

Torah Wellsprings

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Torah Wellsprings - Vayera

Tefillah - The Most Powerful Weapon

It states (Tehillim 20:8-9) אלה ברכב ואלה בסוסים ואנחנו בשם ה' אלקינו נזכיר, המה כרעו ונפלו ואנחנו קמנו ונתעודד, "They come with chariots and horses, but we call out the name of Hashem, our G-d. They surrendered and fell, and we were triumphant and exultant."

The Radak explains that our enemies rely on their chariots and horses for victory (and in our times, tanks, planes, and missiles), but we rely on Hashem, and therefore, we will be victorious. They will surrender and fall before us. The Radak writes, "Initially, we had fallen before them, but when we invoke Hashem's name, we become triumphant, and we win the war."

The goyim have precision missiles, atomic bombs, etc., but we have tefillah, and we will be victorious. Tefillah is the most potent weapon. With tefillah, we will be victorious over all our enemies. Even if we have fallen and were defeated, קמנו, we will stand up again and be victorious.

People find it hard to imagine that words of tefillah can be so powerful. How can words compete with modern-day weaponry?

But behold it states (Amos 4:13) יוצר הרים ובורא רוח מגיד לאדם ומה שיחו, The Rebbe of Ruzhin zt'l explained these words to mean, יוצר הרים, Hashem created mighty mountains, ובורא רוח, but wind can uproot mountains because winds are stronger than mountains. מגיד לאדם, this pasuk tells a person how powerful his speech is. Speech is ultimately only wind, yet wind is the greatest strength in the world.

It states (Yeshayah 41:14) את תיראי תולעת יעקב... "Fear not, O worm of Yaakov...for I help you." "Worm of Yaakov, תולעת יעקב, isn't said in a derogatory way. Rashi explains that the Jewish nation is compared to a worm because החלשה כתולעת שאין לה גבורה אלא

בפיה, "[The Jewish nation] is weak like a worm, whose only strength is its mouth."

The Midrash (Tanchuma Bishalach 9) states, "Why is Bnei Yisrael compared to a worm? A worm can attack cedar trees only with its mouth. The worm is soft, and it smites the hard (the tree). So too, Bnei Yisrael, their strength is their tefillos."

Sarah laughed when the malach said she would bear a child. The Siforno (18:12) explains, "She thought that a brachah from a navi [or malach] wasn't sufficient to cause an old couple to bear children and become young again. They would need a miracle similar to *techiyas hameisim*, and such a miracle would only happen if Hashem commanded it explicitly or through a tefillah that finds favor in Hashem's eyes."

So, we see that even if a brachah from a malach or a navi won't change one's nature, tefillah can. Tefillah brings us Hashem's miracles.

Our Present Times

One of the chapters that discuss our present situation is in Tehillim (124). It states there, לולי ה' שהיה לנו יאמר נא ישראל, לולי ה' שהיה לנו בקום עלינו אדם, אזי חיים בלענו בחרות אפם בנו... עזרנו בשם ה' עושה שמים וארץ, "Had not Hashem been with us - let Yisrael declare now! Had not Hashem been with us when men rose against us, then they would have swallowed us alive, when their anger was kindled against us... Our help is the name of Hashem, maker of heaven and earth."

Reb Chaim Vital (Eitz HaDaas Tov) says this chapter discusses the galus of Yishmael, which we are in today. The chapter begins with the first four galuyos (Bavel, Madai, Yavan, and Edom) and states, לולי ה' שהיה לנו יאמר נא ישראל, "Had not Hashem been with us - let Yisrael declare now!" The next pasuk, לולי ה' שהיה לנו בקום עלינו אדם, "Had not Hashem been with us

when men rose against us," alludes to the fifth galus, the galus of Yishmael. Chazal (Pirkei d'Reb Eliezer 32) say, "Why is his name *ישמעאל*? It is because the Yidden will shout out to Hashem when they are in galus of Yishmael, and *ישמע א-ל* Hashem will listen to them and save them. This is as it states (Tehillim 55:20), *ישמע א-ל ויענם*, "Hashem will hear [their tefillos] and answer them."¹

So, we are living in an extraordinary time, a time when Hashem awaits to hear our tefillah.

We return to the chapter of Tehillim (124) that Reb Chaim Vital reveals is referring to this era, and we quote Reb Chaim's Vital's commentary: "[Tehillim states that at this time] *אזי חיים בלענו בחרות אפם בנו*, 'They would have swallowed us alive when their anger was kindled against us.' This refers to the fifth galus of Yishmael, which is worse than all other galuyos, because they want to swallow us, and we don't know what we can do. Our only solution is to call out to Hashem in prayer. The chapter concludes, *עזרנו בשם ה' עושה שמים וארץ*, 'Our help is through the name of Hashem, Maker of heaven and earth.' Hashem will speedily bring the *geulah sheleimah*, so heaven and earth can exist because they don't have existence without Bnei Yisrael."

Reb Chaim Vital is saying that Hashem created heaven and earth for Bnei Yisrael who serve Him. We are confident Hashem will save us because the entire world depends on our existence.

Shouting Out to Hashem

It states (Devarim 26:7) *ונצעק אל ה' אלקי אבותינו*, "We shouted to Hashem... and Hashem heard our voices." The Torah doesn't say *וישמע ה' את תפילתנו*, that Hashem heard our tefillos; rather, *וישמע ה' את קולנו*, "Hashem heard our voices."

The Chofetz Chaim zt'l (Al HaTorah, Ki Savo) explains that the pasuk expresses the special quality of shouting out to Hashem. "We have to shout...when there is an *eis tzarah*, and Hashem will answer immediately. There are times that Hashem only answers our tefillos after a few days... The Midrash (Midrash Shmuel 4) states, 'There are tefillos that are answered after several years...' But *צעקה*, shouting out to Hashem, is answered immediately."

