

THE MAIN THING IS ACTION

It is stated at the beginning of our parsha, after Abraham's circumcision, "He was sitting at the entrance of the tent in the heat of the day" (Genesis 18:1). Rashi states that Abraham did this in order to see if there were any wayfarers he could invite into his home. The Torah also tells us, "He lifted his eyes and saw...and he ran toward them from the entrance of the tent" (v.2).

Why does this verse seem to repeat itself by stating that Abraham ran "from the entrance of the tent"? We've already been told that he was sitting there, so it's obvious that he ran from there to meet them! We may also ask why he ran, since he could have walked to meet them. Above all, we need to understand Abraham's great courage in putting such tremendous effort into inviting guests to his home.

Our Sages say, "Happy is he who comes here with his learning in his hand" (Pesachim 50a). We should pay careful attention to the precise words the Sages use here. For example, why do they say, "with his learning in his hand" instead of simply "with his learning"? What exactly is the meaning of "in his hand"?

To explain this, we may say that the will to perform, and the actual performance of a mitzvah that results from learning is called "in his hand." This means that learning and the resulting action are found in the hand – the instrument of action – to perform mitzvot. This is what the Sages mean by the words, "Happy is he who comes here with his learning in his hand." In other words, it is not enough to simply come with our learning; it must also be in our hand – it must also be accompanied by action – as the Mishnah says: "Not study but practice is

who comes here with his learning in his hand" – the hand being the instrument of action – for "Not study but practice is the essential thing."

Abraham's good deeds stemmed from his learning. He was not content with just studying the Torah; he lived to fulfill it through action, performing mitzvot by practicing kindness and helping others.

We find this idea expressed by the Sages: "Service of Torah scholars is greater than its study" (Berachot 7b). This is because the essential aspect of Torah study is action, doing things for others, as we explained earlier.

Hence it is more important to serve those who study Torah than to study it ourselves. When an action stems from Torah study, we possess both study and action. Study is also very great because it leads to action (Kiddushin 40b), yet action is more important. By serving Torah scholars, one merits both study and action. This occurs among the tzaddikim of this world, for the more they devote their time to others, the more they elevate themselves in the fear of Heaven, and the more they desire to truly emulate their Creator. This is because action, not study, is the essential thing. Which action is this? It consists of showing kindness to others and helping those in need. These things are greater and more important than study itself, since it is through these things that the world endures. As Scripture states, "Olam chesed yibaneh [Kindness builds the world]" (Psalms 89:3). Thus there is great rejoicing before the Creator of the universe when He sees Jews fulfilling the concept that the world is "the work of My hands, that I may be glorified." (Isaiah 60:21). The more a person demonstrates kindness and performs good deeds, the more he senses the reality of Hashem and elevates himself in Torah and the fear of Heaven.

In every generation, this results from the power of our father Abraham, "the greatest man among the Anakim" (Bereshith Rabba 14:6 and Shemot Rabba 28:1 on Joshua 14:15). Abraham fulfilled the principle by which the main thing is not the thought, but the deed, for he always worked to serve the Torah, to serve guests. He also fulfilled the teaching, "Happy is he who comes here with his learning in his hand." Every Jew should be attentive to serving those who study Torah, for that is even greater than studying it ourselves. A Jew must also remember that the main thing is not the thought, but the deed. In fact it is not enough to be content with learning; we must also do things for others. If a person acts in this way, he will continually elevate himself in the service of Hashem.

the essential thing" (Perkei Avoth 1:17). It is also said that we must "interpret well and act well" (Chagigah 14b; Yebamot 63b). With regards to this subject, our Sages have said: "Study is greater, for it leads to action" (Kiddushin 40b). This means that when a person studies Torah without ulterior motives, it leads to action, for the essential aspect of Torah study and its goal is that a person should carry out what he learns, thereby performing mitzvot. In fact what is the use of studying if a person does not end up performing what he learns? When study is coupled with action, however, a person then carries in his hand the reward for studying and for doing.

