

# THE AVOS WERE ALONE

by Rabbi Yisroel Roll

All of the *Avos* and *Imahos*—the Patriarchs and Matriarchs of the Jewish People, were alone. Some were rejected by family, peers and the nation, and some felt abandoned by God. They had to wrestle with feelings of isolation and apparent rejection by God. They were tested and challenged. They were alone, but not lonely. They maintained their faith in God, and in themselves, while wrestling with, and overcoming loneliness, through proactive *aloneness*.

The Mishnah in Taanis 15a, instructs the community to say, collectively, on a fast day:

The first *brachah* he concludes with, *'He who answered Avraham on Mount Moriah, He shall answer you and hearken this day to the voice of your cry. Blessed are You, Lord, Who Redeems Israel.*

The Torah states,

*And He brought him (Avraham Avinu) outside and said: "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars, if you are able to count them"; and He said to him: "So shall be your seed." (Breishis 15:5)*

Rashi explains that Hashem was saying: "Go outside of your astrological signs. Go beyond the limits of the constellations. Go beyond the counted and numbered stars and leave the natural system behind. In that way you will find Me, and you will no longer be "numbered." In other words, your potential and your level of greatness will be unrestricted when you connect to the *Ein Sof*—The Infinite One.

The *Ein Sof* name of Hashem conveys His Unlimited, Never-Ending, Free, and Unrestricted dimension. "*Ein*" is spelled *aleph*, *yud*, and *nun*. Hashem created every person as "*ani*" with these same three letters—*aleph*, *nun* and *yud*. If you find the *Ein Sof*, the Never-Ending dimension of God within yourself, you will have found Godliness within your "self." When you identify the most Godly character trait—the most noble and refined attribute of God that He has Instilled in you—and utilize it in your relationships with others, you thus bring the *Ein Sof* into the world through your acts of Free

Will.



The Alter of Slobodka [1] states that man has the power to bring the *Shechinah* into himself and into the world through his learning of Torah and performance of *mitzvos*. It is not that living a Torah life makes you transcend into the Heavens. Rather, living a Torah life brings God into your life and into the world. Thus the Torah empowers you to bring God into a personal relationship with you, rather than a seemingly unattainable, transcendent relationship. By bringing Hashem into your world, you transcend the world.[4]

Darkness represents *galus*, exile. Stars are only visible at night. The stars represent redemption from exile — the light in the midst of the darkness. When you contemplate the stars, you are accessing the spirituality within yourself even while you are in the midst of darkness, in exile. When you can access the spiritual power of “the unrestricted self” within yourself, then you can be in the midst of *golah*-physical exile, and still find spiritual redemption. The words “*golah*” and “*geulah*” are composed of the same letters except one: *geulah*-redemption, contains the letter *Aleph*. When you find the *Aleph* — the Godliness within yourself — you transform your exiled self, into a redeemed self. In this fashion, you can operate within the system of this world while connecting to the Higher World. You can be a *ben Olam HaBa* while operating within the rubric of *Olam HaZeh*.

When you find your own Godliness you will access a higher power within yourself.

To find your true self is to have a relationship with the Godliness within yourself and beyond yourself, through actualizing your unique, Godly *middos*-character traits. [3] When you have a relationship with the One Who Gave you a self, you find self-esteem; intrinsic worth and value. In fact, you find something more fundamental than that; you find “self.”

The Ramban, quoting the Yerushalmi, asks why this *brachah* ends with, “Who Redeems Israel,” rather than “who redeems Yitzchak? After all, if we are invoking the merit of Avraham and Yitzchak at the Akeidah, should we not refer to the redemption of Yitzchak?

The answer is that we are invoking Avraham's merit in that he refrained from challenging God with an apparent glaring contradiction, at the Akeidah. Avraham could have asked Hashem, “You told me in the past —*for in Isaac shall seed be called to You*. Breishis 21:12; and yet, now, You have commanded me , *'Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, even Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt—offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell you of.'*

So how can both statements be true?

Since Avraham Avinu placed his complete trust in God, and did not challenge God with this apparent contradiction, that is the merit through which Israel can invoke in order to be saved from our own challenges.

When we, today, face difficult challenges, we may be apt to question God, challenge God, or become angry with God, as to why He is allowing a particular challenge or difficulty to befall us. Are we not trying, after all, to serve God? *Why are You doing this to me? I do not understand You, God.*

It is at these trying times, when we feel abandoned by God, exiled from God's protection, that we may be tempted to call on God to answer the contradiction: How can a good God do this to me? Why have You forgotten me? Why have You abandoned me? This is precisely the question that Avraham did not ask.

Avraham's merit is this: "I held back my inclination to contradict You, and did Your Will; May it be Your Will that when the Children of Yitzchak, namely Israel, face a difficult challenge, and there is no-one who will then step up to defend them, and they feel abandoned and alone, May You, Hashem, be the One to Defend them. Therefore the *brachah* ends — Redeemer of Israel —referring to Yaakov, for he is the child of Yitzchak, who is the beneficiary, and inheritor of Avraham's faith.

If we explore this prayer, further, instead of challenging God with a contradiction, Avraham, was actually invoking the initial promise of Hashem — *for in Isaac shall seed be called to you*. It was God's Promise to Redeem Israel that is the ultimate merit that we can draw upon. It is the *emunah*—faithfulness of Avraham, which is our ultimate legacy. Avraham remained faithful to God's promise, notwithstanding his own perception of a contradiction and apparent abandonment. We too must be able to admit that we do not see or appreciate the whole picture. Faith requires humility.

Historically, our ongoing faith in God has been our merit and our support, and it is the vehicle through which God will continue to answer us. At a moment of personal challenge, it is God's Promise of Jewish continuity through Yitzchak, that we can invoke, which will bring us redemption. Instead of asking God to resolve the contradiction, we can ask God to Remember His Promise of Jewish continuity, and humbly ask God, from this positive perspective, to redeem us, just as He redeemed Avraham, in the merit of his invoking God's Promise, and not challenging Him with the contradiction. This is the test of faith in the midst of apparent aloneness.

[1] Ohr HaTzafun, Maamar Hashraas HaShechinah, Parashas Terumah

[2] Talmud Sotah 5a states: With him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit. R. Huna and R. Hisda [explain it]. One says that it means the contrite is with Me, and the other that I [God] am with the contrite. The more probable view is in accord with him who holds the meaning to be I am with the contrite; for behold, the Holy One, blessed be He, ignored all the mountains and heights and caused His *Shechinah* to abide upon Mount Sinai, but did not elevate Mount Sinai [up to Himself].

[3] Tomer Devorah, Introduction. (See Self Esteem in the Talmud, Feldheim Publishers, by the author.)

This essay is an excerpt from [Alone Against the World-the Torah Antidote to Loneliness](#), by Rabbi Yisroel Roll.