The Zohar (vol.2, p.20.) states, "The greatest [form of tefillah] is *צעקה*, shouting from the heart, as it states (Eichah 2:18) *צעק לבם אל ה'*, 'Their hearts shouted out to Hashem.' ... And it states (Shemos 22:22) *כי אם צעק יצעק אלי*, 'If he shouts out to Me, I will certainly listen to his shouts.' Reb Brachyah says that when Hakadosh Baruch Hu said to Shmuel (Shmuel 1, 15:11), *נחמתי כי המלכתי את שאול*, 'I regret that I have made Shaul king...' *למלך*, 'This distressed Shmuel, and he shouted out to Hashem all night.' Shmuel left everything, and he took himself to shouting to Hashem because our shouts are closer to Hakadosh Baruch Hu than anything else. As it states (Shemos 3:9) *ועתה צעקת בני ישראל באה עלי*, 'And now, behold, the shout of Bnei Yisrael has come [near] to Me.'"

1. Another translation of *ישמע א-ל ויענם* is that Hashem will listen and afflict the goyim.

We quote the Pirkei d'Reb Eliezer (ch.32) because it discusses our times.

"(Bereishis 16:1) *וקראה שמו ישמעאל*, 'You shall call his name Yishmael...' Why Yishmael? Because in the future, Hakadosh Baruch Hu will listen to the Jewish nation's shouting, due to what the descendants of Yishmael will do at the end of time. He is called Yishmael as in the pasuk (Tehillim 55:20) *ישמע א-ל ויענם*, 'Hashem will listen and answer them.'"

Pirkei d'Reb Eliezer (end of ch.30) also writes, "The descendants of Yishmael will conduct three wars at the end of time...and through those Moshiach will come."

We say in Nishmas, שוועת עניים אתה תשמע, "The plea of the destitute You hear, the shouts of a poor man You listen and save." When it states שוועת עניים, it refers to many poor people, as it states שוועת עניים, whereas, when it discusses shouting, it discusses one poor man shouting, as it says, צעקת הדל.

Also, for the shouts of the poor, it states תקשיב ותושיע, "You listen and save," and for the plea of the poor it states אתה תשמע, "You listen," but not that Hashem saves.

The Chida (Safah Achas, ד"ה שועת) explains that this teaches us the benefit of shouting out one's prayers because these prayers are answered immediately. This is implied from the words תקשיב ותושיע, as soon as Hashem hears your shouts, He will save you. And even when an individual shouts out to Hashem (as implied from the singular term הדל) Hashem will answer your tefillos.

We add that it is known that shouting out to Hashem doesn't always need to be in a loud voice. Sometimes, the heart can shout out powerfully to Hashem, but one's voice is regular. This tefillah goes straight up to heaven and brings immediate salvation.

The Pele Yoetz (Tzaakah) teaches:

"How great is the power of צעקה, shouting, to annul gezeiros. This is as it states צעקו וה' שמע, 'Shout and Hashem will hear.' Also, in Tehillim (107) it states, ויצעקו אל ה' בצר להם, "They shouted out to Hashem in their distress, and Hashem saved them from their problems.' ... The Zohar HaKodesh writes that when one raises his voice in tefillah, his tefillah won't be heard in heaven. However, other sources from the Zohar

indicate that one should raise his voice in prayer. I think that to answer this question somewhat... (a) if a fire burns within him, and he can't hold back from shouting in a loud voice because of his tzaros, this is a very good tefillah, and it will bring results. (b) If he is the chazan, he must raise his voice. And (c) the main answer is that he should shout from the heart. His voice can be medium, but a crying voice, like someone who is shouting, crying, and pleading, and Hashem will listen and answer him because Hashem listens to the shouts of His nation."

I heard a story that demonstrates the power of tefillah when we shout out to Hashem:

Kalman, a bachur from Hungary, was sent to Auschwitz. At the notorious selection, there was a metal pole that everyone had to pass by. Whoever didn't reach the height of the pole was deemed a child and was sent to the left. Kalman walked on his toes, hoping to gain a few inches, but he didn't reach the pole, and he was sent to the left, which he knew meant the gas chambers. As his group was being led to the gas chambers, one bachur shouted, "Let us shout out to our Father in heaven that He should save us." They shouted Tehillim (130) מומעמקים קראתיך ה'. They were pushed into the gas chambers, but there was no gas, and their lives were saved. Reb Kalman would often say that the tefillah saved his life. It was as Chazal (Brachos 10.) say, "Even if a sharp sword is on one's neck, he shouldn't lose hope..."

So, let us shout out to Hashem, and primarily, let our hearts shout out to Hashem with the realization that only He can save us, and that will be our salvation.²

2. When Yishmael was ill, Hagar davened for him, as it states (21:16), ותשא את קולה ותבך, "She raised her voice and cried," but that didn't save Yishmael. Yishmael davened for himself, and that saved him, as it states (21:17), כי שמע אלוקים את קול הנער באשר הוא שם. The Midrash (*Bereishis Rabba* 53:14) explains that this teaches us "The best tefillah of all is when the ill daven for themselves." Rashi writes, מתפלת החולה מתפלת אחרים עליו והיא, "The tefillah of the ill is better than when others daven for him. His own tefillos are answered quicker." And this is because a sick person davens from the depths of his heart. He shouts out to Hashem; such tefillos are answered immediately.

Everyone's Tefillah

Some people feel they are unworthy to daven, but everyone must know that Hashem listens to תפילת כל פה, whoever turns to Him in prayer.

Rebbe Pinchas Koritzer zt'l once said to a Yid who had several children dying young, "My friend, I plead to you: Why do you allow your children to die? Don't you believe that when one davens sincerely to Hashem, even if he is the greatest rasha, he will receive anything he wants from Hashem" (Imrei Pinchas, Toras HaAdam 50)?

The name of this man was Avraham Cohen. Rebbe Pinchas Koritzer understood he wasn't davening sufficiently for his children's health because he didn't think his tefillos would help. Reb Pinchas Koritzer explained that Hashem listens to everyone's tefillos, even the tefillos of the greatest rasha, and Hashem will grant him his requests.

And just as Hashem listens to everyone's tefillos, Hashem will save even the reshaim of the Jewish nation when we daven for them.

