

Torah Wellsprings

Collected thoughts
from
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Lech Lecha





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Lech Lecha

Do the Best You Can

The Mishnah states (*Avos* 5:3), עשרה נסיונות נתנסה אברהם אבינו, עליו השלום ועמד בכלם להודיע כמה חבתו של אברהם אבינו עליו השלום, "Avraham Avinu was tested ten times and he passed all ten tests. This is to let us know how much Hashem loves Avraham Avinu."

In this Mishnah, Avraham is called אברהם אבינו, "Avraham, our father." The Tosfos Yom Tov *zt'l* explains that each test that Avraham passed brought many blessings and salvations for his descendants.¹

The Mishnah emphasizes that Avraham is *Avinu*, our father, and we, as his descendants, benefit from all his good deeds.

We, too, emulate Avraham's ways and try to pass all tests Hashem sends us. However, as everyone knows, there won't be 100% success. We will fail sometimes. Perhaps, we will fail most of the time. But that doesn't excuse us from trying our best. As Chazal (*Avos* 2:16) say, לא עליך המלאכה לגמור ולא אתה בן חורין לפטר ממנה, "You are not obligated to finish, but you are also not permitted to raise your hands in despair." We must do what we can.²

1. Rashi (*Bereishis* 22:6) explains that the knife used at the *akeidah* is called a מאכלת, because "The Jewish nation eat its reward." *Parnassah* comes from the *akeidah*, and similarly, all ten tests granted many blessings and salvations for the Jewish nation.

2. Rashi in this week's *parashah* (14:9) writes, "The war was four kings against five, and nevertheless, the four kings won the war."

The Beis Aharon (p.2:) writes, "Be very happy. Everything you do in Avodas Hashem should be very precious to you. Think: 'I won't sell this merit for all the money in the world!' Even if it is merely just one good word, thought, or deed. Nothing will be lost; great things will come from it, for you and perhaps for the entire Jewish nation. Do whatever you can - be it big or small. As people say, 'Whatever you grab in the market is worthwhile.'"

There's a tale about the Golem of Prague who was sent to the sea with a bag over his shoulders and was told to return when the bag is filled with fish.

Many hours passed, and the *golem* didn't return, so people went to see what happened to him.

They found him standing up to his knees in the water, trying to catch fish with his hands. Half of his sack was already filled.

"Come home," they called to him.

The *golem* showed them that his bag wasn't yet full.

They said, "We don't need any more fish."

The *golem* heard that they didn't need fish, so he turned the sack over and freed the fish.

This story shows the foolishness of those who think that it's either everything or nothing. We must cherish whatever we accomplish, even if it is a little.

This also applies to guarding oneself against *aveiros*. Of course, our genuine desire is to be

This means that the four kings were extremely strong. Nevertheless, Avraham didn't refrain from chasing them." Because a person must do what he can, and then Hashem will help him.

completely clean from *aveiros*, but most people will admit that it is close to impossible to achieve. Nevertheless, grasp whatever you can. Each success is precious.

Reb Ezriel Tauber *zt'l* once brought a *bachur* to Reb Chaim Kanievsky Shlita. This *bachur* was at the very beginning stages of his *teshuvah*. He said that he wanted to keep Shabbos, but the main thing holding him back was his addiction to cigarettes. "I'm not ready to stop smoking for 25 hours," he explained.

Reb Chaim took this question very seriously, and after contemplating for a few moments, Reb Chaim said to the young man, "Extinguishing a cigarette is also an *aveirah*. Therefore, when you finish a cigarette, don't extinguish it on Shabbos."

Reb Chaim encouraged the *bachur* to keep as much of Shabbos as he could. He shouldn't look at Shemiras

Shabbos as an all-or-nothing proposition.

The *bachur* followed this counsel. He kept Shabbos when he wasn't extinguishing the cigarette, and he was careful not to cook or turn on the electricity, etc. It didn't take long, and he stopped smoking on Shabbos and eventually became a full *shomer Shabbos*.

Hashem told Avraham (15:5), *הבט השמימה וספור הכוכבים, אם תוכל לספור אותם, ויאמר כה יהיה זרעך*, "Look up at the heaven and count the stars if you can." Hashem said, "This is how your children will be."

Reb Meir Shapiro of Lublin *zt'l* explained that it is impossible to count the stars. But Hashem told Avraham to count them, so Avraham tried, and he began counting. Hashem said, *כה יהיה זרעך*, "This is how your children will be," meaning that when they are given a commandment, they don't say it's

impossible. They try, and they do whatever they can.

Hashem told Avraham, לך לך מארצך וממולדתך ומבית אביך.

The Ropshitzer Rav *zt'l* explains that if Avraham would sit and contemplate about his origins, about his father the avid idol worshiper, he would be discouraged, and he would say, "How can a person like me serve Hashem? What *yichus* do I have?"

Similarly, if Avraham would think about his own history, the days of his youth when he worshipped idols (as the Rambam tells us), he would feel unworthy of

serving Hashem. Therefore, Hashem tells him, לך לך מארצך, וממולדתך ומבית אביך, don't think about your past. Go away from those depressing thoughts, and then you will be able to serve Hashem.

