

בס"ד

למודי משה

לך לך - גליון פ"ו

"The child (Yitzchok) grew up and had a *bris milah*, and Avrohom made a big *seudah* on the day of the *bris*" (Bereishis 21:8).

Insights into Halachah

Why don't we invite people to a *bris seudah*?

From the above *pasuk* we see the *inyan* of making a *seudah* on the day a child has a *bris milah*. The *Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer* (*Perek* 29) writes: רבי ישמעאל אומר לא עכב אברהם מכל אשר צוה וכשנולד יצחק בן שמונה ימים הגישו למילה שנאמר וימל אברהם את יצחק בנו בן שמונת ימים והגישו למנחה על גבי המזבח ועשה שמחה ומשתה מכאן אמרו חכמים חייב אדם לעשות שמחה ומשתה באותו היום שזכה למול את בנו כאברהם אבינו שנאמר ויעשה אברהם משתה גדול ביום הגמל את יצחק – "R' Yishmoel said: Avrohom didn't delay with anything Hashem commanded him to do. As soon as Yitzchok was eight days old, Avrohom gave him a *bris* as it says, "And Avrohom circumcised his son Yitzchok when he was eight days old". He offered him up like one offers a *mincha* offering on the *mizbe'ach* and he made a great *simcha* and a *seudah*. From here *Chazal* learn: One is obligated to make a *simcha* and a *seudah* on the day one merits to perform a *bris milah* on his son, like we find by Avrohom Avinu as it says, "Avrohom made great feast on the day he performed *milah* on his son Yitzchok". (Some learn that יצחק את יצחק, ביום הגמל את יצחק, means, on the day that Yitzchok was weaned, however, the *Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer* learns it means the day Yitzchok had a *bris*.)

Tosfos in *Shabbos* (130a) quotes the above *Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer* and adds a small addition. The *Gemara* in *Shabbos* (130a) says: כל מצוה שקיבלו עליהם – בשמחה כגון מילה דכתיב שש אנכי על אמרתך כמוצא שלל רב עדיין עושין אותה בשמחה, such as *milah*, as it is written: "I rejoice at Your word as one who finds great spoil", they still perform with joy."

Tosfos says: (שוחר טוב) למנצח על השמינית כתיב הנדרש על המילה שהיא בשמיני וכן אמרי' (פ"א פ' כ"ט) ויעש אברהם משתה גדול ביום הגמל את יצחק. במדרש (שוחר טוב) למנצח על השמינית כתיב הנדרש על המילה שהיא בשמיני וכן אמרי' (פ"א פ' כ"ט) ויעש אברהם משתה גדול ביום הגמל את יצחק. *The Midrash (Soichar Toiv)* on the *Perek* of *Tehillim* that starts השמינית writes that this song refers to *bris milah* which is performed on the eighth day. Similarly, the *Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer* writes: Avrohom made a great *seudah* on the day he performed Yitzchok's *bris*. ביום הגמל, ביום ה"ג מל, which means that on day 8 (5+3) Avrohom gave Yitzchok a *bris*."

We see from the above a *mekor* to make a *bris seudah*. Another *mekor*, is a *Rabbeinu Bechaya* also in this week's *sedra*. The *Rabbeinu Bechaya* (17:13) writes: 'וע"י המדרש מצות מילה היא כענין קרבן וכשם שדם הקרבן לכפרה על המזבח כך דם המילה מכפר ועל כן מצותה ביום השמיני כי הקרבן לא יכשר עד יום ח שנאמר (ויקרא כ"ב:כ"ז) ומיום השמיני והלאה ירצה וכשם שכתוב בקרבן (שמות כ"ט:ל"ג) ואכלו אותם אשר כפר בהם שאכילת הקרבן לכפרה כך ישראל עושין סעודה ביום המילה ועוד גדול כחה יותר מן הקרבן שהקרבן בממונו והמילה בגופו באבר שכל גידי האברים נקשרים בו אשר מטעם זה נקרא ראש הגויה כלומר ראש כל הגוף ועל כן חשב לו לעקדה וזבח כאלו עקד את עצמו – "A Midrashic approach to our *pasuk* views the mitzvah of *milah* similar to the offering up of a *korban*. Just like when one offers a *korban* on the *mizbe'ach* the blood of the *korban* achieves atonement for him, so to the blood lost by one having a *bris milah* acts as atonement for him. This is why this rite has to be performed on the eighth day of the baby's life. Just as an animal *korban* can't be brought until the eighth day of the animal's life as it says (*Vayikra* 22:27) "and from the eighth day on it will be welcome as a *korban* for Hashem. In connection with *korbanos* the Torah writes (*Shemos* 29:33) "They - who received atonement through them (the *korbanos*) - shall eat them" so to we make a festive meal to celebrate the day of a *bris milah*. In fact, the effect of a *bris* is far greater than that of a *korban*. An *korban* represents only a financial sacrifice by the donor whereas a *bris* involves his body. The organ which is cut is one that radiates feelings to all parts of the body of the person concerned. This is why it is called ראש הגויה, "head of the whole body" (*Negoim* 6:7). This is why this organ was chosen to serve as a demonstration of self-sacrifice and why someone who undergoes *milah* is considered in the eyes of Hashem as if he had sacrificed his entire body on Hashem's behalf."

