

# תורת אביגדור

הגאון ר' אביגדור מיללער זצ"ל

SEFER BREISHIS - THE CHOPP HOLDINGS EDITION

לע"נ ר' מנחם מענדל בן נחמן ע"ה ור' שלום בן שלמה הלוי ע"ה

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פרשת וירא  
WITH  
R' AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"l

The System of Avraham Avinu

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*Part I. Recognizing Hashem*

**A SIGHT TO SEE**

It was a tremendous sight, something remarkable to witness: והוא יושב פתח האהל כחם היום – “Avraham was sitting at the entrance of the tent in the heat of the day” (Bereishis 18:1). The *possuk* here is relating to us about an extraordinarily hot day in *Eretz Canaan*, and Avraham Avinu, a ninety-nine year old man recovering from a *bris milah*, is sitting near the door of his tent waiting; he’s bandaging his wound and he’s looking out for wayfarers who may be in need of some shade or a meal.

But who ventures out on a day like that? All desert travel was delayed until the heat wave would pass, and the roads were empty. And yet, Avraham Avinu was so anxious to bestow kindness upon his fellow man that he sat by the door looking over the horizon and

hoping. And he sat there until Hashem had pity on him, and sent *malachim* to travel the road that led past Avraham's tent.

When Avraham saw these wayfarers coming – even though they appeared to him as plain Arabs – he ran out into the heat towards them; and he fell down on the ground and begged them: אֵל נָא תַעֲבֹר – *My masters, please don't go away from your servant* (ibid. 18:2).

It was something to see! Avraham; the wealthy man, the *nesi Elokim* and the successful general – *everything* he was – and this important personality threw himself on the ground and begged these simple nomads to partake of his hospitality.

### RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM

Now, there's no doubt that had we been standing there watching Avraham we would have considered his actions excessive – and I use the word excessive in deference to our own honor. *Chesed* is wonderful, we say, but to be so wild, so extreme about it?! It seems to be too much.

Suppose a traveler, a *meshulach*, would come to Rav Pam's street in Kensington. And so Rav Pam would run out of his house: אֵל נָא תַעֲבֹר – “Please don't go away from me,” begs Rav Pam. “Please, I want you to be a guest in my house.” And if the *meshulach* would say, “No, thank you; it's fine. I don't feel like going inside to eat right now,” so Rav Pam falls down on the street; he falls down on his face to plead, “Please my master, don't pass by. Please don't go away from your servant.” The old *rosh yeshiva* is lying on the street begging this stranger to come into his house to eat something.

Suppose the people in Kensington would see that. What would they think of Rav Pam? They would think that he's nuts. It's hard to say such a thing, but it's the truth – that's what we would think; absolutely. Great people are sometimes so great that others can't appreciate them. מְשֻׁגָּע אִישׁ הָרוּחַ – *The man of spirit – the man who is dedicated fully to Hashem – is a madman* (Hoshea 9:7). It means that he *appears* to be a madman, a *meshuganeh*, in the eyes of others. The *navi* said that – it means it's an old story already that the *avodas Hashem* of great men is considered extreme by men of lesser stature.

Now, it's important to note that the Torah's story of Avraham sitting at the doorway of his tent was not a one-time event. No, that's

not how to learn *chumash*. When the Torah tells us this story it's revealing a *derech hachaim*, a way of life that Avraham *always* followed. **וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב** – *And Avraham was sitting*, really means: "Avraham was *always* sitting." Avraham *always* sat at his tent entrance in the hope that he would find wayfarers upon whom to bestow hospitality. He was *me-shuga* for *chesed*; he lived a life that was permeated with the desire to make others happy.

### **AVRAHAM AVINU STUDIED THE WORLD**

Now, such a *madreigah*, such a level of service of Hashem, doesn't grow on its own. It was only after many years of thought that Avraham arrived at such a level of *avodas Hashem*. Avraham Avinu was a great student of nature. He studied everything! All of the details of Creation that we take for granted, everything that we ignore, Avraham thought about.

