

NEFESH SHIMSHON

DIVREI TORAH ON THE WEEKLY PARSHA AND HOLIDAYS FROM
THE TEACHINGS OF **RABBEINU SHIMSHON DOVID PINCUS ZT"l**

THIS PUBLICATION IS DEDICATED TO THE HATZLACHAH AND ZECHUS OF **נחמה ויעקב בן רחל נחמה**.
MAY THEY GROW TO BE TALMIDEI CHACHAMIM AND OVDEI HASHEM.

PEARLS OF WISDOM FROM THE PARSHAH

Laughing Last

וְתֹאמַר שָׂרָה צֶחֶק עָשָׂה לִי אֱלֹקִים (בראשית כא, ו)

Sarah said, “G-d made me laughter” (*Bereishis* 21:6)

Yitzchak Avinu is named after laughter, *tzechok*. There is an expression, “He who laughs last, laughs best.” Yitzchak is the one who will have the last laugh. In the end, the Jewish people will laugh at all the pagan nations that oppressed them so.

Properly understood, laughter is evoked when we think back about a certain time in the past. Let’s say a person was in a state of fear, and in the end it turned out that the situation was quite the opposite of what he had thought at the time. The supposed danger never even existed, it was a total misunderstanding, or a figment of his imagination. He did not overcome the threat; rather, he discovered that the threat never was there.

For instance, Reuven is fleeing from someone who is running after him, because Reuven thinks this person wants to kill him. In the end it turns out that the person came to give him a big gift.

This causes Reuven to laugh about what happened. Another example is that a person is walking down the street and a tank appears in front of him. He is shocked, and shoots an anti-tank missile at it. Then it turns out that the whole “tank” was made of cardboard. This brings him to laugh, because it turns out that everything was false, no more than an optical illusion.

After it all, in the end of time, we will laugh about everything. All the troubles and all the suffering that we thought was so terrible – in the end we will laugh about all of it. Now, we bless *Baruch Hayov Vehameiteiv* over good things, and *Baruch Dayan Ha’emes* over evil tidings. But in the future to come, when *Hashem* will be One and His Name will be One, we will bless *Baruch Hatov Vehameiteiv* over everything.

Hashem sits Above, in Heaven, and sees the whole picture, from beginning to end. He hears

all the noise and the talk, he knows all the evil plans that the kings of the pagan nations plotted against us, and He makes a joke out of it all, so to speak. Not just that the plans came to naught, but they never even existed. We are here on earth, so

we don't laugh. We don't get the joke. But the day will come when we, too, will laugh, when the true picture will be revealed to us, in all its grandeur.

This glorious moment is alluded in the name Yitzchak. ●

The Power of Silence

וַיֹּאמֶר בִּי נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי נְאֻם ה' כִּי יֵעַן אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ אֶת הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה וְלֹא חָשַׁכְתָּ אֶת בְּנִךְ.
(בראשית כב, טז)

He said, "I swear by Myself," says Hashem, "that since you did this thing, and did not withhold your son." (Bereishis 22:16)

Some people ask, what is the enormously great deed that *Avraham Avinu* did at the *Akeidah*? If you say it was his willingness to slaughter his son Yitzchak, what else could he have done? *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* expressly commanded him to take Yitzchak and offer him as an *olah*. Could Avraham have done otherwise?

The answer is in a *Midrash* on the *pasuk* of בִּי נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי נְאֻם ה' – "I swore by Myself," said Hashem." The *Midrash* says:

What need was there for Hashem to swear? R. Bivi bar Abba said as follows in the name of R. Yochanan:

Avraham Avinu stood in prayer and supplication before *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, and said before Him, "*Ribono shel Olam*, You know very well that when You told me,

'Please take your only son,' I had something to say back. I could have replied, 'Yesterday You said to me, "In Yitzchak you will have descendants." And now You say to me, 'Bring him as a burnt offering'?"

