

Torah Wellsprings

Collected thoughts
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Toldos





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Torah Wellsprings

Toldos

Choosing Olam HaBa

The Toldos Yaakov Yosef *zt'l* (*Toldos* 1) says that the names of יעקב ועשו allude to the fundamental difference between them. יעקב is from the word עקב, heel. It means Yaakov always thought of the end, the results of everything he did. Whereas, עשו means "to do," symbolizing impulsive

and immediate action, without considering the consequences.

Rashi (25:22) writes that Rivkah wanted to know מה יהא בסופה, "What will be her end." Because this is the focus of tzaddikim, they think about the future, whereas resha'im concentrate on enjoying the present moment.¹

1. Reb Yechezkel of Kozmir *zt'l* (in *Divrei Yisrael*) explains that Rivkah thought she was carrying only one child, and this child wanted to go at times to the beis medresh and at times to *avodah zarah*. (As the saying goes, "Sometimes a *malach* and sometimes a *galach*, priest.") She asked, מה תהא בסופה, what will the end be? Because when one is wavering back in forth between *kedushah* and *tumah*, the main thing is that the end should be good. As people say, "If the end is good, everything is good."

It states (25:17), ואלה שני חיי ישמעאל, "These are the years of Yishmael's life." Similar words are written about Sarah, שני חיי שרה, and Rashi writes there בולן שוין לטובה, that all her years were good. How can we say that about Yishmael's life, when we know that he had many sinful years.

The Baalei HaTosfos answer that Yishmael did *teshuvah* towards the end of his life. *Teshuvah* turns sins into mitzvos. Thus, it could be said about Yishmael that his entire life was good.

Eisav focused on the sensation of the moment, while Yaakov looked at the larger picture and chose what is truly important and good.

Therefore, Eisav sold his birthright willingly and happily to Yaakov. As it states (25:34), ויבז עשו את הבכורה, "Eisav despised the birthright," and he said, למה למה, "What do I need it for?"

Later, he was upset that he sold it. He shouted (27:36), את בכורתי לקח, "He took the birthright away from me!" Didn't Eisav realize when he sold the birthright that he would regret it one day?

Perhaps he did, but Eisav only thought about the present moment. At the time, he was hungry and tired, and Yaakov was cooking soup. He didn't need the *bechorah* now, so he sold it willingly. Later he suffered the consequences.

One of Yaakov's and Eisav's debates was who would inherit Olam HaZeh and who would inherit Olam HaBa (see *Rashi* 25:22). They reached an agreement: Yaakov gets Olam HaBa, Eisav gets Olam HaZeh. This decision was based on their world views. Eisav thought about the moment, so Olam HaZeh, the present, was more appealing to him. Yaakov was willing to sacrifice a moment of the present in return for a better future. Therefore, he chose Olam HaBa. (We will soon see that Yaakov ended up earning both worlds. But since a choice had to be made, Yaakov chose Olam HaBa over the mundane Olam HaZeh.)

We must train ourselves to focus on the future because the future is far longer than the present. This also applies to this world. A young person might focus on living well in this world (for example, he might waste a lot of money on trips or otherwise waste money

and time) without considering that these attitudes and lifestyles might harm his future potential. He has many years ahead of him, and they will be marked by how he lives his life now.

Another example is food. Some people eat whatever tastes good without considering whether it may cause illness in the future. The wise recognize that it isn't worthwhile partaking in tasty food if it will make them ill later on.²

The *Chovas HaLevavos* (*Shaar Cheshbon HaNefesh* 3:25) writes, "One should make a *cheshbon hanefesh* and think about how he loves Olam HaZeh very much, and his love for the

pleasures of Olam HaZeh is greater than his love for Olam HaBa. He should try to uproot the love for this world from his heart, and instead, fill his heart with love for Olam HaBa. He accomplishes this by thinking about the result of both worlds. A wise man said, 'Just like fire and water can't be together in the same vessel, similarly, the heart of the believer can't love Olam HaZeh and Olam HaBa simultaneously. They also compare Olam HaZeh and Olam HaBa to two *tzaros* (two wives of the same man). When he wants one, the other one becomes angry."

A wealthy man wanted to build a luxury home on top of a frozen river. He

2. Eisav said, הלא עשני נא מן האדום האדום הזה, "Pour this red, red thing into my mouth." He didn't take a moment to ask whether this food is animal feed or people food, or whether it is healthy or not. He saw food and he wanted it. He is called Edom, red, because this episode demonstrates his impulsive behavior. He saw something red, and without knowing what it is, requested that it be poured down his throat.

showed the mayor an area in the middle of the river that he wants to buy to build his luxury home on it. The mayor said, "Your plan is ridiculous. In the summer, the ice will melt, and your house will sink."

The wealthy person insisted he wanted to build a luxury home over the ice, and he was willing to pay top dollar, so the mayor agreed.

The next step was to hire workers to build a luxury home. When they were brought to the construction site, they were shocked. How can they make a house on ice that will soon thaw? Among themselves, they said, "He doesn't seem insane. Why does he want to do something so foolish?" They explained to him the futility of his plans, but he insisted they follow his orders and not offer him unsolicited advice. The workers obliged. After all, they were getting paid for the job.

People from neighboring cities came to the riverside to watch the bizarre scene.

By the end of February, the house was finished. The luxury home was equipped with an elevator, carpeted floors, modern furniture, large windows, good lighting, and properly heated.

Many people stood on the riverside with their cameras, and they clapped and cheered as this wealthy family skated over ice and into their new home.

The rich man loved his new home. It had an unusual view, and it granted him plenty of privacy. He laughed at all the people who mocked him. Who had a beautiful home like him?

But then spring came around, and the ice started melting, and his house began to sink. Soon, the house was gone, and his family had no place to go.

Are we any different than this foolish man? He wasted a lot of money and effort to build something that cannot last. Don't we also spend our lives trying to make a name for ourselves in this world, which won't last eternally? Isn't it wiser to invest in matters that will last forever?