[We see from the above *Rabbeinu Bechaya* that *bris milah* is related to *korbanos*. Some even say, the reason the one who brings the baby into the *bris* is called the "kvater", is because the word "kvater" is related to the word "ketores", and one who brings the baby into the *bris* is considered to be bringing *ketores*. With this we can also understand the well-known *segulah*, that if one is a *sandak* he is *zocha* to lots of wealth. Bringing *ketores* was a *segulah* for wealth, therefore, it make sense that since *bris milah* is related to the *ketores*, *bris milah* also has a *segulah* of wealth attached. It's also accepted among many, that one shouldn't be a *sandak* more than once in the same family, the reason is, since being a *sandak* is a *segulah* for wealth, we want to share the wealth.]

We have mentioned two primary sources for concept of making a *bris seudah*. The *Shulchan Aruch* (*Yoreh Deah* 265:12) *paskens* like the above: נוהגים – "The *minhag* is, that we make a *seudah* on the day of the *bris*".

What is the nature of the obligation to make a *bris seudah*?

From the aforementioned *loshon* of the *Shulchan Aruch*, it would seem that the obligation to make a *bris seudah* isn't *de'O'raisa* or even a *derabonon*, rather it's simply a *minhag*, a nice customary thing to do and if one performs a *bris* without making a *seudah* he hasn't violated any *issurim*.

The *Shaarei Teshuva* in *Hilchos Tisha B'Av* (*Orach Chaim* 551) brings the opinion of the *Ohr Nehlam* who learns that a *seudas bris milah* is actually a *de'O'raisa*. The *Ohr Nehlam* brings a *rayah* from a Rashi in *Niddah*. The Gemara in *Niddah* (31b) says: מפיני מה אמרה תורה מילה לשמונה שלא יהו כולם – “Why does the Torah say that one should perform a *bris milah* on day eight? In order that it shouldn't be that everyone is rejoicing, and the father and mother are sad.” Rashi explains: – “Everyone else is eating and drinking at the *seudah*, and the father and mother are upset as they are forbidden to perform *tashmish*”. In the times of the Gemara, a woman who gave birth was only *tomei* for seven days, therefore, we wait until day eight to do the *bris*, in order that the father and mother can get back together, and everyone will be happy.

The above Gemara is coming to explain how the Torah could say that one only needs to perform a *bris* on day eight, and the Gemara answers because we want everyone to be happy at the *seudah*. If the whole concept of a *bris seudah* was *de'rabonon*, why would the Torah fix the *bris* to be on day eight because of it, therefore, concludes the *Ohr Nehlam*, it must be a *bris seudah* is *de'O'raisa*.

The above opinion is in an individual opinion and we don't take on like this. We take on like the *Mechaber* who says it's a *minhag*, but whatever the case is, whether it's *de'O'rasia*, *de'rabonon* or simply a *minhag*, it has the *din* of a *seudas* mitzvah, and in fact the *Mechaber* (*Orach Chaim* 554) says: If one makes a *seudas* mitzvah in the nine days he is allowed to eat meat, and he lists what is considered a *seudas* mitzvah, and one of the things he mentions is a *bris seudah*.

Although it may only be considered a *minhag* it's an important *minhag*

The Gemara in *Pesochim* (113b) says: שבעה מנודין לשמים אלו הן יהודי שאין לו אשה ושיש לו אשה ואן לו בנים ומי שיש לו בנים אין מגדלן לתלמוד תורה ומי שאין לו – “Seven groups of people receive *niduy* from Shomayim [ostracized by Heaven]: A Jew who does not have a wife, one who has a wife but has no sons, one who has sons whom he does not raise to engage in Torah study, one who does not have *tefillin* on his head or on his arm, *tzitzis* on his garment, a *mezuzah* on his doorway; and one who withholds shoes from his feet. **And some say: Also one who does not sit with a group that is partaking of a feast in celebration of a mitzvah.**” *niduy* from Shomayim

One of the people the Gemara lists, is one who doesn't partake of a *seudas* mitzvah. What type of *seudah* are we talking about? *Tosfos* explains: היינו סעודת מילה דאמר במדרש דניצול מדינה של גיהנם וסעודת נישואין בת"ח ובת כהן לכהן ודוקא שיש שם בני אדם מהוגנים כדאמרין בזה בורר נקי הדעת שבירושלים לא – “The Gemara means a *seudas bris milah*, as it says in the Midrash, one who attends a *seudas bris milah* will be saved from *Gehenem*, and a *chasunah seudah* of a Talmud Chocham and a daughter of a Kohen to a Kohen. (*Tosfos* adds that) the above only applies if the people who are attending the *seudah* are good and correct people, like the Gemara says in *Sanhedrin*: The *chosuvah* people in Yerushalayim wouldn't sit down to eat, unless they knew who they were dining with.”