"Just as I had something to reply, but I subdued my impulse and did not answer You back – I made myself like a deaf person who does not hear and like a mute person who does not open his mouth – So may it be that when the descendants of Yitzchak will do sins and commit evil deeds, You will remember for them the binding of their forefather Yitzchak, and You will leave the throne of judgment to move over to the throne of mercy." [And so Hashem swore.]¹

¹ *Vayikra Rabbah* 29:9.

לְעִירְלֵי נִשְׁמָה

מִוֶּה"ד מֹשֶׁה בֶּן אֱלִיעֶזֶר הַמְּבֹרָךְ זצ"ל

וּמִוֶּה"ד בְּרָךְ זֶאֱבֵן בֶּן נִפְתָּלִי קִרְאוֹס זצ"ל

נִדְבַת נִבְרִיהֶם ~ עֲטֻרַת זִקְנִים בְּנֵי בָנִים וְהַפָּאֶרֶת בָּנִים אֲבוֹתָם

Avraham Avinu had some choice words to say, but he refrained.

What about us?

We are willing to do a lot of things, but we want to at least be able to make a comment, to say what we think about it. Let's say I am willing to put up with mistreatment from my friend. But at least he should know that he didn't do right by me! How can I not even say a word about it, and just let him go on his merry way as if nothing happened?!

When *Hashem* commanded Avraham regarding the *Akeidah*, Avraham could have said back, "*Hashem*, I am ready to do it. But just explain to me one thing. I just want to ask one little question: Didn't You promise me that my descendants, the Jewish people, will come from Yitzchak?"

Avraham Avinu didn't offer his reaction. He didn't ask any questions. But he requested that in the merit of his silence, *Hashem*, too, should not react when the Jewish people do *aveiros*. He couldn't ask *Hashem* to just let their sins go. Sins cannot be let go. But there was one thing he could rightly ask: I kept my mouth shut, I didn't react, so also You, *Hashem*, please don't react.

And this was not Avraham's first *nisayon*. In the

previous *parshah*, *Hashem* commanded him to leave his land and his birthplace and his father's house. This was a very hard thing for *Avraham Avinu* to do. He had built his home in Charan. He worked very hard to bring the people there to *teshuvah*. And there was a lot more he wanted to accomplish.

Then *Hashem* tells him לך לך, you must leave it all behind, and promises Avraham that he will have everything good his new location. What does Avraham do? He doesn't ask questions. He just gets up and goes as commanded. He leaves everything behind and moves on.

And this is not the end of the story. Finally he gets to the land of Canaan, and for the first time in history, a famine strikes. There is nothing to eat in *Eretz Canaan*. He could have complained to *Hashem* and said, "*Ribono shel Olam*, You told me to go to the land that You will show me, and You will bless me there. I went. And now that I got here, I don't even have food to eat. It's the first time ever that food ran out. Didn't You promise to bless me over here?!"

But no, *Avraham Avinu* doesn't say a word.

This is what keeps us alive until this day. The resounding silence of the *Avos Hakedoshim*. ●

PARSHAH TOPIC

Prayer Always Works

וְה' אָמַר הַמַּכְסָּה אֲנִי מֵאַבְרָהָם אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי עֹשֶׂה. וְאַבְרָהָם הָיוּ יְהִיָּה לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל וְעָצוֹם וְנִבְרָכוֹ
בּוֹ כָּל גּוֹי הָאָרֶץ: (בראשית יח, יז-יח)

***Hashem* said, "How shall I hide from Avraham what I am doing, when Avraham is destined to become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed through him?" (*Bereishis* 18:17-18)**

Where Did Avraham's Prayers Go?

The *Maggid* of Dubno asks: What is the logic of the above-quoted *pasuk*? Why should *Hashem*

tell Avraham what He is about to do just because Avraham will someday become a great nation?

The *Dubner Maggid* answers with a parable.

