

# Torah Wellsprings

Collected thoughts  
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# Table of Contents

## *Torah Wellsprings - Vayera*

Concealed Kindness .....	4
A Yid Doesn't Wander.....	8
Growth from Tests .....	11
The Test of <i>Akeidas Yitzchak</i> .....	13
<i>Akeidas Yitzchak Today</i> .....	15
Miracles and Salvations.....	18
Toil.....	20
Desire to Serve Hashem.....	21
Advice on Passing Tests .....	23
<i>Hachmasas Orchim</i> .....	26

# Torah Wellsprings

## Vayera

### Concealed Kindness

One way to translate the word פלא is **concealed** as it states (*Devarim* 17:8), כי יפלא מוכך, דבר, "When a halachah is concealed from you..." In Shemoneh Esrei we praise Hashem for His kindness, and we express our gratitude על נפלאותיך even when the kindness is concealed from us. We know that even in times of distress, when things seem to be bad, they are only orchestrated by Hashem for our good. (from *siddur HaGr'a*).

Reb Hershel Berkowitz Shlita of Ashdod told the following story:

Reb Hershel Berkowitz's daughter got engaged a year ago, and he traveled to New York to raise money for the *chasunah*. Reb Hershel made up with a driver to pick him up at 5:30 in the morning and

drive him to several batei midrashim to collect money during Shacharis.

Reb Hershel waited for a half-hour for the driver, but he didn't show up. Initially, he was angry at the driver, but then he overcame that *nisayon*. He pushed away those angry thoughts and went to Munkatch beis medresh in Boro Park (which was near where he was staying) and said *Tehillim* with *kavanah*. Soon after, a Yid tapped him on the shoulder and gave him five hundred dollars, noticing that he came to America to collect money.

The Yid told him, "I'm going to court today, as people are trying to extort force me, illegally, to give them a lot of money. It isn't simple, and I need a *yeshuah*. Please, say *Tehillim* that I should succeed. I will call you later today to tell

you the outcome of the court case."

Reb Hershel told him, "You won't have to look for me. I will remain here, in this beis medresh until you return and tell me how your day went."

Reb Hershel spent the morning in the Munkatch shul saying *Tehillim*, davening Shacharis, learning Torah, until he received a phone call from this man.

"Where are you?"

"I'm still in Munkatch."

"I'll be there shortly."

He arrived and told him what occurred:

"I had a court case this morning in Manhattan, but my lawyer didn't show up. I was very upset about that because judges in this country don't respect a person who comes to court without a lawyer. They see it as a lack of respect towards the court. That alone could have caused me to lose the case.

"I called my lawyer, but he didn't answer the phone. I stood before the judge, my knees trembling from fear. The judge asked me what I can say to prove my side of the story, and I explained my claim. Then the miracle occurred. The judge said, 'The fact you came here today without a lawyer proves you are confident with your claim and that you are telling the truth. Otherwise, you would hire a lawyer. I believe everything you say.'

"The ruling was far better than what I expected to achieve, even with my lawyer. I was hoping the lawyer would convince the judge to schedule another hearing, and then there would be a compromise. But I was exonerated!

"When I left the court, the lawyer called me. He said, 'I'm a lawyer for forty years, and this is the first time I overslept. Please forgive me.'

"I told him how the proceedings went, and he

was shocked. He said he had never heard of a judge using that logic before. So, I told him that I would send him a copy of the minutes so he can see for himself."

This Yid said to Reb Hershel, "I couldn't speak for an hour because I was so overwhelmed by the miracle that happened to me. Thank you for davening for me. Here's five thousand dollars, the amount I put aside to pay the lawyer."

They chatted some more, and the Yid wrote down Reb Hershel's address and the date of his daughter's *chasunah*.

Later that afternoon, the driver called Reb Hershel to apologize for not coming on time. He said, "I drive *meshulachim* for years, and this is the first time I overslept. Please forgive me." (He said almost the exact words the lawyer said.) The driver added that he would drive him the following day for free to compensate

for the loss of money he caused him today.

And, on the day of Reb Hershel's daughter's *chasunah*, a messenger came with a generous envelope filled with money for Reb Hershel.

The lesson: Hashem's kindness is often concealed. What seems bad, is all good. These are the *נפלאותיך* that we thank Hashem's for.

Years ago, Reb Kook Shlita, *rosh yeshiva* of Maor HaTalmud, Rechovot, was sitting *shiva* for his brother and sister-in-law and their two children who all died in a car accident *r" l*, and Reb Shach *zt'l* came to be *menachem avel*. He told them, "Not asking questions about the ways of Hashem isn't *frumkeit* (an *ehrlicher* and proper response to a tragedy); it is *klugshaft*, it is being wise." Because wise people understand that we don't know what's good and what's bad with our limited minds and impaired vision. We should therefore trust

in Hashem that He is leading us in the best way.

Reb Shach gave an example from the Yidden in Russia who were exiled to Siberia. Everyone thought it was a terrible decree, and those who remained at home thought

they were the fortunate ones. But then the Holocaust came. Those in faraway Siberia survived, and those who remained home were killed by the Nazis, *yimach shemom*.. Sometimes, Hashem's kindness is revealed in remarkably, concealed ways.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Reb Gad'l Eisner *zt'l* was in Eretz Yisrael after the war where he met someone he knew from Poland from before the war. "How are things?" Reb Gad'l asked warmly.

The man replied that both of his parents and most of his family were killed in the Holocaust, and therefore he dropped religion entirely. "How can I be religious, after going through all of this?"