Let us follow in Yaakov Avinu's ways and always keep the future in mind. With that focus, we will invest in Olam HaBa.

Klal Yisrael Earns Olam HaZeh Too

Yaakov and Eisav divided the worlds. Eisav and his descendants chose Olam HaZeh, Yaakov and his family chose Olam HaBa.

The Yesod HaAvodah *zt'l* described what the division between Yaakov and Eisav probably looked like:

One Shabbos, Eisav came into Yaakov's tent and saw Yaakov seated at the table with his students, enjoying a five-course meal of fish, meat, wine, and other delicious foods. Eisav exclaimed indignantly, "We have an agreement! Olam HaZeh is mine! You don't have a right to all this!"

Yaakov explained to him that Shabbos is מעין עולם הבא, one 60th of Olam HaBa, and since Olam HaBa is his portion, he has a right to Shabbos, too.

On Sunday, Eisav returned to Yaakov's tent and found Yaakov and his students enjoying a hearty meal once again. "What happened today? Is it Shabbos again?"

"Today is *rosh chodesh* when everyone receives a רוח יתירה, an additional spirit from Olam HaBa. So it's also like Olam HaBa..."

Thursday, Eisav returned a third time to

Yaakov's tent, and he sees Yaakov and his students eating a wonderful meal. "What's today? "

"Today, we are celebrating a *siyum* on *masechta Bava Kama*. If you want, join us tomorrow. We're beginning *Bava Metzia*. When we finish it, there will be another *siyum*."

The next morning, Eisav came to Yaakov's tent and tried to learn *Bava Metzia* with them. They were discussing *שנים ארוזין במלית*, and he quickly understood what the *beis medresh* is all about. He got up and ran away.

Eisav ran to his uncle Yishmael and asked, "What should I do with my brother, Yaakov? We made a deal that I get *Olam HaZeh*, and he gets *Olam HaBa*, but I see that he's taking both worlds - *Olam HaZeh* and *Olam HaBa*! Why does he get both worlds while I only get one?"

Yishmael replied, "Tell Yaakov that since you know you won't be getting *Olam HaBa*, this causes you to lose enjoyment in *Olam HaZeh*. You aren't getting your portion because you know that you don't have anything afterward. So ultimately, you aren't getting this world, either."

Eisav told that to Yaakov and Yaakov replied, "Don't worry about it. After you die, you will get *Olam HaBa* too."

Eisav was very happy with this answer. He can enjoy *Olam HaZeh* and earn *Olam HaBa* too.

When Eisav died, the *malachim* wanted to bring him to Gehinom. "No! No! No! I made a deal with Yaakov, and I get *Olam HaBa* too."

The *malachim* told replied, "Yaakov only said that so that you could enjoy *Olam HaZeh*. Now that you have thoroughly

enjoyed Olam HaZeh, you received your portion. You don't have a right to Olam HaBa," and they took him to Gehinom.

The Best Olam HaZeh

Eisav received Olam HaZeh, but that isn't much at all. As it states in *Pirkei Avos* (4), "One moment of pleasure in Olam HaBa is better than the entire Olam HaZeh."

Even in Olam HaZeh, Yaakov has a much better portion. As it states (*ibid.*), "*Teshuvah* and good deeds in this world are better than the entire Olam HaBa..." Eisav may have attained wealth, pleasures, and honor, but that doesn't compare to a moment of Torah and *teshuvah* the children of Yaakov enjoy in Olam HaZeh. Indeed, those who enjoy studying Torah, *tefillah*, and mitzvos are living the most joyous life. Fortunate is their portion.

Additionally, Yaakov has *emunah*, and with

emunah, life is always great. Therefore, Yaakov has a better life, even in this world.

It states (at the beginning of the *parashah*), אברהם הוליד את יצחק. Reb Aharon Yosef Luria *zt'l* (*Avodas Pnim*) explains that Avraham represents *emunah*, and Yitzchak means joy. Thus, the translation of the pasuk can be that *emunah* results in joy. Those who have *emunah* are happy because they know everything is for the good.

Those who don't have *emunah* don't know how to comfort themselves when going through hard times.

Thus, Yaakov received the best of both worlds, Olam HaZeh and Olam HaBa. *Ashreinu mah tov chelkeinu!*

Boundaries of Holiness

Yaakov was a ישב אהלים, he sat in tents and studied Torah, while Eisav was an איש שדה, a man whose residence was the outdoors.

(25:27). The main difference between a tent and the outdoors is that the latter doesn't have any walls or boundaries.

The Yeitav Lev said that this epitomizes the difference between Yaakov and Eisav. Yaakov made walls and boundaries for himself to ensure that he remains inside the realm of holiness, while Eisav lived without restrictions or limits. Everything was permitted to him.

(The Yeitav Leiv said this in his *hesped* for the Maharam Shik *zt'l*, saying that the Maharam Shik followed in Yaakov's footsteps, and didn't breach any boundaries of tradition.)

Yaakov Avinu said (27:19), *אנכי עשו בכורך*, "I am Eisav, your firstborn." The commentaries ask: How could Yaakov - the pillar of truth - say this lie?

We can explain that Yaakov was wearing Eisav's clothing at the time, and the clothing that one wears affect him. By

donning Eisav's clothing, Yaakov was, in a way, Eisav, and therefore he wasn't lying.

Clothing is one of the boundaries we use to protect our identity, who we are, and to whom we associate ourselves. There are several other guidelines and precautions that our *chachamim* established to keep us firmly within our faith. When we maintain these safeguards, we are following in Yaakov Avinu's ways to be a *יושב אהלים*, someone who lives within boundaries.

The *roshei teivos* of *ישראל* is: *יש שישים רבוא אותיות לתורה*, "There are 600,000 letters in the Torah." Each member of *בני ישראל* is represented by one letter of the Torah. The halachah is that the letters of a *sefer Torah* must be surrounded with white parchment (*בוקף גויל*). The white boundary around each letter hints at the boundaries, limits, and precautions the Jewish nation accept on themselves

so that they will remain within the realm of *kedushah*, without falling out, *chalilah*.