An elderly man went to the tailor to buy a suit,

and was hesitating whether the suit was the right size or not. After him, a youth came in and bought a suit, and then another suit, without even taking measurements. The elderly man asked him, "How can you buy without checking the size?" The youth answered, "If the suit is not good for me today, it will be good for me tomorrow. And if it will not be good for me at all, it will be good for my children. In any case, the suit will be put to good use."

Thus *Hashem* said, "How shall I hide from Avraham what I am doing – I will tell him about My decree to destroy Sedom." And lest we ask: What about all the heartfelt prayers that Avraham then prayed for Sedom, in order that it should be saved? If *Hashem* had already decided definitely to destroy Sedom, why did He cause Avraham to pray so many *tefilos* in vain? Wasn't it a forgone conclusion that there were not enough *tzaddikim* in Sedom to justify saving the place?

The answer is, "Avraham is destined to become a great nation." The whole Jewish people will descend from him. Avraham's prayers are not in vain; they will be put to good use for his descendants.

Not one of all those fervent *tefilos* that Avraham prayed got lost. Nothing went to waste. Every *tefilah* like this is put into storage in *Hashem's* treasure houses. And it will produce rich benefits when the right time comes. There's no imagining the enormous outpouring of blessing, *siyata d'Shmaya*, protection and salvation that will accrue to the descendants of Avraham, in the merit of the *tefilos* he offered for the sake of the people of Sedom.

This is why *Hashem* revealed to Avraham the decree to overturn Sedom. It brought him to *daven* valiantly and passionately. And this produced a rich treasure to be stored away in Heaven's storehouses. This enormous treasure will be put to good use at the right time.

We can learn from above teaching of the *Dubner Maggid* that every *tefilah* we pray, every request and supplication we utter to *Hashem*, is stored away in *Hashem's* great treasure house in

Heaven. And it will produce glorious results when the time comes.

Hashem is our Father and He loves us infinitely. He will surely use these *tefilos* to bring us a great plenty of blessing and success when we need it.

We just need to rely on Him, and deposit our *tefilos* in His storehouse, and believe with perfect faith that He will put their merit to good use at the best possible time.

Let's say we *daven* for a sick person, and he doesn't get better. We shouldn't assume that our *tefilos* were not accepted by *Hashem* and we prayed in vain. This is not so. *Tefilos* that did not help this sick person will help a different sick person. They will help the person who offered the prayer in his time of trouble. Maybe they will help the sick person himself, who passed away, in the form of *zechuyos*, when he comes to Heaven for judgment. No prayer goes unanswered.

The Power of Public Prayer

I spoke on this very subject after my mother-in-law *Rebbetzin* Mann passed away.

She fell ill and needed a complicated head operation abroad. After the operation she did not wake up. She was unconscious for a whole week, after which she passed away.

Afterward I found out that during that critical week when she was hanging between life and death, they were *davening* furiously in the *yeshivos* of *Eretz Yisrael*. In every *yeshivah* where her sons and sons-in-law held a position, they were *davening* extensively for her *refuah sheleimah*. *Tefillim* were recited after every *tefilah*. And *Tzaddikei Hador* offered prayers for her healing. So many *tefilos*, so many supplications, so many urgent cries emerged from people's hearts that she should recover. Yet, none of those prayers was able to save her. She passed away after a week.

We might mistakenly think that all those prayers on her behalf were not accepted by Heaven. We might feel as if all the heartfelt cries and pleas were

useless, were rejected.

But the truth is that not a single *tefilah* went to waste. Not a single plea was refused. All the cries to *Hashem* were lovingly accepted, not a single little word got lost.

Perhaps the prayers offered by all those precious Jews on behalf of my mother-in-law went to benefit her children and grandchildren whom she left behind. Maybe they were used to protect the entire Jewish people from terrible troubles. It could be that they are helping my mother-in-law in the *Olam Ha'emes* and are a *meilitz yosher* for her there.

But one thing is for sure: no *tefilah* was for nought, no cry was unheard, no plea was ignored.

Storing Up

We need to know that our *tefilos* are being kept in a very secure storage facility in Heaven, and there is a good reason for this, as the following analogy describes.