Reb Gad'l said, "A person can be in Warsaw and yet he is able to speak to someone in America. Does that make sense to you? Do you know exactly how the phone works? Do you understand the mechanism that is used to transfer the sound waves over so many miles? But you use the phone anyway. Similarly, even if we don't understand Hashem's ways, that isn't a reason to abandon Yiddishkeit."

Years later, Reb Gad'l was walking down a street in Tel Aviv and a religious Yid riding a motorcycle stopped near him. "Come aboard. I'll give you a ride." The motorcycle had a small trailer attached to it, suited for a passenger.

Reb Gad'l never rode on such an apparatus before, and he didn't know how to get in. He said, "I don't know how these things work."

The man replied, "Do you need to understand everything? When a Yid is in Warsaw and is speaking on the phone to a Yid in

### A Yid Doesn't Wander

It states (21:14), ותלך ותתע, במדבר באר שבע, "[Hagar] went, and wandered in the desert of Be'er Sheva." The word ותתע, wandered, implies she lost her way.

Rashi writes, חזרה לגלולי בית אביה, "She returned to the *avodah zarahs* of her father's home." Hagar was Pharaoh's daughter, and now, banished from Avraham and Sarah's home, she returned to the pagan ways of her youth.

How does Rashi know that ותתע implies she returned to the *avodah zarahs* of her father's home? Maybe it just means she lost her way, and she was wandering around the desert.?

Reb Mordechai Pogromansky *zt'l* answered that ותתע implies that Hagar was wandering about, and she couldn't find her way out of the desert. When she walked west, she feared that perhaps she should be going east. When she arrived at a location, she ridiculed herself that perhaps she shouldn't even be there.

Such are the thoughts of those who worship idols. But in Avraham's home, she was taught, המכין מצעדי גבר, Hashem prepares each step of mankind. Nothing happens by accident. When one goes someplace, it's because Hashem wants him to be there.

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America, does he understand how it works? But that doesn't stop him from using the phone."

Reb Gad'l looked closer at this person.

The man said, "Do you recognize me? Years ago, you used this reasoning to convince me to believe in Hashem even when matters didn't make sense to me. I took your words to heart and did *teshuvah*."

Since it states ותתע, wandering, about Hagar, Rashi understood that Hagar abandoned the path of emunah, and she was worshipping *avodah zarah*.

Reb Mordechai Pogromansky said this *vort* in Soviet Russia, when he was traveling with a *mohel* from Pinsk to perform the mitzvah of bris milah. They accidentally missed their stop, so they crossed the tracks and waited for a train to take them back to where they should have gotten off. As they waited for the train, the *mohel* expressed his anxiety. "Why weren't we more alert? I don't have time for these delays."

Reb Mordechai explained to the *mohel* that everything is *bashert*, and there is certainly a reason they had to be in this location. Because to think ותתע that they wandered and arrived at the wrong destination is to think in the ways of *avodah zarah*.

They were still waiting for a train when someone ran over to them and said, "I need a *mohel*. Do you know where I can find a *mohel*? My son is eight days old today."

The reason they missed their stop was now understood. It was to perform a bris milah at that precise location.

The Chemdas Shlomo *zt'l* sent his students on a mission to seek an appropriate *shidduch* for his daughter and gave them permission to finalize the *shidduch* when they find something suitable.

The students came to a town where they met with a very clever young man, a genius in Torah, and they completed the *shidduch*.

On their way back, they made a stop in Lublin to receive the blessings and to hear the *divrei Torah* of the Chozeh of Lublin *zt'l*. The Chozeh told them that sometimes a person goes on a mission, and he fails. He must know that there

was another reason why he was sent there. It was *bashert* that he should make this trip; it wasn't for nothing.

The Chozeh proved this from נ"ך, when Shaul and an aide searched for Shaul's father's donkeys. The aide said to Shaul (*Shmuel* 1, ch.9), הנה נא איש אלוקים בעיר הזאת והאיש נכבד, נלכה שם. אולי יגיד לנו את דרכנו אשר הלכנו עליה, "Behold there is a very respected prophet in this city. Let's go to him. Perhaps he will tell us the path we took."

The grammar of this *pasuk* is difficult.

It seems that the wording should be written in future tense: "Perhaps he will tell us the path *we should take*." Why did he say, "Perhaps he will tell us the path we took" in the past tense?

The Chozeh explained that they understood that if they searched, unsuccessfully, for the donkeys, there must be some other reason they were there. The *navi* could tell them the true purpose of their trip.

Then, Shmuel HaNavi anointed Shaul as king. The real purpose for their wandering was understood.

The students returned to the Chemdas Shlomo and told him about the wonderful *shidduch* they found. But in the end, this *shidduch* didn't work out.<sup>2</sup>

The students returned to the Chozeh and asked, אולי יגיד לנו את דרכנו אשר הלכנו עליה, perhaps you can tell us the path we took." They knew that they didn't take this

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2. The wagon driver told the Chemdas Shlomo that the *bachur* was hunchbacked, and after checking into it, the Chemdas Shlomo verified that it was so. The *shidduch* was cancelled (because the students were granted permission to make a suitable *shidduch*, and not an inappropriate *shidduch*).

long trip for no reason at all.

The Chozeh told them, "The purpose was so that you will become my students," and that's what happened.<sup>3</sup>

### Growth from Tests

The Ramban (האמונה) writes that the uniqueness of Avraham wasn't only that he kept the Torah because there were many people who kept the Torah, but never reached the high levels Avraham attained. Rather, Avraham's specialty was that he passed ten tests.