The *Rema* (*Yoreh Deah*, 265:12) quotes this *Tosfos*: וכל מי שאינו אוכל בסעודת מילה הוא כמנוה לשים ודוקא שנמצאו שם בני אדם מהוגנים אבל אם נמצאו שם – “Anyone who doesn't eat a *bris seudah* receives *niduy* from Shomayim, however, that's only if there are good and correct people there, if however, there are people there who aren't good and correct, one doesn't have to eat there.

The *minhag* not to invite people to a *bris seudah*

There is a well-known *minhag* that you don't invite someone directly to a *bris seudah*, what one does is he tells his friend “tomorrow I hope to make a *bris* at such and such a time in such and such a place, I would like to inform you about it”, however, you don't invite him directly. The question is, why not?

The *Pischei Teshuvah* (*Yoreh Deah*, 265:18) brings a *Teshuvos Mekoim Shmuel*, who brings from the *sefer Sharvit HaZohav*: טוב לבטל מה שהשמש קורא – “It's a good idea, to annul the *minhag* that the *gabbah* calls out and invites people to go to a *bris seudah*, as it may be that one is unable to go for whatever the reason may be, and he will *chas vesholam* be liable to receive *niduy* from Shomayim.”

What happens if one does get invited directly?

We see that to avoid one getting in trouble for not attending, we try and not invite people directly. The question is however, what happens if one does get invited explicitly, and he has an important meeting, work etc. and he can't attend, is there anyway out?

The *poskim* bring various ways out of the problem. The *Kores HaBris* says, he doesn't know why the *Rema* *paskened* the way he did, the Gemara in *Pesochim* that says: שאין מי שאין מיסב בחבורה של מצוה, that if one doesn't attend a *seudas* mitzvah he gets a *niduy*, is a *יש אומרים* (one opinion), which means that there are others who argue, i.e. the first opinion in the Gemara holds that one doesn't get ostracized for not attending a *seudas* mitzvah, so why does the *Rema* *pasken* like the second opinion.

However, in the end of the day we follow the *Rema*, and the *Rema* *paskened* like this, so what is the way out?

The *Hegyonay HaParsha* brings from the *sefer Shaarei Aharon*, who asked the Chazon Ish what the way out is, and if there is any *heter* not to join. He brings that the Chazon Ish told him, the *Rema* *paskened* there is only a problem if there are *אדם מהוגנים* there, if there are good and correct people there, if however, there is no such people then there is no problem of not attending. The Chazon Ish said, today most people are considered *אינו מהוגנים* – “not good and correct” therefore, if one doesn't attend there is nothing wrong.

The *Shaarei Aharon* pushed the Chazon Ish a bit further and asked him, what is the definition of someone who is *אינו הגון* – “not good and correct”, and the Chazon Ish said, three things make one *אינו הגון*, if one isn't careful with *netilas yodayim*, with *kinuach beis hakisay*, or to have *kavonah* in *shemonah*

esrei. Sadly, according to the above three things, most of us are probably considered to be בני אדם שאינו מהוגנים. If one isn't careful with even one of the above three things he is considered אינו הגון, therefore, today there would be no problem not to attend a *bris seudah*.

Another *svora* mentioned by the *poskim* is, that the ruling of the *Rema* only applies to guests who are present at the *bris seudah* and refuse to take part, by doing so, they show disdain for the mitzvah. This cannot be said to someone who is absent altogether.

The *Shu"t Sho'el VeNisha'al (Yoreh Deah, 7:209)* writes, the above is *meduyak* [implicit] from the wording of the *Rema* itself, who writes that somebody who does not participate in the *bris* receives a *niduy* from Shomayim. The next sentence, stating that where בני אדם שאינו מהוגנים are present one need not join the meal, implies that the reference is to somebody actually present at the meal.

Why are we only worried about the above by a *bris seudah*?

Tosfos in *Pesochim* brought two examples of what a חבורה של מצוה is. The first one was a *seudas bris milah* and the second one was a *chasunah*. How come when it comes to making a *chasunah* people don't say "I am making a *chasunah* in such and such a place and such and such a time, I'm not inviting you, I'm just letting you know about it", and on the contrary, not only do people send invitations, they even expect reply cards responding if you will be attending or not, and we don't find anyone makes a fuss about it, why aren't we worried about the *niduy* from Shomayim?

R' Moshe Feinstein (*Igros Moshe, Orach Chaim 2:95*) deals with the above *shailah*. He quotes the *Rema* who says: "anyone who doesn't take part in a *seudas bris milah* is *menudah* by Shomayim". Then he asks, why does the *Rema* only quote the part of *Tosfos* which talks about a *bris seudah*, why doesn't he also bring the same thing by a *chasunah seudah* of a *talmid chocham*?