He looked at the trees and the fruits and the plants and the seeds. He studied the processes of the bodies of animals and humans. He studied the emotions of human beings. He studied the vast sky, and the sun and the moon and the clouds and the rain. For hours upon hours, for days and years he studied everything around him and he saw the infinite intelligence of a Creator wherever he looked.

But Avraham wasn't satisfied with merely recognizing the infinite intelligence in all of Creation. Of course he saw supreme intelligence and design everywhere but that was only the first step. Because when he studied the details of what he saw he realized that they all pointed in one direction – that Hakodosh Boruch Hu is a *Chafeitz Chesed*; that this world is a place where Hashem is doing *chesed* for us.

### **THE UNDERLYING PURPOSE OF EVERYTHING**

As Avraham made his way in this world, he took notice of the endless variety of tastes available to mankind. Avraham knew that man could exist quite well without pepper, ginger and cinnamon. "Why then," asked Avraham, "did Hashem plant in His world cloves, and saffron, and sage, and mustard and all the multitude of spices? It's seems so superfluous; we could do just fine without the endless variety."

After much thought about these various pleasures of taste, Avraham concluded that the one and only purpose of all these things is pleasure! The pleasure of Mankind; that's what Hashem is interested in! By means of studying the world, Avraham understood that the Great Designer desires the happiness of His creations.

What does He do in the world? Does He make apples grow bitter and poisonous or do the apples eventually become sweet and red, beautiful and soft? Does He make grapes ripen into poison or do they become full of sweet juice and provide grape juice and wine? Don't the bees produce honey for us? And don't they fructify the plants? They cause the plants to germinate and become the fruits that we enjoy. Aren't all the phenomena of the world beneficial? Nuts and drinks and sensations and fragrances of all kinds, that's what we see all around us.

Everywhere that Avraham turned to look in the Creation, he saw the kindness of the Creator and he came to the conclusion that עוֹלָם הֵבְרָאָה – *The world was built for the purpose of kindness* (Tehillim 89:3). "It's a world built for kindness, to provide mankind with an endless variety of pleasures," said Avraham. "That's the sole reason for everything." עוֹלָם הֵבְרָאָה יִבְנֶה! Hashem had built a world of *chesed*!

### IT'S ALL IN THE DETAILS

Now, I know that when I say these words it doesn't register in our minds; it seems like an exaggeration. And that's because we don't spend time thinking like Avraham did. We almost *never* make time to think about the *chesed Hashem* that is so abundant in His creation. But Avraham was a seeker, a giant thinker, and when he looked around at Hashem's world he saw a world of kindness; he saw *chesed* everywhere. Every detail he observed pointed in one direction: Not only is there a Creator, but that the Creator is a *Chafeitz Chesed* whose sole intention is to bestow happiness on Mankind.

When Avraham passed an orchard he saw the red apples hanging from the tree. Sometimes he saw yellow bananas and pink peaches, and berries. All the luscious fruits, each one with a different taste. Avraham stood in awe before the various tastes that Hashem was making available to man. Taste is not an accident; it's a kindness. Did you ever taste the brown earth? Try it once; you'll see that it's not so

delectable. And out of this brown earth, Hashem brought forth a multitude of fruits and vegetables, each one with its own special taste.

The taste of an orange is different than the taste of a pineapple. The taste of strawberries is different than the taste of blueberries. A walnut doesn't taste the same as a peanut. And cherries and bananas and pineapples and grapes and tomatoes and onions. Onions! Onions add taste to so many foods. Boruch Hashem for onions! Onions and potatoes make us happy! And it's an endless variety!

### THE COLORFUL WORLD

"Even the colors are a *chesed*," thought Avraham. "What was the Creator's purpose in making apples red?" If Hashem had made apples the same bland color as potatoes, people would still eat them. What can you do if you have nothing better to eat? A bland colored apple can also taste sweet. Do oranges *have* to become a golden yellow? Why can't they remain colorless?"