After Avraham passed the test of the *akeidah*, a

*malach* told him (22:12), כי ירא ממני אלקים אתה... ממוני. The Seforno writes, "I'm a *malach*, but your fear of heaven surpasses mine." (The Seforno is translating the word ממוני as though it was written directly and immediately after עתה ידעתי אתה ירא אלקים אתה.) "Your fear of Hashem is greater than mine."

The Seforno writes that it's as Chazal say, "Tzaddikim are greater than *malachim*." They can have greater fear than *malachim*!

How did Avraham reach this high level of *yiras Shamayim*? It's because he passed ten difficult tests. Each test brought him to

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3. On Chol HaMoed Succos there was music and dancing in the Chazon Ish's *zt'l succah*, and after most of the people left, a Yid from America approached the Chazon Ish and said, "The Yidden in America want *chizuk*. What should I tell them?"

The Chazon Ish replied that each generation has its unique mitzvah. About Noach it is written, צדיק תמים היה בדורותיו. This means that Noach performed the mitzvah that was uniquely needed for his generation. "In our generation," the Chazon Ish said, "the mitzvah of our times is *emunah*."

greater levels of fear and love of Hashem.

The Ropshitzer Rav (*Zera Kodesh, Lech Lecha, Likutim*) writes, "The Torah tells us all that transpired with the *avos*, but it doesn't tell us what happened to *מיכאל המלאך* or the other *malachim*. This is because the *avos* overcame their nature and acted contrary to their nature. For example, Avraham went beyond his nature and placed his son on the altar. This becomes Torah."

Human beings are tested, and that's what raises them to the highest levels.

The Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni* 73) states, "When Hakadosh Baruch Hu told Avraham to circumcise himself, he took advice from his three friends: Anar, Eshkol, and Mamrei. Anar told him, 'You are

already one hundred years old, and you are going to injure yourself?'

"Eshkol said, 'Why should you [put a sign on yourself and] make yourself recognizable among your enemies?'" They tried to discourage Avraham from making the *milah*.

Mamrei, however, encouraged Avraham to make the *milah*. Mamrei said, "Hashem saved you from the fiery furnace in Ur Kasdim, from famine, and when you went to war against the four kings, and now when Hashem asks you to circumcise yourself, you won't listen to Him?"<sup>4</sup>

The question is, why did Avraham seek counsel? Avraham kept the entire Torah voluntarily. He wasn't obligated to do the mitzvos, but he chose, on his own, to do Hashem's will. And now that Hashem

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4. Since Mamrei encouraged Avraham to make the *milah*, Hashem appeared to Avraham in Mamrei's field, as it states (18:1), וירא אליו ה', באלוני כמורא, as Rashi writes there.

commanded him to circumcise himself, why did he need to seek counsel?

The Trumas Hakri (פתח שער א) answers that Avraham wanted his friends to discourage him from performing the *milah* (and, indeed, two of his friends advised him against the *milah*), to make this test more difficult and challenging for him. Because when a person passes a difficult test, the value of the *mitzvah* is far greater.<sup>5</sup>

We are advised to avoid tests. As we pray each morning, אל תביאנו לא לידי נסיון. This is an important *tefillah*

because there is no guarantee that we will pass all tests. However, when we do have tests, we should be happy with the opportunity because we reach very high levels through these tests.<sup>6</sup>

### The Test of *Akeidas Yitzchak*

The ultimate test was the *akeidah*, which begins with the words, והאלקם נסה את, אברהם, "Hashem tested Avraham".

The Baal Shem Tov *zt'l* explains that at the *akeidah*, Hashem took away all of Avraham's *madreigos*. As a

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5. The Trumas Hakri explains that Avraham kept the entire Torah voluntarily, and that was a tremendous challenge. But Hashem commanded Avraham with the *mitzvah* of *milah*. To increase the value of the *mitzvah*, he sought counsel from his friends, who for the most part advised him against *milah*. That enabled him to keep the *mitzvah* despite their advice.

6. We can draw an analogy from antibodies. When one's body fights off a disease, he becomes even stronger than before, because now the body knows how to defend itself if it will be attacked again with the same disease. The struggle with the disease makes him healthier. Likewise, when we struggle and pass difficult tests, we emerge a better person than before.

result, he didn't feel any connection to Hashem. And when that occurs, it is a great test.

The Avodas Yisrael *zt'l* (*Vayikra* ד"ה ויקרא) says that this is alluded to in the words (22:4), וירא את המקום מרחוק. The word מקום hints to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, the מקומו של עולם. He saw Hashem מרחוק, from a distance. He didn't feel close to Hashem. All of his lofty levels left him. And nevertheless, he remained loyal to Hashem and was prepared to do Hashem's will and do the *akeidah*.<sup>7</sup>

The Yesod HaAvodah *zt'l* (vol.4, 2:7) writes that המקום also refers to Yaakov Avinu, about whom it states (*Bereishis* 28:11), ויפגע במקום (he came to Har HaMoriah). And, as we wrote, המקום hints to Hashem, the מקומו של עולם.

The *pasuk* is alluding to the questions that unwillingly popped into Avraham's mind as he went to the *akeidah*. First, Hashem told Avraham that Yitzchak would bear a son – Yaakov Avinu. And now Hashem tells him to sacrifice Yitzchak!

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7. The Targum Yonason (22:10) writes that during *akeidas Yitzchak*, "Avraham was looking into Yitzchak's eyes, Yitzchak was looking up at the *malachim* in heaven, but Avraham didn't see the *malachim*."

Why did Yitzchak see the *malachim* and not Avraham?

