

The Narrow Bridge

גשר צר מאוד

PARSHA PERSPECTIVES

Short Divrei Torah on Parshas Lech Lecha

To join our Whatsapp group for daily messages, contact us at 845-641-2648

לע'נ פּעסל בת ישראל מנחם / לזכות חילינו

NO QUESTIONS ASKED

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

"Hashem said to Avram, 'Go for yourself from your land, from your birthplace, and from your father's house to the land that I will show you...' (12:1)

Rashi notes that the reason the Torah uses the double language of *Lech lecha* is to tell Avraham that the place he was going to will be "for your benefit and for your good." Rav Moshe Feinstein (Darash Moshe) asks why Avraham was given so much credit for passing this test. If Hashem had commanded any of us to leave our homes to an unknown place with a guarantee that we would be successful, would any of us question the instructions? We would all be on the next plane to that destination!

Rav Moshe explains that Avraham's test wasn't whether he would go or not. Rather, it was to see if Avraham would think, or even ask, why Hashem couldn't provide that very same benefit in the location he was currently in. Avraham didn't ask questions or delay for a moment. He understood that this is what Hashem wanted from him, and all Avraham wanted to do was the will of his Creator.

We live in a world in which we are conditioned to feel justified to only do that which resonates and makes sense to us. The Torah is highlighting the incredible level of commitment that Avraham had to Hashem despite the legitimate questions he could have asked. As Avraham's descendants, let us strengthen ourselves by intensifying our devotion and dedication to fulfilling Hashem's will even during times of difficulty when we don't necessarily understand so that, like Avraham, we will pass our individual tests as well.

BUILDING DESIRE

Sefas Emes

"...to the land that I will show you." (12:1)

Why didn't the Almighty show Avraham the land immediately? The answer is that Hashem wanted Avraham to have the desire to look to the future for fulfillment of inner striving.

ALWAYS ON THE GO

Sefas Emes

"Hashem said to Avram, 'Go for yourself...' (12:1)

This teaches us that one should always be "on the go," constantly striving to reach greater heights.

EVIL SERVING GOODNESS

Baal Shem Tov

"Hashem said to Avram, 'Go for yourself from your land, from your birthplace, and from your father's house to the land that I will show you...' (12:1)

How can the Divine Presence maintain a state of perfect unity while simultaneously encompassing everything - including the conflicting extremes of good and evil?

The truth is that evil serves goodness. For example, when a righteous person witnesses evil, he rejoices that he is not an evildoer. The evil thereby brings him to a greater appreciation for his life of Divinity, to the extent that we can almost say it is elevated through his sacred delight.

When a soul of *atzilut* (the loftiest of the spiritual realms) descends into this world and sees humans belittling the honor of the King of the universe, it is grieved at the degradation, but it is subsequently delighted that it is not counted among such people.

"G-d said to Avram" - the Jewish soul. "Go from your land" - from *atzilut* to *beriah* (the next of the spiritual realms). "From your birthplace" - from *beriah* to *yetzirah*. "From your father's house" - from *yetzirah* to *asiyah* (this physical world), which is "the land that I will show you" - where I will show you the deeds of mortals who belittle My honor.

"Avram went as G-d said to him... and there was hunger in the land" (verses 4 and 10), meaning that he observed the people's lack of belief in G-d. "Avram descended to Egypt [*Mitzrayim*]" (verse 10), meaning that he was pained [*meitzar*]. "Avram ascended from Egypt" (ibid., 13:1), experiencing far greater delight in his Divine service by contemplating his good fortune at not being like them.

GRADUAL GROWTH

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

"Hashem said to Avram, 'Go for yourself from your land, from your birthplace, and from your father's house to the land that I will show you...'" (12:1)

Rav Yisrael Meir Druck, in Eish Tamid, offers an additional insight into the significance of the command לך לך מארצך וממולדתך ומבית אביך. The Torah here made a point of spelling out all three stages of Avraham's journey - his departure from ארצך, from מולדתך, and from בית אביך - to impress upon us the importance of gradual, incremental growth.

When we are trying to advance and move forward, the worst mistake we can make is to try to grow in leaps and bounds, to undergo a quick, drastic transformation... Inner growth and change takes time.

Rav Druck cites in this context the Chasam Sofer's interpretation of the command at the end of Parshas Bamidbar (4:20), ולא יבואו לראות כבלע את הקודש ומתו. The Chasam Sofer explained this *pasuk* as a warning against trying to "swallow" *kedusha* (כבלע את הקודש) all at once, in large quantities. Just as food must be broken down into small pieces before it can be swallowed, *kedusha*, too, must be attained in small amounts, one step at a time. And just as a person who swallows too much at once can, Heaven forbid, choke to death, so does a person run the risk of spiritual "demise" if he tries to "devour" *kedusha* too quickly...

Real change must occur slowly and incrementally, one step at a time. A person needs to move first מארצך, then ממולדתך, and only then מבית אביך, taking small steps forward.

Rav Druck suggests explaining on this basis the Gemara's teaching in Maseches Sota (17a) regarding the significance of the *techeiles* dye with which the Torah requires coloring one of the *tzitzis* strings on each corner of the garment. The Gemara comments that the color of *techeiles* resembles that of the ocean, the ocean resembles the sky, and the sky resembles the כסא הכבוד (Heavenly Throne), such that by wearing *techeiles*, we are reminded of Hashem.

We might wonder why the Gemara did not simply state that the color of *techeiles* resembles that of the כסא הכבוד. Why did the Gemara instead go through all the steps - from the *techeiles* to the sea, to the sky, and then to the Heavenly Throne?

The answer, Rav Druck explains, is that we are incapable of proceeding directly from our *tzitzis* to the כסא הכבוד. The only way we can hope to grow is gradually and incrementally, one step at a time. We will not look at *tzitzis* and automatically make the association with the כסא הכבוד. We need to proceed slowly, one step at a time, and then our growth and progress will endure.

PAVING YOUR OWN PATH

Reb Elimelech Lizensk

"Hashem said to Avram, 'Go for yourself from your land, from your birthplace, and from your father's house to the land that I will show you...'" (12:1)

"Leave your land" - do not hesitate to leave your country because famous people live there. "And your birthplace" - out of the place where they generate only intellectuals. "And your father's house" - from where you are a respected member of your family. "Go to the land that I will show you" - to establish there a center of culture, learning, and nobility made by your own labors.

One should pave his own path, show pride in his performance of the *mitzvot*, and not be dependent on the behavior of his ancestry.

MENTAL CLARITY

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

"Hashem said to Avram, 'Go for yourself from your land, from your birthplace, and from your father's house to the land that I will show you...'" (12:1)

Many commentators ask: Since we see that G-d did not command Avraham to go to Egypt, how could he have endangered Sarah's life by bringing her there on his own initiative?

The answer seems to be alluded to in what G-d said to Avraham, "Go... to the land that I will show you." These words imply that G-d was telling Avraham to travel to whatever land he would have a logical reason to go to. [By not specifying exactly where He wanted Avraham to go, G-d implied that the destination was open, and that Avraham would have to deduce on his own where G-d wanted him to go depending upon the circumstances.]

Thus, seeing that there was a famine when he arrived in the Land of Israel, Avraham understood that G-d did not want him to be there. This is why the verse (12:10) says, "There was a famine in the land, so Avram descended to Egypt... because the famine was severe in the land," repeating the fact that there was a famine in order to emphasize that this was why he went to Egypt. Avraham understood the famine as a reason not to remain in the land but to go to another land. Thus, it was G-d's will that he go to whatever land that the circumstances would make clear that it was G-d's will that he go there.

Another explanation of this verse: In general, when a person is in doubt whether or not to do something, he should first think about it, and see if he arrives at any mental clarity about how he would go about doing it. If he does, then he should proceed.

This is the deeper meaning of the words "to the land that I will show you." The word for "I will show you" [אראך] implies mental clarity.

ACTIVE PURSUIT

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

"Hashem said to Avram, 'Go for yourself from your land, from your birthplace, and from your father's house to the land that I will show you...' (12:1)

Rashi comments that the reason why Hashem chose not to inform Avraham of his destination was so that Avraham would follow Hashem and yearn to find out where he would be going.

This was intended to generate love for Hashem and the place that he would arrive at, which would also result in more reward for trusting in Hashem.

The Steipler Gaon (Birchas Peretz) explains that from this incident we can learn a very important lesson about life and our service of Hashem. If we want to love learning Torah, and by extension love doing *chesed* and performing *mitzvos*, we have to genuinely yearn for it.

We can't expect to intensify our connection with Hashem and His Torah by simply waiting for it to come to us. Rather, we have to initiate whatever we hope to achieve if we want the feeling of *ahavas Hashem* to result.

Many people wait to be inspired as if somehow by sitting on the side, it will just naturally and magically happen. The Steipler is teaching that it is incumbent upon each and every one of us to actively pursue inspiration, looking for it in every situation that we encounter, in order for us to strengthen our bond with Hashem.

We must get on the field and play an active role if we want to ensure that we have a loving relationship with Hashem.

RETURNING TO OUR TRUE SELF

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Hashem said to Avram, 'Go for yourself...'" (12:1)

Although Avram's accomplishments in spreading Divine consciousness so far had been impressive, they had been limited by the fact that he was speaking only from his personal convictions and reasoning.

All this changed when G-d spoke to Avram. His first words to him were literally "Go, to you," meaning "Go to your true, higher self, the self you could never reach on your own." Through these words, G-d made Avram into a person who could progress beyond his own abilities.

