

APPRECIATING AVRAHAM'S SPIRITUAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

by Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

1. Avraham's Dimension of Being

The Torah tells that on the third day after Avraham had circumcised himself he hosted three angels who appeared in human form. Despite his infirmity, and the unbearable heat of the day, he urged them to receive his hospitality. He was unaware that they were in fact angels. Avraham offered them water to wash their feet, the shade of his tree to rest under, bread, and meat. The Gemara in Tractate Bava Metizia tells us that because of these aspects of Avraham's hospitality to the angels, the Jewish people merited special gifts in the future. These gifts sustained and protected them throughout their forty-year trek in the desert. In the merit of the water that was offered to the angels the Jewish people received the wellspring of Miriam which traveled with them. In the merit of offering the shade of Avraham's tree, they received the protection and benefits of the Heavenly Clouds. In the merit of the bread, the Jewish people were given the Manna, which had special value and physically sustained them for forty years. In the merit of the meat, the Jewish people were given the slav (quail).

When Avraham hosted the angels he was 99 years old. He had dedicated his entire life to performing acts of chesed in an attempt to convert the world to monotheism. Yet, it is only this particular event of chesed that the Torah focuses upon to bring about the far-reaching ramifications for the Jewish people. Why were Avraham's acts of chesed prior to this moment not addressed and evaluated in a similar manner? Why did this particular act of hospitality assume such significance that the Jewish people would reap great benefit and bounty for the forty-year period in the desert?

The Chofetz Chaim z'tl in his work Ahavas Chesed explains that the value of chesed is determined by the spiritual dimension of the recipient. Thus, since the beneficiaries of Avraham's chesed in this case were angels - who have the most special spiritual dimension of value, it generated a level of reward that was one of a kind (relatively speaking it was infinite).

Another explanation is that three days after Avraham's circumcision, which was the hottest day of the year and the most painful day for Avraham, no guests had come to his door. Avraham's hospitality was world-renowned. There was not a day that passed that he was not preoccupied with hospitality. However, on this particular day because of the intense heat, there were no people to be found. Avraham was anguished that there was no one to host because his objective of hospitality was only to espouse monotheism. Therefore G-d sent three angels in human form to be hosted by

Avraham. In the merit of his being anguished for not being able to espouse monotheism, Avraham's chesed assumed another dimension of value.

Another explanation is based on a spiritual metamorphosis that had taken place within Avraham himself. In the Portion of Lech Lecha, Avraham was concerned that since he was childless, his heir was going to be Eliezer of Damascus. G-d reassured Avraham that his heir would be his physical child. Hashem took Avraham outside (of his tent) and said to him, "Look at the heavens "shamaimah." Just as you are not able to count the stars in the heaven, so too will your offspring not be able to be counted." The Midrash addresses the word "shamaimah" which is spelled with an additional "hay" that seems to be superfluous since the Torah could have used the term "shamaim" (without the "hay"). What is the significance of the additional "hay"? Avraham was an expert astrologer and was able to read the stars. The stars stated, "Avram and Sarai will not have children." G-d said to Avraham, "It may be the case that the stars say that Avram will not have children; however, Avraham (with the "hay" added to his name) will have a son." As a result of Avraham's name change, his and Sarah's destiny changed. How do we understand the significance of this change?

Based on a verse in Tehillim which alludes to the fact that Hashem formed the worlds with the letters "yud" and "hay," the Gemara in Tractate Menachos states, "The physical world was created with the spirituality of the letter "hay" and the world to come was created with the spirituality of the letter "yud." Meaning, the spiritual energy contained within the letter "hay" brought about all physical existence. G-d said to Avraham, "Just as the spiritual energy in the letter "hay" was needed to bring about all physical existence, that same energy is needed to bring a change within you to be able to be the father, the Patriarch, of the Jewish people." The additional "hay" is not merely another letter added to Avraham's name; but rather, it brought about a profound change within him; his dimension of person became the equivalent of all existence. Until the insertion of the letter "hay," Avraham had no relevance (as he was) to being the Patriarch of the Jewish people.