The Zohar (vol.1 106.) discusses the differences between the tefillos of Noach, Avraham, and Moshe Rabbeinu. "Who is a compassionate father like Avraham? When Hashem told Noach that he should build a teivah because He was about to destroy the world, Noach was silent. He didn't say anything. He didn't daven. But when Hakadosh Baruch Hu told Avraham about the sins of Sedom and that He is contemplating destroying them, immediately (18:23) ויגש ויאמר, 'Avraham came forward and said, 'Will You also stamp out the righteous along with the wicked? ... Reb Alazar says, "Avraham also didn't daven with perfection. Noach didn't daven at all. Avraham davened that there should be justice and that the innocent shouldn't die together with the guilty. But he didn't finish. He didn't request that whether they are worthy or not, Hashem should save them. Who davened correctly? Moshe Rabbeinu.

When Hashem told him (Shemos 32:8) סרו מהר מן הדרך אשר צויתם עשו להם עגל מסכה וישתחוו לו, 'They have strayed quickly from the way that I have commanded them. They have made themselves a molten calf and bowed down to it.' Moshe davened for them immediately, as it states (Shemos 32:11) ויחל משה את פני ה' אלקיו, 'Moshe pleaded before Hashem his G-d...' and he said that if Hashem doesn't forgive them, his name should be erased from the sefer Torah. He didn't stop davening until Hashem said, סלחתי כדברך, that He will forgive them. But Avraham's prayer was dependent on the tzaddikim, and if there weren't tzaddikim, he didn't ask that they be saved. So, there wasn't a person who protected his generation like Moshe Rabbeinu, for he was a loyal shepherd."

The Essence of a Test

Nimrod threatened Avraham in Ur Kasdim that if he didn't bow to idols, he would throw him into a fiery furnace. Avraham passed this test. He refused to bow down to idols. He was thrown into the furnace and miraculously survived. This story isn't written in the Torah, and we wonder why not. According to many *Rishonim*, this episode isn't even counted among Avraham's ten primary tests in life, which is also surprising. The test of *Ur Kasdim* seems to be a very difficult test, harder than many of the others.

Meforshim answer that the difficulty of a test isn't measured solely by the situation and circumstance. It is also determined by the person's level during the test. When a person is on a high level, the greatest test can be easy for him to pass. The most difficult tests are when one is loyal to Hashem even when he falls from his levels and his emunah isn't so clear.

Avraham's ten tests happened at these times, when Hashem took away his high levels.

It states (22:4) וישא אברהם את עיניו וירא את המקום מרחוק, "Avraham lifted his eyes and saw the place [of the akeidah] from afar." The Zohar

says that המקום alludes to Hashem (because Hashem is the מקומו של עולם). Avraham saw Hashem from a distance, representing the unclear emunah that Avraham Avinu felt at the time, which increased the test challenge immensely.³

Rashi (22:12) writes, "Avraham said to Hashem, 'I will explain my complaint before You. Yesterday, You told me (21:12) כי ביצחק יקרא לך זרע, 'for in Yitzchak will be called your seed.' But then You retracted and said (21:2) קח נא את בנך 'Take now your son [Yitzchak and sacrifice him]." Avraham suffered from questions and unclarities. Questions such as this one can challenge one's emunah. This is why the akeidah was a far greater test than Ur Kasdim. In Ur Kasdim, Avraham's Avinu's emunah was strong and clear. Therefore, according to many *Rishonim*, it isn't counted among Avraham Avinu's ten tests.⁴

What did Avraham do? How did he pass the great test of the akeidah when his emunah was taken away from him, and he had questions about Hashem's ways? The answer is מרחוק, "from a distance." Avraham distanced the questions from his mind to perform Hashem's will.

The Yesod HoAvodah writes, "A human mouth cannot express the high levels that Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov attained. There isn't a man in the world who can comprehend it. Even malachim cannot grasp their greatness. Nevertheless, they only passed the test of the *akeidah* thanks to their *temimus* and *emunah peshutah*." This is because at that time, Hashem took away their *madreigos*. The only way to pass the test was with *emunah peshutah*.⁵

It states (22:4) ביום השלישי וישא אברהם את עיניו וירא את המקום מרחק, "On the third day, Avraham lifted his eyes and saw the place from afar."

How did Avraham know that this was the place meant for the Akeidah?

Rashi answers that he saw a cloud tied to the mountain. This was his sign that it was the place that Hashem wanted him to go to.

We can explain that a cloud denotes concealment, when Hashem's presence isn't vivid. When Avraham saw the cloud over the mountain, he understood that this was the place of tests and the location of the *akeidah*.

We daven that Hashem shouldn't test us, but tests and questions arise, especially

3. The Avodas Yisrael *zt'l* (*Vayikra* ויקרא) writes, "When Hakadosh Baruch tests a person, Hashem conceals Himself and temporarily takes away the person's emunah that he had previously. This is because if a person had clarity in emunah when tested, it wouldn't be a test at all. When one is aware that he is standing before the great and awesome King and knows that Hashem is looking at him, of course, he would not rebel against Hashem. A test can occur when one loses his clarity in emunah. Therefore, we can assume that when Hashem tested Avraham and said קח נא את בנך, 'Please take your son...Hashem took away Avraham's clarity in emunah and deveikus in Hashem. The test was whether he would maintain his righteousness even then. This can be the translation of the pasuk וירא את המקום מרחוק. Hakadosh Baruch Hu is called מקום, for He is the מקומו של עולם 'the place of the world.' Avraham lost his usual levels of emunah and deveikus and felt as if Hashem was far away from him. Even so, וילכו שניהם יחדו, Avraham and Yitzchak went together to do Hashem's will with love and with emunah peshutah."

4. It was certainly a test. A person is tested every moment, as it states (Iyov 7:17) לרגעים תבחנו, "But it wasn't considered one of Avraham Avinu's primary tests. The test of Ur Kasdim wasn't as challenging as the ten other tests he passed.