As we saw, the Flood introduced into the world the possibility to correct wrongdoing and remake our lives even after committing what would otherwise appear to be fatal mistakes. Now, when G-d told Avram to "go, to you," He made it possible for us not only to return to our original selves but to "return" to our authentic, fundamental selves - the selves we never even knew existed, constantly uncovering new and infinitely higher vistas of our innate Divine personality and connection with G-d. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 20, pp. 58-60, 301-308) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Reb Noson of Breslov

"Hashem said to Avram, 'Go for yourself from your land, from your birthplace, and from your father's house to the land that I will show you...' (12:1)

Avraham represents the soul of a person who wishes to serve G-d. Such a person must leave behind his "land" (his materialism), his "birthplace" (his sensual pleasures and depression), and even his "father's house" (his family who tries to stop him from serving G-d).

Freed from those handicaps, he can travel to the Holy Land - to holiness, the place where joy reigns supreme. In that place, "I will make you a great nation" - for you will be able to reveal G-dliness even to others, "I will bless you" - for then you will be able to draw and receive all the blessings, "I will make your name great" - your vitality will increase, and "you will be a blessing" - for the blessings will remain with you.

Furthermore, by leaving behind your past and embracing spirituality, even though you may later descend to "Egypt" (the challenges and difficulties of life), you will have the fortitude to ascend from there and even take with you many sparks of holiness. (Likutey Halakhot I, p. 145a)

G-d did not reveal the Land immediately to Avraham, in order to build up his desire for the Holy Land. (Likutey Halakhot II, p. 45a)

G-d did not reveal to Avraham which land; he had to discover for himself which land G-d meant. When Heaven tests a person, his knowledge of what he must do is constricted and hidden from him. Only through his desire to do G-d's will can he find the right path to follow.

If he seeks the truth - that is, if he seeks where G-d is - he will come upon the right path.

The same was true of the Binding of Yitzchak. G-d told Avraham to sacrifice Yitzchak on one of the mountains, without specifying which one (Bereishis 22:2). This was calculated to intensify Avraham's test, and to increase his reward when he passed that test. (Likutey Halakhot I, p. 212a)

UNLIMITED POTENTIAL

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Hashem said to Avram, 'Go for yourself from your land, from your birthplace, and from your father's house to the land that I will show you...' (12:1)

Lech means "proceed," referring to the beginning of a journey. Real spiritual progress requires that one leaves one's current state behind. Yet as long as an individual's growth depends entirely on his own power, his progress will be limited; nobody can exceed the bounds of his own understanding.

“Go out of your land, your native land, and your father’s house” is an instruction to abandon one’s ordinary way of thinking, to go to levels beyond and to transcend one’s own limits.

With progress that is guided by G-d, there are no limits to the potential of growth. The Torah and its *mitzvot* can take a person far beyond his natural horizons. Thus, Hashem’s statement to Avram: “To the land that I will show you.”

LIBERATING SPARKS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“Hashem said to Avram, ‘Go for yourself...’” (12:1)

Rabbi Shalom Dov Ber of Lubavitch once said:

From the very moment G-d instructed Avram to leave his homeland and set out on his journey, the process of spiritually refining the world began. Sparks of Divinity lay embedded in the materiality of the physical world, awaiting us to redeem them by revealing their potential to be utilized for holy purposes.

Saintly individuals, who possess clear spiritual vision, can perceive just where the captive sparks they are meant to refine are located and go there on their own.

The rest of us are led by Divine providence to places or situations in which the sparks we are meant to liberate await us. Every moment in our lives and every place we go is charged with spiritual potential, challenging us to transform it into something holy. (HaYom Yom, 1 Marcheshvan) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

MAINTAINING THE RELATIONSHIPS

HaDerash VeHalayun

“I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you, and I will make your name great, and you shall be a blessing.” (12:2)

When ordinary people become rich and famous, they may grow estranged from less fortunate relatives and friends; they may consider it beneath their dignity to concern themselves with them or help them. As a result, because of envy, they will make enemies and people will curse them. Therefore, G-d reassured Avraham, saying: “Even after I have made your name great, you will not make enemies, but you’ll be a blessing. You’ll continue to do good and therefore all will bless you.”

REASON FOR REDEMPTION

Ohel Torah

“I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you, and I will make your name great, and you shall be a blessing.” (12:2)

They shall conclude the blessing with you and not with them. (Rashi)

According to the Mishnah (Pirkei Avos 1:2), “the world is based on three things - Torah, worship and loving-kindness.”

These three pillars by which the world endures are recalled by the qualities of our three Patriarchs. Avraham personified loving-kindness, Yitzchak - who was prepared to be offered up as a sacrifice to G-d - personified worship, and Yaakov personified Torah, as is it written (Bereishis 25:27), “Yaakov was a sincere man, dwelling in tents,” meaning “in the tents of study.”

In the generations immediately preceding the coming of the Mashiach, Torah and worship will have all but disappeared. Therefore, the Jewish people will be redeemed solely for the sake of their righteousness and loving-kindness; as the prophet Yeshayahu put it (Yeshayahu 1:27): “Zion shall be redeemed with justice, and they shall return to her with righteousness.”

This is the meaning of Rashi’s statement: “They shall conclude the blessing with you.” The blessing of redemption, the conclusion of exile, will come to pass only “with” (alternative rendering: “for the sake of”) “you,” for the sake of your loving-kindness, for there is little Torah and worship left among the Jews.

FOR ALL THE RIGHT REASONS

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

“I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you, and I will make your name great, and you shall be a blessing.” (12:2)

The commentators explain that Hashem’s command to Avraham to journey to an unknown destination was the first of ten great trials. And yet, within this command, Hashem promises Avraham that if he leaves his land, he will be given great riches and enormous reward. If so, was it really such a difficult decision to go to a place where amazing fame and fortune await him?

This question is made even stronger by Rashi (Bereishis 12:1), who writes that Hashem also told Avraham that he would not merit having any children unless he would leave that land. This being the case, what was the great test facing Avraham?

The famous Tzaddik, Reb Zusha, was once asked if he would want to change places with Avraham. His reply was as follows: “What would Hashem gain? There would still only be one Avraham and one Reb Zusha...” This was Reb Zusha’s response regarding Avraham, whose offspring are as numerous as the stars (Bereishis 15:5) and in whose merit the Jewish People beseech in their prayers three times a day. Nevertheless, Reb Zusha would give up the opportunity because there would be no gain to Hashem.

This exemplifies what the Ramban (Shemos 20:6) describes as the epitome of *ahavas Hashem*, the trait of loving Hashem - someone who serves Hashem with no thought of personal reward.

This tremendous level of love for Hashem, where personal reward is irrelevant and all that matters is “What will Hashem gain?” and “What can I do for Hashem?” is the great test that Avraham faced in this week’s Parsha.

The struggle of coming face to face with such an enormous reward, yet opting to serve Hashem wholeheartedly without thinking about the reward at all, was Avraham’s true test. The test was not whether Avraham would go, his test was “for what reasons would he go” - would his thoughts wander to the great wealth promised to him, or would they remain focused entirely on serving Hashem?

SPREADING BLESSINGS

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

“I will bless those who bless you, and he who curses you, I will curse...” (12:3)

When Hashem tells Avraham that He will bless “those who bless you,” it refers not only to someone who blesses Avraham himself, but also to someone who blesses one of his descendants (Chullin 49).

R’ Yechezkel Levenstein zt’l cites this *pasuk* in a letter he wrote to show that blessing one’s friend is a very worthwhile action. When you bless another person, you are offering a few short words, in return for which the Almighty gives you His bountiful blessings. When one greets a fellow Jew with a hearty “*Shalom aleichem*” or “Good morning,” you are blessing him, and as a result, Hashem will bless you.

For this reason, it is fitting to give a blessing for success to one who embarks on a business venture or undertakes a new job. For in essence, you are not only helping to add to your friend’s success; you are, in fact, helping yourself, as well.

Towards the end of his life, R’ Chatzkel Sarna zt’l, Rosh Yeshiva of Chevron, was ill and very weak. Nevertheless, one *Motzei Shabbos*, a few weeks before his death, he exerted himself to go to the yeshiva to daven Maariv. As he was walking up the steps, he and the person accompanying him realized that the students had just finished praying. The other man paused, unsure if the Rosh Yeshiva wanted to go straight home, but R’ Chatzkel continued up the steps.

“Why are you troubling yourself?” asked his companion. “They have already finished davening.”

“Praying with the congregation is the fulfillment of a rabbinical obligation,” said the Rosh Yeshiva. “But blessing the students to have a good week is the fulfillment of ‘*V’ahavta l’rayacha kamocho* - love your fellow man,’ which is a Torah commandment.”

CREDITED IN ADVANCE

Kli Yakar

“I will bless those who bless you, and he who curses you, I will curse...” (12:3)

Why doesn’t the text read: “I will curse he who curses you” in the same way that it says, “I will bless those who bless you”?

To show that while “G-d regards a good thought as equal to the deed,” He “does not regard an evil thought as equal to an evil deed.”

Those who bless Avraham will be blessed for their good intention even before they demonstrate their friendship, but those who wish to curse him will be cursed only after they have put their evil desire into action, and not before.

BLESSED BY THE MULTITUDE

Meshech Chochmah

“I will bless those who bless you, and he who curses you, I will curse...” (12:3)

Why “those who bless you” (in the plural), but “he who curses you” (in the singular)?

When people see that those who bless Avraham will be blessed and that those who curse Avraham will be cursed, many (as implied by the plural form) will join those who bless him because they, too, will want to be blessed, and only a few (as implied by the singular form) will insist on cursing him, for no one wants to risk being afflicted with a curse.