The Gemara in Tractate Succah tells us that Hillel the Elder had 80 disciples. The greatest of them was Reb Yehonoson Ben Uziel and the least of them was Reb Yochanon Ben Zakai. The Gemara explains that Reb Yochanon Ben Zakai was proficient in every aspect of the Torah. The Gemara asks, "If the least of his disciples was as proficient as the greatest of his disciples, then what is the difference between the greatest disciple and the least disciple?" The Gemara answers, "The difference between the two of them was that when Yochanon Ben Zakai would study Torah and birds would fly over his head, they would not be consumed by fire. However, when the birds would fly over the head of Yehonoson Ben Uziel they would be consumed when he was engaged in Torah study." This clearly indicates that although both of them had the same proficiency in Torah the dimension of Yehonoson Ben Uziel was at a different level than Yochanon Ben Zakai. Yehonoson Ben Uziel generated another level of holiness.

After the letter "hay" was inserted into Avraham's name he became a different dimension of being. Thus, when he hosted the three angels his hospitality assumed another dimension of value then it

had been until that moment. Previously Avraham's hospitality was being offered by "Avram" who was not the Patriarch of the Jewish people. Since Avraham (through the change of name) took on the innate value of all existence, every aspect of his hospitality had far reaching ramifications for the Jewish people.

Chazal tell us in the Portion of Bereishis (Genesis) that word "B'Hebarom - when He (Hashem) created them (existence)," alludes to our Patriarch Avraham. The letters "B'Hebarom" and the letters of Avraham are one in the same. Maharal of Prague z'tl explains that the allusion to Avraham through the word "B'Hebarom" indicates that he was not a continuation of the previous existence; but rather, he himself (within a spiritual context) was the beginning of a new existence. Although Avraham biologically descended from Noach, the father of all mankind, in terms of his dimension of being he had no relevance to anything that had preceded him.

2. The Dynamic of Free Choice

After Avraham hosted his three guests, the Torah states "The men got up from there and gazed (vayashkeefu) down toward Sodom, while Avraham walked with them to escort them." Rashi cites Chazal who explain that whenever the Torah uses the term "vayashkeefu - gaze" it indicates something that is ominous and destructive, except when this term is associated with the distribution of tithes to the poor. In the case of the angels gazing upon Sodom, the term vayashkeefu is used in the context of destruction. When the same term is used regarding the distribution of tithes, it is within a context of G-d gazing from his heavenly abode to rain blessing and bounty upon the Jewish people. The merit of giving tithes to the poor overturns the Attribute of Justice (Midas HaDin) into the Attribute of Mercy (Midas HaRachamim). If the term vayashkeefu is used to communicate something ominous, then why does the Torah use this term regarding the blessing that will come upon the Jewish people?

The most difficult of the ten tests that was presented to Avraham was the Akeidah (binding of Yitzchak). In the Portion of Emor, the month of Tishrei (the month in which Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur come) is referred to as "Chodesh ha'shviee (the seventh month)." The Midrash explains that the word "shviee" alludes to the word "shevua" which means "oath." Thus Tishrei is the month of the "oath" because Avraham requested of G-d that He take an oath. When Avraham was told to bring his son as an offering, he had a difficulty with this dictate of Hashem. G-d had promised him that Yitzchak would be the future Patriarch of the Jewish people. However, later Hashem tells Avraham to slaughter him as a sacrifice. Despite this seemingly irreconcilable difficulty, Avraham did not question the Will of G-d and brought his son as an offering without hesitation. After successfully completing this test, Avraham said to Hashem, "As You know, I struggled within myself to question Your request because it was contradictory to the original promise. However, I suppressed the question and did not ask it. My request of You is that just as I suppressed the inclination to ask, identically when the Attribute of Justice comes upon my children the Attribute of Mercy should suppress it." Hashem took the oath. Thus, on Rosh Hashanah (Day of Judgment) when the Attribute

of Justice is upon the Jewish people, G-d causes his Attribute of Mercy to suppress it. This is an application of the principle of measure for measure.

