

# THE DEEDS OF THE FATHERS ARE A SIGN FOR THE CHILDREN

(BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)



## The Path To Follow

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**GUARD YOUR TONGUE!**

### Attaining the Final Redemption

We have the duty to await the arrival of Mashiach every day, at each instant and every moment. Whoever does not believe in the coming of Mashiach commits a very grave sin, for he lacks one of the thirteen principles of faith. One who does not await his arrival and for whatever reason loses hope in him, such a person is considered to have denied the Torah. The Rambam states in Hilchot Melachim, "In future time, King Mashiach will arise and renew the Davidic dynasty, restoring it to its initial sovereignty. He will rebuild the Temple and gather in the dispersed of Israel. In his days all the statutes will be reinstated as in former times. We will offer sacrifices and observe the Sabbatical and Jubilee years according to all their particulars established in the Torah. Whoever does not believe in him, or does not await his coming, denies not only the other prophets, but also the Torah and Moses our teacher, for the Torah attests to his coming, stating: 'The L-RD your G-d will return your captivity and have mercy on you, and He will gather you in.... Even if your dispersed are at the very ends of the heaven...G-d will return you' [Deuteronomy 30:3-5]."

- Tzipita Lishuah

The Sages say, "Why was our father Abraham punished and his children doomed to Egyptian servitude for 210 years? Because he pressed scholars into his service, as it is written: 'He armed his dedicated servants born in his own house' [Genesis 14:14]. Shemuel said, 'Because he went too far in testing the attributes of the L-RD, as it is written: "How shall I know that I will inherit it?" [ibid. 15:8].' Rabbi Yochanan said, 'Because he prevented men from entering beneath the wings of the Shechinah, as it is written: "Give me the people, and take the goods for yourself" [ibid. 14:21]' " (Nedarim 32a).

The book *Be'er Mechokek* asks how the Children of Israel could be punished for Abraham's sin, since the Torah states: "Fathers shall not be put to death for the children, nor shall the children be put to death for the fathers. Every man shall be put to death for his own sin" (Deuteronomy 24:16). It is also difficult to understand how Abraham's sin consisted of sending Torah scholars into battle, since Hashem Himself helped Abraham in battle. In fact when Shem, the son of Noah, asked Eliezer, "When the kings of the east and the west waged war against you, what did you do?" he replied: "The Holy One, blessed be He, summoned Abraham and seated him on His right. We threw sand upon them and a miracle happened, for the sand became spears; we threw stubble and it became arrows." Along the same line of thought, the Midrash states: "Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Nehemiah differed. One maintained: 'This means that Abraham threw dust at them, which turned to swords; stubble, and it turned to arrows.' But the other argued: 'It is not written, "He makes dust," but "He makes them as the dust" – they threw swords at Abraham, which turned to dust; arrows, which became stubble' " (Bereshith Rabba 43:3). Therefore could anyone even think that the Holy One, blessed be He, would have helped Abraham and performed miracles for him if a trace of sin was involved?

It is also difficult to understand where Rabbi Eliezer learns that the Children of Israel were punished because Abraham had pressed Torah scholars into service, since the Name of Hashem was eventually sanctified. As the king of Sodom said to Abraham: "Give me the people, and take the goods for yourself" (Genesis 14:21). Abraham replied that he could not take this money, for the Holy One, blessed be He, saw to all his needs. He also said, "I have lifted up my hand to the L-RD, the most high G-d, Maker of heaven and earth, that I will not take from a thread to a sandal strap. I will not take anything that is yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich' " (vv.22-23). Here Abraham was announcing to the king of Sodom that gold and silver meant nothing to him. As the Ben ish Hai comments on the verse, "Abram was very heavy in cattle, in silver, and in gold" (Genesis 13:2), what does "very heavy" mean? It means that silver and gold weighed Abraham down, and only Torah, mitzvot, and good deeds were easy for him. He therefore sanctified Hashem's Name by sending his servants into battle. Therefore where did Rabbi Eliezer learn that this was a sin?

