

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
from
Rabbi Elimelech
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Lech Lecha



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Torah Wellsprings - Lech Lecha

The Nature of Avraham's Ten Tests

The Mishnah states (*Avos* 5:3), עשרה נסיונות, "Avraham Avinu was tested ten times and passed all ten tests." Rashi explains, שלא הרהר אחרי הקב"ה, "He didn't ask questions regarding Hakadosh Baruch Hu."

The *miforshim* debate about how to count the ten tests. Some say the first test was the test of לך לך, to leave his homeplace. Others say that the first test was when Avraham was thrown into the furnace in Ur Kasdim, and some go even further back to when Nimrod wanted to kill Avraham when he was a child, and he had to hide for thirteen years, which is discussed in the *midrashim*. Likewise, there is a machlokes as to what Avraham's final test was, whether it was the Akeidah or that Sarah was niftarah, and Avraham had to pay a fortune for her burial (*Sefer HaYashar*). But regardless of how we are to count the ten tests, we learn from this Rashi that the common denominator of all of them was to see whether Avraham would trust that Hashem was leading him in the best way or whether he would ask questions on Hashem and consider, chalilah, that Hashem wanted to harm him. Each *nisayon* was a struggle for Avraham Avinu. If it were easy for Avraham, they wouldn't be regarded as tests. They were significant challenges,

but Avraham passed them successfully. He constantly strengthened himself with the emunah that however Hashem leads him, it is for the best.

Rashi on Pirkei Avos (5:3) writes, "Pirkei d'Reb Eliezer lists the ten tests... First, (1) Nimrod tried to kill Avraham, and he hid underground for thirteen years.¹ (2) Then Nimrod threw Avraham into the furnace of Ur Kasdim. (3) Avraham was sent into galus from his birthplace. (4) Hakadosh Baruch Hu sent a hunger in his lifetime. (5) Sarah was taken to Pharaoh's home. (6) The Kings sent Lot, his nephew, into exile. (7) Avraham saw [in a prophetic vision] by the Bris Bein HaBesarim that his descendants will be ruled and afflicted [in exile] from the four kingdoms. (8) He was commanded to circumcise himself and his son. (9) Hashem told him to banish Yishmael, his son, and Yishmael's mother. (10) Hashem commanded him to slaughter Yitzchak, his son. These are ten tests, and he didn't have questions on Hashem yisbarach due to his immense love [to Hashem]." Rashi's final words teach us the essence of the tests (as the Tosfos Yom Tov, *Avos* 5:3, points out). Each of the tests had the potential to chalilah arouse questions in Avraham's mind, to question Hashem's love for him and Hashem's kindness. But Avraham loved Hashem, trusted Him, and passed all his tests.²

1. Pirkei d'Reb Eliezer (26) writes, "When Avraham was born, all the leaders (including Nimrod) wanted to kill him. He hid underground for thirteen years. He didn't see the sun or the moon. After thirteen years, he came up, spoke lashon hakodesh, was disgusted with the avodah zarahs, trusted in the Creator, and proclaimed ה' צבאות אשרי אדם בוטח בך."

Sefer HaYashar tells us why Nimrod and the leaders wanted to kill Avraham as a child. He writes, "Sorcerers informed Nimrod that they saw a star on the night of the celebration of Avraham's birth..." and they sensed that Avraham was destined to defy and disprove all their beliefs.

2. At the beginning of the parashah, Hashem told Avraham לך לך, to leave his country, birthplace, and family and go אל הארץ אשר אראך "to the land that I will show you." The Bas Ayin writes, "It was certainly very difficult for Avraham to leave his homeland, his father's home, where he was raised and accustomed to, and to go to a foreign land. Additionally, he didn't even know where he was going! But he placed his trust in Hakadosh Baruch Hu, knowing that Hashem's kindness was always with him. He had *bitachon* [and

The Ramban (in his *kuntres* on *emunah*) writes that Avraham became a great tzaddik because he passed ten tests. These were tests of his belief in Hashem's kindness and love, even when everything appeared otherwise.

Therefore, it states, **וְהֵאֱמַן בְּה'**, that Avraham believed in Hashem. **וְהֵאֱמַן** is written here without a yud. Agra d'Kalah explains that *yud* signifies *chachmah*, and Avraham's *emunah* was without *chachmos*. He could have asked several times, "How can this be good?" Logic defied it. But Avraham believed in Hashem with *emunah peshutah*, without needing to understand.

Hashem told Avraham **לֵךְ לְךָ**, to go to Eretz Yisrael, and Hashem promised him that he would become wealthy and successful there. Avraham listened and came to Eretz Yisrael, but he had to deal with poverty and hunger instead of wealth and prestige. He traveled to Mitzrayim, where there was food. The *leitzanei hador*, the scoffers, laughed at Avraham and his beliefs. But after Avram's short stay in Mitzrayim, he became wealthy, as it states (13:2-3) **וְאִבְרָם כָּבֵד מְאֹד בְּמִקְנֵה בְכֶסֶף וּבְזָהָב**, "And Avram was very loaded with cattle, with silver, and with gold. And he went with his journeys." Rashi writes, "He went to pay up his debts."

The Chasam Sofer says that the debts were the answers he owed the mockers. Now, he was able to pay up and give them answers. He could say, "I arrived in Eretz Yisrael without money, and now I am very

wealthy. Now you see that Hashem is leading me."