A LIGHT ONTO OTHERS

Rav Moshe Sheer

“I will bless those who bless you, and he who curses you, I will curse...” (12:3)

With respect to those who bless Avraham, Hashem uses the same root word (ברך) to describe His blessing to them. But with respect to those who curse Avraham, the root does not remain constant. Instead of אקלל, which would have been the parallel verb, the Torah chooses another word for cursing: אאר. This word is based on the same Hebrew root as light (אור), and can be read instead, “I will enlighten them.” Hashem is saying, “I will illuminate their eyes to see the real you.”

Jews must fulfill the role of enlightening their fellow Jews who are “uninformed.” Let them see our *ahavas Yisrael*, our *Daf Yomi* learning and good *middos*; let them see our *yeshivos* and *chassidic* courts. Let them see what we are really like.

WITHOUT DELAY

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

“And Avram went just as Hashem had told him...” (12:4)

Why did the verse need to stress here that Avraham went “just as Hashem had told him” when we already know from the subsequent verses that Avraham followed Hashem’s instruction and left his home?

The Netziv answers that the Torah is praising Avraham for leaving just as Hashem had told him - meaning, the very moment that Hashem commanded him - for he wished to fulfill Hashem’s will without a moment’s delay and without fear of finding valid reasons to defer his journey.

Therefore, without making any preparations or selling any of his possessions which would risk hindering his departure, Avraham immediately left. Only once he was outside of the city and away from any temptation to delay his leaving, he waited for his wife and household to join him.

BUILDING A PALACE

Rebbe Nachman

“Avram took his wife Sarai... and the souls that they had made in Charan...” (12:5)

“The souls that they had made” - this refers to people whom Avraham and Sarah converted to serve G-d. (Rashi)

One who draws others close to G-d, as Avraham did, creates an environment in which G-d’s glory is revealed - and that environment is referred to as a holy palace for G-d. (See Likutey Moharan I, 59:1)

“The souls that they had made” - this refers to people whom Avraham and Sarah converted to serve G-d. (Rashi)

Avraham continuously strove to attain greater knowledge of G-d, and whatever knowledge he attained, he immediately disseminated to others. Because all of his learning had the goal of teaching others, Avraham exemplifies the attribute of *chesed* (kindness). (See Likutey Moharan I, 58:5)

SPECIALIST NEEDED

Chiddushei HaRim

“...and the souls that they had made in Charan.” (12:5)

Rashi comments that Avraham would convert the men.

One should not think that only a good generation deserves a strong Rebbe, while a mediocre generation does not.

Just the opposite, the mediocre generation needs a stronger Rebbe, for as in an illness, the worse the illness, the greater the need for a specialist.

THE PULSE OF LIFE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“Avram continued on his way, moving steadily toward the south...” (12:9)

The words for “moving steadily” in Hebrew literally mean “going and traveling.” Allegorically, this refers to the spiritual process of “running and returning” (see Yechezkel 1:14), the two interdependent yet opposing thrusts that must occur constantly and alternately in order for life to continue and for physical and spiritual growth to take place.

For example, in its yearning to return to its Divine source, the soul aspires to leave the body, but as soon as it starts to do so and achieves the Divine consciousness it was seeking, it is reminded of its Divine mission and humbly returns to the body to continue with its task. This constant spiritual oscillation is reflected in the physical pulsation of the heart and lungs.

Our mission to unite heaven and earth must also comprise both “running and returning,” separating ourselves periodically from the mundane world by losing ourselves in meditation, prayer, or Torah study, yet always returning to the world to fulfill our mission. (Sefer HaMa’amarim 5699, p. 86) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

FROM REGRESSION TO PROGRESSION

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“When Avram came to Egypt...” (12:14)

Instead of being allowed to pursue his monotheistic revival in G-d’s Promised Land, Avraham was thrust into the world’s most prominent bastion of paganism. How ironic it must have seemed to witness this ambitious monotheist suddenly reduced to seeking the mercy of a cultural environment that mocked his every ideal!

Yet, in a miraculous reversal of fortune, Avraham soon had the Egyptians begging him for mercy, and shortly thereafter returned to the Land of Israel with greater wealth, with a greater reputation, and accompanied by Hagar, the Egyptian princess who would, in time, become the mother of Yishmael, his first child. It thus became retroactively clear that this apparent regression was actually a further stage in Avraham’s progression toward his goals.

Similarly, we must never be intimidated by the world - neither by the world outside us nor by the “world” of personal desires, fears, or preconceived notions within us. Once we answer G-d’s call to “go, to yourself,” we are no longer bound by the limits of our own capabilities; even apparent regressions will ultimately prove to be an integral part of the process leading to ever-higher realizations of our Divine purpose in life. (Likutey Sichot, vol. 5, pp. 58-63) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

MERITFUL MATRIARCHS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"The woman [Sarai] was taken to Pharaoh's palace." (12:15)

Sarai's resistance to the Egyptian king's overtures gave her descendants, the Jewish women enslaved in Egypt in Moshe's time, the spiritual fortitude to resist the lure of illicit behavior even in the midst of the depraved Egyptian culture (Vayikra Rabbah 32:5; Shir HaShirim Rabbah 4:25). The Sages (Shir HaShirim Rabbah 4:12) point out that the righteous behavior of the Jewish women in Egypt was one of the merits in which the Exodus occurred.

We too, can draw strength from the examples of our matriarch Sarai and the righteous Jewish women in Egypt, as well as the examples of all righteous Jewish women throughout history. When confronted with the depravity of the society we live in, we must recall that we possess the spiritual fortitude to resist its temptations. And just as our forefathers were redeemed from Egypt in the merit of the righteous women's dedication to Jewish morality and modesty, so will we witness the true and final Redemption in the merit of following their examples. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 5, p. 61) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

DOING THE RIGHT THING

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"He continued on his travels, from the south toward Bethel, until the place where he originally had his tent, between Bethel and Ai..." (13:3)

In Parashas Lech Lecha, Avram is first sent to Canaan, then rerouted to Egypt due to a famine. After an ordeal with Pharaoh, which rewarded him with much wealth, the *pasuk* tells us that Avram reversed his original path away from Canaan (13:3). Rashi explains that he headed home the same way he came so that he could pay the innkeepers, since he couldn't afford to pay for his initial stay. Rav Pam adds that Avram gained much wealth while in Egypt and could have upgraded to nicer lodgings on his way back, but he chose to maintain the same standard of living by staying in the same place.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks questions why Avram was selected to be the progenitor of Judaism, and makes the case that it was his willingness to think outside the box when it came to the order of the universe and our place within it. One could argue that remaining modest despite accumulating great wealth is another such example of a principled approach to life. Avram let his actions be guided by justice rather than desire and ability. Avram didn't let wealth or surroundings affect his thoughts or actions. We, too, would be wise to let our actions be dictated by what we should do rather than what we could do.

ANSWERING ALL QUESTIONS

Reb Yechezkel of Kazimir

"He continued on his travels, from the south toward Bethel, until the place where he originally had his tent, between Bethel and Ai..." (13:3)

On his return, Avraham paid the debts that he had previously incurred. (Rashi)

Does this mean that Avraham was so improvident as to travel without food or money so that he had to borrow money on the way? Furthermore, who would have been willing to lend money to a passing wanderer?

Avraham's debts were not monetary in nature. Wherever he went on his journeys, Avraham glorified G-d's Name, proclaiming that there was One Sole G-d in the universe Whom everyone had to serve. In this manner he brought many people beneath the Shechinah's wings. However, not everyone who heard him believed him, for they argued: "If Avraham is telling us the truth, why should G-d allow so faithful a servant to journey through the world instead of giving him ample reward so that he could dwell in peace and quiet?"

Avraham was unable to answer these and similar questions at the time, for all the hardships he had suffered had been inflicted on him simply to test him. It was this answer - which he could not give - that constituted the "debts" Avraham contracted on his journeys. Only now, when the miracles that G-d had performed for Avraham in Egypt by striking Pharaoh with "great plagues" (Bereishis 12:17) and permitting him to leave Egypt with much wealth ("and Avraham was very rich in cattle, in silver and in gold" - Bereishis 13:2) had become common knowledge, could Avraham repay this debt by giving the proper answers to the questions he had had to leave unanswered before.

ALL PART OF THE PLAN

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"He [Avram] continued on his travels..." (13:3)

The words "his travels" in this verse can also be understood to mean "His travels" i.e., G-d's travels, meaning the travels orchestrated by G-d. It was G-d's plan that Avram travel to these particular places.

Similarly, G-d determines where each of us finds ourselves at any given moment; if we are unexpectedly delayed, or think that we have taken a "wrong" turn, we should remember that it is all part of G-d's unalterable plan. It is our free choice to decide whether to fall into the trap of being frustrated over how our plans went awry or to capitalize on the Divine providence and take the opportunity to fulfill our Divine mission in the precise time and place where G-d has led us. (Sefer HaSichot 5704, p. 51) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

UNDER WATCHFUL EYES

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

“There was a quarrel between the shepherds of Avram’s flock and the shepherds of Lot’s flock.” (13:7)

Rashi writes: “Since the shepherds of Lot were wicked and allowed their animals to graze in the fields of others, the shepherds of Avraham would criticize them for this theft. They (the shepherds of Lot) would answer, ‘[Hashem] gave the land to Avraham but he has no children to inherit him. Lot will be the inheritor, and thus, this is not considered stealing.’ In response, the *pasuk* states: And the Canaanim and Perizim were then living in the land’ - Avraham had not yet taken possession of it.”

