

ONE MAN AGAINST THE WORLD

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The Spirituality Needed For Existence & the Letter Heh ה

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Excusing Himself to Attend to the Ultimate Objective

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1. Avram at 99 had the letter Hey added to his name to become Avraham.
2. This was in conjunction with the mitzvah of circumcision entering into a covenant with G-d.
3. There is a linkage between circumcision and receiving the Land Of Canaan as a gift.
4. G-d created existence with the spirituality that lies within the letter Hey.
5. To be able to father, the future patriarch of the Jewish People needed Hey, which is the equivalent of all existence.
6. Zohar: The foreskin is an expression of the evil of the fruit of the tree of Knowledge.
7. The mitzvah of circumcision was to minimize the effect of Adam's sin.
8. Only after Avraham had the letter added and was circumcised was he able to father Yitzchok.
9. On the 3rd day after his circumcision, G-d unsheathed the sun so he should not be bothered with guests.
10. Avraham was so pained he could not engage in hospitality G-d sent angels in human form.
11. He offered them the shade of his tree, water to wash their feet, bread to satisfy their hunger.
12. In the merit of shade of the tree: The Jewish People were protected with the clouds of glory for 40 years.
13. In the merit of the water: the wellspring of Miriam.
14. In the merit of the bread: the Manna.
15. Midrash: The Torah was given to those who consumed the Manna.



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Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Vayeira

ONE MAN AGAINST THE WORLD

The Sensitivity of the Tzaddik to His Fellow

Torah: Regarding the hospitality that *Avraham* had offered the three wayfarers, "*Avraham* said, '...I will fetch a morsel of bread that you may sustain yourselves....'"

Gemara in Tractate *Bava Metzia*: "The devoutly righteous say little but do much. The evil say much and do not even do as much an iota." Although *Avraham* had told the wayfarers that he was going to offer them a "morsel" of bread, the *Gemara* tells us that the food that was presented before them was the equivalent of a feast that was even greater than the banquet of King Solomon during the height of his power.

We are able to see from here that a *tzaddik* initially minimizes the positive action that he is about to do, but upon actualization it is revealed that it is something substantial in value. In contrast, the evil one exaggerates the positive that he intends to bring about and ultimately nothing that he had said comes to

fruition. The example of the *tzaddik* is *Avraham* offering his hospitality. The example of the evil one is *Ephron* offering the cave of the Machpelah. When *Avraham* wanted to purchase the Machpelah from *Ephron*, *Ephron* had said, "consider it as a gift." Meaning, he was asking nothing in return for its transfer.

Chazal: When the transaction took place tell us that he requested an amount for the purchase that was the equivalent of millions of dollars. One could understand the behavior of the *tzaddik* is an expression of his humility. He speaks little of what he is about to do because he is minimizing himself. However, we are able to understand this concept on a more profound level.

Torah: When *Eliezer*, the servant of *Avraham*, was seeking a wife for his master *Yitzchak*, he had come upon *Rivka*, the future Matriarch. He said, "Let me sip, if you please, a little water from your jug." The *Torah* continues, "...she lowered her jug to her hand and gave him to drink." The narrative tells us that although

he had asked for only a “sip” of water, she offered him as much as he needed to drink.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh: Eliezer only asked for a “sip of water” so as not to burden Rivka. She provided him with as much water as he wanted in a manner that he did not even need to make any effort to drink. She held the jug while he sipped the water. After satisfying Eliezer’s need, Rivka offered to fetch water for his men and his camels. This is something that she did not initially mention. It was only once she felt that Eliezer’s need was satisfied that she made the offer. Why did she behave in this manner – to conceal her true intent?

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh: If Rivka had initially revealed her intent to draw sufficient water for Eliezer, his men, and his animals, Eliezer would feel that he was burdening her and would thus not drink to his fill. She wanted him to be fully satisfied. She thus concealed her intent. It was only after he was sated did she offer the water to his men and his camels.

If Avraham had revealed to the wayfarers that he would prepare a feast for them, they may have rejected his hospitality because they would not want to burden him. They would choose to continue on, rather than accepting his hospitality. Thus, in order to guarantee that they would accept his hospitality, he chose to conceal his true intent. He only mentioned that he would fetch for them a “morsel” of bread to sustain them. When they did accept his hospitality, he actualized his intent by offering them a feast that was greater than that of King Solomon at the height of his reign.