On the above *Rema*, there is a very cryptic Gaon, the Gaon says: 'ענוס' דפסחים קיד א' ד"ה ואין כו' – "see *Tosfos* in *Pesochim* 114a d'h v'ein". R' Moshe learns that the Gaon is asking, that *Tosfos* mentions both a *seudas bris milah* and a *chasunah seudah*, so why does the *Rema* only mention a *seudas bris milah*?

R' Moshe answers, the reason one receives a *niduy* from Shomayim for not attending a *bris seudah*, isn't because if one is invited he has a *chiyuv* to go, and if he doesn't go he gets punished. If someone doesn't eat *matzah* on Pesach, or shake *lulav* on Succos, we don't find he receives a *niduy* from Shomayim. The reason one gets a *niduy* from Shomayim for not attending a *bris seudah* is because if he doesn't attend, it shows a lack of *kovad* for the mitzvah of *bris milah*, by the mitzvah of *bris milah* one has to be very careful to show it the correct respect, and if one doesn't he gets punished, something which we don't find by a *chasunah*.

R' Moshe doesn't explain why this lack of *kovad* is only by a *bris milah*, but perhaps the reason is, we find the mitzvah of *milah* was בריתות – "given over with 13 covenants" and we also find there are only two mitzvos in the Torah that one is *chayav kores* for not keeping, *bris milah* and *korban pesach*. We see that the mitzvah of *bris milah* is a very *yesodosdika* [foundational] mitzvah, therefore, one has to treat it with more respect than a *chasunah*, and if one doesn't attend a *bris seudah* it's worse than not attending a *chasunah seudah*, therefore, people make more of an effort not to invite to a *bris seudah* than they do by a *chasunah seudah*.

R' Moshe Shternbuch (*Teshuvos V'Hanhogas 2:649*) discusses the above. First he says, the above only applies to a *chasunah seudah* of a *talmid chocham*, and nowadays no one is really considered a *talmid chocham* like we find the Gemara says many times. Then he says, one only gets punished for not attending if the reason he doesn't attend is because he holds it's below his dignity to attend such a lowly *seudah*, if however the reason he doesn't attend is because he is busy learning, or he is busy with some other matter then he doesn't get punished for not attending.

R' Moshe says, therefore, if one doesn't attend a *chasunah* because of the mere fact that it takes a long time, and not because he feels it's below his dignity, there is nothing wrong in not attending. By a *bris seudah* however, which is much shorter, then one should make more of an effort to go.

Then he brings from R' Meir Chodosh, that that which *Chazal* say about going to a *chasunah seudah* only applies to the actual *seudah*, if however, one has to waste lots of his time in order to get there, it's better to learn than to go to the *chasunah*. (See also *Teshuvos V'Hanhogas 3:401*)

Divrei Torah for the Shabbos Table

Why Hashem didn't specify where Avrohom should go

This week's *sedra* begins with Hashem telling Avrohom: לך לך אל הארץ אשר אראך - "Go for yourself ... to the Land that I will show you." (*Bereishis* 12:1). Rabbi Yochanan teaches (in the Medrash) the reason Hashem did not tell Avrohom where he was supposed to be going ahead of time was "to give him reward for each and every step." [Since the mitzvah was *Lech Lecha* (go), for every step he received a new mitzvah!]

Rav Boruch Baer, the great Rosh Yeshiva from Kamenitz, gives a "*lomdishe teretz*" to this teaching of Rabbi Yochanan. He explains, that if the Ribbono shel Olam would have told Avrohom simply, "Go to the Land of Canaan" then that would have been the definition of the mitzvah and each step he took along the way would merely be a *hechsher mitzvah* [preparation for accomplishing the mitzvah i.e. – arrival in Eretz Yisrael]. However, now that the mitzvah was formulated as "Go" without being told where to go, then each step of the way was a new mitzvah fulfillment.

If this is true, the following question must be asked: There are two times in the Torah where we find the expression "*lech lecha*". The first is in our *parsha* (*Bereishis* 12:1) and the second is in the *parsha* of the *akeidah* (*Bereishis* 22:2) where Avrohom was directed specifically to go to the Land of Moriah (the location of the future *Beis HaMikdash*). Why by the *akeidah* did Hashem not also say to Avrohom, "Take Yitzchak and go to the place that I will show you"? Just like the Ribbono Shel Olam is interested in giving Avrohom reward for every single step on the way to the Land of Canaan and therefore did not specify the destination, let the same formula be utilized regarding the command to go to the *akeidah*?

