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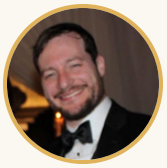
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PARSHAS VAYEIRA

פרשת וירא



Gematria on the Parshah: The Miracle of Yitzchak



BY REB MOSHE HERSKOVITS

In Parshat Vayeira, Yitzchak Avinu is born to Avraham and Sarah in their old age. Why did they have to wait so long to have a child? What merit brought about this miraculous birth, and what can it teach us about meriting miracles?

The Lubavitcher Rebbe explains that Yitzchak was a miracle child because the history of his descendants, Am Yisrael, would itself be miraculous. The survival of the Jewish people and their extraordinary impact on the world testify to this. But what enabled Avraham and Sarah to bring this miraculous child, and ultimately this miraculous nation, into the world?

GOING BEYOND NATURE

Rebbe Avraham HaMalach explains that Avraham and Sarah merited Yitzchak because they served Hashem by going beyond their own nature and limitations. When a person remains confined by their natural tendencies and ego, they are limited by their mazal (destiny). But when someone goes beyond themselves for Hashem and others, they become a vessel for the infinite, opening themselves to blessings beyond the natural order.

This idea is reflected in Avraham's journey to Canaan. The name כנען (Canaan) shares the same root as the Hebrew word כנע, meaning humility and lowering oneself.

Throughout their tests, Avraham and Sarah did not complain. They maintained complete trust in Hashem and believed in the blessings He had promised them, even when circumstances seemed to make those blessings impossible. Avraham and Sarah repeatedly demonstrated their willingness to go beyond their ego and nature for Hashem.

Gematria reveals this connection. Avraham was 100 years old and Sarah was 90 when Yitzchak was born. Their ages together equal the gematria of כנען (Canaan), 190. This alludes to the humility and selflessness that made them vessels to receive this miraculous blessing.

Another gematria deepens the connection: הארץ אשר אראך (the land that I will show you) equals יצחק בן אברהם ושרה (Yitzchak son of Avraham and Sarah), the gematria of 1019. Rebbe Avraham HaMalach explains that the land Hashem would show Avraham represents an ongoing journey. Avraham and Sarah continually reached higher levels of humility and dedication to Hashem and others. Through this journey of spiritual growth, they prepared themselves to bring a child into the world whose very birth would transcend nature.

GOING BEYOND YOURSELF FOR OTHERS

Two actions in the parshah reveal how Avraham and Sarah went beyond themselves for others: Avraham's hospitality toward his guests and Sarah's prayer for Avimelech and his people.

Avraham welcomes three angels whom he believes to be ordinary people. Rashi explains that this was the third day after his brit milah, when the pain is the greatest. Nevertheless, Avraham runs to greet his guests and care for their needs. Even in his own pain, he puts others first. In return, one of the angels announces that Sarah will have a son.

The announcement of Yitzchak's birth is also juxtaposed to the episode of Avimelech taking Sarah. Rashi explains that Hashem punished Avimelech and his household by preventing them from having children. Sarah then prayed for them, and afterward she was blessed with Yitzchak. Despite what had happened to her, Sarah prayed for those who had wronged her. She put aside her own pain to ask Hashem to help others, and afterward received the very blessing she herself needed.

Despite what had happened to her, Sarah prayed for those who had wronged her.

Chazal teach that when someone prays for another person who needs the same blessing, they are answered first. The gematria of בית אבימלך (the house of Avimelech) equals תפלה (prayer), both with a gematria of 515, alluding to the power of Sarah's prayer and the blessing that followed.

STORY: RAV ADDA BAR AHAVAH

Taanis 20b relates that Rav Huna had many barrels of wine in a dilapidated building that he feared would collapse. He needed to remove the wine but was

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afraid to enter. Knowing that Rav Adda bar Ahavah was renowned for his miraculous protection, Rav Huna brought him into the building and engaged him in a deep discussion of halachah while the wine was removed. As soon as they left, the building collapsed.

The Gemara also teaches that Rav Adda merited long life because he never became angry in his household. By overcoming his natural reactions and maintaining his composure even in difficult moments, Rav Adda merited blessings that transcended the ordinary limits of nature.

THE LESSON FOR US

Avraham and Sarah teach us that going beyond ourselves can open the door to blessings beyond nature. When we put aside our ego and help others even when it is difficult, we follow in their footsteps and can merit blessings we could never have imagined.

For more, check out the Gematria Torah channel on YouTube!

