

Torah Wellsprings

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Parshas Vayeira

Chinuch – Avraham Avinu's approach

In this week's *parashah* Hashem reveals the reason He loves Avraham. (18:19) **כִּי יִדְעָתוּ לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר יִצְוֶה אֶת בְּנָיו**, “I love him because he commands his children and household: ‘Go in Hashem’s ways...’” In other words, Hashem loves Avraham because he is *mechanech* his children.

In last week's *parashah* Hashem promised Avraham (15:1) **שְׂכָרְךָ הֲרֵבָה מְאֹד**, that he will earn a very great reward. When Hashem promises a “very great reward” we can be certain that it will be far beyond our greatest imaginations. Yet, Avraham wasn't satisfied. He said, “Hashem, what can you give me? I'm without children.” Avraham felt that if he doesn't have children, he has nothing at all.

Obviously, it wasn't that he wanted a child to cuddle and enjoy. Avraham wanted children to educate to go in Hashem's ways.

Aspects of Avraham's approach to *chinuch* can be gleaned from this week's *parashah*.

When the three guests came to his home, Avraham chose for them three young calves, but he didn't prepare them himself. He asked Yishmael to prepare them. As Rashi (18:7) explains, “He was training Yishmael to do mitzvos.”

Notice, however, that Avraham didn't

tell Yishmael to do the entire mitzvah himself. In fact, Avraham and Sarah performed the bulk of this good deed. Why? If he wanted to train Yishmael to do *hachnasas orchim*, he should tell Yishmael to do the entire mitzvah.

The answer is, *chinuch* has three parts: to train by practice, to train by example, to train through conversations.

It is essential that you have your children practicing doing good deeds. Those good deeds will become their second nature. (This is the reason Avraham asked Yishmael to help feed the guests.) Another essential aspect of *chinuch* is conversations. As it states **לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר יִצְוֶה אֶת בְּנָיו**, “Avraham will command his children...” It is important to tell children about the great privilege we have to keep Torah and mitzvos, and to tell them about good middos, etc. But perhaps an even greater part of *chinuch* is to be a role model. When Yishmael saw his father, Avraham, devoted to the mitzvah of *hachnasas orchim*, it taught him lessons that practice and words couldn't convey.

Avraham was a hundred years old and it was the third day after his *milah*. Nevertheless, when he saw hungry people, he ran to do *chesed*. Yishmael saw Avraham's love and devotion for

hachnasas orchim, and that's the ultimate lesson in *chinuch*.¹

These three aspects of *chinuch* are implied to by the words למען אשר יצוה את בניו. The simple translation of this *passuk* refers to conversations, that Avraham would speak to his children and tell them to follow Hashem's ways. The Sfas Emes says that יצוה comes from the word צוותא, together, implying that Avraham would perform the mitzvos *together* with his children. The combination of conversations, being a role model, and having the children practice doing the mitzvos, was Avraham's approach to train his children in Hashem's service.

Avraham's efforts in Yishmael's *chinuch* paid off in the end. There was a time when Yishmael was sinning. The Torah (21:9) writes that Yishmael was מצחק and Rashi writes that this means either *avodah zarah*, *arayos*, or murder. Also, Rashi writes that Yishmael would shoot arrows at Yitzchak and say, "I'm just playing." Yishmael's evil ways caused Avraham immense distress, so when he sent Yishmael and Hagar away he gave them only bread and water. Rashi (21:14) writes, "He didn't give them gold or silver, because he hated Yishmael" because of the path of life Yishmael took. Nevertheless, eventually Yishmael

did *teshuvah*. As it states (*Bereishis* 25:9), ויקברו אותו יצחק וישמעאל בניו אל מערת, המכפלה, "Yitzchak and Yishmael his sons buried him in Mearas HaMachpeilah." Yitzchak's name is written first. Rashi writes, "We know from this that Yishmael did *teshuvah*, because he let Yitzchak go ahead of him..." So, although there were years when it seemed all the *chinuch* was in vain, ultimately, it paid off.

Also, in this week's *parashah*, Hashem told Avraham קח את בנך ... אשר אהבת "Take your son...whom you love..."

Avraham replied that he doesn't know which son to take, because, "I love both of my sons" (22:1). This is just a few *pesukim* after Rashi clarifies that Avraham hated his son, Yishmael because he was sinning. So, it seems that already in this week's *parashah*, Yishmael began the process of improving his ways.

Pirka d'Reb Elazar (31) states that Yishmael visited Avraham on the night Avraham would receive the prophecy to sacrifice Yitzchak. Baalei Mussar say, just like Avraham's love to Yishmael was reignited when Yishmael came to visit him, when one returns to Hashem, Hashem's love to him will surely be reignited.

1. Someone told the Alexander Rebbe *zt'l* that his son wasn't *benching* properly. The Rebbe said, "Don't worry about that. Just make certain that you should *bench* out loud and with *kavanah*, and your child will soon begin *benching* properly too."

סור מרע - Evading even a Trace of Sin

When Hashem gave the Torah to the Jewish nation, the *malachim* said, “Give the Torah to us in heaven! Who are mortals that You should give the Torah to them?”

Hashem replied, “When you were in Avraham’s home you ate meat and milk [together]” (see 18:8). They transgressed the Torah, therefore, they lost the privilege of receiving the Torah (*Midrash Tehillim* 8).

The question is, Rashi (18:8) writes the *malachim* didn’t actually eat in Avraham’s home. As Rashi writes, “It looked like they were eating [but they weren’t really eating]. We learn from this that one shouldn’t deviate from the custom of the place.” So, if they didn’t eat meat and milk, why can’t they receive the Torah?

