

OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK OF BEREISHIS

The Creation

While most three-year-olds can relate the basic events of creation, the true depth of creation only be understood by those who have attained Kabbalistic wisdom through an established teacher. We do not know the order of creation: we learn that G-d's Spirit hovered over the waters, but we are never told when the waters were created.

Ten things were created on the first day; yet, we are by no means clear of their relationship or sequence. We are not told when the higher spiritual worlds or Malachim were created, or when or how the minerals came into being. We are not told about intermediary forms at all, and the only way we know of the ten things created Bein HaShmashos of Erev Shabbos is through an oral tradition from the Sages.

In fact, the Chumash had an entirely separate agenda in telling us about the creation of the world in the first place, relating to us that the world was created for a purpose. The group of people who would fulfill this purpose is the Jewish people. Therefore, the world was created for our sake (בשביל ישראל שנקראו ראשית תבואתו).

The Torah tells us quite clearly that everything was created ex-nihilo (something from nothing) on the first day. *These are the chronicles of the heaven and earth when they were created, on the day G-d completed earth and heaven.* However, things were still in a highly spiritual form. The later creation days were essentially a further development, taking the created potential from that first day and actualizing it. Hence, the first day uses the word ברא, creation ex-nihilo, while all the other days use words such as He formed (יצר) and He made (ויעש). יצר means to make something from something, whereas ויעש (as in עשה) means to complete a process, to place it in its final form. We also see phrases like *Let the earth bring forth* etc., implying that the earth already had within it what it needed to bring forth. Rashi tells us that when G-d said יהי מארת on the fourth day, these lights were already created on the first day and were now only being commanded to correctly position themselves in the Heavens.

In order that one should not err and think that the later days were an automatic evolutionary process devoid of G-d's input, the Chumash explicitly tells us ויאמר אלוקים on each occasion to show that all of creation is but a reflection of Divine Will. Yet, the Sages tell us, the creation is set up in such a way that a concerted effort for an atheistic interpretation of these events will yield a plausible theory. On the other hand, an honest attempt to see G-d's hand in the creation process will do so to such a degree that the Sages decreed that there should be ten verses of Malchus, of proclaiming G-d's reality on Rosh Hashana, paralleling each one of the Ten Sayings of Creation.

There are but two other places in the entire creation story which use the word ברא. The first is at the beginning of the creation of animal life, the Taninim, implying that the Nefesh HaBehamis could not entirely evolve from what already existed. The transition from plant to animal life required another creation ex-nihilo. After that, the rest of the animal kingdom could once again be directed by G-d to develop out of what already existed.

The second additional place where the word ברא is used is with the creation of Man. By man, all three words עשייה, יצירה, בריאה are employed. The body of man

appears to have emerged from existing reality while his Neshama was created ex-nihilo. (See note where the Vilna Gaon breaks this down into 3 stages for each of three creation words used for man.) We will come back to the creation of man in greater detail below.

Not only was the world created over six days and in ten separate 'Sayings of Creation', but each thing was also developed in stages. G-d could have easily created everything to its completion in one act of creation. Why did He choose to create the world as He did?

The Sages answer that this action of G-d was to give reward to the righteous and punishment to the wicked. What this means is that had G-d created the world in one go, His involvement in this world would have been so obvious and revealed that there would have been no room for choice, and therefore no room for Avodah. Instead, He partially hid Himself in the Ten Sayings, thereby creating the עולם, the world, which comes from the word העלם, to be hidden. This was achieved through the fact that with each Saying, G-d's original light was brought lower.

Ohr Gedalyahu adds another reason. Had G-d created everything all at once, each one would have been given simultaneous existence on the same plain of existence with everything else. As a result, there would have been no connection between it and the rest of creation. However, since creation is made in stages, all of the world is connected in a chained-down form with higher realities connected to lower ones, each one receiving and giving in turn.

בראשית

The Creation of Man and Woman

Man is the pinnacle of creation. By coming at the end of creation, man contains within him all the elements of creation. He is a mini-universe all unto himself, an עולם קטן. In fact, the higher levels of man's soul soared, and continue to soar, way above the Angels to the very tip of creation.

Man was created in stages, perhaps as many as four stages:

- The creation of Adam's body
- The creation of his animal life-force and possibly the power of speech
- The creation of his upper souls, making him *BeTzelem Elokim*
- The division of this male-female being into a separate male and female

All three creation words *עשייה*, *יצירה*, *בריאה* are employed in the creation of man. The use of the word *בריאה* indicates that at least one aspect of man was created ex-nihilo, whereas the use of the words *עשייה*, *יצירה* tells us that other aspects of man were later formations of some earlier form. The body of man appears to have emerged from existing reality, while his Neshama was created ex-nihilo.

Man was created as a composite of all existing reality both laterally and vertically. Laterally, man's body was taken from all the dust of the earth; vertically, the different levels of man's soul go as high as all the universes of spirituality. Man then is an *Olam Katan*, a complete world that parallels the *Olam HaGadol*, the world beyond man's body and soul.