Rabbeinu Ovadia Seforno zt’l gives an alternative explanation as to why the *pasuk* connects these seemingly unrelated words - “the Canaanim and Perizim were then in the land” - to the feud between the shepherds of Avraham and Lot. It is clear that this dispute had nothing to do with Avraham and Lot themselves. They were above the fray and refused to get involved in petty arguments between their staffs.

Avraham’s insight into human affairs made him realize that were he to attempt to break up the fight, it could quite possibly have the opposite effect and end up dragging him down to the shepherds’ level. This he could not do, for aside from the obvious reason, Avraham had a “business” to run. He was in the “business” of creating believers in the One and Only G-d, Hashem. His “clients” were the local Canaanim and Perizim. How would it look for his own reputation as a Man of the Lord, and for “business” itself, were he to become involved in silly and inconsequential disputes? This would undoubtedly turn “customers” away. Hence, the *pasuk* tells us that although the shepherds were fighting, Avraham never got involved, since “the Canaanim and Perizim were then in the land.” Lot, as Avraham’s nephew, had internalized this lesson, as well.

Every Jew is important, influential and consequential in his own right. Let us take a lesson from our forefather, Avraham Avinu, and conduct our “business affairs” properly.

People are watching, judging, and waiting to see how we react. We must be careful to make only a kiddush Hashem in all our actions and not, G-d forbid, a chillul Hashem.

CONFLICT SPREADS

Rabbi Alexander Zusia Friedman

“Avram said to Lot: ‘Let there be no strife, I pray you, between me and you.’” (13:8)

The quarrel, Avraham implied, had begun among the herdsmen, but if it were to be allowed to continue it would eventually drive a wedge “between me and you.”

This is the way of all quarrels. They begin among the followers but eventually involve the leaders.

LOSE-LOSE SITUATION

Reb Shlomo Ephraim of Luntchitz

“Avram said to Lot: ‘Let there be no strife, I pray you, between me and you.’” (13:8)

Avraham pleaded with Lot that they should not quarrel between themselves because of the Canaanites and the Peruzim who lived in their midst. When two people have a dispute, the third-party wins.

BROTHERLY LOVE

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

“Avram said to Lot: ‘Let there be no strife, I pray you, between me and you.’” (13:8)

Later, we read that Avraham was compelled to separate from Lot, his nephew who had accompanied Avraham to Eretz Yisrael, but whose shepherds were now quarreling with Avraham’s shepherds. Rashi (13:7) explains that Lot allowed his shepherds to bring their animals to graze in private property. Avraham felt he could no longer live with Lot, and he offered Lot the option to choose where to live. Lot chose to live among the sinful people of Sodom, because of the luxurious lifestyle that he could enjoy there. Eventually, Lot was taken captive along with the rest of the city by the four kings who attacked Sodom and the surrounding cities. When Avraham heard the news, he mobilized an army and set out to rescue his nephew, and he defeated the four kings.

Rav Soloveitchik noted that many people in Avraham’s situation would have responded to the news of Lot’s captivity by thinking, “Well, it serves him right!” Lot got himself into this situation by first allowing his shepherds to steal, and then choosing to live among the wicked people of Sodom. A lesser person would have said, “He got what he deserved,” and leave it at that.

But Avraham, the Torah says, heard “כי נשבה אחיו” - that his brother was taken captive” (14:14). Rav Soloveitchik notes the Torah’s emphasis on the fact that Lot was Avraham’s “brother,” his kin, to whom he felt responsible irrespective of Lot’s poor decisions which caused his crisis. Avraham’s conduct teaches us that we are responsible for our fellow Jews, and duty bound to help them when they are in trouble, regardless of their conduct, even if they had made bad decisions. When a brother or sister needs help, we are to go help them no matter what they have done.

I have occasionally worked with a wonderful organization that takes care of Jewish inmates in prison. Some might frown upon such efforts, figuring that Jews that have committed crimes do not deserve our assistance. But this is incorrect. Even they are our brothers and sisters, and brothers and sisters must be there for one another, even if they had made bad mistakes. We are to be ready and willing to assist all our fellow Jews, show them love and compassion, and do what we can to help them rehabilitate themselves and live the lives that they are supposed to live.

KEEPING THE PEACE

Rabbi Shimon Finkelman

"Avram said to Lot: 'Let there be no strife, I pray you, between me and you.'" (13:8)

An argument erupted between the shepherds of Avraham and the shepherds of Lot. Lot's shepherds allowed their animals to graze on private property without the permission of the owners. They offered an excuse for why they thought it was allowed. Avraham's shepherds maintained, correctly, that using property without permission is robbery.

Avraham did not want to live near Lot because of the *chillul Hashem* that Lot's shepherds were creating. He also wanted to put an end to the "war of words" between their shepherds.

Lot was Avraham's orphaned nephew whom Avraham took with him wherever he traveled. Lot became wealthy only because of his association with Avraham. Avraham had every right to tell Lot, "Leave this area and don't ever come back here. You are ruining my good name, and I no longer want to have anything to do with you."

But Avraham did not do that. Instead, he told Lot, "Choose the place where you wish to make a home for yourself. I will separate from you, but don't worry. If you ever need my help, I will be ready in an instant to offer a helping hand."

Avraham kept his word when, later in the parashah, Lot was captured in a war. Avraham armed his students, and together they pursued Lot's captors and rescued Lot.

Avraham had told Lot, "Let there be no quarreling between me and you." Avraham understood that *machlokes* is terribly destructive and did everything in his power to maintain *shalom*.

TEMPORARY SEPARATION

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Look, the whole land is before you, so please separate yourself from me. If [you go] to the left, I will go to the right; if [you go] to the right, I will go to the left." (13:9)

Although Lot followed Avram's monotheistic revival, he still harbored a fascination with evil. This is clear from Lot's choice to settle in Sodom, a den of immorality. Avram saw that Lot's potential holiness was buried so deeply within his attraction to evil that merely associating with Avram would not be enough to bring it to the surface. Thus, it was in Lot's interest that they part company.

Over the ensuing generations, the "sparks of holiness" within Lot did indeed become manifest. His descendants, Rus the Moabite and Shlomo HaMelech's wife Naamah the Ammonite (1 Melachim 14:21), rejoined Avram's line. Rus became the ancestress of Dovid HaMelech, and thereby of Mashiach himself.

We learn from this that sometimes, despite our best efforts to forge positive relationships with certain people, it is necessary to temporarily distance ourselves from them. Of course, we must remain prepared to help them, just as Avram risked his life to help Lot in his time of need. With our prayers and G-d's help, they will eventually realize their Divine potential and rejoin those who have dedicated their lives to making the world into G-d's home. (Torah Ohr 11c-d) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

UNCONDITIONAL ACCEPTANCE

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"If [you go] to the left, I will go to the right; if [you go] to the right, I will go to the left." (13:9)

Avram, Sarai, and Lot's travels to Canaan produce wealth in the form of flocks and cattle, which lead to their herdsman's bickering. To prevent future conflict, Avram asks Lot to choose his desired direction. "If you go left, I will go right, and if you go right, I will go left" (13:9). Onkelos translates that Avram will go in the opposite direction of whichever direction Lot chooses.

Rashi offers an alternative explanation, one that makes sense in the context of future events: If Lot veers left, Avram will veer to the right, and vice versa. The nuance is that veering still allows Avram to stand by Lot to help and protect him, which Avram ended up doing several times. Rabbi Chaim Marder solidifies this thought, explaining that even though they could not live together, Avram and Lot were still family, and Avram felt responsible to always be available for his family. This sentiment is a beautiful model for all, one of unconditional love and acceptance, despite disparities that may exist.

GREAT PEOPLE, GREAT TESTS

Rabbi Aryeh Leib of Plotzk

"Hashem said to Avram after Lot had parted from him..." (13:14)

We are told that G-d refused to communicate with Avraham while the wicked Lot was still with him. Why, then, do we read elsewhere in the text that G-d appeared to Avraham even while Lot was with him? The answer is that in those days Lot had still been righteous. (Rashi)

What, indeed, caused Lot to become so wicked? The answer can be reasoned out easily enough. According to the Gemara (Kesuvos 5), one who comes from abroad to settle in the Land of Israel rises to a higher level. However, it is well known, too, that "for one who is greater than others, the evil impulse grows accordingly," so that more strenuous efforts must be exerted to overcome it.

When Avraham and his nephew Lot arrived in Canaan, Avraham succeeded in overcoming his heightened evil impulse and so grew even stronger in holiness than he had been before. Lot, however, was unable to conquer his evil impulse and became more wicked than he had been before entering the Land.

OUR HOLY LAND

Meshech Chochmah

“For all the land that you see, to you will I give it, and to your descendants forever.” (13:14-15)

This teaches us that the Land of Israel is holier than all other countries on earth even when it lies in ruins and foreigners dwell in it, as it is written (Devarim 11:12): “The eyes of Hashem, your G-d, are always upon it, from the beginning of the year until the end of the year.”

When Avraham looked around and saw the Canaanites still dwelling in the Promised Land, G-d said to him: The land you see before you seems no more than an ordinary tract of land settled by Canaanite tribes, but “raise now your eyes,” consider the Divine Providence that fills and guides the world, and then you’ll understand that “all the land that you see, to you will I give it,” that even now, when the Canaanite tribes still dwell on its soil, the land has a unique holiness and is destined to belong to you and to your descendants forever.

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“And he built an altar there for G-d.” (13:18)

The three altars that Avraham built express the three levels through which we can ascend in our relationship with G-d.

Avraham built his first altar to thank G-d for the promise of sustenance, children, and a land in which they could live. This corresponds to observing G-d’s commandments, which gives life to the soul and sustains its connection to the body.