Apparently, *pretending* to eat meat and milk also disqualified them from receiving the Torah. The severity of an *aveirah* is so great that even to pretend to be eating *basar bechalav* is an imperfection, which disqualified the *malachim* from receiving the Torah.

When the *malachim* (appearing like travelers) came to Sedom, Lot told them (19:2), סורו נא אל בית עבדכם ולינו ורחצו רגליכם “Come to your servant’s house. Sleep and wash your feet. In the morning you can continue on your way.”

The order לינו ורחצו “sleep and wash your feet” indicate they should sleep with dust on their feet, and wash their feet in the morning. Rashi asks, “Is that the way of

people; to sleep and then to wash their feet...?”

Rashi answers, “Lot told the *malachim*, ‘If the people of Sedom come here and see that you’ve already washed your feet...they will have a complaint on me. They will say, ‘These people are in your house for two or three days already and you didn’t tell us!’ Therefore, Lot said that it is better they should be in his home with dirt on their feet, so it will appear that they just came in. This is the reason Lot told them, ‘Sleep first and wash your feet later.’”

Previously, in the *parashah*, it states that Avraham told the guests (18:4), יקח נא מעט מים ורחצו רגליכם “We will bring you some water, so you can wash your feet.” Rashi writes, “He thought they were Arabs who bow down to the dust on their feet and he was cautious that *avodah zarah* shouldn’t enter into his home. But Lot wasn’t concerned about that, so he told them to sleep first and then to wash their feet in the morning. As it states, לינו ורחצו רגליכם.”

How did Rashi know that Lot didn’t mind having *avodah zarah* in his home? Perhaps he minded, but this time he had no choice, because he was afraid of the people of Sedom.

The answer apparently is, if Lot would care about *avodah zarah*, he wouldn’t be lenient, even if that would make matters more difficult for him.

Because when it comes to sin, there are no compromises. Devotion to

keeping Hashem's decrees means there are no exceptions (unless *halachah* dictates otherwise).

Sometimes people have good 'excuses' and feel they 'need' to bring internet into the home for *parnassah*, for sales, for keeping up with family, etc. etc. They

should ask themselves, "Does this really validate bringing internet into the home? Would such a device be allowed entry into Avraham's house, even when there are good reasons to have it?" Remember Avraham's caution (in contrast to Lot's) regarding bringing avodah zarah into his home, and then reach a conclusion.

Yesurim Be'ahavah

The *malachim* told Lot (19:13), **כי משחיתים את המקום הזה**, "We will be destroying Sedom" therefore, "Who else do you have in this city? Your sons-in-law, sons and daughters and everything you own; take them out of this place, because we will be destroying it... Hashem sent us to destroy it."

The Midrash says that the *malachim* were punished for those words, and for 138 years they were banished from Heaven.

(138 years later, Yaakov saw in his dream *malachim* climbing up a ladder. They were these *malachim* who destroyed Sedom.²)

What was wrong with what they said?

According to some opinions, they were punished for arrogance, because they made it sound like they would destroy Sedom – and not Hashem. They shouldn't have said, **כי משחיתים אנחנו**, "We

are destroying the place..." rather, **כי משחית ה' את המקום**, "*Hashem* will destroy the place..." Another explanation is their sin was that they revealed Hashem's plan. Hashem wanted to keep His plans, regarding the destruction of Sedom, a secret, and the *malachim* revealed it to Lot and his family.

We see that Hashem wanted to conceal his plans, because Hashem was even hesitant about telling Avraham that He plans to destroy Sedom. As it states, **וה' אמר, המכסה אני מאברהם אשר אני עושה**, "Can I conceal from Avraham, what I am planning to do? **ואברהם היו יהיה לגוי גדול ועצום**, "Avraham will become a large nation..." Rashi writes, "Can I conceal it from Avraham? Behold he is beloved to me, and I will make him into a large nation."

Additionally, Rashi writes that Hashem said, "It isn't proper that I should destroy Sedom without Avraham knowing about it. I gave him this land,

2. The Eitz Yosef (commentary on Midrash) shows how 138 years end by the time Yaakov Avinu had his dream. Yitzchak was born the following year (because just before, the *malachim* were by Avraham and Sarah to tell them that they would bear a child in a year's time). Yitzchak was sixty when he had Yaakov. He was 63 when he received Yitzchak's *brachos*, and then he spent 14 years in the yeshiva of Shem and Ever. So, the calculation is $1 + 60 + 63 + 14 = 138$.

these five cities [around Sedom] are his... I called him אב המון גוים – אברהם, the father of many nations. Should I destroy the children and not tell the father, whom I love?” (18:17).

If it weren't for these above-mentioned reasons, Hashem would prefer not to tell Avraham either. Therefore, the *malachim* shouldn't have revealed to Lot that they were about to destroy Sedom. They should have told Lot to escape from Sedom without telling him the reason.

Reb Chaim Efraim Zeitchik *zt'l* asks, the destruction of Sedom was imminent. Anyway, the city was overturned within moments. So why couldn't the *malachim* say what they knew? And why is it considered such a terrible sin for which the *malachim* were barred from serving Hashem in heaven for 138 years?

Reb Chaim Efraim Zeitchik answers that

Hashem's punishments are never a drop greater than they need to be. When the *malachim* revealed to Lot and his family that Sedom would be destroyed, that added another moment to their distress. They suffered this bad news some moments before it happened. That suffering wasn't included in Hashem's decree. The *malachim* were punished for causing Lot and his family those few extra moments of anguish.

This information should give people *chizuk*, because they will know that they are never punished an iota more than they rightfully deserve – so why should they complain? In fact, the suffering is always far, far less than what they deserve. Hashem's compassion always lessens the punishment immensely. Keep these ideas in mind and you will be happy with your lot.