We may explain this according to what Hashem told Abraham: "I will make your seed as the dust of the earth" (v.16). Why does He say "as the dust of the earth," rather than "as the sand of the sea" or "as the stars of the heavens"? Abraham was being told that just as he overcame adversity, his descendants would overcome adversity without transgressing. Even if their enemies threatened to kill them, they would not deny their faith, for they would rather give up their lives than deny it, just as Abraham overcame adversity by the humility he possessed. In fact he made himself like the dust, as he said: "I am dust and ashes" (Genesis 18:27), for dust does not grow proud, since everyone tramples upon it. Such was Abraham's distinguishing feature, as the Mishnah states: "The disciples of our father Abraham possess a good eye, a humble spirit, and a meek soul" (Pirkei Avoth 5:19). Therefore the Jewish people demonstrate this humility and meekness before Hashem, and just as Abraham yielded

before Him, they yield before Him like the dust of the earth and overcome adversity. This is a great principle: Whoever possesses humility and the ability to compromise, there is no obstacle that he cannot overcome, for he annuls himself before G-d and thereby fulfills all that He decrees for him, without ever questioning His decisions. Hence G-d told Abraham, "I will make your seed as the dust of the earth," meaning that the Jewish people will be as humble as him, and by this trait they would merit to overcome adversity.

This is why Abraham was later punished for preventing his disciples from studying Torah when he sent them into battle. In fact Abraham knew that he would not die in battle and that the kings he was facing could not defeat him, for when he left Haran Hashem made him the promise of *lech lecha*, which has a numerical value of 100. This meant that he would live for another 100 years. He therefore had no right to take his disciples away from their Torah study. Even if he did this in order to make them fulfill a mitzvah, the fact that Hashem had promised that he would not be defeated in battle meant that he could have waged war alone. He did not have to take his disciples away from studying. Furthermore, as our Sages have said: "The Holy One, blessed be He, gave Abraham a sign that everything that happened to him would also happen to his descendants." That being the case, his descendants would learn from him to neglect the study of Torah, which is why he was punished. It was not because he had sinned, for he had diverted them from study in order to fulfill a mitzvah – without counting the fact that Hashem had helped him in battle, meaning that it could not have been an actual sin – but because it contained a teaching for all his descendants in every generation. They must not do the same, but instead they must constantly be engaged in the study of Torah. They cannot interrupt their learning as long as there is no urgent need. In fact the Sages have said, "Schoolchildren may not be made to neglect [Torah study], even for the building of the Temple" (Shabbat 119b). Here Abraham should have gone out to battle alone; there was no need for him to interrupt the Torah study of his disciples.

We should not be surprised that Abraham was punished despite the fact that no sin actually took place, for in this regard it is stated: "Sages, be careful with your words, for you may incur the penalty of exile and be banished to a place of evil waters, and the disciples who follow you there will drink and die, and consequently the Name of Heaven will be desecrated" (Pirkei Avoth 1:1). Along the same line of thought, the Gemara states that the disciples of Hillel hold that one may recite Shema while standing, sitting, reclining, walking on the road, or at work. The disciples of Shammai hold that in the morning one must recite Shema while standing, and in the evening while sitting. Rabbi Yishmael and Rabbi Eleazar ben Azaryah were once dining at the same place, with Rabbi Yishmael reclining and Rabbi Eleazar standing upright. When the time came to recite Shema, Rabbi Eleazar reclined and Rabbi Yishmael stood upright. Rabbi Eleazar ben Azaryah said to Rabbi Yishmael, "Brother Yishmael, I will tell you a parable. To what can this situation be compared? It is like a man to whom people say, 'You have a fine beard,' and he replies, 'I will cut it off just to spite you.' So too with you: As long as I was upright, you were reclining. Yet now that I recline, you stand upright!" He replied: "I acted according to the rule of Hillel, while you acted according to the rule of Shammai. What's more is that I had to act in this way, lest the disciples see and fix the Halachah for future generations accordingly" (Berachot 11a). All the deeds of the fathers are a sign for the children. This is why Abraham was punished, lest his children learn from him to neglect the study of Torah. He was punished for the desecration of Hashem's Name, not because he committed a sin.

# MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

## A Deep Sleep

*It is written, “The sun set and it was very dark. Behold, there was a smoking furnace and a torch of fire that passed between these parts” (Genesis 15:17).*

The Midrash states that the Holy One, blessed be He, showed Abraham four things: Gehinnom, the kingdoms, the giving of the Torah, and the Temple. He said to him, “As long as your children occupy themselves with the latter two, they will be saved from the former two. If they neglect the latter two, they will be punished by the former two. Would you prefer for your children to descend into Gehinnom or into the power of the kingdoms?” Rabbi Chanania bar Papa said, “Abraham chose the kingdoms.” Rabbi Yudan, Rabbi Idi, and Rabbi Chama bar Chanina said, “Abraham chose Gehinnom, but the Holy One, blessed be He, chose the kingdoms for him.” Rabbi Huna said in the name of Rabbi Acha, “Abraham sat wondering all day long thinking, ‘Which should I choose?’ The Holy One, blessed be He, then said to him, ‘Make a decision without delay’” (Bereshith Rabba 44:21).