Since we have reached this point, we can now explain Abraham's conduct. The Torah wants to highlight his greatness, for although he was ill at the time, and despite the sweltering heat on that day – since the Holy One withdrew the sun from its sheath (Bava Metzia 86b) – Abraham sat at the entrance of his tent and did not move from there. He did this solely to find wayfarers whom he could welcome into his home as guests.

Furthermore, the Torah mentions "the entrance of the tent" again in v.2, informing us that Abraham remained at the entrance of his tent, not inside, during all that time. Thus despite the great heat he continued to sit there until he saw some wayfarers, at which point he ran to meet them. He made a tremendous effort for his guests, for he desired to emulate his Creator and perform His commandments with great devotion.

Thus Abraham did not remain sitting when the angels arrived, but instead he "stood over them" (Genesis 18:8) in order to better serve and provide them with all they needed. Abraham truly wanted to emulate Hashem, desiring to fulfill the teaching, "Happy is he



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MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

Outside the Picture

It is written, "It happened after these words that G-d tested Abraham" (Genesis 22:1).

Rashi states, "After the words of Satan, who said accusingly: 'From all the feasts that Abraham prepared, he did not offer to sacrifice a single bull or ram to You.' He [G-d] responded to him, 'Does he do anything but for the sake of his son? Yet if I were to say to him, "Sacrifice him to Me," he would not refuse.'" We can understand this statement by Rashi in light of a story recounted by a certain rabbi: "We sent our young daughter to kindergarten, and on the first day the teacher invited all the parents to school, as is customary. My wife wanted to be a good mother, and so she went. In the end, the teacher asked if she could tell the parents something of a more personal nature: 'It's been a long time that I've been a teacher, more than 25 years in fact, and each year I get to meet an average of 35 families. You as a parent have the impression that your daughter is just five years old, that she understands little, remembers nothing, and that almost nothing affects her. However when you speak in front of your child, she hears, understands, and remembers – and it affects her – yet you downplay her intelligence. She has one fault, however, which is that she can't stop talking, and as her teacher I'm her outlet. Therefore I know exactly what's going on at home, whether it was milk that was spilled, or there wasn't any margarine at the grocery store, or you had an argument with your husband. Therefore I beg you, please watch what you say!'"

"At the end of the year, I asked my wife to go speak with our daughter's kindergarten teacher. I told my wife to say that we also know what is happening with the teacher, due to the conversations that she has with her colleagues, conversations that our child overhears. We therefore begged her to watch what she says!

"This teacher understood the power that children have to absorb everything around them, and she even felt the need to transmit that understanding to us as parents. However I know that the teacher's conduct in front of her students results from her impression that this only concerns other people, that she herself is outside the picture."

The Satan told Hashem, "It's true that Abraham proclaims Your Oneness in the world. Yet that's an understanding that he maintains while remaining outside the picture himself."

Hashem replied, "Abraham is not like that. He demonstrates his devotion to Me at each instant. This is why he does not need to show it by offering a sacrifice to Me. The proof is that Abraham's celebration was entirely for his son, and if I were to tell him to sacrifice his son to Me, he would not hesitate, for he is sincere." Abraham did not feel that he was "outside the picture." He belonged to a world in which the Name of Heaven was sanctified at each instant, which is the message he bequeathed to us.

A Pearl From the Rav

It is written, "The L-RD appeared to him...he raised his eyes...and beheld three men...and he ran to meet them" (Genesis 18:1-2).

In his book *Pahad David*, Rabbi David Pinto Shlita states: "Abraham was speaking with the Shechinah, which anyone would want to merit, when suddenly he left the Shechinah and ran to meet people that he did not even know. How could he abandon Hashem when He visited him? Furthermore, although the Sages learned from here that hospitality is greater than welcoming the Shechinah, where did Abraham learn it from?"

To explain this, Rabbi David Pinto brings a parable concerning a king who loved to eat fish. One day the king and his servants, including the royal fisherman, found themselves far from home, in a place where fish were almost impossible to find. Still, since the king had a desire to eat fish, he and the fisherman got into a boat in an attempt to catch some. The king was speaking with the fisherman as the latter deployed his net, when suddenly the fisherman felt something tugging on it. What was his reaction? He naturally stopped speaking to the king (despite the honor due to him) and quickly tried to bring the net aboard before any fish escaped. He did this, of course, in order to provide the king with what he desired. As for the king himself, he in no way considered this abrupt halt to their conversation as an affront to his honor. On the contrary, he felt that the fisherman's action was for his honor, given that they were in a place where fish were so hard to find.