Everything is for the Good

“Avraham was tested ten times, and he passed all of them” (*Avos*). By the first and the last test Hashem said, לך לך (12:1, 22:2). By the first test, Hashem told Avraham לך לך, to leave his homeland to go to Eretz Yisrael. Rashi writes, לך לך: “You shall go for your pleasure and for your good.” Therefore, by the Akeidah, when Hashem told Avraham, לך לך אל ארץ המריה והעלהו שם לעולה, “Go to the land of Moriah and bring your son on the *mizbeiach*” it also means that it was for Avraham's benefit that he pass that test. But how could slaughtering one's own child be for one's own good?

But in retrospect, we see that Avraham only gained from the Akeidah. Yitzchak wasn't slaughtered, and Klal Yisrael earned great promises for the future.

As the Ramban (22:16) writes, “At first, Hashem promised Avraham he would have children, as many as the stars in the heavens (see 13:16). [After the Akeidah] Hashem added that since he did this great deed, Hashem swears by His holy name that Avraham's children will inherit the cities of their enemies (וירש זרעך את שער) (איוב). This promise contains a guarantee that sins won't ever cause his offspring to be destroyed, or to fall into their

enemies' hands forever. This promise guarantees that there will be a *geulah*, and we will be redeemed in the future."

The knife of the Akeidah is called *מאכלה*, eater (22:06) and Rashi writes "Bnei Yisrael benefit (eat) from the reward of the Akeidah."

On Rosh Hashanah we merit a good year in the merit of the Akeidah. The holy sefarim say that by reading the Akeidah every morning, *dinim*, harsh decrees, are removed from Klal Yisrael.

Also, Chazal say Yitzchak was born

with a female *neshamah* and he couldn't have children. At the Akeidah, he attained a masculine *neshamah*, and could have children.

So we see that the Akeidah was certainly לך לך, for Avraham's benefit. At first, it seemed detrimental; it seemed it would destroy Klal Yisrael. It is actually the origin of Klal Yisrael. If it weren't for the Akeidah, there wouldn't be Klal Yisrael. Because, (as we discuss several times in Torah Wellsprings) whenever something seems bad it is goodness concealed.

The Power of *Emunah Peshutah*

The Gemara (*Nedarim* 32.) teaches that Avraham was three years old when he recognized Hashem. With this awareness, he made it his life goal to train others to believe in Hashem too. The Midrash (42:8) writes, 'Avraham was on one side, and the entire world was on the other side.' Only he believed in Hashem, and he fought the false notions of the world until he taught them to believe in Hashem too. And all this time, his awareness in Hashem was on the level of *emunah*, alone, without any sign from Heaven that he was on the correct path. Reb Chaim Kuafman (*Mishchas HaShemen* p.81) writes that according to most *rishonim*, the first time Hashem revealed himself to Avraham was at the Bris Ben HaBesarim, when Avraham was seventy years old. This means from the age of three until 67 Avraham lived with *emunah* alone, without any clear, divine revelations.

Later on Avraham had revelations and prophecies, such as by the Bris Ben HaBesarim and other times. Hashem spoke with him, and they even had joined conversations (like when Avraham prayed for Sedom). When such occurred, he didn't only believe in Hashem. He knew. He experienced. He spoke with Hashem and Hashem spoke with him.

Nevertheless, Avraham continued serving Hashem with *emunah peshutah*. He didn't base his awareness in Hashem on those episodes of prophecy and revelation. Because Avraham realized that when he bases his awareness of Hashem on those revelations is an intellectual awareness, and one's intellect has limits. Therefore, he chose to serve Hashem with *emunah peshutah*, because the intellect is limited, but *emunah* is unlimited.

We don't have *nevuah*, nevertheless, there are times when we know Hashem

with our intellect, too. This can happen when one sees wondrous *hashgachah pratis*, or when one perceives the wonders of the Torah, or when one focuses on the miracles in nature, etc. These wonders are helpful; they give vigor and life to our *emunah*. But we shouldn't limit our devotion to Hashem based on those perception. When we are tested, our awareness of Hashem based on our intellect won't help us pass the test. *Emunah peshutah* will.³

The Yesod HaAvodah (Vol.4 2:7) writes, "The mouth is unable to express the great levels the *avos* attained, and the mind can't grasp it. Even the *malachim* weren't able to perceive the extent to their holiness... Nevertheless, Avraham passed the test of the Akeidah with *temimus* and *emunah peshutah*..."

At the Akeidah there were great paradoxes and contradictions. Rashi (22:12) writes, "Avraham said [to Hashem], 'Let me express my bewilderment: Before you told me that my continuation will come through Yitzchak. Then you said I should slaughter him. And now you are telling me that I shouldn't slaughter him.'

"Hakadosh Baruch Hu replied, 'I didn't change my words; I didn't transgress the covenant. When I said you should take Yitzchak, I didn't change my words, because I never told you to slaughter him. I told you to bring him on the *mizbeiach*. Now that you brought him, take him off.'"

Avraham's questions at the Akeidah is hinted at in the words, וירא את המקום מרחוק,

3. In year תשע"ח, when I was in Miron, I heard the following story from a very special Yid and *talmid chacham*, who told me that the story happened to him:

His kidneys weren't functioning. Every night, he did dialysis. He paid \$180,000 He prepaid \$180,000 for the cost of the operation and the hospital stay, and even had a kidney donor ready. He was almost ready for a kidney transplant. The problem was, the doctors told him that before they do the transplant, he will have to undergo dental work. As long as his teeth and gums were infected it could ruin the success of the transplant. But his teeth needed a lot of work, (130,000 shekels worth of work) and he couldn't afford it. So, the transplant was pushed off for the time being.