We have always known that the concept of the “kingdoms” signifies exile and enslavement. Yet we never imagined that it could signify gas chambers, ovens, and the wholesale slaughter of millions of Jews. The human mind cannot picture such a fate. However the Holy One, blessed be He, showed Abraham which “kingdoms” awaited the Jewish people, which is what prevented him from making a final decision as to what he should choose.

During the same covenant between the parts, in which Abraham was shown the immense suffering that his children would endure under the servitude of the kingdoms, it is written: “A deep sleep fell upon Abram” (Genesis 15:12). This means that even the words “a deep sleep fell upon Abram” were part of the prophecy concerning what would happen to his descendants. In other words, when tremendous terror and darkness will fall upon them – when the kingdoms will reduce them to slavery and seek to destroy them – the descendants of Abraham will have fallen into a deep and restful sleep.

Out of Hashem’s kindness to us, He has dulled our senses like a surgeon anesthetizes a patient. It would have been better for us to receive local anesthetic, which at least would have enabled us to understand what was going on. However we are now in a deep sleep, like one who is still unconscious following an operation. When we regain consciousness, we will only hear the sounds of our snoring.

– Rabbi Yosef Shlomo Kahaneman, HaPardes

## A Pearl From the Rav:

### Giving Your Life for Torah

*It is written, “Terah died in Haran. The L-RD said to Abram, ‘Lech lecha...’” (Genesis 11:32-12:1). Rashi asks why the death of Terah is mentioned here, since Terah was still alive when Abraham went down to Egypt.*

We may explain this by saying that a person cannot merit the words of Torah unless he gives his life for them, as it is written: “Words of Torah abide only with one who kills himself for them” (Gittin 57b). How can a person kill himself for words of Torah in this world? It is by forgetting everything that concerns the world. When a person kills himself for them, he is assured that his Torah will be preserved. When Abraham saw that his father Terah practiced idolatry and that he did not have a chance to study Torah, he

immediately distanced himself from him and acted as if Terah had died. He did not worry about him. Why did Abraham do this? It was in order to serve G-d without being drawn to the idols that his father sold. Therefore when he left Haran, it was as if his father were dead. At that point G-d revealed himself to Abraham and said, “Leave your country, your birthplace, and your father’s house” (Genesis 12:1). The Sages explain that since Abraham said, “Is it possible for this world not to have a master?” the Holy One, blessed be He, signaled to him and said: “I am the master of the world.” Hashem did not reveal Himself to Abraham as long as he lived next to idols in his father’s home. It was only once he left that G-d immediately revealed Himself to him.

## A Message for Every Jew

*It is written, “Leave your country, your birthplace, and your father’s house to the land that I will show you” (Genesis 12:1).*

Rashi interprets the urging contained in lech lecha to signify “for your benefit and for your good.” A message for every Jew is contained in this commandment: Serve G-d with satisfaction and joy. Serving G-d is described by the term “walking,” as we find in the book of Psalms: “I will walk before the L-RD in the land of the living” (Psalms 116:9). The Torah commands us to walk before Hashem in such a way that it is for our benefit and our good, with pleasure and joy.

Furthermore: “Leave your country, your birthplace” – separate yourself from the vanities of the world that surround you; “and your father’s house” – from the habits that have been ingrained in you from the day you were born in your father’s house. Go, distance yourself from all these vanities and the ways of your youth. Progress and better yourself!

– Ouva HaLevi

## We Lose Nothing by Giving Tzeddakah

*It is written, “I will not take from a thread to a sandal strap. I will not take anything that is yours, lest you should say, ‘I have made Abram rich’” (Genesis 14:23).*

What did Abraham care if the king of Sodom were to say, “I have made Abram rich?” The Brit HaLevi, Rabbi Shlomo Alkabetz Zatzal, explained that there was a long-running dispute between Abraham and the king of Sodom. Abraham taught people to help the poor, practice hospitality, and do the utmost good for every person. The king of Sodom, on the other hand, personified the wickedness of Sodom. He developed a theory which held that the poor were parasites on society. They were not productive, and an affluent society that works to earn a living should reject all who need help. Otherwise, the king of Sodom said, the poor and needy would completely ruin the state’s economy. Yet here was Abraham, a man who very wealthy despite practicing hospitality and doing good for others. His generosity did not make him lose anything, and on the contrary he was still growing richer. This fact irritated the king of Sodom, for Abraham was a walking contradiction to the path of greed that he advocated.