Why does the term "gazing" identify with the Attribute of Justice? When one's spiritual record is scrutinized carefully, inevitably a shortcoming will be identified. Therefore, when the Torah uses the term *vayashkeefu* (gazing) it is an indication of something ominous and destructive because upon close examination there is no record that is perfect. This level exactness comes about only when there is a basis for prosecution (which causes the implementation of *Midas HaDin*). Man is not naturally inclined to give up something that has come about through his toiling and effort. When one's crop is harvested, the Torah commands that one must take the various tithes to be given away. Thus the obligation of tithing is something which goes against his nature. When one suppresses his inclination, despite the difficulty, because he is committed to the Will of G-d, Hashem responds in kind by suppressing His Attribute of Justice with the Attribute of Mercy. This is why the giving of the tithes to the poor overturns the Attribute of Justice to that of Mercy.

The Mishna Berurah in the Laws of Reciting the Shema states the words of Chazal that if one recites the Shema in an unhurried fashion, the fires of *gehenom* (purgatory) will be cooled for him. The Mishna Berurah explains the reason for this is that the human initiative within man is driven by the heat of his being, which causes one to recite the Shema in a hurried manner rather than at a more deliberate pace. Thus, when one suppresses the heat of his drive, and articulates the Shema at a slower pace, G-d responds measure for measure by cooling the fires of *gehenom*.

Reb Eliyahu Lopian z'tl, who was the last living student of the Alter of Kelm, explains that the differentiating factor between the animal and the human being is the ability to make choices. The animal functions on instinct; however, man's function is based on his ability to make choices. A human being demonstrates his free choice not by doing what he is inclined to do; but rather, by refraining from what he is inclined to do. Thus, man's "tzelem Elokim - image of G-d" is demonstrated through his suppression of his inclination. It is in this context that one causes Hashem to suppress His Attribute of Justice.

3. G-d's Posture of Chesed

The Gemara in Tractate Bava Metzia tells us that in the merit of Avraham's hospitality towards the angels, the Jewish people merited special gifts which sustained them in the desert for 40 years. Although Avraham lived a life in which he was fully occupied with *chesed*, this particular act of *chesed* which he had performed on behalf of the angels had unlimited ramifications. Every aspect of his hospitality that he personally performed, Hashem personally endowed the Jewish people with blessing. However, the hospitality that was done through an intermediary, Hashem only allowed the blessing to come about through an intermediary. Because Avraham did not provide water personally to the angels to wash their feet (it was given through an agent), the water that sustained the Jews in the desert for forty years, had to be extracted from a rock - through Moshe Rabbeinu. What made

this chesed so special to bring about such an impact on the future of the Jewish people?

The Torah tells us that Avraham, our Patriarch purchased a burial location (the tomb of Machpelah) for Sarah his wife. The Midrash says that after this acquisition Hashem said to Avraham, "My profession is doing Chesed and you have taken hold of my profession. Come and cloak yourself with My Cloak." This means that only now (at the time of the purchase of the Machpelah) did Avraham finally assume G-d's posture of Chesed. Why only now is the chesed of the purchase of Machpelah considered "the Cloak of G-d" and all the chesed that he had previously done not considered similarly? How do we understand this?

Avraham our Patriarch is known as the pillar of Chesed because he indiscriminately hosted people - whether they were worthy or not. Avraham assumed the posture of Chesed to emulate G-d's characteristic of Chesed. Although Avraham's chesed was identical in action to that of G-d, his motive was not the same. Hashem's acts of Chesed are an end unto themselves. Avraham's acts were only a means to an end- being the vehicle to espouse G-d's existence in this world. When Avraham purchased the tomb of Machpelah to bury his wife Sarah, he performed an act of chesed for its own sake. Avraham only then assumed G-d's posture of Chesed - which is for its own sake.