The same applies to Abraham. The entire world denied the Oneness of G-d, and only Abraham proclaimed His Name among humanity and brought people closer to Him. As Hashem was speaking with Abraham, he saw three people whom he could also bring closer to Him. Abraham then realized that this was precisely how he could please Hashem, knowing that it would not be considered as a slight to His honor. On the contrary, it would be considered as a glorification of Hashem. It would be considered a great achievement to bring others under the wings of the Shechinah.

When to Visit the Sick

It is written, "Then Abraham ran to the herd and took a calf tender and good" (Genesis 18:7).

Where did Abraham run to?

The Zichron Shmuel explains: It is stated in the *Shulchan Aruch* that one must not visit the sick during the first three hours of the day, for they feel well at that time and visitors do not sense the need to pray for them. Nor should one visit the sick during the last three hours of the day, for then their illness leaves them so weak that visitors feel that praying for them is hopeless. One should visit the sick during the middle three hours of the day. The angels therefore came to Abraham at that time. Where is the herd found? They are in the pasture then; hence it was there that Abraham ran.

Angels of Fire

It is written, "He took butter and milk, and the calf...and he placed it before them. He was standing by them under the tree, and they ate" (Genesis 18:8).

When Moses ascended to Heaven to receive the Torah, the angels came to protest. Hashem said to Moses, "Answer them," and Moses reminded them that they had eaten meat and milk together in Abraham's home. In reality, the Torah's prohibition applies only if meat and milk are cooked together. In the case of the angels, however, it appears that no cooking occurred when they ate.

The Steipler asks, "What prohibition did the angels transgress in that case?" He replies by noting that angels are composed entirely of fire. Therefore when they put meat and milk into their mouths, they are cooked together.

For the Generations to Come

It is written, "The L-RD said, 'Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, now that Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation?'" (Genesis 18:17-18).

The Holy One, blessed be He, wanted to destroy Sodom. However He did not want to hide this from Abraham, for He wanted him to pray for them. Even though Hashem knew that Abraham's prayer would be ineffective, since they were too far gone, his prayer would still not be in vain. The fact that he prayed would benefit the generations to come.

This is the way the verse ends: "Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation," meaning that he will have many descendants, and his prayer will help them for generations to come!

– The Maggid of Dubno

From Dust and Ashes

It is written, "Behold now, I have taken upon myself to speak to my L-rd, though I am but dust and ashes" (Genesis 18:27).

The Sages state, "As a reward for having said of himself, 'I am but dust and ashes,' Abraham's children were privileged to receive two precepts: That of the ashes of the Red Heifer, and that of the dust for the faithless wife" (*Bamidbar Rabba* 9:15). What is the connection between these mitzvot and the fact that Abraham compared himself to dust and ashes?

A very modest tzaddik arrived at the wedding of a certain Jew, and he decided to sit by a corner near the door. The head of the household was distressed at this sight, and he thought: "I have to make this tzaddik sit at the table of honor." What did he do? He changed the table layout in the hall and made all the important guests sit next to the tzaddik. It follows that the table at which the tzaddik sat became the table of honor.

Because he was so small in his own eyes, Abraham said: "I am but dust and ashes." Hashem wanted to honor the tzaddik. What did He do? He created something of great importance from dust and ashes, transforming them into mitzvot. Thus Hashem said: "You said, 'I am but dust and ashes.' By your life, I will give your children atonement through them" (*Bereshith Rabba* 49:11).

– The Maggid of Dubno

A Dispute Among Dust and Ashes?

It is written, "Behold now, I have taken upon myself to speak to my L-rd, though I am but dust and ashes" (Genesis 18:27).

There was once a dispute between Rabbi Chaim Rappaport Zatzal and the Baal Shem Tov. One day someone entered the Beit Midrash as Rabbi Chaim was studying there alone. Rabbi Chaim welcomed him with a warm Shalom and asked, "What is your name?" He replied, "I am but dust and ashes, and you – who are you?" Rabbi Chaim said, "I too am but dust and ashes." The man then said, "If that's the case, why should there be a dispute among dust and ashes?"