He went to Miron and prayed that Hashem should do a "small" miracle for him, and heal him, without needing a transplant. (He thought he was praying for a small miracle. He didn't realize that he would need a great miracle for such a thing to happen. Medically, kidney failure as he had it, never begun working again.)

After those *tefillos*, he felt that he doesn't need the dialysis anymore. Doctors checked him, and were shocked: He was totally healed.

This is the strength of *tefillos*. *Tefillos* can bring salvations, beyond the rules of nature. This episode strengthened his *emunah* (and it strengthens the *emunah* of those who hear the story). However, this story, and similar stories and indications such as this one, shouldn't be the root and source of our devotion to Hashem. Because our intellect is limited. Therefore, we should use these stories for inspiration alone, and then serve Hashem with *emunah peshutah*.

“He saw the מקום from the distance.” המקום hints to Hashem. Avraham saw Hashem from the distance, which means his intellectual awareness of Hashem wasn’t clear, because his intellect was challenged by questions and contradictions.

The Yesod HaAvodah adds that מקום refers to Yaakov Avinu, about whom it states, ויפגע במקום, “Yaakov came to the מקום.” The Torah says, וירא את המקום מרחוק, Avraham saw that Yaakov’s birth seemed far-fetched. Because if Yitzchak will be sacrificed, how can Yaakov be born?

If Avraham would confront the test of the Akeidah with his great intellectual awareness, he would fail. So Avraham approached the Akeidah with *emunah peshutah*, and thereby passed the test.

The Yesod HaAvodah writes, “Avraham told himself, ‘I’m ignorant; I don’t know Hashem’s ways. A human being can’t grasp the Creator’s thoughts...’ So he relied on his *emunah peshutah*, and with *emunah peshutah* he passed the test.

Reb Mendel of Vitebsk זת”ל explains that all of Avraham’s tests were due to contradictions. Things didn’t add up and make sense.

For example, one of Avraham Avinu’s ten tests was that he came to Eretz Yisrael at Hashem’s behest, and then he

finds a famine precisely in that land. Why would Hashem tell him to come to a land where he won’t be able to stay there? This was a paradox, a question, and he passed the test with his *emunah peshutah*.

Nimrod warned Avraham that if he doesn’t bow down to idols, he will throw him into a burning furnace in Or Kasdim. Avraham refused to bow down and Nimrod threw him into the furnace. Miraculously, the fire didn’t harm Avraham. Why isn’t this episode of *mesirus nefesh* counted as one of Avraham’s ten tests? It is because the *avos* were always ready to be *moser nefesh* for Hashem. That wasn’t considered a great test for them. Their tests were specifically when their intellectual awareness of Hashem was challenged with contradictions. At those times, they had to admit to themselves that their minds are too feeble to understand Hashem and His ways, so they should serve Him with *emunah peshutah*, and with *emunah peshutah* they passed their tests.⁴

When Lot told his sons-in-law that Hashem was going to destroy Sedom, they laughed. They didn’t believe it. As it states (19:14), ויהי כמצחק בעיני התניו, “It was like a joke in the sons-in-law’s eyes.”

4. Some explain that the test of Or Kasdim can be compared to the foundations of a building. The foundations are laid deep in the ground and aren’t seen from the outside. Similarly, Avraham Avinu’s *mesirus nefesh* at Or Kasdim is at the foundation of Avraham’s *avodas Hashem*. All ten tests were built on the foundation of Avraham Avinu’s initial *mesirus nefesh*. It is the unseen foundation, and therefore it is not counted among the ten revealed tests.

The Shem MiShmuel (תר"פ) asks, miracles were happening in Sedom. As it states (19:11), ואת האנשים אשר פתח הבית הכו, בפנורים, "The people [of Sedom] who were by [Lot's] doorway were smitten with blindness..." The sons-in-law knew about that miracle. Why was it hard for them to imagine that Hashem will soon destroy Sedom?

The Shem MiShmuel answers that the plague of פנורים, blindness, that smote the people at the time wasn't a physical blindness. It was a spiritual blindness, which prevented them from seeing Hashem's miracles.

Miracles were happening in front of their

eyes, only they were blind and they didn't recognize them.

Miracles happen to us, too, only we don't open our eyes to see them.

Let those times we see *hashgachah pratis* waken us to believe that everything is run by Hashem. And even when there are contradictions and questions, recognize that our perception is limited. We aren't capable of understanding everything. Believe in Hashem with *temimus* and *emunah peshutah*, and with that we can pass all tests.

Where One Goes is Destined by Hashem

Avraham asked his guests to wash their feet. Rashi (18:4) explains, "He thought they were Arabs who worship the dust of their feet..."

The Shinover Rav *zt'l* (*Divrei Yechezkel*) asks, "Are there such fools who bow down to the dust on their feet? We never heard of such a thing before!"

He answers that this alludes to people who think their *parnassah* comes from their traveling to this place or to that place. When they succeed, they "bow down" in gratitude to the dust on their feet. They think their feet and their travels earned them their wealth. They don't realize that Hashem gave them their wealth.

The *Sefer Chassidim* (309) describes how a person becomes rich. It isn't because of his wisdom, and it isn't because he

thought of going someplace, or of investing somewhere. The *Sefer Chassidim* writes, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu sends *malachim* to put into the hearts of merchants to bring merchandise to a specific location where a specific businessman is located. The *malachim* also place a desire into that businessman to buy that merchandise. And then the *malachim* place into the hearts of consumers to go there to buy the merchandise, or the angels will place into the heart of the businessman to go to them, to sell it to them..." So where one goes, and the decisions one makes, are really entirely in Hashem's hands. Hashem sends *malachim* to direct things. If one wants to express gratitude, he should express it to Hashem, alone. It wasn't his wisdom or his going here or there, it was Hashem's *hashgachah*.

