

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
from
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Lech Lecha



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Torah Wellsprings - Lech Lecha

Clarity in *Emunah*

When the Berdichever Rav zt'l returned from one of his first trips to the Maggid of Mezritch zt'l, his non-chasidic father-in-law mocked him and asked, "What did you learn there this time?"

The Berdichever replied, "I learned that there is a Creator."

The father-in-law laughed and called for his gentile maid. "Do you know that there's a Creator?"

"Certainly, I know," she replied.

The Berdichever Rav replied, "She *says*, but I *know*."

There are many levels of emunah. There is a superficial level of emunah, the level that this non-Jewish maid had, which is also good, but there are much greater depths of perception and clarity in emunah.

The topic of Emunah should be the first thing we study because it comes before all other wisdoms. The Rambam (Pirush HaMishnayos, Brachos) writes, "Studying the foundations of דת והאמונה is more precious to me than everything else I learn."

The Rabbeinu Yonah (Mishlei 3:7) writes, "Most of this sefer (Mishlei) deals with the importance of acquiring good middos, but before that, it talks about belief and trust in Hashem because the perfection of emunah comes before all other subjects."¹

We, therefore, understand why one of the first parshiyos of the Torah is Lech Lecha. This parashah focuses on Avraham Avinu's

emunah, and as the Rabbeinu Yonah writes, "emunah should come before all other subjects."

Rebbe Pinchos Koritzer said: "Until parshas Lech Lecha the world was unhappy and confused. Afterwards the *chesed* of Avraham is aroused, bringing salvation into the world."

We can explain that it isn't solely the kindness of Avraham that is aroused when we read parshas Lech Lecha. It is also his pure emunah that illuminates the world.

Emunah Peshutah

There are two types of emunah. There is emunah peshutah, which is having the belief without feeling the need to prove it. Then there is the emunah, the belief that is the product of philosophical discussions and proofs, questions and answers. Avraham Avinu started with philosophical emunah, and then he adapted the approach of emunah peshutah, as we will explain.

The Rambam (*Avodah Zarah* 1:3) writes, "As soon as this strong one (Avraham) was weaned, his mind began searching. He was young and was thinking day and night. He wondered, 'How can it be that the sun is always moving, and no one is turning it? He didn't have anyone to teach him because he lived in Ur Kasdim among stupid idol worshipers (בין עובדי כוכבים הטפשים). His father, his mother, and the entire country worshiped the stars, and he worshiped the stars together with them. But his heart was searching... until he perceived the true path... He discovered that there is one G-d, He directs

1. The Ramban (Bereishis 1:1) writes, "There is a great need to begin the Torah with בראשית ברא אלקים [the story of creation] because it is the foundation of emunah. Whoever doesn't believe in creation is a kofer in Torah and doesn't have Torah at all."

the sun, He created everything, and there is no G-d other than Him. He knew that everyone in the world was mistaken. He recognized the Creator when he was forty years old. Avraham began debating with the people of Ur Kasdim and admonished them, 'You aren't on the right path,' he would tell them. He broke their idols and told them that they should serve the Creator of the world. Avraham proved it to them with many proofs until the king wanted to kill him, but he was saved through a miracle, and he ran to Charan. Avraham proclaimed loudly to everyone that there is only one G-d, and we should serve Him alone. Thousands and tens of thousands followed Avraham. He planted emunah in their hearts, and he wrote *sefarim*."

This Rambam discusses Avraham's initial emunah, the approach of proofs and philosophical logic. He thought about the sun, about creation, and he discovered Hashem.

Nevertheless, after Avraham attained emunah, he adopted the ideal path for emunah, which is *emunah peshutah*, simple faith, without questions or reasoning.

It states (15:4, 6), ... לא יירשך זה כי אם היוצא ממעיד. "[Hashem told Avraham], 'This one

[Eliezer] won't inherit you, rather the child that will come from your loins...' And Avraham believed in Hashem..." Avraham believed Hashem that he would bear children, and he didn't question it. The Agra d'Kalah writes that this was the moment that Avraham adopted the path of *emunah peshutah*. והאמן is written without a י"ד. The letter י"ד represents *chachmah*, wisdom. The missing י"ד in והאמן implies that Avraham believed in Hashem with *emunah peshutah*, with simple faith, without needing wisdom and proofs to support it.² When Avraham Avinu heard that he would bear children, he understood that philosophy is a dangerous path for the masses and that if he continued with his philosophical approach, his children might also study philosophy to acquire an awareness of Hashem. "If my children are wise, they will succeed in recognizing Hashem through philosophy. But it is a risky route because if they aren't wise enough, they may end up with questions, and they won't know the answers, and they will deny Hashem." Therefore, when Avraham heard he would bear children, he changed paths, and he followed the path of *emunah peshutah*, as implied in והאמן בה'.