One could also say that Avraham had initially offered his guests only a “morsel” of bread so that they should not feel indebted to him for his magnanimous offer of hospitality – and would thus surely reject it. By offering them only a morsel of bread, they would be agreeable to be hosted by him because they would incur no personal debt. He would be able to host them as he truly saw fit. The *tzaddik* actualizes his intent by considering and understanding the recipient’s sensitivities, thus not revealing the extent of his intention.

Because the *tzaddik* is acting purely for the sake of the objective, rather than ingratiating himself, he has no difficulty concealing his goal. In contrast, the evil one, whose intent is purely based on his self-centeredness, expresses himself in a manner to ingratiate himself and put himself on a pedestal. However, when it is

time to accommodate the recipient, his true intent is revealed– that he only wants to benefit himself.

The Patriarchs – Touching Upon the Totality of Existence

Torah: Regarding the blessing that G-d had given to Avraham, “...Go for yourself from your land, from your relatives, and from your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great, and you shall be a blessing.”

Rashi citing the *Midrash:* To explain the verse, “‘I will make you into a great nation’ means I (G-d) will be identified as ‘the G-d of Avraham – Elokei Avraham.’ ‘I will bless you...’ means, I will be identified as ‘the G-d of Yitzchak – Elokei Yitzchak.’ ‘I will make your name great...’ Means I will be identified as ‘the G-d of Yaakov – Elokei Yaakov.’ You may think that since G-d identifies Himself with each of the Patriarchs, the first blessing of the *Amidah* should conclude with all of the Patriarchs (Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov); nevertheless, ‘you shall be a blessing’ means that the blessing will only conclude with the name of Avraham– *Magein Avraham*.”

Each of the Patriarchs chose to emulate G-d within the context of one of His Attributes. Avraham our Patriarch personified kindness (*chesed*). Yitzchak chose to emulate G-d through the Attribute of Justice (*Midas HaDin*). Yaakov our Patriarch, chose to emulate G-d through the Attribute of Mercy (*Midas HaRachamim*). The Attribute of Mercy is a coalescence of the Attribute of Kindness with the Attribute of Justice.

Ultimately, the Attribute of Mercy will deliver G-d’s Justice; however, the manner in which it is expressed is through Mercy. It is because Yaakov was the embodiment of the Attribute of Mercy that he is the most special of the Patriarchs. He was only able to come upon this Attribute through his total dedication to *Torah* study, as he is depicted in the *Torah* as, “The perfect man who dwells in the tent (of *Torah*).”

Chazal: G-d initially wanted to create existence with the Attribute of Justice as we see the appellation of “*Elokim*” (which connotes the Attribute of Justice), is mentioned continuously throughout the process of Creation. However, because G-d had seen that man could not tolerate the exactness of the Attribute of

Justice, He coalesced His Attribute of Kindness into Justice to bring about the Attribute of Mercy. If Mercy is the Attribute of G-d that maintains mankind within existence, why did *Avraham* not choose to emulate the Attribute of Mercy?

Bereishis: The *Torah* states regarding creation, “*B’hee-bar-am* – When He Created them...”

Chazal: The letters of contained in *B’hee-bar-am* are the same letters in the name *Avraham*.

Maharal of Prague in Gevuras Hashem: When G-d changed *Avram*’s name to *Avraham* by adding the letter “hey”, a metamorphosis had taken place within his being that was the equivalent of the creation of all existence. Thus, the significance of *Avraham* and his being was the equivalent of being the beginning of a new existence that no relevance to what had existed prior to him.

King David in Psalms: “The world was created out of (His) Kindness (*Olam chesed yibaneh*).” G-d’s decision to bring about existence was an act of kindness. G-d had no reason to bring about Creation other than for the sake of kindness in its most absolute sense. Since nothing had existed prior to Creation, its purpose was only to do kindness to mankind – that if he should succeed in the objective of Creation, he would be the beneficiary of the ultimate Good, which is cleaving to G-d Himself.

While the basis for Creation was an expression of G-d’s Kindness, the actual act of Creation came about with the Attribute of Justice, which is exact and deliberate. There is nothing superfluous in existence. However, understanding that man could survive the exactness of Justice, G-d coalesced His Attribute of Kindness to bring about Mercy.

We see that each of the Patriarchs represented one of the Attributes of G-d; however, *Avraham* being the beginning of a new existence emulated G-d within the context of what had initially precipitated Creation, which is G-d’s Kindness. *Yitzchak*, the second Patriarch, corresponds to the actual creation of existence, which came about through the exactness of G-d, which is the Attribute of Justice.