Opposition

According to the simple reading of the *Chumash*, Rivkah didn't know, at first, that she was carrying twins. Therefore, she wanted to know why whenever she passed a beis medresh the child she carried wanted to come out, and when she passed a house of *avodah zarah* the child also wanted to come out. Shem told her that she has two children in her womb. They would be rivals and competing nationalities.

Rebbe Yehoshua of Belz *zt'l* explains the episode using a different approach. He says that Rivkah knew from the onset that she was carrying twins because Hashem told Avraham (*Bereishis* 21:12), *כי ביצחק יקרא לך*, *ויער*, which means Yitzchak

would have two children, and only one of them would be counted as Avraham's genuine descendant. She also knew she was carrying a *rasha* in her womb because whenever she passed a house of *avodah zarah*, this child wanted to go out. Rivkah's question was, why was it destined for her to carry a *rasha* in her womb? She figured that after praying for children, she should only beget righteous children.

Shem told her, *לאום מלואם יאמין*. These words can mean *לאום*, Yaakov's nation, *יאמין* will become stronger, *מלאום* due to Eisav's oppression. It is because of these challenges that Eisav brings on that we become stronger and better.

The Midrash states, "Nimrod died the day Avraham was *niftar*. Eisav died the day Yaakov was *niftar*..." Similarly, Moshe

was *niftar* about the time Bilaam died.³

The explanation is, a *rasha* comes to the world to present a challenge for a *tzaddik*. When the *tzaddik* is *niftar*, the *rasha* can leave the world, too.

Yaakov was born together with Eisav so that from the beginning of his life until his *petirah* he would be tested by him. And from all those challenges, Yaakov rose to even greater heights.

“Hashem is with you”

It states (26:16), ויאמר אבימלך, אל יצחק לך מעמנו כי עצמת ממנו מאד, “Avimelech told Yitzchak, ‘Leave our city because you became far wealthier than us.’ Yitzchak left Gyor and moved to נהל גרר (which Rashi writes was distant from Gyor). Afterward, Yitzchak moved to Be’er Sheva, and

then Avimelech came to visit him. Yitzchak asked him, מדוע באתם אלי ואתם שנאתם אתי, ותשלחוני מאתכם, “Why did you come to me? You hate me, and you sent me away?”

Avimelech replied that he wants to make a *bris*, a peace treaty, with Yitzchak, to promise that they won’t hurt each other. Yitzchak obliged.

Avimelech’s hatred of Yitzchak was seen in several ways: (1) He sent Yitzchak away, and he didn’t permit him to live in Gyor. (2) His servants plugged up and sometimes stole, Yitzchak’s wells. (3) Avimelech even tried to kill Yitzchak (*Baal HaTurim* 26:29), as we will explain.

Avimelech said to Avraham, אם תעשה עמנו רעה, כאשר לא נגענוך, “Don’t do bad to us as we didn’t touch you.” It seems that it should say, “Don’t do bad to us, as

3. Moshe was *niftar* immediately after the battle against Midyan [see *Bamidbar* 31:2], and Bilaam was killed in that war.

we didn't do bad to you." But instead, Avimelech said, כאשר לא נגענוך, "As we didn't touch you." The Baal HaTurim says that this implies that Avimelech wanted to harm Yitzchak, but he failed.

Furthermore, the end of the *pasuk* states that Avimelech said to Yitzchak, אתה עתה ברוך ה', "You are now the blessed one of Hashem." The words ברוך ה' were also said by Lavan, when he invited Eliezer *eved* Avraham into their home. Lavan said to Eliezer, בוא ברוך ה'. The Baal HaTurim explains that this ⁴מסורה hints to us that just as Besuel and Lavan tried to

poison Eliezer, Avimelech also tried to kill Yitzchak – but failed.

Avimelech wanted to make a peace treaty with Yitzchak. Wasn't this a bad time to bring it up since he tried to kill him? Wouldn't it be wiser to conceal this point?

We can explain that Avimelech was telling Yitzchak the following message: "I tried to harm you many times. I commanded that we steal your water, banish you from Gzor, and I even tried to murder you. But Hashem turned everything around and gave you immense success and wealth."⁵ (As the

4. A *מסורה* is when the same words or phrase are used in in just a few places in Tanach, which tells us that they are associated and related.

5. As it states, ויגדל האיש וילך הלוך וגדל עד כי גדל מאוד, 'The man [Yitzchak] became greater and greater, until he became extremely wealthy.' Rashi explains, שהיו אומרים זבל ופרדותיו של יצחק, ולא כספו וזהבו של אבימלך, 'People were saying that it's better to have the manure from Yitzchak's mules, rather than the gold and silver of Avimelech.'" And the next *pasuk* states, ויהי לו מקנה צאן ומקנה בקר ועבדה רבה ויקנאו אותו פלישתים, He had a lot of cattle and the Plishtim were jealous of him."

Ramban writes, Avimelech said, ואין לאל דינו לעשות עמך רע, "We can't harm you.") I now understand that no one can go against Hashem's plan. If Hashem wants to protect someone and grant him success, no one can act against Hashem's will. The same applies to me," Avimelech said. "If Hashem wants to protect me, you won't be able to harm me. So, we might as well make a peace treaty together."⁶

Avimelech said to Yitzchak (26:28), ראה ראינו כי ה' עמך, "We saw, and we saw that Hashem is with you..."

What does the double expression, ראה ראינו, "We saw, and we saw" tell us?

Avimelech was saying, "We saw when you were successful, and we saw you

when you were going through hard times. But always, ה' עמך, you remain with your *emunah* in Hashem. Therefore, I can't harm you. Because, if a yid believes in Hashem, nothing bad can happen to him.

Everything becomes Good

As we explained, Avimelech tried to harm Yitzchak various times, but Hashem turned everything around and granted Yitzchak immense success. This is the way Hashem deals with the Jewish nation: They go through hard times, and in the end, all the hardships become the source of immense *chesed* and success.