It states (Tehillim 37:18), יודע ה' ימי תמימים, when one believes in Hashem with *temimus*,

2. Darkei Noam (vol.1, p.164) explains the pasuk (15:5) והאמן בה' ויחשבה לו צדקה, that even when Avraham went through hard times, ויחשבה לו צדקה, he believed that it was Hashem's kindness (although he didn't know how and why it was so).

Chazal (Brachos 54.) say, "One is obligated to praise Hashem for the bad like he praises Hashem for the good." The holy brothers Rebbe Shmelka of Nickelsberg zt'l and the Hafla'ah zt'l asked the Magid of Mezritz zt'l to explain this Gemara to them, because they didn't understand how one can praise Hashem for the bad.

The Magid told them to ask Rebbe Zusha of Honipoli.

When Rebbe Zusha heard the question, he replied, "I don't understand why the Magid advised you to ask me. The question should be asked to someone who experienced bad in his life. But from the day I was born, I only had good."

Rebbe Zusha was very poor. Sometimes he didn't have food, but he considered every moment and every day of his life as good.

That is the lesson that the Magid wanted them to hear. When we consider everything good, we will praise Hashem for everything that happens to us.

with *emunah peshutah*, ונחתלם לעולם תהיה, his belief will continue forever. But the path of philosophy isn't guaranteed to continue through one's children and descendants.

The Baal Shem Tov *zt'l* said to his students, "After all the perceptions that I perceived in the root of the Torah and the mitzvos, and after all the pleasures I had from my perceptions, I forgo them all, and I have *emunah peshutah*. 'איך בין א נער און איך גלייב, 'I am a fool and I believe.'" The Baal Shem Tov had *ruach hakodesh* and great levels of spiritual perceptions. He saw *malachim* and the *neshamos* in heaven. But he didn't use these as the root or proof for his *emunah*. He believed in Hashem with *emunah peshutah* (*Baal Shem Tov al HaTorah, parashas Shemos*). This is because *emunah peshutah* is the highest form of *emunah*, preferred over recognizing Hashem through philosophical or intellectual proofs.

The Zera Kodesh explains that the intellect is limited, and when one's *emunah* is based on his intelligence, it is limited to the extent of one's intellect. But to believe in Hashem with *emunah peshutah* is limitless.

Bitachon

One of the greatest praises one can give a person is to say that he is a *baal bitachon*. Every morning, in the *brachah* of אהבת עולם we say, "אבינו מלכנו... בעבור אבותינו שבטחו בך, "Our father, our King...in the merit of our forefathers who trusted in You..." In this *brachah*, we don't mention any praise of the avos other than their *bitachon*. The Shem Mishmuel (*Miketz* 5675) proves from this that having *bitachon* is the highest form of praise.

We say in *Shemonah Esrei*, ומושיע, מלך עוזר, "[Hashem is] a king who helps, saves and protects." Reb Avraham, the son of the Vilna Gaon *zt'l* explains that when one says Hashem is עוזר, helps, this implies that one does his *hishtadlus*, but he has *bitachon* that Hashem will *help* him and his *hishtadlus* will bear fruit, and he will succeed.

מושיע refers to a person who doesn't even do *hishtadlus*. He trusts that Hashem will save him and grant him his needs.

מגן, protect, is when, for Hashem's honor, one places himself in jeopardy. For Hashem's sake, he does something dangerous, and he trusts that even then, Hashem will protect him.

We conclude this *brachah* with מגן אברהם because Avraham's level of *bitachon* was on the level of מגן, protection. Avraham went almost alone to battle with four powerful kings, and he allowed himself to be thrown in the furnace at Ur Kasdim rather than bow down to idols. He did things that seemed dangerous, but he had a high level of *bitachon*, and he trusted that Hashem would protect him and save him. Hashem told Avraham (*Bereishis* 15:1) אל תירא אברם אנכי מגן לך, "Do not fear, Avram, I will protect you."³

There is no one happier than someone who trusts in Hashem, as we say (*Tehillim* 84:13) אשרי אדם בוטח בך, "Fortunate is the man who trusts in You," and it states (*Tehillim* 146:5) אשרי שא"ל יעקב בעזרו שברו על ה' אלוקיו, "Fortunate is he whose hope is in Hashem his G-d" (see *Metzudas Dovid*). He lives a life without worry and fear, and Hashem bestows His kindness on him, as it states

3. The Chidushei HaRim *zt'l* explained that אנכי מגן לך (and the *brachah* מגן אברהם in *Shemonah Esrei*) means that Hashem will always protect the *pintele Yid*, the spark of Judaism, that is in every *Yid*. Even if one committed many severe aveiros, *rachmana litzlan*, there remains a part of the *Yid's* soul that is pure and holy. Hashem protects that spark that it should never be extinguished.