However, the finalization of Creation, which is the basis for the continuation of existence is emulated through the most perfect of the Patriarchs, which is the *Yaakov* who was the Patriarch of *Torah*, which is the basis of

existence. *Yaakov* corresponds to the third blessing ‘I will make your name great...’ The renown of *Avraham*, is existence itself which is maintained by “*Elokei Yaakov*” which is synonymous with the Attribute of Mercy.

Although the world can only function within the context of Mercy, the ongoing Will of G-d that allows it to exist for the period of time that He deems so, is based upon the Attribute Kindness. Thus, the first blessing of the *Amidah* concludes with Shield of *Avraham*, which represents the ultimate concept of existence itself.

When *Chazal* tell us that each of the blessings that *Avraham* received manifested themselves as “the G-d of *Avraham*,” “the G-d of *Yitzchak*,” and the “G-d of *Yaakov*” it does not mean to say that *Avraham* will have a child that will represent a particular Attribute and a grandchild that will represent the ultimate Attribute, but rather, *Yitzchak* will be able to evolve into the being that he was is only because it was the blessing that was given to *Avraham* to become a great nation and for *Yaakov* should have the capacity to develop in to the dimension of being of ‘I will make your name great...’

Discerning Between Tests

Torah: Regarding the test of the *Akeidah* (binding of *Yitzchak*), “And it happened after these things that G-d tested *Avraham*...”

Midrash: “The verse states, ‘G-d tests the righteous (*tzaddik*).’ *Reb Yonah* says, ‘Regarding the flax plant, the more one crushes and pummels it, it becomes improved and its qualities become more pronounced. This is only true if the flax plant is of superior quality. However, if the flax is of inferior quality, when one crushes it, it will disintegrate. It is the crushing and pummeling that brings out the quality of the flax.

Similarly, G-d crushes and pummels the *tzaddik* in order to test him (to bring out his qualities). He does not do so for the evil one. *Reb Yehudah Bar Shalom* says, ‘How does the potter test his clay vessels after they were spun on the wheel to ensure that they will endure extensive use? He takes a piece of metal and clangs it against the vessel. He only does this if it is a quality vessel.

However, if it is not of good quality he does not do so because it will break and shatter. Similarly, G-d tests the righteous and not the evil. *Reb Elazar* says, ‘It is

similar to one who owns two cows. One is strong while the other is weak and sickly. On which cow does the owner place the yoke? It is certainly upon the strong one. This is the meaning of the verse, 'G-d tests the *tzaddik*' and therefore it is stated, 'And G-d tested *Avraham*...' He presented *Avraham* with the most difficult tests because G-d knew that *Avraham* had the capacity to succeed."

G-d created the world within a context that allows man to have choice to be able to advance himself spiritually or be diminished. This is based upon if one chooses good or evil. In order to maintain an ongoing context of choice, G-d presents man with challenges and tests to give him the opportunity to succeed or fail. If this is so, it would seem that G-d tests the evil one as well as the righteous. Why does King David state in Psalms, that G-d only tests the righteous?

Gemara in Tractate *Shabbos*: "One who comes to purify himself, will be assisted. One who comes to contaminate himself, the way is open before him." If one wishes to advance himself spiritually, G-d will provide him with Divine Assistance in order to achieve that objective. However, the one who chooses to sin, G-d does not assist him to do so but rather He does not interfere with his choice. This context of choice is referring to the daily challenges of life. However, the verse in Psalms is referring to the special challenges that G-d presents only to the righteous for the sake of their advancement.

Ramban: It is to allow the *tzaddik* to advance himself to actualize his unique potential. Since *Avraham* had the capacity to advance himself he was presented with the most difficult test of the Binding of *Yitzchak* to be brought as a sacrifice.

Torah: Regarding the second set of five plagues that came upon Pharaoh and Egypt, "G-d hardened the heart of Pharaoh." It is clear that Pharaoh had the power of choice to be able to appreciate and recognize G-d's Omnipotence in creation, thus releasing the Jewish people from bondage. However, Pharaoh chose to refuse to deny it. As a punishment, G-d withdrew his power of choice during the final five plagues. With each of the final plagues, G-d continued to harden his heart because each plague brought about a more advanced level of revelation.

We see from this that had G-d not withdrawn Pharaoh's ability to choose, he was capable of making the proper

choice to release the Jewish people. If this is so, how do we reconcile it with the verse that G-d tests the *tzaddik*? The ten plagues that came upon Egypt, which were revealed miracles, were not "tests" that were meant for Pharaoh or the Egyptian people to actualize their spiritual potential – even if they were to choose correctly.