Every Good Deed is Rewarded

Rashi (*Bereishis* 11:28) writes, "Terach was responsible for the death of his son Haran. Terach complained to Nimrod about his son Avraham who broke his idols and threw the pieces into a furnace.³ Haran was present, and he thought, 'If

3. The Midrash (*Bereishis Rabba* 38) relates:

Terach manufactured and sold idols. One day, Terach had to go someplace, so he asked his son Avraham to tend to the idol store that day.

A customer entered requesting to purchase an idol.

Avraham asked him, "How old are you?"

The man replied that he was about sixty years old. Avraham said, "Woe to someone who is sixty years old and bows down to an idol that was made just today." The man left, embarrassed, recognizing the foolishness of his faith.

Then a woman carrying a bowl of flour came to the shop. She said to Avraham, "Sacrifice this to the idols," and she left.

Avraham took a hammer and smashed most of the idols in the store, and then placed the hammer in the hand of the only remaining idol – the largest one.

Terach returned and demanded, "Who did this?"

Avraham replied, "I will tell you the truth. A woman asked me to give a bowl of flour to the idols. All of the idols wanted the flour, and they began to fight. One said, 'I should eat first,' another said, 'Give it to me first.' It was a big mess. Then, this tall idol grabbed a hammer and broke all smaller idols."

Terach replied, "Why do you lie to me? These idols don't know anything, and they can't do anything."

Avraham responded, "Listen to what you just said. If they don't know anything and they can't do anything, why do you worship them?"

Enraged, Terach brought Avraham to King Nimrod.

Nimrod ordered, "Bow down to the fire."

Avraham replied, "Why not bow down to water, because water puts out fire?"

Nimrod: Bow to water.

Avraham: Why not bow to the clouds, because clouds carry water?

Nimrod: Bow to the clouds.

Avraham: Why not bow to the wind, because the wind blows the clouds?

Nimrod: Bow to the wind.

Avraham: Why not worship a human being, because he carries wind within him?

Nimrod: You're speaking foolishness. I worship fire and I'm going to throw you into fire. Let the G-d who you bow down to save you.

Avraham's brother, Haran, was also present, and he wasn't certain

Avram wins, I am with him. And if Nimrod wins, I am with him.' When Avram was saved, they asked Haran, 'Which side are you on?' He replied that he was with Avram. So they threw him into the furnace, and he perished."

The Sfas Emes (תרי"ז ד"ה) (טעם) says that although Haran wasn't perfect (because he had doubts, and he waited to see what will happen to Avraham), nevertheless, he went into fire *al kiddush Hashem*, and he deserves a reward for that. His reward is that Dovid HaMelech and Moshiach descend from him. (Dovid HaMelech and Moshiach are grandchildren of Haran's son Lot.)

This is because every good deed is rewarded, even when it isn't perfect.

Here's another example:

Rashi (21:34) tells us that Lot was captured in the war, Og notified Avraham. Avraham went to the war and saved Lot.

Og's good deed (telling Avraham about Lot) didn't come from righteous intentions. Rashi explains that Og wanted Avraham to die in war so he could marry Sarah. Nevertheless, Og did a good deed and was rewarded. As the Midrash (*Bereishis Rabba* 42:8) states, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu said, 'I swear, you will be rewarded for each step

which side to take. He said to himself, "If Avraham is saved from the furnace, I will say I am with Avraham, and if Nimrod wins, I will say that I'm with Nimrod.

Avraham was thrown into a burning furnace and was saved. They asked Haran, "Whose side are you on?"

He replied, "I'm with Avraham."

They threw him into the furnace and his innards were burned. He came out dead. As it states, *וימת הרן על פני תרה*, Terach caused Haran's death.

you took [to tell Avraham], and you will live long in this world."

Years later, in Moshe Rabbeinu's era, Og was the king of Bashan, and Moshe was afraid to wage war against them. Rashi (*Bamidbar* 21:34) explains that Moshe feared that Og's merit might protect him.

So we see that every good deed will be rewarded, even the good deeds of *reshaim*, even when the intentions weren't pure. We can therefore be confident that all our good deeds will be rewarded. This awareness will encourage us to perform as many *maasim tovim* as we can.

Turning Theory into Deeds

With regards to Avraham's ten tests, there

is a *machlokes* how to count them. Some say the first test was לך לך, leaving his homeland to come to Eretz Yisrael. Others say the first test was when Avraham chose to be thrown into the furnace at Ur Kasdim rather than to bow down to idols.

The test of Ur Kasdim is mentioned very briefly in the *Chumash*. All we have are the words (15:7), אֲנִי ה' אֲשֶׁר, הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאוּר כַּשְׁדִּים "I am Hashem who saved you from Ur Kasdim..."

We wonder (according to one view) why Ur Kasdim isn't among the ten tests and why the story of Ur Kasdim isn't discussed more in the Torah. It seems like a much greater test than ⁴. לך לך

People answer that לך לך was actually a greater test, and this is the proof:

4. The Bas Ayin writes, "It was certainly very hard for Avraham to leave his homeland and his father's home, where he was born and raised, and travel to a foreign land. Furthermore, he didn't

The Noam Elimelech (Tzetel Katan) writes, "Every moment you aren't studying Torah, especially when you are sitting idle in your room or lying on your bed, and you can't fall asleep, be diligent to think about the mitzvah (*Vayikra* 22:32), ונקדשתי בתוך בני ישראל, to sanctify Hashem's name. Imagine a large fire is before you, burning up to the heaven, and you go against your nature, and for Hashem's sake, you

throw yourself into the fire *al kiddush Hashem*. Hashem considers a good thought like a deed. So, with this thought, you aren't lying idly, rather you performed a mitzvah of the Torah."

