

The boy proceeded to obtain a large jar which he partially filled with plants for the caterpillar to eat and a stick for it to climb on. Every day, he would watch his pet grow, as he replaced the plants. One day, the caterpillar climbed up the stick and began to act strangely. He called his mother, who explained that the caterpillar was moving on to its next stage in life by creating a cocoon from which it would metamorphasize into a butterfly. The little boy was thrilled with the changes his pet caterpillar would experience. He would watch daily for the emergence of the butterfly, until one day it happened. A small hole appeared in the cocoon and the butterfly began to struggle to get out. Shortly thereafter, the boy's excitement changed to concern, as the boy saw the butterfly struggling to get out. It seemed an almost impossible task. In the boy's mind, the butterfly appeared desperate, as nothing was happening. No progress.

Out of concern for his pet's welfare, the boy decided to help it along. He went to get scissors and then snipped the cocoon to make the hole bigger. The butterfly quickly emerged, but all was not good. The butterfly had a swollen body and small, shriveled wings. He continued to watch the butterfly expecting that, at any moment, the wings would dry out, enlarge and expand to support the swollen body. He was certain that, in short time, the body would shrink and the wings would expand. He was wrong. Neither happened. The butterfly spent the rest of its life crawling around with a swollen body and shriveled wings. It never was able to fly.

Upset, the boy asked his mother to find out why his butterfly did not seem to thrive. She spoke with a scientist who explained that, by easing the butterfly's struggle, her son had inadvertently relegated the butterfly to a handicapped existence. The butterfly was supposed to struggle. By struggling to push its way through the tiny opening of the cocoon, the fluids in its body were being pushed back into its wings. Without the struggle, the butterfly would never ever fly.

As we travel the road of life, we must remember that struggle is a critical part of any growth experience. It is struggle that gives us the ability to fly.

Avraham Avinu is the father of struggle. His successful withstanding of the *Asarah Nisyonos*, Ten Trials, set the stage for his confirmation as our Patriarch. The **Koznitzer Maggid, zl**, writes (*Avodas Yisrael, Parashas Vayeira*): "When Hashem tests a person (it makes sense), at the crucial moment of trial, Hashem conceals His *kedushah*, Holiness, and limits man's cognition of Him." The reason is simple: if man were to be clear in his understanding of Hashem, if no ambiguity would be allowed to creep into his mind, it would diminish the impact of the *nisayon*. The struggle must continue unabated and unfettered. This is what is meant by our *pasuk*, *Va'yaar es ha'makom meirachok*, "And (he) perceived the place from afar." Explains the **Chidushei HaRim, makom**, place, is reference to Avraham's spiritual plateau. Thus, on the third day as Avraham was getting closer to seeing the conclusion of the trial, he saw the place from afar. His spiritual status was tested even further, and he saw the place becoming more distant from him.

At that crucial moment, as Avraham was about to slaughter his only son, Yitzchak, one would think that Hashem would bring him closer, to buttress his faith, to show him that He would be there with him, to sustain him through his ordeal. That is not, however, what

happened. On the contrary! Instead of coming closer, Hashem distanced Himself from Avraham, thereby increasing the difficulty of the test! The Satan did everything to swat Avraham. In addition, Hashem had distanced Himself. Our Patriarch had no support. He was floundering in a sea of darkness with no visible means to save himself. Nonetheless, Avraham prevailed. At that moment, Avraham was rewarded that his descendants would have the same resolute forbearance to withstand the demanding tests, under the most inhumane conditions. Struggle allows us to fly! Struggle gives us the ability to soar!

This idea is underscored by the **Baal Shem Tov, zl**, who explains that Hashem leads us like a father who is teaching his young son to walk. Every time the boy takes a few steps in the father's direction, the father moves back, compelling his son to take a few more steps. At times, the child cannot handle the distance, and he falls. So the father starts over again. Each time, the child develops greater proficiency and self-confidence. Veritably, there are instances when the child falls and even hurts himself, causing him to cry with pain, but anyone with a modicum of intelligence understands that this is how the child will learn to walk.