This is why Abraham did not want to take even a thread or a sandal strap from the king of Sodom. Abraham worried that if he took something, the king of Sodom would immediately proclaim that without his help, Abraham would have become poor long ago on account of the tzeddakah that he gave. The king of Sodom would have said that Abraham’s wealth resulted only from the fact that he had given him all he possessed.

– Brit HaLevi

## Stealing Words is Also Theft

*It is written, “When she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes. Sarai said to Abram, ‘May my injustice be upon you’ ” (Genesis 16:4-5).*

Rashi explains this to mean: “For the injustice that has been done to me, I lay the punishment on you. When you prayed to G-d, ‘What will You give me, since I am going childless?’ you prayed only for yourself. Instead you should have prayed for both of us, and I would have been remembered with you. Moreover, you are stealing your words from me, for you hear my degradation and remain silent.”

Rav Shach Zatzal said, “We have a tendency to think that theft only involves the taking of money, or when something has clearly been stolen, such as when a person takes something out of someone’s pocket or robs his store of all its merchandise. When we confess our sins on Yom Kippur and say, ‘We have transgressed... we have robbed,’ we think that we are innocent of this sin if we have never robbed anyone.

“However here we learn that there exists a form of theft that is much more subtle than the norm, yet which the Torah still considers to be explicit theft. Sarah told Abraham that because he failed to pray on her behalf that they would have children, it was considered as if he had stolen the words of this prayer! Similarly, according to Rashi’s second explanation, because Abraham heard that Hagar despised Sarah, yet he did not rebuke her (since he could and should have scolded Hagar in order to defend her honor), it was considered as theft and violence against Sarah. We therefore learn an important lesson here, namely that theft does not consist solely of stealing money. If we can do something for someone, put in a good word for him, or pray for his well-being, such a prayer, good word, or good deed is considered as being due to the person in question. Therefore if we do not accord it to him, it is considered theft!”

– Machshevet Mussar

## Overview of the Parsha

Parsha Lech Lecha recounts the beginning of the era of Abraham, which actually marks the beginning of the era of Israel. Abraham himself was separated from earlier generations of mankind, and although they forgot Hashem, Abraham began to invoke His Name. In this parsha Abram becomes the new Abraham, from whom would emerge a people destined to become a light for the nations. Following Hashem’s orders to leave his land, Abram journeys with Lot towards the land of Canaan. After they arrive, they travel to Egypt because of a famine, and upon returning they part ways because the land cannot support them both. The status of Abram the exile increases when he returns the spoils that he captured in his battle against the kings. He is promised that he has nothing to fear, for Hashem will protect him and increase his numbers. In the vision of the covenant between the parts, he receives the promise that he will inherit “this land.” Hashem also tells him that his descendants will be persecuted in a foreign land, and that they will be oppressed until the fourth generation returns to Canaan. After living in the land for ten years, the childless Sarai gives Abram her maidservant so that she might obtain children through her. When the maidservant conceives, she begins to despise Sarai. She then runs away, but is brought back by an angel and bears Abram a son. These are Hagar and Ishmael. At the age of 99, Abram is given his new name, Abraham, and Sarai is called Sarah. Hashem establishes the covenant of circumcision, to be the G-d of Abraham and his descendants, and to give them the land of Canaan.

## REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

### Go to the Land of Moriah

In this week’s parsha we find the expression lech lecha, which also appears in the account of the sacrifice of Isaac. The Midrash states, “We do not know which was more important, the first or the second [instance]. Yet when it is written, ‘Go to the land of Moriah’ [Genesis 22:2], it follows that the second instance is more important than the first” (Bereshith Rabba 55:7). How are we to understand that the second instance is more important than the first? The answer is that regardless of the effort that a person puts into bettering himself, he has still not fulfilled his goal in life as long as he does not see to his children’s education, ensuring that they too become faithful Jews who will walk in his footsteps. Although leaving his birthplace and father’s house was a difficult trial for Abraham, it only served to better him on a personal level, for it caused him to leave a wicked environment and devote himself entirely to serving G-d. On the other hand, the second trial that he faced, the sacrifice of Isaac, demonstrated Abraham’s concern for the education of his son. He was ready to offer his only son to G-d, and he infused such a fear of Heaven and love for G-d into his son that he went to the sacrifice with joy. From here we see the greatness and complete perfection of Abraham.