And so Avraham realized that color is a *chesed*. He saw that when the fruits aren't ready, so they're not colored yet. Only when they became edible they changed color. "The purpose of the color is to let people know that the fruit are ripe; that they're ready to be eaten," said Avraham. It's a kindness so that people shouldn't have to risk biting into a raw banana or an unripe apple. The beautiful colors, the shades of red, the yellow hues, are there to attract your attention. "I'm ready to be eaten now," the fruit calls out to you when the color turns attractive.

And Avraham saw even more than that. Because there were hundreds of various shades of color in the food that Hashem was providing. Red and pink and purple and yellow and orange; some dark, some bright. What for? Avraham saw that the colors make eating more fun, more enjoyable. Because anything that looks beautiful is more enjoyable to eat. Avraham saw that Hashem wants to make eating fun!

Not only eating. When Avraham woke in the morning, and looked up at the sky, he saw a beautiful sight. Hashem had painted for him the clear blue sky, spotted with clouds over the horizon. It was a pleasure. And the beautiful blue sky was only the beginning of a most colorful day. The green of the trees and the grass. You know how

beautiful the color green is?! It's a pleasure. It's a sweet and soft color and that's why Hashem chose it for the grass and the leaves that are in abundance. And the beautiful hues of the various flowers, the gold orange glory of sunrise and sunset, the magic of the moonlight – so many beautiful things to see!

And for what? That's what Avraham asked himself. For what purpose are all these beautiful colors that Hashem is painting for us? And Avraham came to the conclusion that it's nothing but for the sole purpose of the pleasure of man. All of the colors and tastes and pleasures of this world, left not the slightest doubt in the mind of Avraham that Hakodosh Boruch Hu was busy doing kindness with Mankind.

## Part II. Emulating Hashem

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### SEEING SOMETHING OF HASHEM

Now, when Avraham recognized this, he came to a life-changing conclusion: "Everyone knows," said Avraham, "That Hakodosh Boruch Hu is יָשֵׁב בְּסֹתֵר – He sits in concealment (Tehillim 91:1). That means that He doesn't show Mankind anything of Himself; He's entirely invisible. "But," said Avraham, "There's one thing that He does show of Himself – He shows us His *chesed*! That's what we see of Him. Creation is filled with an endless list of useful and pleasurable objects and processes that fill our lives with all forms of enjoyment."

Now Avraham understood that Hashem could have chosen to reveal Himself to us in any way He wished. "So why is it," asked Avraham, "that Hakodosh Boruch Hu *shows nothing of Himself except for strawberries and gooseberries and blueberries and cherries and oranges and apples and peaches and onions?!*"

There's no accident here! *Chesed* is the most prominent thing in nature because *that's what He wants we should know about Him*. It won't help you to know more about Him! More than what He shows us, we're not capable of understanding anyhow. But this one fact we are capable of understanding; that Hakodosh Boruch Hu is intent on giving everyone the things that will make him happy. The world is fully

stocked with all good things and He shows us, by means of tens of thousands of examples, that He wishes to make people happy, to give people enjoyment.

### THE ONE THING I SEE OF HASHEM

“At least one thing I know about Hashem,” said Avraham, “That He *desires kindness*, הוא בִּי הַפִּיץ הַסֶּדֶר (Michah 7:18). And that’s what Avraham came along and taught the world: “The ways of Hakodosh Boruch Hu are *not* hidden. It’s no secret; they are open in the world. On all sides you can see the great principle that He is a *Chafeitz Chesed*. There is nothing in the world that is more conspicuous than this demonstration, that Hashem wishes to do kindness to mankind.” And therefore Avraham saw that the most prominent attribute of Hashem is that He’s a אֱ-לֹהֵי הַסֶּדֶר, *He’s a G-d of kindness*.