Reward for Passing the Tests

Avraham earned many rewards for passing his tests. Rashi writes, "Avraham was tested ten times corresponding to the ten *mamaros* [that Hashem said] to create the world. It is in Avraham's merit that the world stands. Corresponding to Avraham Avinu's ten tests, of which he passed, Hakadosh Baruch Hu brought ten miracles in Mitzrayim and ten at the Yam Suf. Also, Hashem brought ten makos on the Mitzriyim, and ten at the Yam Suf. And, corresponding to these ten tests, Hashem gave Avraham's offspring the Ten Commandments. And when the luchos, which had the Ten Commandments written on them, were broken, the merit of Avraham's belief in Hashem and passing ten tests protected the Jewish nation from destruction..."

Avraham and his descendants earned and gained many other blessings and marvelous benefits because he passed these ten tests. By the Akeidah, the word **מֵאֲכֹלֶת** is used for a knife. Rashi (22:6) writes, "It is called **מֵאֲכֹלֶת** because Bnei Yisrael **אוֹכְלִין**, eat, the reward [of this test]."

As we wrote above, the Mishnah states (*Avos* 5:3), **עֲשֶׂרָה נִסְיוֹנוֹת נִתְּנָסָה אֲבִרָהָם אֲבִינוֹ עֲלֵיו הַשְּׁלוֹם**, "Avraham Avinu was tested ten times and he passed all ten tests." In this Mishnah, Avraham is called **אֲבִרָהָם אֲבִינוֹ**, "Avraham, our father." Tosfos Yom Tov *zt'l*

trusted that if Hashem was sending him, that was best for him]. That is what gave him the strength to pass this difficult test. As it states, **וְאִבְרָם 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 had *bitachon*. This is how he had the courage to uproot himself and travel to an unknown destination. Because with *emunah* and *bitachon* that everything the Creator of all worlds does is for the good, one has the strength to keep the mitzvos and pass the most difficult tests."

The Midrash (HaGadol, Bereishis 22:1) states, "Avraham was tested with ten tests, each one more difficult than the one before it, and he passed them all."

The Midrash Tanchuma (Eikev 5) states, "No one had more tzaar than Avraham Avinu. He was thrown into a fiery furnace, exiled from his father's home, and chased by sixteen kings. He had ten tests and buried Sarah, but in the end, he had peace."

explains that this is because each test that Avraham passed brought many blessings and salvations for his descendants.

Rav Pinchos Koritzer zt'l said: "Until parashas Lech Lecha, the world was unhappy and confused. Afterwards, the *chesed* of Avraham is aroused, bringing salvation unto the world."

The Concealed Good

Hashem told Avram to go אל הארץ אשר אראך, "To the land that I will show you."

The Baal HaTurim writes that אראך is gematriya 222, the same as בעננים, clouds. The Baal HaTurim writes, "This tells us that there were clouds that went before Avram, showing him the way." Perhaps we can also explain that this hints that Hashem bestows His kindness when it appears dark and negative. When it seems to be בעננים, -cloudy and distant, at those times, אראך, Hashem reveals Himself and His kindness to the Jewish nation.

The clouds on Har Sinai are called הערפל (Shemos 20:18), and the Baal HaTurim writes that הערפל is gematriya שכינה. The Nesivos Sholom explains that this indicates that when there are clouds, Hashem is there. As the Torah says אשר שם האלקים, "The opaque darkness where Hashem was there." This is as it states (Malachim 1, 8:12) ה' אמר לשכן ה' אמר לשכן, "Hashem said that He will dwell in the thick darkness."³

The Midrash (*Bereishis Rabba* 39) tells the following *mashal*: "A traveler saw a בירה דולקת, a mansion on fire. He said, 'Could it be that this home doesn't have an owner?' The owner peeked at him and said, 'I am the owner of this home.' So too, Avraham said, 'Could it be that the world doesn't have a leader?' Hakadosh Baruch Hu peeked out to him and said, 'I am the leader of the world.'"

Commentaries on this Midrash explain that Avraham looked at our wondrous, magnificent world and recognized the Creator through it. But then he saw the *resha'im* who destroy the world with their *aveiros*. (Their sins destroyed the world in the generation of the *mabul* and the generation of *dor haflagah*.) Avraham didn't understand why Hashem wasn't taking care of the world. Since Hashem created it, He should guard it from becoming ruined. The Midrash compares this to a traveler who sees a house on fire and says, "This house surely has an owner; why isn't he putting out the fire?"

The house owner peeked out at him and said, "I am the owner of the house." Similarly, Avraham didn't understand why Hashem was allowing the *resha'im* to destroy the world. Hashem revealed himself to Avraham and said, "I am the Owner of the world."⁴

The Midrash states, מציין עליו בעל הבירה, "The owner of the house peeked at him." מציין, peeked, is an unusual expression. It seems that the Midrash should have stated, הביט עליו בעל הבירה, "the owner of the house *looked* at him." What is implied by הציין, peeked?

3. Someone complained to Reb Moshe Kliers zt'l (rav of Teveria) about his many problems. The rav replied, "Why did you only tell me half of the story?"

"What is the other half?" the man asked.

"I don't know. The other half hasn't happened yet. But there is another half - the salvation that will come in the end."

4. Nevertheless, the question remains. Why doesn't the owner of the house put out the fire?

The answer is that the owner of the house *lit the fire*. And he obviously did so for a good purpose. Similarly, Hashem told Avraham that everything that happens in the world is part of His master plan and for the good.