The Gemara (*Succah* 29.) says that the Jewish nation is compared to the moon. The Lubavitzer Rebbe *zt'l* noted that the moon is always there, only sometimes we don't see it. Similarly, the spark of a *Yid* is always present, only sometimes it is covered over, and we don't recognize it. But the holiness is there, his spark can be ignited, and then he will return with *teshuvah sheleimah*.

(Tehillim 32:10), הַבּוֹטָח בְּה' חֶסֶד יְסֻבֵּנּוּ, "For the one who trusts in Hashem, kindness will surround him."

Chazal (Tana d'Bei Eliyahu 22:2) write, "Everyone is obligated to say, 'when will my deeds reach the deeds of my forefathers.' We aren't on Avraham's high level of emunah and bitachon, but we should strive to have some association with it.

Bitachon Helps us Pass Nisyonos

The Mishnah (Avos 5:3) states, עֲשֶׂה נִסְיוֹנוֹת, "Avraham was tested ten times, and he passed them all."

The Bas Ayin says that Avraham passed the tests because he had bitachon. He trusted that Hashem always meant his good, and all of Hashem's mitzvos were ultimately for his benefit, so why shouldn't he obey and pass the test? When you know something is for your good, you want to do that thing. With this thought in mind, Avraham passed all his tests.

According to the Rambam (Pirush HaMishnayos, Avos 5:3), Avraham's first test was לֵךְ לְךָ, to leave his homeland to go to Eretz Canaan. We quote the Bas Ayin:

"It was certainly difficult for Avraham to leave his birthplace and his father's home where he was raised and was accustomed to being his entire life and go to a foreign land. He didn't even know where he was going! But he trusted that Hashem only does kindness. His trust in Hashem gave him the strength to pass this difficult test. It states, 'וַאֲבִרָם בֶּן חָמֵשׁ וּשְׁבַעִים שָׁנָה בְּצֵאתוֹ מִחָרָן', 'Avraham was 75 years old when he left Charan.' 75 is the gematriya of בְּטַחֲוֹן. The *pasuk* is hinting that Avraham was able to pass this test and leave Charan due to his *bitachon*. Because with *emunah* and *bitachon* in the Creator of

all worlds that everything He does is for the good, one has the strength to keep the mitzvos and to pass the most difficult tests."⁴

It states (Tehillim 37:3) בְּטַח בְּה' וַעֲשֵׂה טוֹב, "Trust in Hashem, and do good." When you trust in Hashem you will be able to do good deeds.

This also applies to parnassah. The pursuit of parnassah can take up one's entire day until there is hardly any time left for Torah and tefillah. However, when one has emunah and bitachon, he knows Hashem can sustain him even if he works less. This is the meaning of the *pasuk* בְּטַח בְּה' וַעֲשֵׂה טוֹב. With bitachon, one has more time to do good.

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

The Agra d'Kalah writes that this lesson is hinted at in the words לֵךְ לְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ. Hashem was telling Avraham that he should leave the notion that everything happens according to nature and instead, he should trust in Hashem. אֵל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֵרָאךְ, Hashem will prepare the means of parnassah that you need. You don't have to search for new ideas of how to earn parnassah other than the plan Hashem arranged for you.

4. Reb Yehudah Diner Shlita, rav of beis medresh Divrei Shir, Bnei Brak, expressed that when people are worried or upset, they ask לָמָּה, "Why did it occur?" or מָה יִהְיֶה, "What will be?" The gematriya of לָמָּה is 75, and the gematriya of מָה יִהְיֶה is also 75. The solution is בְּטַחֲוֹן, which is also gematriya 75.

אבר"ם, the Agra d'Kalah says, is *roshei teivos* רבות מחשבות בלב איש, "There are many thoughts in man's heart." People are constantly thinking up ideas of how to earn wealth. ועצת ה' היא תקום, we should follow Hashem's counsel, and engage in the *parnassah* that He prepared for us.

Avram's name was changed to אברה"ם. The extra ה, can be written out fully in three ways: ה"י, ה"א, ה"ה. The filler letters spell ה"א, and the Shlah HaKadosh (Shaar HaOsiyos 46, א) explains that it comes from the *pasuk* ה' עצת ה' היא תקום. The *roshei teivos* of ה"א are אם ירצה ה', "If Hashem wills it."

So, instead of רבות מחשבות בלב איש, many thoughts of how to earn *parnassah*, follow עצת ה', Hashem's counsel, the *parnassah* He prepared for you, ה"א, *im yirtzeh Hashem*, תקום, that will be enough for your *parnassah*.

"I'm the Leader of the World"

Avraham Avinu was born into a chaotic world. It seemed like no One was in charge *ch"v*. The world appeared to Avraham like an abandoned house that caught fire, that no one was extinguishing. It seemed like no one lived there!