During the years of Communist Russia, when even a *bris milah* might be considered counter-revolutionary, Reb Mordechai Pogromansky *zt'l* traveled with a *mohel*, with *mesirus nefesh* to perform a *bris milah*. They accidentally boarded the train heading in the wrong direction, when they finally when they realized it, they had to wait on the train for a few more stops and then get off and wait for a train to bring them back. The *mohel* was very upset about this error and delay. Reb Mordechai Pogromansky told him the *pasuk* (21:14), ותלך ותתע במדבר באר ושב [Hagar]...strayed in the deserts of Beer Sheva." The Targum Yonoson says that this means she lost her way, and was wandering about the deserts near Beer Sheva.

Rashi however says that it means, חזרה לגילולי בית אביה, "She returned to the *avodah zarah* of her father's home."

Where is it implied in this *pasuk* that Hagar was doing *avodah zarah*?

The answer is, the *pasuk* states, ותתע, that she wandered and that she went the wrong way. In Avraham's home, they were taught that one never wanders and one never goes the wrong way, because wherever one goes that is where Hashem sent him. Since it states Hagar felt that she was wandering this means Hagar returned to the *avodah zarahs* of her father's house. (The Kotzker *zt'l* has a similar commentary.)

Reb Mordechai Pogromansky said this *vort* to the *mohel*, to encourage him

to believe that there's a reason why they had taken the extra detour. Then someone approached them. He said, "Do you know where there's a *mohel*. I have an eight-day-old son, and I need a *mohel*..." They discovered that they didn't stray there, erroneously. They came there to perform a *bris milah*.

Rebbe Yechezkel of Kozhmir *zt'l* said: A person takes thousands of steps each day. If he doesn't believe that each step was destined and planned from Above, then his *brachah*, המוכין מצעדי גבר, "Who prepares the steps of man" was a ברכה לבטלה, *brachah* said in vain.

Reb Eliyahu Dessler *zt'l* asked the Chazon Ish *zt'l*, "We have a rule, מעלין בקודש ואין מורידין, we should always go from one level of *kedushah* to a higher level. We should never descend. In *Shemonah Esrei*, we should also be מעלין בקודש, gradually asking for holier and greater matters. But that doesn't seem to be the order of *Shemonah Esrei*. We begin *Shemonah Esrei* requesting for wisdom (for Torah) for *teshuvah*, for repentance, and then we descend and ask for material matters, such as health and *parnassah*. Shouldn't we ask for health and *parnassah* first, and then ask for Torah and *teshuvah*?"

The Chazon Ish replied, "What do you think?"

Reb Dessler replied, "The entire *Shemonah Esrei* is about serving Hashem. We daven for *parnassah* so we can have a calm mind to serve Hashem.

We daven for health so we can have strength to serve Hashem. That is not going down in levels." The Chazon Ish gave a different answer:

When one prays for *parnassah*, essentially he is saying, "Hashem, even if I have a job and I have income, I am incapable of earning *parnassah* on my own. Only You can give me *parnassah*." And when he prays for health, he is

saying, "The doctors can't help me. Only You can." These *brachos* are going up a level, because he is reaching extremely high levels in *emunah*.

The Chazon Ish added that requests for Torah and *teshuvah* must come first, because only after one has the purity of Torah and *teshuvah* can he recognize that everything is from Hashem.

Bitachon – Trust in Hashem

In the times of the Chovas HaLevavos, chemists tried to turn regular stones into gold and silver. The Chovas HaLevavos (*Shaar HaBitachon, Pesichah*) writes that if someone would know how to do this, he would certainly live a peaceful and tranquil life. He would never have financial worries. All he has to do is take a stone and turn it into gold and buy whatever he wants or needs.

The Chovas HaLevavos writes that someone who has *bitachon* will be just as calm, and even calmer, because he knows that whatever he needs, Hashem will supply it for him.

Lot pleaded to the people of Sedom that they shouldn't do anything to his guests, "כי על כן באו בצל קורתי, "because they came to my home."

This is difficult, because that was exactly the Sedomite's complaint: Why did you bring guests into your home?

The Chofetz Chaim answers that Lot was telling them, "They came to my home; they trusted me, and it isn't proper to harm someone who placed his trust in you."

Even the *resha'im* of Sedom understood that. Because when someone places his trust in you, you shouldn't let him down. It follows, that when we place our trust in Hashem, we should feel confident that Hashem will surely help us.

Yishmael was ill, lying under a bush. He needed water. Suddenly, (21:19) ויפקח אלקים את עיניה ותרא באר מים ותלך ותמלא את Hagar's eyes and she saw a well of water. She went there and filled her thermos with water, and she gave it to her son to drink."

The Midrash (53) isn't happy with Hagar, being that she filled up the flask up to the top. She should have taken just enough water for the present need. As the Midrash writes, הדא אמר מחוסרת אמונה, היתה, "This teaches us Hagar didn't have perfect *emunah*." If she believed fully in Hashem, she would have filled the flask enough for her son to drink now, and Hashem would help them find more water later on.

Reb Leib Chasman (*Or Yahel* p.43) asks, what did Hagar do wrong? Her son,

Yishmael, was ill. Miraculously, a well sprouted in the middle of the desert. Shouldn't she fill the flask up to the top, so there will be water for tomorrow, too? To answer this question, Reb Leib Chasman gives the following *mashal*: Someone is riding in the king's chariot together with the king, and he brings along some food for the way. If the king finds out about his food bag, he will be upset. The king will say, "Why did you feel it was important to bring along your own food? Didn't you realize that I

would feed you?"

This was Hagar's error. Hashem performed a miracle for her son. This means her son is in good hands. They have nothing to worry about. And if she does worry and she prepares for the future that means she lacks *emunah*.