At harvest time, enormous amounts of grain are hauled in from the fields. Why do we need all that grain? Just a few pounds of it will suffice for now.

The obvious answer is that we have a long winter ahead of us, and after that, several months of spring,

and also the beginning of the summer season. Until the next harvest comes, a whole year will pass by. So we need to store up enough grain to last throughout this long period.

But all our efforts are only worthwhile if we have a good place to store this grain. If we do, then we may be sweating and toiling at harvest time, but afterwards, when winter comes, and then spring comes, we will be relaxed and confident, knowing we have all the food we need to make it through the whole period.

But if the silo in which we put the grain is no good, if it is moldy and infested with mice, then the grain will go to waste, and we knocked ourselves out for nothing. In such a case it would be better to harvest just a few pounds for immediate use, rather than exert ourselves for no good reason.

We know that everything is stored away up in heaven under perfect conditions. We know that our *tefilos* are in the safekeeping of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, and He won't let a single *tefilah* get lost. He saves them for the day when they can be used best. This knowledge should strengthen our desire to invest more, to *daven* another *tefilah* and another *tefilah*. Because even if it doesn't help today, it will surely help as time goes on. ●

SPECIAL TOPIC

Trait of Avraham, Trait of Yitzchak

We will start by stating that the trait *Yitzchak Avinu* represents is *yiras Shamayim*. This means making oneself as nothing before *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

The trait that *Avraham Avinu* represents is *chesed*. Avraham was excited his whole life over how the

entire world is so full of *chesed* in a most wondrous way. The very existence of heaven and earth, with the infinite individual objects and beings they contain, which come in endless variations and hues, are all acts of *Hashem's* great *chesed*.

Avraham's main *avodas Hashem* consisted of resembling *Hashem* by doing *chesed* as expansively as possible. Thus, Avraham brought in the three guests he saw, even though they appeared to him as lowly Arabs who worship the dust on their own feet. And he valiantly struggled to rescue the people of Sedom from destruction, although they were as evil as could be.

Chesed is a trait that builds and provides benefit, as it says:

עוֹלָם חֶסֶד יִבְנֶה – The world is built through *chesed*.¹

Therefore, the main thing Avraham involved himself with was bringing people to *teshuvah*, because this is the greatest *chesed* that can be done, and the greatest and most beneficial thing that can be built.

By contrast, Yitzchak's main way of looking at the world was to perceive *Hashem's* absolute rule over His world.

Yitzchak saw how all the laws of nature, by means of which the world was established, stand on the foundation of *yiras Shamayim*. As *Chazal* say, the pillars of the heavens were weak and loose until *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* raised His voice and rebuked them.² This expresses the idea that the fundamental laws of nature, which seem so strong and fixed and unchanging to us, are that way only because of the word of *Hashem* that is within them. It is the force of *Hashem's* glory that makes everything stand strong and immutable. The whole world is thus full of *Hashem's* Divinity. His power grants life to all.

This is what Yitzchak focused on.

Here are a few examples of how Yitzchak did things, as contrasted with how Avraham did things. They show how Avraham was involved with building, and Yitzchak was involved with making himself as nothing before *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

וְהוֹכַח אַבְרָהָם אֶת אַבִּימֶלֶךְ עַל אֲדוֹת בְּאֵר
הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר גָּזְלוּ עַבְדֵי אַבִּימֶלֶךְ – Avraham
reproved Avimelech regarding the well
of water that the servants of Avimelech
stole.³

Avraham had an incident where his well was stolen. What did he do? He took action to get it back. He had a meeting with Avimelech about it, and the well was returned.

Yitzchak, too, had incidents where his wells were stolen. What did he do?

וַיַּעֲתֶק מִשָּׁם – He moved away from that
place.⁴

He just accepted what happened. He didn't do anything about it. He didn't feel any need to look out for his needs and engage in *hishtadlus* because he saw *Hashem* as being right there with him, in control of everything that happens.