Rabbi Chaim then understood that the man standing before him was none other than the Baal Shem Tov. "True, it's not worth having a dispute," replied Rabbi Chaim. From then on, peace reigned between these two great men.

Overview of the Parsha

Our parsha covers the main events in the life of the first Patriarch upon his becoming "Abraham" through circumcision (detailed in the previous parsha). Hashem revealed Himself to Abraham on the plains of Mamre as he sat by the entrance of his tent. Three visitors came to Abraham, one of whom announced the birth of a son to Sarah "at this time next year" (Genesis 18:10). Two angels then destroyed Sodom and its surroundings while saving Lot, who initially fled to Zoar. He subsequently departed with his daughters and lived in a cave in the mountains. From the plains of Mamre, Abraham traveled toward the Negev and settled in Gerar, where Sarah was taken to Abimelech's house and eventually released. Abraham prayed for Abimelech's household, for Hashem had made them all barren. Hashem also made Sarah fertile, and she gave birth to a son. Sarah told Abraham to separate her son from the son of her servant Hagar, and to drive both him and his mother from their home. At that time Abimelech entered into a pact with Abraham at Beersheba, the city where Abraham planted a tamarisk. It was also there that Abraham (who lived among the Philistines for a long time) called upon the Name of Hashem. Abraham was then commanded to offer Isaac as a sacrifice on Mount Moriah, and from there he returned to Beersheba. Finally, Abraham was told that his brother Nahor had fathered children, among them being Bethuel, who fathered Rebecca.

IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTORAH

You, No One Else

It is written, "He is a holy man of G-d who passes by us regularly" (II Kings 4:9).

Rabbi Yossi the son of Rabbi Chanina said in the name of Rabbi Eliezer the son of Yaakov: "If a man entertains a scholar in his house and lets him enjoy his possessions, Scripture accounts it to him as if he had sacrificed the daily burnt-offering" (Berachot 10b).

The Chafetz Chaim Zatzal once welcomed the gaon Rabbi Zalman Sorotzkin Zatzal to his home, showing him great honor and fulfilling the mitzvah of hospitality in every detail.

As soon as Rabbi Zalman arrived, the Chafetz Chaim set the table and served him a delicious meal. They exchanged words of Torah until it was time to go to sleep, at which point the Chafetz Chaim began preparing a room for his guest, even making his bed.

Rabbi Zalman was greatly embarrassed, for how could it be that the Chafetz Chaim himself was making his bed? No, Rabbi Zalman could not agree to this, and therefore he turned to the Chafetz Chaim and said, "It's not possible that you should be the one to serve me. I can do all this myself!" The Chafetz Chaim said nothing as he continued to prepare the sheets and pillows for his guest. When they left for synagogue the next morning, they handed their tallit and tefillin to a student who was accompanying them. When they arrived, Rabbi Zalman looked for the student to retrieve his tallit and tefillin, but he was nowhere to be found.

Rabbi Zalman asked the Chafetz Chaim about his tefillin, for perhaps he knew where the young man had gone. The Chafetz Chaim replied, "Why weary yourself to put on your tefillin? I can do it for you!" Rabbi Zalman then understood that it was not without reason that the Chafetz Chaim took it upon himself to personally fulfill the mitzvah of hospitality, not leaving it for others to do. Hospitality is a mitzvah like any other, one that a person must perform himself in order to be properly fulfilled.

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

Let a Little Water be Brought

It is written, "Let a little water be brought...and let me take a piece of bread" (Genesis 18:4-5). Why is it "a little water," but not "a little piece of bread"?