Rather, the purpose of the plagues was so that they should recognize that G-d is the Omnipotent Being and thus reject paganism. We see from the allegories presented by the *Midrash*, such as crushing and pummeling the flax, is to bring out special qualities. Similarly, the test that is presented to the *tzaddik* is for him to actualize his potential. The plagues that came upon Egypt were not for this purpose are thus not similar to the "tests" that is mentioned in the verse. As the *Midrash* tells us, when one pummels inferior flax it disintegrates.

Avraham's Initiative to Save Sodom

Torah: Before G-d destroyed *Sodom*, "And Hashem said, 'Shall I conceal from *Avraham* what I do...'"

Rashi citing *Chazal*: "G-d had said, 'It is not appropriate that I should destroy *Sodom* without informing *Avraham*. I have given him this land with its five metropolises. He has been declared the 'father of all nations.' Should I destroy the children without informing the father? Therefore I will inform him."

Torah: After G-d had informed *Avraham* that He was going to destroy them, "*Avraham* came forward and said, 'Will You also stamp out the righteous (*tzaddikim*) along with the wicked? What if there should be fifty *tzaddikim* in the midst of the city?...It would be sacrilege to You to do such a thing, to bring death upon the righteous along with the wicked; so the righteous will be like the wicked. It would be sacrilege to You! Shall the Judge of all the earth not do justice?'"

Since *Avraham* lived his life for the sake of glorifying G-d, he did not want the destruction of *Sodom* to be misperceived, because it would be a desecration of G-d's Name. The world would think that G-d destroys the righteous along with the evil. He wanted to establish beyond any doubt that there were in fact no righteous people in *Sodom*. Therefore, he pleaded on their behalf until it was determined that there were no righteous people in *Sodom*.

Gemara in Tractate *Nidarim*: There is an opinion that the reason the Jewish people were exiled to Egypt was because *Avraham* had not taken the opportunity to convert the people of *Sodom* to monotheism. After *Avraham* was victorious over the Four Mighty Kings, the king of *Sodom*, who was initially taken captive with his subjects, had said to *Avraham*, "Give me the people and take the possessions for yourself." *Avraham* the victor should have said to the king of *Sodom*, "Because you are the equivalent of my spoils, I will take the people."

Gemara: "If *Avraham* had taken the members of the *Sodom* community under his jurisdiction he would have brought them under the wings of the Divine Presence (converted them to monotheism)." *Avraham* chose to forgo this opportunity. He had said to the king of *Sodom*, "I will not benefit from you as much as a thread or a bootstrap..."

The consequence of *Avraham*'s not taking the people of *Sodom*, was that they had not only remained non-believers, but they had descended to the depths of evil to be destroyed and go into the oblivion, as the verse states, "The men of *Sodom* were evil and sinned against G-d defiantly..."

Mishna in Tractate *Sanhedrin*: The members of the *Sodom* community do not have a share in the world to come. It was because of *Avraham*'s inaction, regarding *Sodom*, that the Jewish people were exiled to Egypt. When G-d had revealed His Decree of destruction to *Avraham*, he understood that G-d was giving him the opportunity to correct his mistake of not taking the community of *Sodom* under his influence. He was greatly pained that because of his inaction the people of *Sodom* would never be spiritually rehabilitated.

Thus, the Jewish people would be destined to go to Egypt where they would become pagans – measure for measure. If through his supplication he would be able to bring about a stay of destruction, it would allow the people of *Sodom* to repent. *Avraham* would thus nullify the chain of disastrous events that came about because he chose not to take the members of the *Sodom* under his influence.

Bais HaLevi in *Beshalach*: It is interesting to note that the only reason the Jewish people throughout history were susceptible to idolatry was because the pagan influence of their masters in Egypt was not fully purged from them. Despite the fact that they had witnessed revealed miracles in Egypt and had ascended to the

forty-ninth level of purity to be worthy of receiving the *Torah* at Sinai, they nevertheless had a susceptibility to revert to idolatry, which caused them to sin with the Golden Calf.

The negative ramifications of the bondage in Egypt continued throughout the First Temple Period when they had once again become pagans. Thus, the spiritual deficiency that exists within the Jewish people, that will remain with them until the end of time, came about because of *Avraham*'s initial inaction regarding the members of the *Sodom* community. If *Avraham* could have prevented the destruction of *Sodom*, there was a chance that he would have spared the Jewish people the exposure to the idolatry in Egypt.

Avraham's Intervention on Behalf of the Evil Ones

Torah: Before G-d destroyed *Sodom*, "And Hashem said, 'Shall I conceal from *Avraham* what I do, now that *Avraham* is surely to become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by him?'" Seemingly, the conclusion of the verse is unrelated to the beginning of the verse.