And why is He showing us that? Avraham said that it’s not only for the purpose of letting us know that He desires to do good to us. And it’s not even so that I should learn to love Hashem because of this kindness; that’s important too but it’s not the only thing. Avraham understood that Hashem is showing us that He’s the *Chafeitz Chesed* primarily *because He wants us to learn to imitate Him*; that we also should be desirous of doing *chesed*.

Not only that He is kind to us, but *it’s what He wants from us*. Avraham learned from the world, from the *briah* of *chesed*, what Hashem wants from us most. Once Avraham saw that everything in the world was kindness he became obsessed with this model that Hashem was showing him. Hashem became his *rebbe* in *chesed*. “He does kindness,” said Avraham, “and I’m going to emulate Him. Hakodosh Boruch Hu practices *hachnasas orchim* on us, doesn’t He? He made a beautiful hostel for us – that’s this world – and He gives us food and lodging, so why shouldn’t we emulate Him and do the same? I’m going to do the same as He does, and I’m going to bestow *chesed* on the world.”

And that’s why he sat פָּתַח הָאֵהָל בְּחֶם הַיּוֹם – *At the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day* looking out into the desert for wayfarers. That’s why he ran out to the three guests and begged them to come into his tent. It was because he saw that Hashem went all out for

Mankind, so he too became **מְשׁוּנָע אִישׁ הָרוּחַ**; he became extreme, wild with enthusiasm about doing *chesed* in order to emulate Hashem.

### PLANTING TREES L'SHEIM SHAMAYIM

Avraham saw that Hashem had created trees so to provide food and shade for mankind, so he got busy planting trees. **וַיִּטַע אֲשָׁל בְּבְאֵר** – He planted an orchard in Be'er Sheva and invited the guests to enjoy the *chesed* (Vayera 21:33). And when Avraham drank a refreshing cup of water, he thought about the *chesed Hashem* and he looked to do that *chesed* with others as well. **יִקַּח נָא מֵעַט מִיָּם וְרוּחְצוּ רַגְלֵיכֶם** – *Take some water, he told all of his guests, and wash yourselves off and refresh yourselves with a cup of water.*

He saw that the trunk of a tree was a *chesed Hashem*; a place to lean back and rest one's weary body, and so he offered his tree as a place to rest: **וְהִשְׁעֵנוּ תַּחַת הָעֵץ** – *Please rest here under the tree*, he said (ibid. 18:3). And because Hashem was giving the world bread and butter and milk and meat, so Avraham didn't only lend his visitors the real estate under his trees. **וְאִקְהָה פֶּת לָהֶם וְסִעְדוּ לִבְכֶם** — *“Lean back and relax while I bring you some food to eat,”* he said, and he got busy feeding his guests.

### LEARNING SPRING WITH TOSFOS

When Avraham was encouraged by a comfortable breeze, a nice spring day, so he said, “That’s a lesson from Hashem.” You know, a nice breeze is like a *Tosfos*; it’s teaching you something. And Avraham didn’t skip over that *Tosfos*. He said, “I’m also going to be a *me’odeid anavim*. I’m going to encourage people, and make them feel good, make them happy, like Hashem does.” Wherever Avraham was, it was *oz v’chedvah*, encouragement and *simchah*, just like *b’mkomo*, in the place of Hashem.

Avraham transformed himself into a *chafeitz chesed*— he made it a career of being kindly to everybody. He taught his family to be kind to people because he understood that politeness, being respectful to others, is a subcategory of *chesed*. When he had to buy a grave for Sarah and he went to negotiate a price with the people who owned the *Me’aras Hamachpeilah*, he bowed down to the ground and spoke politely to them. It's remarkable to see how Avraham did business

with politeness. Avraham was a man who was a *chafeitz chesed* to everybody because He saw that it was the *ratzon Hashem* in this world.