As we know, our Sages said that everything which Abraham did for his guests, Hashem personally did for his descendants. Likewise everything that Abraham did through an intermediary (including the water that was brought for his guests), Hashem did for his descendants through an intermediary. It is said that when the gaon Rabbi Israel Salanter visited the city of Kovno, he was invited to a meal in the home of the famous Rabbi Yaakov Karpas, who was very wealthy. When Rabbi Yaakov saw Rabbi Israel washing for the meal by using the least amount of water possible, he asked why he didn't use much more water. After all, everyone in Rabbi Yaakov's home used great quantities of water when washing, just as the Talmud relates in the name of Rav Chisda: "I washed with full handfuls of water and was granted full handfuls of prosperity" (Shabbat 62b). Rabbi Israel replied, "I saw your Jewish maid carrying the water from a distance over a steep slope, and she was sagging under the weight of the water as she carried it upon her shoulders. It's not good to do mitzvot on a grand scale at the expense of others, who themselves are weary." From this we understand why Abraham said, "Let a little water" – not a great amount – "be brought," for someone other than Abraham brought the water to his guests. It was therefore not good to do things in abundance at that person's expense. As for the bread, which Abraham himself wanted to bring, he said: "let me take a piece of bread" – in generous quantities.

From here we learn that we must always take other people into consideration. We must always ensure that we are not wronging them, even to a minor degree. Even when we are performing mitzvot and want to do good, it should not be at the expense of others. For example, if we are in a rush to get to synagogue or to a Torah lecture, that doesn't mean we can jostle people in our way or yell insults at our car if it fails to work in the morning, thereby waking the neighbors.

If we want to establish good customs in the home, we must not impose them by force, but with gentleness. These things should be obvious to us, just as it is obvious that we cannot rob a bank, not even to purchase a beautiful etrog.

All the Torah's ways are pleasant, and all her paths are peace.

EISHET CHAYIL

Supported by Her Dedication

Rebbetzin Rachel Toledano was known as the exemplary wife of her husband Rabbi Baruch Toledano Zatzal, and her love for Torah was legendary. Not only was she concerned for the Torah of her husband and sons, but even for the students who stayed in their home, sometimes for years. In order for them to study Torah in peace and tranquility, she treated them all like sons. Every student who ate and slept in their home truly felt like a member of the household. If a student was sick, she took care of him attentively and without reserve until he recovered. She did their wash in addition to ironing their clothes, even sewing them when necessary, as if for her own sons.

One young man who stayed in their home also received permanent financial support from them, since his father wanted to save money and therefore sent him nothing. In their home, however, the young man found what he needed. After her passing, one student said: "I obtained all my Jewish education – all my Torah learning and mitzvot – from Emma Rachel. It was her great dedication that supported me during those difficult times, and without her I don't know where I would be today."

A TRUE STORY

A “Chance” Recovery

It is written, “He lifted his eyes and saw: Behold, three men were standing over him” (Genesis 18:2).

Rashi states: “One angel cannot accomplish two missions.... Raphael, who healed Abraham, went from there to rescue Lot.”

When the gaon Rabbi Shlomo Kluger was appointed as the Rav of Brody, he was given the honor of being the Sandek during his first day in office. When he arrived at the Brit, however, he learned that the father of the child was on his deathbed. Now in Brody there was a custom that in such cases, the Brit was delayed until after the father died, thereby ensuring that the child would be named after him. Rabbi Shlomo Kluger, however, ordered people to quickly assemble a minyan and circumcise the child. The Brit therefore occurred immediately, and afterwards the father recovered and arose from his bed completely healed. Word of what happened quickly spread, and it made tremendous waves in town.

In explaining what he did, Rabbi Shlomo Kluger said: “I decided to act in this way based on what Rashi wrote. It’s difficult to understand his remarks, since it would seem that Heaven was lacking angels to save Lot. That is, the mission to save Lot was given to the angel Raphael, even though he had already saved Abraham! Lot’s merit was seemingly insufficient to have a special angel sent to save him. It was therefore necessary that this should occur as if by chance, by an angel that had already been sent to save Abraham.”

Rabbi Shlomo Kluger continued his explanation: “I reflected upon our situation in a similar way. It seems that in our case Heaven was determining whether the father of the child would live or not. It is possible that he did not have enough merit for Eliyahu to specifically come and save him from death. This is why I immediately ordered the child to be circumcised, for at that point Eliyahu would arrive for the circumcision, and at the same time he would heal the father of the child.”

Guard Your Tongue!