Avraham built his second altar to acknowledge the Divine gift of repentance. This altar expresses how we deepen our relationship with G-d in order to restore it after having sinned.

Avraham built his third altar purely for the sake of glorifying G-d. This altar expresses our ability to abandon our sense of independent selfhood and fuse with Him. All reality will fully attain this level of Divine consciousness only in the Messianic Era, but our awareness of this fact fuels our yearning for the Messianic Era, and G-d will hasten its arrival commensurate with our yearning for it. - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

ALTAR OF UNITY

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“And he [Avram] came and settled in the plains of Mamrei, in Chevron. There, he built an altar to G-d.” (13:18)

The name Chevron is related to the word for “connect” (*chaber*). The city of Chevron, both allegorically and physically, expresses the unity of the Jewish people, as well as their unity with G-d (Zohar 1:122b and 125a).

This is why Dovid HaMelech was crowned in Chevron (II Shmuel 5:3). Of all Biblical figures, he personified our constant and absolute unity with G-d. His psalms, the source of many of our prayers, speak of his unwavering love and devotion to G-d, throughout both the successes and tribulations of his life. Furthermore, Dovid HaMelech is the ancestor of Mashiach, who will usher in the Redemption, in which we will all live with the constant awareness of our unity with G-d.

This is the deeper reason why Avram built his third and final altar in Chevron. He built this altar - unlike the first two - neither to thank G-d for something nor to forestall some future calamity. He built it simply to express his oneness with G-d and his desire to spread Divine consciousness.

By internalizing these values, living in unity with one another and with G-d, we can hasten the advent of the Redemption, when both these unities will be fully actualized. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 30, pp. 41-43) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

STANDING ALONE

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

“The survivor came and told Avram the Ivri, who was living in Eilonim, the plains of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshkol and Aneir, who were Avram’s allies.” (14:13)

When the southern region of Canaan becomes embroiled in a battle involving nine kings, Avram’s nephew Lot is among the captives. When Avram is informed of this, the *pasuk* refers to him as “Avram the Ivri,” (14:13) a label not used to describe Avram anywhere else. Rashi explains that Ivri connotes “from the other side of the [Euphrates] river,” and is in fact an accurate designation, yet it is still unclear why this is the one and only time this term is used to describe Avram.

Rav Moshe Neriyah posits that the Torah defines Avram as morally and spiritually on “one side of the river,” while the rest of the world is on the other. While Sodom and Nimrod subjected innocent people to brutal punishment, Avram stood for kindness. Avram did not require acceptance from anyone or try to assimilate but stood alone in defense of the innocent. Perhaps it’s this steadfastness, along with G-d’s help, that empowered Avram to triumph over the evils that surrounded him.

Doing the right thing and standing for what’s moral and just can be a lonely endeavor, but Avram’s actions and G-d’s support shows us that it’s a fight worth fighting and a victory worth pursuing.

SUPERNATURAL SUCCESS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“The survivor came and told Avram the Ivri, who was living in Eilonim, the plains of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshkol and Aneir, who were Avram’s allies.” (14:13)

The Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 42:8) tells us that “the survivor” cited in this verse was Og, the sole survivor of the battle between his people, the Rephaim, and the invading armies. This wicked individual knew that Avram would pursue the armies in order to save Lot, and he hoped that Avram would be killed in battle, allowing Og to then marry Avram’s wife Sarai. The Midrash further relates that it was Pesach, and Og found Avram eating matzah.

In telling us that Avram was eating matzah at the time of Og’s arrival, the Midrash is explaining Og’s certainty that Avram would irrationally place himself in such great danger by pursuing the invading armies: matzah is “the bread of faith” (Zohar 2:183b), meaning that eating it endows us with supra-rational faith in G-d. Og, witnessing Avram eating “the bread of faith,” perceived that it would cause Avram to act “beyond reason,” risking his life to save Lot.

What Og neglected to take into consideration was that when G-d sees our supra-rational devotion to His agenda of goodness and justice, He grants us supernatural success. Thus, Avram defeated the armies, rescuing Lot and thwarting Og’s scheme. (Reshimot 17) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

GOING THE EXTRA MILE

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

“And Avram heard that his kinsman had been taken captive, and he armed his disciples who had been born in his house - three hundred and eighteen.” (14:14)

The Torah (14:1-16) records the episode of the war between the four kings and the five kings in which the four kings captured Lot and held him hostage. Avraham was subsequently notified that Lot was taken captive and decided to enter the war with his army of men in order to rescue Lot.

Rav Yaakov Kaminetsky (Emes L’Yaakov) points out that had Avraham asked a *halachik* question as to whether he was obligated to try and save Lot, he certainly would have been told that he was exempt. The *halachah* is abundantly clear that a person is not responsible to put their own life in danger in order to save someone else. Yet, Avraham didn’t delay or hesitate for a second in his attempt to rescue Lot.

The Gemara (Avodah Zarah 25a) tells us that Avraham and the other Avos are referred to as *yesharim* - the upstanding and straight individuals. They didn’t just do things because they were obligated to, rather, they did what they felt was right irrespective of whether they were commanded to or not. Avraham felt responsible to take care of Lot, therefore he did whatever it took to save him, even if he could have been exempt.

Avraham and the Avos set the standard for all of us for what it means to be a *mentsch*.

We aren’t supposed to just check boxes off so that we fulfill our obligations in our relationship with Hashem or with our fellow Jews. Instead, we need to constantly ask ourselves: “Is that what I should be doing even if I am not commanded to do so? Is this really what Hashem would want me to do?”

If we follow Avraham and the Avos as our models by always going the extra mile, we are sure to earn the title of *yesharim* as well.

NEVER DESPAIR

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

“And Avram heard that his kinsman had been taken captive, and he armed his disciples who had been born in his house - three hundred and eighteen.” (14:14)

In order to save Lot, who had been captured by one of the four kings, Avraham prepared 318 of his household for war. The Medrash explains that it was in fact Eliezer alone who went with Avraham, and the number 318 is only meant as an allusion to Eliezer, whose numerical *gematria* is 318. (See Bereishis Rabbah 43:2 and Nedarim 32a)

Since the Torah must be understood on a simple level, why would the verse say that Avraham armed 318 of his household if he only brought Eliezer? What happened to everyone else?

Rabbeinu Bachya answers that Avraham did originally arm his entire household of 318 men, but after warning them of the Torah’s strict parameters regarding who should be going out to war and who must return home (see Devarim 20:8), only Eliezer remained. And because Eliezer remained with Avraham, explains the Daas Zekeinim M’baalei Tosefos, Hashem granted him the strength equivalent to everyone else who had returned home, 318 men.

Yet, this explanation leads to an even greater dilemma: with just Eliezer by his side, how did Avraham think that he could possibly defeat four mighty armies?

Rav Tzadok HaKohen answers that Avraham was absolutely confident of success in facing the four kings because he knew that the will of Hashem always prevails; even when the odds seem impossible, he knew that he could achieve anything as long as he was fulfilling Hashem’s will.

But if so, yet another question arises: why did Avraham need to take Eliezer at all?

The answer, explains Rav Tzadok, is that Avraham specifically brought Eliezer with him as a proclamation that he would never give in to **שיא**, despair, which has the numerical *gematria* of 317. The reason why we are told that Eliezer’s numerical *gematria* is 318 is because it is one above **שיא**; a declaration that despite the enormity of the challenge, Avraham knew that he was acting in accordance with Hashem’s will, and as such, even in the face of impossible odds, he would never despair.

(It is also important to note that the word Eliezer itself comes from two words “אלי - My G-d” and “עזר - help”, showing again that Avraham had perfect faith that Hashem would help him.)

We too should learn from Avraham and understand that as long as we are doing what is right, there is no need to despair. We too should always be above יאוש. (Divrei Sofrim 16)

INSPIRATION TO ALL

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“And Avram heard that his kinsman had been taken captive, and he armed his disciples...” (14:14)

We would have expected Lot, Avram’s kinsman and companion, to become his foremost disciple. Yet Lot eventually rejected both Avram and G-d, and even chose to live in Sodom, the center of immorality and corruption.

Nonetheless, even when Avram had no choice but to send Lot away, he assured him that he would always remain close enough to protect him should the need arise. When it did, Avram did not hesitate to risk his own life to save Lot’s.

Avram’s perseverance with Lot paid off: Lot maintained some of the praiseworthy practices Avram taught him. For example, Lot insisted on providing hospitality to visitors in Sodom even though it was a capital offense there. Ultimately, Lot became the ancestor of Rus, Dovid HaMelech, and Mashiach.

Following Avram’s example, we should realize that our efforts to inspire others, even if they appear to be in vain, will have positive results that we cannot always foresee. (Sefer HaSichot 5750, vol. 1, pp. 100-102) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

FINDING THE GOOD

Reb Noson of Breslov

“He and his servants deployed against them at night and struck them.” (14:15)

Even though Lot was wicked, Avraham pursued the Four Kings to rescue him, because he knew that Lot had some good points in him, even in his “night” - his darkest moments. [That is, Avraham, the “man of *chesed* (kindness),” always looks for the good points even in the “Lots,” the most evil people.] (Likutey Halakhot I, p. 5a)

FAITHFUL TITHING

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“He gave him a tenth of everything.” (14:20)

Tithing our wealth expresses our awareness that everything we possess really belongs to G-d and must therefore be used for holy purposes.

Generally, we amass wealth in order to improve our lives and the lives of our loved ones; the more we internalize the Torah’s values, the more these motives fuse with our desire to make the world more G-dly.