### Va'ani Tefillah

**ברוך אתה ד' הקל הקדוש – Baruch Atah Hashem HaKel HaKadosh. Blessed are You Hashem O Holy G-d.**

*Baruch*, blessed, is an expression of gratitude. This blessing, however, does not mention any of Hashem's acts of kindness. For what is the expression of thanks intended? **Horav Avigdor Miller, zl**, offers a few answers: First, the superiority of *Klal Yisrael* is the greatness of their G-d (we must not forget this). Second, the holiness of Hashem is *Klal Yisrael's* reward, that we join Him in *Olam Habba*, the World to Come. Hashem concealed two matters from even His greatest prophets: 1) comprehending the afterlife; 2) recognizing His true glory. In other words, the ecstasy of the afterlife consists of viewing the true glory of Hashem. Therefore, the greater Hashem's holiness, the greater will be our joy in experiencing our eternal reward. Thus, this *brachah* is an expression for His choice of *Klal Yisrael* as His People, because: 1) His holiness is our source of pride; 2) His holiness will ultimately be our source of joy in the afterlife.

Dedicated in loving memory of our dear

father and grandfather

Arthur I. Genshaft

יצחק בן נחום ישראל ז"ל

נפטר חי' חשוון תשל"ט

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### TORAH THOUGHTS ON THE PARSHA

**ויאמר מהרי שלש סאים קמח סלה לועי ועשי עונות**  
**And he said, "Hurry! Three se'ahs of meal, fine flour!"**  
**(18:6)**

*Kemach* is meal; *solas* is fine flour. They are not the same. The *Talmud Bava Metziah 87a* wonders how we reconcile these contrasting "flours" in the same cakes. They explain that Avraham Avinu asked for fine flour. Sarah *Imeinu* responded with inferior flour. *Chazal* conclude from here, that we may derive that a woman is stingier than a man toward guests. Anyone who studies Torah understands that this dialogue between Avraham and Sarah contains more than meets the eye. Especially noteworthy is the fact that Hashem had earlier instructed Avraham to listen to Sarah, because she was greater than him with regard to *nevuah*, prophecy. Moreover, we find in *Sefer Mishlei* that Avraham praised Sarah for her open hand in doling out food to travelers. As I said, this is another perspective which demands an additional level of understanding of the dialogue. For this, we must plumb the depths of Torah exposition.

The **Chasam Sofer** illuminates the debate (*Derashos chelek bais daf 403*), explaining that Avraham Avinu's hospitality towards wayfarers consisted of two components: physical nourishment; and spiritual sustenance. Indeed, Avraham would employ the physical provision to cultivate a conversation about G-d and spiritual growth. Thus, the **Chasam Sofer** explains that the debate between Avraham and Sarah concerning the quality of flour to serve the guests was not referring to physical flour, but rather, the spiritual definition (with regard to Torah study) of *kemach*, inferior flour, and *solas*, fine flour.

In the *Talmud Nedarim 38a*, *Chazal* state that the laws of the Torah were intended for all of *Klal Yisrael*, with *pilpul*, dialectic, to be reserved for Moshe *Rabbeinu*. Hashem taught Moshe a methodology by which to derive keen insights from the Torah's text. Moshe, however, generously imparted this methodology to all of *Klal Yisrael*. [*Maharasha* explains that, while the entire law applies to the entire nation, the issue at hand was concerning the *study* of Torah's text and the corollary capacity to rule on the Torah, which was to be the prerogative of Moshe alone, and his descendants.]

The **Chasam Sofer** continues: Hashem sought to impart the Torah to *Klal Yisrael* in a clear-cut, unambiguous state, leaving no room for any logical dialectical. Moshe, however, was hoping to increase the nation's merits by giving each man the opportunity to delve deeper and deeper, plumbing the depths of Torah knowledge, exerting himself, diligently applying himself to its study and perfection of its knowledge. Is this better than error-free, absolutely – perfect Torah?

