the fire to go on - a Biblical prohibition- unlike the question of opening a refrigerator door on Shabbat.

Accordingly, Rav Moshe Heinemann (cited in the above referenced Kashrus Kurrents essay) rules that one should not open the door to a lit oven unless he opens the door one time in order to remove the food so that the burning to follow is unintended (Davar She'Eno Mitkavein), unwanted (Psik Reisha D'lo Nicha Lei), and serves no purpose (Melacha She'Enah Tzricha LeGufa). On the other hand, Rav Dovid Ribiat (The 39 Melochos p.1220) notes (based on a ruling of Rav Moshe Feinstein, published in both Teshuvot Igrat Moshe O.C. 4:74: - Bishul - 28 and in the end of volume two of Rav Shimon Eider's Halachos of Shabbos) that "most ovens will not automatically ignite when the door is opened" and that it is permissible to open the doors to these ovens on Shabbat. He cites (footnote 86 ad. loc.) an expert who reports "in general the thermostats in ovens are not that sensitive to the extent that they would quickly change due to a change in temperature." One should consult his Rav for guidance regarding this issue.

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"And Hashem appeared to Avraham and He said to him, 'I am *E-l Sha-dai*...' " (Bereishis 17:1)

Among the different names of Hashem, we rarely find the name *Sha-dai* used in the Torah. In the above *pasuk*, Hashem identifies Himself to Avraham by this unusual name. Why? The Ramban (ibid.) states that Hashem uses the name *E-l Sha-dai*, "To do hidden miracles for the righteous: To save their lives from death, to sustain them in times of famine and to rescue them in times of war from the sword; as He did with all the miracles that were performed for Avraham *Avinu* and the other forefathers."

The miracles that Hashem performed for Avraham were extraordinary and amazing: Avraham was saved from the fiery furnace in Ur Kasdim; Avraham and just 318 of his men (some say he was only accompanied by his servant Eliezer) defeated the armies of the four kings – the superpowers of that time; Avraham and Sarah had a child at a very advanced age after a lifetime of childlessness; and many more astonishing miracles. How can the Ramban describe these as "hidden miracles"? These miracles were done in public and blatantly defied the laws of nature. How can they be considered "hidden"?

With this one word, the Ramban is revealing a common flaw in human nature – the need to explain events in simplistic, natural terms. We know intellectually that Hashem orchestrates, with infinite precision and control, the symphony of world events, and yet we tend to interpret it as a complex series of coincidences. The *yetzer hara* knows all too well that if we recognize Hashem's active involvement in our lives, it will bring us closer to serving Him. Therefore, our nemesis will suggest to us the most outlandish rationalizations to explain away even an open miracle. Avraham *Avinu* walked around in the fiery furnace of Nimrod at Ur Kasdim and emerged without even a singed hair, and yet people could have convinced themselves that it was perhaps an illusion or the furnace was cooled by a cold breeze, or some other far-fetched interpretation. The defeat of the four kings could have been attributed to clever military strategy, as many people have misconstrued the miraculous Israeli victory in the Six Day War. Giving birth to Yitzchak at the age of 100 – perhaps a change in diet or some rare herbs could explain that as well. Are these reasonable or probable approaches? Definitely not, but the alternative is to admit Hashem's miraculous intervention, which the *yetzer hara* will fight at any cost. Let us learn to fight this tendency, and to actively seek out and notice Hashem's *hashgacha pratis* – His Divine providence – in every aspect of our lives, especially the constant miracles He performs for us. In fact, the Ramban (Shmos 13:16) writes that there is no such concept as nature; everything that happens is a miracle, some more open than others. When we see that grass grows, our hearts pump and rain falls, we are seeing nothing less than Hashem pulling the strings in a seemingly natural way. If we can look beyond the facade of nature and coincidence, and recognize, as we say in the *Modim* prayer, "Hashem's miracles each day for us," we will live in a state of gratitude and joy, that brings us closer to our Creator.

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Weekly Parsha

LECH LECHA

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As one who has made major location changes in one lifetime, I can immediately identify with the opinion of the rabbis of the Talmud and Midrash that the movement of Avraham and Sarah from their home in Mesopotamia to the Land of Israel was one of the ten great challenges in the life of Avraham. Leaving one's home, family, and society is always a wrenching experience.

The Torah's description of marriage is the description of leaving one's parents and home to become united with someone "other" to build a new life and family unit. Avraham is searching for communication and instructions from his Creator. He evidently cannot find this in Mesopotamia though the Lord, so to speak, is to be found everywhere and nowhere, depending upon the seeker and the search. Only in the Land of Israel will Avraham find the spiritual satisfaction and role of influence and leadership that will make him the father of all peoples.

Just as his name will later be changed from Avram to Avraham to signify this, so too his journey from Mesopotamia to the Land of Israel will mark a transformation of level and character in his lifetime. Avram in Mesopotamia is not the same person as Avraham in the Land of Israel. Change of location changes all of us in a myriad of ways. It will bring Avraham to greater heights of spirituality and tenacity of leadership. From being the persecuted victim of Nimrod in Mesopotamia, in the Land of Israel he will become the respected prince of G-d in the midst of a Canaanite and Hittite civilization. In spite of the difficulties of change, he will find the move to be most beneficial.

The Jewish people, in our long millennia of dispersion over the face of this earth, have always attempted to remain a positive and spiritually strong community. But every emigration from one location to another took its toll on us. The early immigrant generation almost always suffered dislocation, nostalgia and oftentimes confusion and difficulty in adjusting to the new society and its challenges. In our times, the immigration of Jews to America and later to the Land of Israel posed and still poses the greatest challenge to successful and meaningful Jewish life.

In both cases there was first a headlong flight from Jewishness and tradition in order to become American or Israeli. The past few decades have noticed a slow but steady change in this attitude. More and more Jews both in America and Israel now wish to incorporate true Jewishness into their lives and values. Both America and Israel currently provide a new opportunity for a stronger more vibrant and value-driven Judaism than did Eastern Europe in its waning decades of the twentieth century.

There are currently great opportunities to convert Avram into Avraham, to expand our religious and spiritual horizons and to build a truly strong and holy society in the land of Israel and even in America as well. The challenge is there for us. May we be worthy of surmounting it successfully.

Shabat shalom. Rabbi Berel Wein

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