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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON VAYEIRA - 5785

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from: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <ryfrand@torah.org>

to: ravfrand@torah.org

date: Nov 13, 2024, 1:35 AM

subject: Rav Frand - **Maintaining Inspiration**

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: #1311 – I Had Eggplant Parmesan for Lunch Friday: Can I Have Fleishig for the Shabbos Seuda? Good Shabbos!

It is certainly a sobering ethical lesson that even though the people of Sodom were the antithesis of all that Avraham stood for morally, nevertheless Avraham's ahavas habriyos (love of all creation) compelled him to try to save the city upon hearing that they were facing imminent destruction. However, I would like to focus our attention today on a comment Avraham made in "apologizing", so to speak, to Hashem for his brazen defense of the city. Avraham says "...Behold, now, I have begun to speak to my L-rd although I am but dust and ashes." (Bereshis 18:27).

Avraham excuses himself for speaking to the Master of the Universe when he himself is "only afar v'efer" (dust and ashes). Rashi here notes that "afar v'efer" is not merely a colloquial expression. Rashi interprets: "and behold I should have already been nothing more than dust as a result of my battle with the kings." Avraham Avinu had just engaged in war with the mightiest army in the world. They should have crushed him; pulverized him into dust – and yet he emerged victorious. Furthermore, "I should have already been ashes as a result

of my encounter with Nimrod (who threw me into the fiery furnace in Ur Kasdim)."

In other words, "I am afar v'efer" is not merely a rhetorical expression. Avraham states "If not for Your mercy towards me, saving me from two certain death sentences, I would have already been turned into afar v'efer!"

Rabbi Avraham Buxbaum, a former talmid of Ner Yisroel, came out with a very nice sefer on the weekly parsha, in which he makes the following observation: Avraham states over here, "I am afar v'efer" in the present tense. This is noteworthy because Avraham is not afar v'efer now. Avraham really means I was almost dust and I was almost ashes, but right now I am alive and well. Yet Avraham speaks in the present tense.

We learn from here the key to remaining appreciative of something that has happened sometime in the past. It is an extremely common scenario for a person to go through a near death experience and then recover. He may be cured from a life-threatening illness. He may have been in a terrible accident and have walked away from it. It is the nature of people that when they emerge from those type of situations, they proclaim "I am now a new person. From now on, I will never miss davening. I am never going to speak lashon ha'rah. I am always going to daven with a minyan." However, invariably, what happens to most people is that with the passage of time, it becomes "same old, same old."

I know a very fine fellow, who, by his own admission – I am not accusing him of this – experienced this. This fellow was in a terrible car crash. He was hit by a truck and walked away from it without a broken bone. The State Trooper who pulled up to the accident site, upon seeing the car, proclaimed it to be a miracle. "No one walks away from such a crash." The person made a seudas ho'da'ah (meal of thanksgiving). He was very shaken and moved by the whole experience. He told me that he started learning various mussar sefarim, etc., etc.

Now, almost a year later, the effect of the experience dissipated. By his own admission, he does not feel the same way. What is the key to a person maintaining that same feeling of hakaras hatov and gratitude to the Ribono shel Olam, thus enabling the person to maintain the kabalos he accepted upon himself at the time of the "salvation"? The key is to keep the day of the crash in mind. Live in THAT time frame rather than in the present. That is what Avraham is saying: Right NOW I consider myself afar v'efer because I should really be a dead man! I remember to this day the moment I entered into the fiery furnace and I didn't burn up. That miracle is ever-present in my mind.

However, if a person focuses on how he is TODAY, rather than immediately after the incident, then his feelings of overwhelming gratitude will inevitably dissipate. The key is to stay focused on the day that it occurred.

Rabbi Buxbaum gives an example: A person has been unemployed for several months. To say the least, it is a very depressing situation. He can't pay his debts. He must come onto the largesse of other people. It can be humiliating and ego destroying. Then someone gives him a job. The day he receives the job and the day he starts receiving a paycheck again, it literally becomes "Layehudim hoysa orah" (To the Jews there was light – Esther 8:16). The person is so grateful: "I am working. I am making money. I am being productive. I have a job."

However, six months later he does not like the working conditions. He thinks he should be getting a raise already. He doesn't like this. He doesn't like that. The boss yells at him. He is grumpy, etc., etc., etc. How does that happen? Why does this happen? It is because the person looks at himself in the present and thinks "I have a job. I don't like the job. What did my boss do for me?"

A person must try to bear in mind the way he felt the day BEFORE he got the job. "Remember how depressed you were – those feelings of worthlessness that you had!" A person should always try to look at where he is NOW, relative to the day BEFORE he got the job! That is the key. "I am afar v'ef'er."

General Motors once ran a commercial which said, "It is typically American to ask – 'What have you done for me lately?'" This is such an improper attitude! It is the diametric opposite of hakaras hatov. Hakaras hatov is constantly bearing in mind what someone else or what the Ribono shel Olam did for you. It is not a question of "What have you done for me LATELY?" That is not a Jewish mentality. That is not our mesorah.

Put differently, Pete Rose famously once said "You are only as good as your last at-bat." That also is a treife hashkafa. A person must constantly be makir tov. This certainly is a challenge. It is human nature to feel otherwise. It is a chessed that the Ribono shel Olam blessed us with shikcha (forgetfulness) because if people would be obsessed for the rest of their lives with the impact of 'the crash,' they would go crazy. That is why we were granted shikcha. The Gemara says in Pesachim that there are three things without which the world could not exist, and one of them is shikcha.

If we didn't have shikcha, we would always be confronted by the greatest tragedies in our lives. When a person, chas v'shalom, loses a relative, there is a decree that the deceased will be (somewhat) forgotten from their loved one's heart after twelve months. It is not as painful as it once was. If it were as painful as the day it happened, people would not be able to go on.

So, emotionally it is a beracha. However, intellectually a person needs to be able to think "I remember what it was like when I did not have a job. I remember when that car hit me and I walked away unscathed. I looked at that car and thought 'And I am but afar v'ef'er.' I remember how it was when I got the diagnosis and I thought 'That's it!' But, chasdei Hashem, I was cured." That is what we need to remember: Keep THAT day in mind.

This is the lesson that Avraham Avinu is teaching us when he says "I am but afar v'ef'er."

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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Vayeira is provided below: A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information. Rav Frand © 2023 by Torah.org. Torah.org: The Judaism Site Project Genesis, Inc. 2833 Smith Ave., Suite 225 Baltimore, MD 21209 <http://www.torah.org/> learn@torah.org (410) 602-1350

From: Yeshivat Har Bracha <info@en.yhb.org.il>

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Revivim

**Divination: What's Forbidden, and What's Permitted
Rabbi Eliezer Melamed**

Divination: What's Forbidden, and What's Permitted

November 14, 2024 Revivim One who transgresses the prohibition of divination, nullifies the commandment to act with simplicity before God * It is forbidden to use divination or sorcery even for promoting good purposes * For true prophets, it is permissible to inquire about the future, because all their words are true, and meant to guide us along the path of the Torah * It is permissible to ask a child for a verse * It is better not to use the method of opening a book to make decisions, including the method called 'the Gra's lot.'

Q: Is it permitted to predict the future using various divination tools – by asking a child for a verse, or by opening the Bible randomly – to decide how to act in the future?

A: To answer this, we must first explain the prohibition of menahesh (divination).

The Prohibition of Divination It is written (Deuteronomy 18:10-13): "There shall not be found among you... a necromancer, a soothsayer, a diviner, or a sorcerer... for anyone who does these things is an abomination to the Lord... You shall be wholehearted with the Lord your God." The term "diviner" comes from the root meaning 'to hasten' (Ramban). Naturally, a person does not know what will happen in the future until it happens, whereas the diviner wants to hasten, and know the future based on events that happen to him now, without any logical or causal connection between what has happened, and what he predicts will happen. As our Sages said (Sanhedrin 65b), a diviner is one who says, "If my bread falls from my mouth," and then takes precautions based on that, worrying that something bad will happen that day. "If his staff falls from his hand, if his son calls him from behind, if a raven caws, if a deer crosses his path, if a snake is on his right, or a fox on his left" — these are all considered bad omens. If he had planned to go on a journey, or do business, he should avoid doing so. Similarly, there are other signs, such as seeing a black cat, which some people consider a bad omen, even though there is no rational basis for such beliefs. In summary, anyone who refrains from doing something he planned, due to these superstitions, transgresses the prohibition of divination.

Also, "those who divine through rats, birds, fish, or stars" violate the prohibition of divination (Sanhedrin 66a). That is, there was a superstition that if a person saw certain things in birds, fish, or stars, it would be a sign for him, either to proceed with something, or to avoid it.

Wholeheartedness with God One who transgresses the prohibition of divination, as well as other prohibitions related to magic and sorcery, for the purpose of knowing the future, also negates the commandment to act with wholeheartedness before God, as it is written: "You shall be wholehearted with the Lord your God" (Deuteronomy 18:13). This means that it is a commandment to act with simplicity before God, trusting that everything is for the good. Even though a person may long to know the future, he is commanded to restrain himself, and wait until things happen naturally. If a hardship comes upon him, he should not try to escape it through unnatural means, but should face it according to God's guidance in the Torah, and the natural laws He established. Through this, he will purify and elevate himself, and progress genuinely. This also includes praying to God, as prayer is one of the means God gave man

to draw closer to Him and to correct himself, and through this, God will bless him. Even to advance good goals, it is forbidden to use divination or sorcery, because Israel must add goodness and blessing to the world through the way of the Torah, which, though it may be long, brings about deep and foundational correction, gradually leading to the perfection of man, and the world. Nonetheless, with true prophets, it is permissible to inquire about the future, because all their words are true, and meant to guide us on the path of the Torah. Asking a Child for a Verse It is permissible to ask a child for a verse, as is mentioned in the Talmud (Chulin 98b). Our Sages would sometimes, when uncertain whether to go on a journey, or do something, ask a child studying Scripture: “Give me your verse” — meaning, “Tell me the verse you studied today,” and based on the verse, they would resolve their uncertainty.