There is also the fear that, through the application of one's own logic, he might approach the *halachic* application with tainted logic. This was the "debate" between Hashem and Moshe, and, likewise, says the *Chasam Sofer*, it was the debate between Avraham and Sarah.

Our patriarch insisted on *solas*, fine flour, Torah in its pristine *halachic* form, leaving no room for dialectic, allowing for no false logic, no misguided analysis to creep in. (We have witnessed throughout history that those whose beliefs are misguided think along the same lines in order to validate their ignominious deeds.) Sarah insisted on *kemach*. Let the people learn, study, exert effort, toil in Torah, submerge in its depths until they bring up its pearls of wisdom. Moshe *Rabbeinu* bequeathed the power of *pilpul*, dialectic, to *Klal Yisrael*. Avraham lauded Sarah, *piah paschah b'chochmah*, "She opens her mouth with wisdom." She disputed Avraham by insisting on *kemach*. This was a wise choice. Our Patriarch saw the value of Torah *study* amid toil. Their debate was how to make the best "bread": Torah knowledge and observance.

**ויאמר ד' אל אברהם למה זה צחקה שרה... היפלא מד' דבר**  
**Then Hashem said to Avraham, "Why is it that Sarah laughed?"... Is there anything beyond Hashem?"**  
**(18:13,14)**

Sarah *Imeinu* wondered how a woman of her age could possibly conceive and bear a child. Hashem's response is one that should be on our lips all of the time. Indeed, it should be the Jew's mantra: *Ha'yipalei mei Hashem davar?* "Is there anything beyond Hashem?"

Nothing is beyond Hashem's capabilities. The *Midrash* cites a meaningful *mashal*, parable. A man carrying two links of a metal chain that had snapped came to the blacksmith shop. "Can you possibly repair my chain?" The blacksmith looked at the man somewhat incredulously and asked, "If I can fashion a new chain from raw metal, is there a question that I can repair an old one?" In other words, if Hashem can create a new human being from nothing, is it difficult for him to rejuvenate the body of an old woman? Indeed, as **Horav Yechezkel Levenstein, zl**, declares, "It is the obligation of every true believer to believe unequivocally that everything in this world, everything which we refer to as the laws of nature, are all the manifestation of Hashem's will. Everything is the product of the Hand of G-d.

"Thus, even if the ones who were blessing her with a child appeared to be Arabs, she should have responded, 'Amen, so be it G-d's will.' Nothing is beyond Hashem, regardless of the circumstances. The problem is not in Hashem: the problem is that we

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do not fully believe. The One Who created the world can certainly sustain it and all of its inhabitants.”

We have no right to give up hope, says **Horav Yaakov Galinsky, zl**. The venerable *maggid* was on a trip in which nothing seemed to be going his way. A fellow traveler was concerned for him. The *maggid* said, “It will all work out. We never give up hope. It is not our privilege.” He explained his comment with the following story. During the war, he was separated from his wife and children. Only after the war did he discover that he alone was all that was left of his family. Alone in the world, he was understandably depressed. Seeking solace and words of encouragement, he went to the address of the *gadol hador*, preeminent Torah leader of the generation, the *Chazon Ish*, who welcomed him with a warm smile and a listening ear. The *Chazon Ish* himself did not have any biological children, although he was a spiritual father to many. He related the following story to *Rav Galinsky*.

Leipzig was the city in which much of European commerce came together. Wholesalers, brokers, buyers, would converge from all over to buy and sell their wares. A wealthy Jewish businessman, who would annually make the trip, became too ill to travel. He asked his wife to replace him. After much coaching and convincing, she reluctantly agreed to make the trip. He gave her a pouch of money with which to purchase goods for their retail business at home. She made the trip and commenced her business dealings. One can only imagine her travail when she went to retrieve her money pouch to find that she must have somehow lost it. She turned to the other Jews that had come to Leipzig for business opportunities, inquiring if they had found her money pouch.