Yitzchak blessed Yaakov (27:29), ארריך ארור ומברכך ברוך,

6. We can also explain that Avimelech understood (from the times he tried to harm Yitzchak but failed) that it is impossible to harm a person who believes in Hashem. Avimelech said, "After witnessing the miracles Hashem performed for you, I also believe in Hashem. Therefore, you won't be able to harm me, either, just as I wasn't able to harm you. So we might as well make a peace treaty."

"Those who curse you shall be cursed and those who bless you shall be blessed." Rashi notes that the *pasuk* discusses those who curse before those who bless the Jewish nation. Rashi writes, "This is because tzaddikim first endure *yesurim* and then they have tranquility. Therefore, those who curse them precede those who bless them. That is why Yitzchak mentioned the 'cursers' before the 'blessers.'" The curses and the hardships come first, but soon afterward, the blessings arrive.

The Divrei Yisrael (Modzhitz) *zt'l* asks why the tzaddikim need to be cursed at all?

Furthermore, it states (*Tehillim* 109:28), יקללו המה ואתה יקללו, which means: The *resha'im* curse the Jewish nation, but Hashem turns the curses around, and He blesses them. The *pasuk*

doesn't state "אם יקללו", "If they will curse." Rather יקללו המה, "they will curse." Why is this a given? Why must it be that the *resha'im* will curse the Jewish nation?

The answer is that it is good for the tzaddikim to endure curses and suffering from the *resha'im*, because Hashem will turn these around, and they will become great *chasadim* for the Jewish nation. This is the principle: When hardships come to the Jewish nation, they will eventually become immense *chasadim*. As it states (*Tehillim* 23:5), אך טוב והסד ירדפוני כל ימי חי. This *pasuk* implies that from the opposition (the *resha'im* who chase the Jewish nation), the result will be, אך טוב והסד, much good and kindness.

Reb Yehoshua ben Chananya said (*Taanis* 7:): אי חי הדי חכמי מפי. The Divrei Yisrael says that the

7. Literally, Reb Yehoshua ben Chananya is saying that one needs humility to grow properly in Torah. And therefore, it is good for

translation of טי is hated. Thus, Reb Yehoshua ben Chananya could be saying, "If the *chachamim* are hated - which means they have opposition from *resha'im* - they will succeed even more.

It's for the Good

It states (*Tehillim* 23), ירחי במעגלי צדק, which means Hashem leads me on good paths and He always performs kindness with me. ירחי can be read backward and forwards. This hints that even when matters seem backward and wrong, it is all for the good.

Yesurim are for our benefit, but one needs to learn how to accept the *yesurim* with love and joy. Here is a mashal to explain this point:

The car is a wonderful invention; it helps people

get quickly to where they need to go. But before driving a car, one has to know the rules of driving a car, and one has to know *how* to drive a car. If he doesn't know these matters, driving a car could be perilous. Similarly, *yesurim* helps us come closer to Hashem, and the path to Dveykus BaHashem is hastened considerably. However, one needs to know how to accept the *yesurim* with love and joy, believing everything is for the good. Only then will *yesurim* be beneficial.

There was a drummer who fell asleep on the job. The head of the band smacked him. The drummer immediately awoke and drummed along with the merry song the band was playing. A tzaddik witnessed this, and he said, "*a patch gechapt un freilech geklapt* - he was slapped,

scholars when they aren't beautiful. "If they were ugly, it would be better for them."

but he drums joyously." The lesson: Even when you go through hard times, pick yourself up, and remain happy. And to be happy, you must believe that it is all for your good.

Here is a story on this topic that I heard it from the *baal maaseh*:

This person had the *machlah* (cancer), and his immune system was compromised due to the treatments. When the corona epidemic broke out (around Purim time), his doctor warned him to be cautious that he doesn't catch the disease because his body is too weak to fight it off.

He was cautious - as much as possible. He kept away from people, he washed his hands often, and he wore a mask. Unfortunately, he still contracted the virus.

As the doctor predicted, it wasn't easy for his body to fight off the disease. He

needed a respirator, and for a few days, his life was hanging on a thread. But, *baruch Hashem*, gradually, the virus left his body.

Then the miracle occurred: The antibodies that fought off the virus also attacked the cancer. He was healed from both diseases!

This story is not meant to encourage those who are ill with cancer to try to catch the virus. That is something for doctors to determine - not us. We tell this story to bring across the point that when something negative happens, it is actually positive. When the person in this story caught the virus, which he tried so hard to avoid, he and his family thought it was terrible. However, the problem ended up being the critical cure that he needed. Similarly, whenever we go through challenging moments in life, we must know that it is all for the good.

Here's another story; it happened to a *yungerman* who is in our *chaburah*:

He published a *sefer* last year, which was sold primarily to *menhalim*, principals of *chadarim*, who distributed the *sefarim* among their students.

One organization wanted to make a large order and distribute the *sefarim* among their friends and supporters; however, the head of the organization said that he couldn't buy the *sefarim* without a receipt. It had to be sold legally. The *yungerman* didn't have any legal papers to offer, and he didn't know how to obtain them. After some inquiries, effort, and not an insignificant sum of money, he made his small business official. He wrote receipts to this organization and to several principals who wanted to buy his *sefer*, and needed to prove that they made this purchase.

This happened last year, in Teves and Shevat. Soon afterward the covid 19 pandemic hit, and the government was distributing monthly grants to small businesses to help them during this challenging time. This *yungerman* legally opened his business only two months before the virus outbreak, and he had several invoices. That was sufficient for him to be eligible for the monthly grant.

This *yungerman* was going through financial difficulties, and this monthly bonus helped him immensely.

From this story, we learn two lessons: (1) Hashem gives *parnassah*, sometimes from the most unexpected places. (2) Although you might think something is negative, it is actually for your good. This *yungerman* considered it an unnecessary expense and hassle to arrange the legal papers, but it was for

his benefit. It made him eligible for the grants.