Let us apply these lessons to ourselves. Hashem gives us all our needs, and always helps us. It is as though we are riding in the King's chariot. We don't have to be worried about the future.

The Desire to Serve Hashem – our primary obligation

When one reviews the great deeds of Avraham Avinu, one notices that he is praised primarily for his *desire* to serve Hashem and for his longing to help his fellow man, and not necessarily for what he actually accomplished.

Rebbe Tzaddok HaCohen *zt'l* (*Divrei Sofrim* 21) writes, "From all the *gemilus chasadim* and *hachnasas orchim* that Avraham Avinu did, the Torah only tells us about what he did to the *malachim*, which actually wasn't *gemilus chasadim* at all since *malachim* don't eat. Avraham's part in this deed was his desire. This shows us that this is the main thing..."

Similarly, the *akeidah* is mostly about desire because ultimately, Avraham Avinu never sacrificed Yitzchak. Rebbe Tzaddok HaCohen notes this as another indicator that our primary obligation is to desire to do good.

Chazal tell us that the אפר, ashes, of Yitzchak Avinu are gathered on the

mizbeiach. We pray that Hashem look at those ashes, and bestow kindness on us. The question is: Yitzchak was never slaughtered as a *korban*, so which ashes are we referring to? The answer is, *Chazal* (*Shabbos* 63) tell us, "When one desires to do a mitzvah and there's an אונם, accident, and he isn't able to, the Torah considers it as if he did it." Avraham desired to do the *akeidah*, and therefore Hashem considers it as though Yitzchak was sacrificed on the *mizbeiach*. There were no ashes, but due to Avraham's attempt to do Hashem's will, Hashem considers it as if the *akeidah* took place, and He even looks at the ashes that would have been there, if there were an *akeidah*.

These ideas are very encouraging for the people who yearn to serve Hashem, but often find that they aren't succeeding. They must know that Hashem wants us to desire and to try. The results aren't entirely in our hands, and the desire is the primary part of *avodas Hashem*.

Mitzvas Hachnasas Orchim

This is an ideal week to discuss the great mitzvah of *hachnasas orchim*. At the beginning of the *parashah*, the Torah elaborates on how Avraham Avinu performed this mitzvah.

Also, at the end of the *parashah* it states (21:33), וַיֵּטַע אֱשֶׁל בְּבֵּאֵר שֶׁבַע, "[Avraham] pitched an *eishel* in Be'er Sheva." Rashi writes, "An *אשל* is an orchard, so they could bring fruits to the guests when they eat their meals.... Another explanation, *אשל* is a hotel for guests, where there were all kinds of fruits."⁵

אשל is *roshei teivos* for אכילה שתייה לוויה, food, drink, and escort, or אכילה שתייה לינה, food, drink, and board, which Avraham provided for the guests traveling by.

The *parashah* also tells us about the corrupt ways of the people of Sedom, who refused to do *hachnasas orchim*. So, we see that *hachnasas orchim* is a primary theme in this week's *parashah*, and it is indeed a very special mitzvah.

Fortunate are those who partake in it.

My grandfather, Rebbe Moshe Mordechai of Lelov *zt'l*, was once telling his chassidim about a certain

Yemenite tzaddik who fed hundreds of war refugees.

One of the chassidim added, "I heard that this tzaddik was also a *chavrusah* with one of the giant kabbalists..."

Rebbe Moshe Mordechai replied, "Why are you mentioning that? We're discussing that he fed hundreds of homeless Yidden..."

The Maharil Diskin *zt'l* excelled in the mitzvah of *hachnasas orchim*. Once, he was learning when suddenly he put his *sefer* down and went over to one of his elderly guests and helped him take the soft parts of the challah out of the crust.

People asked him, "You were so immersed in your studies. How did you notice that the elderly man needed help?"

The Maharil Diskin replied, "When Hashem was speaking with Avraham, how did Avraham notice that three guests arrived? The answer is, when one is very dedicated to a mitzvah, he can be speaking with the *Shechinah*, he can be learning Torah, and when an opportunity to do that mitzvah arrives, he will know..."⁶

5. The *pasuk* states, וַיֵּטַע אֱשֶׁל בְּבֵּאֵר שֶׁבַע וַיִּקְרָא שְׁם בְּשֵׁם ה' אֱלֹהֵי עוֹלָם. Rashi explains, "Through this *אשל*, Hakadosh Baruch Hu was called 'G-d of the entire world.' Because after people ate and drank, Avraham would tell them 'Bless the One from Who you ate. You think I gave you food, you are eating from the Creator of the world...'"

6. The Baal HaTanya *zy'a* and the Tzemech Tzedek *zt'l* were studying together when the Baal HaTanya heard a child crying. He quickly went over to the child to calm him. The Tzemech Tzedek asked his grandfather, "How did you hear the child crying?" They were so immersed in their learning; the Tzemech Tzedek didn't hear anything.

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

The Avnei Nezer opened the window, and showed him a tannery across the road, "All you'll find in that store is hides. But when those hides are turned into tefillin they become holy. Likewise, you are now our guest. You are being used for a mitzvah. So you have become holy. You deserve people should wait on you."

Similarly, the Sfas Emes *zt'l* taught that a guest is a *cheftza shel mitzvah* (an item used for a mitzvah) and there is a *kedushah* on him.

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

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

Reb Chaim Brim *zt'l* was once speaking in learning with the Chazon Ish *zt'l* late at night, until he missed the last bus back to Yerushalayim . So he stayed that night in the Chazon Ish's home. Reb Chaim Brim said that the Chazon Ish, the Steipler, and the Steipler's *rebbetzin* (who lived in the Chazon Ish's home) were all waiting on him. The Chazon Ish was giving the orders; one brought *negel vasser*, one brought food, one prepared a bed, and so on. Reb Chaim Brim was uncomfortable that they were all serving

him, and said to the Chazon Ish, "Please don't do this for me."