It is also told of Rabbi Yochanan, one of the greatest Sages of his time, who, uncertain whether to go to Babylonia to meet Rabbi Shmuel, asked a child, “What is the verse you have learned?” The child replied: “And Samuel died, and all Israel mourned for him...” (1 Samuel 28:3). From this, Rabbi Yochanan concluded that Samuel had passed away, and he did not go to Babylonia. However, the Gemara concludes that in fact, Samuel was still alive, but in order to prevent Rabbi Yochanan from making the trip, Heaven arranged for the child to recite that particular verse (Chulin 98b).

Similarly, it is told (Gittin 68a) that Rav Sheshet, who was blind, feared that the servants of the Exilarch (Reish Galuta), would try to kill him. He asked a child for a verse, and the child replied: “Turn to the right or to the left” (2 Samuel 2:21). Based on this, Rav Sheshet turned toward the wall, and avoided falling into the pit they had prepared to kill him.

Some Halachic Authorities Say Not to Rely on the Verse According to Rambam (Maimonides), it is forbidden to act based on the verse a child says, except to rejoice if the verse is a good one, and to be strengthened by it, as a good sign concerning something already done (Mishneh Torah, Avodah Zarah 11:5). This is also the opinion of the Tur (Yoreh De’ah 118:4), and the Sefer HaBatim (33). According to their view, it should be explained that Rabbi Yochanan was already hesitant to go to Babylonia because of his advanced age, and in his heart, he had decided not to go, and the verse from the child merely reinforced his decision. Similarly, regarding Rav Sheshet, it was his understanding of the situation that led him to be cautious, suspecting the Exilarch’s servants wanted to harm him, and the verse simply served to strengthen his resolve (Kesef Mishneh, there).

Most Authorities Permit Acting Based on the Verse However, according to most authorities, it is permitted to act based on the verse that the child says, as long as the guidance derived from it does not contradict the Torah’s teachings, or logic. This is the opinion of the Sefer HaMitzvot Gadol (Negative Commandments 51), the Ran (Chulin 98b), the Meiri (Sanhedrin 68a), and many others. They explain that there is no prohibition of divination here, because divination involves relying on signs that lack rationality, while asking a child for a verse is akin to receiving a small prophecy. As our Sages said (Bava Batra 12b): “Since the destruction of the Temple, prophecy was taken from the prophets and given to fools and children.” This is the view of most later authorities (Levush 118:4; Prisha 11; Turei Zahav 3; Shakh 5; Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 165:2).

It should be noted, however, that throughout the generations, most rabbis did not rely on asking for a verse, but rather, made decisions based on their understanding of the Torah, and their own reasoning. Opening a Book Just as our Sages sometimes resolved doubts by asking for a verse, sometimes they did so by randomly opening a Torah scroll and looking at the verse that appeared at the top of the page. It is also told in the Talmud (Chulin 98b), that the Amora Shmuel would occasionally open a book at random, to see which verse appeared to him.

However, as mentioned, according to Maimonides (Mishneh Torah, Avodah Zarah 11:5), it is forbidden to act based on this, except to rejoice if a good verse appears, and be strengthened by it, as a good omen for something already done. However, according to most authorities, it is permissible to act based on the verse that appears, as long as the guidance derived from it does not contradict Torah, or logic.

The Gra’s Lot In recent generations, some rabbis used a sophisticated method of opening a book, known as “the Gra’s lot” (goral HaGra). According to this method, a Torah scroll or Bible is opened at random, and seven pages are counted from the opening. The eighth page is then examined, and guidance is sought from the eighth line of the eighth column.

However, it seems that there is no source for this method from the Gaon of Vilna, since for many generations, there is no record of his students using this lot. The rumor that this was a method of the Gaon of Vilna only began to spread over 100 years after his passing. Additionally, the term “lot” seems to be a mistake, as it is ruled in the Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh De’ah 118:1) that it is forbidden to use lots, and this method is indeed not considered a “lot,” but rather, a sophisticated version of “opening a book.”

In practice, during the difficult times of World War I and II, some rabbis from Lithuania used this method to decide whether to flee or stay, among other things, including the Chafetz Chaim, Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian, and Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler. They would pray before opening the book, asking God to guide them through it. On the other hand, some rabbis, such as the Chazon Ish and his brother-in-law, Rabbi Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky, opposed this practice, and Rabbi Kanievsky even rebuked those who used it, saying, “I know people who have made their lives miserable through the answers they received from this method” (‘Orchot Rabbeinu’ Vol. 1, pg. 218).

Is It Appropriate to Use These Methods? In practice, it is preferable not to use the method of opening a book to make decisions, including the method called “the Gra’s lot.” First, because it is not a reliable method for decision-making, and historically, most rabbis did not use “opening a book” or “asking for a verse,” but rather made decisions based on the Torah’s guidance as understood through their intellect. Second, some authorities hold that it is forbidden to make decisions based on opening a book (Maimonides and the Tur), even though most authorities are lenient in this regard. Ideally, one should be stringent.

Only in special circumstances, when both options are equally reasonable and there is no way to decide, can those interested use these methods, as was the practice of the Chafetz Chaim.

Rabbi Aryeh Levin zt”l In cases where the decision is not about the future, but is intended to prevent great sorrow, there is room to use the method called “the Gra’s lot.” This was done by Rabbi Aryeh Levin zt”l, when, after a year, the bodies of the 35 holy soldiers from the convoy that went to rescue Gush Etzion during the War of

Independence were brought, and there was no way to identify the fallen. Rabbi Frank, the Rabbi of Jerusalem, turned to Rabbi Aryeh Levin ztz"l, to perform a lot to determine the identities of the fallen soldiers, and place a tombstone on their graves (see Ish Tzaddik Hayah, pp. 113-117).

This article appears in the 'Besheva' newspaper and was translated from Hebrew.

Parsha Potpourri Parshas Vayeira – Vol. 20, Issue 4 Compiled by **Rabbi Ozer Alport**

... והנה שלשה אנשים נצבים עליו וירא וירץ לקראתם מפתח האהל וישתחו ארצה (18:2-4) Avrohom excelled in the mitzvah of hachnasas orchim (hosting guests). Three days after he circumcised himself at the age of 99, Hashem did not want Avrohom to burden himself with taking care of guests, so He brought a powerful heat wave that deterred all travelers on that day. Still, the weak Avrohom's greatest concern was that the scorching weather would deny him the merit of welcoming guests, so he decided to sit at the entrance of his tent in the hopes that he might spy a stray traveler. When Hashem saw Avrohom suffering over his lack of guests, He sent three angels in the guise of people. Rejoicing at this improbable turn of events, the elderly and frail Avrohom personally ran to invite them to his home and proceeded to serve them a lavish and abundant feast. Rav Yissocher Frand recounts a powerful story regarding the importance of the mitzvah of hachnasas orchim. One morning in Toronto, a local man noticed a visiting meshulach (charity collector) and invited him to his home for breakfast. He asked the fundraiser about his itinerary, to which he responded that he intended to spend most of the day circulating around Toronto, after which he would move on to his next destination that evening.

The local man begged the meshulach to change his plans and to sleep in his house that night instead. The collector resisted, explaining that his time was extremely limited and he could not afford to spend another night in Toronto. The host persisted and told the collector that if he stayed with him that evening, he would give him a larger check than he would ever receive in the next city, an offer to which the fundraiser acquiesced. The following morning, the host gave his guest an extremely generous check as promised, jotted down his contact information, and sent him on his way. A year later, the host in Toronto called the meshulach and informed him that he would be making a bris for his newborn son the following week and would be sending an airplane ticket so that the collector could fly in for the occasion and serve as sandek (person who holds the baby during the ceremony). The meshulach was speechless. He barely knew the man and could not fathom why he wanted to fly him in and honor him as sandek. Nevertheless, the host was determined, and the incredulous fundraiser ultimately agreed to come in for the occasion.

After the bris, the new father called over the collector to explain his actions. He said he had been married for many years, but had not been blessed with children. He shared his plight with Rav Avrohom Yaakov Pam, who advised him that the mitzvah of hachnasas orchim is a segulah (an action that can change one's fortunes) for having children.

When he came to the synagogue and saw the meshulach, he saw his opportunity and prevailed upon him to sleep in his house that evening. As Rav Pam had told him, the host's wife became pregnant, and that is the reason he insisted that the collector attend the bris that he helped make possible and be honored as sandek. While this is

certainly a fascinating story, where did Rav Pam get this segulah? In Tefillas Geshem (the prayer for rain said on Shemini Atzeres), we invoke the water-related virtues of our righteous ancestors and beseech Hashem to grant us water in their merits. The stanza about Yitzchok begins, זכור הנוול בבשורת יקה נא מעט מים – Remember the one who was born with the tidings of, "Let some water be brought." Avrohom and Sorah were married for many years without children, yet after they hosted the angels with tremendous self-sacrifice, their guests immediately informed them that at this time the following year, they would have a son.

Rav Frand suggests that this may be the source for Rav Pam's advice that just as the heretofore barren Avrohom and Sorah were blessed with the news of Yitzchok's birth through their hachnasas orchim, so too would the merit of the hospitality of the couple in Toronto enable them to have a long-awaited child of their own.

Tidbits • Parashas Vayeira 5785 Klal Gavoah In memory of Rav Meir Zlotowitz ZT"l

Ira Zlotowitz <Iraz@klalgovoah.org> Parashas Vayeira • November 16th • 15 Cheshvan 5785

As of Maariv on Wednesday, November 20th, Shemoneh Esrei will have been recited ninety times with the inclusion of Mashiv HaRuach U'Morid HaGeshem. Therefore, after this point, one who is unsure if he added Mashiv HaRuach can halachically be presumed to have said it correctly, and need not repeat Shemoneh Esrei. (Applicable for Nusach Ashkenaz; Nusach Sefard mispalleim [who say Morid Hatal in the summer months] never need to correct.). Note: One who served as a sheliach tzibbur during this period may count his chazaras hashatz towards his count of ninety. The final day of BeHaB is this Monday, November 18th. The final opportunity for Kiddush Levana is Friday night, November 15th (ideally it should be recited prior to Friday night). Daf Yomi - Shabbos: Bavli: Bava Basra 144 • Yerushalmi: Bikkurim 16 • Mishnah Yomis: Bava Basra 3:1-2 • Oraysa: Next week is Beitza 20a-22a Chanukah begins on Wednesday evening, December 25th.