From Afar

BY RABBI ADAM LAW



The sources say that Avraham reaches his completion at his milah. But the final of his tests comes after the Akeidah. When he succeeds over this terrible challenge, he achieves "the land of light," ארץ אשר אראך, spoken about in לך לך. This לך לך verse is repeated in the Akeidah here, with the place being revealed as Moriah, מוריה. There he achieves יראת אלוקים. That is why the parsha is called וירא. All the lashon of א ר, light.

CONCEPT OF THE TRIAL

At the end of the parsha, we see Avraham's greatest trial, עקידת יצחק. It is an impossible task to imagine. There's a question among the Sages regarding whether, when going through this, Avraham had mental clarity or not.

The prophecy is clear that God spoke to bring up Yitzchak. What was unclear was what would happen at the top of the mountain. Also, how would bringing him up as a sacrifice work, considering that God had already promised Avraham that his seed would continue through Yitzchak? There was a lot of confusion.

However, in Moreh Nevuchim (III:24), the Rambam explicitly maintains that Avraham had certainty in the Akeidah:

"Scripture thus tells us that whatever the prophet perceives in a prophetic vision, he considers as true and correct and not open to any doubt; it is in his eyes like all other things perceived by the senses or by the intellect. This is proved by the consent of Abraham to slay his only son ... although the commandment was received in a dream or vision. If the prophets had any doubt or suspicion as regards the truth of what they saw in a prophetic dream or vision, they would not have consented ... and Abraham would not have found in his soul strength enough to perform that act if he had any doubt ..."

The Rambam clearly believes in the mental acuity of the prophet.

Rashi on our parsha here (22:2) also speaks of Avraham's mental state. Because of the concern for Avraham, God slowly introduced the command:

ולמה לא גילה לו מתחלה? שלא לערבבו פתאום ותזוח דעתו עליו ותטרף

"And why did He not reveal to him from the start that it was Yitzchak? So as not to suddenly confuse him, lest his mind become disoriented."

These sources indicate that Avraham had clarity. However, there's a difference between clarity of knowledge and difficulty of action. Just because Avraham knew what he had to do didn't mean the experience itself wasn't tremendously difficult.

However, there are sources that explicitly say that even the prophecy wasn't clear.

THE GEMARA AND KABBALAH: ASPAKLARIA D'LO NAHARA

The Gemara in Yevamos (49b) tells us that all the prophets, with the exception of Moshe Rabbeinu, received their prophecy through an unclear looking glass:

כל הנביאים נסתכלו באספקלריא שאינה מאירה, משה רבינו נסתכל באספקלריא המאירה

The אספקלריא דלא נהרא, Aspaklaria D'lo Nahara, is the unclear looking glass.

And we see the Zohar (Parshas Vayera, I, 120a), discussing the Akeidah, commenting on the pasuk וירא את המקום מרחוק, "And he saw the place from afar" (Bereishis 22:4):

חמא ליה גו אספקלריאה דלא נהרא בלחודוי

"He saw it only through the non-illuminating mirror."

Thus, the Zohar tells us that even Avraham Avinu, at the moment of his greatest nisayon, did not experience the full illumination of divine revelation. He could only see the place מרחוק, from afar.

Once Avraham showed his willingness to walk, Hashem caught him and showed him that He had been there the whole time.

This approach accords well with both the Torah and stories of the Baal Shem Tov regarding both Avraham and himself: at the time of a test, one's intellect and powers are removed.

בעל שם טוב – פרשת וירא, אות י"ג

והאלהים נסה את אברהם, אמר הבעל שם טוב זללה"ה, שבעת הנסיון לאדם הוא בהיותו בהסתלקות הדעת, וביאר בזה לשון הכתוב והאלהים נסה את אברהם, שאלקים הוא מוחין דקטנות כידוע, ואז ניסה את אברהם כשהיה בבחינת הקטנות

Here the Baal Shem Tov says that during the time of a test, a person's intellect, דעת, is removed.

In his stories, we see that when the Baal Shem Tov was tested as he tried to arrive in the Land of Israel, he lost everything, even the ability to pray. Thus, he went forward as a "simple Jew."

Also, there's another Rashi that says, "HaKadosh Baruch Hu makes the righteous anxious by not telling them the details of the mission." The lashon Rashi uses is מתהא, related to the lashon תהו, chaotic and unsure.