Avraham's home (ohel) was not a place for doing acts of hospitality for their own sake (to satisfy people's physical needs); but rather, it was a place to convert pagans into monotheists. Hashem told Avraham to leave his homeland and go to a land that He would show him. Only there Avraham would succeed in his objective. Regardless of his own abilities, Avraham understood that only with Divine Assistance would he succeed in impacting on people to bring them back to G-d.

Avraham sat at the entrance of his tent on the third day after his circumcision. G-d had caused the temperature of the day to be unbearable to the point that no person would venture outdoors. Under normal circumstances, Avraham would be continuously occupied with hospitality and convincing his guests that there is only One Supreme Being. On that day there was no one with whom to engage in this dialogue. Avraham was not pained because he was denied an individual to whom he could offer his hospitality; but rather, he was pained because he was deprived of converting people to monotheism.

When Avraham had the opportunity of hosting the three angels, he ran to them despite his infirmity and his age. Because Avraham felt G-d's pain (that the pagans deny His existence), his accommodating the needs of the three wayfarers assumed a dimension of value that impacted the future of the Jewish people. The Torah states, "Avraham ran from the entrance of the tent." The Torah could have simply stated that he ran towards the three men; since it had previously informed us that Avraham was seated at the entrance of the tent. Why does the Torah specify the location from which he ran?

The Torah is telling us that Avraham ran from the entrance of his tent to inform us that he was not running to accommodate their physical needs; but rather, he was pursuing them to bring them into

his home to convert them. His tent/home symbolizes a location dedicated to converting people to monotheism. This is the reason the Torah specifies the location from which he had run.

When we are denied the opportunity to do a mitzvah - are we pained because of the loss of opportunity? Are we indifferent? Or do we even feel a sense of relief? We must evaluate ourselves and understand our feelings when we are not able to perform a mitzvah. It is only through understanding how we are lacking that we can improve.

4. Avraham's Interest in Sparing Sodom

The Torah tells us that when G-d informed Avraham that He was going to destroy Sodom, Avraham began beseeching Him not to destroy them. The Torah states, "Avraham came forward and said, 'Will You also stamp out the tzaddikim (righteous) along with the wicked? What if there should be fifty tzaddikim in the midst of the city?...It would be sacrilege to You to do such a thing, to bring death upon the righteous along with the wicked; so the righteous will be like the wicked. It would be sacrilege to You! Shall the Judge of all the earth not do justice?'"

At the conclusion of the exchange between Hashem and Avraham, he was informed that there were no tzaddikim in Sodom and it will be destroyed. What was Avraham's motive to plead on their behalf? Sodom and Gomorrah personified evil. They recognized G-d as the Master and intentionally defied Him. In fact their very existence undermined Avraham's efforts to bring the world closer to G-d. The community of Sodom had fallen to a level of evil that even the Attribute of Mercy was in agreement that they should be destroyed. Seemingly, they were beyond hope within a spiritual context. They had no capacity to do teshuvah (repentance). They had fallen to the category to which the Midrash refers, "Woe are the evil doers who overturn the Attribute of Mercy to the Attribute of Justice." Despite all of this, Avraham pleaded on their behalf. Why?

Avraham's only interest in life was to bring about a greater sanctification of G-d's Name. He continuously sacrificed selflessly to bring about a Kiddush Hashem (sanctification of G-d's Name). Avraham was not concerned about the people of Sodom per se; but rather, he pleaded that they should not be destroyed because of how the world would perceive such destruction. If the decimation of Sodom and Gomorrah was not properly understood by the world it would be a Chilul Hashem (desecration of G-d's Name). Rashi cites Chazal who explain that the world would say, "G-d creates existence and He destroys it - just as He had done with the Great Flood." Could existence fall to such a level that G-d needs to continuously destroy it? Were there no tzaddikim during the time of the Great Flood? In actuality, the world can and did fall to that level. Thus, there was no recourse but to destroy it.

Avraham pleaded with Hashem that if there were ten tzaddikim in Sodom, then perhaps in their merit the community could be saved. Thus, there would not be a Chilul Hashem resulting from its destruction. G-d responded to Avraham that there was no basis to save them.