The Targum Yonason (*ibid.*) writes that Yitzchak asked his father to tie him down well on the *mizbeiach* so that he shouldn't jump from the pain and disqualify the *korban*. Yitzchak was tied down, and there was nothing he could do to prevent the *akeidah*. His part of the test was already completed. Therefore, he was permitted to see the great revelations that were happening at that time. But Avraham was in the middle of the test, therefore he couldn't see the *malachim*. If he would see the all that was transpiring in *shomayim*, there wouldn't be a test.

This is the meaning of the words וירא את המקום. He had questions on Hashem, who told him that Yitzchak would become a great nation. How would Yaakov be born (about whom it states (ויפגע במקום).

So, what did Avraham do? The pasuk answers, מרחוק, "distance." He pushed these thoughts far away from his mind. He refused to think about these questions, and with *emunah peshutah* he performed Hashem's will.<sup>8</sup>

Reb Mendel of Vitebsk ז"ל (Pri HaAretz, Vayeira, כללא (דמלתא עיקר הנסיונות) explains that the common theme of Avraham Avinu's tests was that things weren't making sense. For example, Hashem tells him that Yitzchak will

bear children and become a great nation, and then Hashem tells him to sacrifice Yitzchak.

Hashem tells him to go to Eretz Canaan, but there was a famine in the land. Rashi (*Bereishis* 12:10) writes, "The hunger was solely in Eretz Canaan, to test Avraham, to see whether he will question Hakadosh Baruch Hu."

But Avraham passed all the tests with *emunah peshutah*.

### **Akeidas Yitzchak Today**

It states (22:13), והנה איל אחר, נאחז בסבך בקרניו "Avraham saw another ram caught in the bushes by its horns," and Avraham sacrificed this animal instead of

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8. As the Yesod HoAvodah writes, "Even the *malachim* cannot perceive the greatness of the *avos*. Although, by the *akeidah*, Avraham passed the test only because of his *temimus* and *emunah peshutah*."

Hakadosh Baruch Hu told Moshe Rabbeinu that he misses the *avos*, because they never asked questions about His ways (see *Sanhedrin* 111.).

Yitzchak. The *meforshim* seek to understand the word אחר, "another," because there was only one ram.<sup>9</sup>

The Or LaShamayim (חוקת ד"ה עלי באר) answers in the name of the Chozeh of Lublin *zt'l* that there is more than one *akeidas Yitzchak*. Because whenever a person overcomes his *yetzer hara*, that is another *akeidas Yitzchak*.

The Chozeh explains the pasuk as follows:

והנה איל אחר, there are other *akeidas Yitzchaks*.

נאחז בסכר when one is trapped in the lure of temptation and bad habits and he overcomes them, that is another *akeidas Yitzchak*.

בקרני, the Or LaShamayim explains that קרני can also mean shine (as in *Shemos* 34:35, כי קרן עור פניו, Moshe's face

shone). Because when one passes his tests תהל אורו עד כסא הכבוד, "His light shines up to Hashem's throne."

It is encouraging to know that we can perform an *akeidas Yitzchak* even in our times. Whatever level you are on when you overcome your nature and take a step forward, that is a sacrifice, an *akeidas Yitzchak*.

In *Shemonah Esrei* of Rosh Hashanah we say, ועקדת יצחק לזרעו היום תזכור, "Remember *akeidas Yitzchak* today..." We can explain that we ask Hashem to remember the *akeidos* that happen today, and every day, when we overcome the *yetzer hara*.

The *Shlah Hakadosh* (וירא דרך חיים תוכחת מוסר אות מ"ב) elaborates on how to perform an *akeidas Yitzchak* in our times. He writes:

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9. Rashi translates אחר as "after." He saw the ram *after* the *malach* spoke with Avraham and told him that he shouldn't sacrifice Yitzchak.

"When we think about the self-sacrifice Avraham and Yitzchak displayed at the *akeida*, we derive *mussar* that we, too, should be *moser nefesh* for Hashem. Certainly, one should be able...to break a *taavah*. For example, to wake up early for Torah and tefillah or to refrain from pleasures, idle talk, and so on. One should forgo his will to do Hashem's will. If an *aveirah* comes his way, or a *mitzvah*, he should think, 'Perhaps Hashem is testing me now, similar to the test that Hashem gave to Avraham. Because when a person knows that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is testing him, he will be cautious. Whenever a test arises, remember that it is Hashem that is testing you.

Fortunate is the person who always keeps Hashem in his thoughts."

These are wonderful and helpful suggestions to help us pass the tests that come our way.<sup>10</sup>

The Ramchal (דע"ה ד"ה) (וילהיית) writes, "The greatest and the best cure one can find for the *yetzer hara* - and it is easy to do and the gain is immense - is that one should focus for at least an hour each day, when his mind is clear from all other thoughts, and ask himself, "What did the *avos* of the world do that Hashem loved them so much?" And then he should think, 'How good would it be if I can also do so?'"

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**10.** In review, the Shlah Hakadosh teaches us the following ideas:

1) Think: If Avraham and Yitzchak were prepared to sacrifice their life for Hashem, I should certainly be prepared to sacrifice something minor, like overcoming temptation.

2) When you are going through a *nisayon*, be aware that Hashem is testing you. With that awareness, you will find strength within yourself to pass it.

## Miracles and Salvations

When a person goes beyond the limits of his nature to serve Hashem, Hashem, in return, will perform miracles beyond nature for him.