At night, one may be thinking about being *moser nefesh* for Hashem. And then the morning comes, the alarm clock rings, לך לך, get up and serve Hashem, but he pushes the snooze button, and falls back asleep. So, it seems that לך

even know where he was going! But Avraham had *bitachon*. He trusted that Hakadosh Baruch Hu only does kindness with him [and he believed that if Hashem sends him someplace, it is certainly for his benefit]. Therefore, it states, ואברם בן חמש ושבעים שנה, בצאתו מחרן, 'Avram was seventy-five years old when he left Charan,' and 75 is *gematriya* בטחון. [The *pasuk* is saying that] Avraham had *bitachon*, and his *bitachon* enabled him to pass the test, to leave his family and homeland behind and to travel as Hashem commanded him. When one has *emunah* and *bitachon* in the Creator of the world that everything He does is for the good, then he has the emotional strength and willpower to keep the mitzvos and to pass the most difficult tests."

In this paragraph, the Bas Ayin expresses the great test of לך לך. It was certainly a very great test. Nevertheless, it seems to be a far easier test than Ur Kasdim. So, if the Torah tells us of the test of לך לך, we wonder why the Torah doesn't tell us about the apparently greater test of Ur Kasdim?

לך is a harder test to do than to be *moser nefesh* for Hashem.

This is said בדרך צחות, but the message is very true. It is easier for people to be servants of Hashem in theory than in action. In theory, people are ready to be very holy, they can imagine themselves being *moser nefesh* for Hashem, which is what they truly want. But the challenge is to translate that devotion into actions. Are you prepared to do something? Are you ready to put your actions where your heart is calling you?

Taking action is the hardest step.

A group of Lubavicher chassidim in communist Russia gathered for a *farbrengen* to sing songs to Hashem and discuss chassidus. The *mashpiah* (leader) at this *farbrengen* was Reb Chat'she, the gabai of the Rayatz (Rebbe Yosef Yitzchak of Lubavitz) *zt'l*. During the communism

era, such gatherings were dangerous, and the participants were at risk of being exiled to Siberia. A *bachur* stood guard outside to make sure that police and informers didn't come.

Once, the *bachur* rushed in and said that there was someone suspicious outside.

The men immediately hid their *sefarim* and took out newspapers, vodka, and cake to make it appear that they are just talking and spending time together.

Some of the men escaped through the back door or through a window to save their lives.

Soon afterward, the *bachur* returned and said that the coast was clear.

The men immediately took out the holy *sefarim*, and resumed their studies.

Reb Chat'she told them, "Just a moment before, we were all doing deeds. The realization that our lives

were at risk caused one to grab the newspaper, another to jump out of the window, a third to bring cake and drinks. Everyone was active. We should do the same when we study chassidus. The exalted ideas should lead us to improve our tefillos, to perform *chesed*, etc. It shouldn't remain in theory alone." But that's always the hardest part, to translate yearning into action.

There's a Lubavicher song, עסן עסט זיך שלאפן שלאפט זיך וואס זאל מען טוהן אז ס' לערענט זיך נישט... "We are able to sleep, we are able to eat. But what should we do if we can't learn? What should we do if we can't daven."

The song expresses the longing of a Yid who desires to daven with *kavanah* and learn properly, but he isn't successful.

A wise person asked, what would be if it were the opposite? He can daven, he can learn, but

isn't able to sleep and eat properly. Would he also sing a song about it, or would he do something about it? He would run to doctors, take medication, exercise, and do whatever he can to be healthy, so he could sleep and eat.

When something is related to the body, there is a small step between the theoretical and the actual. One is prepared to act upon what he knows he should do. However, when it comes to spirituality, we can know what we should do, study about it, and then do nothing at all.

Reb Shlomo Wolbe *zt'l* spoke about people learning *hilchos tzedakah*, and then a poor person arrives and asks for *tzedakah*. They might respond, "Sorry. We're learning now. Come back later."

Similarly, Reb Avigdor Miller *zt'l* said that he once saw a yeshiva *bachur* studying the Gemara,

which discusses the gravity of theft, and he was using a Gemara that was taken without permission from his beis medresh!

May we merit to actualize our desires and put into practice what we know we should be doing.

Tests

The *malachim* say, איה מקום כבודו, "Where is Hashem's honor?" What is their question? They are in heaven, and there are multitudes of *malachim* honoring Hashem, singing His praises. So why do they ask, "Where is Hashem's honor?"

And, if Hashem's honor isn't in heaven, where, indeed, is Hashem's honor?

The Chasam Sofer *zt'l* explains that Hashem's honor isn't in heaven because they don't have another choice other than to serve Hashem.

He compares it to people honoring the king in the

king's palace. They stand up for the king, sing his praises, immediately obey all his requests, play music before him, but that isn't necessarily honor. It might be fear. Perhaps they hate the king and belittle him in their heart, but they act as though they honor him because they know that they will be severely punished if they don't. Therefore, the *malachim* say, איה מקום כבודו, "where is Hashem's honor?" It is not in heaven. Hashem's honor comes specifically from this world, as it states, כבודו מלא עולם, "His honor fills the world." In this world, Hashem's presence is concealed, yet we choose to honor Him. That is genuine honor.