Hence the second instance of lech lecha, which was said near Mount Moriah with regards to the sacrifice of his son to Hashem, is more important than the first instance. The latter was said for Abraham’s personal betterment, and a person cannot perfect himself until he teaches his children to follow in his footsteps.

This is also the meaning of what our Sages stated: “What was on the coin of Abraham our Patriarch? An old man and an old woman on one side, and a young man and a young woman on the other” (Bava Kama 97b). In the spiritual sense, a “coin” designates the path of Torah study. Abraham’s path was that a person’s efforts in bettering himself in Torah and wisdom (represented by the old man and old woman) must go hand and hand with the work involved in educating his children. This is what Abraham teaches us by the two trials he faced through lech lecha: Leaving his country and going to mount Moriah.

– HaDrash VeHaIyun

## ESHET HAYIL

### Putting an Effort into Educating Children

The education of children is like the dough used in making matzah. As long as we work it, it will not ferment. Likewise for the education of children, as long as a child feels that his parents are thinking about him, observing his actions, going to the Talmud Torah to speak with his teacher, the Mashgiach, and the Rabbi to find out how he is behaving and learning, he will stay on the right path and constantly grow in Torah and the fear of Heaven. However when parents allow things other than their children to occupy their thoughts, they will immediately notice negative consequences. Today a double responsibility rests on parents: Devoting their time to their children and supervising everything that regards their education. This constitutes the fruit of our efforts in this world and in the World to Come.

– Chinuch HaBayit



## YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

### Rabbeinu Tam

Rabbeinu Yaakov, the son of Rabbi Meir, is commonly known as Rabbeinu Tam, as we read: "Yaakov was a tam [upright] man." The second of three brothers, Rabbeinu Tam was the greatest among them in Torah, and all three were the grandchildren of Rashi. Torah and wealth came together in Rabbeinu Tam, for he was very rich and greater in wisdom and Torah than any of his contemporaries. He wrote numerous books on the Talmud and a great number of responsa, including Sefer HaYashar. Of him the Raavad wrote: "We have heard that there is a great sage in France by the name of Rabbi Yaakov, may Hashem protect him, grant him life, and give him the merit to study and teach Torah." In his response to Rabbi Chaim ben Glifa, the Rivash said of Rabbeinu Tam: "Since the Talmud was completed, there is no one like him in pilpul. He completely understands the entire Talmud, and he is both a great scholar and a profound thinker. In the depths of his intelligence and the magnitude of his understanding, he handles it all with ease. Anyone who is wise of heart should revere him."

We are familiar with how Rabbeinu Tam differed with his grandfather Rash regarding the order of the texts in the tefillin. As the Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 34 explains, according to Rashi (and the Rambam), the order of the texts in the tefillin of the head must be the following: Kadesh in the left-most (from the wearer's point of view) compartment, followed by Ki Yaviacha in the second compartment, Shema in the third, and Vehaya Im Shamo'a in the fourth, which is the right-most compartment. According to Rabbeinu Tam, the third compartment should contain Vehaya Im Shamo'a and the fourth, on the wearer's extreme right, should contain Shema. The custom is to follow Rashi and the Rambam. The Shulchan Aruch concludes that a G-d-fearing man should do both, having two pairs of tefillin to wear. He must have the intention of wearing the one corresponding to Halachah in order to fulfill his duty, and the other simply as a lash, for there is enough room on the head, as well as on the arm, for both pairs of tefillin. Some say that if one cannot wear both at the same time, he should wear Rashi tefillin by reciting the blessing over them, which he wears during Shema and the morning prayer, and afterwards he puts on Rabbeinu Tam tefillin without reciting a blessing. He then reads Shema and Vehaya Im Shamo'a while wearing them.

Rabbeinu Tam's method regarding times is also well-known. According to him, Shabbat ends 72 minutes after sunset. Rabbeinu Tam died in 4931.

## A TRUE STORY

### Reduced to Slavery

The Maggid of Lublin asked why, if the Children of Israel could not enter the land of Canaan before the sin of the Amorites who lived there had peaked, it meant that they also had to be slaves during that time. In other words, why did the Children of Israel have to suffer at the hands of the Egyptians before inheriting the land? We can understand the reason behind this with a parable: As a man was taking his three-year-old son to Talmud Torah, he was surprised by the thought that such a young child could learn something, for what could he retain during the year? Why not start teaching him at the age of four or five? The answer is simple: Rather than having him study in order to learn things, the intention in schooling him at such an early age is to initiate him in how to learn. He must learn to sit in place, listen to the rav, and accept authority. Children by nature are loud and undisciplined, but if they are trained to accept authority at an early age, they can learn and retain a great deal of things afterwards.