To answer this question, we bring the *pasuk* (*Shir HaShirim* 2:9) מִשְׁגִּיחַ מִן הַחַלּוֹנוֹת מִצִּיץ מִן הַחַרְסִים, "Looking through the windows, peeking through the cracks..." What is the difference between "looking through windows" and "peeking through cracks"? When one looks through a window, he sees everything that's in front of the window, but because he sees so many things, he isn't focused on anything in particular. When one peeks through the cracks, he sees less but can entirely focus on what he sees.

We want Hashem to "peek" at us and see us with intense focus so we will receive His *hashgachah pratis* on a very high level. Avraham merited this special *hashgachah pratis* after he saw the house/world burning. This suggests that when one goes through hard times, Hashem's *hashgachah* is more intensely on him.

This can be compared to when a child is *chas veshalom* ill and hospitalized. Although parents love all their children equally and don't have favorites, now their love and attention are focused on the child who needs their help most. When we go through hard times, *chalilah*, Hashem's eyes are focused on us, watching and guiding us with extra love and care. If the hospitalized child pleads to his parents to be with him, they will be even more devoted to that child. When one goes through difficulties and turns to Hashem, הַצִּיץ עָלָיו בְּעַל הַבִּירָה, Hashem watches you with immense *hashgachah pratis*.

When the Baal Shem of Michelstadt *zt'l* was five years old, he was called a *wunderkind* (genius-child) because of his quick and ingenious mind. The count of Michelstadt heard about the child's wisdom and wanted to witness it with his own eyes. He summoned the child to his castle.

The count instructed his family and staff not to be around when the child arrived. He wanted it that way, to test the child. The castle had many rooms, and there wouldn't be anyone to ask for directions. He wished to see if the child would find him.

When the day arrived, the count stood at the window of his room and watched the child as he came to the courtyard. The count was sure it would take the child a long time before he would knock on the door. Surprisingly, it was only a few minutes before the count heard knocking at his door and a voice called, "Good day, honorable count."

The count asked, "How did you know I was in this room?"

"Before entering, I stood outside the castle and took in what I saw. I noticed that the curtains of all the rooms were open to let in the sunlight, but one room had the curtains drawn. I understood that you were watching me from behind the curtains in this room."⁵

Years later, the Baal Shem of Michelstadt *zt'l* repeated this story and explained the lesson that we can learn from it. When one is going through hard times in life, he feels

5. At their meeting, the count asked the five-year-old lad, "What would you do if some members of my household told you that I'm in one place and others told you that I'm somewhere else? Where would you go?"

The boy replied, "The Torah tells us אַחֲרֵי רַבִּים לְהִטּוֹת, one follows the majority. I would follow the advice of the majority."

The count asked, "So why do you remain in your religion? Most of the world isn't Jewish. You should follow the majority."

The boy replied, "When in doubt, one follows the majority. But when one is certain, he doesn't follow the majority. For example, now that I know you are here, even if your entire staff will tell me that you are somewhere else, I wouldn't believe them."

that the curtains of heaven are drawn, that's a sign that Hashem is peeking out at you from behind the curtains, watching you in concealment. In fact, at those times, Hashem's *hashgachah* over you is even more pronounced.

Hashem Leads us in the Best Way

After the war, Reb Michoel Ber Weissmandl zt'l established a yeshiva in America, and at times, he would go to wealthy people in America to ask them to support the yeshiva. Once, he had an appointment with a rich person in Manhattan at four in the afternoon. Reb Michoel Ber hired a taxi and began his trip to Manhattan well before the time of the appointment. He didn't want to come late to this important meeting. However, the taxi driver was new at his job and didn't know the exact way. They were an hour late when they arrived at the office for the meeting. It was already five o'clock. The secretary told Reb Michel Ber and his assistant that they missed the appointment and would have to reschedule. Reb Michoel Ber was disappointed. He wasted precious hours without results.

Reb Michoel Ber immediately reminded himself that what occurred was *Hashgachah pratis*, and therefore, there was no reason to be upset. He took out a Chovos HaLevavos and said to his assistant, "I will never rely on a new driver, only on someone who has experience. And who is the "driver" with the

most experience? It is the Chovos HaLevavos! Klal Yisrael has been traveling through life and the world under his direction for five hundred years. Whoever follows his directions will reach his destination to where he needs to go. Whoever follows the counsel of the "new" drivers will travel for hours on the wrong paths and, after much distress and disappointment, will end up like us today, traveling without any purpose and benefit."⁶

The Imrei Emes zt'l (Korach 5676) says that he heard a lesson in the name of Rebbe Bunim of Peshischa zt'l in his youth. Rebbe Bunim noted that if everyone in the world would place their *pekel* (package) of tzaros on a table and there would be an announcement that every man could take whatever *pekel* he wanted, everyone would grab their own *pekel* with both hands. This is because Hakaodsh Baruch Hu gives each person the strength to pass his tests. As the Chovos HaLevavos writes at length (Shaar HaBitachon), a person must believe that the portion that Hashem gave him is precisely what he needs, and therefore, no one should have complaints about how Hashem leads him.