However, when unearned wealth comes our way, it might not occur to us to relate to it in the same way. By tithing the spoils of war, which he received miraculously, Avraham demonstrated that not only the wealth that we have produced ourselves belongs to G-d, but all our wealth.

G-d promises to pay us back many times over for giving Him our tithes, and in fact implores us to test Him in this. By following Avraham’s example even with our unearned wealth, our lives will demonstrate how G-d rewards those who fulfill His will. In this way, we, like Avraham, will disseminate the knowledge of G-d’s goodness and kindness throughout the world. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 5, pp. 68-76) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

IT’S ALL FROM ABOVE

Yad HaMelech

“Avram said to the King of Sodom: ‘I have lifted up my hand to Hashem... so you should not say: I have made Avram rich...’” (14:22-23)

An alternative rendering of this passage is: “I have lifted up my hand to G-d lest it should say: I have made Avram rich.” Avraham had taken gifts from Pharaoh, but in the case of the King of Sodom - where the gifts would have been in the form of a tribute for the victory Avraham had wrought - he refused to accept anything, lest he would be tempted to think that he had earned the tribute by the strength of his own hand without the help of G-d. So the meaning is: “lest it (his own hand) should say: I have made Avram rich.”

BOUNDLESS REWARDS

Chacham Rabbeinu Yosef Albo

“Fear not, Avram; I am your Shield; your reward is exceedingly great.” (15:1)

According to logic, the reward for doing a *mitzvah* should be finite and limited to the amount of effort which a person expends on its behalf. But from here we see that Hashem, in His infinite greatness, is capable and willing to increase the reward beyond the boundaries of time and place.

PROTECTED SPARK

Yid HaKodesh

“Fear not, Avram; I am your Shield; your reward is exceedingly great.” (15:1)

In every Jewish heart there is a spark of the Divine that is protected so that it can never be extinguished.

THE KING'S COUNCIL

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

"After these incidents, the word of G-d came to Avram in a vision, saying..." (15:1)

There are two ways that a king speaks with his subjects. There are those with whom the king speaks openly; these are the members of the king's council. There are others with whom he speaks only from behind a curtain. This is because the king is a person of great intelligence, and not everyone can understand his great intellect. Whoever can understand it more is deemed worthy of being a member of the king's council.

Now, Avraham originally served G-d out of love (Yeshayahu 41:8) but did not comprehend Him with his other faculties completely, only doing so from the perspective of the faculty of love. However, after killing the four hostile kings and wreaking vengeance on the enemies of G-d, he attained the level of *Gevurah* and fear of G-d, thereby comprehending G-d more deeply and thoroughly.

Thus, the verse says, "after these incidents" - meaning Avraham's acts of vengeance against the four kings - "the word of G-d came to him in a vision." The word "vision" implies greater perception and comprehension, for he now achieved a higher grasp of G-d than he had been able to attain earlier.

LOVING SHIELD

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

"Fear not, Avram; I am your Shield; your reward is exceedingly great." (15:1)

(As Rashi points out, after Avraham's miraculous victory over the four kings, he was concerned that he had exhausted whatever merits that he had accrued on account of his righteousness until that point. G-d therefore assured him that this was not the case, by saying, "Your reward will [still] be very great." Rashi does not, however, explain why Avraham's miraculous victory did not "cost" him anything in terms of his merit. The Kedushas Levi explains why this was the case.)

In other words, G-d assured Avraham as follows:

"The reason why you exacted vengeance against your enemies is because they wanted to harm you, but I acted as your protective shield so nothing bad would happen to you. It was I Who prevented them from harming you by killing them so they could not harm you."

"It follows that the main reason for the vengeance that I wreaked upon them was because I love you and therefore acted as your shield. But the reason I did this was not out of a desire to seek revenge against them, out of My hatred for them. It follows that there is no reason to reduce the reward that you are destined to receive for your Divine service."

INFINITE AND FINITE REWARD

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Fear not, Avram; I am your Shield; your reward is exceedingly great." (15:1)

According to the logic of strict justice, finite acts of goodness should elicit a commensurately finite reward. G-d, however, bestows upon us infinite reward for our fulfillment of His commandments. This is the meaning of "Your reward shall be *very* great." (Ikkarim 4:36)

The reason for this is because the Torah's commandments are both finite and infinite. On the one hand, each commandment refines one particular aspect of our animal nature and is performed in a finite, physical way (see Bereishis Rabbah 44:1). On the other hand, each commandment also expresses the will of the infinite G-d, and thus, fulfilling any one commandment connects us with infinity.

We therefore receive both finite and infinite reward, corresponding to the two aforementioned aspects of the commandments. (Sefer HaMa'amarim 5699, p. 84-89, Sefer HaMa'amarim Kuntreisim, vol. 2, 352a-355b) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

CONTINUOUS INCENTIVES

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

"Fear not, Avram; I am your Shield; your reward is exceedingly great." (15:1)

In this verse, Hashem is reassuring Avraham that despite the miracles performed on his behalf, his reward in the World to Come would not be diminished (Rashi). This appears to contradict the dictum that someone who gains special favor in This World - especially through a miracle - has his reward reduced in the Next World (Taanis 20b). Why was Avraham able to benefit from a miracle without it detracting from his spiritual account?

The Alter of Novordok answered that the above principle only applies when one is subject to Hashem's kindness for his own personal benefit, but when he is using the very thing that Hashem gave to him in order to actually serve Hashem, then he receives no deduction from his ultimate reward.

The example The Alter gives is of a restaurant worker who works in the most expensive restaurant in town, yet despite not being able to afford the food, he nevertheless receives his meals for free because he is working there, and it is in the interest of the restaurant owner to make sure that his workers enjoy the food and are suitably fed. This keeps them excited about the product they are presenting and gives them the energy to continue to do a good job. Similarly, if someone is using his possessions to do *mitzvos* or be more involved in Torah, then the resources he uses to this end are not deducted from his "personal account," rather, they are taken from Hashem's proverbial "business account."

Perhaps we can illustrate this further in the following way:

If a child is making deliveries for his father, then his father will provide him with a suitable bike. As the child gets older and he outgrows his bike, the father will automatically buy him a new one so that he can continue doing the deliveries. As the child develops still and decides to take on more complicated routes, his father will provide him with a stronger and more sophisticated bike with the appropriate enhanced features to help him on his journey. Additionally, as long as the son continues to do his deliveries, the father will have no problem with his son using the bike for his own enjoyment at other times. However, if the son has no interest in helping his father, he just wants to have fun riding his bike, then the decision to upgrade his bike is not so simple. And perhaps, the son himself will even have to pay for it.

Accordingly, not only do we not lose out when we use our assets to serve Hashem, but the more we desire to serve Hashem, the greater our assets become.

PERSONALIZING OUR LEGACY

Rabbi Jeremy Finn

“And Avram said, ‘My Lord, G-d, what can You give me, seeing that I go childless, and the steward of my house is Damascene Eliezer?’” (15:2)

Rashi offers a few explanations as to why Eliezer is referred to as “דמשק אליעזר - Damascene Eliezer,” and one of the reasons is that he is so-called because “דולה ומשקה - he would draw water and give to drink from the Torah of his rabbi,” i.e., he would learn and teach the Torah of his master to others.

Avraham is explaining why Eliezer is not suited to act as an heir because of his דמשק אליעזר, his learning and teaching the Torah of Avraham Avinu to the world. What could be wrong with that? Eliezer was, in effect, Avraham’s PR man, who ensured that his Torah was disseminated and introduced to new audiences. What more would Avraham Avinu want from an heir?

The answer is that precisely in the fact that Eliezer was דולה ומשקה מתורת רבו לאחרים; Eliezer only had the ability to repeat, verbatim, that which he heard from his teacher Avraham. Eliezer could not inject any insight of his own into those teachings. He could not add to those teachings, adapt them to meet the needs of new situations, or lace them with any *chiddushim* of his own.

Avraham was not looking for a clone but an heir, and therefore Eliezer was unsuitable!

In the first of the *berachos* of the Amidah, we say: אלוקי אברהם, אלוקי יצחק, ואלוקי יעקב. Why do we need to repeat אלוקי each time, and not just say יעקב ויצחק ויעקב? The relationship that each one of the forefathers had with Hashem was different from that of his father. They each took what they had received from their father and injected their own personality into that relationship.

They built on what they had received and forged something of their own. Thus, the word אלוקי is mentioned with each one individually to reflect this individual and unique relationship.

If we wish to be true heirs and continue the legacy of previous generations, we need to accept and preserve all that we received from them and then add our own unique flavor and carry that legacy forward.

LOOKS CAN BE DECEIVING

Baal Shem Tov

“[G-d told Avraham,] ‘Gaze, now, toward the Heavens and count the stars, if you are able to count them!’ And He said to him, ‘So shall be your descendants.’” (15:5)

Seen from the earth, the stars look like tiny specks. Yet they are worlds in themselves, some even larger than our own earth. So, too, are the Jewish people. They may appear small and insignificant on earth, but in the sight of Heaven they are immense indeed and considered as the pillar of all Creation.

PARTS OF A WHOLE

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

“And He took him outside, and said, ‘Gaze, now, toward the Heavens and count the stars, if you are able to count them!’ And He said to him, ‘So shall be your descendants.’” (15:5)

After Avram rescues Lot from being held captive by the victorious kings, G-d reassures Avram that he will be rewarded for his righteousness. In reaction to Avram’s response that he is childless, G-d takes him outside and says, “Please look to the heavens and count the stars, if you are able to count them,” followed with, “So will be your seed” (15:5). Why did G-d answer Avram by bringing him outside and asking him to count the stars? Couldn’t a simple explanation have been just as effective in conveying G-d’s plan?