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

Two Yidden came to Kozhmir late at night, and were looking for a place to sleep. All homes were dark. The only light shone from the home of Rebbe Yechezkel of Kozmir, *zt'l*, as he was awake studying Torah. Unaware that this was the Rebbe's home, they knocked at his door, and asked if they could stay the night. The Rebbe invited them in joyously, served them supper, and gave them a place to sleep.

The *gabai*, who slept in the adjoining room, awoke from the commotion. He was certain the voices he was hearing were *neshamos* who had come down from heaven so the Rebbe could rectify them. Too frightened to see *neshamos*, he remained in his room and didn't come out.

The next day, in the beis medresh, the *gabai* was telling everyone about the souls who came to the Rebbe's home. The Rebbe said, "It's true that two precious souls came to me last night, but they didn't come for me to fix their *neshamos*. They came to fix my *neshamah*," for they gave him the opportunity to do *hachnasas orchim*.

The Baal HaTanya replied, "Believe me, I can hear the painful cry of a Yid from the other side of the world."

The Segulos of Hachnasas Orchim

The Baal HaTanya zy'a didn't have children for many years after his *chasunah*. He asked the Maggid of Mezritch zy'a for a *segulah*. The Maggid told him במה יזכה נער, "How can one merit having a child, את אורחו, by hosting guests" (*Tehillim* 119:9). The Maggid added that the father of the Baal Shem Tov zt'l merited bearing this holy son in the merit of *hachnasas orchim*.

It states, הא לכם זרע (*Bereishis* 47:23). ה"א is *roshei teivos* for הכנסת אורחים, implying that with *hachnasas orchim*, one can merit bearing children.

Avraham Avinu and Sarah Imeinu merited children due to *hachnasas orchim*. Sarah was eighty-nine years old, and she was still barren. Avraham was ninety-nine. But after they did the mitzvah of *hachnasas orchim* the *malachim* told her that she would bear a child.

The Ishah Shunamis also bore a child in the merit that she hosted Elisha HaNavi (see *Melachim ll* ch.4).

The Midrash (*Tanchuma Ki Seitze* 2)

states, "There are mitzvos whose reward are children, like Sarah who hosted guests, and the Shunamis [woman] who hosted Elisha."

The Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 103:) discusses the great benefits earned from practicing *hachnasas orchim*. Among the gains are מעלמת עינים מן הרשעים. Rashi explains, "Hashem doesn't look at his sins... Hashem pretends not to see his aveiros..."⁷

On the words, ויטע אשל (21:33), the Rabbeinu b'Chaya writes that the only other place where it states the word ויטע is (*Bereishis* 2) ויטע גן בעדן מקדם "He planted a garden in Eden." This hints that for the mitzvah of *hachnasas orchim*, one will merit Gan Eden.

Hachnasas orchim is also rewarded in this world. As we say every day, אלו דברים שאדם אוכל פירותיהם בעולם הזה... הכנסת אורחים, "These are the things that one eats the fruits [of his good deeds] in this world..." and one of the mitzvos listed is *hachnasas orchim*. There are many gains to be gotten from *hachnasas orchim*. Fortunate are those who engage in it.⁸

7. This seems to be contradicting the Gemara (*Bava Kama* 50.) כל האומר הקב"ה ותן יותרו חייו, that Hashem doesn't overlook sins.

But it isn't a contradiction, because generally Hashem doesn't overlook sin. But when one feeds the poor, without thinking about whether the person deserves to be helped or not, מדה כנגד מדה, Hashem will bestow kindness onto him, without measuring whether he deserves the kindness or not.

8. *Chazal* say, גדולה הכנסת אורחים יותר מקבלת פני השכינה, "Hosting guests is greater than welcoming the *Shechinah*." בדרך צחות, we can explain that welcoming the *Shechinah* is once a month, as we say in *Kiddush Levanah*, לא זכו ישראל אלא להקביל פני אביהם, שבשמים פעם אחת בחודש דים, "If the Jewish nation would only merit welcoming the face of

Torah Purifies the Soul

The Imrei Yosef *zt'l* of Spinka told the following *mashal*:

Someone was in a room where there were barrels filled with expensive wine. The smell was intoxicating, and he wanted a drink. But he only had one dirty cup. There was no water around, so he rinsed the cup with wine, and then poured himself a cup of wine to drink.

The *nimshal* is, ideally one should learn Torah without any sins at all, in a state of purity. It isn't proper to study Torah when one is sullied with sins. But what should one do if he has sins? The

counsel is, he should learn Torah. The Torah will cleanse him, and then he can learn Torah properly, free from sins.

This lesson is hinted at in the *pasuk* (18:4), יוקח נא מעט מים ורחצו רגליכם והשענו תחת העץ. The Midrash states that מים in this *pasuk* represents Torah. The Imrei Yosef explains that the *pasuk* is saying that when one wants to learn Torah, but he sees that he is impure by his *aveiros*, יוקח נא מעט מים, he should learn some Torah, ורחצו רגליכם, and wash with it his lowliness and his sins, והשענו תחת העץ, and then he can immerse himself in Torah, and learn Torah with purity.⁹

their Father in heaven once a month, it would be enough..." But *hachnasas orchim* should be יותר מקבלת פני השכינה, more often.

Yet, although we should increase the performance of *hachnasas orchim*, we must always remember to do so within the guidelines of *tznius*. When the guests asked, איה שרה אשתך, "where is Sarah...", Avraham replied, הנה באהל, "She's in the tent." Sara wouldn't come out between the men, as they conducted themselves with *tznius* even when doing *hachnasas orchim*.