The Imrei Emes says that this is hinted at in (Bamidbar 17:24) ויראו איש מטוהו and the Targum writes ואשתמודעו, meaning that each person understood that the problem they have is best for them.⁷

6. The Beis Avraham zt'l once came to a nichum aveilim and said, ידיים ידיים אלעם בידי שמים, "Hands, hands, everything is from the hands of heaven." These words comforted the mourners. A child was niftar, r'l, and the parents were overtaken with grief and remorse, blaming themselves for what occurred. With his clever words, the Beis Avraham reminded the parents that everything is from Hashem. Even what a person does to himself is ultimately from Hashem.

It states (Tehillim 119:161) שרים רדפוני חנם ומדברך פחד לבי, "Princes pursued me without cause, but my heart feared Your word." The Ruzhiner zt'l explained that Dovid HaMelech was referring to Shaul HaMelech (and his family), who sought to harm him. Dovid used the word חנם, which means nothing, because he wasn't afraid of them. He knew they couldn't harm him if it wasn't Hashem's will. His fear was ומדברך פחד לבי, that perhaps Hashem decreed that they harm him.

The Ruzhiner zt'l said this while running away from the Russian government. He added that he wasn't afraid of the Russians, only of Hashem.

7. מטוהו is a staff of tzaros. ואשתמודעו, each person should understand that the punishments he receives are

The Chofetz Chaim zt'l once asked someone how things were going for him. The man replied, "It wouldn't hurt if it were a little better..." The Chofetz Chaim said, "How do you know it wouldn't hurt? Hashem knows what's best for you. If it would be better for you to have an easier life, He would certainly give it to you. Hashem is רחום וחנון, compassionate and kind. He can give you the best, and since He doesn't, it must be that you are receiving the best you can receive now, and it can't be better than that."

And even what a person does to himself is also from Heaven. It states (Tehillim 23:4) **גַּם כִּי אֵלֶיךָ בָּגִיא צַלְמוֹת לֹא אִירָא רַע כִּי אֶתָּה עֹמְדִי**, אלך, why does it state אלך, that I go? A person doesn't go to dangerous, hazardous places on his own! He is brought there by others!

Apparently, the pasuk refers to when a person makes foolish choices and ends up in a perilous situation. Even then, **לֹא אִירָא רַע** because **אֶתָּה עֹמְדִי**, You led me to this situation, and Hakadosh Baruch Hu will save me from it.

Chesed

The following story was told by Reb Yaakov HaLevi Josef Shlita, who heads the Hatzalah organization in Bnei Brak and is familiar with all the details of the story:

Sunday, parashas Re'eh **תשפ"ד** (a few months ago) at 5:39 in the morning, Hatzalah received a call about a fire on a tiny road called **כַּמְטָה מְנוּשָׁה** in Bnei Brak. The fire was on the third floor, in the apartment of an elderly couple, and they were unable to get out of the house.

Reb Yaakov Josef related: "The Hatzalah office is on that street, so I know the street well. It is a very narrow road, and a fire ladder truck cannot make it down the road.

"The Hatzalah members that rushed to the fire were greeted with a frightening

scene. The elderly couple stood before a window, unable to access the stairway through the fire and smoke. They stood at the window, waving to the Hatzalah members to save them. They were close to despair, seeing death before their eyes, as we say on Yom Kippur, **וּמִי בְּחִינָקָה**, r'l. Fire trucks have ladders for such situations, but as we mentioned, these trucks couldn't get to the scene since the street was so narrow. Meanwhile, the fire was spreading, getting closer to the couple. By the rules of nature, they didn't see how they would escape the inferno alive.

But just then, the baal chesed, Hatzalah member, Reb Elchanan Mamo, n'y, arrived at the scene, and he saw that Hashem had prepared a salvation for this couple. A porch, used for building a succah, wasn't too far beneath the couple's apartment. On top of the porch was a small hut (which would be removed before Succos). If he stood on the roof of this hut, he figured he could reach the couple. He didn't think twice. He grabbed a ladder and climbed onto the porch of the lower floor and, from there, onto the hut. From there, he managed to pull down the elderly couple, saving their lives.

The elderly man's beard was slightly burned, and he suffered some burns, but they were happy to be alive!

Now, this miraculous story has an interesting beginning: Three years and three months earlier, this elderly woman had collapsed in her apartment (the same apartment that went up in flames). Hatzalah members performed CPR and brought her back to life. Shortly afterward, she came to the Hatzalah office to thank them for saving her life and left a donation for Hatzalah. And then she asked Reb Yaakov, "You are aware of my delicate state of health, and you and your team saved my life with great miracles. I, therefore, want to ask your advice. The neighbors who live below us want to

renovate their apartment to make it larger and add a porch where they could build a succah. However, I am concerned that the dust from the renovation might harm my health and breathing, which is still fragile. Should I permit my neighbors to renovate or stop them?"

Reb Yaakov replied, "You didn't come to ask me as a rav, because I am not a rav who paskens shailos. You asked me for medical advice. So, my answer is that the dust from construction can harm you. If you ask a rav, he will likely say that you are correct for not wanting the construction. And without your permission, the neighbors won't be able to renovate. You are not stopping them for a minor selfish reason but rather because it is a matter of ושמרתם for your health.

"Nevertheless, you just said that you received your life back miraculously. I think that to praise Hashem for your life, it is proper that you permit your neighbors to proceed with their plans, and Hashem will help that nothing bad will happen to you."

She accepted his advice and permitted her neighbors to build. Since it was dangerous for her to be in her apartment during the construction period, she moved in with her son for four months. She was *mevater* for the sake of peace, so there won't be a *machlokes*.