Remember this when faced with a test. Remember that this is your opportunity honor the King of the world.

When Reb Mendel Futerfas *zt'l* was imprisoned in Russia, someone asked him for a *brachah* because

he planned to escape that night.

"How can you escape?!" Reb Mendel wondered. "There are guards with watchdogs all around, and we are surrounded with barbed wire. Are you crazy? How do you expect to escape?"

"I've been watching the guards for a long time, and I discovered that every day, there are thirty minutes when there aren't any guards standing outside the prison. One group leaves and the other group doesn't arrive until a half-hour later. For quite a while, when the guards weren't present, I was busy drilling and carving out a round hole in the wall so I can escape. Tonight, the hole will be completed. All I'll need to do is push the circle out, and I will go to freedom.

That night, Reb Mendel came to see what would happen. He saw the man push out the circle he

carved out in the prison wall and run for his life. Dogs chased him, but he quickly threw out of his pockets a few pieces of meat. The dogs forgot about the prisoner and focused on eating the meat.

A guard was watching from a tower in the distance. He was happy to see the dogs chasing after the prisoner. But when he saw that they stopped to eat the meat, he became angry at the dogs and shot them with his revolver.

Sometime later, Reb Mendel asked the guard why he killed the dogs. "They only did what dogs naturally do. Furthermore, by killing them, you lost your watchdogs. So, what did you gain by killing them?"

The guard replied, "We invest a lot of money to train those dogs. But if they don't do their job, and their hunger for meat causes them to abandon their

mission, why do we need them?"

Reb Mendel repeated this story, and with tears in his eyes, he would add: "We were sent to the world to do Hashem's service, but if we get sidetracked with foolishness, what are we worth?"

He would express it in Yiddish, הונט וואס די ביסט... וואס, "You dog! What purpose do you have in the world?"

Chazal (*Pesachim* 109.) say, אין שמחה אלא בבשר, "There is no joy other than with meat." Tzaddikim explained that בשר, meat, flesh, hints to human beings. Hashem's joy is from people, made of flesh and bone when they pass their tests and serve Hashem.

The Chidushei HaRim *zt'l* said, "*Yungerleit* beg me to take away all their *taavos*, temptations. But without temptation, they are like animals. The superiority of man is that he has a *yetzer*

hara to conquer. It is very precious in heaven when one abstains from even just a drop of his desires."

There was a deep hole in the middle of the road, and all cars had to drive around it. City Hall sent a worker to fix it, but this worker also drove around the hole and did not stop to fix it.

His boss rebuked him, "You were sent to fix the problem, not to dodge it."

The *nimshal* is, Hashem sent people to the world to pass tests. So why do you complain when you have tests? That's the reason you came to this world.

Reb Eliyahu Lopian *zt'l* (שביבי לב, לב אליהו עמי שי"א) told a *mashal* of someone who came to a palace. The outside of the palace was beautiful, as would be expected. The meticulous gardens with aromatic flowers were a pleasure to behold.

But inside, everything was topsy-turvy. He was surprised. How can this be?

But then he realized that they must be renovating the palace. Nothing was in order, as it is in a preparatory stage, so the palace to be even more beautiful.

Reb Elyah Lopian explained that in *galus*, things seem to be out of order. But this is clearly in preparation for the times of Moshiach. It is the renovations for something that will be outstandingly beautiful.

As we say, על כן נקוה לך ה' אלקינו לראות מהרה בתפארת עוֹד, we are waiting for the time when everything will be fixed and beautiful, with the coming of Moshiach.

We add that the same applies to a Yid. He sees that everything is in the wrong order, not as it should be. He wants to shout, "What's happening

here? How could this be?" How can I be so far from my goal to properly serve Hashem?

But he must know that this is the renovation stage. Soon, when the renovations are complete, his genuine beauty will shine forth.

Machlokes

It states in this week's *parashah* (13:7-8), ויהי ריב בין רעי אברם ובין רועה מקנה לוט... ויאמר אברם אל לוט אל נא תהי מריבה ביני וביניך, "There was an argument between Avram's shepherds and Lot's shepherds... Avram said to Lot, "Let there not be a dispute between us..."

The Shlah HaKadosh notes that the *pasuk* (ibid.) begins with the word ריב and ends with מריבה. Both words mean dispute. The difference between the two is that מריבה is in feminine form, implying that the dispute can *chalilah* increase in intensity and multiply, while ריב is the masculine form of the same word,

which implies that the argument will not grow out of proportion. There was a ריב between the shepherds, and Avram requested אל נא תהי מריבה, let's be careful that this dispute doesn't turn into something greater. Let's stop this *machlokes* now, so it doesn't bear fruit and create a great rift between us.

The Gemara says, דעה קניית מה חסרת which can be translated to mean that someone with *daas*, wisdom, מה חסרת, will take the letters מ"ה out of מריבה. When the letters מ"ה are taken out of מריבה, the word becomes ריב, the masculine form of dispute. The wise are cautious that a fight remains small and insignificant making sure that it doesn't grow and get out of hand.