5. There are times when a person is plagued by questions and has a low level of emunah. He is upset with himself and asks, "Why isn't my emunah clear, without questions?" But he must know that his questions and doubts don't necessarily mean that he is on a low level. It is possible that Hashem took away his emunah in order to test him.

during the current difficult times. We don't understand why good people suffer, or why our tefillos aren't immediately answered, and so on. The counsel is *המקום מרחוק*; keep the questions far away from you and trust in Hashem with *emunah peshutah* that everything happens precisely as it is meant to.⁶

Teshuvah in an Eis Tzarah

The Rambam (Hilchos Taanis 1:2-3) writes, "This is how teshuvah is performed. When there is a tzarah, and people shout and pray, they must know that the tzarah came because of their bad deeds, as it states (Yirmiyahu 5:25) *עוונותיכם הטו*, 'Your sins have caused this...'

"When they know this, the tzarah will leave them. However, if they won't shout out to Hashem, rather they will say that this tzarah is a natural occurrence, it is *אכזריות*, cruel, to think so. If this is their attitude, they won't change their ways, and then even more tzaros will come. About this, the Torah (Vayikra 26:27) states, *והלכתם עמי בקרי*, if you think it is all natural and by chance, (Vayikra 26:28) *והלכתי גם אני עמכם בחמת קרי*, Hashem will behave toward you with fury of chance..."⁷

Therefore, at this challenging time, let us review our deeds and return to Hashem. Let us realize that what is happening in Eretz Yisrael today didn't happen by chance. Our sins are what caused it, and we must repent.

6. The Baal HaTanya *zt'l* was in the beis medresh of the Magid of Mezritz *zt'l* and heard three people discussing the *akeidah*. "What is so special about this test? Wouldn't every Yid sacrifice his child if Hashem spoke to him and clearly instructed him to do so?"

One answered that it's true that every Yid would do the same, but that's because Yidden are descendants of Avraham Avinu, and they inherited Avraham's devotion to Hashem. But Avraham was the son of Terach. He didn't have holy genes from his ancestors to draw upon. He had to reach this level on his own. That's why the *akeidah* was a very difficult test for Avraham.

Another person said that he wasn't fully satisfied with that answer because when one is commanded directly by Hashem to do an *akeidah*, he would undoubtedly do so, even without the influence of parents and ancestors. "In my opinion, the greatness of the *akeidah* is that Avraham performed it immediately and didn't push it off. When Hashem instructed Avraham to perform the *akeidah*, but Hashem didn't specify *when* he should do it. Avraham could have waited several years before bringing Yitzchak as a *korban*. But because of Avraham's great love for Hashem, he didn't wait – that's the greatness of his deed."

The third person was not satisfied with that answer either because every Yid would immediately do Hashem's will if they received this message directly from Hashem. "In my opinion, the greatness of Avraham is when the *malach* came and instructed Avraham not to sacrifice Yitzchak. At that moment, Avraham wasn't any happier than when Hashem told him to *והעלהו לעולה* to sacrifice Yitzchak. This is the aspect of the *akeidah* that is so unique."

The Baal HaTanya commented that they each spoke in accordance with the level they were on.

7. A boy was acting wildly, and his father smacked him across the face. The child went to his room and began writing something. The father wanted to see what his son was thinking, so he read the paper. "What is a smack?" his son wrote. "A smack is when a hard hand hits forcefully a soft cheek. Often, the cheek will change colors, but with some time, it will go back to its original color..."

The father was angry once again with his son. He said, "I smacked you so you would learn your lesson, and you are creating a thesis to explain the essence of a smack?"

The point is that although Hashem is merciful, and we believe that it is all for our good, however, as the Rambam tells us, Hashem is also arousing us to teshuvah, and we must respond correctly. If a person is busy analyzing the news, what did the Arabs do, what is their plan?" they are acting like this boy who analyzed the smack, ignoring the purpose of the smack.

With this attitude, Hashem will remove His wrath from His nation.

This is the only place that the Rambam uses the word אכזריות, cruelty. Why is one cruel if he doesn't do teshuvah? One answer is that by refraining from doing teshuvah, more tzaros come, as the Rambam writes. Furthermore, to think that Hashem shook up the entire world and took the lives of so many people for no reason at all is a cruel thought. How can one think that Hakadosh Baruch Hu, the *Av HaRachaman*, would cause this devastation to occur for no reason at all?

Dovid HaMelech urges us (Tehillim 32:9) אל תהיו כסוס כפרד אין הבין, "Be not like a horse, like a mule, uncomprehending."

The Baal HaTanya explains that when one hits a horse, the horse runs forward, and he doesn't look back to see who is hitting it. Dovid HaMelech tells us, "Don't be like the non-understanding horse. When you are hit, look back, understand who is hitting (and it is ultimately our Father in heaven Who loves us), and understand that Hashem wants something from us. He wants us to improve our ways.

It states (Amos 5:1-2) שמועו את הדבר הזה אשר אנכי נושא עליכם קינה בית ישראל, נפלה לא תוסיף קום בתולת ישראל, "Hear this pronouncement that I recite over you in lamentations, O house of Yisrael. She has fallen and will no longer rise - virgin of Yisrael."

The Malbim explains that when a person falls and can get up again, people allow him to stand up on his own. But if a person falls and can't get up alone, friends and family will immediately come and extend a hand and help him stand up. Klal Yisrael fell and can't get up by themselves. So why don't the malachim come to help us get up? The answer is (Amos 5:4) כי כה אמר ה' לבית ישראל דרשוני, וחיי, "For thus said Hashem to the house of Yisrael: Seek Me and live." The Targum translates it, "Seek fear of Me, and you will live." This is what is incumbent on us now, to search for ways to improve our ways.

Kabbalos

The path to teshuvah is accomplished with small steps. A few small steps in the right direction are so meaningful.

Reb Aryeh Levine zt'l would visit the Yidden of Yerushalayim who were in jail. When one prisoner was freed, someone asked him whether he planned to steal again. He replied that he wouldn't turn to crime again. And then he said, "Maybe I will steal once more. Reb Aryeh Levine doesn't have a watch, and I want to get him one. If I can't obtain it legally, I will steal a watch for him. But after that, I won't steal again."

The man asked Reb Aryeh Levine, "What type of students do you have? I just spoke to one of them, and he said he would steal to get you a watch."