One man, who appeared to be G-d-fearing and learned, was walking around overtly happy. Apparently, he had found a money pouch containing within it enough money to sustain his family for the entire year. The distraught woman went over to him and asked if “perhaps” it was her money pouch that he had found. He replied, “What difference does it make? The *halachah* in this case is clear: If one finds an item in a city that is predominately non-Jewish, he may keep it, because the owner certainly was *meyaeish*, gave up hope of ever finding it.” The woman argued that she had not given up hope of finding it. When two Jews have a legitimate dispute, they go to the *Rav* or *Bais Din*. The woman, and the man who found her money pouch, went to the *Rav* of Leipzig, where the man smugly presented his claim to the money pouch based upon his knowledge of *halachah*. The *Rav* listened to him, then raised his voice, “Is this woman the owner of the pouch? Is it her money? No! It belongs to her husband. She is only an agent on a mission. An agent has no right to give up hope!”

*Rav Galinsky* understood the meaning of the story. We are all here on a mission. The true Owner is Hashem. We do not have the privilege of giving up; rather, we must believe with deep faith that a solution to our problem will materialize.

What about those of us who have been blessed, who did not have to journey through the path of adversity to see our hopes and prayers realized? Do we appreciate what we have? Do we pay gratitude with the same passion as the one who drank from the cup of bitterness before it turned sweet? Perhaps the following story will be illuminating and inspiring.

A *mohel*, ritual circumciser, who had successfully performed thousands of *Brissim*, was called one day, “*Mazel tov! Mazel tov!* We have been blessed with a healthy son and would like to have you perform the *Bris*.” The joy in the father’s voice was so palpable that the *mohel* was spurred to ask, “If I may ask, how long did you wait for this child?” The father enthusiastically responded, “Twenty-two years! Our joy is overwhelming. We are so fortunate to have been blessed by the Almighty!”

The *Mohel* was now truly excited. This would not be just “another” celebration. It would be beyond special.

The day of the *Bris*, the *mohel* arose extra early and went to the *mikveh*, immersing himself in the water with extra special care. He was preparing for a *Bris* that was twenty-two years in the making. His *davening* was filled with noble thoughts, concentrating on every word. After all, he was to officiate at a *Bris* where the parents had waited twenty-two years for this child. As soon as the *mohel* entered the hall where they would have the *Bris*, he met the child’s father. They warmly embraced.

Twenty-two years is an incredible amount of time to wait for a child. Thus, the *mohel* figured that the hall would be tumling with unusual excitement. Surprisingly, it was no different than the thousands of *Brissim* at which he had officiated. When the father recited the blessing, one would have expected the assemblage to declare, “*Amen!*” with unusual fervor; they did not. After the ceremony, one would have expected the excitement to be palpable; it was not. The “clincher” came when a young man of about twenty years old went over to the father and said, “I will take the three younger ones home; Naomi will watch the other four girls. So, that leaves the five older ones to help clean up.” Something was wrong (or very right). The man had fifteen children! How could he imply to him that this was his first child? For five days, the *mohel* had been excited beyond anything he had previously experienced. How could the father have misled him so?

Unable to conceal his feelings, the *mohel* expressed himself to the father. “I am sorry if my excitement misled you, but I never meant any deception,” the father replied. “You asked me how long we had waited for this child, and I told you. We have been married for twenty-two years, and every child is a precious gift from Hashem. Every child brings with him/her an enormous potential, which we, as parents, acknowledge and nurture. Does one have to Heaven-forbid be childless for a lengthy period in order to realize the extraordinary blessing of each child?”

In order to be *makir tov*, pay gratitude, one must first be *makir*, recognize, acknowledge, the *tov*.