Rashi citing *Chazal*: Regarding the blessing to *Avraham* at the conclusion of the verse, *Zeicher tzaddik l'veracha*, when one mentions the righteous (*tzaddik*) one must do so within the context of blessing. As it states in Proverbs, 'Remember the *tzaddik* with blessing'. Since the *Torah* mentions *Avraham*, G-d blessed him because he was a *tzaddik*. Although there is no relationship between the opening statement of the verse and its conclusion; nevertheless it is relevant because of the principle of *Zeicher tzaddik l'veracha*.

Sforno: The reason the verse concludes by mentioning that *Avraham* will become a great nation is to teach us that because of the greatness and renown into which he will evolve, his rebuke will have a greater effect.

Torah: 'For I have loved him, because he commands his children and his household after him that they keep the way of Hashem, doing charity and justice...' Meaning, because *Avraham* had an understanding and appreciation of justice, his rebuke will be valued to a greater degree. His explanation of G-d's justice will be more readily accepted by humanity.

Ramban: The juxtaposition of not concealing the destruction of Sodom and the future greatness of Avraham can mean, "G-d wanted to reveal to the world how special Avraham and his descendants are. They are meant to become a great nation. G-d, therefore, needed to reveal His decree regarding the destruction of Sodom to Avraham so that the nations of the world should not say, 'If Avraham was so special and intimate with G-d, why did He conceal His plan to destroy Sodom from the tzaddik?'"

Evidently, Avraham was not as intimate with G-d as one would think.' In addition, the nations would say, 'If Avraham was such a special tzaddik, why did he not supplicate G-d on behalf of the Sodom community?' G-d, thus revealed His plan to destroy Sodom so that Avraham should supplicate on their behalf. Thus, the nations of the world would not have a criticism of him." If the members of Sodom truly personified evil, how could Avraham who lived his life for the sake of glorifying G-d pray on their behalf? Why would he not rejoice over their destruction?

Netziv in *Haamik Davar* in his introduction to *Bereishis*: The first book of the *Torah* is referred to in the Book of Joshua as "*Sefer Ha'Yashar* (The Book of the Straight Ones)."

Gemara in Tractate *Avodah Zorah*: This is because the Patriarchs, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov were "yesharim (straight)." The Book of *Bereishis* is primarily devoted to their lives.

Netziv: There are three classifications of righteous people – devout (tzaddik), devoutly pious (chasid), and straight (yashar). A tzaddik is one who meticulously observes all of the mitzvos without deviation. A chasid is one who not only meticulously adheres to the Dictates of the *Torah* but also goes beyond his basic obligation. One who is considered to be "straight (yashar)" is an individual who maintains his objectivity in all situations and does not allow his personal conflict of interest to interfere with his service of G-d.

Avraham our Patriarch demonstrated his characteristic of "yashar" when he pleaded and supplicated G-d on behalf of Sodom. He had devoted his entire life to the espousal of monotheism and to dispel pagan beliefs from society through the attribute of loving kindness. One would think that when G-d had informed him that Sodom was going to be destroyed he would have rejoiced because G-d was openly vanquishing evil from existence. This would demonstrate before all that it is something that G-d does not tolerate. However, this was not Avraham's response. He supplicated G-d on their behalf in the most intense manner to the point that he needed to interject within his supplicates a request of forgiveness from G-d for his directness. If Avraham had not supplicated G-d to spare Sodom, it would have been a desecration of G-d's Name.

Gemara in Tractate *Berachos*: There were a number of heretics that had disrupted the life of *Rebbe Meir*. He thus wanted to pray that they should be destroyed; however, his wife interceded saying, "Rather than cursing them so that they should be destroyed, why do you not pray that they should repent? As the verse states, 'At the end of time their sins will cease to be.' It does not state that the 'sinners will cease to be.' Indicating that the evil ones will repent." When Avraham prayed that Sodom should not be destroyed, he did not want them to be spared so that they should continue to perpetrate evil, but rather, he supplicated G-d that they should have the opportunity to repent. Therefore, Avraham's pleading on behalf of Sodom is not a desecration of G-d's Name.

Amidah (Silent Prayer) in the *blessing of repentance*: "Bring us back, our Father, to Your *Torah*..." The blessing is stated in the plural because we pray that all those who have sinned to be assisted by G-d to repent and return to Him. Despite the fact that we may not have positive feeling towards many of those who defiantly reject the *Torah* and its mitzvos, we nevertheless ask G-d to give them clarity so that they should have the ability to repent to bring about the ultimate glorification of His Name.



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