The End Ties the Idea Into the Beginning

The gaon Rabbi Ben Tzion Alfass recounted the following story: “One day I approached a certain Jew and said to him, ‘Come, I want to tell you some stories containing Lashon Harah and Rechilut that I’ve had on my mind for a while. You can even tell me similar things as well. Now I know that your time is precious, so I’ll even pay you for it.’ This Jew looked at me in anger and said, ‘What do you want to do – make me sin by transgressing a number of prohibitions? Even if you offered me a fortune, I wouldn’t have that kind of conversation with you!’

“As it turned out, a week later I met the same person speaking Lashon Harah in synagogue! I approached him and said, ‘A week ago I asked you to speak some forbidden words with me, and I even wanted to pay you for it, but you refused. Yet now you’re in synagogue wearing your tefillin, and you’re speaking Lashon Harah!’ Needless to say, the man felt a great deal of shame.

“Let’s try to understand why he wasn’t willing to listen to forbidden words at first, whereas later on he himself was speaking them! The answer is that at first he thought about and knew that what I was asking him to hear was forbidden. Later on, however, he didn’t think about what was coming from his mouth, for it was open. However in the end he felt great shame, for the end ties the idea into the beginning.”

A MATTER OF EDUCATION

You Did Not Spread the Torah as He Did

Resh Lakish was marking the burial places of the Rabbis, but when he came to [mark] the grave of Rabbi Chiya, it was hidden from him. He thereupon experienced a sense of humiliation. “Sovereign of the universe!” he exclaimed, “did I not debate on the Torah as he did?” A Heavenly voice then cried out in reply: “You did indeed debate on the Torah as he did, but you did not spread the Torah as he did.”

Whenever Rabbi Chanina and Rabbi Chiya were in a dispute, Rabbi Chanina said to Rabbi Chiya: “Would you argue with me? If, Heaven forbid, the Torah were forgotten in Israel, I would restore it by my argumentative powers.” To that Rabbi Chiya rejoined: “Would you argue with me, I who ensured that the Torah would not be forgotten in Israel? What did I do? I went and sowed flax, made nets [from the flax cords], trapped deer, whose flesh I gave to orphans, and prepared scrolls [from their skins], upon which I wrote the five books [of Moses]. Then I went to a town [that contained no teachers] and taught the five books to five children, and the six orders [of the Talmud] to six children. I ordered them: ‘Until I return, teach each other the Pentateuch and the Mishnah,’ and thus I preserved the Torah from being forgotten in Israel.”

This is what Rabbi [Yehudah HaNasi meant when he] said, “How great are the works of Chiya!”

– Bava Metzia 85b

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

Rabbi Issachar Dov Rokeach – The Belzer Rebbe

The tzaddik Rabbi Issachar Dov of Belz was the son of Rabbi Yehoshua, the Belzer Rebbe, and the grandson of the first Rebbe of the Belz dynasty, Rabbi Sar Shalom Zatzal. Rabbi Issachar Dov was born in 5614, and he was known as being holy and pure from an early age. Many people who went to see his father loved to discuss words of Torah and Chassidut with the young Issachar Dov, who would later become the Rebbe of Belz. He agreed to lead the Belz community upon the passing of his father in 5654, and the Belz community greatly prospered from that time on. In his Beit Midrash were numerous chassidim who were called yoshvim (literally “seated ones”), individuals who built an army of Belz communities throughout the Diaspora. The Belzer Rebbe was known as an influential man, respected by even the political authorities of his day. Some even brought him a kvitel (written request).

When World War I broke out, the Belzer Rebbe was forced to leave the town of Belz, moving through towns and villages such as Ratzport, Munkacz, Holshitzta and others. He was welcomed with great honor wherever he went, and he energetically fought to strengthen Judaism and Torah observance everywhere.

The Rebbe led the Belz community for 33 years, his words carrying weight in every place and assembly that stood for Torah. His soul ascended to Heaven on Shabbat, Heshvan 22, 5687, and the loss of this great tzaddik was deeply felt. Succeeded as Belzer Rebbe by his son Rabbi Aaron Zatzal (who later settled in Israel), Rabbi Issachar Dov is buried in Belz. May his merit protect us all.