Avraham witnessed the events and punishment of the *דור הפלגה*, when Hashem dispersed the nations. It was a global calamity which shook the entire world. And before Avraham was born, the enormous destruction of the *mabul* took place. There was so much devastation and destruction in the world, it appeared to Avraham that, *chas veshalom*, no one was taking care of it.

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

Many people consider the present era a time of immense chaos and confusion. Perhaps the world today can be compared to the house on fire that no one is putting out! It appears like no one is in charge, *chalilah*. But don't forget, אני בעל הבירה, Hashem is behind everything that is happening.

There will come a time when we will know the reason and logic for everything that's happening.

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

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

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

The Sar Shalom of Belz *zt'l* said that the opinion which states that Avraham recognized Hashem at age 48 needs explanation. That Avraham recognized Hashem when he was three years old tells us that when Avraham was at the age of minimal comprehension, he was already able to recognize Hashem. The opinion that he was forty years old comes from what Chazal say, בן ארבעים לבינה when one turns forty, he becomes wise. But what's the significance of recognizing Hashem at age 48? (And we can't say that it was a coincidence, without significance, because everything that happens in the world is for a purpose. Certainly, everything that happened to the Avos has significance, and especially something so important like attaining *emunah*. So, why did Avraham recognize Hashem specifically when he was forty-eight-years-old?)

When Avraham was 48, the infamous Tower of Bavel was completed, its purpose was to rebel against Hashem. The spirit of the time was a denial of Hashem; it was a generation of immense heresy. It wasn't easy to have *emunah* during that period. However, the truth remains that when one acquires *emunah* at a time when it's challenging to acquire it, the *emunah* becomes very deeply engrained in one's mind and soul. This is the significance of the fact that Avraham acquired *emunah* particularly at this time. He was strong and didn't let himself get influenced from the impurities around him, and therefore he attained a very high level of *emunah*.

Indeed, it was at this time that Avraham had questions about Hashem. "Who is

leading the world?" he wondered. Everything seemed chaotic, and Avraham asked, "If there's a Creator, why doesn't He take control of the world and turn things around for the better? Why do catastrophes happen, as though the world is running on its own? Hashem came to him and said, "I am the creator of the world; I am running the world."

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

Tzaddikim tell us that before Moshiach comes, it will be extremely difficult to believe in Hashem. Rebbe Yisrael of Ruzhin *zt'l*

compared this era to someone trying to climb up a straight wall.

Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk *zt'l* described the hardship that one will have to endure for his *emunah* to stay strong during the era before Moshiach. It is compared to a gigantic rope that is spread out across heaven, which will be shaking and turning rapidly. One will need to hold on with all his might, or else he will fall into the abyss below. This describes how tightly we need to hold on to our *emunah* in the days before Moshiach comes.⁵

When we remain firm with our *emunah*, it will be very clear and beautiful.

No Yeush

Rebbe Tzaddok HaKohen (Divrei Sofrim 16) teaches that the Jewish nation never needs to lose hope. Hashem saves them even in seemingly impossible situations. We begin

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

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

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

During the Communist regime, it was difficult to find a *mohel* in Russia. One Russian family somehow contacted a *mohel* from Eretz Yisrael and requested that he come and make a *bris milah* for their child. The *mohel* agreed. When he arrived, he discovered that the "baby" was a six-year-old boy. The *mohel* wasn't prepared to make a *milah* on a six-year-old child, but the parents pleaded with the *mohel* to do it.

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

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

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

Think about the *mesirus nefesh* this mother had. For six years, she wouldn't kiss her own son because he didn't have *milah*. And think of the *mesirus nefesh* of this young child and let this be a reminder that Torah is kept with *mesirus nefesh*.

this discussion with the following introduction:

The Rambam (Hilchos Gezeilah 1:5) writes, "If one steals something, he must return it to the owner, as it states (Vayikra 5:23) וְהָשִׁיב אֶת הַגְּזֵלָה אֲשֶׁר גָּזַל, "He shall return the article which he had robbed." He can't keep the stolen item and compensate the owner with money. Instead, he must return the item he stole.

There are exceptions to this rule. One exception is when the owner of the item has given up hope of ever recovering the stolen item. Another exception is if the thief used the stolen item in construction, and the stolen goods became part of a larger structure. At these times, the thief may keep the stolen item and pays its value in cash to the owner.

With this information in mind, we go to the Gemara (Succah 31.). The Gemarah relates that an old woman (הָיְתָה סְבִיבָה) came shouting to Rav Nachman that the slaves of the reish galusa⁶ stole her lumber and built a succah with it. She said, "All the rabbanim of the reish galusa are sitting in a stolen succah!"