It turned out that her *vatranus* saved her life because if it weren't for that porch, the Hatzalah members would have no way to rescue her and her husband. She could have protested, and no one would say that she was wrong for doing so, but her caring for others saved her life.

This brings us to the great topic of chesed, which is one of the outstanding traits of Avraham Avinu, whom we seek to emulate. Ramchal teaches that a person should designate an hour each day to think about

the tzaddikim of the past and ask himself, "What did they do that caused Hashem to love them so much, and what can I do to be similar to them?" He says this is easy to do, and it is the best counsel for fighting the yetzer hara.

So, let us take a moment to think about Avraham's chesed, his caring for his fellow man, and see what we can do to emulate him.⁸

Rebbe Eliezer of Dzikov *zt'l* was careful to have a guest on the first day of Succos because the first day of Succos is the *ushpizen* of Avraham Avinu, who excelled in *hachnasas orchim*. One year, on the first day of Succos, the Dzikover Rebbe didn't have a guest, so he asked his son (the Imrei Noam *zt'l*) to go outside and look for someone who needed a yom tov meal. The son walked around the streets until he found a homeless, drunk person. "Come with me," he said to the poor man. "My father wants you to eat the seudah with him."

The Dzikover Rebbe rejoiced with his guest and served him fish, meat, and other delicacies. The Rebbe said: "Avraham Avinu didn't have more respectable guests. Avraham cared so much about people that he was eager to bring home anyone who desired a meal. At least, on this day, we should emulate Avraham Avinu's ways..."

Hashem told Avraham מן עיניך וראה כי את כל הארץ המקום אשר אתה שם צפנה ונגבה וקדמה וימה, כי את כל הארץ "Raise your eyes and look from the place you are at, to the north, south, east, and west, for all the land that you see I will give to you and your children, forever" (13:14-15).

Why did Hashem specify that Avraham should look מן המקום אשר אתה שם, "from the place you are at"? The Or HaChaim HaKadosh explains that these words reveal

8. Tana d'Bei Eliyahu (22:2) states, "Everyone must ask himself, 'When will my deeds reach the deeds of my forefathers?'" Everyone must strive to emulate the ways of the holy *avos*. Therefore, we should also think, "What can I do to ease the plight of my fellow man?"

a miracle that happened to Avraham. He didn't have to turn in different directions to see the four sides of Eretz Yisrael. Standing in one place, Avraham saw the entire land of Eretz Yisrael. The Or HaChaim writes, כאן עשה לו גם עצום שיוכל לראות מצפון לדרום ומערב למזרח, ממקום אחד מבלי שיוצרך לסובב "A great miracle happened [to Avraham]. He could see from north to south, from west to the east, while standing in one place, without needing to turn around."

The question arises what was the significance of this miracle, and through which good deed did Avraham earn it?

Perhaps the answer is as follows: The Midrash says that Avraham's tent had doors on all four sides, so hungry people could enter immediately without needing to search for the entrance. Since Avraham had compassion on his guests that they shouldn't have to circle his tent to get to the door, he was granted this miracle - that he could see the entire land without turning around.

The Torah begins with the letter ב, which is *gematriya* two, not with the letter א, which is *gematriya* one. This implies that the root of the Torah is ב, two, to think about what you can do for others. One shouldn't be an א, self-centered, only thinking about himself.

In Eretz Yisrael, we begin saying ותן טל ומטר on the seventh of Cheshvan. What is the significance of this date? It seems that an ideal time to begin asking for rain would be ג' חשוון, for that is the expected date for the first rain.

The Mishnah (*Taanis* 1:3) explains that the furthest place in Eretz Yisrael is in the north, on the shores of נהר פרת (the Euphrates River). The people living there and went to Yerushalayim for Succos and Shemini Atzeres will only be back home on ז' חשוון (fifteen days after Shemini Atzeres). It is, therefore, not proper to pray for rain while these people are still traveling. We must be concerned they should be able to travel in dry weather. Thus, we wait until the seventh of Cheshvan, when everyone has reached their home.

This halachah portrays the ideal of *ahavas Yisrael* and the concern we should have for every single Yid. We don't consider praying for rain before everyone is safe and comfortable in their homes.

Due to our sins, the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed, and we don't have the mitzvah of עליה לרגל, to ascend to the Beis HaMikdash for Yom Tov. So why is the halachah still in place? Why do Yidden in Eretz Yisrael begin saying ותן טל ומטר on the seventh of Cheshvan? The original reason no longer applies.

We can answer that since this halachah teaches us a lesson in *ahavas Yisrael*, we want to remember it in all generations. We want to remember that we must be concerned for the well-being and comfort of every single Yid.

Emunah is Attained from the Challenges

There are different opinions about how old Avraham was when he first recognized Hashem. Rambam (*Hilchos Avodas Kochavim* 1:2) writes, "Avraham was forty years old when he recognized the Creator..."

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

Another Midrash states that Avraham recognized Hashem at the age of forty-eight. The Sar Shalom of Belz *zt'l* said this opinion needs clarification. The opinion that Avraham recognized Hashem when he was three years old is understood: When Avraham was at the age of basic comprehension, he already recognized Hashem. Also, Rambam's opinion that Avraham was forty years old is understood because בן ארבעים לבנה, at forty, one attains understanding and perception. But what's the significance of forty-eight? (And we can't say it was just by chance since we know that nothing ever happens by chance. Certainly not when discussing the *avos* and the fundamental issue of when Avraham attained *emunah*.)