This is his reward מדה כנגד מדה. He went beyond his standard nature to serve Hashem, so Hashem will alter the rules of nature to help him.<sup>11</sup>

The *malachim* asked Avraham (18:9) איה שרה אשתך, "Where is Sarah?" The Ksav Sofer (וירא ד"ה עוד נ"ל ע"ד צחות) explains that when the *malachim* saw the large meal that was served to them - three tongues with mustard, etc. - they asked, "Where is Sarah? She certainly isn't at home because if she is, she

wouldn't have permitted you to give us so much." As Chazal (*Bava Metzia* 85.) say, אשה עיניה צרה באורחים, a woman is stingy towards the guests.

Avraham replied, הנה היא באוהל, "Sarah is at home, and she prepared this generous meal for you. She overcame her nature of stinginess, and she performs *hachnasas orchim* generously."

The *malachim* said, "If she changed her nature, heaven will treat her beyond the rules of nature. Naturally, Sarah cannot bear children, but nature will be altered, and she will miraculously bear a child."

The Be'er Mayim Chaim (נח"ד) discusses that Hashem performed miracles beyond nature for Avraham Avinu.

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**11.** נסיון, tests, has the word נס, miracle, in it. The Sefer Chasidim (196) explains, "When one passes his tests, miracles will happen to him."

The Maharal (*Derech HaChaim Avos* 5:3) explains it another way. He says that one needs a miracle to pass a test. He needs *siyata dishmaya*.

For example, Hashem saved Avraham from the furnace in Ur Kasdim, and when Avraham battled a war against four mighty kings, he threw earth, which turned into arrows that destroyed the powerful armies (see *Sanhedrin* 109.). This is because Avraham served Hashem beyond the rules of his nature, therefore, miracles happened to him.

However, miracles didn't happen to Noach. He was saved in an ark, which is within the rules of nature. The Be'er Mayim Chaim explains that Noach served Hashem according to the limits of his nature, as it states, *את האלקים התהלך נח* and *הטבע אלקים* is *gematriya*. He served Hashem to the extent of his nature, and Hashem treated him that

way, according to the rules of nature.

But when one serves Hashem beyond nature, Hashem treats him the same way *מדה כנגד מדה*, and miracles beyond nature will happen to him.<sup>12</sup>

The Be'er Mayim Chaim concludes, "Also in our generation, we see with our own eyes miracles that happen to the *gedolei hador* and the true tzaddikim. Nature changes for them. Everyone recognizes that they are blessed by Hashem and Hashem's name is on them. New things happen to them; the rules of nature are altered, all because they are righteous and truthful in Hashem's service, beyond the rules of nature..."

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**12.** And this applies to everyone. When we go beyond our nature to do Hashem's will, Hashem will perform miracles beyond nature for us. This is true even with minor things. For example, it isn't your nature to daven with *kavanah*. You didn't do that for over a year. If you will have some *kavanah* today, even if only for a portion of the tefillah, you have gone beyond your nature, and Hashem will bring you salvations beyond nature.



who don't need to eat or drink!

Reb Shlomo Zalman Auerbach *zt'l* explains that the Torah wanted to elaborate on when Avraham performed *hachnasas orchim* when he was weak, on the third day after his *milah* because a mitzvah is measured according to how hard it is to perform it.

The holy sefarim write that one can determine the importance of a mitzvah based on how much opposition he experiences. Because when a mitzvah is very important, the *yetzer hara* will try harder to prevent you from performing it.

For example, how did Avraham know that it was a mitzvah to sacrifice the ram? We do not find that Hashem commanded him to do so. It's because when the ram ran to him, it got caught in the bushes (22:13 נאחז בסבך בקרניו). It was hard for the ram to come to Avraham. That's a sign that sacrificing the ram is a great

*avodah*, and the *yetzer hara* was trying to prevent it.

Similarly, in Megilas Rus, Naomi tried to convince Rus to return to Moav. But then she changed her mind. This occurred when she saw that the young Rus was having difficulty keeping up with her pace. As it states (Rus 1:18), ותרא כי מתאמצת היא ללכת אתה, ותחדל לדבר עליה "[Naomi] saw that Rus was struggling with all her might to walk beside her, and she stopped speaking with her." The Gra explains that Naomi understood from Rus's struggles to walk with her that her resolve was complete. Because when the *yetzer hara* tries to stop you, that indicates how special the mitzvah is.

### **Desire to Serve Hashem**

After the *milah*, Avraham yearned to perform *hachnasas orchim*, but he couldn't because he was weak. He longed for this mitzvah for three days, and then three *malachim* arrived. Reb Yisrael of Tchartkov

zt'l (Ginzei Yisrael 5662) explains that the number three isn't a coincidence. The three *malachim* were created from Avraham's yearning for *hachnasas orchim* during those three days.

This is because after the *milah*, Avraham became a Yid. Until then, he had the status of a בן נח, a non-Jew. Chazal say that when a Yid desires to do a mitzvah Hashem considers his desire as if he performed the deed. However, a non-Jew doesn't get credit for a mitzvah until he performs it. Hashem wanted to show Avraham that now that he is a Yid, he will be rewarded for his good desires, too. Therefore, after yearning for the mitzvah of *hachnasas orchim* for three days, Hashem showed him the three *malachim* that were created from his yearning.

The Tchortkover (5682) adds that by the *akeidah* it states (22:16), יען אשר עשית את, הדבר הזה ולא חשכת את בנך את יחידיך, "Since you *did* this thing..."

But what did Avraham do? In the end, he didn't perform the *akeidah*!

Nevertheless, since Avraham wanted to perform the *akeidah*, the *pasuk* calls it עשיית, as though he performed the mitzvah. Because a good desire is counted like a deed.

The Shem Mishmuel (5671) writes that we are in Hashem's hands, and if He wants to, He can take away our soul at any moment. Therefore, when Hashem commanded Avraham to sacrifice Yitzchak, Avraham really didn't have a choice in the matter. It is impossible to escape Hashem's will. So, what was the great test of the *akeidah*?