VAYEIRA: Hashem appears to Avraham, who, despite his weakened condition and the unbearable heat, seeks to welcome guests • Avraham rushes to greet three "nomads" • An angel foretells that Sarah will bear a child, Sarah laughs • Two angels leave for Sedom • Hashem tells Avraham that He intends to destroy Sedom • Avraham (unsuccessfully) pleads with Hashem to spare Sedom • The angels arrive at Sedom, Lot hosts them • The people of Sedom attempt to attack the guests • The angels extract Lot's family from the doomed city, commanding them not to look back at the destruction • Lot, his wife and two unmarried daughters escape the city • Lot's wife looks back and turns into a pillar of salt • Lot and his daughters settle in a cave • Lot's daughters get their father drunk and bear their father's children, naming them Ammon and Moav • Avimelech takes Sarah, Hashem appears to Avimelech in a dream • Avimelech returns Sarah along with gifts • Yitzchok is born, and then circumcised at eight days old • Sarah worries about Yishmael's influence on Yitzchok • Hashem commands Avraham to heed Sarah and banish Hagar and Yishmael • Yishmael is saved from death in the desert; an angel promises that Yishmael will be a large nation • Akeidas Yitzchok • Avraham is promised great blessings for passing the test • Rivkah is born to Avraham's extended family. Haftarah: Avraham Avinu is renowned with his great acts of chessed. The haftarah discusses chessed which was performed by Elisha on two occasions (Melachim

Beis 4:1-37). Both Ovadiah's widow and the Isha Hashunamis who benefited from Elisha's chessed performed chessed in kind with others. Parashas Vayeira: 147 Pesukim • No Mitzvos listed
 “וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו אֵיךְ עָרְהָ אִשְׁתְּךָ וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה בְּאֵהָלִי” “They said to him, ‘Where is Sarah your wife?’ [Avraham] said, ‘She is in the tent’ ” (Bereishis 18:9) The Gemara (Bava Metzia 87a) explains that the Malachim knew of Sarah's whereabouts; yet they inquired in order to endear her to her husband by bringing attention to her excellence in the middah of tznius. Rashi adds that in this attribute Sarah was a Tz'nuah Yoser Meichavroseha, that her trait was extraordinary amongst her peers. Rav Elya Baruch Finkel zt"l explains that even beyond complimenting a trait of Sarah's, the Malachim highlighted a unique characteristic that she possessed. One can continually strengthen a relationship with others by focusing on their unique attributes and abilities. This leads to genuine admiration and appreciation. Rabbi Zlotowitz z"l would point out that we are discussing two of the greatest people in history, Avraham and Sarah, who at this point were married for many, many years. Yet still, the Torah notes that a Malach sought to compliment her to her husband. How much more careful and proactive must spouses be nowadays in fostering mutual endearment!

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Considering the Perspective of Others

Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh

(Transcribed and adapted by a talmid, with the help of internet-based AI tools, from the YUTORAH shiur presented at Gruss Kollel in Yerushalayim on November 3, 2023) There is a peculiar Rashi at the beginning of this week's Parsha. The pasuk says, Va-yikach ben bakar, rach va-tov, va-yiten el ha-naar, va-yimaher la'asos oso. We would have said that ben bakar rach va-tov simply describes a young bull that was soft and good. However, Rashi asks, Why is this so wordy? And he replies, It is a remez that shloshe parim hayu—Avraham actually sheched three animals. Now, that is a very expensive investment to regale only three guests. And how much did they eat? One cow is plenty to feed a considerable amount of people. So Rashi says that Avraham did this le-haachilan shalosh leshonos be-chardal. Avraham wanted to give each one tongue. Tongue is a delicacy. Nowadays, it is not as popular. But once upon a time, it was a big delicacy—especially with mustard. And there was not enough tongue for three people in one animal, so he sheched three animals to give each guest the shpitz, the most delicious, fanciest dish ever. And why did he do that? I understand he was very much machshiv the mitzvah of Hachnasas Orchim. But why did he have to go that far? Rav Pam, the Rosh Yeshiva of Torah Vodaas, was known for his focus on Bein Adam la-Chaveiro and his sensitivity and understanding of other people. He asks, What is this Rashi trying to teach us? And Rav Pam answers, Do not imagine Avraham Avinu as some Bedouin in the desert someplace who happens to excel at hospitality. Avraham Avinu was the Gadol ha-Dor. He taught everyone about the existence of Hashem. On his own, Avraham

understood and intuited kol ha-Torah kula—even the need to make Eruv Tavshilin. And what did Avraham think of food? You do not have to be Avraham Avinu. Even if you ask a contemporary rosh yeshiva what he thinks of food, he will say, It's just nutrients you need to serve Hashem. It is not to get hana'ah or to be fancy. It is not to have a culinary experience. You eat to live; you do not live to eat. What do I care about what I eat? If it has carbs and proteins, I will have the strength to learn Torah and be oved Hashem. Avraham clearly had the proper Torah perspective on food, and he would never have a hava aminah to order tongue for himself. If you are a ben Torah, you must be someone who is a little removed from gashmiyus. You think to yourself, I am not so machshiv gashmiyus. I do not care about restaurants and all these fancy dishes and choice cuts of meat, etc. So when you relate to other people, you tend to feel that gashmiyus is not so important. And what is truly important is the Divrei Torah and ruchniyus. However, this approach often results in a lack of proper care for other people. Imagine a situation where I am only machshiv ruchniyus, and my guest is machshiv gashmiyus. If I invited them to my house, I would give them lots of ruchniyus—Divrei Torah and zemiros. But where they are holding, they feel like no one understands them, no one cares about them, no one is mechabad them. From my perspective, I care about them so much. I give them Divrei Torah instead of fancy food! But because I do not understand where they are coming from, they feel neglected, unseen, and not understood. So Rav Pam says, Avraham Avinu was on a madreiga of va-yeira eilav Hashem. Hashem came to visit him—Kabbalas Pnei Shechina. And now Avraham needs to leave that exalted madreiga for Hachnasas Orchim and think to himself, These guys would appreciate the fancy-schmancy prime grill and shalosh leshonot be-chardal—and not just regular meat. And the gadlus of Avraham Avinu was that he could be on this high madreiga on the one hand and yet understand what other people need to feel mechubad, valued, and cared about—on their madreiga—on the other hand. And if that means giving them fancy meat, then that is what he would do—and the Divrei Torah would come only afterward. I know this certainly comes up a lot. Often, I get she'eilos, and my initial thought is, Who cares? Just be machmir. Why is it even a she'eila? Why do you need this in the first place? Is it not more important to just be a little more makpid than to have this shtus? And that may be the right answer for the Rabbi. But that is not being machshiv and seeing people where they are. And from Avraham Avinu, we see that it is a hard balance to be on a madreiga and to really understand other people's perspective. But part of being talmidim shel Avraham Avinu is not just Kabbalas Pnei Shechinah and not just taking a break for Hachnasas Orchim but really being able to relate to people where they are at. Stop and think, This is my head, but where is their head? Instead of thinking, What would I need if I were in their place? Ask yourself, What do they need, and how can I give it to them with all the physical and psychological comfort that comes with that? And if you can really strike that very delicate balance and do it properly, then you are following the Derech of Avraham Avinu. Shabbat Shalom

<https://www.yutorah.org/lectures/1115332> YUTORAH IN PRINT • Vayeira 5785 www.yutorah.org **The Two Sides of the “Coin” of Life** Rabbi Efreim Goldberg The Gemara in Maseches Bava Kama (97b) states that Avraham minted his own coin. One side of this coin featured the images of an elderly man and woman, and on the other

side, the images of a young man and young woman appeared. What might be the meaning of this coin? How did these images express the teachings and legacy of Avraham Avinu? Rav Yisroel Meir Druck, in Lahavos Eish, cites his father, Rav Mordechai Druck, as explaining that the message of this special coin relates to the lure and temptation of wealth. Certain temptations and vices are common and pronounced during one's younger years, but less so when he grows older. Conversely, there are some moral and spiritual challenges which are more difficult in one's older years than during his youth. The lust for money, however, is ever present. It affects us all equally at all ages. Both young and old are vulnerable to this vice – the obsessive pursuit of wealth. This, Rav Mordechai Druck suggested, is the meaning of Avraham's currency. The coin bore the images of both young and old as a warning that at all ages, we must struggle to overcome this dangerous temptation. Rav Yisroel Meir, however, offers a different explanation. He writes that this coin was intended to teach us that at either stage of life, we must look at the other side of the coin. When a person is young, he must be mindful of the advent of old age, of his mortality, of his limited time on earth. Often, young people make the mistake of thinking that they have all the time in the world, that this most precious of all resources – time – will never run out. Young people need to look to the other side of the coin, to the reality of old age, and recognize that their time is limited, and that they must therefore use every day wisely. We can never retrieve lost time. If we waste a day, or even an hour, on vanity or nonsense, we will never get it back. Even in our younger years, when it seems as though we have so much time left, we need to use all our time as productively as possible. Conversely, those in the advanced stages of life must look to the other side, at the energy and opportunity of youth. As people grow older, they might decide that they have nothing left to achieve or to strive for, that the time has come to relax, without striving to accomplish more. Avraham's coin calls upon those in advanced stages of life to draw inspiration from the other side, from youth, to realize that even in their older years, they have the capacity and the opportunities to achieve and to contribute. Youthfulness depends not on age, but on one's mentality. There are people of all ages who are still young in the sense that they have not stopped accomplishing. This is the message of Avraham's coin - that the young must be aware of the eventuality of old age, and that the aged must harness the "youth" within them to continue striving for greatness

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The Salt of Sodom
Rabbi Immanuel Bernstein