And therefore Avraham went out into the world with his new teaching; he taught the world the *chiddush* that Hakodosh Boruch demonstrates to us that He is a *א-ל-לֵךְ חֶסֶד* in order that we should emulate Him. It was one of the very great achievements of our first father Avraham to introduce to the world the concept that Hakodosh Boruch Hu does not want anything except compassion. And not only compassion; He wants you to bestow happiness on others. Hakodosh Boruch Hu desires of you that you should be devoted to the ideal that He is devoted to – the ideal that you see all around you of a world that is making people happy.

## Part III. Emulating Avraham

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### HOW TO BECOME GREAT

In his sefer *Derech Eitz HaChaim (Hakdama)*, the Ramchal offers some advice for people who want to become great in the eyes of Hashem. He says there that man must find time every day to sit in solitude and contemplate some of the most important questions of life. And one of the most valuable, he says, is the following: “What was it that made Avraham Avinu so beloved by Hashem? How did he become so great that he was chosen to be the father of the most holy nation?”

It takes time to contemplate such things and I don’t know how many people have tried it even once in their lives. But we understand that the Ramchal is giving us good advice here.

“And after a person spends time thinking about the practices of Avraham,” the Ramchal continues, “Let him say *אֲנִי כְּאַבְרָהָם בְּכָל יְמֵי חַיָּוְיָא* – “I want to do likewise. I want to walk in these ways of Avraham and find favor in the eyes of Hashem.” And the Ramchal tells us that *הָאִישׁ הַחֹשֵׁב עַל הָאִדָּה הַחֹשֵׁב עַל הַשְּׁלֵמוֹת מְאֹד* – *One who thinks about these things is very close to the perfection that he was created for,* *וְהִיא הַתְּרוּפָה הַיּוֹתֵר גְּדוֹלָה וְחֻזְקָה וּפְעֻלָּה* – *And it is the most effective prescription, the most effective*

*tive advice for perfection of character, with effects that are great and immensely valuable."*

"I want to be like Avraham Avinu." It seems like just words; it's too big for us we think. And so we learn now what the *Chovos Halevavos* says about this. He says as follows (Cheshbon Hanefesh 2): When you study the ways of Hashem, the ways of the *tzaddikim*, some of these things are far beyond you. You're striving, you want to be a *tzadik*, an *eved Hashem*, but you know it's a long trip, a long journey before you'll even come close to such *madreigos* of perfection.

## GOOD DESIRES

So what does the *Chovos Halevavos* tell us? A big *chiddush*, he teaches us. He says that when a man does whatever he can, so whatever he's *not* able to attain yet, he should at least desire it. That's the *eitzah* of the *Chovos Halevavos*: וְזָכַר שֶׁלֹא יוּכַל לְהַשְׁיִיגוֹ יְתְאוּזָה לָהֶם - *If you can't achieve the highest levels of service of Hashem, you should at least desire to reach those madreigos.*

It's an important lesson you're hearing now. You're not able to achieve everything? At least you should desire it! Desire to be like Avraham Avinu, and that's already going to be for you an achievement. "Hashem please help me I should see the *chesed* in the *briyah* the way Avraham saw it." "Hashem, help me please desire to do kindness in this world like Avraham Avinu did; I want to achieve the *madreigos* of *chesed* that Avraham achieved." And although you're far away from such things, but the desire to become a *tzaddik*, to become a *chafeitz chesed*, that itself is already a tremendous achievement.

"What can I do?" you say. "I don't know all *Bava Kamma*, all *Bava Metzia* and all *Bava Basra*. How can I know everything – all the *dinim* of how to treat other people?" So the *Chovos Halevavos* says that right now before you know these things, יְתְאוּזָה לָהֶם, you should desire them. Say, הוֹרֵנִי הַשֵּׁם הַרְבֵּי; *Please Hashem, teach me Your ways in this world.*" You have to say to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, "Hashem, I'm a nobody. I'm ignorant, but please Hashem show me. Teach me, guide me to become a *chafeitz chesed* in this world like Avraham Avinu was."