The answer is that the primary test was whether Avraham would perform this mitzvah willingly, with joy, or like someone who acts against his will.

Avraham passed the test. Here are some proofs:

It states (22:3), וישכם אברהם בבוקר, Avraham rose early in the morning to go to the *akeidah*. His *zrizus* demonstrates his desire to fulfill Hashem's will. ויחבש את המורו, he saddled the donkey himself. Rashi writes, "He didn't command someone else [to saddle the donkey] because אהבה מקלקלת השורה, love disrupts the order." And it states, וילכו שניהם יחדו, "[Avraham and Yitzchak] walked together." Rashi explains, "Avraham, who knew he was going to slaughter his son walked joy (רצון ושמחה), just like Yitzchak who didn't [know the reason for this trip]."

At the moment of the *akeidah*, Avraham heard the *malach* say, אל תשלח ירך אל, "Don't

strike the child. Don't do anything to him." Chazal (*Shabbos* 30:) tell us that it's impossible to have prophecy without joy. So, it is obvious that Avraham was joyous even then.

Imagine what would have happened if Avraham was sad at the *akeidah*. He wouldn't hear the *malach* warning him to stop, Yitzchak would have been slaughtered, and there would be no continuation of the Jewish nation. So, ultimately, the existence of the Jewish nation is because of joy and desire to do Hashem's will.<sup>14</sup>

### Advice on Passing Tests

How does one pass the tests of life? Here is some advice:

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**14.** A Bobover chassid asked his rebbe, the Kedushas Tzion, when is the best time to bring his son, for the first time, to the Rebbe. The Kedushas Tzion advised him to come on Simchas Torah. "Although on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we stand most of the day and we daven, but Simchas Torah we rejoice with the Torah most of the day. Serving Hashem with joy will be engraved in your young son's heart forever. Therefore, I recommend you bring him on Simchas Torah"

(1) Don't Converse with the *Yetzer Hara*

A poor person didn't have a coat and was shivering from the cold winter weather. He was jealous of his friend, who was warm and cozy in his fur coat.

"Where did you get your coat?" he asked.

"It's made from bear's fur. If you want, you can also buy one."

"How much does it cost?"

"About a hundred rubles."

"I can't afford it."

"So, you can kill a bear and dress yourself in the bear's fur."

He decided to do that. So, he went to the forest with a bow and arrow, and when a bear appeared, he drew his arrow to kill it.

The bear said, "Why will you kill me? Don't you know that the Torah forbids murder?"

The man asked, "Are you a human being?"

The bear replied, "You're also not a human being because you plan on killing me. Is that civil behavior? Is that how human beings act?"

The man replied, "Tell me the truth: If you had a sword with you, wouldn't you kill me?"

The bear said, "I would, but that's because I'm hungry."

"Well, I'm shivering from the cold, and I need your fur."

The bear said, "Let's think about this rationally: You are cold, and you need a fur coat; I'm hungry, and I need to eat. What can we do that will satisfy both our needs?"

They sat down to discuss this matter when the bear jumped up and devoured the man.

The man called out from inside the bear, "You call this a compromise?"

The bear replied, "Why are you complaining? Both our needs were met. My hunger is satisfied, and you are no longer suffering from the cold because you are in my warm stomach."

Where did the man err? It was at the very beginning when the bear asked him, "Why will you kill me?" The man shouldn't have answered. Because when you meet a bear, you don't make conversation.

The same is when one meets the *yetzer hara*. Don't negotiate with him, and don't hold any conversations. Run away and do Hashem's will.

## (2) Good Influences

Another counsel to pass the tests of life is to steer away from bad friends and bad influences.

The *pasuk* states, ויש אהלה ויש מקדם בית אל מים והעי מקדם, "Avraham pitched his tent: Beis El was to the west, and Aiy was to the east." The Torah doesn't solely say where the tent was located. It tells us about

the neighboring towns. Why?

The Chofetz Chaim explained: It isn't enough that your home is clean and pure. You must make sure that the neighborhoods around you are pure, too.

So, seek to be among good influences, people who serve and fear Hashem, and that will help you pass the tests.

## (3) Tefillah

Yet, a third counsel to pass tests is to daven.

When Yishmael was ill, Hagar davened for him, as it states (21:16), ותשא את קולה ותבך, "She raised her voice and cried," but that didn't save Yishmael. Yishmael davened for himself, and Hashem answered Yishmael's tefillos. As it states (21:17), כי שמע אלוקים את שם קול הנער באשר הוא שם. The Midrash (*Bereishis Rabba* 53:14) explains that this teaches us that "The best tefillah of all is the tefillah that the ill daven for themselves." As Rashi writes, מכאן שיפה תפלת

החולה מתפלת אחרים עליו והיא קודמת להתקבל, "The tefillah of the ill is better than when others daven for him. His own tefillos will be answered more quickly."

This is because a sick person davens from the depths of his heart, as he feels his distress with all his heart, and such tefillos will always be answered.

Therefore, if a person is truly disappointed with his *aveiros* and his shortcomings in *avodas Hashem* and he davens to Hashem, that tefillah is very powerful and can bring him the salvation he so desires. With his tefillos, he will be able to pass all difficult tests.

The malachim told Sarah that she will bear a child, and she laughed. As it states (18:12) ותצחק שרה בקרבה ולאמר אחרי בלתי היתה לי עדנה.