This is why the Torah says that Avraham saw the place from afar. Rashi says there was a cloud affixed there. This alludes to the mystery of the deepest unknown, the void, and the limit of human understanding: Aspaklaria D'lo Nahara, the aspect of reality where Hashem is hidden by a cloud (צימצום?).

The experience of the trial, according to this opinion, is therefore an approach from a place of unknowing and doubt.

But it has to be that way, because Hashem wants us to grow on our own. That is the Baal Shem Tov's teaching. When a father is teaching his child to walk, he lets go a little to allow the child to walk, but keeps his arms hovering around him, ready to catch him.

Once Avraham showed his willingness to walk, Hashem caught him and showed him that He had been there the whole time.

המקום ההוא השם יראה

Hashem is the name of the place where we see Hashem's light, purpose, and השגחה, providence. That is why he called the place Hashem Yireh, as opposed to Elokim Yireh: the cloud had transformed into crystal-clear reality.

Prove You Mean It!

BY RABBI AVROHOM JACKS



Have you ever noticed how your muscles hurt the most three days after a tough workout? On the first day, you are full of adrenaline. The second day is still manageable. But by day three the pain has reached its peak.

This is the reason so many beautiful beginnings stall on their metaphorical third day. A new business, a promise made on Yom Kippur, the latest diet: these all tend to hit their "third-day" wall.

Every worthwhile goal could attract its own third-day dip. The dip is the long stretch after the thrill of starting has passed. The work becomes more difficult, and the real results are still a long way off. Most people quit when they find themselves in the third-day dip, and who could blame them?

Rashi explains that our Parsha opened on the third day after Abraham's circumcision at age ninety-nine. That was the day the pain was at its worst. It was also the day that G-d appeared.

Day three hurts because you are still in the race.

Four chapters later, Abraham traveled to Mount Moriah to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice. The Torah tells us that on the third day, he saw the mountain from afar. There's that third day again.

Rashi asks why G-d waited until the third day to show Abraham the mountain. The answer? Had G-d shown it to him right away, people could say he acted in a moment of shock, before he had time to think. The three-day journey, therefore, was a chance to prove his sincerity.

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The lesson is clear. If you've started something and it is hurting now, take heart. You are in your third-day dip. Remind yourself that this is the spot where most people turn back, but it is also the spot where champions are forged. The dip is where you get to prove you mean it too. Day three hurts because you are still in the race. G-d has a habit of showing up on the third day. Make sure you're still there when He does.

Building Base

BY REB JOSH HERTZ

Running at an opportunity, as the word veyerah, to foresee, suggests. The chesed l'Avraham that the mishnah in Avos says that the world is built on, its base, olam chesed yibaneh, was in a sense self-created, as the Sforno states with Aner, Eshkol and Mamre, in which they took for themselves positively for helping others, versus what was given to them by the Melech Sedom, who ultimately was destroyed due to personal kavod: self-gratification.

The wording of tze'irah for the younger one, Rashi says, tzor is lashon of tzar. As wine was used to cause an aveirah rather than kedushah, this tzar was ultimately a building base, a recipe for disaster.

Open My Eyes



BY REB YACOV ABOUDI

Finding Hashem in the moments before the answer.

There is a teaching in the Midrash that has always been one of my favourites, and one I speak about often.

In this week's parsha, Hagar is wandering in the wilderness with her son Yishmael. Their water has run out. Believing her child is about to die, she places him beneath a bush, moves away, and cries.

Hashem hears Yishmael's voice, and the Torah tells us:

וַיִּפְקַח אֱלֹקִים אֶת עֵינֶיהָ וַתֵּרֶא בְּאֵר מָיִם

"And Hashem opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water." (Bereishis 21:19)

Notice what it doesn't say. Hashem didn't create a well. He opened her eyes to one that was already there.

Rabbi Binyamin teaches in Bereishis Rabbah (53:14):

הכל בחזקת סומין עד שהקדוש ברוך הוא מאיר את עיניהם

Everyone is considered blind until Hashem illuminates their eyes.

I've always loved what this teaches about hashgachah pratis. Imagine finding a hundred-dollar bill on the sidewalk. You pick it up and feel lucky. But how many people passed that very spot before you? How many looked straight ahead and never noticed it?

The money was there all along. Yet you were the one who saw it. Even noticing what's right in front of us depends on Hashem's will.

This is also why many people recite Rabbi Binyamin's words when searching for a lost object. We've all looked everywhere for our keys, only to find them somewhere we've already checked.

But lately I've been thinking about the other side of this Midrash.

What about the moments when Hashem hasn't opened our eyes?