And Hakadosh Baruch Hu says, "Oh, that's something else. וּבְחָרוּ בְּאִשְׁרֵי הַפְּצָתִי – *You're choosing what I desire.*" You don't even know what to desire; you didn't learn anything yet, but וּבְחָרוּ, you're choosing

what I desire.” Hashem says, “If that’s the case then you’re My man already.”

### DEVELOPING DESIRE

It’s not easy to get that desire though. Don’t think it’s so easy; because if you really desired it you’d be doing something about it. When a person doesn’t show interest in pursuing his desire then he’s not really desiring it. Are you opening a *sefer* in your house to study how Avraham Avinu lived? Do you ever think about Avraham Avinu and what he learned from Creation? Do you walk on the street looking at the world around you and thinking about the *chasdei Hashem*? Do you spend one minute a day thinking about how *you* could do *chesed* in this world like Avraham Avinu did?

If you don’t start doing it, that’s the first *pircha* to refute your contentions that you really desire. You desire it?! A man is standing in a brook, a flow of water, and he’s shouting to people passing by, “Give me a drink!” You want a drink? You have to bend down and drink. You’re up to your knees in the water. Why are you asking for water?

There are so many details of how to do *chesed* in this world; it means that all the subdivisions of *bein adam lechaveiro*, how to behave properly to other people, you must learn. The *gemara* says **הָאִי מֵאֵן דְּבָעֵי לְמַהוּי חֲסִידָא לְקַיִם מִלֵּי דְנִזְיָקִין** – If you want to be a *chosid* – a *chosid* means someone who does *chesed* – so what should you do? **לְקַיִם מִלֵּי דְנִזְיָקִין** – He has to fulfill all the things of *Bava Kama*, *Bava Metzia* and *Bava Basra*.

### GOOD INTENTIONS AREN’T EVERYTHING

For instance, *chesed* will include you have to be careful with other people’s property. Even if you’re going to open a window in somebody’s house, be careful how much you push. And if you pushed the pane out and you broke the window so you have to pay for it. That’s part of *chesed*. But if you didn’t study, so you say, “I didn’t intend to break the window. I’m a *shogeg*.” Only if you learn so you know that **אָדָם מוֹעֵד לְעוֹלָם** – you’re *chayav* in *nezikin* even if it was an accident. Even if you didn’t want to break out the pane you have to pay for it. But people who didn’t learn think, “My intention was good. I just wanted to open the window.” Oh no; you have to learn! That’s a *chesed* you have to learn right away if you want to be like Avraham Avinu.

You're sitting here right now – you have to be careful; don't stick your foot out. When a person is walking down the aisle here and your foot is sticking out, it's a בור בְּרִשּׁוֹת הָרַבִּים. Someone might fall over your foot. "I didn't intend to make him fall. I didn't have any wrong intentions in my mind." If he falls, "I didn't mean it," won't help. That's *chesed*. *Chesed* means you're being careful not to cause injury to people.

*Hashavas aveidah* is a *chesed*. Let's say your fellow man's garbage can fell into the street. Soon a car will come and flatten it out. You don't care; you keep on walking. What do you mean you don't care?! No such thing! Somebody lost something. Avraham Avinu would walk out in the street, pick it up and put it back. It's *hashavas aveidah*; a *chesed*.

Let's say you borrow a *sefer*. When you borrow a *sefer* you have to be careful how to handle it. You can't turn it inside out like this. You can't let your little child take the *sefer* in his hands, and he does like this. You have no right to do that. If your little boy takes the *sefer* and turns it like this, ruining the binding, so you're a *choteh*. That's the opposite of an Avraham Avinu. אֵין הַשׁוֹאֵל רֶשָׁאִי לְהַשְׁאִיל – If you borrow, you can't lend it to someone else; only you can handle it. When you're using a seat in the *beis haknesses* and instead of sitting flat on it you make a rocking chair out of it, so you're breaking it. You're a שׁוֹאֵל שְׁלֹא מְדַעַת and a *mazik*.