The *Bei Chiya* cites a *Maharal* in *Nesivos Olam*. The *Maharal* says, that if you have a *succah* that is half a mile away and another *succah* that is a mile away, it is not a bigger mitzvah to walk to the *succah* that is a mile away. The mitzvah is to eat in the *succah*. How you get there is independent of the mitzvah and therefore there is no extra mitzvah to go to the *succah* that is further away. However, the *Maharal* says, if there is a *shul* half a mile away and a second *shul* a mile away it is a bigger mitzvah to go to the further *shul* (all other things being equal) because every single step is a separate mitzvah.

What is the difference between the *succah* and the *shul*? The *Maharal* explains: Hashem's presence is in the *shul*. A *Beis HaKnesses* is a miniature *Beis HaMikdash* consequently, when a person is walking to *shul*, he is being drawn to Hashem and the very walking is a type of joining (*chibbur*) and clinging (*deveikus*) to Him." When you are going to *shul*, you are going to be with the Ribbono Shel Olam. The walking is in itself a mitzvah.

If this is true, we can understand the difference between the two "*lech lecha*" commands. In our *parsha*, Hashem wanted to give Avrohom reward for every single step, so He told him, "Go to the Land I will show you (hiding the destination)." Why then by the *akeidah*, did He tell Avrohom, "Go to the Land of the Moriah (specifying the destination)?" The answer is, that there Avrohom also received reward for every single step because the Shechinah was dwelling on Har HaMoriah. Since Avrohom was going to Hashem, by definition, every single step was a separate mitzvah. Therefore, there was no need to hide the destination of where he was supposed to go.

Rav Chaim Zvi Senter notes that Rav Baruch Baer's concept applies to our own lives, whenever we experience times of turmoil and uncertainty and the future is unknown. Hashem does not reveal to us how a difficult situation will turn out or even when it will begin to improve, our job is to place our trust in Him and continue along the path on which He leads us, reassured by the knowledge that like Avrohom, we may not know where we are headed, but we are accruing eternal reward for every faithful step we take.

Bad surroundings effect even the greatest of men

ותיה כאשר הקריב לבוא מצרימה ויאמר אל שרי אשתו הנה נא ידעתי כי אשה יפת מראה את
"And it was, when they came close to the borders of Mitzrayim, and Avrohom said to Sorah his wife, 'behold now I know, that you are a woman of beautiful appearance'" (*Bereishis* 12:11).

Due to a famine in the land of Canaan, Avrohom and Sorah decided to travel to Mitzrayim. As they approached the border between the two countries, Avrohom became aware of Sorah's beauty and began to fear that the Mitzriyim would want to marry her and would kill him in order to do so. Why did he suddenly become aware of her beauty at this time?

Rashi explains that due to their tremendous modesty, Avrohom had never looked at her and was unaware of her attractive appearance. At this time, something occurred which caused him to look at her for the first time, and he recognized her beauty. Why does the Torah emphasize the seemingly irrelevant geographical fact that this occurred as they drew close to Mitzrayim, and as there are no coincidences in even the most minute details of events, why did Hashem cause this to occur at this time?

Although we are unable to relate to it, Avrohom was on such a high level in spirituality and modesty that he felt it appropriate to be married solely for the sake of Heaven and not to even look at his wife, a practice which he successfully upheld for decades. The *Noda BeYehuda* notes that this is even more remarkable in light of the teaching of the Gemara in *Megillah* (15a) that Sorah was one of the four most beautiful women in the history of the world, a reputation of which he was surely aware, and yet with tremendous self-control elected not to have any benefit from.

The Rambam writes (*Hilchos Deios* 6:1) that a person is naturally influenced by his surroundings. The Mitzriyim were a nation more immoral and depraved than any other, excelling in their passion for illicit relationships (Rashi *Vayikra* 18:3). Rav Moshe Wolfson explains that as Avrohom approached the border of Mitzrayim – even before he crossed it – he was negatively influenced by the immorality which permeated the very air of Mitzrayim, which caused him to fall from his great heights of personal modesty, and for the first time he glanced at his wife's beauty. The recognition of the effect that one's surroundings can have on even the greatest of men should serve as a lesson for us, who have much further to fall, about the importance of dwelling and spending our leisure time in environments that are conducive to Torah values. (I saw this brought down from R' Ozer Alport, in his *Parsha Potpourri*)

Inner spiritual purity can't be captured on camera

We just mentioned Rashi who explains that due to his tremendous level of personal modesty, Avrohom had never looked at Sorah before this incident and was oblivious to her good looks.

The *Maharsha* (*Bava Basra* 16a) points out that this episode is difficult to understand, as the Gemara in *Kiddushin* (41a) says, that it is forbidden for a man to marry a woman until he has looked at her to ensure that she will find favour in his eyes, and the Gemara in *Yoma* (28b) teaches that Avrohom observed the entire Torah even though it had not yet been given. If so, how was he permitted to marry Sorah without ever looking at her?