The fugitive came and told Avram, the Ivri. (14:13) The Gemara in Masseches Chullin (105b) discusses the mitzvah of mayim acharonim (washing the hands after partaking of a bread meal, before reciting bircas hamazon), explaining that it is on account of the salt of Sodom. This salt, which was typically on the table during the meal in Talmudic times, is especially strong and can impair a person's eyesight if it touches his eyes. Therefore, having finished one's meal, there is a requirement to clean one's hands of any traces of this salt. Interestingly, the Talmud elsewhere also discusses mayim acharonim. In Masseches Berachos (53b) the gemara adduces the verse קָדַשׁוּ אֲנִי וְאַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, You shall sanctify yourselves and you shall be holy, (Vayikra 20:7) commenting as follows: •You shall sanctify yourselves – this refers to washing the hands before

eating. •And you shall be holy – this refers to washing the hands after eating (mayim acharonim). One cannot help but notice that the background offered in the second Gemara differs drastically from the first. After all, attaining holiness and removing dangerous salt from one's hands are both worthwhile endeavors, but they are not the same thing! How are we to relate to two such differing approaches to this mitzvah? Indeed, it seems as one's approach to mayim acharonim will primarily be based on when he joined the Daf Yomi cycle! Rav Kook (Commentary Ein Aya to Berachos) explains that, in reality, these two Gemara's are talking about the same idea; with one addressing the cause and the other the result. The idea of salt represents added taste or enjoyment to the staples of life. Indeed, even the austere menu in Pirkei Avos (6:4) for the one toiling Torah is consists of bread with salt. In reasonable measure, enjoying one's material assets is a good and positive thing. However, it is possible for this idea to exceed its healthy boundaries, with enjoying one's resources becoming one's primary focus in life. At this point, one's relationship with can undergo a drastic deterioration, for they may be perceived as those who might interfere with or detract from his enjoyment of life. This pathological course is reflected in the story of the inhabitants of Sodom, who were infamous for their acts of cruelty towards strangers. From where did this abhorrent policy originate? The midrash informs us that the plains of Sodom, which were extremely fertile, led its inhabitants to become obsessively protective of their city's bounty, ultimately resulting in their institutionalized cruelty toward anyone who would seek to diminish those assets. Indeed, says Rav Kook, everyone needs some "salt" in life, representing added taste and enjoyment to one's activities; however, the "Salt of Sodom," which represents a view to enjoying one's material assets to the point of fixation, is not healthy at all. In fact, it is so harmful it can "blind the eyes," leaving one unable to see anyone else and be cognizant of or sensitive to their needs. This is something that is of ongoing concern, expressing itself especially as a person finishes a meal. Having just partaken of one's material assets, a person needs to assure himself that he will not retain traces of Sodom Salt on his hands, blocking out the needs of others. Yet, how does one do this? With the first Gemara having identified the problem, what is the solution? The answer is in the second Gemara – "And you will be holy." As long as a person has a mundane and limited vision of life, material pleasures may fill his horizon, and his compulsive desire to protect and enjoy his assets may blind him to other people and any needs they may have. Achieving holiness involves attaining a higher vision of life, including a higher vision of his own possessions. With this worldview, enjoying one's assets is not the highest value, but rather, it takes a healthy and subordinate role within a more elevated vision of those assets – being able to use them to help others. Therefore, says the Gemara, having finished one's meal, one should wash his hands, removing from them any traces of food. This signifies his insistence that his actions not be hampered or controlled by his involvement in physical matters, but will rather partake of a higher view of those very involvements. In this instance, as the Gemara informs us, the key to maintaining this perspective is at our very fingertips. This is a truly illuminating idea, whereby, one of the primary markers of holiness is developing a world-view which enables one to see other people and their needs – and to respond with kindness and graciousness. Here, too, we see how a man and God relationship should ultimately elevate a person's relationship between himself and his fellow man. And indeed, as we

know, the ones who give in life are not always the ones with the most to give, but the ones with the most giving ingrained into their outlook. In other words, the extent to which one will be inclined to share what he has with others will ultimately be determined, not by the size of the premises in which he lives, but by the quality of the premises upon which he lives.

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Not Hearing Morning Kiddush

by R. Daniel Mann

Question: At a shul Kiddush, I wasn't able to hear the beracha but answered amen when I heard others answer. Was I yotzei? What should I have done?

Answer: The answer to your question depends on two issues – how morning Kiddush works; the status of one who knows a beracha was made but did not hear it.

At nighttime Kiddush, the main beracha is Mekadesh Hashabbat. Borei Pri Hagafen, whose point is to make it permitted to drink the wine of Kiddush (and similarly, of Havdala) is of minor importance (see Living the Halachic Process VII, C-16). Therefore, if one did not hear Borei Pri Hagafen, he is yotzei anyway (see Shulchan Aruch, OC 271:4; Mishna Berura 296:33).

The problem is that the morning Kiddush consists only of Borei Pri Hagafen (see Pesachim 106a). The p'sukim we recite are a late and not required addition (see Mishna Berura 289:2). So if one did not hear Borei Pri Hagafen, in what way did he take part in Kiddush?! There are two approaches in the Rishonim as to the nature of this abbreviated Kiddush that does not even need to mention Shabbat. The Ran (Pesachim 22b of Rif's pages) suggests that it connects to the night's full Kiddush, and posits that its beracha functions along the same lines as Kiddush of the night. Rabbeinu David (Pesachim 106a) says that given its content, it cannot serve as a real Kiddush; rather, its function is to elevate the meal's stature via the wine. Therefore, the drinking is more important than the beracha, which just permits the drinking.

If the drinking is the important thing, why don't we all have to drink the required amount? Many quote the Brisker Rav as requiring everyone to drink at the morning Kiddush. However, this position encounters difficulties with classical sources (see Tosafot, Pesachim 106a) and contemporary minhag (see Shemirat Shabbat K'hilchata 50:9). The Netziv (Ha'amek She'ala 54:4) explains that others connect to the drinking of the one who drinks the requisite amounts, who sets the proper tone for the joint "meal." Based on this, we might argue that since the "meal" you attended was elevated, missing Borei Pri Hagafen did not preclude your fulfilling Kiddush. On the other hand, the Ran's approach appears to be more accepted (this column, Bechukotai 5784).

Let us now look at your connection to the beracha to which you answered amen. It is forbidden to recite an amen yetoma (Berachot 47a), e.g., answering without hearing the beracha (Rashi ad loc.). On the other hand, the mishna (Sukka 51b) tells about the davening in the amphitheater in Alexandria, in which they raised flags to prompt people to answer amen. The two main distinctions raised (see Beit Yosef, OC 124) to reconcile the sources are as follows: 1. If one plans to be yotzei with a beracha, he must hear it and must not answer if he does not, but he may answer a beracha he does need to

"use for himself" (one answer in the Rosh, Berachot 7:17). 2. The problem is when one does not know which specific beracha was recited, but if he knows, he may answer even if he did not hear it (Rashi & Tosafot, Berachot 47a). The Beit Yosef implies that the two answers are separate – it is not that either factor suffices or that both factors are needed; rather there is one deciding point, with a machloket about which is correct. According to #2, your amen was fine because you knew to what beracha you were answering, and you apparently were even yotzei. According to #1, your amen was an amen yetoma if you intended to be yotzei, and so the beracha could not be motzi you. The Shulchan Aruch (OC 124:8) rules like #1 (admittedly, this is not a unanimous ruling – see Rama and Be'ur Halacha ad loc.).

The best idea was to make your own Kiddush, after first speaking (to ensure Borei Pri Hagefen was necessary). Under extenuating circumstances (e.g., insufficient wine or insulting to the mekadesh, and it was important to eat), there is room for leniency to eat based on the Kiddush (we have to leave out a lot of sources/analysis). If so, Kiddush before your meal at home would be called for, whatever your regular minhag.

לעילוי נשמת יואל אפרים בן אברהם עזיאל זלצמן ז"ל

web: <http://ohr.edu/11877> For the week ending 16 November 2024 / 15 Cheshvan 5784 Taamei Hamitzvos - The Roots of Amon and Moav

from: Ohr Somayach <ohr@ohr.edu>

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Taamei Hamitzvos - Reasons Behind the Mitzvos By Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

"Study improves the quality of the act and completes it, and a mitzvah is more beautiful when it emerges from someone who understands its significance." (Meiri, Bava Kama 17a) Mitzvahs #561-562 (Devarim 23:4-7)

Parashas Va'eira records the births of Lot's two sons, the forebears of the nations Amon and Moav. Centuries later, when the Jewish people left Egypt and passed by the lands of these two nations on their way to Eretz Yisrael, they refused to offer the Jewish people food and drink and Moav even hired Bilaam to destroy them (see also Ramban). This cruel conduct bore evidence of the faulty character of Amonite and Moavite men, but not of the women, because it is not the way of women to go out and bring refreshments for wayfarers (Yevamos 76b). As a result, the Torah commands us in Parashas Ki Seitzei not to allow the male members of these nations to marry into our people, even if they convert. Moreover, while we are usually required to seek peace with other nations, we may not accord this merciful treatment to Amon and Moav. Sefer HaChinuch explains that their cruel conduct revealed them as being despicable in the core and undeserving of our mercy. These Mitzvos thus educate us about the importance of kindness and compassion.

If we explore the history of Amon and Moav, we gain further insight into these Mitzvos. Lot was an orphan; his father Haran died in Ur Kasdim. His illustrious uncle Avraham took him under his wing and shared with him the good fortunes which he merited on account of his righteousness. When Lot's city was conquered by an axis of world powers, Avraham came to rescue him; when his city Sodom was overturned, it was only in Avraham's merit that he survived. Lot's descendants Amon and Moav are not only at fault for lacking compassion, but also for repaying with cruelty the immense kindness

that the forebear of the Jewish people dealt to their ancestor (Ramban and Bechor Shor). The Torah refers to an ungrateful person as a naval, a despicable person (Devarim 32:6). Indeed, someone lacking the sensitivity to even recognize the kindness of others is surely rotten at the core. In contrast, the great men of our nation are well-known for possessing a fine sense of gratitude to others, and above all, to Hashem.

The ungrateful streak of Amon and Moav would continue for all generations; the Sages call them "the bad neighbors of Yerushalayim." They relayed to Nevuchanetzar that the Jewish prophets were predicting the destruction of Yerushalayim and urged him to come and conquer it, and they gleefully joined his forces (Sanhedrin 96b).