### WATCH WHAT YOU SAY

*Chesed* also means to beware of *ona'as devarim*. Don't say wrong words that will hurt people's feelings. גָּדוֹל אֹנְאָת דְּבָרִים מֵאֹנְאָת מָמוֹן – *Hurting people's feelings is worse than stealing their money* (Bava Metzia 58b). If you say something to your wife and it hurts her feelings, that's worse than stealing money out of her pocketbook. Would you steal money from your wife's pocketbook? You gave her money and now you're stealing it?! Only a wicked person would do such a thing! But *ona'as devarim* is worse than that.

For someone who wants to be like Avraham Avinu and emulate Hashem it's so important to beware of harming anybody with words. You can't make his feelings hurt; you can't belittle his *kavod*. How important it is to be careful with other people's money and not harm their property!

More than that, you have to make people happy. How important it is to encourage people and and bestow kindness on the world the same way Hashem does. There's so much to learn! A person who desires to do *chesed* makes sure to be thinking about others all the time.

And Avraham learned all these things from Hashem's creations. He learned *Bava Kama* and *Bava Metzia* and *Bava Basra* from Hakodosh Boruch Hu. Hashem's creation is a very great subject; it's a whole *shas* of *chessed*. All the details, all the subdivisions of *chessed*, are overwhelmingly evident in Hashem's creations and by studying the *briyah* Abraham became a *gadol batorah* in all the *dinim* of *chessed*. And when he studied the *chesed Hashem* in this world he came to the conclusion that Hashem created a world of *chesed* not only because He wants us to be happy, but *because He wants us to learn to make others happy!*

Avraham spent his lifetime studying the *chesed Hashem* in nature and emulating Hashem and that's why he achieved what nobody had ever achieved before. He became greater and greater every day and that's how Avram, the little boy from *Ur Kasdim*, became Avraham Avinu, the father of the *Am Yisroel*. And that's why we say, אֶעֱשֶׂה כִּן גַּם, - "I also desire to do the same; to emulate Avraham Avinu and be a *chafeitz chesed* like he was." And more importantly, by means of the *avodah* of walking in the footsteps of Avraham, you're fulfilling the mitzvah of וְהִלַּכְתָּ בְּדַרְכֵי יְיָ, walking in the ways of Hakodosh Boruch Hu, the original *Chafeitz Chesed* who created this world to be an *Olam Chesed*, a world of good times.

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# A VORT ON THE PARSHA

## Vayera

וַיִּשְׁלַחְהָ וַיְתַנְּחָ וַיֵּלֶךְ בְּמִדְבַּר בְּאֵר שֶׁבַע:

*He sent her away and she went and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheva:*

We learn that Avraham sent Hagar and Yishmael away into an empty wilderness. Now, we know that Avraham was the kindest of men. There was never a man as kindly and soft-hearted as Avraham. He lived for *chessed!* This kind-hearted man should send away Hagar and his own flesh and blood into an empty wilderness? It makes no sense. Isn't it cruel to send them off like that? Sarah didn't say that they had to be left alone in the wilderness!

Why didn't Avraham accompany Hagar and Yishmael? At least he could have taken them to the nearest town. It's a queer thing for this man who was a giant in *chessed*.

So we'll understand as follows. The Torah tells us that Avraham was a wealthy man; besides for silver and gold he also had many slaves. הִנָּפֶשׂ אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ בְּחָרָן – *The souls that he acquired in Charan*. Now, it doesn't mean that Avraham made people slaves. Avraham spent his days teaching people about Hashem. And he convinced them! אֲבָרְהָם מְגִיר אֶת הָאֲנָשִׁים – *Avraham was converting people*.

These converts became members of his community by becoming *avadim*. They weren't like black slaves, like we think of down South, who were being whipped by their masters while they picked cotton all day long. (The truth is that even that wasn't true; it was exaggerated, by the way. A lot of it is just propaganda.) But this was much different. These *avadim* were Avraham's *talmidim*.