As it states (*Mishlei 17:14*), פוטר מים ראשית מדון, "Like water gushing through an opening, is the beginning of a dispute." Rashi (*Sanhedrin 7.*) explains, "When a river swells, it flows to the fields

along the banks. The flow goes through narrow furrows and channels. If the flow isn't stopped immediately, it will become stronger and wider until it can't be stopped. This is the nature of a dispute..." If it is not stopped at the onset, it becomes larger and overpowering.

The Shlah said that this is alluded to in the word מוחלקת. The מו has a tiny opening, which represents a still small and narrow *machlokes*. The opening of the ה is wider, for the argument has become greater. ל is the tallest letter, going upwards, and ק is long downwards. This suggests that the *machlokes* is growing in all directions. And finally, ה, the *machlokes* stands firmly and securely on its own two legs.

All of this could be avoided if you stop the *machlokes* at the very beginning when it's still merely a tiny opening in the מו.

The Shlah HaKadosh (Yoma Derech Chaim 44) writes, מחלוקת אחת דוחה מאה פרנסות, "One *machlokes* drives away a hundred *parnasos*."

The word כנען can mean poverty, as it states (Zechariah 14:21), ולא יהיה כנעני עוד בבית ה' , צבאות, "There will be no more poverty..." Thus, the *pasuk* tells us, ויהי ריב... והכנעני... , אז יושב בארץ, "there was a *machlokes*...and poverty... was then in the land." *Machlokes* causes poverty; unlike peace, *shalom*, which brings *parnassah* in abundance.

Chesed

Rebbe Pinchos Koritzer said, "Until [we read] *parshas Lech Lecha*, the world is unhappy and confused. Afterwards, the *chesed* of Avraham is aroused, and there are salvations in the world."

Avraham is the paradigm of *chesed*, and this brings salvation to the world. Let's go in Avraham

Avinu's ways and study the great trait of *chesed*:

At the beginning of a new year, we are afraid that perhaps it was decreed in heaven that there will be an exile (for the individual or for communities, *chalilah*). We annul the decree with the mitzvah of *succah*. As the *sefarim* explain, going into the *succah* is a micro- exile, which saves us from needing to endure the devastation of actual *galus*.

As it is known, on Succos we are visited by the seven Ushpizen. The Vilna Gaon *zt'l* (אזור אליהו) (סוכות) tells us that all the seven Ushpizen went to *galus*. Therefore, it's fitting that they visit us on Succos when we go into *galus*

Avraham went to *galus*, as Hashem told him, לך לך, מארצך, that he must leave his homeland. Yitzchak went to *galus*, as it states (Bereishis 26:1), ויהי רעב בארץ... וילך, "There was a famine in the land... and Yitzchak went to

Avimelech... to Ggor," and he lived there.

The Vilna Gaon proves that Aharon went to *galus*, because Hashem said (*Shemos* 4:27), לך לקראת משה, המדברה, "Go to greet Moshe in the desert..."

Reb Menasheh Reisman Shlita asks, Aharon went out to meet Moshe when Moshe was returning from Midyan! It wasn't that he moved to a new location. Why is that called going to *galus*?

It's because this was a great challenge and test for Aharon. Moshe was the younger brother, yet he was becoming the redeemer of Bnei Yisrael and not Aharon. Aharon passed this difficult test and greeted Moshe with happiness. As it states (*ibid.* 14), וראך ושמה בלבו, "He will see you, and he will be happy in his heart." This act of going out to face this difficult challenge can be considered going into *galus*.

The sister and brother-in-law of the Yismach Yisrael of Alexander *zt'l* were making a *chasunah* for their son. The Yismach Yisrael came for the *chasunah* and stayed the week of *sheva brachos*.

On the final day of *sheva brachos*, the Yismach Yisrael's sister said, "I don't like the *kallah*. I can't even look at her." She said that she will encourage her son to divorce her.

The Yismach Yisrael was very upset when he heard his sister say this.

At the *sheva brachos*, the Yismach Yisrael said, "On the words (16:6) עשי לה הטוב, *Onkelus* writes, בדקין בעיניך, בעיניי, which can be translated as "correct her with your eyes." Avraham told Sarah that she could fix Hagar with a good eye. Think good about Hagar, and that will transform her.

People respond to how others think about them.

Focusing on their faults affects them one way, and if you focus on their qualities, it helps them become better.

(This certainly occurs when the people you are thinking about know the good thoughts you think of them. And even when they don't know, there is a power of having a positive view of others that changes them. Think about people's good, and they will become even better.)

This is an essential tool for teachers and parents. Focus on the inner good of your charges, and that will help them become better. Replay in your mind constantly, "he is good; he is special. He has this quality, and he has that quality..." and with such thoughts, you will nurture and develop the good in them.

The first letter of the Torah is a ב and not an א. The *gematriya* of ב is two. This reminds us that the purpose of the Torah is to

have in mind your fellow man. You shouldn't only think about א, yourself alone. Think about others, and ask yourself, "What can I do to help them?"

It states (13:16), ושמתי את זרעך כעפר הארץ, the Jewish people will be like the earth.

In which way?

Reb Moshe Feinstein *zt'l* explains that the earth doesn't have any intrinsic value. Its purpose is to help others. Food grows from the earth; earth and stones can be used to build houses. But earth alone is valueless. Hashem told Avraham that his descendants will be like the earth, meaning that they will be focused on how they can help others, not merely thinking of themselves.