Reb Aryeh Levine replied, "I don't give them mussar, and I don't tell them not to steal. I teach them one thing: they must be cautious to speak the truth. And as you saw, this person was very truthful. He admitted that he would steal once more. When someone is careful never to lie, he won't steal. He knows that if he is asked whether he stole, he will have to admit the truth, so with this one precaution, he will be protected from theft and all other aveiros.

Once, a man was smoking a cigarette on the street on Shabbos, and Reb Aryeh Levine was approaching from the other side. One of Reb Aryeh Levine's post-jail friends went over to hear what Reb Aryeh Levine would tell the smoker. Reb Aryeh said, "I won't tell you to stop smoking because you know on your own that it is Shabbos, and you are smoking, regardless. But I will tell you that you shouldn't extinguish the cigarette when you finish smoking it. Let the coal extinguish on its own. That way, you will have one aveirah less on Shabbos."

A couple of weeks later, this smoker said, "Now, not only do I not smoke on Shabbos, but I also don't smoke during the weekdays."

These stories remind us that we can grow with small steps.

The following *din Torah* came before Reb Nissin Korelitz *zt'l*: In an apartment building in Bnei Brak, there was a warning sign in the elevator that no more than four people could be inside. Once, four people were already in the elevator, and two more climbed in. As the elevator headed up, it broke. The question was whose responsibility it was to pay for the repairs. Some said the two people who entered last must pay because they overloaded the elevator. Others claimed that all six were responsible because when they saw two people insisting on coming in, they should have left the elevator.⁸

Reb Nissin Korelitz cleverly ruled that the person who pressed the elevator button must pay because he was the one who caused the elevator to overwork and collapse.

One wonders, "The person who pushed the button? He did so little?" That's true, but that little push of the finger was significant, and that caused the elevator to break. Regarding our topic, the *nimshal* is that people think a small step is insignificant, but it isn't so. The most minor things can hold so much significance.

Hashem says (*Shemos* 19:4), *וַאֲשַׁא אֶתְכֶם עַל כַּנְפֵי* וַאֲשַׁא אֶתְכֶם עַל כַּנְפֵי, "I carried you on eagle's wings..." An eagle carries her children on her wings. As the eagle flies high in the sky, the children can look down and see the world below. But how do the birds climb up onto the eagle's wings? The young birds have to hop on. The mother eagle doesn't help them. This hints that Hashem can raise us to very high levels,

but we must take the first step. Even if it seems insignificant, these small steps can make all the difference.⁹

Growing from Tests

Once, a person told his Rebbe that he wished he had no tests. His Rebbe told him, "Take three pots and fill them with water. Cook a potato in one, an egg in the second, and coffee, sugar, and milk in the third."

An hour later, the rebbe showed him that the egg became hard, the potato became soft, and the third pot had sweet coffee. The rebbe explained, "The boiling water represents life's tests. Tests toughen soft people, softens tough people, and it can make someone sweet like sweetened coffee."

This is because people grow from the hardships they overcome.

The Maharal writes that the purpose of tests isn't to let Hashem know where we are up to in our *avodas Hashem* because Hashem knows this information even before we are tested. The purpose of tests is to help us bring forth our potential.

The Gemara (*Yoma* 69:, based on *Nechemya* 9) tells us how the *chachamim* abolished the *yetzer hara* for *avodah zorah*. They fasted for three days and three nights, and the *yetzer hara* came out of the *Kodesh HaKedashim*, appearing like a lion of fire. *Zecharyah HaNavi* told them, "This is the *yetzer hara* for *avodah zorah*!" and they captured it.

But we wonder, why did the *yetzer hara* come out of the *Kodesh HaKedashim*? Why

8. See *Bava Kama* 10:, regarding ten people sitting on a bench and the bench broke, which discusses a similar scenario.

9. It is written in *sefarim* that the best time to serve Hashem is early morning because that sets the tone for the rest of the day. If one is lazy in the morning, the day will likely pass without many accomplishments.

We learn *zerizus* from Avraham Avinu. By the *akeidah*, it states (22:3) *וַיִּשְׁכַּח אַבְרָהָם בַּבֶּקֶר*, "Avraham awoke early in the morning." Also, when Avraham davened for Sedom, it says (19:27) *וַיִּשְׁכַּח אַבְרָהָם בַּבֶּקֶר*. We should do the same. We should get into the habit of serving Hashem early in the morning, and then we will be able to accomplish a lot during the day.

was the *yetzer hara* in the holiest site of the world?

The answer is that the *yetzer hara* elevates people to the highest levels. The challenges that the *yetzer hara* gives us enable us to grow very high.

Avraham's first test was לך לך to leave his father's home to go to Eretz Canaan. The tenth test was וּלְךָ לֶךְ... וְלֶךְ לֶךְ, that Avraham should go to the Akeidah. By both tests, לך לך is written. The Midrash (*Bereishis Rabba* 39:9) states, "It says לך לך twice, and we don't know which is more beloved, the second or the first?"

The Midrash concludes that the second לך לך, of the *Akeidah* was a greater test and, therefore, more beloved to Hashem.

We wonder, isn't it evident that the tenth test was more difficult? What could be harder than to bring one's own child as a korban?

Perhaps the answer is that, in a way, the tenth test was easier because Avraham approached this test after already successfully passing nine difficult tests. Each test made Avraham stronger and better, and therefore, the Midrash debated the idea that perhaps the first test of Lech Lecha was a harder test.

The Ramban writes that there were other tzaddikim in Avraham Avinu's era who kept the Torah, but they didn't reach his level because they didn't pass tests as Avraham had.

We are being tested these days, but we can grow from them. We can improve our levels of emunah and bitachon, teshuvah, and tefillah, which we wouldn't have achieved if it weren't for these tests.

Salvations from Passing Tests

The Toldos zt'l (Rebbe Yaakov Yosef of Palnoa) zt'l and Rebbe Nachman Horedenka zt'l were traveling to the Baal Shem Tov zt'l, and they wanted to arrive in Mezhibuzh well before Shabbos. However, the wagon in

front of theirs belonged to the governor, who was traveling slowly. The law of the land forbade passing a governor on the road.

The Toldos became anxious and said, "We will never get to Mezhibuzh in time."

