

Among the events in this week's *Parashah*, we read that Avraham prayed that *Hashem* not destroy S'dom and its sister cities. As the Torah relates, Avraham's prayer was unsuccessful. Later in the *Parashah*, we read that Lot asked that S'dom's sister city, Tzo'ar, not be destroyed, and he was answered. Why was Lot's prayer successful, while the prayer of the world's greatest *Tzaddik*, Avraham, was not?

R' Noach Weinberg z"l (1930-2009; founder and *Rosh Yeshiva* of *Aish HaTorah*) explains: When one prays, he gets no more than what he asked for. Avraham asked that S'dom be saved if ten righteous people lived there. Since there were not ten such people, Avraham's prayer was not answered. Lot, in contrast, asked that Tzo'ar be saved because it was one year newer than S'dom, so its sins were fewer (see *Rashi* to 19:20). Since that was true, Lot was answered.

R' Weinberg continues: Why didn't Avraham pray as Lot did, if his goal was to save lives? Because, R' Weinberg answers, another important principle of prayer is that one needs to believe what he is saying. Avraham believed that there was hope for S'dom if there were ten *Tzaddikim* there; therefore, he prayed on that basis. The mere fact that Tzo'ar was one year newer than S'dom was not meaningful in Avraham's mind, so he could not base his prayer on that difference.

This, concludes R' Weinberg, explains why we pray every day in *Shemoneh Esrei* for the coming of *Mashiach*, even though great *Tzaddikim* before us did not succeed in bringing him. Because each succeeding generation is more degenerate than its predecessors and needs *Mashiach* more, we may be capable of praying with a yearning that our forebears could not muster. (48 *Derachim L'Torah* p.164)

## Bitachon

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

This week, we begin to discuss what it means to "have *Bitachon*." *Iy"H*, future issues will elaborate on the ideas summarized here.

R' Nosson Yehuda Leib Mintzberg z"l (1943-2018; rabbi and *Rosh Yeshiva* in Yerushalayim and Bet Shemesh, Israel) writes: On the most basic level, *Bitachon* means knowing that *Hashem* alone is the King and the Director of the world; therefore, one should trust only in Him and should rely on Him to operate the world.

R' Mintzberg writes further: When one delves deeper, one finds three basic approaches to defining *Bitachon*. He summarizes:

- R' Avraham ben Ha'Rambam z"l (son of Maimonides; Egypt; 1186-1237; author of *Ha'maspik L'ovdei Hashem*) and R' Avraham Yeshayahu Karelitz z"l (1878-1953; Bnei Brak, Israel; the "*Chazon Ish*"; major *Halachic* authority and author of *Emunah U'vitachon*) understand *Bitachon* as an outgrowth of the *Mitzvah* of *Emunah* / belief in G-d. Abstract belief is not enough. Rather, one's *Emunah* must impact his daily life, so that every decision he makes reflects his *Emunah*. One who has this understanding views every good thing that happens to him as a gift from *Hashem*, and he gives thanks. Conversely, he views every bad thing that happens to him as a rebuke, and he seeks to come closer to *Hashem* in response.
- Rabbeinu Bachya ibn Pekudah z"l (Spain; early 11<sup>th</sup> century; author of *Chovot Ha'levavot*) understands *Bitachon* as focusing on *Hashem's* goodness, and believing that one can count on Him. A person with *Bitachon* not only believes that *Hashem* is in charge, he believes that *Hashem* cares about him personally and will never forsake him.

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### From the Haftarah . . .

**“She came and told the man of Elokim, and he said, ‘Go sell the oil and pay your creditors, and you and your sons will live on the remainder’.” (Melachim II 4:7)**

R’ Shlomo Kluger z”l (1785-1869; rabbi of Brody, Galicia) explains: Our Sages teach that one should not derive benefit from a miracle, lest that enjoyment be deducted from his reward in the World to Come (see *Rashi, Ta’anit* 24a). Therefore, after the unnamed woman in our *Haftarah* miraculously filled all of the available jugs with oil from her one small container, she came to the prophet Elisha and asked, “Now what do I do with all this oil that I obtained miraculously?” Elisha answered her: First, pay your creditors. Paying creditors is a *Mitzvah* and, therefore, is not considered “having enjoyment” from the miracle. (This was especially true since the debts she was paying were her late husband’s debts, not her own.) Thereafter, Elisha continued, you and your sons may live on the remainder, which will be insignificant compared to the amount you spent on the *Mitzvah*.  
(*Chochmat Ha’Torah: Shema Shlomo* p.655)