The Sar Shalom explains that when Avraham was forty-eight, the infamous Tower of Bavel was being built, an edifice

that represented heresy and rebellion against Hashem. The spirit of the entire generation was one of heresy and rebellion. The rule is that when one acquires emunah at a time when it's difficult to do so, the emunah becomes very deep and sincere. Since Avraham attained his *emunah* when many people were leaning towards heterodoxy, he achieved a profound and sincere level of *emunah*.

We too live at a time when it is difficult to have proper emunah. Rebbe Yisrael of Ruzhin *zt'l* compared believing in Hashem in the generation before Moshiach to the difficulty of climbing up a straight wall. Rebbe Elimelech of Lizensk *zt'l* compared it to holding onto a rope suspended from heaven. The rope is shaken violently, and only those grasping onto the rope with all their strength will survive.

We live in a time of great challenge, but those who cleave to Hashem with all their might at this time will reach great heights and perfect clarity in *emunah*.

Hashem told Avraham (15:5) *הבט נא השמימה וספר הכוכבים אם תוכל לספר אתם ויאמר לו כה יהיה זרעך*, "Look up to the heaven and count the stars, if you can count them." Hashem said, 'So shall be your offspring.'"

In which way does the Jewish nation resemble the stars? Stars shine at night, and likewise, the specialness of the Jewish nation emerges when it is dark. In a spiritual context, this means that from tests and

challenges of the *yetzer hara* one rises to greater heights. Avraham reached perfection in emunah due to the tests. Similarly, every Yid attains perfection in his emunah and all aspects of his character and avodas Hashem through his tests and struggles.⁹

Small Steps

Reb Mendel Hendler relates that when he was bar mitzvah, he went to the Satmar Rebbe *zt'l*, that the rebbe should help him put on his tefillin for the first time. His father wasn't there at this milestone because he had to be at work very early to earn *parnassah*. (This was common in America in those days. People had to work very hard and for many hours to earn their *parnassah*, and bar mitzvah bachurim would go to their rebbe themselves to put on their tefillin for the first time.)

Reb Mendel Hendler's bar mitzvah was on Thursday. Before the bar mitzvah, his father asked the Satmar Rebbe whether he could push off saying the brachah *ברוך שפטרני ביום הזה* until the Shabbos after the bar mitzvah.¹⁰ The Rebbe replied, *b'derech tzachus*, "Certainly you can wait until Shabbos, but make up with your son that he shouldn't do any aveiros from Thursday until Shabbos, so you won't be held accountable for them."¹¹

Then the Satmar Rebbe added, "The truth is, it isn't hard to avoid doing aveiros for one day."

The Satmar Rebbe elaborated and explained that the tricky part about serving

9. The Sfas Emes (תרי"ז) says that to our eyes, stars seem tiny, but they are really very large, enormous objects. The Jewish nation is compared to the stars because even when the Jewish nation appears simple and unimpressive to our eyes, they are really very great beings.

Reb Meir Shapiro *zt'l* said that when Hashem told Avraham to count the stars, he began to do so - although it is impossible to count them all. Hashem told Avraham *כה יהיה זרעך*, your children will be like you. They will never say a task is impossible. They will always try, and do whatever they can.

10. This brachah is for the father to thank Hashem that he will no longer be punished for his son's aveiros. Because now his son is bar mitzvah and responsible for his own deeds

11. The Satmar Rebbe said this in the form of humor, *derech tzachos*, not literally, because even without saying the brachah, the father won't be punished for his son's aveiros, after his bar mitzvah.

Hashem is that it is for a long time. For example, if one makes a kabbalah to learn more hours daily, the kabbalah isn't only for a day or two. It means studying more Torah daily, which makes the kabbalah seem difficult and overwhelming.

If his kabbalah is to daven with kavanah, it isn't hard to do so for a short time, but to do so every day, at each tefillah, seems too hard for people. This is why people give up and don't try. Therefore, it is advisable to make kabalos for shorter periods of time.

A hint to this concept is the pasuk (Devarim 4:39) וידעת היום, The Torah urging us to focus on *today*, to have yiras Shamayim today, and to fight with the yetzer hara today. Don't think now about tomorrow. And tomorrow, you will renew your kabbalah for that day.

This can be hinted in לדוד ה' אורי, when we say אחת שאלתי... כל ימי חיי, I focus on doing just one good deed. When I want to perform a mitzvah, I tell myself אחת שאלתי, I request that Hashem help me perform just this one mitzvah. With this thought in mind, serving Hashem doesn't seem so frightening and overwhelming. And with this technique, כל ימי חיי, I will end up serving Hashem properly, keeping all the mitzvos, all days of my life.

The Satmar Rebbe explained that, therefore, the father should ask his son, the bar mitzvah bachur, to be clean from aveiros until he says the brachah ברוך שפטרני. For a short time, everyone can devote themselves to avodas Hashem.

The Gemara (Shabbos 105:) teaches, "This is the technique of the yetzer hara. Today, he tells you to do this; tomorrow, he tells you to do that until he convinces you to go and worship Avodah Zarah!"

The Chasam Sofer zt'l (Toras Moshe, Ki Seitzei (ד"ה או יאמר) says that we should use the same technique in our battle against the yetzer hara. The yetzer hara tries to catch us, one aveirah at a time, one day at a time. We combat the yetzer hara with the same approach. Focus on each day individually, and grow one good deed at a time. Ultimately,

you will see that you have grown immensely in avodas Hashem.