Rav Nissan Kaplan suggests that Avrohom certainly fulfilled the Gemara's requirement to look at Sorah at the time of their marriage, and he was well aware that she was beautiful. If so, what changed at this time, and why did Avrohom suddenly become concerned about the Mitzriyim when he was not afraid of them at the time they set out on their journey? He explains, that although Avrohom recognized his wife's beauty at the time of their marriage, he believed that it emanated from her sublime spiritual purity. Thus, he wasn't worried about the Mitzriyim attempting to take Sorah away from him because he assumed that they would view her through their crude physical lenses, which would prevent them from discerning her true inner splendour. However, as they approached the border, Avrohom noticed Sorah's reflection in the water, which merely serves as a mirror of the external and is incapable of capturing inner spiritual beauty. When Avrohom saw that Sorah's charm and appeal remained unchanged when displayed in the water, he realized that she also possessed great physical beauty and therefore grew concerned that the Mitzriyim would be interested in taking her for themselves.

Taking this insight a stage further, Rav Nissan Kaplan suggests that when people who are in *shidduchim* insist upon seeing a picture of a prospective *shidduch*, it is often counterproductive and self-defeating. There are many young men and women who radiate an inner spiritual purity when seen in real life, but like the water, the camera is incapable of capturing this appeal. This often leads to people rejecting potentially suitable marriage partners to whom they could have felt attracted if they had only given themselves the opportunity to meet them in real life, instead of emulating the Mitzriyim by focusing solely on external appearances.

The power of tefillah

ותאמר שרי אל אברם חמסי עליך אנכי נתתי שפחתי בחיקך ותרא כי הרתה ואקל בעיניה ישפט ד' ביני וביניך
"And Sorah said to Avrom: The wrong done me is your fault! I myself put my maid in your bosom; now that she sees that she is pregnant, I am lowered in her esteem. Hashem should decide between you and me!" (*Bereishis* 16:5)

After being married for ten years without bearing any children to Avrohom, Sorah suggested that he should marry her maidservant Hogar and attempt to have children together with her. After Avrohom married Hogar and she successfully conceived, Sorah became upset with Avrohom. Rashi explains that she argued that Avrohom had not davened on her behalf. When he beseeched Hashem for a child to inherit his spiritual legacy, he davened only that he should merit offspring but did not include her in his petitions.

The Gemara in *Yevamos* (64b) teaches that Sorah did not have a *rechem* [uterus] and was physically incapable of conceiving a child, it is difficult to understand Sorah's claim. Of what benefit could Avrohom's *tefillah* have been, and for what reason did she hold him responsible for not asking Hashem for something that was impossible according to the laws of nature?

Rav Nosson Wachtfogel answers that we ask this question only because we do not understand the tremendous power of true heartfelt *tefillah*. While it is true that Hashem normally runs the world based on the physical laws of nature, *tefillah* is a supernatural instrument that allows a person to bypass scientific obstacles. As an example of this concept, he recounts the following powerful story.

When the *K'Sav Sofer* was a mere six years old, he became so ill that the doctors despaired of his life. Based on their diagnosis of his ailment, they despondently said that there was nothing they could humanly do to save him. His illustrious father, the Chasam Sofer, requested that everybody present leave the room in which his son was resting.

The Chasam Sofer entered the room, locked the door, and davened as he had never davened before. He emerged and confidently announced that he had successfully attained a *yovel* (50 years) on his son's behalf. To the amazement of all but his father, the child had a miraculous recovery and went on to lead a prolific and productive life, one which was cut short at the tender age of 56.

Sadly, the Gemara in *Berachos* (6b) teaches that while *tefillah* has the potential to reach the greatest heights imaginable, people don't recognize this power and disrespectfully take it for granted. The Gemara in *Yevamos* (64a) teaches that the infertility of the *Avos* and *Imahos* was due to Hashem's desire for their intense *tefillah*. Sorah understood this lesson and therefore wasn't the slightest bit fazed by the apparent obstacle presented by her lack of a womb, instead focusing her frustration on the real impediment to her pregnancy – Avrohom's lack of *tefillah* on her behalf. Many times in life we face seemingly insurmountable challenges. At such times, we may take inspiration and comfort from the recognition that there is no hurdle large enough to stand in the way of our heartfelt *tefillah*.

Developing potential

In this week's *sedra* Hashem informs Avrohom that his wife will have a child. Avrohom is pleased to receive such a prophecy but he is worried about what will be with Yishmoel. Hashem tells him: וְלִישְׁמֹעַל שְׁמַעְתִּיךָ הִנֵּה בִרְכָתִי אֶתְּךָ וְהַפְרִיתִי אֹתְךָ וְהִרְבִּיתִי אֹתְךָ בְּמֵאד מֵאֵד שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר נְשָׂאִים יוֹלִיד וְנִתְּתִי לְגוֹי גָדוֹל – “Regarding Yishmoel, I have heard you. Behold, I have blessed him, and I will make him fruitful and will increase him most exceedingly; **he will beget twelve princes** and I will make him into a great nation” (*Bereishis* 17:20).