The K’sav Sofer explains why the Jewish people are compared to stars and planets: Stars and planets are part of solar systems and galaxies, and removing even one planet can shift the balance of its entire system. The same is true of us; we are separate but together, as part of an ecosystem of people that need each other.

While this concept makes sense intellectually, seeing it with our own eyes reinforces the reality that we are all part of an enormous and harmonious universe. Knowing that our community is there to support us is comforting, but seeing its individuals in person helps bolster that warmth and support for one another. This could be G-d’s way of encouraging us to physically attend community events, go to synagogue, visit the sick, help the more vulnerable, and seek out opportunities of *chessed* (kindness).

ONE BRILLIANT SUN

Kol Omer Kro

"[G-d told Avraham,] 'Gaze, now, toward the Heavens and count the stars, if you are able to count them!' And He said to him, 'So shall be your descendants.'" (15:5)

Only at a later point (15:12) are we told that the sun had set. Thus G-d and Avraham's meeting must have taken place during the day. The question thus arises how Avraham could have seen and counted the stars while the sun was shining.

The answer is that G-d did not really expect Avraham to count the stars to see how numerous his descendants would be. He did not intend to promise Avraham that his seed would be numerous. In fact, the Jews are the smallest among the peoples in that respect. Rather, G-d's promise was that although the Jewish people would not be numerous compared to other nations, they would be endowed with spiritual qualities so powerful that they would be teachers and guides for all the rest of humanity. All the nations would learn the concepts of ethics and justice from the Jewish people, and if not for the light spread by the Jews, the world would sink into utter darkness.

G-d said to Avraham: "Look towards heaven, while it is still day and the sun is shining, and count the stars if you are able to count them. Of course, you will not be able to count them. The stars are in the sky, but you cannot count them for it is day, and the strong light of the sun eclipses the light of the millions and millions of stars in the heavens. Don't you see then that quality is more important than quantity? Look, one powerful shining sun can be stronger than millions of stars."

And G-d said to him: "So shall be your seed. Not like the stars, but like the sun. Your descendants will be few and vastly outnumbered by other peoples of the world. But the one brilliant sun of Judaism will be strong enough to outshine the millions of the other nations. The spirit of Judaism, the light of its Torah, will stand invincible, outlasting all the many nations and their powerful armies."

NOT THE NORM

Sefas Emes

"And He took him outside, and said, 'Gaze, now, toward the Heavens and count the stars, if you are able to count them!' And He said to him, 'So shall be your descendants.'" (15:5)

G-d took Avraham out of this world and placed him above the stars. (Rashi)

Hashem raised Avram to a high spiritual state beyond the natural. Hashem promised him that the future generations, "your offspring," would live above the norm and would be on a high spiritual level.

SHINING LIKE THE STARS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"[G-d told Avraham,] 'Gaze, now, toward the Heavens and count the stars, if you are able to count them!' And He said to him, 'So shall be your descendants.'" (15:5)

Although the plain meaning of this statement is that the Jewish people will eventually be as numerous as the stars, its metaphorical meaning is that they will sparkle like the stars; their light is so bright that even those walking in the thick of night will not stumble.

We are all Avraham's "shining stars," possessing sufficient moral and spiritual fortitude to prevent those around us from stumbling and to exert a positive influence on them. (HaYom Yom, 5 Marcheshvan) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

ABOVE MAZAL

Chiddushei HaRim

"And He took him outside, and said, 'Gaze, now, toward the Heavens and count the stars, if you are able to count them!' And He said to him, 'So shall be your descendants.'" (15:5)

Rashi quotes the Midrashic interpretation, "Go out of your astrology that you have seen in the Zodiac."

Hashem promised Avraham that his life activities would be beyond the natural and the signs of the constellations. Though he would not be able to have children, Hashem put him above the natural.

"So will be your children" - they, too, will be beyond the natural and their behavior will be extraordinary. They will be under Divine supervision in a miraculous manner, as our Sages have said: "The signs of the constellation will hold no sway over Israel."

BEYOND NATURE

Reb Noson of Breslov

"And He took him outside, and said, 'Gaze, now, toward the Heavens and count the stars, if you are able to count them!' And He said to him, 'So shall be your descendants.'" (15:5)

G-d took Avraham out of this world and placed him above the stars. (Rashi)

The blessing of children that Avraham received when G-d elevated him above the heavens teaches that the Jews, Avraham's descendants, supersede natural forces; therefore they can always accomplish things that seem beyond their reach. (Likutey Halakhot I, p. 20a)

G-d showed Avraham that his descendants would transcend the laws of the stellar system. They could attain levels beyond time and space. (Likutey Halakhot V, p. 158)

NEVER IMPOSSIBLE

Rabbi Meir Shapiro

"[G-d told Avraham,] 'Gaze, now, toward the Heavens and count the stars, if you are able to count them!' And He said to him, 'So shall be your descendants.'" (15:5)

When Hashem told Avraham to count the stars, he began to count them. If anyone other than Avraham would have been given this task, their immediate response would have been, "That's impossible! There are too many stars to count!" but not Avraham.

To this, Hashem responded, "So shall be your children." The Jewish people are divinely blessed to achieve the impossible. They will never give up.

BLESSED WITH FAITH

Kozhnutzer Maggid / Reb Moshe of Kobrin

"And he believed in Hashem, and he counted it to Him for righteousness." (15:6)

Avraham believed in Hashem and he (Avraham) counted it to Him (G-d) for righteousness.

Meaning, Avraham regarded his belief in G-d as a favor bestowed upon him by G-d in His righteousness. This, in turn, gave Avraham even more cause to believe in Him.

PROVEN COMMITMENT

Rabbi Jeremy Finn

"I am G-d who brought you out from Ur Kasdim..." (15:7)

The word אור - light, can be used to describe the burning light of a fire, and therefore אור נשדים is so-called in reference to the fiery furnace into which Avraham Avinu was thrown by Nimrod, which he miraculously survived unscathed.

Why is this great miracle not mentioned explicitly in the text? According to Rashi, this was one of Avraham's ten tests!

If we were to compare this test to that of the *Akeidah*, which is hailed as the most difficult of Avraham's tests, we would be entitled to ask that while the *Akeidah* posed no direct threat to Avraham, the furnace was a life-or-death decision. Also, the *Akeidah* took place at the end of Avraham's life, when his relationship with Hashem was well-cemented and he had already been the recipient of miracles from Hashem.

By contrast, allowing himself to be thrown into a furnace for a G-d Whom he had only just discovered would seem to be a much higher act, and yet it goes almost unnoticed. Why?

The Chassid Yaavetz says that the difference between the two is that the *Akeidah* was the result of a direct command from Hashem, who told Avraham to take his son והעלה לעולה, and offer him up.

אור נשדים was not commanded by Hashem but was a case of Avraham willing to sacrifice his own life for his beliefs.

Therefore, when Avraham was willing to give up his own life, it was due to what he thought to be correct, what he had worked out to be true and his religious beliefs. History is full of people who are willing to sacrifice themselves for what they believe to be true, and therefore the Torah does not make specific reference to this act.

However, when you go against everything you believe in, and when you go against your logic because G-d has told you to do so, it shows that you are a servant of G-d, and that deserves to be highlighted.

When what you believe in dovetails with what Hashem wants from you, it is easy to be a G-d-fearing person. The question is what happens when there is a clash. That is when the truth of your convictions is tested, and when we can truly demonstrate our commitment.

INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

"He [Avram] said, 'My Master, Hashem, how will I know that I will inherit it?'" (15:8)

The Gemara (Berachos 7b) tells us that Avraham was the first human being to refer to Hashem as an *adon* - master. Avraham inquired from Hashem as to how he will know that his descendants will inherit Eretz Yisrael, employing the word of *adon*. What is so significant about this change of title that the Gemara feels compelled to highlight it?

Rav Shimon Schwab (Maayan Beis Hashoeivah) explains that Avraham was sharing a way of how to serve our Creator in a manner that had not been introduced to the world until that point. When we refer to someone as a master, there is a recognition that we are the servants of that person. Not only do we acknowledge that we are his servants, but we accept that a master gives each of his servants a specific job and purpose in his household. We also feel a much closer connection to the master that we are serving, as our lives are far more intertwined. Unlike a king who is placed on a pedestal with very little personal connection to his subjects, a master is constantly focused on meeting with and instructing his servants on what to do next. Avraham was showing us that Hashem is more than a King; He is our Master. We have the opportunity to relate to Hashem as a Master Who is interested in being involved in our lives and Who has carefully selected our roles in this world.

We often feel that Hashem may have more important things to "worry" about when overseeing our world. Rav Schwab is teaching us that Avraham revealed that Hashem is invested in our lives. He wants to have a meaningful and tangible connection with us, and we have to be willing to embrace the roles He gives us. With the knowledge that Hashem desires to be involved in our lives and the recognition of the various roles that we each have to serve Hashem, we are sure to have a more meaningful and real relationship with Him.

INHERITING FAITH

Reb Elimelech Grodzisker

"He [Avram] said, 'My Master, Hashem, how will I know that I will inherit it?'" (15:8)

How was it possible that Avraham, who was a sincere and wholehearted believer, should ask, "Whereby shall I know?"

The answer is that Avraham was asking about his children. He was a believer, but his concern was for his children and all future generations. How would they inherit his deep beliefs?