The Chasam Sofer says that this is hinted at in the pasuk (Devarim 21:10) כי תצא למלחמה ושבת: "If you go out to war against your enemies...and you take his captives." This means we should adopt the yetzer hara's battle techniques. Focus on one success and then on another; in the end, you will succeed.

We wrote above that we should seek to emulate Avraham Avinu, but we wonder how we can achieve even remotely Avraham Avinu's exceptional levels. But the Ropshitzer Rav zt'l says that at the beginning of Avraham's service, Avraham Avinu also wondered how he could succeed in avodas Hashem. Hashem told him לך מ'ארצך וממולדתך אל הארץ אשר אראך, ומבית אביך אל הארץ אשר אראך, "Go forth from your land and your birthplace and your father's house to the land that I will show you."

The Ropshitzer Rav zt'l explains that when Avraham considered his origin—that he was born to a father who worshiped avodah zarah—he became discouraged. He thought, "How can a person like me serve Hashem? What *yichus* do I have?"

Also, when Avraham reminded himself of his youth, the days when he worshipped idols (as the Rambam tells us), he felt unworthy of serving Hashem. Therefore, Hashem told him, לך מ'ארצך וממולדתך ומבית אביך, "Don't think about your past or your imperfect origins. Go away from those discouraging thoughts, and you will be able to serve Hashem."

Rebbe Reb Bunim zt'l said, "If a baal teshuvah saw how with a single thought of teshuvah, his neshamah becomes like the great, perfect tzaddikim, he would be so happy that he left the darkness to a great light (Remasayim Tzofim, ch.18, 57, who heard it from Rebbe Bunim).

A person can grow and reach high levels. It is within his reach; as we said, it is accomplished one step at a time.

Avoiding Aveiros, One at a Time

Reb Ezriel Tauber *zt'l* brought a *bachur* to Reb Chaim Kanievsky *zt'l*. This *bachur* was at the very beginning stages of his *teshuvah*. The *bachur* told Reb Chaim that he wanted to keep Shabbos and that his main obstacle was his addiction to cigarettes.

Reb Chaim said, "Extinguishing a cigarette is also an *aveirah*. Therefore, when you finish a cigarette on Shabbos, don't put it out."

The *bachur* followed this counsel. He kept Shabbos by not putting out his cigarettes, not cooking, not turning on the electricity, etc. He understood that the notion of "all or nothing" is a fallacy and kept as much of Shabbos as he felt he could at the time.

It didn't take long before he stopped smoking on Shabbos and became a full *shomer Shabbos Yid*.

Above, we discussed the process of *teshuvah*. There, our discussion was primarily about performing mitzvos, such as davening with *kavanah*, learning more Torah, and to do so by taking on *kabalos* for small intervals of time, which are easier to keep. We now extend the conversation to avoiding *aveiros*. There, too, it is helpful when one takes on smaller *kabalos* or for a short period. Even if we aren't perfect, taking a step in the right direction can bring us to great heights.

Someone asked the Tchebiner Rav *zt'l* whether hitting Amalek is also part of the mitzvah of *עמלק*? Or perhaps the mitzvah is to kill Amalek, and anything less than total annihilation isn't a mitzvah at all?

The Tchebiner Rav replied that it is indeed a mitzvah to hit Amalek, even if you can't kill him. He proved this from a Rashi in Pesachim 88. The Gemara discusses cleaning out the innards of the Korban Pesach. The process begins by poking the innards with a knife and then cleaning out its waste. The Gemara calls the process *מיחוי* *קרבי*, and Rashi writes that the word *מיחוי* is like the word found by Amalek, *תמחה את זכר*

עמלק. So, we can take from this discussion that the mitzvah of *mechiyas Amalek* is also to poke, make holes, and wound, even if we don't end up destroying Amalek. Harming and weakening Amalek is also a mitzvah.

The holy sefarim say that every Yid has an element of Amalek in himself – his *yetzer hara*. We destroy Amalek through our battles against the *yetzer hara*. As we explained, even if we don't succeed in removing the *yetzer hara* entirely, each time we don't listen to the *yetzer hara*, we are hitting him, a fulfillment of the mitzvah to destroy Amalek.

Gratitude

We say in Nishmas that it is impossible for a person to praise Hashem sufficiently. אין אנחנו מספיקים להודות לך... על אחת מאלף אלפים וריבי, רבבות פעמים הטובות ניסים... ונפלאות שעשית "We won't be able to satisfactorily praise you Hashem... not even for one millionth of the miracles and wonders that you performed for us."

Regarding the mitzvah of *bikurim*, which focuses on expressing gratitude, Rashi writes that we demonstrate *כפוי טובה*, that we aren't ungrateful for Hashem's kindness. The question arises: why doesn't Rashi write that the purpose of *Bikurim* is to thank and praise Hashem for His abundant blessings? We does Rashi limit the purpose to demonstrate that we aren't *כפוי טובה*, and merely recognize Hashem's kindness?

Reb Moshe Feinstein *zt'l* replies that it is impossible to praise Hashem. As much as we will say, it will be insufficient. This is why Rashi writes that we express that we aren't *כפוי טובה*. We express awareness that the kindness came from Hashem. We want to praise Hashem, and we praise Hashem to the best of our abilities, but we know that as much praise we say, we didn't even begin.