If we ponder the matter at its roots, it appears that the irreversible spiritual blemishes of these two nations began from the time of their conception. When Sodom and its sister cities were destroyed, Lot's daughters, thinking that the entire world had been destroyed, had an incestuous union with their father to perpetuate mankind, for the same reason Kain and Hevel were allowed to marry their sisters. Lot, though, had been told by the visiting angels that only that region would be destroyed, and he knew good and well that there was no such permissibility. The Gemara (Horayos 10b) remarks about this act of incest that it was considered virtuous for Lot's daughters and at the same time shamefully sinful for Lot. Amon and Moav emerged from those unions. Since only the male participant in those unions sinned, the male descendants would emerge blemished and forbidden from entry into the Jewish people, while the female descendants would emerge pure (Rabbeinu Avigdor HaTzarfati to Horayos ibid.). Indeed, the entire Davidic dynasty, including the Mashiach, emerged from Rus, a Moavite woman.

The above-stated law, that the ban against marrying Moavites is limited to male Moavites, is an oral tradition, which was a matter of dispute when Rus converted and Boaz sought to marry her. Boaz eventually did so, with the consent of the Beis Din of Beis Lechem. Rav Shlomo Alkabetz wrote a commentary to Megillas Rus called Shoresh Yishai. In his introduction, he suggests that this Megillah was written in order to publicize the authenticity of this oral tradition, which was necessary to legitimize the Davidic dynasty. Based on what we have written above, we may add that Megillas Rus substantiates the ruling of the Beis Din of Beis Lechem by describing the kindness and compassion of Rus in detail, thus demonstrating that the cruelty that characterizes Moav is clearly not shared by its female members.

It emerges that the moral sensitivities are largely dependent on the pureness of the soul and on spiritual genes that pass on from generation to generation. That is why it is strictly forbidden to mix the pure seed of Avraham, in whose spiritual genes are embedded kindness, compassion, and bashfulness (Yalkut Shimoni §82), with the impure seed of Lot's male descendants.

In closing, it is fascinating to note that Avraham himself eventually decided to separate himself from Lot upon observing his twisted values (see Panim Yafos to Bereishis 13:9). The impure roots of Amon and Moav had sprouted forth even before they were born.

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PARSHAS VAYEIRA 5785

CHESSD—GREATER THAN GREETING THE SHECHINAH!?

By Rabbi Moshe Krieger, Yeshivas Bircas HaTorah

Parshas Vayeira teaches us a surprising rule: hachnasas orchim (taking in guests) is so important that it takes precedence even over greeting the Shechinah! This principle is derived from the episode that begins the parshah: Avraham Avinu was sitting at the entrance of his tent, waiting for someone to appear on the horizon so he could try to fulfill the mitzvah of hachnasas orchim. However, before anyone appeared, Hashem appeared to him. Even though the Shechinah was before him and in spite of acute pain due to his bris milah three days earlier, Avraham stood up and ran when he saw three nomads in the distance. We learn from this episode that taking in guests takes precedence even over greeting the Shechinah (Shabbos 127a).

One may wonder, though—is this really so? Suppose a prominent Rosh Yeshivah comes to visit you. Should you abandon him to tend to some needy person you see walking by on the street? Of course not! How could Avraham have chosen the guests over the Shechinah? Furthermore, Avraham's efforts in hachnasas orchim seem exaggerated. It says in Avos D'Rebbe Nassan (chap. 7, 1) that Hashem contrasted Iyov's chessed with Avraham's, saying to Iyov, "You didn't attain Avraham's level of chessed. You gave people only what they needed, but Avraham gave people even more than what they needed." Though Iyov served his guests the foods that they were accustomed to, Avraham introduced his guests to finer and more expensive foods as well. Avraham was constantly involved in kindness. The Sages teach (Sotah 10a) that he ran a free hotel in Be'er Sheva.

Why did Avraham Avinu expend such effort in hachnasas orchim, even seeming to go above and beyond the norm by preparing dishes that people weren't even expecting? The Alter of Slobodka explains that there are two forms of chessed. The first involves seeing to a fellow man's needs. The Rambam (Hilchos Aveilus 14:1) states that acts of kindness such as hachnasas orchim are included in the mitzvah of loving your neighbor as yourself (Vayikra 19:18). This form of chessed finds expression only in areas in which a fellow man is discernibly lacking. In the second form of chessed, a person is so caring that he is always looking for ways to be helpful. He assesses and re-assesses a situation until he finds a way to assist his fellow even when no lack is apparent. This was the chessed of Avraham Avinu, and it stemmed from his desire to emulate Hashem. Just as Hashem created the world in order to bring into existence beings that could receive His goodness, so too Avraham looked for ways to bestow goodness on others. If a person was not used to meat and wine, Avraham would introduce him to these dishes, so that he could then give him even more. This is chessed in its complete, G-dly form (as explained by the Rambam, Hilchos Dei'os 1:6). This also explains how Avraham Avinu could have left the Shechinah when he saw the wayfarers. He was not, in fact, leaving the Shechinah at all! Receiving the Shechinah is indeed a form of connecting with Hashem, but one that is merely external. By emulating Hashem, though, Avraham was bringing Hashem into himself.

Rav Dessler notes that external forms of connecting to Hashem, even something as lofty as prophecy, are not a guarantee that a person will remain on a high spiritual level. For example, Hashem spoke to

Kayin, who then killed his brother Hevel. Connecting externally is much less valuable than actually doing what Hashem wants. When we follow in Hashem's ways, we are making Him a part of ourselves. This has a much greater impact on us. Many people do chessed in an incomplete manner. They feel that they have to do it, or they want the reward in Olam Haba. Some people do chessed as an investment, with the expectation that the recipient will owe them a favor in return for their act of kindness. Other people feel uncomfortable seeing the plight of a poor man and do chessed simply to alleviate the pain his situation causes them. While such acts may fulfill the command to love your neighbor as yourself, chessed in its ultimate form exists only when done completely—solely for the goodness of giving to another. This is the type of chessed we can learn from Avraham Avinu's actions.

In addition to his stature as a gadol b'Yisrael, Rav Avraham Chaim Brim was also known for his love of chessed, often going out of his way to assist others. He was constantly looking for worthy causes and needy people for whom he could collect funds or aid in other ways. He noticed people whom he thought needed a kind word of encouragement, and he was always there for others in their times of grief. Like Avraham Avinu, who was pained by his inability to do chessed (on the third day after his bris milah when Hashem took out the sun from its case to prevent anyone from traveling and causing the tzaddik to strain himself), Rav Brim once commented when he was sick in the hospital that though he was able to learn and daven, he was unable to do chessed, and that pained him.

Whenever he traveled by taxi, Rav Brim added money to the fare, because many passengers complain to drivers about poor service or high fares, and he wanted to offset that by showing the taxi driver that he was satisfied with his service. Once, an appreciative taxi driver looked at the money Rav Brim was offering him and said: "Rabbi, this extra sum is the only money that I want. You can keep the fare. This sign of appreciation is worth more to me!" May we be zocheh to go in Hashem's ways, and bestow goodness on the world!

from: **Rabbi YY Jacobson** <rabiyy@theyeshiva.net> reply-to: info@theyeshiva.net date: Nov 14, 2024, 4:27 PM subject: Don't Run Away from Your Past - Essay by Rabbi YY Jacobson

Don't Run Away from Your Past

Abraham's Search for Truth Was Also Part of Truth

By: Rabbi YY Jacobson

Nearing the End

A priest and a pastor from a local church were standing by the road pounding a sign into the ground that reads: The End is Near! Turn Yourself Around Now Before It's Too Late!

As a car sped past them, the driver yelled, "Leave us alone you religious nuts!"

From the curve, they heard screeching tires and a big splash.

The priest turns to the pastor and asks, "Do you think the sign should just say 'Bridge is down'?"

Coming in Days

The Torah relates in this week's portion, Vayeira:

וַיְהִי כִּי יָרָא יְהוָה אֶת אַבְרָהָם וְשָׂרָה זָקְנִים בְּאַיִם בְּיָמָיו...

Now Abraham and Sarah were old, coming in in days. [1]

In the following portion the Torah says again:

...וְהָיָה כִּי יִרְאֶה אֱלֹהִים אֶת אַבְרָהָם וְשָׂרָה זָקְנִים בְּיָמָיו...

"And Abraham was old, coming on in days."

What do these words mean? If the meaning was simply that Abraham and Sarah grew old, it could have just said: Abraham and Sarah were old ("zekeinim"). Why the need for the extra words "baim bayamim," "coming on in days?"

[Indeed, while many, including Abraham, achieve the title of "old" (zakein) in the Hebrew Bible, the particular words "baim bayamim" or "ba bayamim," literally "coming on in days," only appear in connection with four people: Abraham, Sarah, Joshua (Joshua 13:1 and 23:1) and David (I Kings 1:1). Such selective application of words triggers our attention.]

The Zohar offers a lovely, if problematic, interpretation. [2] The literal translation of the words "baim bayamim" is "coming with their days." ("Bayamim" can both mean in their days, or with their days.) What the verse is saying is that "Abraham and Sarah were old, coming with all of their days." Abraham and Sarah did not only grow old. That happens to many people. But rather they "came with all their days," they showed up with each of their days. Each day was accounted for; each day was lived to the fullest; each day was wholesome, meaningful, and complete. "They came with all their days." No day had to be left behind.

Yet, there is a problem here. For the first period of his life, Abraham was steeped in pagan idolatry. Following the path of his father Terach, he was committed to the pagan beliefs and practices of the time. [3] What is more, as the genuine person he was, Abraham was sincerely entrenched in the world of the pagan belief system, more than others who just conformed to the masses. [4]

It was only later in life that Abraham discovered the truth of Monotheism, the truth of a unified universe fashioned by a single Creator with moral expectations from His creation. The Torah does not give an age, and the Rabbis in the Talmud and Midrash argue over it. One Midrash says that Abraham was 48 years of age when he recognized the one and only true G-d. [5] Another Midrash and Maimonides [6] put him at the age of 40. The Talmud [7] cites a view that he was three years of age when he became aware of G-d. (Perhaps, it has been suggested, they are not arguing; there were different phases in Abraham's intellectual and spiritual development. [8])

But whatever the case, one cannot possibly say that Abraham "came with all of his days," that each and every day of his life was morally complete and wholesome, because for years or even decades he was steeped in his father's and his society's idol practices.

The fact that Abraham made a remarkable transition in his life at the age of 40, 48 or 3, is, of course, astounding. One man stood up against an entire world because he cared for Truth. Yet this precisely was the greatness of Abraham: that he had the courage to tear himself away from a youth spent in error; that he could start all over again when discovering his mistakes. How then can the Torah state, according to the Zoharic interpretation, that all of his days were spiritually unblemished?