In ש"ה, Reb Pinchas Weinstock ז"ל escaped together with his parents and siblings from the Nazis. To support themselves during their escape, they took along chickens to eat the eggs, and they would do odd jobs along the way, whenever possible. The father would bake and sell bagels. They passed many cities and countries during their escape, and four years later, they found refuge in France. (The war hadn't reached France yet.)

The Weinstock family rejoiced. They thought they were saved from the Nazis. But then, Reb Pinchas (who was about twenty years old) caught the contagious and deadly typhus. The family was devastated. After everything they went through to save their lives, Reb Pinchas may die from the disease.

Reb Pinchas declared, "Ribono Shel Olam. For four years I was running away from the Nazis, trying to save my life. If You desire that I die and return my soul to You, so be it. I accept Your decree with love."

Reb Pinchas was in the hospital, in a quarantine ward. For months he was delirious and didn't know what was happening outside his closed ward. He didn't know that the Germans attacked France and that the lives of the Yidden in France were in danger.

When Reb Pinchas recovered, he sought out his family, but he discovered that they were all deported to Auschwitz. He was the sole survivor of his family.

The disease, which everyone thought was a terrible problem, proved to be his ticket for life. He lived until he was a hundred years old, and he

has children and grandchildren, all going in the ways of the Torah. He would often repeat this story, telling his family that even when we think things are bad, they are really all for the best.

An elderly American couple moved to Eretz Yisrael to live their final years in the holy land. A few years ago, the wife died and was buried on Har HaMenuchos. The widower moved to Kiryat Sefer to live near his children. His ID card (*teudat zehut*) still said he lived in Yerushalayim. He tried to correct his ID to state his new residence but being an American and not well versed with Israeli bureaucracy, he didn't succeed. Eventually, he made peace with the fact that his ID states that he lives in Yerushalayim.

When he was *niftar*, the family sent a copy of his ID papers to the *chevrah kadishah* of Har HaMenuchos, and the

chevrah kadishah sold them a plot next to his deceased wife. He was interred there.

The family later discovered that they had experienced a miracle. Due to a shortage of available burial sites on Har HaMenuchos, the *chevrah kadisha* only allotted plots for residents of Yerushalayim. Had their father's ID stated that he lived in Kiryat Sefer, he wouldn't be buried next to his wife.

This elderly person thought it was a problem when he couldn't correct his ID papers, but it was for his good.

A parable:

An elephant asked a mouse why it was rushing. The mouse replied, "A cat is trying to catch me."

With his trunk, the elephant poured a glob of earth and mud on top of the mouse. The mouse hid underneath, and the cat ran right by it.

The cat returned and studied the mound. It noticed the mouse's tail sticking out. With one swipe, the cat pulled the mouse out of the dirt...

This parable reminds us that when someone throws dirt on you, he isn't always seeking your harm. And when someone cleans you, he isn't always seeking your good.

We must learn to accept the difficulties of life with joy. Sometimes one thinks that Hashem is piling a mountain of *tzaros* on him, but it is always for his benefit. Perhaps because of these *tzaros* your life will be saved, or you will gain some other benefit. It's always for the good.

The Benefits of *Yesurim*

The Chazon Ish wrote the following to someone going through a tough time (*Igros*, 1 201), "*Yesurim* are beloved to the person who sees them as Hashem's messengers to strengthen

his connection...with the Creator, and to elevate him to a world that is solely light - distant from the pulls of the body... Fortunate is his portion."

Yitzchak went blind in his old age as it states (27:1), ויהי כי זקן יצחק ותכהינה עיניו מראות. Why did this happen?

The Midrash (*Bamidbar Rabba* 15:24) states that by *matan Torah*, Nadav v'Avihu and the seventy *zekeinim* gazed at the *Shechinah* without the proper *derech erez*. As it states (*Shemos* 24:11), ויחזו את האלקים ויאכלו וישתו, "They saw Hashem, and they ate and drank." The Midrash writes, "It can be compared to a slave who is serving his master and takes a bite of his meal at the same time." That isn't *derech erez*. Nadav v'Avihu and the seventy *zekeinim* looked at Hashem by *matan Torah* without proper *derech erez*, and they deserved to die, but Hashem didn't want to ruin the joy of the moment, and their deaths were

postponed for a later time. Nadav v'Avihu were *niftar* the day the Mishkan was erected, and the seventy *zekeinim* were *niftar* by the *מתאוננים* (see *Bamidbar* 11).

The *sefer Pninim Yekarim* explains that by the *akeidah*, Yitzchak also looked up and saw the *Shechinah*. Looking at the *Shechinah* can be punishable with death (as happened to Nadav v'Avihu and the seventy *zekeinim*). The death sentence, however, for this great *tzaddik*, was exchanged for other kinds of *yesurim*.

The Gemara (*Nedarim* 64:) states, *ארבעה חשובין כמה עני ומצורע, וסומא, ומי שאין לו בנים*, "Four [people] are considered dead: paupers, *metzorahs*, the blind, and the childless." For twenty-three years after the *akeidah*, Yitzchak was childless. This was in his favor, as it was in place of the death sentence, because being childless is like being dead, *r'l*. Afterward, Yitzchak bore children. Now the death sentence was exchanged

with blindness because a blind person is also considered dead.

Let's learn from this to be happy with every situation that Hashem prepares for us because although it may seem bad, it is for our good. It is shielding you from something far worse.

Someone complained to the Steipler Gaon *zt'l* about his many debts. The Steipler Gaon told him, "Perhaps if you didn't have these *tzaros*, you wouldn't be alive at all. Perhaps these debts were given to you instead of death."

The man said that from this conversation, he attained a new, refreshing outlook. Instead of complaining over his lot, he rejoiced that Hashem was saving him from worse problems.

The Gemara (*Rosh Hashanah* 18:) tells of a miracle that happened on the third of Tishrei, and the

chachamim declared that day a yom tov (which was celebrated until the Churban Beis HaMikdash), and it is related to the story of Chanukah:

One of the *gezeiros* the Yevanim placed on the Jewish nation was that they weren't permitted to say Hashem's name. When the Chashmonaim miraculously won the war, they enacted a law that Hashem's name should be written even on legal documents (שטרות). They wrote the date in the *shtar* as follows: "Year so-and-so to Yochanan Kohen Gadol ל"א עליון."