We say in the first blessing of the Amidah (silent prayer), "...mighty, and awesome G-d, the supreme

G-d... Who recalls the kindnesses of the Patriarchs and brings the Redeemer to their children, for the sake of His Name, with love." Meaning, when the merits of the Patriarchs will come to an end and there is no basis to continue sustaining the Jewish people, Hashem will bring the Redeemer/Moshiach for "the sake of His Name." G-d will bring Moshiach who will reveal the truth of His existence to the world to ward off a Chilul Hashem. The world does not recognize the Jewish people as the "chosen people" of G-d because we are continuously oppressed, down trodden, and discriminated against since the destruction of the Second Temple. The condition of the Jew in the eyes of the world is a Chilul Hashem. Therefore, Hashem needs to bring Moshiach for the sake of His Name. Hashem will illuminate the eyes of the world to understand who He is and thus bring about a Kiddush Hashem.

The Gemara in Tractate Nidarim tells us that one of the reasons that the Jewish people needed to be enslaved in Egypt was because of a failing in Avraham. After Avraham defeated the four mighty kings, the king of Sodom approached Avraham (the victor) and said to him, "Give me the people and take the possessions for yourself." Avraham's response was, "...I shall not take as much as a thread or a boot strap from you..." The Gemara tells us that Avraham at that moment had the opportunity to bring the subjects of the king of Sodom under the wings of the Divine Presence - to convert them to monotheism. However, he chose not to have anything to do with the king of Sodom or his community. It was because Avraham had missed this opportunity of converting these pagans to monotheism that the Jewish people were destined to go to Egypt and subsequently they become pagans themselves (measure for measure).

With this, we can gain another understanding of Avraham's motive for beseeching Hashem to spare Sodom. He understood that because he had not taken the initiative to take the subjects of Sodom under his tutelage, his progeny were destined to go to Egypt. However, if there was a way that he could correct his failing by preventing the destruction of Sodom, there could be a chance that they would do teshuvah. Thus, the Jewish people would not need to go to Egypt. If on the other hand the Sodomites were to be destroyed then Avraham's failing could never be corrected. Therefore Avraham beseeched Hashem to spare the Sodom community not only because of the Chilul Hashem discussed earlier but also to rescind the decree that the Jewish people must go to Egypt.

As Avraham, our Patriarch's focus of life was only to increase the awareness of G-d's Presence in this existence/Kiddush Hashem, and thus eliminate Chilul Hashem, so too this must be our focus. As Tana d'vei Eliyahu states that every Jew must say, "When will my actions reach the level of my forefathers Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov?" This must be the aspiration of every Jew. 5. The Supreme Importance of the Akeidah

The Torah states regarding the Akeidah (the binding of Yitzchak), which was the most difficult test presented to Avraham, "And it happened after these things (words) G-d (Elokim) tested Avraham and said to him...Please take your son, your only one, whom you love - Yitzchak..." It is interesting to note that the Torah uses the appellation of "Elokim" to refer to G-d, which represents the Attribute of

Justice. G-d's Attribute of Justice only can come about within the context of prosecution. Satan is given a platform to prosecute, thus, activating the Attribute of Justice. Rashi cites Chazal who explain that the beginning of the verse, "And it happened after these things (words)..." alludes to Satan approaching G-d in order to bring prosecution upon Avraham. Satan's prosecution was that out of the entire banquet that Avraham had made, he did not offer to Hashem even one bull. Satan asked, "How could Avraham be considered a dedicated servant if he has never brought before You an offering?" This criticism of Avraham precipitated the Attribute of Justice (Midas HaDin). This is the reason the Torah states, "...Elokim tested Avraham..."

The Midrash states, "G-d requested of Avraham to bring his son as an offering in a beseeching manner - as the verse states, "Please take your son..." Meaning, "Please succeed in this test of the Akeidah." The Midrash continues to explain why G-d felt it was imperative for Avraham to succeed with an allegory: "A king who had a general was victorious in all his battles. Subsequently, the king and his general were confronted with an even greater battle. The king pleaded with his general saying, "We must be victorious in this particular battle so that my soldiers should not say that the reason we were successful in our earlier conflicts was because they were only skirmishes. So too G-d addressed Avraham, "You must succeed in this more difficult test so that they should not say that the earlier tests were meaningless."

