

In this week's *Parashah*, we begin to focus on the life of our Patriarch Avraham. Some commentaries count our *Parashah's* opening verse, "*Lecha lecha / Go for yourself from your land, from your relatives, and from your father's house to the land that I will show you,*" as the first of Avraham's *Asarah Nisyonot / Ten Tests*.

R' Moshe Zuriel *shlita* (Bnei Brak, Israel; former *Mashgiach Ruchani* of Yeshivat Sha'alvim) writes: The *Rishonim / early authorities* who list the 613 *Mitzvot* (for example, *Rambam z"l*, *Ramban z"l*, and *Sefer Ha'chinuch*) do not list *Bitachon / placing one's trust in Hashem* among the commandments. Indeed, *Bitachon* is never mentioned expressly in the Torah. Where, then, asks R' Zuriel, can we find the concept of *Bitachon* in the Torah? After all, the *Zohar* teaches, "There is nothing that is not alluded to in the Torah."

R' Zuriel answers: Each of Avraham's *Asarah Nisyonot* was a test of his *Bitachon*. Leaving his homeland, Sarah's kidnaping, through the command to sacrifice Yitzchak--notwithstanding *Hashem's* promise that a great nation would come from him--each of these called on Avraham to stand firm in his *Bitachon*. Likewise, Yaakov Avinu's *Bitachon* was tested when he fled from Esav and came empty-handed to Lavan. *Midrash Rabbah* records that Yaakov said on that occasion, "Have I lost my hope that my Creator will care for me? G-d forbid! I will not lose my hope. My assistance comes from *Hashem!*" The *Midrash* teaches that Yaakov gained this strength from reciting (prophetically) the fifteen chapters of *Tehilim* (120-134) that begin "*Shir Ha'ma'alot.*" (*Otzrot Ha'mussar* p.321)

Bitachon

This year--a Shemittah year--we will devote this space to discussing the related subject of Bitachon / placing one's trust in Hashem.

Below and on the front page, we examine whether there is an express source in the Torah for the obligation to have Bitachon.

R' Eliezer Azkari z"l (1533-1600; Tzefat, *Eretz Yisrael*; author of the hymn *Yedid Nefesh*) writes: Many fine qualities [which we would want to possess even if we were not commanded to do so] were commanded to us as *Mitzvot*. . . The second is *Bitachon*, as it is written (*Devarim* 18:13), "You shall be wholehearted with *Hashem*, your *Elokim*." R' Moshe ben Nachman z"l (*Ramban*; 1194-1270; Spain and *Eretz Yisrael*) writes that this verse commands us not to consult astrologers about the future and, if we hear the future foretold by them, to believe that everything is in *Hashem's* hands, and He can annul the signs in the stars if we serve Him [Until here from *Ramban*]. From this we learn, writes R' Azkari, that it is a *Mitzvah* to trust in *Hashem* with all our hearts regarding all aspects of this world. This is stated many times in the Prophets, for example: "Blessed is the man who trusts in *Hashem* . . ." (*Yirmiyah* 17:7); "Accursed is the man who trusts in people . . ." (*ibid*, verse 5); "Trust in Him at every moment . . ." (*Tehilim* 62:9); "Trust in *Hashem* with all your heart . . ." (*Mishlei* 3:5).
(*Sefer Chareidim* 9:21)

R' Eliyahu z"l (1720-1797; the *Vilna Gaon*) writes: Each of the six letters of the Torah's first word ("בראשית / *Bereishit*") alludes to a fundamental of serving *Hashem*. The first, "*Bet*," alludes to *Bitachon*. The others are: "*Ratzon / the Will of Hashem*"; "*Ahavah / Love [of Hashem]*"; "*Shetikah / Silence*"; "*Yir'ah / Awe [of Hashem]*"; and "*Torah*."

(*Aderet Eliyahu* 1:1)

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(*Rivka Rachel bas Yehuda Leib a"h*)

From the Haftarah . . .

“Why do you say, Yaakov, and declare, Yisrael: ‘My way is hidden from Hashem, and my judgment has been passed over by my Elokim?’” (Yeshayah 40:26)

R’ Saadiah Gaon z”l (882-942; Egypt, Eretz Yisrael and present-day Iraq; author of the earliest known work on Jewish Thought) writes: The prophet is rebuking the Jewish People for thinking that Hashem is not aware of our situation in the exile and that He is not judging us fairly. Rather, we are assured by the prophets that He will redeem us, either at the preordained time, or earlier if we repent. (Ha’Nivchar B’emunot V’de’ot 8:2)



“For you know, even if you had not heard, that the Elokim of the world is Hashem, Creator of the ends of the earth, Who neither wearies nor tires, Whose discernment is beyond investigation. He gives strength to the weary, and for the powerless, He increases might.” (Yeshayah 40:27-28)

R’ Yosef Albo z”l (Spain; 1380-1444) explains:

“For you know”--from your own philosophical investigations, “even if you had not heard”--through a received tradition, “that the Elokim of the world is Hashem”--i.e., that there is a Being whose existence is a logical necessity, and He is “the Elokim of the world,” the ultimate Cause of everything, and “Hashem,” having no physical body and being uninfluenced by any physical phenomena.