The idea quickly caught on, and everyone was overjoyed to write their *shtar* in this manner. However, this new idea was established by regular people, perhaps by government officials, but it wasn't discussed with the *chachamim*. When the *chachamim* heard about the new way to write documents, they

disapproved. They said, "Tomorrow, the debt will be paid up, and the document will be thrown into the garbage. It is better Hashem's name shouldn't be written on the documents."

It is hard to change something you became accustomed to. The nation had become used to writing Hashem's name on the documents, and they were also passionate about it. Yet, they accepted the *chachamim's* rule, and in all Jewish communities, they stopped writing the documents with Hashem's name. The *chachamim* considered the quick and vast acceptance of their law a miracle and declared the 3rd of Tishrei (the day people stopped writing Hashem's name in documents) a *yom tov*.

I heard someone ask, they could have written Hashem's name on money because no one throws money into the garbage. *L'havdil*, in America, the government prints on the

currency "In G-d we trust." Why didn't they have such a law?

The answer is, it isn't hard to believe in Hashem when you have money. The challenge is also to believe in Hashem when you must take loans. They wanted to write Hashem's name on the debts, to remember that even then, Hashem is with us.

Seeking *Yesurim*

We have seen some benefits for *yesurim*. Sometimes, it is protection

from far worse punishment. Furthermore, what seems like a significant problem today might prove to be the greatest kindness in the future.

Another benefit of *yesurim* is that it enables us to go to Olam HaBa. If a person lives a life without any *yesurim*, he isn't eligible for Olam HaBa.

As the Gemara (*Eiruchin* 16:) says, כל שעברו עליו ארבעים יום, בלא יסורין קיבל עולמו, "Whoever goes forty days without *yesurim* has received his reward in this world.⁸ And

8. The Gemara says that this is solely when one lives a perfect tranquil life, without any hardships at all. However, if he has some hardships, even if they are minor, he doesn't forfeit his portion in Olam HaBa. The Gemara gives examples of minor forms of *yesurim*:

- (1) A tailor made clothes for him, but it doesn't fit him perfectly, according to his taste.
- (2) He wanted a hot drink of wine and they poured him a cold drink (or vice versa).
- (3) He accidentally put on his clothes inside out, and now he has to take them off and to dress again.
- (4) He put his hand in his pocket to take out three coins and took

the Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 101.) states:

Reb Eliezer was ill, and his students came to visit him (*bikur cholim*). During the visit, Reb Eliezer said, חמה עוה בעולם, "The world is very hot." Rashi explains that Reb Eliezer was saying, "Hashem is angry at me, and He gave me a lot of *yesurim*."

The students began to cry. Reb Akiva was laughing. The students asked Reb Akiva, "Why are you laughing?"

Reb Akiva asked, "Why are you crying?"

They said, "A *sefer Torah* is in distress; shouldn't we cry?"

Reb Akiva replied, "That's why I'm happy. I used to be concerned that Reb Eliezer may lose his portion in Olam HaBa, because he had a perfect Olam HaZeh. His wine never turned to vinegar. His flax was never ruined in a storm. His oils didn't spoil, and his honey didn't rot. But now that I see rebbe is afflicted in this world, I know he will receive Olam HaBa. That's why I'm happy."

Reb Eliezer asked, "Reb Akiva, is there anything in the Torah that I didn't keep?"

Reb Akiva replied, "Rebbe, you taught us (*Koheles* 7:20), אדם אין צדיק בארץ,

out only two coins. Now he has to put his hand back into his pocket to take out another coin. Even that is counted as *yesurim*.

It is known that Rebbe Moshe Kobriner *zt'l* said that Hashem showed him the Gan Eden and the Gehinom. About the Gehinom, he said, ברדעלאך סאז זייער ניט גוט, "Brothers, it is really not good. It is exactly as the elderly women say, people are beaten there with fiery rods... But for those who have *emunah*, the *malachei chavalah* throw them out of Gehinom."

אשר יעשה טוב ולא יחטא, there is no human in the world who does solely good, and never sins." This Gemara teaches us that when a person has a perfect life, he might not receive Olam HaBa.

Avimelech's men were stealing Yitzchak's wells. Finally, Yitzchak's servants dug a well (which Yitzchak called רחובות), and there was peace. No one was trying to steal it. Yitzchak said (26:22), כי אתה הרחיב ה' לנו ופרינו, בארץ, "Now Hashem has broadened our portion, and we will prosper in the land." After so many days (perhaps years) of distress, he finally had tranquility and success.

The next *pasuk* (26:23) states, ויעל משם באר שבע, "Yitzchak went up from there to Be'er Sheva." The *meforshim* ask: Yitzchak finally succeeded in having a well. Now he can prosper in Eretz Yisrael. Why did he suddenly leave everything behind and go to Be'er Sheva?

Reb Shimon Shwab *zt'l* answers that *yesurim* helps us remember Hashem. Yitzchak was afraid that since everything was going so good for him, he might forget Hakadosh Baruch Hu. That is why he left his perfect life and moved elsewhere.

The Chasam Sofer answers that due to Yitzchak's success and tranquility, Yitzchak was concerned that he might lose his portion in Olam HaBa. Therefore, Yitzchak undertook a self-imposed galus, and he moved to Be'er Sheva.

After Yitzchak went to Be'er Sheva, Hashem came to him in a dream and said (26:24), אל תירא כי אתך אנכי, "Don't be afraid, because I am with you." Hashem was telling Yitzchak that even if he has a perfect Olam HaZeh, he won't lose Olam HaBa. The explanation is as follows:

The Gemara (*Bava Basra* 16:-17.) says:

שלושה המעימן הקב"ה בעולם הזה מעין "העולם הבא, אלו הן, אברהם יצחק ויעקב Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave a taste of Olam HaBa in this world to three people: to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov." Most people can't enjoy a perfect life in this world and then expect to receive Olam HaBa. The exception is the *avos*. They can live an ideal life in this world and then receive Olam HaBa.