The same question, of course, applies to Sarah, about whom the Torah also states "she came in her days."

What is more, concerning Sarah, the Torah states, [9] "And the life of Sarah was one hundred years and twenty years and seven years; [these were] the years of the life of Sarah." The last words, "these were the years of Sarah," are superfluous. The Midrash and Rashi explain them to teach that "All of them were equally good." But how can we make such a claim about Sarah? The beginning of her life was consumed by idolatry. Her Judaism was discovered later in life.

How can we say that all of her days and years were equally good, worthy, and wholesome?

It was during a public address (a "farbrengen") on Shabbos Parshat Vayeira, 15 Cheshvan 5748, November 7, 1987, when the Lubavitcher Rebbe offered the following explanation. [10] I was only 15 at the time, but I can still recall the brilliant life-changing insight I heard that day.

The Paradox

The Lubavitcher Rebbe first introduced a paradox in Jewish law. [11] Every Jew becomes obligated to fulfill all of the mitzvos of the Torah at the age of 13 for a boy, and at the age of 12 for a girl (since girls mature faster than boys). Yet, the Torah does not obligate a father or mother to train their children to perform the mitzvos before the age of bar or bat mitzvah, so that they can be well-rehearsed by the time they reach that moment of duty. The sages did impose an obligation on every Jewish father to train his children to perform all of the mitzvos, [12] once they reach the appropriate age; [13] but that is a rabbinic obligation, not a biblical one. [14]

We are thus faced with a paradox: There is no way that one can suddenly, on the day he turns 13 (or she turns 12), observe all of the mitzvos perfectly, without previous practice and rehearsal. It would be like asking a youngster to suddenly join a big-league (or even a little-league) football team without a day of practice!

How can one suddenly master the art and intricacies of all the mitzvos without previous rehearsal? Can I suddenly, in a few minutes' notice, become an expert in donning tefillin, prayer, grace after meals, and all of the negative commandments?

What is more, many of the mitzvos require much work before you can fulfill them: One needs to craft or buy tefillin; weave or purchase tzitzis; form or buy a shofar for Rosh Hashanah; purchase material to build a sukkah, etc.

That is exactly why the Rabbis introduced the rabbinic mitzvah of "chinuch," educating our children to rehearse all of the mitzvos years before their bar-mitzvah. Yet the Torah itself does not demand this? [15]

There is an enigma here. Either we should not make them obligated on the day they turn 13, or give them some prep time beforehand? Maybe there is a simple answer. The Torah need not state the obvious. It is a given that you have to prepare your child beforehand if you want him/her to take on the task. If the Torah would tell me that at 13 my son needs to play professional football, it need not tell me that I should teach him and practice with him beforehand. It is obvious! Just as the Torah does not state that you have to buy a shofar before Rosh Hashanah, or buy tefillin, or buy wood to build a sukkah. Why not? Because it is obvious. The Torah tells you to build a sukkah. How can you build a sukkah if you don't purchase lumber? How can you blow the shofar if you don't have one? Ditto with rehearsing the mitzvos with your children.

Yet this answer does not hold sway. If this was the case it would mean that educating our children in the practice of mitzvos is somewhat of a biblical obligation—it is so obvious that the Torah does not even have to state it. Yet, the Talmud and all of the halachic authorities state unequivocally, [16] that training our children in the practice of mitzvos (chinuch) is a rabbinic obligation, not a biblical one.

Yet this seems senseless. If you are obligating these kids on the day they turn 13 to perform 613 mitzvos, how does the Torah expect them to know them all?

Training is Part of Service

It was here that the Rebbe introduced an incredibly perceptive insight into Judaism (I still recall the passion and excitement in the Rebbe's words when he presented this message.) From the Torah's perspective, practice, trial, and error are all integral components of the mitzvah itself. When the Torah obligates the 13-year-old boy and 12-year-old girl to begin observing all of the mitzvos it does not mean that on that day they should suddenly perform them all perfectly. Rather, the Torah is obligating them to begin the process of mitzvah observance, knowing full well that it is a process that takes time and will inevitably be less than perfect for a while.

Here is a simple illustration. In Israel, every 18-year-old is drafted into the army for three years. But before they can actually become full soldiers on duty protecting the land and the people, six months of basic training is required. They need to learn how to hold a gun, how to use it, how to protect themselves and others, how to enter into combat. They must also perfect their bodies to be able to handle the grueling tasks of the soldier. Those that enter elite units need far more time for training. Do these months of practice count as part of their service in the army? Of course. They may be still making mistakes; they may not be doing the job well; they are not yet drafted to the front lines because of their inexperience; they still need time to perfect their performance. Yet that is the way things work. To become a soldier, you need training. When the country mobilizes you into the army for three years it knows that you can't become a soldier overnight, and the time for training is considered part of your army service.

This is also true with Judaism. At the age of 13 or 12, the young Jew is "drafted" into the "adult army" of the Jewish people. Now we must begin the training—and that takes time, trial, error, and repetition till you get it right. In the famous expression of the Talmud, "the Torah was not given to angels!" It was given to humans, and humans need time and effort to master a new lifestyle and get it right. That necessary "training time" is part and parcel of the very mitzvah. When the Torah tells the 13-year-old, "start performing all of the mitzvos," it means: Begin the process. The time you will need to purchase your mitzvah items, to master the practices, to learn the nuances, and to perfect your performance, that is all included in the package. And if on day one you can't do it all perfectly, that is not a flaw; it is an intrinsic part of the mitzvah.

It was the Rabbis, however, who introduced the mitzvah of "chinuch," to begin the training far earlier, so that at the age of 13 or 12 our youths are ready to "shoot!"

Abraham and Sarah's Discovery Process

This is the answer to our original question, how can the Torah describe all of the days of Abraham and Sarah as spiritually wholesome, despite them worshipping idols in their youths. There is a profound message here—and it is at the heart of Judaism. Abraham and Sarah were not born in an environment of Torah. On the contrary, they were born and raised in ancient Ur Kasdim, a city in Southern Iraq, dominated by idolatry and the cult of kings as demigods, in which the gods were perceived as blood-thirsty jealous titans. Now, G-d—the real G-d—did not expect Abraham and Sarah to turn their lives upside down in a single day! People are not robots or computers. Humans need the time and mental space to inquire, investigate, research, question, and slowly evolve in their consciousness. The road to truth is paved by trial and error, again and again, and yet again.

Just as with any scientific discovery or theory, it does not come with a snap of the finger. The scientist spends months or years in research, in speculations, doubt, uncertainty, and experimentation, until he or she may discover the truth. Is all that research time not considered part of scientific progress and discovery? Is it seen as a futile waste of time? Of course not! It is the only way to reach any type of truth. This, exactly, was the journey of Abraham and Sarah. In the words of Maimonides: [17]

"He began to explore and think. Though he was a child, he began to think incessantly throughout the day and night, wondering: How is it possible for the planet to continue to revolve without having anyone controlling it? Who is causing it to revolve? Surely, it does not cause itself to revolve. He had no teacher, nor was there anyone to inform him. Rather, he was mired in Ur Kasdim among the foolish idolaters. His father, mother, and all the people around him were idol worshippers, and he would worship with them. However, his heart was exploring and gaining understanding.

"Ultimately, he appreciated the way of truth and understood the path of righteousness through his acute comprehension. He realized that there was one God who controlled the planet, that He created everything, and that there is no other God among all the other entities. He knew that the entire world was making a mistake...

Abraham was forty years old when he became aware of his Creator. When he recognized and knew Him, he began to formulate replies to the inhabitants of Ur Kasdim and debate with them, telling them that they were not following a proper path... When the people would gather around him and ask him about his statements, he would explain them to each one of them according to their understanding, until they turned to the path of truth. Ultimately, thousands and myriads gathered around him."

This is why the Torah tells us that Abraham and Sarah "came with all of their days." From G-d's perspective, all of their days were perfectly wholesome. Of course, many of these years included theological blunder and false pagan beliefs. But that was part of their search for truth. The road to perfection must lead through imperfection. The road to truth runs through error. The road to awareness travels through failure. They were not entrenched in idolatry because they were careless and gluttonous; they were seeking the truth and in our complex world, you often embrace the wrong before you discover the right. For Abraham and Sarah, their path to G-d had to lead through other paths, because without that they could have never discovered Monotheism.

Even their "bad days" were "good days," for all of their days were part of "training," even if it included error and failure.

Our Journeys

The same holds true, at least to some degree, for all of us. Churchill said, "Success consists of going from failure to failure without loss of enthusiasm." I can view my errors, shortcomings, setbacks, and failures as the bad days of my life; I can view my traumas as my prison sentences, those experiences which paralyzed me.

Some of us have traveled through many roads which "diverged in the forest," and at times we took the less-wiser one. We journeyed, physically and mentally, to distant locations, geographically and existentially. On the road, we encountered potholes and ditches. We stumbled. We fell. Sometimes we got badly bruised and made some foolish mistakes. Some of us, in our trauma or ignorance, hurt our loved ones along the way.

Sometimes we look back at our stories and feel dejected. We feel that we wasted so many years. We look back at our lives, review the unwise decisions we made for ourselves, or our loved ones, due to our ignorance, pain, confusion, anxiety, and cluelessness, and we become demoralized. The pain and the regrets cripple us. We wish we would have discovered what we know now far earlier.

But when the Torah says that "Abraham and Sarah came with ALL of their days," or that "all of Sarah's years were identical in goodness," it is suggesting a deeper perspective. Life isn't something that should be edited. The only way we discover our soul is through going through the processes we did. Every pitfall, every mistake, every confusing moment, is an integral part of our journey toward our own truth. We must embrace them all. Even the bruises are somehow part of our ultimate destination.

Of course, at times I need to grieve, and at times I need to apologize and make amends to the best of my ability. Yet my focus can be to redefine my traumas as the springboards that allow me to become the person I am capable of becoming and empower me to cast my unique light on our planet.

Many of us have discovered the truth, majesty, and depth of Judaism at a later point in life. We did not all have the privilege of growing up with it. Until we found our Jewishness we engaged in all types of behaviors that seem today to be empty and foolish. We are filled with shame, and often are terrified of anyone discovering our past. But authentic Judaism see it differently. Your mistakes are all part of your search for G-d. They too constitute a glorious part of your journey toward oneness and wholeness.