Eliezer *eved* Avraham was זֶקֶן בֵּיתוֹ, the elder of Avraham's house. When Avraham wanted a wife for Yitzchak, he sent Eliezer. You don't send your janitor, your cotton picker to find a wife for your son. Eliezer was דוֹלֵה וּמְשַׁקָּה רֵבּוֹ לְאֶחָרִים, *he used to draw water from his Rebbi's well of Torah* – the

instruction and philosophy and mussar and yiras Shamayim that Avraham taught him, and he would share it with others.

Now, Avraham and Sarah were a team, a conglomerate. שָׂרָה מְנַיֶרֶת אֶת הַנְּשִׂיִם – Sarah was doing the same; she was teaching the women. They came together in her tent and she spoke to them. And of all her disciples, Hagar was the best. She had been trained by Sarah and had become a great personality on her own. She had all of Sarah's ideas and ideals.

And that's the key to understanding our puzzle: a great woman like Hagar, she didn't want to go to any town! All she wanted was to stay in the wilderness. "If I can't be in Avraham's house," said Hagar, "I'm going to the wilderness."

And she never moved out of the wilderness, because she didn't want to mix with anybody. And she insisted – she told her son: "Never mind, you can make a living here. You're good with a bow and arrow, you can hunt. We are going to live here forever."

And he became a פֶּרֶא. Pere means a man who can live in the wilderness and get along. He was successful in that. הוּא יְהִי פֶּרֶא אָדָם, pere adam doesn't mean a wild man like people think. Pere means a person who can live in the wilderness. He succeeded in the wilderness. That's pshat. He was very far from a wild man. Yishmael became a big tzaddik, all because of Sarah.

If Yishmael had remained in that house, he would have become more and more embittered looking at the success of Yitzchak, and bad middos would develop in him. Sarah saved his life. Sarah drove him out, and he became a tzaddik gamur.

When he died, the Torah says (Bereishis 25:17): "One hundred years and thirty years and seven years he lived." Because every minute is precious to Hakadosh Baruch Hu. By Avraham and Sarah it says the same thing, and by Yitzchak and Yaakov. Not by Rivkah, not by Rachel and Leah, not by the sons of Yaakov, it doesn't say that. Only these tzaddikim, because they were perfect. Yishmael did teshuvah. He became a very big tzaddik.

When Avraham passed away, it says וַיִּקְבְּרוּ אֹתוֹ יִצְחָק וְיִשְׁמָעֵאל בְּנָיו. Yitzchak was first, and then Yishmael followed. Yishmael was thirteen years older than Yitzchak. And still, he said to Yitzchak, "You go first, because my father said that you are more important than me." Isn't that a great righteousness? So the Gemara says מִכַּאן, from here we see, יִשְׁמָעֵאל תְּשׁוּבָה. Yishmael yielded. Yishmael was a big tzaddik, but he became a tzaddik only because of Sarah. Sarah saved his life, and her disciple Hagar further watched over him and ensured that he remained in the wilderness, far away from foreign ideals that would ruin his character and noble upbringing.

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# QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

שאל אביך ויגדך זקניך ויאמרו לך

Q:

**A boy was insolent to his rebbi in the yeshiva. How should his parents react?**

A:

Look, the rebbi maybe didn't hit him, but the parents should hit him. When parents hit however, they should let the boy know that they're doing it al pi mishpat. Here's how they should say: "My son, you did a very big aveirah! You were insolent to the rebbi. You deserve to be hit six times. But we're going to have pity on you and hit you only five times. It really should be one time more, so you're getting a bargain." So he knows it's mishpat, not anger. And then hit him; one, two, three, four, five. And he'll appreciate it. He'll appreciate that.

But if you just have a temper and without any hakdama, without any introduction, you start hitting him, so he thinks you're an enemy of his. But here he knows you're a dayan, you're a shofet tzedek, a righteous judge, and you're giving him a bargain too, less than he's supposed to get.

[TAPE # E-39 (December 1995)]

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