The Gemara (*ibid.*) says the *avos* were all blessed with כל, "everything." As it states about Avraham (*Bereishis* 24), ויה' ברכ אברהם בכל. And about Yitzchak it states (*Bereishis* 27:33) ויאכל מכל, and about Yaakov, it states (*Bereishis* 33:11) יש לי כל.⁹

Rashi (*Bava Basra* 17.) explains that כל means, לא חסרו שום טובה, they didn't lack anything." Life was perfect for them, even in this world, and yet, it didn't

lessen their reward in Olam HaBa.

How *Tefillah* Helps

According to the rules of nature, Rivkah couldn't bear children, but *tefillos* brought about a miracle. The Rabbeinu b'Chaya (25:21) says, "We learn from this story the amazing power of *tefillah*. *Tefillos* can change nature. This is the reason Yitzchak's *tefillos* are called ויעתר, and the Torah doesn't call it ויהפלל or ויעקב. An עתר is a pitchfork... As Chazal (*Succah* 14.) teach, 'Why are the *tefillos* of tzaddikim compared to a pitchfork? Just as a pitchfork turns over the grains from one side to another, so do the *tefillos* of tzaddikim turn over Hakadosh Baruch Hu's plan from אכזריות (cruelty) to רחמנות (compassion)."

9. As we say in *birchas hamazon*, כמו שנתברכו אבותינו אברהם יצחק ויעקב בכל מכל, "As our forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, were blessed with כל, מכל, בכל - so shall you bless us..."

With *tefillos*, wonders occur.

The *meforshim* ask, why does *tefillah* work? When one is going through hard times, it means he has sinned, and it was decreed in heaven that he should be punished. Therefore, we ask, how can *tefillah* change the situation? The *aveiros* were transgressed, the decree was placed on him, so why should his life improve because of *tefillah*?

The Bnei Yissaschar (*Maamarei Shabbos* 8:7) explains that when one davens, he becomes a new person. His enhanced *emunah* and closeness to Hashem that he attained through *tefillah* elevate him to higher levels, and he is no longer the same person as before. The decree was placed on the old, previous person. But

that person doesn't exist anymore. He has acquired a new identity. That's how *tefillos* help.¹⁰

The Ikarim (4:18) teaches this lesson with a *meshal*:

A king decreed that all ערלים (uncircumcised people) will be executed. Those who will quickly make a *milah* will live because the decree is no longer on them. They've changed; they are no longer among the people upon whom the rule was established. Similarly, when one prays, he becomes a new person, and on this new person, the decree was never made.

A hint to these ideas is that a person who prays is called a מתפלל. The grammatical translation of מתפלל, with the prefix ...מת, is from the *dikduk* root of מתפעל, which expresses

10. The Bnei Yissaschar also answers that when the decree was placed, it had a clause that it should remain until the person prays. Therefore, after he davens, the decree and the problems are automatically removed.

when something happens to himself. (For example, מברך or בירך means to bless someone else. מתברך, means that he, himself, became blessed.) It seems that someone who prays should be called בילל, and not מתפלל. Instead, this hints that when one davens, he changes. The prayers affect him, and he turns him into a new person.

With these ideas, the Shach על התורה (a student of the Arizal) explains why the *imahos* were barren. Sarah's father was Haran, and her grandfather was Terach – not the greatest *yichus*. Rivkah's father was Besuel, and Rachel and Leah's father was Lavan. We are proud descendants of Sarah, Rikvah, Rachel, and Leah, but we wouldn't want to say that we are also descendants of Haran, Terach, Besuel, and Lavan! The *imahos* were barren, and with their *tefillos*, they became new people – people who could bear children –and thereby, they

became detached from their previous *yichus*.

As the Shach al HaTorah writes, "The primary reason the *imahos* were barren was so they should daven and become a new creation. That way, Rivkah isn't anymore the daughter of Besuel. Rivkah, Besuel's daughter, couldn't bear children, but this new Rivkah could. She isn't the same Rivkah. This cleansed the children of Bnei Yisrael, so that they don't have any connection to the nations of the world... Therefore, it states ויעתר, which means like an עתר, pitchfork, that turns over grains. Similarly, the *tefillos* turned over the barren [and made them into new people]"

The Shach al HaTorah writes that Leah wasn't barren, but she didn't need to be. As the Shach explains, "Leah wasn't barren because she changed her essence with her tears. For she cried a lot that she shouldn't marry Eisav, as Chazal say on the *pasuk*, ויעיי

לאה רכזה, and this is how she became a new Leah. The old Leah was destined to marry Eisav, but she became a new Leah."

With *tefillos* and tears, our matriarchs severed their connection to their lineage, and Klal Yisrael descends solely from them and not from the *resha'im* who preceded them.

Chazal (*Yalkut Shimoni* 78) tell us that from the *avos*, only Avraham was barren. Based on the *Shach al HaTorah*, the explanation is simple. Yitzchak and Yaakov were born from holy parents. They didn't need to be barren, to become severed from their past. But Avraham Avinu was born from Terach. Therefore, he had to be barren to detach himself from his lineage. Thus, Klal Yisrael are descendants of Avraham and are not at all associated with Terach.

The Purpose is *Tefillah*

The Midrash (*Shir HaShirim Rabba* 2:34) writes, "Why were the *imahos* barren? It's because HaKadosh Baruch Hu desires to hear the *tefillos* of *tzaddikim*." It is the opposite of how we generally think of *tefillah*. We think of *tefillah* as a solution to problems. But at times, *tefillah* is the purpose. The problems come to prompt us to daven to Hashem.

The Rabbeinu b'Chaya teaches this lesson from the *pasuk* (25:21), ויעתר יצחק לה' לנכה, "אשתו כי עקרה היא", "Yitzchak prayed to Hashem across from his wife because she was barren." The Rabbeinu b'Chaya notes that the order of the *pasuk* is unusual. It should first state the problem - that Rivkah was barren, and then state the solution, *tefilla*. Why are Yitzchak and Rivkah's *tefillos* mentioned first? He writes, "The Torah wrote the main [idea, the *tefillos*] first.