The fact is that Avraham went into the fiery kiln in Kasdim and did not bow to the idol. He left his homeland and his father's household after G-d told him to do so. He never wavered; but rather he meticulously adhered to the dictate of Hashem - despite every reason to do differently. Nevertheless, if Avraham would fail in the final test, it would have discredited and undermined the validity of all the previous tests. How do we understand this?

The test of the Akeidah was presented to Avraham was so difficult that the world should understand and appreciate the value of the previous tests. Just as the general losing the final great battle would tarnish the image of the king, so too would Avraham's failure in the Akeidah reflect negatively on G-d vis-à-vis the world. If Avraham would fail regarding the Akeidah all of his previous accomplishments - the glory that Avraham had brought to G-d's Name- would be compromised. This would cause the world to see Avraham in a different light.

Avraham was selflessly devoted to G-d. When Hashem told him to leave his homeland and his father's household, he was given many incentives to encourage him to leave. However when he did leave, he only did so for the sake of G-d. Avraham giving his life not to bow to the idol was a demonstration of his selfless devotion to G-d. Avraham demonstrated through his actions that the value of his life was only to bring about G-d's Glory. If he were to fail and not perform the Akeidah, the slaughter of his beloved son Yitzchak, then it would be an indication that in fact all of his previous acts of sacrifice were motivated by his own self interest. Thus, Avraham in the eyes of the world would no longer be considered as the dedicated subject of G-d.

If Avraham, the dedicated servant of G-d, was in fact correct that G-d is the Supreme Being (who Wills all existence), then why should he not bring his only son as an offering to Him as he was commanded? It would only confirm that G-d forbid, that Hashem is not the Supreme Being, thus causing G-d's Name to be desecrated.

Rambam states in the Laws of the Fundamentals of Torah that a Jew must give his life not to violate the three cardinal sins (Idolatry, Adultery, and Murder). However, regarding any other area of the Torah one is not permitted to give his life or it would be considered the equivalent of forfeiting one's life recklessly. However, all of the other earlier commentators argue and rule that if one is renowned as a devoutly pious person, then he is permitted to give his life for something even less severe than the three cardinal sins. This would be considered a Kiddush Hashem because of his devout status. If one is considered as "ordinary" then giving his life for anything other than the three cardinal sins is not permitted.

The devoutly righteous person is perceived as the one who selflessly lives to do the Will of G-d. If Avraham was not willing to bring his son as the sacrifice it would have indicated that G-d's Command was not supreme. This would have indicated that all of Avraham's previous actions were only selfishly motivated and were not done for the Glory of G-d. This is why G-d beseeched Avraham to succeed in this final test.

On Rosh Hashanah (the day of judgment) the merit which silences prosecution (satan) is the Akeidah. It is important to note that Hashem did not present the test of the Akeidah to Avraham so that the Jew should have this merit; but rather, it was for Avraham to bring about the ultimate Kiddush Hashem- demonstrating that G-d is the Supreme Being.

5. The Short Sightedness of Man (from Lech Lecha)

The Torah tells us that when Avraham and his wife Sarah went to Egypt because of the severe famine in Canaan, Avraham said, "See now, I have known you are a woman of beautiful appearance. And it shall occur, when the Egyptians will see you, they will say 'This is his wife!' then they will kill me, but you they will let live. Please say that you are my sister, that it may go well with me for your sake, and that I may live on account of you." Avraham was concerned that if the Egyptians would know that Sarah was his wife, they would kill him and take her. Therefore, he asked her to say that she is his sister so that "it may go well" for him and he would live.