Turn Around

There is an interesting and strange Jewish custom, which raises many an eyebrow for synagogue newcomers. On Friday night, when we conclude the "Lecha Dodi" poem, the entire congregation makes an "about-face." Why? [18]

We are making the same point. In life, some of us are lucky enough to discover the "Shabbat." We discover our G-d, our faith, our love partner, our soul, or space of serenity. For some of us, it means we discover a new destiny, a new appreciation for Judaism, new happiness, a new lifestyle. As we do so, some of us tend to say goodbye to our past. We want to shake off our past experiences; we are ashamed by them; we feel contaminated by them. Some of us even cut off ties with former friends and family members.

But Judaism sees it differently. At the end of Lecha Dodi, as we are about to welcome the Shabbat and enter into 24 hours of spiritual transcendence, we turn around! We do not detach from our past. We turn around, we acknowledge it, we embrace it, we take it along with us on our journey. Because our past is never to be cast away; it is to be seen as the path through which we arrived at our present destination.

Or as a wise man once said, "The closest thing to perfection is imperfection."

Yes, when we discover the truth we must have the courage, like Abraham and Sarah, to smash the idols of falsehood and the gods of stupidity. Yet we must still look at compassion for the time we were "outside," looking in, trying to find our way, our soul, our G-d. When imperfection leads to perfection it is imperfectly perfect.

[1] Genesis 18:11 [2] Zohar Chayei Sarah 129a. 224a. Cf. Maamar V'Avraham Zaken 5738 and 5746. [3] See Midrash Rabah Bereishis 39:8. Rambam, Mishnah Torah, Laws of Avodah Zarah 1:3 [4] See Sidur Eim Dach Shaar Halulav. [5] Midrash Rabah Bereishis 30:8.

Kesef Mishnah to Rambam ibid. [6] Midrash Rabah ibid. Rambam ibid. [7] Nedarim 32a [8] See Likkutei Sichos vol. 20 p. 14 [9] Genesis 23:1 [10] Likkutei Sichos vol. 35 Vayeira pp. 61-69. Sefer Hasichos 5748 Vayeira. [11] For all the references to the following points, see Likkutei Sichos vol. 35 ibid. [12] There are a few exceptions. For example, Tefilin (because it requires a clean body throughout, and complete concentration); fasting a full day on Yom Kippur (due to weakness). [13] See Shulchan Aruch HaRav Orach Chaim 343 and all references noted there. Encyclopedia Talmudis entry of Chinuch. Likkutei Sichos vol. 35 ibid. [14] To be sure, there is a biblical obligation on a father to teach his son Torah. But that does not include the practice, training, and rehearsal of any mitzvos. For example, biblically, I never have to teach my son how to bentsh; I do not have to prepare for him tefillin before his bar mitzvah and teach him how to put them on; etc. [15] There are a noted few exceptions: We are obligated to teach Torah to our children (but that does not include practicing with them the observance of mitzvos); we are obligated on Passover to relate the Exodus story to our children (but that does not include them eating matzah etc. in which they are not obligated biblically); we are obligated to bring them to Hakhel once in seven years. [16] See Likkutei Sichos vol. 35 ibid. for all the references. [17] Mishnah Torah, Laws of Avodah Zarah 1:3 [18] On the simple level, we turn around for the verse in which we welcome the Sabbath Queen, ending with the words, "Come O Bride, come O Bride, come O Bride O Sabbath Queen." As we welcome the Sabbath, we turn to greet her as we would any special guest. This is a throwback to the time when people would actually go outside greet the Sabbath Queen exclaiming, "Come O Bride, come O Bride!" The holy Arizal taught his students—the mystics of the city of Tzefat—that when greeting Shabbat in the field, they should face the setting sun with closed eyes and serenade the Shabbat bride. (See Talmud, Shabbat, 119a; Code of Jewish Law, O.C. 262; Shaar Hakavanot, Derushay Kabbalat Shabbat, 1) One of the early Chassidic masters explains that on Sabbath even the souls who are being punished and are "pushed out," are welcomed in for a respite. When we turn around, we welcome them to their Shabbat rest. (Tiferet Shlomo Metzora.) The following explanation in the essay on why we turn around is based on the writings of Reb Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin.

 from: **Rabbi Berel Wein** / The Destiny Foundation
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 date: Nov 13, 2024, 3:09 PM
 subject: Parshat Vayera 5785 Newsletter - Rabbi Berel Wein
 Weekly Parsha VAYERA
 Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

God appears to Avraham in the opening verse of this week's parsha. How does God appear to him? The rabbis teach us that He appears to him in the form of a visitor there to cheer him in his illness and pain after the rite of circumcision. The Jewish value of visiting and cheering the sick stems from our imitation of this Godly virtue as first revealed to Avraham. In this instance, God reveals Himself to Avraham through three Bedouin Arabs who are apparently searching for a place to rest, eat and drink.

The apparent Arabs are angels and messengers of God. It is one of the great attributes of the house of Avraham and Sarah that visitors can enter their home as Arab desert dwellers and leave as angels. It is these wayfarers that deliver to Avraham and Sarah the message of

continuity and eternity of Jewish life. Sarah will give birth to Yitzchak after decades of being a barren woman. Earlier, God informed Avraham of this momentous news directly. Yet Sarah, the direct recipient of this blessing, He somehow chooses to inform in an indirect manner through the unknown strange visitors that arrive at her tent and that she hospitably feeds. There is a great insight in this chosen method of God, so to speak, in delivering the message to Sarah through seemingly human auspices. God often, if not constantly in our times, talks to us through seemingly human messengers. If we are able to listen carefully to what others say to us, oftentimes we will hear a divine message communicated to us through a human conduit.

I think that this also explains why Sarah was initially bemused by the words of the angel. She evidently thought that it was just a throw-away promise of a wandering Bedouin Arab and reacted accordingly. At the outset she did not hear the voice of God in the words of the angel that addressed her. Therefore she did not take those words seriously. God reprimands her for this attitude and asks "Why did Sarah not take these words seriously?"

Avraham who heard the tidings from God directly realized that the message was true and serious. Sarah had to believe what she thought was a human wish and therefore discounted it. But God demanded from her, as He does from each of us, that we pay proper attention to what other humans say to us. Perhaps in their statements and words we can realize that God Himself, so to speak, is talking to us. God has many messengers and many ways of reaching us individually but we must be attuned to hear the messages that emanate from Heaven. They should never be allowed to fall on deaf or inattentive ears and minds. To a great extent this ability to listen to the otherwise unheard voice of Heaven is the measure of a Jew and of his ability to accomplish in life. Eventually Sarah hears and believes - and through this Yitzchak is born and Jewish continuity is assured and protected.

Shabat shalom. Rabbi Berel Wein

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Parshat Vayera

by **Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair** - www.seasonsofthemoon.com
 PARSHA INSIGHTS

Voting for the Existence of the World

"...and all the nations of the world will bless themselves by him (Avraham)" (18:18) How valuable was your vote on November 5th? In 2020 political spending, including rallies and TV ads, billboards etc. was 14.4 billion dollars. This year OpenSecrets predicts it will have been at least 15.9 billion. 16 billion dollars! How important is our vote to them? How much do they value your time? What they are asking you to do is to leave work, leave your family, leave whatever you'd rather do - and vote. Maybe it will take you half an hour - maybe less. The question is how much do they value your time? Well. Let's do the math. If you divide 15.9 billion dollars between 186.5 million people - that's the number of Americans who are registered to vote as of September 2024 - you will be giving each one of them 85 dollars and 25 cents. Not bad for half an hour of your time! But let's look at your time another way. Nefesh HaChaim says that the reason Hashem created the world as a sphere was that it would always be day somewhere. Somewhere on the globe, people will be awake, and there will be a Jew burning the midnight oil toiling in Torah. Because, if there would be one split

second when no Jew was learning Torah, the world would return to Tohu u'vohu. Without that constant energy of Torah learning and observance, the whole world would return to primordial emptiness. The Worldometer's World Population Clock says that right now there are 8.2 billion people in the world. On Erev Rosh Hashana the year before last, the Jewish Agency said the number of Jews worldwide stood at approximately 15.7 million compared to 15.6 million in the year before that. More conservative estimates put it nearer 14 million, but whichever way you look at it, we are little more than 0.2 per cent of the world. But it doesn't stop there.

According to the Institute for Jewish Policy research in 2022, only one in seven Jews are religious. In other words, there are only 2 million people giving life to the 8.2 billion inhabitants of this planet.

If you do some simple math, every second you learn Torah, or you do a mitzvah, you just gave life to 4000 people. Four Thousand.

And if, G-d forbid, Jews would suddenly take a day off all together, stop doing the mitzvahs, learning, davening, giving, the world – 8.2 billion people - would, quite literally, cease to exist. It's quite impressive how powerful our actions are! Not just in the next world, not for just our children, but for the world to exist today, for all of Mankind. Those who keep the Torah — less than a tiny 0.2 percent of the world – are supporting 8.2 billion people.

Politicians may value your vote at 85 dollars and change, but a religious Jew breathes life – the most valuable gift in the world - into 4000 people every single second.

From: **TorahWeb** <torahweb@torahweb.org> date: Nov 14, 2024, 8:47 PM subject: **Rabbi Yakov Haber - Jewish Stardust**
Rabbi Yakov Haber
Jewish Stardust

In the aftermath of the momentous event of akeidas Yitzchak, an angel bestows Hashem's blessing on Avraham Avinu: "For I shall bless you and multiply your offspring like the stars of the heaven and like the sand on the seashore... and through your offspring will all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Bereishis 22:17-18).

Bemidbar Rabba (2:12) comments, incorporating the aforementioned verse into its presentation:

You find that Avraham was blessed with the stars, as it is stated, "Look now toward the heaven and count the stars...[and He said, 'So shall be your offspring!'] Isaac was blessed with the sand, as it is stated, "For I shall bless you and multiply your offspring as the stars of the heaven [and as the sand on the seashore]." Ya'akov was blessed with the dust of the earth, as it is stated, "And your offspring shall be as the dust of the earth."