She made the following two points: (1) She wanted her wood back, not just money. (2) She also wanted Rav Nachman to tell the rabbanim that they may not eat in this succah because, in her opinion, the succah wasn't kosher because it was built with stolen lumber.

Rav Nachman ignored her shouts. Annoyed, she exclaimed, "A woman whose father had 318 slaves shouts before you, and you ignore her?"

Rav Nachman turned to his students and said, "She is a shouter, and her only right is to get money."

Rashi explains that she didn't have the right to demand back the lumber because it was built into the succah, and the chachamim

established *Takanas Hashavin*, that when a stolen item is used in construction, the thief isn't obligated to break down the structure to return the stolen object. As such, the succah was kosher because the thieves had a right to keep the lumber.

What did this woman mean when she said her father had 318 slaves?

Some explain that she was saying that she comes from a wealthy family and therefore deserved respect and to be listened to.

Rashi explains that she was saying that she is a descendant of Avraham Avinu, who had 318 slaves (see this week's parashah 14:14).

Why did she describe Avraham Avinu as 'my father who had 318 slaves'? She could have said that she is a descendant of Avraham Avinu. Why did she speak in riddles?

Rebbe Tzadok HaKohen zt'l explains that she was saying that she is a descendant of Avraham Avinu who taught his descendants never to lose hope, and she, too, never gave up hope on recovering her wood. Had she given up, she would have lost her right to the wood and would only be entitled to money. But she claimed she didn't lose hope, so she should get the wood, too.

She called Avraham "My father who had 318 slaves" because this number hints to Avraham Avinu's attribute of never giving up, as we will explain:

The Torah (14:14) tells us that Avraham with his 318 slaves battled against four powerful kings in order to rescue his relative Lot. It seemed impossible to win this war, most people had lost hope (see Rashi 14:9). But not Avraham. He went out to war and won.

When Avraham rescued the king of Sedom, he told Avraham (14:21) וְהָרְכִישׁ קַח לְךָ, that Avraham can keep the spoils of the war.

6. The reish galusa was the government ruler for the Yidden in Bavel.

Why? Because the king of Sedom, and everyone else, had lost hope of ever seeing their money again, so he told Avraham that he could rightfully keep everything.

The only person who didn't lose hope was Avraham Avinu. He trusted in Hashem, fought and won the war against the four kings, and saved Lot.

The old woman referenced Avraham's 318 slaves who joined Avraham in this war because it was through this war that Avraham Avinu taught to us never to lose hope.

(2) Chazal (see Rashi 14:14) say that 318 is the gematriya of אליעזר, the name of Avraham's slave. According to this view, Avraham went to war solely with his slave Eliezer (not with 318 slaves). The name אליעזר reminds us not to lose hope. Moshe Rabbeinu named one of his sons אליעזר because (Shemos 18:4) ויצילני מחרב פרעה, 'The G-d of my father came to my aid and rescued me from Pharaoh's sword.' The sword was on Moshe's neck, and Hashem saved him.

So, this is another indication from the number 318 that one should never lose hope.

(3) The gematriya of יאוש is 317, so 318 means to go beyond yeush and to believe that Hashem will help.

The woman thought Rav Nachman wasn't paying attention to her claims because Rav Nachman figured that she lost hope of ever getting back the stolen wood (especially since they were stolen by the powerful slaves of the reish galusa) and the halachah is that when one loses hope, the thief is only obligated to pay its worth, and not the stolen item. To that effect, the old woman stated that she is a descendant of Avraham Avinu, who had bitachon and never lost hope, and she followed in his ways. Therefore, she should get back the actual stolen wood, not just monetary compensation.

So, Rav Nachman explained that there is another reason she doesn't have a right to the wood, which is because it was used in construction (as we explained).

We quote the words of Rebbe Tzaddok HaKohen, who elaborates on this important lesson:

"A Yid must never lose hope. Chazal (Brachos 10:) say, 'Even if a sword is on one's neck, one shouldn't lose hope from Hashem's compassion.' This also applies to ruchniyus. Even if one fell to very low levels, chas v'shalom, and even if he committed the aveiros that the Zohar (vol.1 p.219:) says teshuvah doesn't help, or that it is very difficult for him to do teshuvah, he shouldn't lose hope, and he shouldn't say that he can't change his habits. For Yidden, there is no yeush. In all situations, Hashem yisbarach can help.

"Bnei Yisrael came from a place of total yeush and despair. Avraham and Sarah were old, and no one dreamed they could bear children (see Bereishis 20:7). Even when a malach promised that they will bear a child, Sarah laughed, because it was so far-fetched that she could bear a child at her old age. It was destined and planned by Hashem that Bnei Yisrael shall come from a place of total despair to teach us that it is never too late. Hashem can always help because there is nothing Hashem can't do.