Rashi comments on the fact that Hashem promised to give Yishmoel twelve princes (*Nesi'im*): כַּעֲנָנִים יִכְלוּ - “They will disappear like clouds”. Rashi is interpreting this *pasuk*, in which Hashem is promising Yishmael *nesi'im* as not such good news. Yishmoel will have princes alright, but they will be like clouds. Clouds come and clouds go! Clouds disappear! The twelve princes Yishmoel will have are no big deal. They will dissipate like clouds.

The Tolner Rebbe asks a question. Rashi says in the beginning of *Bereishis* (3:8), that he is only coming to explain the *p'shuto shel mikra* – simple interpretation of the *pasuk*. Rashi makes it clear in *Sefer Bereishis* that he does not consider it his mission to provide a Medrashic interpretation of the *pasukim*. Certainly, Rashi occasionally quotes Medrashic interpretations, and he typically will label an interpretation as such. However, Rashi considers his job to say the simple interpretation of the *pasukim*.

If so, why does he interpret the *pasuk* regarding Yishmoel the way he does. Where does Rashi see in the *p'shuto shel mikra* that *nesi'im* should mean disappearing like clouds?

The Tolner Rebbe isn't the first to raise this question, the *Mizrochi*, *Maharal*, and others are bothered by this as well. The *Mizrochi* answers, that if it really meant princes, it should have used a more common expression for political and military leaders—*sorim*, *alufim*, etc. Since the relatively unusual expression for head of a tribe—*nesi'im*—is used, it means dissipating like clouds.

The above answer is slightly difficult however, as is *nesi'im* really such an uncommon expression, it seems just as usual as *sorim* and *alufim*?

The Tolner Rebbe offers an alternative and brilliant interpretation: He quotes a Medrash Tanchuma in *Parshas Vayechi*. The Medrash contrasts the expression used by Yaakov Avinu when he blessed the *shevotim* on his deathbed: כָּל אֵלֶּה שְׁבֻטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר – “All these *shevotim* of Yisroel, twelve in number”, to the expression used by Yishmoel: שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר נְשָׂאִים יוֹלִיד - “twelve *nesi'im* he will father”.

What is the contrast? The Tolner Rebbe says the key to the contrast lies in one word: שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר נְשָׂאִים יוֹלִיד. What is unusual about this expression? The expression is unusual because a person does not give birth to a prince. No one is born a *nassi*. You need to work your way into the job. What does it mean “he will give **birth** to twelve princes?”

The Tolner Rebbe explains that this is the fundamental nature of Yishmoel. Yishmoel is about extraordinary potential that was there at birth but was never developed. When someone has extraordinary potential that was never developed, nothing comes from it. He gives an example:

Sometimes there are children who are born as a genius and people may assume the child will grow up to be the next *gadol hador*! However, genius needs to be cultivated. It must be nurtured. A genius child may sit down at the piano and play beautiful music when he is three years old. If someone takes that three year old and sends him to the Julliard School of Music where he can be trained and develop his talent, then he can become something special. However, if someone has a genius child — whether in math, science, music, or art, or in **learning**—and no one works with him and develops him, nothing will come of him.

Hashem tells Avrohom, "Avrohom, you davened for Yishmoel. Okay. Your *tefillos* will be answered. He will give birth to twelve princes—child prodigies with awesome potential. But the promise is only that they will be that way at birth. Let's see what he does with them!" Yishmoel, unfortunately has a history of not developing his talent.

That is the point of the Medrash. עשר כל אלה שבטי ישראל שנים עשר - "All these are the *shevotim* of Yisroel....". Yaakov Avinu had twelve sons by his death bed. They were not all perfect. But they worked on themselves. They developed. There on his death bed, Yaakov Avinu was still giving them *mussar*. "You still have not perfected yourselves." This is Klal Yisroel. Klal Yisroel were not perfect from birth. They had to develop, they had to work, and they had to sweat. Yishmoel fathered "twelve princes" from the moment of their birth. That is the difference.

From this, the Tolner Rebbe goes on to decry the phenomenon we have in our day and time of a "Yeshiva for *metzuyanim*" [A *yeshiva* for geniuses]. Sometimes a good boy is not the brightest child, but he is willing to work hard to achieve in learning. Many times, his parents will apply to get him into a high quality *yeshiva* and they are told "No. We cannot take him. He is not a genius." So what if he is not a genius? He is a *masmid* [works hard]! At the end of the day, that wins the race. You want geniuses? That is Yishmoel.