My great Rebbe, Maran Rav Chaim Yaakov Goldwicht zt"l, founding Rosh Hayeshiva of Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavneh, seeks to analyze the teachings inherent in these three comparisons: stars, sand, and dirt.[1] Furthermore, he asks, why is the comparison to sand attributed to the blessing to Yitzchak when it was stated to Avraham after the binding of Yitzchak?

In answer to these questions, Rav Goldwicht explains that the difference between stars and sand lies in their fundamentally different nature. Stars are uniquely noticeable; they each have their own "personality" as evidenced by the unique name given to each one by its Creator (see Tehillim 147:4). Sand, by contrast, is only significant in its conglomeration; each individual grain is hardly noticeable and of little import. In light of this distinction, Rav Goldwicht explains that Avraham Avinu, standing out as a "stellar"

individual, surrounded by a world so distant from the truth, courageously spreading the message of G-d to all who would listen, was blessed with descendants many of whom would be "stars" in their own right, forging an elevated path in the service of the One whom our father Abraham discovered in the star-lit nights of Mesopotamia.[2] I have also heard an idea that a star, while seeming like a tiny speck of light when viewed from the Earth, is, in reality, indescribable in its magnitude, totally dwarfing the Earth and, for many of them, even the sun. In the language of the Midrash (ibid.-), each star is capable of totally devouring our planet.[3] So too, unique individuals within the Jewish people, while seeming ordinary, ultimately are absolutely magnificent in their spiritual stature from Hashem's perspective.

However, not all of Avraham's descendants would follow such an exalted path. Unfortunately, many would not follow in the footsteps of their outstanding ancestors. What would assure their continued existence? Yitzchak Avinu's willingness to offer his own life to obey G-d's commandment, the merit of akeidas Yitzchak, would guarantee the Jewish people's eternal existence even if they were not worthy. For this reason, the blessing of the sand is associated with Yitzchak who partnered with his father, Avraham, in the test of the akeida.

Like all the millions of grains of sand of the seashore which collectively hold back the waves from flooding the land even though each grain is insignificant, so too, the collective of Klal Yisrael, regardless of their stature, would always survive.

What does Ya'akov's blessing, comparing his descendants to the dust, represent? The Midrash comments that just as dirt is constantly trampled upon, so too Ya'akov's descendants would be persecuted and abused through much of Jewish history. But, just as the earth continues to exist even after so much trampling and - perhaps we can add - becomes stronger by becoming more packed together, so too the Jewish people would always out-survive their persecutors. Rav Goldwicht explains that this also refers to the spiritual resilience of the Jewish people. Even if, through years of persecution and assimilatory trends, many of the Jewish people would be adversely affected, ultimately, "Once a Jew, always a Jew - " ישראל אף על פי שחטאו, ישראל הוא! The internal sanctity in the Jewish individual will ultimately lead to either his or at least his descendants' return to Torah observance.[4]

This past painful year for the Jewish people has demonstrated to all of us all of the blessings bestowed upon Klal Yisrael as stars, as sand and as dirt. The acts of individual heroism of those who rushed to the front - many of whom were not classically connected to halachic lifestyles as well as ongoing chessed projects spearheaded by dedicated individuals bringing both the spiritual armor of tzitzis, tefillin and siddurim to those on the front, and the physical armor of helmets, bullet-proof vests, night-vision goggles and more to the tune of millions of dollars, can only be described as "stellar" examples of our people. A religious soldier brought one of the Gedolei Yisrael to tears when, after losing both of his legs and one arm, asked him three questions. First, on which hand shall he place tefillin now? Second, how should he hold his lulav and esrog? Third, should he say the shehecheyanu on his prosthetic limbs when he receives them or when he first uses them? When hearing such stories, one can only think of the verse in Iyov (13:15): "הן יקטלני, לו איחל - even if He kills me, I will still long for Him!" Stories of soldiers diligently continuing Torah study in respites from battle abound.[5] At a shiva house, I recently heard from the father of a fallen soldier that his son[6]

finished two masechtos while serving in Gaza! Stories of selfless kindness also have proliferated. As one example, a soldier, finding he was a match for a 3-year old leukemia patient, found the time to donate bone marrow in between battles!

But the collective of the Jewish people who have not yet risen to classic stardom are still surviving and, with the kindness of G-d, still thriving. Economic activity and agricultural productivity - including in moshavim under constant missile attack[7], continues at a robust pace, alongside the constant sweet kol Ya'akov of tefila and Torah heard in shuls and batei midrash. The "sands" of the Jewish people miraculously continue no matter how much the "dust" of Israel is trampled upon.

We hear of so many stories of religious inspiration - soldiers and civilians taking upon themselves the observance of Shabbos or the mitzvah of tefillin for a lifetime realizing that אין לנו להשען אלא על אבינו שבשמים. The "dust" of Israel, as Rav Goldwicht teaches, will always return to their source! May Hashem continue to fulfill his promise to bless the "stardust" of the Jewish people, save us from our enemies, return all the hostages from captivity, return our chyalim from the battlefield after victory over our many enemies, and may we constantly recognize His protection over us, praise His name and move ever closer to His service!

[1] See Asufas Ma'arachos (Bereishis, "Birchas Haribui"). The editor (Rav Goldwicht's son-in-law, Rav Meirnik z"l) notes that the essay was not actually presented in this form by Rav Goldwicht, but it is based on his teachings. [2] A paraphrase from Rav Soloveitchik's majestic Lonely Man of Faith.

[3] Current scientific knowledge, of course, wholly concurs with this midrashic teaching. Also see the Midrash for many other comparisons between the righteous and the stars. [4] An interesting story is told of a secular, Israeli father who sued his son and his Yeshiva in Israeli court for becoming religious and causing him suffering. The presiding judge, who recognized the father from Europe as someone who gave up religion and caused his parents much sorrow, chided the father, "Just as you rebelled against your parents and caused your parents pain, your son is doing the same! Case dismissed!" [5] One is reminded of Chazal's interpretation of the rebuke of the angel to Yehoshua (5:14), "עתה באתי - על ביטול תורה" - "Now I have come" - concerning the stopping of Torah study" (see Megilla 3a). Radak wonders, "War is not the time for Torah study!" Many of our courageous soldiers have followed the simple message of our Sages! [6] Hillel Eliyahu Ovadya Hy"d. [7] I recently noticed on a carton of a popular brand of eggs in a local makolet the following note: "We proudly continue to supply these eggs even though we are under constant fire from Lebanon!" © 2024 by TorahWeb Foundation. All Rights Reserved Copyright © 2024 TorahWeb.org, All rights reserved. Our mailing address is: TorahWeb.org 94 Baker Ave Bergenfield, NJ 07621-3321

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Haftarat Parshat Vayera: Coaxing divine miracles to heal our wounded – by Rabbi Dr. Kenneth Brander (Rabbi Dr. Kenneth Brander is President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone)

As Israel's hospitals continue to treat thousands wounded in the war, a story from this week's haftara, of Elisha and the Shunamite woman's son, offers powerful lessons about healing, miracles, and our responsibilities to the injured.

A desperate Shunamite woman races to find the prophet Elisha, the same prophet who had blessed her with the miracle of motherhood – but now that

young son lies lifeless on his bed. When Elisha arrives at her home, he does something unexpected. Instead of merely uttering prayers or blessings from a distance, he takes direct action: he climbs up onto the bed and lies down on the boy, breathing over him until warmth returns to the child's body. Gradually – miraculously – the boy regains his breath and life returns to him. Elisha's choice of healing method, mirroring that of his teacher Eliyahu in I Kings 17, is puzzling. When the son of a widow in Zarepta fell ill, Eliyahu similarly stretched himself over the boy's body and prayed to God until the child revived. The need for Elisha to press his own face and body against the Shunamite child is not immediately clear from the story in our haftara. To address this, Rav David Kimchi (Radak, II Kings 4:34) offers two interpretations, each with insights that resonate today as we grapple with our own wounded.

One of Radak's interpretations is theological. He writes that while God's power and abilities know no limits, it is still the divine preference that even when particular moments in human history call for divine intervention, events should still unfold with as little divergence from the natural order as possible. In this reading, the reason for Elisha's actions are clear; what Elisha did was nothing other than a prototypical version of resuscitation, using his own breath and body heat to revive the child.

We, too, have witnessed no shortage of medical miracles over this past year, masked as standard medical procedures. Wounded soldiers and civilians, whose lives were hanging in the balance, have been saved by divine grace only visible to the spiritually-inclined eye that looks beyond the talented medics, emergency surgeries, innovative drugs and other procedures. While the best practices of doctors, nurses, and medics do not break with the laws of nature, their work is often miraculous.

The story of Elisha reminds us to not forget to look for miracles and be incredibly grateful to God as well as to those doctors, nurses and medics whose work has allowed so many wounded to survive, heal, recuperate, and return to their prior lives at least partially, if not fully or more robust than before.

At the same time, the same has, unfortunately, not been true for everyone. Of the approximately 12,000 wounded soldiers treated in Israel since Oct. 7 of last year, many still face long roads to recovery. Some are learning to live with prosthetic limbs or vision impairment, while others haven't yet regained the ability to breathe independently. Radak's other interpretation of Elisha's actions in healing the child contains valuable insights and lessons in how we should treat these patients, those still undergoing long and arduous journeys of healing, including those whose condition remains uncertain. He suggests that Elisha's physical closeness to the child is in fact a fulfillment of a halakhic principle – that when praying for a person in need, being physically present enhances empathy and focus in one's prayer. This approach to the mitzva of Bikur Cholim, visiting the sick, shared by Radak and others (cf. Nachmanides Torat ha-Adam Sha'ar HaMeichush) highlights that close proximity to the ill person empowers one's prayer on their behalf. Like Elisha, we must combine faith in miracles with direct, personal action. Our wounded defenders need not only our prayers; they need our presence, support and commitment to walk alongside them on their journey to recovery. This is a concept that medical professionals recognize today. Studies have demonstrated that having visitors helps patients recover more quickly; and that those patients who lack visitors fare worse than those with visitors. As those who have been protected by these wounded soldiers' sacrifices; it's our obligation to honor them through the mitzva of Bikur Cholim – to actively show up for them and create the conditions for healing. By being there for them, we not only rely on hidden miracles, but help to make them happen.