The Seforno explains that Sarah laughed because "She thought the *malach* was blessing her to bear children, and that it wasn't a prophecy sent by Hashem

Yisbarach. Sarah understood that a *navi's brachah* isn't sufficient to make her young again. That would be like *techiyas hameisim* (resurrection of the dead). Such a miracle can only occur if Hashem commands it or if one prays and Hashem accepts his tefillos."

We learn from this Seforno the power of tefillah. A blessing from a *malach* won't bring on a miracle, but your tefillos can.

And with tefillah, one can pass all tests.

### ***Hachnasas Orchim***

Rebbe Moshe of Kobrin *zt'l* says that Avraham Avinu continues to do *hachnasas orchim*. When a Yid takes care of guests, Avraham Avinu is present, participating in the mitzvah.

The story of Avraham Avinu's *hachnasas orchim* and the three *malachim* is written in the past tense: "He took... He went... He

hurried... etc. The exception is the words (18:8), והוא עומד עליהם תחת העץ ויאכלו "[Avraham] stands above them..." These words are written in the present tense because, until today, when Yidden do *hachnasas orchim*, Avraham stands there, and he partakes in the mitzvah.

Reb Chaim Brisker *zt'l* was extremely ill as a child; the doctors lost hope. Rebbe Moshe Kobriner was visiting Brisk at the time, and he stayed in the home of Reb Chaim's grandfather (Reb Itche Efron *z'l*, the father-in-law of the Beis HaLevi). The grandfather said to the Rebbe, "What's going to be with my Chaimke?"

Rebbe Moshe Kobriner told him the *vort*, אברהם עומד indicates that Avraham is present at every *hachnasas orchim*. He added, "Chazal (*Bava Basra* 16:) say, 'A precious stone hung from Avraham Avinu's neck. Whoever saw the stone was healed.' Since you are hosting me and performing *hachnasas orchim*, this means Avraham Avinu is here, in

this home. And Avraham wears the gem that brings *refuah*. Your Chaimke will surely have a *refuah sheleimah*."

And indeed, he did. (This story is written in *Machsheves Nachum*, written by Reb Nachum Mikontikoziva-Chaifa. He adds that he told this story to Reb Chaim Brisker, and Reb Chaim said he also knows this story. He heard it from his father, the Beis HaLevi.)

Once, Rebbe Moshe Kobriner was a guest in the home of Rebbe Aharon Karliner *zt'l*, and Reb Aharon told him that his daughter was ill. Rebbe Moshe Kobriner said to the sick girl, "Your father is performing *hachnasas orchim*. This means right now, he has the stone of healing hanging on his neck. Look at your father and you will be healed."

Rebbe Moshe Mordechai of Lelov *zt'l* once talked with his chassidim about a certain Yeminite tzaddik who fed hundreds of

refugees who lost their homes in World War I.

One of the chassidim said, "I heard that this tzaddik was a *chavrusah* with one of the Kabbalah giants." He was implying that in addition to his *chesed*, this tzaddik was a scholar in the hidden parts of the Torah.

The Rebbe replied, "Why are you mentioning that? Right now, we are discussing that he fed hundreds of homeless Yidden..." as if to say, the merit of feeding Yidden is so great, it isn't necessary to add anything else.

The Sar Shalom of Belz *zt'l* built a majestic shul in Belz. Two generations later, his grandson, Rebbe Yissachar Dov of Belz *zt'l*, added on the Groyse Shtub, a large room where the *tishen* were conducted, and food was served to Yidden. When the construction was complete, Rebbe Yissachar Dov said, "A thousand years ago, on this spot, there lived a yid

who excelled in the mitzvah of *hachnasas orchim* - like Avraham Avinu. When my grandfather built the shul, this yid thought it was time for *techiyas hameisim*. He got out of his grave and came to my grandfather. The Sar Shalom told him that it isn't *techiyas hameisim* yet, and the *niftar* returned to his grave. In the merit of his *hachnasas orchim*, which he kept with all his might right at this spot, he merited that the Groyse Shtub be built on this location."

The Maharil Diskin *zt'l* excelled in the mitzvah of *hachnasas orchim*. Many people ate in his home, and he would often be learning at the side of the room. Once, the Maharil Diskin suddenly stopped his in-depth studies, went over to the table to help an old man pull the soft parts of the bread away from the crust because it was hard for this man to eat the crust.

People asked the Maharil Diskin, "You were immersed in your studies. How did you notice that

this elderly man was struggling with his bread?"

The Maharal Diskin answered, "How did Avraham see the three malachim approaching? He was speaking with Hashem, totally engrossed in the conversation. How could he recognize the guests? The answer is that when a person is devoted to a mitzvah, he is alert and aware of everything associated with this mitzvah - at all times." The Maharal Diskin explained that he is also dedicated to *hachmasas orchim*. Therefore, even when he is in the midst of learning, he is aware of a guest's needs.

At night, the city Kozmir was silent, and all homes were dark. But one house was still lit up. That was the house of Rebbe Yechezkel Kozmir *zt'l*, for he would awaken at midnight and study Torah until the morning.

Two travelers once arrived in the middle of the night, and they needed a

place to stay. They knocked at the Rebbe's home; the only house lit up at that hour. The Rebbe took them in, prepared a meal for them and a place to sleep. This caused a drop of noise, which awoke the *gabbai*, who slept in the next room. The *gabbai* thought, "Who could come to the Rebbe's house so late at night? I must be hearing *neshamos*."

The *gabbai* thought *neshamos* came to the rebbe so he could rectify their souls! The *gabbai*, afraid to meet the *neshamos*, stayed in his room.