Rebbe Nachman Horedenka replied, "I always strive to live with the emunah that what we think is a problem and a deterrent will actually help us achieve our goal. Somehow, this problem will help us to get to Mezhibuzh on time."

"*Halevai*, it should be so!" the Toldos replied.

To reach Mezhibuzh, they had to pass through a town which had an outdoor market that morning. Tables with food and goods were spread out all over the long street which passed through the town. Hundreds of people were on the road, making it nearly impossible to pass through. But the governor was in the wagon in front of them, and in honor of the governor, everyone moved their wares to the side of the road so that the governor could pass by. The Toldos and Rebbe Nachman Horedenka could pass through the town with ease. When they reached the other side of the road, the governor turned left, the Toldos and Rebbe Nachman Horedenka turned right, and they arrived in Mezhibuzh before noon.

As Rebbe Nachman Horedenka said, what they thought was a deterrent turned out to help them get to their destination on time.

I heard a marvelous story that happened with Reb Ovadyah Yosef zt'l. Just a week before his chasunah was scheduled, his kallah began talking about a lifestyle that Reb Ovadyah hadn't planned on living. She expressed her desire to go with him to theatres and the like.

They didn't end up marrying. Reb Ovadyah married another woman, Rabbanit Margalit.

When Reb Ovadyah was ninety years old, just a few years before his petirah, a woman arrived at his house, shouting that she must speak with Reb Ovadyah. They brought her in, and she said, "Do you remember me?"

Reb Ovadyah didn't. "We were supposed to get married many years ago, and a week before the chasunah, it was called off. You should know that Hashem loves you because now I am an almanah, and all the years I was married, I never had children. The doctors told me that I can't have children."

Reb Ovadyah went through a hard time when the shidduch had to be called off, but it was all for his benefit. Similarly, when something difficult happens to us, let us remember that it is for our good. Something very good will come from it.

The same is true with tests-*nisyonos*. When we go through tests, know that something very good will come from it. At first, it appeared that *akeidas Yitzchak* would end the future of Bnei Yisrael. How could a nation come from Avraham if Yitzchak is brought as a korban, but in the end, many brachos came from *akeidas Yitzchak*.

According to the teachings of the holy sefarim, Yitzchak Avinu had a female-type neshamah, and therefore, he couldn't beget children. At the akeidah, his neshamah left him, and he received a new neshamah, a male soul, and now he could bear children.

Let this be a reminder that good comes from tests. Avraham thought that due to *Akeidas Yitzchak*, he wouldn't have descendants, but it was the opposite. He bore children because of *Akeidas Yitzchak*. Indeed, after the Akeidah, Hashem blessed Avraham that he would have many offspring. Hashem said (22:17) והרבה ארבה את זרעך ככוכבי וְהָרַבְתָּ אֶת־אֲרָבָה אֶת־זֶרְעֶךָ כְּכּוֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְכָחֹל אֲשֶׁר עַל־שֵׁפַת הַיָּם, "I shall greatly

increase your offspring like the stars of the heaven and like the sand on the sea shore." Now that Yitzchak received a male neshamah, Klal Yisroel was able to be born.

Where did Yitzchak's previous neshamah go after it left Yitzchak by the Akeidah? The Midrash Talpiyos (יעקב) writes that when Yitzchak's soul left him, it went into the ram, the איל, that was snagged in the bush. This is why Avraham sacrificed the ram and said that it should be considered as though he sacrificed Yitzchak. The ram was in a sense, his son Yitzchak because Yitzchak's neshamah was in it.

It states (22:13) וַיֵּלֶךְ אַבְרָהָם וַיִּקַּח אֶת־הָאֵיל וַיַּעֲלֵהוּ לְעוֹלָה תַּחַת בְּנוֹ, "Avraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a korban olah instead of his son." Rashi writes, "Why does the pasuk add תַּחַת בְּנוֹ, instead of his son? During each action of the korban, Avraham prayed, 'May it be Your will as if this was done to my son; as if he was slaughtered, his blood sprinkled, and skinned, and burned and became ashes.'" According to the Midrash Talpiyos, Avraham said these tefillos because Yitzchak's neshamah was in the ram, and sacrificing it was indeed a form of *Akeidas Yitzchak*.

Akeidas Yitzchak didn't jeopardize the future of Klal Yisrael. On the contrary, it caused it to materialize. It gave Yitzchak the neshamah he needed to have children.

At the beginning of the parashah, it states לָךְ לָךְ, and Rashi says that this means the journey would be "for your good and your benefit: (להנאתך ולטובתך). When Hashem instructed Avraham to perform the akeidah, Hashem once again said לָךְ לָךְ. This means the akeidah will be for Avraham's benefit, and indeed it was. The continuation of Klal Yisrael came from the akeidah. Additionally, Bnei Yisrael every day in its merit.¹⁰

10. After the akeidah, it states (22:16-17) כי יען אשר עשית את הדבר הזה ולא חשכת את בנך את יחידך כי ברך אברכך והרבה ארבה את זרעך, "because you have done this thing and you did not withhold your son, your only one, that I will surely bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed..." The Ramban (22:16) writes that these pasukim contain

Similarly, whenever we go through difficult times, we think the problems prevent us from reaching our goals. It is the issues that actually enable us to achieve our goals and succeed.¹¹

Akeidas Yitzchak Today

Akeidas Yitzchak occurred 3,699 years ago, in the year 2085.

Not exactly, because Akeidas Yitzchak happens every day. When you have a temptation and you overcome it, or when you have a test and you pass it, that is your personal Akeidas Yitzchak.

In Shemonah Esrei of Rosh Hashanah, we say, *ועקדת יצחק לזרעו היום תזכור*, "Remember Akeidas Yitzchak *today*..." We want Hashem to remember the Akeidas Yitzchak that happens today, and every day when we overcome the *yetzer hara*.

It states (22:13), *והנה איל אחר נאחו בסבך בקרניו*, "Avraham saw another ram caught in the bushes by its horns," and Avraham sacrificed this animal instead of Yitzchak. The *meforshim* seek to understand the word *אחר*, "another," since there was only one ram.¹²

The Or LaShamayim (הוקת ד"ה עלי באר), quoting the Chozeh of Lublin *zt'l* explains that the pasuk tells us that there are many akeidas Yitzchaks. Whenever a person overcomes his *yetzer hara*, that is another *akeidas Yitzchak*.