Imagine a blind man sitting in a beautiful park on a sunny afternoon. The sun is shining, flowers are blooming, and the trees are full of colour. He feels the sun's warmth and hears the birds, but cannot see the beauty around him.

Would making the sun brighter help? Of course not. He doesn't need more light. He needs sight.

Dovid HaMelech asks:

גַּל עֵינַי וְאַבִּיטָה נִפְלָאוֹת מִתּוֹרָתֶךָ

"Open my eyes, that I may behold wonders from Your Torah." (Tehillim 119:18)

The Lubavitcher Rebbe discusses why Dovid asks for opened eyes rather than simply asking for the wonders to be revealed. The difference is between changing what is shown to us and changing our ability to perceive it.

And the Navi says, מָלֵא כָל הָאָרֶץ כְּבוֹדוֹ, the whole earth is filled with Hashem's glory (Yeshayahu 6:3). His presence isn't waiting for us to notice it.

So why are there times when we cannot see?

I don't pretend to know why Hashem leaves us searching. But perhaps the searching can offer something we might otherwise overlook.

In Hagar's story, before her eyes were opened, there was a cry. The Torah doesn't say the well was hidden to produce that cry. Still, the sequence makes me wonder about the moments when we too have nowhere left to turn.

Even losing our keys can interrupt an ordinary day and make us speak to Hashem. What began as a search becomes a tefillah.

The keys may be insignificant. The conversation isn't.

Even when I cannot see the well, I can still speak to the One who can.

This past year has been filled with many unique challenges for myself and my family. I constantly found myself looking for answers, for solutions, for some indication of how things would work out. I davened for clarity, strength, and reassurance.

But looking back, I wonder whether I was so focused on each problem that I couldn't see the forest for the trees. I was asking Hashem for answers without always appreciating that I was speaking to Hashem at all.

Rebbe Nachman of Breslov teaches in Likkutei Moharan (II:25) about hisbodedus: speaking privately to Hashem in our own words, telling Him what's on our hearts. Not only the words of the siddur, but an actual conversation. He even teaches that when we cannot find the words, the desire to speak to Hashem has value.

That thought has stayed with me.

I still want answers. There are things my family has faced that I don't understand, challenges that haven't disappeared, and nights when I wish I could see a little further down the road. Sometimes all I can say is, "Hashem, I don't know what to do."

But perhaps I have been so busy waiting for an answer that I've overlooked the privilege of the conversation itself.

Dovid HaMelech says:

קָרוֹב ה' לְכָל קֹרְאָיו לְכֹל אֲשֶׁר יִקְרָאֻהוּ בֶּאֱמֶת

"Hashem is close to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him sincerely." (Tehillim 145:18)

Not only to those who have received an answer. To those who call.

I've spent years speaking about the moment Hagar saw the well. Maybe I haven't paid enough attention to the moment before it, when all she had was her cry.

I don't know when the wells I'm searching for will become visible. But even when I cannot see the well, I can still speak to the One who can.

גל עיני: Hashem, open my eyes.

And while I wait, help me appreciate that I can speak to You.

When the People You Love Start Feeling Like Interruptions



BY REB ADAM KLASNER

Have you ever noticed how sometimes the people we're working so hard for are the same people we have the least patience for?

We spend our days carrying responsibilities, dealing with pressure, and trying to provide for our families. We tell ourselves that everything we're doing is for the people we love. But then we come home, our wife needs something, our child wants our attention, and suddenly we feel irritated. We genuinely love them, but when life becomes overwhelming, the very relationships that matter most to us can begin to feel like another responsibility we have to manage.

There's something in this week's parsha, Vayeira, that I think speaks to this on a much deeper level.

The parsha begins with Avraham sitting at the entrance of his tent, recovering from his bris milah, when Hashem reveals Himself to him. In the middle of this extraordinary experience, Avraham notices three strangers approaching. Rather than remaining where he is, he asks Hashem to wait and runs to welcome them.

Our Sages learn from here that "Gedolah hachnasas orchim me'hakbalas pnei haShechinah." Welcoming guests is greater than receiving the Divine Presence.

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Think about what this means. Avraham is experiencing an incredible closeness with Hashem, yet he understands that turning toward another human being isn't taking him away from that connection. It's an opportunity to express it.

And I think this challenges something about the way we approach personal and spiritual growth.