**וְהָאִמֶּר הַמַּכְסָּה אֵינִי מְאֻבְּרָהּ אֲשֶׁר אֵינִי עוֹשֶׂה וְאֻבְּרָהּ הִיּוּ יְהִי לְנוֹי גְדוֹל וְעֻצוֹם**

**Shall I conceal from Avraham what I am about to do, and Avraham will surely become a great and mighty nation? (17:18)**

Hashem’s apparent deliberation concerning whether or not to share His plans about the destruction of Sodom with Avraham *Avinu* begs elucidation. The very statement implies that He had a legitimate reason to conceal this information from Avraham. Nonetheless, Hashem decided to share the information with Avraham (regardless). The Patriarch was destined to be the progenitor of a great nation. Thus, he should be made aware of the impending destruction. Obviously, something is happening of which the reader is not aware. *Rashi* explains that this is a rhetorical question, which should be read in astonishment. Nonetheless, it still does not clarify Hashem’s reason for not informing Avraham and explain what prompted His ultimate decision to share the information with him.

The **Belzer Rebbe**, *Horav Yehoshua, zl*, gave the following pivotal explanation. I use the word “pivotal,” because the *Rebbe* is teaching us a seminal lesson in Torah *haskafah*, perspective, concerning *tefillah*, prayer. Avraham prayed fervently for the people of Sodom, hoping beyond hope that they would be spared. Despite his supreme efforts, Hashem denied his pleas. Thus, it would make sense to question why Hashem told Avraham about Sodom’s impending doom. Apparently, the verdict had been signed, sealed

and delivered. What would Avraham’s prayer achieve, other than – possibly – frustration? If prayer is futile, should one bother praying? Furthermore, the Torah provides the reason that Hashem informed Avraham of Sodom’s bleak future: “And Avraham will surely become a great and mighty nation.” What does that have to do with it? Why is Avraham’s prayer contingent upon his status as progenitor of *Klal Yisrael*?

The *Belzer Rebbe* explains that, when a Jew prays to Hashem during times of travail, even if it appears that his *tefillah* has gone unanswered, it does not mean that Hashem did not listen. Hashem listens quite well and, while He might not apply the prayer to this person, it will nonetheless be saved, so that it yields results for someone else in need. It might be the petitioner himself at a later date, a member of his family, or someone else altogether unrelated – but it will be used.

We now understand why Hashem revealed to Avraham ahead of time that He was going to annihilate the city of Sodom. He wanted Avraham to pray, to extend himself, to exert the effort, to seek their salvation in the merit of ten *tzaddikim*. Unfortunately, the requisite number was not to be found. The *tefillah*, however, was shelved for a later opportunity, when it could be used to help someone in need. Furthermore, we now see the significance of Avraham becoming a large nation. His *tefillah* was not in vain. When necessary, his descendants could avail themselves of their Patriarch’s prayers.

The **Steipler Gaon, zl**, once said, “Do not be dismayed. There is no such thing as a sincere prayer that goes unanswered. Any heartfelt request addressed to G-d **must** be answered. It cannot be otherwise. If it is not answered today, it will be answered tomorrow. If not tomorrow, it will be answered in a week. If not in a week, in a month. If not answered in a month, it may be answered in a year, or in ten years, or in one hundred years – or more. If your prayers are not answered in your lifetime, they will be answered for your children or for your children’s children. We cannot say for sure when a prayer will be answered, but we can rest assured that every prayer will be answered somehow, someday.”

Veritably, Avraham *Avinu’s tefillah* did have an incredible effect. **Horav Tzadok HaKohen, zl**, of Lublin, teaches that the *neshamah* of David *Hamelech* was “trapped” in Sodom, concealed within Lot. Hashem had Avraham pray for the people of Sodom, even though their fate had already been sealed due to their overwhelming iniquity. Why was it necessary for the *neshamah* of David *Hamelech* to emerge from Lot via his daughters? One would think that such a pure, holy *neshamah* would have been the product of the holy union of *tzaddikim*. The **Sifsei Kohan** (commentary to *Parashas Vayeishev*) explains that, when a magnificent, holy *neshamah* is about to descend from Heaven Above, a vehement objection arises in the Heavenly kingdom. Why permit such a lofty soul to enter this world? Thus, in order to deceive and mislead these adversaries, Hashem is “compelled” to dispatch this *neshamah* in a roundabout manner. It appears from a place from which these adversaries would never imagine that it could come.