GUARANTEED SUCCESS

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"He [Avram] said, 'My Master, Hashem, how will I know that I will inherit it?'" (15:8)

Embedded in this week's parashah is Avram's asking G-d, "How will I know that I will inherit it [the land]?" (15:8). His question seems strange considering G-d already promised Avram that he would have children and that his children would be as many as the stars. If Avram believed G-d's promise about having children (which would be a great miracle at his age), why would he need reassurance about a much less miraculous promise of inheriting the land?

Sforno explains that Avram did not doubt that he would have children and that they would inherit the land; he needed reassurance that his children wouldn't forfeit their future by faltering, because - unlike the stars' existence - his descendants would be living among temptations and impurities. G-d's response, "You shall surely know," is that they will indeed rise above their struggles.

Rashi says that Avram will know because of the *korbanos* (sacrifices) his descendants will bring. The root of the word *korban* means "close," which lends great insight into the act of giving: The more we sacrifice to others, the closer we become to them. If we give to each other, we are assured to inherit a prosperous and fulfilling future.

GUEST IN THE LAND

Kotzker Rebbe

"Know with certainty that your offspring shall be sojourners in a land not their own..." (15:13)

Jews should always feel that they are in a land that is not their own rather than have an emancipated attitude. The latter attitude causes a feeling of equality that might jeopardize their behavior as Jews.

FORWARD LOOKING

Reb Saadiah Gaon

"Also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge..." (15:14)

If these two words, *dan anochi* ("will I judge"), alone held the promise of the many miracles and wonders that occurred at the time of the Exodus from Egypt, how many more miracles must surely come to pass at the time of redemption yet to be, concerning which the Torah brings such a multitude of references, promises and prophecies?

THIS LAND IS OUR LAND

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"I have given this land to your descendants..." (15:18)

When G-d promised the Land of Israel to Avraham's descendants, the land in its entirety became - and remains to this day - the inheritance of every Jew, not subject to negotiation or trade. It is solely G-d's promise to Avraham that constitutes our connection to our land.

When we articulate this confidently and unapologetically, the community of nations will acknowledge its truth. In contrast, basing our claims to the Promised Land on treaties, military victories, or diplomatic machinations will undermine other nations' respect for our inheritance. By asserting our inviolable connection to the Land of Israel, we hasten the Messianic Redemption, when G-d will grant us its full possession peacefully. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 15, pp. 100-109) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

LIVING WELL

Reb Zev Wolf of Zbaraz

"Therefore, he called the well, 'The Well of the Living One Appearing to Me.'" (16:14)

A basic principle of the Torah is that it is everlasting and not a series of stories. It teaches us to be vigilant of the evil inclination and offers us the means of repentance. Being of a devious nature, the evil inclination begins by telling a person that everything is good. That is why one should be diligent at all times to study, do repentance, and do good deeds.

The word *b'er* is analogous to a person who is like a "bubbling spring" and does good deeds from the depths of his essence. He is like a fountain that derives all from its source. Therefore, if a person wishes to be called a *b'er* - a fountain - he must constantly be absorbed in learning Torah, performing *mitzvot*, and being penitent. He should be as a "Well of the Living One." He should try to bring others to repentance while he, too, is examining himself. Thus, he will become like a living well drawing from his inner source.

DO WHAT YOU CAN

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

“And Hashem appeared to Avram and He said to him, ‘...walk before Me and be whole.’” (17:1)

Rashi explains the words “and be whole” as follows: Be whole in all the tests that I bring upon you. Rav Yaakov Meir Schechter shlit’a elucidates these words by explaining that since most of Avraham Avinu’s trials came about during moments of darkness and lack of direction, Hashem’s commandment was really a piece of advice: Be wholehearted and simple in all the tests that I bring upon you. Don’t force yourself to perform high levels of *avodah* which you are not prepared for at this specific moment.

When a Jew is at a low point in his life, he needs to know how to behave in order to get past it intact and even grow from it. The best advice, writes R’ Yaakov Meir, is to perform simple acts of goodness with honesty and sincerity. One should recite one or two chapters of Tehillim; study Torah on a simpler level than usual, according to his ability at the moment; do small acts of kindness.

The principle is if one cannot do all that is required of him at the moment, he should do as much as he can. Often, that little bit of good will immediately lift him back to his proper place, and he will once again be able to serve Hashem with his full strength. And, even in the worst of times, one can still refrain from committing improper actions, which alone will yield great benefits.

A person who can hold onto these things and not lose hope in moments of difficulty has found eternal value. He will be able to turn descent into ascent and sin into merit.

SPREAD THE JOY

Rabbi Jeremy Finn

“And Avraham fell on his face and laughed...” (17:17)

In Koheles, there seems to be a contradiction in its approach to *simchah*. In one verse (Koheles 2:2), it says, “ולשמחה מה עושה” - And joy, what does it accomplish?” meaning that there is no productivity attached to *simchah*, while in another verse (Koheles 8:15), it says, “ושבחתי אני את השמחש” - praised enjoyment,” implying that *simchah* is a good thing!

The Gemara (Shabbos 30b) resolves the contradiction by explaining that there are two types of *simchah* - של שמחה מצוה, which is positive, and the other, less positive is שמחה that is not associated with a *mitzvah*.

Rashi states that an example of a שמחה של מצוה would be the הכנסת כלה - helping bring a bride to her wedding.

Why does Rashi bring that example in particular? Out of all the מצוות that we perform with joy, why is the *mitzvah* of הכנסת כלה singled out?

Rabbi Aviel Kotler suggests that the reason הכנסת כלה is chosen is because it is an example of a *mitzvah* whose purpose is to bring happiness to someone else. (HaKeriyah L’simchah, p. 22)

When we perform *mitzvos* that benefit other people, the *simchah* is magnified. This is reflected in the Midrash Rabbah (Midrash Tehillim 117) that says that rainfall is more significant than *Matan Torah* because while *Matan Torah* brought *simchah* to Klal Yisrael, rain brings joy to all of humanity.

Therefore, the greatest *simchah* is that which is shared with others. Any joy that is kept to ourselves and not shared is not a שמחה של מצוה and is described by Koheles as “ולשמחה מה זו עושה” - what does it accomplish?” It is here today and gone tomorrow!

If we share our *simchah*, if we cause others to experience joy and happiness, then it is a *simchah* that Koheles praises.

When Avraham Avinu laughs after being told that at the age of one hundred he will have a son, he is not rebuked. However, when Sarah does the same, Hashem reprimands her and says, “למה זה צחקה שרה” - Why did Sarah laugh?” (Bereishis 18:13). What’s the difference?

There was a big difference in the way that Avraham laughed and the way that Sarah laughed.

When Avraham laughed, the verse says, “ויפל אברהם על” - פניו ויצחק - Avraham fell on his face and laughed.” His laugh was an outward expression of his inner joy. Everyone could see him laughing. He shared his happiness with others.

When Sarah receives the news that she will give birth to a son, the verse (Bereishis 18:12) says, “ותצחק שרה בקרבה” - And Sarah laughed inwardly,” i.e., to herself, without sharing her joy with others.

The charge against Sarah is that after having received such fantastic news, how was it possible not to share the *simchah* with others? How can it remain בקרבה - inwardly?

Whereas Avraham is involved in the שמחה של מצוה that is shared with others and brings joy to others, Sarah keeps it to herself. The latter is thus best described as מה זו עושה!

We can now understand why Hashem instructs that the child be named Yitzchak, which means laughter (Bereishis 17:19). If Sarah’s laughter was negative, why does Hashem wish the child to have such a name?

The answer is that Yitzchak is not so-called after the laughter of his mother, but after the positive laughter of his father - a laughter that is shared and that brings joy to others.

This should be our approach to *simchah*. It is less profound if it isn’t shared and doesn’t benefit others, but when it is shared with others, it can light up the world!

DIRECT AND INDIRECT INFLUENCE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"[G-d said,] 'She will no longer be called Sarai, for Sarah is [now] her name..." (17:15)

Whereas Avraham's name change proclaimed him to be the "father of nations," Sarah's proclaimed her to be a "sovereign."

Sovereigns remain aloof and detached from their subjects, wielding their influence by virtue of this very aloofness. Parents, by contrast, are personally involved with their children's daily lives.

Avraham influenced people by interacting with them directly, inducing them to keep G-d's laws and behave ethically. Sarah, in contrast, influenced people indirectly, via personal example and by virtue of her awe-inspiring righteousness.

Similarly, in our own lives, although we should always aim to inspire others directly, we should not overlook our own spiritual growth, which will ultimately serve to inspire others indirectly, as well. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 35, pp. 97-100) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

REACHING OUR POTENTIAL

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"He [Yishmael] will beget twelve princes..." (17:20)

When G-d promises Avraham that he and Sarah will have a son, He also blesses Yishmael that he shall be fruitful and multiply, and "beget twelve princes and become a great nation" (17:20). Rashi explains that the word for princes is similar to the word for cloud (נשיאם; see Mishlei 25:14), which seems to imply that Yishmael's offspring will act like clouds and disappear. If Yishmael's progeny are born as princes, why would they disappear?

The Tolner Rebbe suggests that Yishmael represents extraordinary potential that has yet to be developed or nurtured. Being born with talent may give one a head start, but only if one views it as a start and is motivated to develop and hone the talent. Our tradition reinforces the fact that we are not born perfect; otherwise, Jewish boys would be born already circumcised. Since self-improvement begins at birth, parents must begin the process by nurturing their children to reach their full potential. It's a process that does not end and is eternally rewarding.

**TO VIEW OUR PREVIOUS POSTS, CHECK OUT:
WWW.SHIURENJOYMENT.COM/CHIZUK-WITH-REBBENACHMAN/**