We can spend years learning, davening, working on ourselves, understanding our triggers, and becoming more aware of our emotional patterns. We gain insight into why we react the way we do and begin to understand the kind of person we want to become. But then we return to the ordinary demands of life, where people have needs, emotions, and expectations, and suddenly everything we've learned becomes much harder to live.

It's one thing to understand patience. It's another thing to remain patient when your child is asking you the same question for the fifth time and you're exhausted. It's one thing to understand the importance of connection. It's another thing to listen to your wife when she's expressing something painful and every part of you wants to defend yourself.

Sometimes we confuse understanding ourselves with actually changing.

Awareness is important, but its purpose isn't simply to help us understand why we struggle. It's to help us respond differently when those struggles show up.

His guests weren't interrupting his spiritual experience. They were giving him an opportunity to bring that experience into the world.

Chassidus teaches that Hashem desires a dira betachtonim, a dwelling place within this physical world. Hashem doesn't only want to be revealed in the moments when we're feeling inspired or spiritually connected. He wants to be revealed in the places where our patience runs out, where our ego gets involved, and where loving another person requires us to move beyond ourselves.

And perhaps that's what Avraham understood. His guests weren't interrupting his spiritual experience. They were giving him an opportunity to bring that experience into the world.

I think there's something even deeper here. Often, the moments we experience as interruptions reveal the very things we still need to work on. When someone needs us at an inconvenient time, we discover how attached we are to our own plans. When our spouse disagrees with us, we see how difficult it can be to let go of being right. When our children need our attention, we confront the gap between how much we love them and how available we're actually able to be.

Of course, this doesn't mean we shouldn't have boundaries or take care of our own needs. But it does invite us to recognize that some of the most meaningful opportunities for growth are found in the moments we would rather avoid.

And maybe that's the question worth asking ourselves this Shabbos.

What is it actually like for the people closest to us to be in a relationship with us?
We may be learning more, understanding ourselves better, and feeling more connected to Hashem. But are the people around us experiencing that growth? Do they feel more understood, more accepted, and more loved?

Because the purpose of becoming more connected to Hashem isn't only to experience more holiness within ourselves. It's to allow that connection to change the way we show up for others.

And sometimes, the person we feel is interrupting what we're trying to accomplish is giving us the very opportunity to become the person we've been working so hard to be.

Dust and Ash



BY RABBI NACHUM AARON KUTNOWSKI

In this week's Parsha, Parshas Vayeira, Avraham speaks to Hashem regarding the impending destruction of Sedom. In the course of their conversation, Avraham declares: "I am but dust and ash" (Bereishis 18:27).

Rav Asher Weiss points to a connection between Avraham's words and a passage in the Gemara, which records the Tefillah that Mar, the son of Ravina, would recite upon concluding his Davening: "May my soul be like dust to everyone" (Brachos 17a). This Tefillah should be familiar to us, as it is part of our own conclusion to the Amidah. But what does it mean that our souls should be like dust? Is this simply an expression of humility?

Tosafos explains that just as dust can never be entirely destroyed, so may it be Hashem's will that my descendants never be destroyed, as it says, "Your descendants shall be like the dust of the earth" (Bereishis 28:14). The comparison to dust is therefore not merely an expression of lowliness, but a blessing of endurance for Klal Yisrael.

Yet even ash, which evokes destruction, need not signify the end.

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 108b) relates that Shem noticed a bird called Avarshina lying beside the Teivah. When he asked why it was not being fed, the bird explained that it had seen Shem busy feeding the other animals and did not want to trouble him. Shem blessed the bird that it should live forever. Rashi identifies this bird as the Chol.

What appears to be the end becomes the beginning.

Rabbeinu Bachya, citing a Midrash, elaborates that, according to Rabbi Yudan, this bird lives for a thousand years. At the end of that time, fire erupts in its nest, reducing its body to ashes smaller than an egg. From this remnant, the bird regenerates itself (Rabbeinu Bachya on Bereishis 3:6).

Here, too, we find renewal: what appears to be the end becomes the beginning.

Perhaps both of these strengths are rooted in Avraham's statement of humility. Standing before Hashem, Avraham recognized his own smallness. Yet humility need not mean that we view ourselves or our circumstances as insignificant. Rather, it allows us to recognize the limitations of our understanding and to appreciate that what appears to be an ending may not be the end of the story.

May we merit to embrace Avraham's humility and, in its merit, receive the blessings promised to his descendants: endurance and renewal.

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REFLECTIVE QUESTION

Am I so focused on the answer I'm asking Hashem for that I'm missing the conversation?

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