Had Avraham prayed specifically for the *neshamah* of David *Hamelech*, all of the opposing forces would have rallied to prevent the efficacy of this prayer from being realized. Somehow, they would have made sure that David’s *neshamah* remain concealed forever in Sodom. Therefore, by informing Avraham of Sodom’s upcoming predicament, Hashem knew that Avraham would pray for them. The opposing forces saw that Hashem did not apply Avraham’s *tefillas* on behalf of Sodom. They had no reason to believe that those *tefillas* would be transferred to David, so that his *neshamah* could see light in a world expunged of the evil perpetrated by Sodom. His birth would set the process for our eventual redemption, heralded by *Moshiach Tzidkeinu*.

We have no shortage of stories to demonstrate how Hashem saves every single sincere *tefillah* that emanates from the mouths of those who petition Him. I was especially moved by the following vignette.

A bitter, unhappy woman came to the *tzaddik* of Yerushalayim, **Horav Aryeh Levine, zl**, and requested, “Let me sit in your house, so that I may cry and weep before you.” The *tzaddik* responded, “You may surely sit; you may surely cry and weep, but only if you direct your tears to Hashem. He listens to the weeping of His children.”

The woman took a seat and began to lament about her husband’s condition. He was in the hospital, mortally ill, waiting to die. *Rav Aryeh* pleaded with her, “Do not cry so; Hashem will surely have mercy and grant your husband a cure.” Alas, her husband’s *neshamah*, soul, returned to its Source a few days later. *Rav Aryeh* did all he could to comfort this woman, but she remained inconsolable. Finally, she calmed down enough to say, “I will accept your solace and stop my expression of grief – but only if you tell me what became of the thousands of tears that I shed for my husband. I recited pages and pages of *TeHillim*; I prayed every waking minute of the day, imploring Hashem to let my husband live. What happened to all of the prayers, to all of the tears?”

“Let me tell you,” *Rav Aryeh* began. “When your life on this world comes to an end, you will come before the Heavenly Tribunal and discover how many severe and harsh decrees against the Jewish People have been torn up, extirpated, annulled, all because of the precious tears which you shed on behalf of your husband. Not one teardrop goes to waste. The Holy One counts each one like pearls, treasuring them, saving them for a later time when they will be put to use.”

As soon as *Rav Aryeh* concluded his words, the woman immediately burst into tears – again. Only this time they were tears of happiness, because now she knew that her tears had not been in vain. A while later, she returned to *Rav Aryeh*’s home and asked the *Rav*, “*Rebbe*, please tell me again those beautiful words. What happened to those tears of mine that I wept?”

**וַיֵּרָא אֶת הַמָּקוֹם מֵרְחוֹק**

**And (he) perceived the place from afar. (22:4)**

In *Perek Aleph of Mesillas Yesharim*, the *Ramchal* writes: “From this we learn that the primary purpose of man’s existence in this world is solely to do *mitzvos*, to serve Hashem, and to overcome tribulations.” I have always felt that when we add the verse, *Zachreinu l’Chaim*, during the *Aseres Ymei Teshuvah*, the word *l’maancha*, for Your sake, is its most defining point. We pray for life. For what reason should we live? Hashem owes us nothing. It is almost insolent to ask for life unless one has a lofty purpose in living. *L’maancha* is that lofty purpose. We live to serve Hashem. Every action, every deed that we perform, must in some manner have the Hashem factor included therein. Otherwise, it has no validity. Life has purpose; life has meaning only insofar that it is connected with Hashem.

*Nisyonos*, trials, tribulations, life’s speed bumps, are all part of our growth as a Jew. An integral part of our existence is our ability to triumph over the challenges that we confront. These challenges are Heavenly imposed upon us by design, so that we become spiritually stronger. There is a well-known story of a butterfly that was struggling to emerge from its cocoon (many versions), which is practical and illuminating. A little boy was playing outdoors and discovered a fascinating caterpillar. He carefully picked it up and brought it home to his mother. “Mommy, can I have it as a pet?” the boy asked. His mother agreed, on the condition that he would take good care of it.