Here's another case where we see the difference between Avraham and Yitzchak. They both traveled to unruly regions where there was good reason to be concerned over the fate of their wives. But they handled it differently. Before Avraham went down to Egypt to escape the famine, he developed a plan of action:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל שָׂרִי אִשְׁתּוֹ וְגו' אֲמַרִי נָא אַחֲתִי
אֵת – “He said to his wife Sarai, ‘Please say
that you are my sister.’”⁵

Avraham set up a system to protect himself and his wife.

But when Yitzchak went with his wife Rivkah to sojourn in Gerar, among the Plishtim, he didn't tell his wife to say this. He didn't make a plan in advance. When he got there, and people asked about Rivkah, he replied that she is his sister, but that was only after they already confronted him with the issue.

1 *Tehillim* 89:3.

2 *Chagigah* 12.

3 *Bereishis* 21:25.

4 *Ibid* 26:22.

5 *Bereishis* 12:13.

Allowing the Philistines to assume that she was his wife would have been fatal for him, and it is *asur* to commit suicide.

It is worth noting that that in the incident with Avraham, they did take his wife. But thanks to Avraham and Sarah's great *tzidkus*, she was not touched, and was returned to him after *Hashem* struck Pharaoh and his household with plagues. Whereas in the incident with Yitzchak, it says that after a long time went by, Avimelech finally discovered that Rivkah was Yitzchak's wife, but never actually took her.

This is because of the trait of Yitzchak. He placed all his matters in Hashem's hands alone. He let Hashem take care of everything. And the rule is that someone who places himself completely in Hashem's hands is saved from trouble – לא יבושו ולא יכלמו – לנצח כל החוסים בך.

We see the difference between Avraham and Yitzchak also in how they related to the *Akeidah*. It says regarding the *Akeidah* that *Hashem* tested Avraham, *Hashem* put him through a trial, and the Commentators ask why it was considered only Avraham's *nisayon* not Yitzchak's *nisayon*.

The answer is we need to understand what a *nisayon* is. It is called a *nisayon* only when it goes against a person's nature. The *Akeidah* went totally against Avraham's nature. Avraham was involved his whole life with building up the world. Now he was asked to destroy everything he built.

Furthermore, as a true man of *chesed*, Avraham spread to everyone the proper views and outlook. He taught people his whole life that *Hashem* doesn't want human sacrifice; that's pagan. Now he was commanded to destroy all the positive influence he had on the world over the course of 135 years, and

subject himself to public ridicule and humiliation to boot. Everyone will say he is a liar and that he was peddling a false doctrine all along.

All this, and more, was the *nisayon* of Avraham.

But Yitzchak wasn't involved with all these things. He had a different approach. He just did *Hashem's* Will without thinking twice, and this included getting on the *mizbeach* and being offered as a sacrifice to G-d.

The *Akeidah* did not go against Yitzchak's nature. It was not a contradiction to his approach. On the contrary, this is exactly what he had been doing the whole time. He was always giving himself totally to *Hashem*. So for him this was not called a *nisayon*.

Chazal recount that Yishmael boasted to Yitzchak that he underwent *milah* when he was thirteen years old, while Yitzchak was a mere baby when he was circumcised, to which Yitzchak responded, "If *Hashem* would tell me to offer my entire body to Him, it would be nothing for me." This is how Yitzchak lived.

Chazal say that *Avraham Avinu* underwent ten *nisyonos*. This means that he was tested in ways that went against all his various traits and qualities. The number ten represents a totality. It contains and sums up all the traits of the world and of the human being. Avraham withstood all ten *nisyonos*.

Yitzchak didn't have ten different traits and qualities. He didn't have traits and qualities at all. He just did one thing: *Hashem's* Will. He didn't need to undergo ten *nisyonos*, or even one *nisayon*, because for him, there was no such thing as doing *Hashem's* Will against his nature. For him, it was his nature to do whatever *Hashem* wants. ●