

AND HASHEM BLESSED AVRAHAM WITH EVERYTHING

by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

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Chazal lavish effusive praise on the lofty achievement of Avraham Avinu. No wonder - between the two *parshios* that focus on his life, we witness the great esteem in which he was held, whether by humans ("You are a prince of G-d in our midst") or angels (e.g. those who wept for him as he readied his knife-laden hand at the climax of the *Akedah*).

His accomplishment is alluded to in summary fashion at the beginning of our *parshah*: "Avraham was old, well on in years, and Hashem had blessed Avraham with everything." This can only mean his grasp of *chesed*, through which he was able to access and secure all levels of spiritual elevation.

Why is it precisely at this moment that we see Avraham holding the keys to the Heavenly kingdom? Be'er Mayim Chaim borrows from the Rambam (Perush HaMishanyos, Peah 1:1) to explain why this blessing was bestowed upon Avraham specifically after burying Sarah.

Despite the fact that mitzvos are rewarded primarily in the World to Come, the "fruits" of some mitzvos are served in this world. Two elements are included in those mitzvos. Obeying them means responding to His command - which, like most mitzvos, can be rewarded only in the next world. At the same time, however, these mitzvos in particular benefit other people. They bring good to others. Those who perform these mitzvos inspire others to do the same. The general goodness that this brings about benefits everyone, including the original performers of the mitzvah, to whom some of that benefit redounds. Torah stands as "the equivalent of them all" because learning it leads to many acts of *chesed*.

What emerges is that the main "substance" of any mitzvah is so lofty that its reward is not and cannot be of this world. That reward is reserved for a loftier place - *Olam Habah*. The ancillary aspect of a mitzvah, such as the benefit that it brings to others, is rewarded in this world. Thus, the rich *chesed shel emes* (i.e. the *chesed* done for the dead, who cannot reciprocate the favor) performed by Avraham in burying Sarah brought him untold reward in the next world, but also much bounty in this one. "Hashem blessed Avraham with everything" follows inexorably from Avraham's extending himself in *chesed* in the long Machpelah drama.

Moreover, Avraham distinguished himself in the *hidur mitzvah*, the embellishing of the mitzvah beyond its strict requirements. He spent a large fortune on acquiring the Machpelah cave, sparing no expense to bury Sarah in the most perfect way possible. While Chazal tell us that mitzvos are not

rewarded in this world, the extra touches - the *hidur mitzvah* - is rewarded. This, too, is part of the Be'er Mayim Chaim's intent in linking Hashem's blessing of Avraham with the burial of Sarah.

(We find an analogous thought by the *Saba Kadisha* of Lechowitch. A familiar passage in the Zohar states that all *beracha* - "upper and lower" - is contingent upon Shabbos. The Saba Kadisha expands upon this. Blessings of *ruchniyus* - "upper" blessings - stem from Shabbos itself. The lower blessings of material benefit flow from our observance of *Tosafos Shabbos* - the time we voluntarily append to Shabbos, embellishing it by lavishing a bit more time and concern. Here, too, the added element that stands a bit to the side of the main observance of the mitzvah occasions its own rewards, which are experienced in this world rather than the next.)

We are still puzzled. Just why should it be that all these seemingly unrelated items - benefiting others, embellishing mitzvos, and adding on to Shabbos - deserve special treatment, special reward in the here and now?

A Gemara in Avodah Zarah (25A) provides the missing link. Two opinions are voiced regarding a line in 2 Shmuel that speaks of *Sefer HaYashar*. Just what is this *Sefer HaYashar*? One opinion sees this as *Bereishis*, the book of Avraham, Yitzchok and Yaakov, all of whom were called *yesharim*, upright. A second opinion links the *pasuk*, to Devarim. It might be called a *Sefer HaYashar* because it records the command "You shall do what is upright and good in the eyes of Hashem."

We are getting closer to our destination. We understand the role of the *Avos*, their importance in beginning the process of *tikkun*, of launching the observance of mitzvos. Just how did they know in what manner to observe the Torah before it was given?

The foundation of their observance was complete commitment to doing all that was upright and good in the eyes of Hashem. Utterly devoted to this goal, they found that their very souls and limbs led them inexorably to do what is upright and good, which ultimately means living by the Torah's mitzvos. Put more succinctly, the source of the observance of the Torah by the *Avos* was their devotion to the upright and the good. Their observance in turn became the foundation of the practice of Torah by their descendants, the Jewish nation.

The Torah provides a place for the mitzvah of "you shall do what is upright and good" not at the very beginning of Chumash, but at the end, in Devarim, well after the *Avos* discovered that this translated into observing the Will of G-d through the performance of what would become the mitzvos. Even after these actions were translated into fixed demands upon their descendants, there would be room for seeking out the upright and the good. An entirely different facet of this search applies after *Matan Torah*. It is aimed at areas not specifically addressed by the mitzvos. It calls on us to carefully weigh all of our actions and decision, to determine whether Hashem will approve of them as upright and good.

This search is a global one. It applies in all areas of life, whether in our relationship with G-d or with man. In our relationships with our fellow man, we are called upon to make choices that maximize the

good that can result from our endeavors. Chazal make a point of illustrating the principle with one law of their making, the right of the neighbor². In dealing with G-d, seeking out the upright and good requires us to examine activities that the Torah does not forbid, but may not be so upright or good. Included in this is the concept of sanctifying ourselves in the arena of the permissible, taking care not to make use of available pleasures in excess.

We now understand that the two opinions do not conflict with each other in the slightest, but touch on two aspects of the same quest. A commitment to steer all activity in the direction of the upright and good in the eyes of Hashem, a resolve to do nothing but that which will bring, as it were, pleasure to our Creator, leads to different places. A Bereishis variety leads to discovering the complete structure of halachic life. This was the experience of the Avos. A Devarim variety leads their descendants to find new and otherwise unlegislated opportunities to fulfill what we sense is Hashem's Will.

In the follow-through to the Devarim-command, the Torah promises that Hashem will "do good to you and your children after you, forever." We see here the mirror of Avraham's experience with burying Sarah. His preoccupation with the upright and good led to Hashem's blessing him with everything good. The two sections are perfectly parallel.

Why the promise of a bounty of Hashem's good? Two kinds of Divine flow of good are available to us. One we merit as a result of the performance of mitzvos, and it is reserved for the next world. A second kind of Divine flow results from our very relationship with Hashem, not from what we deserve as a reward for having served Him. It comes to us, even in this world, when we find grace in His eyes. Our *davening* is full of references to our desire to find this grace. The surest way to finding this grace is through single-minded devotion to do the upright and good. This, *kevayachol*, brings Him pleasure, which in turn cements the relationship of closeness. The Divine influence associated with this closeness operates entirely outside of considerations of reward for our actions; that can only be addressed in the next world.

How rich are the words of Rambam, now that we are cognizant of the inner meaning of his words. Rambam created an identity between deeds that benefit others and the promise of tasting the "fruit" of the good deeds in this world. The very purpose of Creation was for Hashem to be able to do good for His creatures! When we mere mortals succeed in doing so, we act in consonance with the most basic purpose of Creation. We bring pleasure, as it were, to Him, and receive the benefits of our closeness to Him.

Pursuing the upright and good is not reserved for the enlightened few. All of us can find ways to do so, each according to his comprehension and his spiritual level.

¹ Based on *Nesivos Shalom*, pgs. 138-140

² Basing itself on the imperative to do what is upright and good, the Gemara legislated a right of first

refusal for a neighbor. One who offers a parcel of land for sale is legally required to allow his neighbor to match his best offer and buy the land in preference over a stranger.

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