Rashi explains "it may go well with me" to mean that the Avraham would receive gifts on Sarah's behalf. Initially Avraham's primary concern was that he would be killed; however, after he explains to Sarah that she should pose as his sister, he says that it is so he should receive gifts/wealth on her behalf and secondly, he will live. Meaning, remaining alive was a secondary concern to receiving the gifts. How do we understand this?

Chazal tell us that Avraham was cast into the kiln of Kasdim because he would not bow to the idol. Hashem had performed a miracle and Avraham emerged unscathed. On the other hand, his brother

Haran, who was given a similar ultimatum (either to bow or die by fire), chose to be cast into the kiln and he perished. The Midrash tells us that the reason Avraham survived the fire was not because he was willing to die for G-d, but rather it cites a verse which states, "Yaakov redeemed Avraham." This means that because Yaakov our Patriarch needed to come into existence to father the tribes of Israel, who would ultimately receive the Torah, Avraham needed to survive and to father Yitzchak, (who was Yaakov's father). Thus Avraham did not perish in the kiln in order to bring about the Jewish people.

The Midrash teaches us the principle of, "Maasei avos simon l'bonim - the actions/experiences of the forefathers is a sign/indicator for their children." The events experienced by the Patriarchs forecast what would be experienced by the Jewish people in the future. It continues, "Avraham went to Egypt, Yaakov and his family (seventy souls individuals) would later go to Egypt. Avraham left Egypt with great wealth; the Jewish people left Egypt with great wealth. Sarah was not defiled by Pharaoh the Egyptian king, no Jewish woman during 210-year period of bondage (with the exception of one) was defiled." All that was experienced by the Patriarchs would later be experienced by the future generations of the Jewish people.

Hashem told Avraham, "The nation that would enslave the Jewish people would be judged and then they will go out with great wealth." The Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us that Hashem encouraged Moshe to ask the Jewish people to borrow the wealth of the Egyptians before they leave. This was so that Avraham (our Patriarch) should not say, "The first part of the prophecy was fulfilled (that they were in bondage), but the second part was not (that they would leave with great wealth)." What was the importance of this wealth? The Mishkan (G-d's dwelling location in this existence) would not have been built without the enormous wealth that was taken out of Egypt. The Midrash tells us that the most minimal amount of wealth that was taken out by an individual was forty loaded pack animals. Thus, the wealth that was promised to the Jews was a pre-requisite to the redemption from Egypt because without it they would not have been able to build the Mishkan.

Avraham understood that if he would receive the wealth from Egypt it would set in motion and establish a momentum that would guarantee that the Jewish people should be redeemed from Egypt. The great wealth would allow the building of the Mishkan. Thus, only in the merit of establishing this dynamic of bringing about the future wealth of the Jewish people, will Avraham merit to live. Therefore receiving the wealth was of primary importance and being spared would be a consequence of that (and secondary). This is why Avraham's focus was on the wealth and his life was a lesser consideration. Similarly to what the verse states, "Yaakov redeemed Avraham," - just as Yaakov redeemed Avraham from the kiln of Kasdim, identically the Jewish people's future situation saved him in Egypt.

We see that there are individuals who may appear unworthy of blessing and of receiving special gifts during their lifetime. Ramchal z'tl explains that this can be attributed to some merit from a forefather. Another possibility is that this individual, despite his own personal unworthiness, receives

blessing because he is the antecedent to a special descendent in the future. Thus, Hashem provides him with wealth and other blessing to accommodate the future situation of that special individual.

Since we do not and cannot know what the future holds for us, we must have trust that Hashem not only provides for the present but He will even give in the present for the future. With this understanding one can appreciate the concept stated in the Gemara in Tractate Berachos, "Just as one blesses on the good, so too he should bless for the bad." The Gemara in Tractate Nidah cites a verse which elucidates this concept. The verse from Tehillim states, "I give thanks to You because you enraged me." The Gemara explains this with an incident: There was a poor man whose only source of livelihood was his donkey. One day, as he was walking with his donkey, it breaks its leg on a rock. The poor man in his anger against Hashem picks up the rock and discovers a treasure under it. One must thank Hashem despite the difficulty of the situation because ultimately it is for the good.

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