**“Elisha came into the house and behold! -- the lad was dead, laid out on his bed. He entered and shut the door behind them both, and prayed to Hashem . . . and the lad opened his eyes.” (Melachim II 4:32-35)**

R’ Daniel Movshovitz z”l Hy”d (1880-1941; a leading figure in the Kelm branch of the *Mussar* movement) teaches: Our *Haftarah* teaches the extent of the obligation of *Hakarot Ha’tov* / feeling and expressing gratitude. This lad’s mother had offered Elisha hospitality whenever he traveled past her home. She even set aside a room for him with a bed, table, and lamp. How did Elisha express his gratitude? Not only did he thank her, and not only did he discern that the woman was childless and bless her and her husband that they would have a son, he even returned to perform *Techiyat Ha’meytim* / to revive the child after the boy had died!

(*Haggadah Shel Pesach Kelm* p.112)

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- Rabbeinu Yonah Gerondi z”l (Spain; died 1263; author of *Sha’arei Teshuvah*) understands *Bitachon* as a very high level of *Yir’at Shamayim* / awe of Heaven, such that a person recognizes beyond a doubt that he can never lose out by obeying the Torah and can never gain by transgressing the Torah.

R’ Mintzberg notes that these three understandings of *Bitachon* are not mutually exclusive.  
(*Ben Melech: Bitachon* p.3 & 13-18)

**“And so it was when Elokim destroyed the cities of the plain that Elokim remembered Avraham; so He sent Lot from amidst the upheaval when He overturned the cities in which Lot had lived.” (19:29)**

*Rashi z”l* writes: What bearing does G-d’s remembering Avraham have upon the rescue of Lot? *Hashem* “remembered” that Lot knew that Sarah was Avraham’s wife--yet, when Lot heard Avraham say in Egypt that Sarah was his sister, Lot did not betray Avraham, because he sympathized with him. For this reason, G-d had mercy on Lot. [Until here from *Rashi*]

R’ David Halevi Bamberger *shlita* (Manchester, England) observes: Lot literally risked his life for the *Mitzvah* of taking in guests, but that did not give him sufficient merit to be saved. Only Lot’s silence in Egypt saved him, which teaches us the incredible merit of guarding one’s tongue.

(*Nachalei Devash Al Ha’sofer Chafetz Chaim* p.3)



**“Avraham said, ‘Because I said, “There is but no fear of Elokim in this place and they will slay me because of my wife’.” (20:11)**

R’ Yerachmiel Shulman z”l Hy”d (*Menahel Ruchani* of the Bet Yosef-Novardok Yeshiva in Pinsk, Poland; killed in the Holocaust) comments: Gerar was a civilized society. However, without fear of G-d, even descending into outright murder is not farfetched.

(*Peninei Ha’chochmah* 1:23)

#### A related thought:

R’ Yosef Yozel Horowitz z”l (1847-1919; the *Alter* of Novardok) writes: With fear of G-d, one can make unbiased judgments. Without fear of G-d, one’s ability to weigh choices and alternatives is corrupted by biases.

(*Madregat Ha’adam: Ma’amar Yir’ah Va’ahavah* ch.10)



**“So Avraham woke up early in the morning . . .” (22:3)**

Our Sages teach that, when *Bnei Yisrael* stood at the *Yam Suf*, the guardian angel of Egypt argued before *Hashem*: “Why do these--*Bnei Yisrael*--deserve to be saved more than these--the Egyptians? These are idolators and these are idolators!” The *Zohar* relates that *Hashem* answered the angel that *Bnei Yisrael* were being saved in the merit of Avraham.

One would imagine, observes R’ Moshe Zuriel *shlita* (Bnei Brak, Israel; former *Mashgiach Ruchani* of Yeshivat Sha’alvim), that *Hashem* was referring to Avraham’s act in picking up the knife in preparation for offering Yitzchak as a sacrifice. No! Rather, the *Zohar* teaches that it was in the merit of Avraham’s waking up early to do a *Mitzvah*!

(*Kuntreis Shuvu Aili Va’ashuvah Aleichem* p.77)