The Ostravtza Rebbe *zt'l* met with Reb Chaim Ozer *zt'l* and said a very deep *pilpul*. Reb Chaim Ozer replied, "You are an אדם גדול, a great person!"

The Ostravtza Rebbe humbly disagreed. "Being well-versed in Torah doesn't make one an אדם גדול. Someone who does *chesed* is an *adam gadol*."

He proved this from the Gemara (*Makos* 22:) that discusses how prized Torah scholars are, and therefore, how much we must honor them. The Gemara says, "People are foolish because they stand up for a *sefer Torah*, but don't stand up for an *adam gadol*. The Torah says that *malkus* is 40 lashes (as it states ארבעים יכנו), and the *Chachamim* detracted one."

The *Chachamim* taught that *malkus* is 39 lashes, although the Torah seems to say forty. This is the Gemara's proof that the Torah scholars are greater than the Torah scroll itself because they can change and override what's written in the Torah.

(Obviously, they only do so following the 13 principles of derivation. Nevertheless, the

Gemara says that this demonstrates the greatness of the *Chachamim*. If we show honor to a Torah scroll, we should undoubtedly honor the *Chachamim*.)

The Ostravtza Rebbe noted that the Gemara could have brought another source to prove the greatness of the *Chachamim*. The Torah says to count fifty days of the *omer* (תספרו חמישים יום), and the *Chachamim* say to count forty-nine days.

Why doesn't the Gemara use this source to show the greatness of the scholars?

The answer is that a great person is someone who can reduce the distress and pain of the Jewish nation. If they can detract even one of the *malkus*, that is an example of greatness.

The fact that they detracted one day of *sefiras ha'omer* isn't proof of the greatness of the *Chachamim*. That they got rid of one

lashing shows true greatness.

Rewards for Doing Chesed

Reb Elazar Tzaddok Turchin *zt'l* was a *masmid* already as a young *bachur*, but the following incident elevated his knowledge and *hasmadah* to a very high level.

Erev Yom Kippur, after the *seudah hamafsek*, he was going towards the beis medresh to say *Tefillah Zakkah* in preparation for Yom Kippur. But when he passed the Tepliker Rav's *zt'l* home, the rav called to him, "*Bachur'!! Bachur'!!* I need some help cleaning my home."

Reb Elazar Tzaddok put aside his aspirations to be in beis medresh early and helped the elderly Tepliker Rav. When he completed this good deed, the Tepliker Rav told him, "I know it is late, and you have many things to do. You helped me with *mesirus nefesh*. In

return, I'm certain that Hashem will help you this year beyond the laws of nature."

Indeed, after this incident, Reb Elazar Tzaddok Turchin became a new person. He was able to learn thirty pages of Gemara a day, and he didn't forget anything.

Reb Meir Chadash *zt'l*, the *mashgiach* of Yeshivas Chevron, saw how his student, Reb Elazar Tzaddok, was finishing one *masechta* after the other and suspected that he was learning on a superficial level. So he tested him, and Reb Elazar Tzaddok knew everything perfectly.

Reb Meir Chadash didn't know the secret, the reason Reb Elazar Tzaddok Turchin's mind was so open for Torah, beyond the rules of nature.

Reb Elazar Tzaddok continued studying in this manner, and he became a great Torah scholar. (Years

later, he wrote the *sefarim Shoneh Halachos* together with Reb Chaim Kanievsky *shlita*.)

Reb Elazar Tzaddok helped the Tepliker Rav on *erev* Yom Kippur, but ultimately, he did himself the greatest favor. He earned dividends from this *chesed* for the rest of his life.

Because for doing *chesed* one earns reward also in this world.

Rebbe Henoch of Alexander *zt'l* said *chesed* is *mesugal* for bearing children. He explained that *שערי הולדה*, the chambers in heaven for bearing children are sometimes closed. But right near this chamber is *שערי גמילות חסדים*, the chamber of loving-kindness. So, even if the gates to the chambers for children are closed, one can enter through the gates of *gemilus chasadim*, and from there it

is easy to jump into the chambers for children.

Rebbe Baruch of Zichlin *zt'l* came to Rebbe Henoch of Alexander *zt'l* for *Shabbos Parashas Noach*, and he told the Rebbe that his son-in-law doesn't yet have any children.

Rebbe Henoch told him to do *chesed*, because the chamber for children is near the chambers for *chesed*. He added that this is alluded to in Rashi (6:9), עיקר תולדותיהן של צדיקים מעשים טובים. This can be translated, עיקר תולדותיהן של צדיקים, *tzaddikim* have children, *מעשים טובים*, in the merit of their *gemilus chasadim*. Therefore, the next *pasuk* states, ויולד נח שלשה בנים את שם, "Noach gave birth to three children: Shem, Cham, and Yafes." Noach bore those children because he was involved in doing *chesed*.⁵

5. The Divrei Chaim *zt'l* wrote to his son-in-law, Reb Moshe Ungar, something along these lines: "You sent me information you

In particular, *tzedakah* and giving interest-free loans are *mesugal* for bearing children and for having good children. The Gemara (*Bava Basra* 9:) states, "Whoever gives *tzedakah* regularly, Heaven will grant him children who are wise, wealthy, and learned in all aspects of the Torah."