The same thing happened to the Children of Israel. The Holy One, blessed be He, wanted to give them the Torah as a heritage and bring them into the covenant of the 613 mitzvot. Now man by nature loves liberty, independence, and exerting the least amount of effort possible. Since the Holy One, blessed be He, wanted to accustom them to performing mitzvot and serving Him, He brought them into Egypt. There they were enslaved to a vile nation that imposed heavy burdens on them. They were made to work in mortar and brick, and they lost their children. In fact they were so crushed in Egypt that when the King of kings revealed Himself to them, they cried out: "Draw me after You, we will run" (Song of Songs 1:4). In other words: Far better for us to serve Hashem than to be enslaved to the Egyptians!

The Holy One, blessed be He, responded: "I am the L-RD your G-d, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Exodus 20:2), concerning which Rashi states: "Bringing you out is sufficient reason for you to be subservient to Me." – Shaarei Armon

## THE DEEDS OF THE GREAT

### The Merit of the Torah

Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair was on his way to redeem prisoners. When he arrived at the River Ginnai, which he wanted to cross, he said to it: "O Ginnai, divide your waters for me." The river replied, "You are about to fulfill your Maker's will, and I am also doing my Maker's will. While you may or may not fulfill your goal, I am sure of fulfilling mine." Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair said, "If you do not split, I will decree that no waters should ever pass through you." The river immediately split. Also with Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair was a man carrying wheat for Passover. Rabbi Pinchas once again addressed the river: "Split for this man as well, since he is engaged in a religious duty." It then split for him as well. There was also an Arab with Rabbi Pinchas, and therefore he again addressed the river: "Split for this person as well, so that he cannot say: 'Is this the treatment of a fellow traveler?'" It then split for him as well (Chullin 7a).

From here we see the tremendous holiness of our Sages, who by the power of their Torah could control nature without end, with even rivers yielding to their decrees. The saintly Ohr HaChaim asked, "If Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair could split this river and cross it with those who accompanied him, what was so special about the Sea of Reeds splitting for the Children of Israel when they left Egypt? Why do we consider that to be a greater miracle than all others?"

He replies by saying that Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair split the river by the power of his Torah. This was not such a great miracle, however, because the Torah is more powerful than nature. Yet that was not the case for the Children of Israel, for they crossed the Sea of Reeds before receiving the Torah on Mount Sinai, and therefore they did not possess the merit of the Torah. Hence it truly was a great miracle!

## IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTORAH

### As Weak as the Worm, as Strong as the Cedar

It is written, "Fear not, O worm of Jacob, O men of Israel. I will help you – the word of the L-RD and your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel" (Isaiah 41:14).

Rabbi Yehuda Halevi writes in the Kuzari that when a person contemplates the length of the exile, as well as the scattering and decline of the Jewish people over the course of our exile, the evil inclination is liable to make him lose hope. It will tell a person, "Can these bones live, for the importance of the Jewish people has greatly diminished among the nations of the world, and its memory is forgotten, as it is written: 'Our bones are dried and our hope is lost. We are doomed' [Ezekiel 37:11]." To eliminate such thoughts from the heart, this week's haftarah states: "Fear not, O worm of Jacob" – do not be surprised to return to your previous state when all that remains of you now is but a small remnant. Just as little remains of a body in the grave after it has been devoured by worms – though it will be brought back to life – so too will the Jewish people be brought back to its former glory. As Hashem promises, "I will help you – the word of the L-RD and your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel."

The Midrash asks why the Children of Israel are compared to a worm. The answer is that just as a worm – which is soft – uses its mouth to strike cedars – which are hard – so too do the Jewish people resort to their mouths, to prayer, in order to bring down the mighty. By the power of prayer, they will strike the nations that are compared to cedars, as it is written: "Behold, the Assyrian was a cedar in Lebanon" (Ezekiel 31:3). By the power of their prayers, they overcome their enemies and defeat them. This is a great encouragement for us in times of trial, when it may seem that the nations of the world are powerful enough to control us. We must nevertheless trust in Hashem and pray for Him to save us. Such is the power of prayer, for even one who is as weak as the worm can bring down nations as strong as the cedar.