"Moshiach will come at a time when there will be a feeling of despair and people will feel that there is no hope, as it states (Yeshayah 53:1) מי האמין לשמועתנו, 'Who would have believed?' Chazal (Sanhedrin 97:) say that Moshiach will come when people lose hope of redemption. Therefore, [about this future era], it states (Yeshayah 51:2) הביטו אל אברהם אביכם ואל שרה תחולליכם, 'Look at Avraham, your father and at Sarah who bore you.' Recognize that Bnei Yisrael comes from a place of yeush. Don't let feelings of yeush destroy your hope.

Remember never to lose hope because yeush doesn't apply to the Jewish nation.⁷

Don't Give Up on Ruchniyus

In this week's parashah, Avraham Avinu comes to Eretz Yisrael, called Eretz Canaan. His father, Terach, also tried to take his family to Eretz Canaan, but he stopped in the middle of the way and settled in Charan. As stated at the end of last week's parashah (11:31), ויקח תרח את אברם בנו... ויצאו אתם מאור כשדים, "Terach took Avram his son [and the rest of his family] and went forth with them from Ur Kasdim to go to the land of Canaan. They came as far as Charan and settled there."

Going to Eretz Yisrael signifies going to the kedushah. Many people desire to attain kedushah but inevitably encounter difficulties along the way and give up. This is what happened to Terach and his family. They came to חרן, which means anger. This alludes to the attribute of *din*, which attempts to stop people from achieving their spiritual goals.

Obstacles arise, and most people lose hope and settle wherever they are. But Avraham traveled on and reached Eretz Yisrael.

The lesson for us is to overcome all obstacles and continue trying. You will fall, but you can get up and try again. If you remain stubborn, you will reach the kedushah you strive to attain.⁸

It states (13:18) ויאהל אברם ויבוא וישב באלוני ממרא, "Avram pitched his tents, and he came, and he dwelt in the plain of Mamre."

The *trop* on ויבא and on וישב is תביר. (It isn't so often that the *trop* תביר is found on two consecutive words.) The translation of תביר is broken. Avraham's specialty was that even when he broke, which means when he fell from his level, he continued. This attitude enabled him to reach אלוני ממרא and Eretz Yisrael.

When one falls from his level, the correct reaction should be, "What good deed can I do now?" Instead of moping over the past, think about what you can accomplish to improve the future.

In Parashas Bereishis (Bereishis 2:20), we read about how Adam named all the animals. Then Hashem created Chavah. Adam said (2:23), זאת הפעם עצם מעצמי ובשר מבשרי לזאת יקרא אשה, "This time it is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. This one shall be called *ishah* (woman) because this one was taken from *ish* (man)." But he didn't name her, yet. He only said that her name should be Chavah, when it says a few pesukim later (3:20) ויקרא האדם שם אשתו חוה כי היא היתה אם כל חי, 'Adam named his wife Chavah because she was the mother of all life.' This is written after the story of the sin of the Tree of Knowledge.

Rashi (3:20) says that Chavah should have been named earlier when he named all creation.

7. It states (15:5) ויצא אותו החוצה, "Hashem took Avraham outside," and Rashi explains that Hashem said to Avraham, צא מאצגנויות שלך, "Go out of your astrology. You have seen in the signs of the zodiac that you are not destined to have a son. Indeed, Avram will not bear a son, but Avraham will have a son. Sarai will not give birth, but Sarah will give birth. I will give you another name, and your destiny will change." Essentially, this means that Hashem told him that the rules of nature doesn't limit him. Hashem will take him out of the realm of nature and perform miracles for him.

8. The Kotzker zt'l (Siach Sarfei Kodesh, Inyanim Shonim, Avodas Hashem 43) teaches that there's a tall ladder, going down from heaven to earth, and Hashem brings down neshamos to this world using this ladder. Then Hashem takes the ladder away and says, "Now, come back to Me." Some lose hope, and they don't even try. Some jump up and fall, and then they lose hope. But there are those who jump again and again until Hashem has compassion on them and He brings them up to Him.

We can derive a very important lesson from the fact that Adam named her only after they ate from the Tree of Knowledge. Chavah ate from the Tree and convinced her husband, Adam, to eat from the fruit, as well. This brought devastation and destruction to the world. What should Chavah do now, after committing such a severe sin? Should she mope over the destruction she caused? What would that accomplish? Instead, Adam named her Chavah, which means that all life will come from her. With this name, he was telling Chavah to focus on the good that she could still accomplish in the world. The entire world, all mankind, will come from her!

This is the only way to react to mistakes. Moaning over the past won't accomplish anything; focusing and fixing the future will.⁹

The following pasuk states (Bereishis 3:21) וַיַּעַשׂ ה' אֱלֹקִים לְאָדָם וּלְאִשְׁתּוֹ כִּתְנוֹת עוֹר וַיַּלְבִּשֵׁם, "Hashem made for Adam and his wife shirts of skin, and He dressed them."