And it states (*Tehillim* 37:26), כל היום חונן ומלוה וזרעו לברכה, "All day long he is compassionate and he lends money and his children will be blessed." This hints that by giving *tzedakah* and loans, one merits having good children. (The *Divrei Avraham* said this explanation to the Chasam Sofer *zt'l*, and the Chasam Sofer *zt'l* praised it.)

Don't Harm Your Fellow Man

It states (16:6), ותענה שרה, ותברח מפניה, "Sarah harrassed Hagar, and she fled from her."

The Ramban writes, "The affliction that our mother caused Hagar was a sin, and it was Avraham's sin, too, because he allowed Sarah to harass Hagar. Hashem heard Hagar's pain and gave her a wild son [Yishmael] to afflict Avraham and Sarah's descendants in so many ways."

Until today, we suffer from Yishmael's descendants, and as it appears from the Ramban, the origin of this suffering

heard about the boy that was suggested for your daughter. You told me about his scholarly abilities and his *yichus*, but you left out the main part. You didn't tell me whether he is a *mench*, someone who is kind to others, and will be kind to your daughter. And that is a key point to find out, because it states (*Devarim* 22:16), את בתי נתתי לאיש, "I gave my daughter to an *ish*, to a *mench*." (The Chebener Rav *zt'l* often repeated this story.)

can be traced back to when Sarah tormented Hagar.

We can't understand the ways of the holy *avos* and *imahos*, but we learn from this to be cautious to follow the path of chesed and to avoid harming any human being. Unfortunately, for this one error, we suffer until today.

Reb Yeshaya Weisberg Shlita from Beitar told the following personal story in public:

A few years ago, I fell into very deep debt, and that wasn't my only problem. I also had two older children who weren't finding their *shidduchim*, and several other struggles and challenges. I felt the *midas hadin* on me, and I didn't know why.

My friends advised me to go to America to collect money, to alleviate my financial burden.

One friend, a Stoliner chassid, told me that if I'm already going to America, I

should make a stopover in Frankfurt, Germany, to visit the *kever* of Reb Yisrael Frankfurter (of Stolin) *zt'l*, as many people merited salvation by davening at this holy *kever*.

I bought a ticket for a connecting flight from Eretz Yisrael to Germany, with a few hours layover before continuing to New York. My friend ordered a driver for me; someone who knows where Reb Yisrael Frankfurter's *kever* is located, so when I arrive in Frankfurt Germany, this taxi driver will drive me straight to the *kever*.

I disembarked in Frankfurt, but I didn't know where I should go. Thousands of people were streaming in all directions, and I couldn't ask anyone, as I don't speak German or English.

So, I followed where the majority of people were headed, until I found myself on the sidewalk outside the airport.

Now I had to find the driver that was arranged for me. I called, but the call didn't go through. What do I do now? Taxis were lined up, but I didn't know how to communicate with them.

I approached the first cab. It was an Arab. I don't speak Arabic. So I went to the next cab, and amazingly, this taxi driver was a Yid from Eretz Yisrael and spoke fluent Hebrew. He told me that he knows where Reb Yisrael Frankfurter is buried and could take me there.

I was shocked at my good fortune. Hashem was helping me. The miracle wasn't lost on the taxi driver either. As we rode to my destination, he told me that there are only a handful of Israeli taxi drivers in Frankfurt, and the chances of me finding one was almost impossible. Furthermore, he told me that he doesn't usually work in the airport. "But today, by *hashgachah pratis*, I came here..."

We both saw Hashem's hand, and this roused the taxi driver to *teshuvah*. He told me that he doesn't keep any mitzvos in Germany, and when he lived in Eretz Yisrael, he was more religious. He spoke to me about this for a long time. May Hashem help him do a *teshuvah sheleimah*.

We arrived at the *kever*, and I was able to daven there for forty-five minutes. I davened for *parnassah*, to pay off my debts, for *shidduchim* for my two older children, and primarily, I davened that Hashem reveal to me why I am being punished so that I can rectify my ways.

When I finished my tefillos, I sang *י"ה אכסוף*, the renowned holy, Stolinkarlin *nigun*, and I returned to the taxi that was waiting for me.

The taxi driver brought me back to the airport, and he explained where I

needed to go to catch my flight.

I have relatives in Monroe, New York, and I stayed in their home. On my first morning in America, I went to a large Satmar beis medresh to daven Shacharis, and there I met someone who looked very familiar. Thirty years earlier, in yeshiva, I had a classmate who had a speech impediment. I used to mock him. My friends laughed when I copied the way he spoke, but I'm sure it tore that poor boy's heart. Could it be that this is the same person? Years ago, I asked him *mechilah*, but he refused to forgive me. I forgot about the entire episode, but now that I saw him, everything came back.

Thirty years is a long time, and I wanted to make sure it was the same person. He was collecting for *hachnasas kallah*, and I approached him to hear his speech better. But this man spoke fluently. There wasn't any sign of a speech

impediment. I asked him, "Do you perhaps have a brother..."