The following day, at *Shacharis*, the *gabbai* told people about the *neshamos* who came to the rebbe's home the previous night. The rebbe commented, "It is true that two *neshamos* came to me last night, but they didn't come so I can fix their *neshamos*. They came to fix my *neshamah*," because through the people that came to Rebbe Moshe Kobriner's home, he had the merit and opportunity

to perform the special mitzvah of hachnasas orchim.<sup>15</sup>

When the Chofetz Chaim *zt'l* was very old, he couldn't travel anymore to

**15.** 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. There was a tannery across the street. The Avnei Nezer said, "In the tannery, you find hides. But when these hides becomes tefillin, they become holy. Similarly, regardless of your level, now you are a mitzvah, a *cheftza shel mitzvah* (an item used for a mitzvah) so now you are holy.

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

"Really?" the Chofetz Chaim replied. "And tomorrow, will you wear my tefillin for me?" *Hachnosas orchim* is a mitzvah, and the Chofetz Chaim was happy to perform the mitzvah himself.

As a *bachur*, Reb Chaim Brim *zt'l* would often travel to Bnei Brak to speak in learning with the Chazon Ish *zt'l*. After their conversation, he would return home to Yerushalayim. One night, he missed the last bus back, so he had to stay the night in Bnei Brak in the Chazon Ish's home.

Reb Chaim Brim related that he felt very uncomfortable that night, because three great people doted on him: the Chazon Ish, (the Chazon Ish's brother-in-law) the Steipler, and the Steipler's *rebbezin*. The Chazon Ish gave the orders; one brought *negel vasser*, one brought food, another prepared a bed... He said, "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."

rabbinic gatherings, so the rabbanim decided to hold their next meeting in the Chofetz Chaim's home. Reb Chaim Ozer Grodzhinsky *zt'l* also came to this meeting, and the Chofetz Chaim was very happy to see him. One of the rabbanim said, "Now, that Reb Chaim Ozer came, we are ten people. Perhaps we should daven *minchah* now?"

The Chofetz Chaim disagreed. He said, "It doesn't state anywhere that we should ask a guest if he wants to daven." A guest arrived, and he should be given food, drink, a place to sleep, and not obligate him to make a minyan.

The Chofetz Chaim said that this is alluded in the pasuk (20:11), רק אין יראת אלקים, במקום הזה, that Avraham told Avimelech there was no *yiras Hashem* in his town. How did Avraham know that? Rashi writes, אכסנאי שבא לעיר, על עסקי אכילה ושתייה שואלין אותו, או על עסקי אשתו שואלין אותו, "When a guest comes to your city,

do you ask him about food and drink (whether he has where to eat) or do you ask him about his wife, 'Is she your wife or your sister?'"

The Chofetz Chaim explained, "This means, when a guest arrives, you are supposed to ask about him whether he is tired or hungry."

The Chofetz Chaim asked Reb Chaim Ozer *zt'l* whether he wanted to eat. Reb Chaim Ozer said that he doesn't. The Chofetz Chaim said, "But you are certainly tired; you just arrived. Go rest up a little bit."

Avraham told the guests (18:5), ואקחה פת לחם, "I will take bread..." It seems that he should have said, ואתנה פת לחם, "I will give you bread." The Ahavas Yisrael *zt'l* replied that when one gives bread to the hungry, he is the one who "took." As Chazal say, "More than the wealthy do for the poor, the poor do for the wealthy," as he gives them the opportunity to do a

mitzvah, which has many segulos and brings many blessings. So, the one who gives is the one who receives.<sup>16</sup>

Avraham asked Sarah to prepare שלש סאים קמה, which is an awful lot of flour for just three guests. The Ben Ish Chai zt'l explains that Avraham wanted that there be *sherayim*, leftovers, because Avraham wanted to feed his household holy food.

This teaches us that that leftovers from *hachnasas orchim* food is holy.

The Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 103:) states, גדולה לגימה, "It is a great deed to feed other people," and the Gemara describes the rewards and benefits that go to those who perform *hachnasas orchim*. One is: ומעלמת עינים מן הרשעים, "Hashem doesn't look at the inequities of the *resha'im*." When one performs the mitzvah of *hachnasas orchim*, Hashem doesn't think about his aveiros.

The proof is Michah. The *Navi* (*Shoftim* 17) tells us that Micha made an idol and a temple for its worship.

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**16.** The Gemara (*Shabbos* 127.) states, גדולה הכנסת אורחים יותר מקבלת פני השכינה, "Taking in guests is greater than greeting the *Shechinah*."

בדרך צחות, we can explain that we greet the *Shechinah* once a month during *Kiddush Levannah*, as we say, אלמלא לא זכו ישראל אלא להקביל פני אביהם, "If the Jewish nation would greet their Father in heaven once a month, it is enough..." But *hachnasas orchim* should be יותר מקבלת פני השכינה, more often. We should have guests more than once a month.

Although we want to have guests often, we mustn't forgo the guidelines of *tznius*.

Avraham's guests asked, איה שרה אשתך, "Where is Sarah...," Avraham replied, הנה באהל, "She's in the tent." Rashi writes, צנועה היא, she is *b'tznius*, and she remains in the tent.

The Gemara states "Migrav (where Michah's temple stood) was just three *mil* from Shilo (where Mishkan Shilo stood). The smoke of Michah's altar mixed with the smoke from Mishkan Shilo's *mizbeiach*. The *malachim* wanted to kill

Michah. Hakadosh Baruch Hu said, 'Let him live, because פתו מצויה לעוברי דרכים, he gives bread passing travelers.'" Michah had a *hachnasas orchim* stop on the road, and in that merit, Hashem overlooked his sins.