What is the uniqueness of this clothing? The Rabbeinu b'Chaya writes, "Hashem made them honorable, good clothing... Perhaps it was made from skins of the tachash, which was an animal that existed in Moshe Rabbeinu's time, and Moshe used it to cover the aron and the utensils. The skins had many colors, as Unkelos tells us.

"Chazal say that the clothing [that Hashem gave to Adam and Chavah] had

pictures of all the animals in the world drawn onto it.

"The Midrash says that Hashem dressed them in clothes of the kohen gadol."

Notice that these honorable clothing were given to Adam and Chavah after they sinned! They ate from the Tree of Knowledge, and Hashem gave them this honor! This is because Hashem doesn't want us to feel distressed or be overcome with a feeling of hopelessness. Even after a grave aveirah, Hashem wants us to remember our greatness and honor.

The Rabbeinu b'Chaya notes that it doesn't state ללבוש, that Hashem gave them clothes to wear. It states וילבשם, that Hashem Himself dressed them. The Rabbeinu b'Chaya writes, "The pasuk wants to express Hashem's love and compassion for His creations. Even after they sinned, He doesn't stop loving them. He fixes them and does kindness with them." Hashem Himself dressed them because Hashem wanted to help them, despite the grave aveirah they committed.

The Rabbeinu b'Chaya adds, "We also find Hashem acting this way to their descendants, the generation who lived in the desert. It states that Hashem, Himself, sent them *mann* (as it states הַמָּן מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם). Although they sinned as Adam did, Hashem didn't stop loving them, and His kindness didn't leave them. The *mann* continued to fall like before. Also, by kriyas Yam Suf, although they had *avodah zarah* with them,

9. The Ropshitzer Rav zt'l gives an innovated explanation to the words לך לך... מבית אביך. Avraham's father was an idol worshipper. Avraham could think, "How can I serve Hashem? What yichus do I have? What importance do I have?"

Furthermore, the Rambam says that Avraham, as a youth, also worshipped *avodah zarah*. If he would focus on where he comes from and the aveiros he performed, he would feel broken and unworthy to serve Hashem. Hashem told him לך לך, go away from these negative thoughts.

Many people think similar negative thoughts. They think, after I committed an aveirah, how can I serve Hashem. Hashem replies, לך לך, go away from those thoughts, focus on the future, and you can serve Hashem.

Hashem didn't refrain from splitting the sea for them. This is an example of Hashem's kindness."

It states (Bereishis 6:4) הנפילים היו בארץ בימים ההם, "The נפילים were on the earth in those days, and also afterward." The translation of נפילים is fallen, and the pasuk refers to the malachim שמהזא"ל ועזא"ל that came down from heaven and fell from their levels (see Rashi Bamidbar 13:33). Malachim are called נפילים, fallen because after they fell from their level, they can't go up again. A Yid is never called נופל, fallen because even when he falls, he always has the potential to rise again.

And when he lifts himself up and improves his ways, he becomes even better than he was before. This is based on the principle of ירידה לצורך עליה, one falls to climb even higher.

Rashi (Bamidbar 29:36) explains the essence of the day of *Shemini Atzeres*. After the seven days of Succos, Hakadosh Baruch Hu asks us to stay one more day (for *Shemini Atzeres*). Hashem says, קשה עלי פרידתכם, "It is painful for me when you leave."

Sometimes, after Succos, people regret that they didn't use their time well. But Hashem sees matters differently than we do. Hashem loves our yomim tovim and cherishes every aspect of them, until Hashem says, "Stay another day. It is so hard for Me when you leave."

We can take a lot of chizuk from this lesson. Realize that Hashem sees things differently than we do, and even if we think the days were wasted, Hashem has an entirely different view on the matter.

It states (15:5) ויוצא אותו החוצה ויאמר הבט נא השמים וספר הכוכבים... כה יהיה זרעך, Hashem took Avraham outside and said, 'Please look heavenward and count the stars... So will be your children.' According to the simple meaning, Hashem told Avraham that he would have an endless number of children as there were innumerable stars.

The Sfas Emes explains that Hashem was telling Avraham that he would have children *like* the stars. Indeed, the Midrash states, "The Jewish nation is compared to stars." Stars appear tiny to us, but each star is magnificent and huge in heaven. Similarly, a Yid appears simple and regular in this world, but from Hashem's view in heaven, every Yid is perceived with all his splendor and luster.

Rebbe Shalom Ber of Lubavitz *zt'l* once praised a certain community. A chassid remarked, "They seem quite regular to me. Why do you praise them so much?" The Rebbe didn't respond.