The Chozeh explains the pasuk as follows:

a promise that sin won't destroy the Jewish nation or cause them to fall forever into the hands of the goyim. This is a promise of future redemption." So, the akeidah was certainly for our benefit, although initially, it seemed that it was going to end the existence of the Jewish nation.

11. After Noach and his family and all animals entered the teivah, it states (Bereishis 7:16) *ויסגר ה' בעדו*, "Hashem shut him in." The Targum Yonason (and see Rashi) writes, *ואגין ה' עלוהי*, "Hashem protected him." I heard from a talmid chacham that this tells us that when one feels *ויסגר ה'* that Hashem closed him in and is limiting his successes, he should know that it is for his benefit. *ואגין ה' עלוהי*, Hashem is protecting him and helping him with this matter that he thinks is bad.

12. Rashi translates *אחר* as "after." He saw the ram *after* the *malach* spoke to Avraham and told him not to sacrifice Yitzchak.

והנה איל אחר, there are other *akeidas Yitzchaks*. *נאחו בסבך*, when one is trapped in the lure of temptation and bad habits and he overcomes them and passes the test, *בקרניו*, "His light shines up to Hashem's throne." (*קרניו* meaning shine, as in *Shemos* 34:35, *כי קרן עור פניו*, Moshe's face shone.)

The Shlah Hakadosh *zt'l* says that we should think: If Avraham Avinu was *moser nefesh* to sacrifice his own son on the *mizbeach*, we should at the very least be *moser nefesh* with regard to minor matters, like to overcome temptation or passing a test.

The Benefits of Chesed

The Chofetz Chaim (Ahavas Chesed (2:5) writes, "A person must be devoted to performing deeds of kindness because this arouses Hashem's compassion on Bnei Yisrael..."

In the footnote, the Chofetz Chaim adds, "Today, when the Midas HaDin is so strong in the world and there is no way to escape from the tzaros that arise each day, it is important to be involved in with *chasadim*, as this will arise Hshem's *chesed*... As Chazal tell us, Hakadosh Baruch Hu will say, 'These people need *chesed* themselves, and yet they do *chesed* for others. I, who am filled with kindness and compassion, of course, should perform kindness with My creations."

After *kriyas HaTorah* on Monday and Thursday, there's a list of *tefillos* that the

chazan recited that begin with the words, יהי רצון מלפני אבינו שבשמים. But the final one begins with אהינו כל בית ישראל הנתונים בצרה ובשביה... המקום... יהי רצון without the preface of יהי רצון. The Rebbes of Belz zt'l explain that when Yidden daven for one another, the gates of Hashem's compassion, open. We don't have to request that it should be Hashem's will because simply by davening for our fellow man, it certainly becomes Hashem's will to bestow kindness upon us.

In Eretz Yisrael, we began saying ותן טל ומטר on the seventh of Cheshvon. This was needed in the days of the Beis HaMikdash when people came to be עולה לרגל. We wanted to make sure that everyone returned home before we daven for rain.

The question is that now, due to our many sins, we don't have a Beis HaMikdash. So why don't we begin davening for rain earlier?

Perhaps the answer is that we want to remember the reason behind the old halachah, that we were concerned for the very last Yid, that he should travel peacefully, without getting caught in a rainstorm, and without needing to travel through muddy roads. This attribute of chesed for every single Yid is something that we don't want ever to forget.

Hashem said to Kayin (4:7) הלוא אם תיטב הלווא את. The Tiferes Shlomo (Vayeira זעקת) explains, "If you do kindness to others, Hashem will forgive all your aveiros."

The Midrash (Shochar Tov 65) says, "Whoever does chesed, his tefillos are answered."

Maharam Papirsh (Or Yashar) writes, "Whoever has compassion on others, heaven will have compassion on him, and they won't be too particular with his tefillah [to check whether his tefillos are adequate]. His tefillah will be answered with a happy countenance, and at a time of judgment, he will have many malachim advocating on his behalf."

It states (Tehillim 116) אהבתי כי ישמע ה' את קולי. Zera Shimshon (Kedoshim 5) explains these words with the Arizal's lesson, that one should say before the tefillah that he accepts upon himself the mitzvah of ואהבת כי ישמע. The Zera Shimshon explains, לרעד כמוד. ה' את קולי, when I want that Hashem should accept my tefillos, אהבתי, I increase my love for every man.

In this week's parashah, Hashem expresses his love for Avraham because of his attribute of Chesed. Hashem said (18:19) כי ידעתיו למען אשר יצוה את בניו ואת ביתו אחריו ושמרו דרך. "For I have loved him, because he commands his children and his household after him that they keep the way of Hashem, doing charity and justice..."

This week's parashah also emphasizes Avraham's chesed, such as Avraham's perfection in hachnasas orchim. Let us go in Avraham Avinu's ways, which will bring us much needed chesed from Above.¹³

13. The holy *sefarim* say that when a tzaddik excels in a mitzvah during his lifetime, he continues to perform this mitzvah after his *petirah*. For example, Avraham Avinu excelled in his hachnasas orchim, and until today, when a Yid performs hachnasas orchim, Avraham comes to help him perform the mitzvah.

The story of Avraham Avinu's *hachnasas orchim* and the three *malachim* is written in the past tense: "He took... He went... He hurried... etc. The exception is the words (18:8), והוא עומד עליהם תחת העץ ויאכלו, "[Avraham] stands above them..." These words are written in the present tense. This implies that until today, when Yidden do *hachnasas orchim*, Avraham stands there. He is present, for he wants to partake in the mitzvah.

Reb Chaim of Brisk zt'l was extremely ill as a child, and the doctors lost hope. Rebbe Moshe Kobriner was visiting Brisk at the time and stayed at the home of Reb Chaim's grandfather. The grandfather asked the Rebbe, "What will be with my Chaimke?"