Someone was walking towards Rav Shach *zt'l*, and even from a distance, Rav Shach noticed that this person was extremely happy about something. When he got closer,

he told Rav Shach that he had given birth to a baby girl.

Rav Shach asked him, "This is good news that occurs daily... Yet, you seem to be extraordinarily happy."

The man replied, "I have been married for twenty years, and this is my first child. That's why I am so happy."

Soon after, another person came to the rosh yeshiva, Rav Shach, and appeared a bit sad. He told Rav Shach that he had given birth to a baby girl. "So why are you sad?" Rav Shach asked. The man replied, "I already have seven daughters; this is number eight. I was hoping for a boy."

Rav Shach told him about the person he had met earlier, the man who had a child, a girl, after twenty years of waiting. "He was extremely happy. He is about your age. If you had not had children in all these years, you would be as happy as him. So why should you be sad that you have seven other daughters?"

The kohen at a *pidyon haben* says to the father, מאי בעית טפי, "What do you want more?"¹²

I heard from a grandfather who spoke at a *pidyon haben* that we can explain that the kohen is telling the father, מאי בעית טפי "What more can you possibly want in life? Hashem did so much kindness for you!"

An orphan came to Reb Yehudah Zev Segal, rosh yeshiva of Manchester zt'l, for advice. His father had died, and his mother asked him to take over his father's food business. Reb Segal agreed that under the circumstances, he should listen to his mother's requests and support the family. But the rosh yeshiva had one request: "Every night, when you daven maariv, and you say על ניסוך שבכל יום עמנו, 'For the miracles that occur to us every day,' stop at these words and

think, 'What miracle did Hashem perform for me today?'"

This person says that he has been doing this nightly for forty years, and there was never a night when he couldn't find a miracle that Hashem performed for him that day.

There is a humorous story about a poor person who lived in an old crumbling house at the edge of the city. He had a friend who owned a store. Once, his friend advised him to buy a lottery ticket. The poor man replied, "If I had a penny in my pocket, I would use it to buy food for my children. I wouldn't use it to buy a lottery ticket."

The store owner felt bad for his poor friend, so he said, "I will lend you the money. If you win, the prize is yours. And if you lose, you don't have to pay me anything."

The poor man's ticket won the lottery. The store owner discovered this in the middle of the night, and he figured that his friend would be happy to hear the good news, even if that meant waking him up from his sleep. So he went to the poor man's home in the middle of the night, woke him up, and told him the good news.

As soon as he heard that he had won the lottery, he began shouting at the store owner, "Where is your respect? How dare you wake up the wealthiest man in town in the middle of the night!?" And he went on and on. He was still in his rickety and small, poor man's home, but he had forgotten the poverty of his past and was living in his newly found wealth. But this isn't proper. When things turn around and become good for you, you mustn't forget the difficulties that preceded it. That will help you appreciate the good you have, and it will help you praise Hashem for His kindness.

The yomim tovim are זכר ליציאת מצרים, in memory of leaving Mitzrayim. We don't

12. Literally, the kohen is asking the father, "What do you want more? Your child or your money? Do you want to hold onto your five sela'im or give the money to me and, thereby, redeem your child?"

limit our joy to the present; we simultaneously remember our formative challenges and from where we were rescued and elevated.

The Mishnah (Avos 5:8) states, "Ten miracles occurred to our fathers in the Beis HaMikdash..." Reb Yechezkel Abramsky zt'l noted that the common theme of the miracles listed in the Mishnah is that we were spared from trouble and misfortune. The miracles aren't about wonderful things happening to people, like becoming wondrously wealthy or that the ill were miraculously healed. Instead the miracles listed are that everything went smoothly. For example, among the ten miracles of the Beis HaMikdash mentioned are: "No woman miscarried... the korbanos never spoiled.... A fly didn't come near the meat in the Beis HaMikdash... The rain didn't extinguish the fire on the mizbeiach..." Let us learn from this that when everything goes well, that is also a miracle, for which we must praise Hashem.

The Kav HaYashar (18) writes, "Everyone experiences miracles. Especially in recent times, when there is so much strife and hardship in the world, and things perpetually get worse – evil decrees, war, hunger, people in captivity, distress, and various diseases. When Hashem saves a person from these tragedies, he should continuously consider Hashem's kindness. Anyone living in peace and security and with parnassah must praise Hashem."

A yungerman came home and for some reason, his wife didn't serve him supper, as

she generally would, and the sink was filled with dirty pots and dishes. He scolded her, "You didn't cook supper, and you didn't clean the dishes. What did you do today?" implying that she did nothing. She didn't reply.

The next day, it was the same story. There was no meal; the sink was full of dishes. Again, he rebuked her, "What did you do all day?" Once again, she remained silent.

The next day, the children weren't dressed properly. They were running around wild, fighting with one another, writing on the walls, and making a royal mess. The wife was lying in bed. This time, the husband was quite angry. It was far worse than ever before. "What did you do all day long?" he asked bitterly.

She replied, "Today, I didn't do anything."

She wanted her husband to see how things look when she does nothing, and he should learn to appreciate all the things she does that he never noticed.

This story has an important lesson for the home: learn to appreciate the work that others do for you, which you may have never appreciated. But there is another lesson here, too. It reminds us of how much can go wrong. With this awareness, we should appreciate and recognize the kindness that Hashem bestows upon us constantly and every day.