"No, I recognize you. It's me, the same boy as back in yeshiva. You're probably wondering how I'm able to speak so well. It's because I went to many professionals. Now I can speak regularly. It's even possible that the shame you caused me encouraged me to put in a lot of effort until I could speak well. Nevertheless, I don't forgive you. I still feel the shame in my heart and all of my limbs. I'm sorry. I can't forgive you."

I took three hundred dollars out of my pocket and gave it to him, and I pleaded with him to forgive me.

He told me that he forgives me.

It seems that this was the sin blocking my shefa, because everything improved after I got his forgiveness. That day, I

met a relative in Monroe (whom I'd never met before), and he helped me raise a lot of money. It was evident that the forgiveness I received opened up the heavens for me.

There was still a long way to go until my debts were paid off, but things were improving. I returned to Eretz Yisrael filled with hope. I felt in my bones that now my situation would improve.

The hope gave me the courage to attempt once again to end my financial struggles. So, after a few weeks in Eretz Yisrael, I returned to America.

This time I stayed with relatives in Williamsburg. In the Zlotchever beis medresh, I met a very special *yungerman* named Reb Yoel. He listened attentively as I told him about my financial hardships, and he, together with a few of his friends, went all out to help me. They spent nights and days

raising money for me (and they continue to help me until today.)

My debts weren't paid up yet, but we were getting there. Some months later, I was in Eretz Yisrael, and I received a call from Reb Yoel. His oldest child was getting married, and he wanted to buy me a ticket, so I can come to the *chasunah*.

I told him that I'd be happy to participate in his *simcha* after all that he did for me. But I told him that I needed to sleep in an apartment by myself, not together with a group of *meshulachim*. I explained to him that I snore loudly, and people can't sleep in the same room as me.

I came to America and followed directions to the address Yoel arranged for me, but I discovered that I wouldn't be there alone. There were many people in the apartment; they were Reb Yoel's guests for the *chasunah*. It was too late at

night to seek another place to stay, so I slept there and hoped for the best.

In the morning, with trepidation, I asked someone in my room how he slept. He replied, "There was a lot of thunder in the room, but *baruch Hashem*, I was able to fall asleep."

I can't express to you how I felt when he said that. It was so embarrassing.

The following night, I woke up in middle of the night and heard snoring sounds that sounded exactly like me! Was I dreaming and hearing myself? I looked in the next room. One of the guests was mocking me! Apparently, he did this because I was disturbing his sleep.

He saw that I was awake and watching him, but he didn't care. He kept pretending to snore, to spite me, to shame me.

I was so embarrassed; I took my bags and ran out

of the apartment. It was raining outside, and I didn't know where I was going. I wanted to cry, but I wasn't able to.

And then a thought popped into my mind: Heaven was allowing me to feel a similar shame to the one I caused that young *bachur* in yeshiva. Although he forgave me, the sin wasn't fully atoned for. Hashem gave me a taste of the cup I poured my friend each day for so long in yeshiva, so my *aveirah* can be completely atoned for.

What can I say: When I had that thought, I became extremely happy and began to dance with joy. Those were the sweetest moments of my life.

At Shacharis *k'vasikin*, the person who shamed me that morning was also there. His face turned red from shame and regret when he saw me, but I didn't have any grievances against him. I considered

him my messenger to atone for my sin.

Naturally, I decided not to sleep in that apartment anymore. Baruch Hashem, a friend gave me an entire floor just for myself.

I came to Reb Yoel's *chasunah*, and who do you think I met there? It was my classmate from thirty years ago. He was there, at the *chasunah*, collecting money.

I helped him a lot at the *chasunah*. I introduced him to Reb Yoel and to Reb Yoel's wealthy friends, whom I had gotten to know. Months earlier, I told Reb Yoel about my old classmate who forgave me, which was the turning point in my life, and now I was able to introduce this very man to Reb Yoel, and Reb Yoel gave him a very generous sum.

I walked with my classmate to all the people seated at this *chasunah*, and he earned a very substantial

sum. As we stood outside the hall, my classmate told me, "I feel that now your *aveirah* is erased, entirely."

I told him about the terrible shame I had the night before and understood that it was to atone for the embarrassment I caused him. This conversation reminded my classmate of the terrible shame he experienced back in yeshiva. We both cried for a long time, and we felt like very close friends.

Some days afterward, Reb Yoel introduced me to a wealthy person. This rich person had compassion on me; he invited his wealthy friends to his home, and they raised \$100,000 in one night! My financial troubles were finally resolved.

I had to return to Eretz Yisrael quickly because a *shidduch* was cooking for my son. They were ready to "break the plate" and to finalize the *shidduch*. They were just waiting for me to return.

Immediately after my son's *chasunah*, my next son was engaged. And from then on, I've experienced *hatzlachah* and *brachah*.

This is Reb Yeshaya's inspirational tale, and these are the lessons that I learned from it:

1) *Hashgachah pratis*.

From all the taxi drivers in Germany, he found someone who speaks Hebrew and knows about the *kever* of Reb Yisrael Frankfurter.

2) The power of tefillah.

A day after his tefillos at the Frankfurter's *kever*, he met the person he had shamed thirty years before, so he could attain his forgiveness and atone for his sin.

3) We also learn the severity of shaming one's fellow man. How much he suffered because he shamed a fellow man!

4) The more the sin was erased, the greater was his *siyata dishmaya*. When the sin was completely erased, all his debts were covered, and his children got married.