Because it isn't the barrenness that caused the *tefillos*... Rather, the *tefillah* caused the barrenness... She was barren so they would daven. The pasuk discusses the *tefillah* first because the *tefillah* is the reason Rivkah was barren"

When going through hard times, people sometimes think that Hashem has abandoned them and that He isn't interested in them. But the opposite is true. Hashem wants you, immensely, and He wants to hear you speak with Him in *tefillah*. That is

the reason He gave you these hardships.

If you davened many *tefillos* for salvation and your *tefillos* weren't answered, don't lose hope and don't stop davening. Hashem may desire to hear more of your *tefillos*. Hashem knows that when you get your *yeshuah*, your davening will be with less intensity and devotion (as is the nature of most people), so Hashem postpones the salvation, somewhat, to get you to daven some more.¹¹

11. People's nature is to turn to Hashem when they have hardships, and to forget Hashem when everything is well. There's a *mashal* of a person who wanted attention, so he stood on top of a tall building and threw down money. He looked down and saw the people below scattering about to pick up the money, and no one looked up to see who threw down the money. So, he came up with another approach to draw attention to himself. He threw stones. Now, everyone looked up to see who is throwing stones at them.

This describes people's nature to recognize Hashem during hard times, and to forget Hashem when everything is good.

When people are going through hard times, they go to tzaddikim to receive their brachos, they say a lot of *Tehillim*, they seek *segulos*,

But there is a solution. If a person commits, sincerely, to daven to Hashem with the same sincerity even after the problems are resolved, there is no reason for the hardships to endure. Hashem will remove the *tzaros*, and your life will be good.

Hashem wants the connection; He wants your *tefillos*. But if you plan to supply this connection by praising Hashem and by praying to Him even after the problems go away, Hashem doesn't have a reason to prolong the problems.

The Arvei Nachal says this lesson is hinted at in the words (*Tehillim* 86:3), *הנני* *ה' כי אליך אקרא כל היום*, "Have compassion on me, Hashem, because I will call

to You all day long." Dovid Hamelech is saying, "Whether there are *tzaros* or whether my life is good, I will always pray to You, Hashem, all day long. I won't stop davening to You. Therefore, *הנני ה'*, have compassion on me. It isn't necessary to give me *tzaros* to encourage me to pray because I will pray to You, regardless."

Just One More *Tefillah*

As we wrote above, one shouldn't give up on *tefillah*. Even if you said a hundred *tefillos* or a thousand *tefillos*, say another *tefillah* because each *tefillah* brings the *yeshuah* closer, and eventually, it will happen.

Consider the following analogy:

they do *teshuvah*. In short, they remember Hashem. But as soon as the problem is resolved, they forget that everything they have is from Hashem and that they must continually praise Him and pray to Him.

Someone wants to go to mikvah before davening *shacharis*, but the mikvah door (turnstile) is locked. To unlock it, one must insert money into a machine affixed to the wall near the mikvah. He puts in a coin, tries the door, but the door is still locked. He puts in another coin, and another one, and the door doesn't budge. After putting in nine coins, he says, "This machine isn't working. I better stop wasting my money, or I will end up losing all my money."

Another person comes to the mikvah and puts in a five-dollar bill, and the mikvah opens for him immediately.

The first person (in this story) didn't realize that with just one more coin, the mikvah doors would open. The same occurs to people who daven for *yeshuos*. When they don't see immediate results, they lose their trust in prayer.

But it could be that they need just one more *tefillah*, and they will get their *yeshuah*.

The mikvah doors opened immediately for the other person, who put a five-dollar bill into the slot. This can be used as an analogy for the concept of *עֵת רִצּוֹן*, auspicious times for *tefillah*. Because there are times when it is more likely that Hashem will listen to your *tefillos*. When one prays at such times, sometimes, even with just one *tefillah*, his requests are answered.

The Gemara says, "When is an *eis ratzon*? It is when the congregation davens." *Tefillah b'tzibur* is a wonderful time for prayer. The Beis Aharon writes, "I am certain that one can accomplish with *tefillah b'tzibur* equally to the *tefillos* of the greatest *tzaddik* of the generation."

Each *tefillah* you say to Hashem brings your salvation closer,¹² but when you daven in an *eis ratzon* the results can come much quicker.

Another *eis ratzon* are the *tefillos* said after performing a mitzvah. That is why women daven after *licht tzinden*, and we say the *תורה* after *birchas hamazon*. This is because after performing a mitzvah, it is an *eis ratzon* for the *tefillos* to be answered.

Rebbe Hershel of Zidichov *zt'l* discusses the *eis ratzon* of davening in one's own words before *alos hashachar* (daybreak) during the winter nights. He says that *tefillos* at this time can accomplish as much as the *tefillos* of Neilah.

The Tana d'Bei Eliyahu (*Rabba* 24) states, "In the merit that Eisav cried three tears, he was granted Har Seir, where there is always plenty of rain." Thus, *tefillos* with tears is another *eis ratzon*. When one davens with tears, there is a greater likelihood that the *tefillos* will be answered because Hashem is, *מלך מתרצה בדמעות*, a king who is appeased by tears.

There are other examples of *eis ratzon*, auspicious times for *tefillah*, and when one prays at these times, his *tefillos* will be answered more quickly.

But definitely never give up on *tefillah*. Daven at an *eis ratzon* and at all times, because each *tefillah* brings your salvation closer. Perhaps this *tefillah* is the one that will bring about your salvation.

12. The Noam Elimelech says a *tefillah* emitted from the depths of one's heart is even greater than the *tefillos* of a tzaddik who davens for him.

Moshe Rabbeinu davened 515 *tefillos* to enter Eretz Yisrael. Had he said one more *tefillah*, he would be permitted to enter Eretz

Yisrael. Therefore, invest in another prayer. Perhaps this will be the one that will turn everything around.