The Gemara (*Moed Kattan* 28.) states that it came Rav Chiya's time to die and the Malach HaMaves was trying to take his *neshamah*, but he wasn't able to. The Malach HaMaves appeared like a pauper and knocked at Rav Chiya's door, asking for bread, which Rav Chiya brought out to him. The Malach HaMaves said, "I see that you have compassion on the poor; why don't you have compassion on me?" and the Malach HaMaves showed him a rod of fire. That's when Rav Chiya knew that he wasn't a pauper but the Malach HaMaves. Rav Chiya agreed to let him take his soul.

This Gemara needs explanation, for although Rav Chiya had compassion on the poor, there is no reference that he was prepared to do this *chesed* even if it meant dying. So why should Rav Chiya agree to do a *chesed* for the Malach HaMaves and lose his life?

But the answer is, whenever Rav Chiya gave *tzedakah*, he did so with all his heart and soul. He gave *tzedakah* with *mesirus nefesh*. Therefore, the Malach HaMaves told him, "If you are ready to sacrifice so much for the poor, why don't you agree to die, to do *chesed* with me too?"

9. The Imrei Yosef *zt'l* adds that טובים מאורות שברא אלקינו, can mean: Hashem created good *tzaddim*, יצרם בדעת בשכל ובהשכל, but Hashem created in them a wise *yetzer hara* who

As children, Reb Dovid and Reb Chaim Greineman lived with their uncle, the Chazon Ish *z't'l*. (Their father, Reb Shmuel Greineman, was stuck in America due to the war, and wasn't able to come to Eretz Yisrael.)

The Chazon Ish taught them *masechta Chulin*, and when they were finished, the child, Dovid, asked the Chazon Ish to test him.

The Chazon Ish tested him and said that he knows it very well, but it wasn't sufficient. *Chazal* say, *שיהיה דברי תורה מחודדים בפך שאם ישאל לך אדם דבר אל תגמגם ואמר מיד*, "Torah must be sharp in your mouth, so if someone asks you something you won't answer after stuttering, rather you will answer immediately." The Chazon Ish told him that his fluency in the *masechta* hasn't yet reached that level, and he should review the Gemara again.

After another review and after another test, the Chazon Ish repeated this Gemara, and said that although there was improvement, it still lacked *אמור לו מיד*, to answer immediately. He told him to review the Gemara another time.

After another review, he returned to the Chazon Ish, and once again the Chazon Ish repeated the Gemara. This time he said that now the answers were *מיד*, immediate, but they were still lacking in

מחודדים בפך, that it should be sharp in the mouth.

Dovid reviewed the Gemara yet another time, and this time he received the Chazon Ish's approval.

When Reb Dovid's son, heard this story, he said, "Now I understand why my father was an expert in *masechta Chulin*."

When Reb Moshe Greineman was eleven years old, he studied in Yeshivas Tiferes Tzion in Bnei Brak. His parents lived in Yerushalayim, so he would sleep in his grandparent's home in Bnei Brak (in the home of Reb Shmuel Greineman).

His grandmother (who was the Chazon Ish's sister) told him, "I see that you have extra time in the afternoon. I suggest you use this time to review the Gemara you're learning in cheder. You'll show me which pages you reviewed, I'll test you, and I will give you a present; a ball-point pen."

Once, when Moshe wanted to be tested, the Gemara was missing. Another member of the house had already taken it. His grandmother told him that she could test him even if she doesn't have a Gemara to look inside.

Reb Meir joyfully assumed that he won't be caught by a mistake. But when he said Abaya instead of Rava, his grandmother corrected him, and he admitted that he

lures them to sin. Nevertheless, *כח וגבורה נתן בהם*, Hashem gave the tzaddikim the strength and the ability to overcome the *yetzer hara*, *בקרוב תבל*, by learning Torah, for Torah is the *תבלין*, spice, for overcoming the *yetzer hara*. As *Chazal* say, "I created the *yetzer hara*, and I created the Torah as its *תבלין*, spice."

made a mistake. He asked her how she knew the Gemara so well. She replied, "When we were young, we were three sisters, and our brother, the Chazon Ish. The Chazon Ish was learning the same chapter as you are (שנים אוחזין), and he reviewed it so many times, until all of us knew it by heart.

The Menoras HaMeor gives a *mashal* about someone who had three friends. He was extremely close to one of his friends. They spent most of their day together. He was also close to his second friend, but not as close as to the first one. They would meet almost every day, though not for a very long time. He also had a third friend whom he hardly saw. Even when they met, their conversations were brief.

One day, he received a letter in the mail, summoning him to court, to be tried for some felony that he was accused of. He asked his best friend to come with him to court, but his best friend refused, explaining, "If the court sees that I'm supporting you, I'm afraid I'll also be suspected of partnering with you and may be arrested."

The second friend agreed to walk up to the courthouse, but he wouldn't go any

further. He wouldn't enter the court room. The third friend said he would go with him to court and would remain throughout the court case.

A person has three friends: (1) money (2) family (3) and Torah and mitzvos. He is always occupied with the first friend, as he spends most of his day earning money. He spends less time with his second friend, and the third friend even less.

After 120 years when he is summoned before the heavenly court for judgment, his best friend, money, doesn't even walk him to the grave. The money stays in the house, and he is brought to the cemetery without it. His family walks him to his grave, but no further. When the funeral is over, they all return home. They don't enter the heavenly court with him. Only Torah and mitzvos, which he seldom saw in his lifetime, remain with him in the heavenly court.

We should seek to be as close as we can to that friend, so he will speak in our favor in court, because he is the only one who is willing to help us. No one else will be there, only the Torah and mitzvos one acquired in his lifetime.