Despite being removed from anything physical, He is “Creator of the ends of the earth”--the Cause of all physical beings. But, do not think that our physical or mental limitations are due to His having limitations. No! “Who neither wearies nor tires, Whose discernment is beyond investigation. He gives strength to the weary, and for the powerless, He increases might.” He has no limitations. (Sefer Ha’ikkarim IV 3)

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Elsewhere, the Vilna Gaon writes: The primary purpose for which the Torah was given to the Jewish People is so that they will place their trust in Hashem. The most important thing in life is complete *Bitachon*, and that is the unifying principle of all *Mitzvot*.

(Be’ur Ha’gra Al Mishlei 22:19)

And, the Vilna Gaon writes: Because proper *Middot* / character traits [including *Bitachon*] are the foundation of the Torah, they are not discussed expressly in the Torah.

(Peirush Ha’Gra Al Megilat Esther 10:3)

“And there was a Riv / quarrel between the herdsmen of Avram’s livestock and the herdsmen of Lot’s livestock . . . So Avram said to Lot, ‘Please let there be no Merivah / quarrel between me and you, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen, for we are kinsmen.’” (13:7-8)

Why does the Torah change from the masculine form “Riv” to the feminine form “Merivah”?

R’ Yerachmiel Shulman z”l Hy”d (Menahel Ruchani of the Bet Yosef-Novardok Yeshiva in Pinsk, Poland; killed in the Holocaust) explains:

The *Midrash Yalkut Shimoni* states, “Sins are barren and do not bear fruit, while *Tzedakah* bears fruit, as it is written (Yeshayah 3:10), ‘For they shall eat the fruits of their deeds’.” It is human nature, explains R’ Shulman, that a person quickly forgets the kindness that another did for him, whereas he remembers another’s wrongdoings for a long time. Hashem acts in the opposite way, however: “Sins are barren and do not bear fruit”--they are forgotten, while “*Tzedakah* bears fruit”--it provides long-term benefits to the one who did it.

In a related vein, continues R’ Shulman, R’ Yeshayah Halevi Horowitz z”l (the *Shelah Hakadosh*; rabbi of Prague and Yerushalayim; died 1630) answers our question as follows: There was a “Riv” between Avraham’s shepherds and Lot’s shepherds. The masculine form is used because it had not yet become a quarrel that had the potential to “bear fruit” and create lasting enmity. Avraham said: Let us nip this quarrel in the bud before it becomes a “Merivah,” using the feminine form to indicate the ability to “bear fruit.”

(Peninei Ha’shlaimut: Sha’ar Ha’savlanut 1:6)

“After these events, the word of Hashem came to Avram in a vision saying, ‘Fear not, Avram, I am a shield for you; your reward is very great.’

“And Avram said, ‘My Lord, Hashem/Elokim! What can You give me seeing that I go childless, and the steward of my house is Damasek Eliezer?’” (15:1-2)

Rashi z”l explains: After the miracle of defeating the four kings, Avraham worried, “Perhaps I have already received, in the form of this victory, reward for all my good deeds.” Therefore, Hashem reassured him, “Your reward is very great.”

Rashi explains further: The nickname of Avraham’s slave Eliezer (“Damesek”) is short for “*Doleh u’mashkeh*”--he drew from Avraham’s wisdom as one draws water from a well, and he gave others to drink, i.e., he taught others. [Until here from *Rashi*]

R’ Noach Weinberg z”l (1930-2009; founder and *Rosh Yeshiva* of *Aish HaTorah*) asks: Hashem promised Avraham great reward in *Olam Ha’ba*. Why does Avraham turn around and ask for children? Children are a wonderful gift, R’ Weinberg writes, but nothing can compare to the promise of reward in the World-to-Come!

He explains: Avraham wanted children only so that he could father the Jewish Nation and fulfil his mission of turning the wayward world back to Hashem. He wanted to bring the entire world to *Olam Ha’ba*, and this required him to have a fitting heir. Why wasn’t Eliezer a fitting heir? Because he did nothing more than pass on his master’s teachings, like one who draws water from a well and gives it to someone else to drink. He did nothing to build himself spiritually.

(48 Derachim L’Torah p.163)