This chassid was a jeweler, and the Rebbe asked to see some of his precious stones. The chassid showed them to the Rebbe, stating their high prices.

"They seem regular to me," the Rebbe said.

The chassid replied, "To understand the value of a gem, one needs to be a מבין (knowledgeable).

The Rebbe replied, "To understand the value of a Yid, one needs to be a מבין too."

Appreciate Your Deeds

In the *Tzetel Kattan* of Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk *zt'l* it states, "Every moment that one isn't learning Torah, especially when one is sitting idle in his room or lying on his bed and he can't fall asleep, he should be cautious to think about the mitzvah (*Vayikra* 22:32), ונקדשתי בתוך בני ישראל. He should imagine that there's a great, awesome fire, burning up to the heaven, and for Hashem's honor he overcomes his nature and throws himself into the fire to honor Hashem. Hashem considers a good thought like a deed. So, he wasn't idle. He performed a mitzvah of the Torah." A person might have these lofty thoughts of *mesirus nefesh* at night, but when morning arrives and the alarm clock rings, and now his test is לך לך, to get out of bed, the test becomes much harder.

This is because people want to do great deeds, and they don't value "mediocre deeds." They are ready to be *moser nefesh* and throw themselves into fire for Hashem, but they aren't prepared to wake up on time to learn Torah or to do other relatively easy actions.

When Avraham lived in Ur Kasdim, Nimrod gave Avraham an ultimatum: Either he bows down to the idols, or he would be thrown into the fire. Avraham chose the furnace.

According to the Ra'v Bartenura (Avos 5:3) this was Avraham's first test, but according to the Rambam, Avraham's first test was לך לך, to go to Eretz Canaan. According to the Rambam, the test of Ur Kasdim isn't counted among Avraham's ten tests, and we wonder why not? Isn't choosing the furnace over idol worship a greater test and accomplishment than לך לך?

We also wonder why the test of Ur Kasdim isn't written explicitly in the Torah?

We can answer that it is because it is often easier for people to do great deeds than mediocre ones. Perhaps it was easier for Avraham to choose the furnace over worshipping idols than לך לך, to leave his father's home.

Throughout history, many good Yidden chose death over bowing to the cross. But an even greater test is to keep the daily mitzvos, those that we think are ordinary and not as important.

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

or big. As people say, 'Whatever you grab in the market is worthwhile.'"

The following tale is told about the Golem of Prague:

One week, fishermen didn't catch any fish for Shabbos, so the Golem of Prague was sent to the sea to fill a large sack with fish. A long time passed, and the Golem didn't return, so people went to the sea to check up on him. They found him standing in the sea, struggling against the waves, trying to catch fish. They signaled for him to return home. The Golem showed them that the sack was only half full. They told him, "We don't need any more fish."

The Golem heard they didn't need more fish, so he turned the sack over and let all the fish free.

This story can be used as a *mashal* to show the foolishness of people who think "Either everything or nothing at all." They want perfection, and anything less than that isn't valuable. But whatever you have is precious, even if it is a little.

The Midrash (*Bereishis Rabba* 38) states:

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

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

Avraham replied, "I will tell you the truth. A woman came and asked me to give a bowl of flour to the idols. I did so, and the idols began to bicker. One said, 'I will eat

first,' and another said, 'I will eat first.' Then, this big idol took an axe and smashed them all."

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

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

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

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

Nimrod said, "Bow down to the water."

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

Nimrod, said, "Bow to the clouds."

Avraham replied, "We should bow to the wind because the wind blows the clouds."

Nimrod said, "Bow to the wind.:

Avraham quipped, "We should bow to a human being because he carries wind within him."

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

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

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

"I'm with Avraham."

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

The Sfas Emes (תרל"ז ד"ה טעם) says that Haran was rewarded immensely for his good deed. His deed wasn't perfect, and therefore he was burned in the furnace, but nevertheless, he went into fire *al kidush Hashem*, and he deserves a reward. His reward is that Dovid HaMelech and Moshiach come from him. (As we know, Dovid HaMelech and Moshiach come from Haran's son, Lot.) So, we see that every good deed, even an imperfect deed, is rewarded.

Lot was captured in the war, and Og told Avraham about it. Og's intention wasn't pure. Rashi (21:34) tells us that Og was hoping Avraham would die at war and he would marry Sarah. Nevertheless, Og did a good deed because he told Avraham that Lot had been captured.

The Midrash (*Bereishis Rabba* 42:8) states, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu said, 'I swear, you will be rewarded for coming [to Avraham]. You will live long.'"

We see that every good deed is rewarded – even the good deeds of *reshaim*. We can be confident that all our good deeds will also be rewarded. We shouldn't consider any of our good deeds small because they are small only in our eyes but great in the eyes of Hashem.