Rebbe Moshe Kobriner told him the *vort* that אברהם עומד indicates that Avraham is present at every *hachnasas orchim*. He added, "Chazal (*Bava Basra* 16:) say, 'A precious stone hung from Avraham Avinu's neck. Whoever saw it was healed.' Since you are hosting me and are performing *hachnasas orchim*, Avraham Avinu is right here, in this home. Avraham has the gem that brings *refuah*. Your Chaimke will surely have a *refuah sheleimah*." And indeed, he did.

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

Rebbe Moshe Mordechai of Lelov *zt'l* was once talking with his chassidim about a certain Yemenite tzaddik who fed hundreds of refugees that lost their homes during World War I.

One of the chassidim added, "I heard that this tzaddik was a *chavrusah* with one of the kabbalah giants..." He was implying that in addition to his *chesed*, this tzaddik was well-versed in the hidden parts of the Torah.

The Rebbe replied, "Why do you mention that? Right now, we're discussing that he fed hundreds of homeless Yidden..." as if to say that the merit of feeding Yidden is so great it is unnecessary to add anything else.

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

The Maharil Diskin *zt'l* excelled in the mitzvah of *hachnasas orchim*. Once, the Maharil Diskin suddenly stood up from his in-depth studies and went over to the table to help an old man separate the soft parts of the challah from the crust, making it easier for him to eat.

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

The Maharil Diskin replied that the answer to this question is in this week's *parashah*. The *parashah* begins וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים, Hashem came to Avraham, and Rashi writes, "It was the third day after his *bris milah*, and Hakadosh Baruch Hu came to ask him how he was feeling." It was a wonderful moment. Avraham was having a conversation with Hashem. So, how did Avraham notice the three travelers approaching? The answer is that Avraham was extremely dedicated to *hachnasas orchim*, and when a person is devoted to a mitzvah, he is alert and aware of everything associated with this mitzvah."

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

The Avnei Nezer opened the window and pointed to a tannery across the street. The Avnei Nezer said, "There are hides in this tannery. But when these hides become tefillin, they become holy. Similarly, regardless of your level, now you are a mitzvah, a *chefetz shel mitzvah* (an item used for a mitzvah), so now you are *kadosh*."

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

"Really?" the Chofetz Chaim asked. "And tomorrow, will you wear tefillin for me?"

As a *bachur*, Reb Chaim Brim *zt'l* would often travel to Bnei Brak to speak in learning with the Chazon Ish

zt'l, and then return to Yerushalayim, where he lived. One night, he missed the last bus back, so he had to stay in Bnei Brak in the Chazon Ish's home. He recalled feeling very uncomfortable because three great people served him: the Chazon Ish, the Steipler (the Chazon Ish's brother-in-law), and the Steipler's *rebbezin*. The Chazon Ish gave orders; one brought *negel vasser*, one brought food, and another prepared a bed. He protested, "Please don't do this for me."

The Chazon Ish replied, "Since when does an *esrog* tell the person holding him how to be handled? Now you are a mitzvah, and you can't tell the people obligated to do this mitzvah how to perform it."

Two travelers came to Kozmir in the middle of the night, and they needed a place to stay. They knocked at the Rebbe's home, the only lit home. The Rebbe took them in, prepared a meal, and a place to sleep. This caused some noise, and the *gabbai*, who slept in the next room, awoke. The *gabbai* thought, "Who could come to the Rebbe's house so late at night? I must be hearing *neshamos*. The *gabbai* thought that *neshamos* came to the rebbe so that he could rectify their souls! The *gabbai* was afraid to see *neshamos*, so he stayed in his room.

The next morning, at *shacharis*, the *gabbai* told his fellow *mispallelim* about the *neshamos* who came to the rebbe's home the previous night. The rebbe commented, "It's true that two *neshamos* came to me last night, but they didn't come to me so I can fix their *neshamos*. They came to fix my *neshamah*" because through them, he had the merit to perform this special mitzvah.

When the Chofetz Chaim zt'l was very old, he couldn't travel anymore to rabbinic gatherings, so the rabbanim once held a meeting in the Chofetz Chaim's house. Reb Chaim Ozer Grodzhinsky zt'l also came to this meeting, and the Chofetz Chaim was very happy to see him. One of the rabbanim announced, "Now that Reb Chaim Ozer arrived, we are ten people. Perhaps we should daven *minchah*?"

The Chofetz Chaim disagreed. He said, "It isn't written anywhere that we should ask a guest if he needs to daven."

The Chofetz Chaim added a lesson from this week's *parashah*: Avraham told Avimelech (20:11), רק אין יראת אלקים, במקום הזה, he saw that there was no *yiras Hashem* in his land. How did Avraham perceive that? Rashi writes, "When a guest comes to your city, do you ask him about food and drink (whether he has where to eat) or do you ask him about his wife, 'is she your wife or your sister?'"

The Chofetz Chaim explained, "This means, when a guest arrives, you are supposed to ask about him whether he is tired or hungry."

So, the Chofetz Chaim asked Reb Chaim Ozer zt'l whether he wanted to eat. Reb Chaim Ozer said that he didn't. The Chofetz Chaim replied, "But you are certainly tired. You just arrived. Go rest up a bit."

Avraham told the guests (18:5), ואקחה פת לחם, "I will take bread." Shouldn't he have said ואתנה פת לחם, "I will give you bread?" The Ahavas Yisrael zt'l replied that when one gives bread to the hungry, he is the one who "takes." As Chazal say, "More than the wealthy does to the poor man, the poor man does to the wealthy," having enabled him to perform the mitzvah of *tzedakah*.

The Gemara (*Shabbos* 127.) states, גדולה הכנסת אורחים יותר מקבלת פני השכינה, "Taking in guests is greater than greeting the *Shechinah*."

אלמלא לא זכו, we can explain that we greet the *Shechinah* once a month, by *Kiddush Levanah*, as we say, ישראל אלא להקביל פני אביהם שבשמים פעם אחת בחודש דים, "If the Jewish nation would greet their Father in heaven once a month, it is enough." But *hachnasas orchim* should be יותר מקבלת פני השכינה more often. We should have guests more than once a month.