Divrei hesped for R' Avrohom Erlanger zt"l

This week Klal Yisroel suffered yet again the tragic loss of another one of our *gedolim*. Although it's not really my place to try and be *maspid* such an *adam choshuv*, and there already have and I am sure will continue to be people greater than me who will be *maspid*, I feel that out of *hakoras hatov* for all the Friday night *musser shmoozen* I gained greatly from (which were given weekly in Kamenitz), and the story telling sessions that R' Avrohom use to give in his house telling over stories of the *gedolim* and the appropriate lessons we have to take from the stories, in addition to the amount of times I have been stuck on various *sugyos* throughout *shas* and have opened up the *Birchas Avrohom* to find that he asks the exact question I have been stuck with and is *medayek* a Rambam to answer the question, I can't not say anything.

The *pasuk* in this week's *parsha* says: הבט נא השמימה וספר הכוכבים אם תוכל לספר אותם - "Look please to the heavens and count the stars, if you can count them, thus will be your seed" (*Bereishis* 15:5). In this famous *pasuk*, the Ribbono Shel Olam takes Avrohom Avinu outside and promises him that his descendants will be (according to the simple *pshat*) as numerous as the stars. *Rabbeinu Bechaye* provides a unique reading of this *pasuk* which is not its straight-forward interpretation.

When we look at the stars from our vantage point, they all look the same. However, someone who looks through a telescope notices that each star is vastly different from one another – in colour, in brightness, in shape, etc. *Rabbeinu Bechaye* interprets Hashem's promise to Avrohom as follows: Just as the stars are each different from one another and totally unique, so too the Chachmei Yisroel will be unique. No *gadol* will be an exact replica of any other *gadol*. *Gedolim* are not cut from the same cloth. They are all different in their personalities, in their approaches, in their *hashkafos*, and in their spiritual achievements.

Rabbeinu Bechaye takes the *pasuk* totally out of context and sees a different insight in it. It is not merely referring to the multitude of descendants of Avrohom Avinu. Rather, it is referring specifically to the *gedolim* of each generation and is stating that they will each be unique as each star is unique. *Gedolim* are not clones of one another and they do not mimic one another. That is what gives Klal Yisroel its diversity and its character.

R' Avrohom Erlanger was truly unique in many ways, I would just like to mention one way in which I found him to be unique.

Boruch Hashem there are many people who learn according to the Brisker *mehalach* [approach], and R' Avrohom was no exception. In fact I heard that the only time R' Avrohom got angry was once when someone asked him if he had any *keshet* [connection] with the Brisker Rov, R' Avrohom angrily responded "Not only did I have a *keshet* with him, I had a *kevius* with him every *erev Shabbos*". There are also many *seforim* written based on the Brisker *mehalach*, but sadly most of the *seforim* written are limited to the main *Kodshim masechtos*, i.e. *Zevachim* and *Menachos*. There is only one person who has taken the *mehalach* and spread it throughout the entire *shas* and written *seforim* on most *mesechtos* and that's R' Avrohom Erlanger.

There are many *choshuva yidden* who give *musser shmoozen* but it's not so easy to find a *shmooze* where the one giving it really lives what he says. I remember once that R' Avrohom was giving a *shmooze* about *shemiras aynayim* [guarding your eyes], and he said that one of the worst places for a *erliche yid* to be is in the airport. He went on to say about how one should do his best to avoid going there, if however, a person does have to go there, he said there is a very simple solution. He said: one can take some Vaseline and smear it on his glasses. Although when he said the above most people started to laugh, he said it with such sincerity, that I even thought about doing it the next time I went to the airport.

I would just like to mention one final point that I was always very *nispoe!* [impressed] from. After R' Avrohom's Friday night *shiur* that he used to give in Yeshivas Kamenitz, he would daven *Maariv* there. I was always amazed to see how after R' Avrohom finished *shemonah esrei*, he would take three steps back and reach for a *Chumash* to learn from until the *chazon* would start *vayechulu* (making sure not to waste a second). Of course before he managed to open the *Chumash* the *chazon* would start *vayechulu*, as the only reason the *chazon* hadn't started yet was because he had been waiting for R' Avrohom to finish his *shemonah esrei*. If it would have happened once, I would say R' Avrohom thought perhaps they were waiting for someone else, but the fact it happened every week made it obvious they were waiting for him. Although it was obvious, it never entered his mind that they were waiting for him, and therefore, week in week out he would reach for a *Chumash*, begin to open it, and immediately close it again. We see from here not only how lowly he thought of himself, we also see how he made sure not to waste a second.

May R' Avrohom be a *melitz yosher*, for me and my family, all those who gained (and will *iy'h* continue) from him and his tremendous *seforim*, and the rest of Klal Yisroel.

This week's sheet has been dedicated in the *zechus* of a *refuah shlamah* for מרים בת מרים. Please have her in mind when reading the above sheet

This week's sheet is dedicated *leiluy nishmas* R' Avrohom ben Toyba (*Birchas Avrohom*), from whose Torah I have gained so much

This *gilyon* was compiled by Moshe Harris. Please consult a Rov for any final rulings. For sponsorship, dedications, comments or to receive these pages weekly

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