The first stage of man-creation, that of his basic body, occurred when G-d commanded the earth to bring forth both (*תוציא הארץ*) the animals and the body of man (*נפש חיה*). Both were already contained within the potential of the earth. (This was the partnership of ground which G-d was referring to when He said *נעשה אדם*.) However, whereas the body of man was taken from a sampling of all the dust of the earth, the animals possibly evolved from the earlier fish forms but at any rate did not come from all the dust of the earth. Secondly, the final shape of man's body had his head, power of speech and primary senses on top, his heart in the middle and his most sensual and physical aspects further down. This was a function of the spirituality which filled him up (his soul) and is not purely a physical phenomenon.

So much for the body of man. As for his more spiritual aspects, the verse states, *And He blew into his nostrils the soul of life and he became a living being*. Until now, man's body was a lifeless lump of clay. Now he became a *Nefesh Chaya*, a living being at a basic animal level. Alternatively, man now became a speaking being. According to this, man had already become uniquely distinguished before this verse.

Either way, there was a third stage of creation, where man became *BeTzelem Elokim*, and a final stage when man was divided into separate male-female components. Until then man was an androgynous being, a male face looking one way and the female looking the other way. *פנים*, faces, means turning, for the face is the point at which one's internal reality turns towards the outside. Man's faces, his inner spirituality, faced the world from every side. Man was complete; there was no back to man where spiritual lack or sin could take place. Being complete, man had no need to face him/herself; there was no deficiency, no need for the male/female parts to turn to

each other in order to give to each other to fill any lack; consequently, man faced away from him/herself.

In this state there was no possibility of imitating G-d by giving to another. Man was simply a spiritual robot. This state was **לא טוב**: It was not good for **אדם** to be alone and maintain the state of independence in which he/she does not feel the need to relate to others. Initially, Adam thought that the solution lay in becoming a giver to the animals, that they should become the **חומר** for his **צורה**. This did not work, for although man might complete the animals they do not fully complete him. His completion of them, therefore, only involves some of his general potential but not the full force of his human uniqueness. For a perfect match, man therefore needed a fellow **Bar Sechel**, a being that he could connect to with all of his unique potential.

The solution to this was to take Adam himself and divide him into two parts, neither one complete on its own. The creation of an incomplete being was reflected in the **תרדמה**, the deep sleep, which **השם** caused to fall on man at the time of the woman's creation. Now each half of **אדם** had a front and a back. The back represented the missing half, what man lacks in his existing state. **אדם** now existed as a potential to be actualized like the ground he came from.

Unlike the animals, man was first created as one being and only afterwards was his partner created from him. This gave a certain dimension of unity. Man is not a total unity like G-d, for, as a created being, he needs a partner. Yet, he has a dimension of unity to him. Man was originally one and he can again become one by giving himself over to his other half. In this way man and women re-create G-d's original act of the creation of **אדם**. This is the ultimate imitation of G-d, the creation of man.

Woman is called **עזר** in the sense that she completes a process already begun. Although other animals were an **עזר**, even to the point of some **חבור**, they were not **כנגדו**, i.e. not equal in their complimentary roles. She is called the helpmate and not him because he initiates and she completes. Herein lies a danger, for since she is the force which desires for final expression in this world she has the most contact with this world. She is **סוף קומת האדם**, the point at which man translates his potential into the world. This is called the **Midah of Malchus** and is reflected in the fact that when **השם** created the first woman, He first placed **אדם** in a deep, deep sleep which is one sixtieth of death.

The creation of woman allowed for a greater potential for good, but that same potential could also be used for bad. The **Nachash** recognized this and therefore targeted Chava rather than Adam for moral seduction. Therefore, it is the very reality of a man divided in two, the creation of a back of man, which allows for the potential weakness of man, both male and female. But it is just that same fact which allows for man to soar to greater heights. Either he will be the pinnacle of creation or he will sink to such depths that he will be told, "Even the mosquitoes preceded you in the creation."

Man – Before & After the Sin

The first man and woman were so pure that they saw their outer bodies as a pure garment for their inside reality. As the verse says, *though they were naked, they were not ashamed*. Modesty is required when there is an incompatibility between the outer superficial reality and the deeper spiritual reality. Adam and Chava, however, were identified with the good all the way through. All their body parts, even the most private ones, were but instruments to do G-d's Will and not a source of sensuality in any way. The closest thing we see to this today, says HaEmek Davar, is the love of a brother and a sister to each other. Their affection for each other is not at all sensually based.

Adam and Chava's state was such that there was simply no physical barrier between them and G-d, a state which prophets, with the exception of Moshe Rabbeinu, only achieved during the actual time of their prophecy and after great preparation. Before the חטא, the גשמיות of הראשון אדם was like our רוחניות today. His spirituality was so concentrated that he and חוה were able to achieve through one positive מצוה, i.e. לעבדה/מכל עץ הגן אכל תאכל, and one negative מצוה, i.e. לשמרה/מעץ. כלל הדעת טוב ורע לא תאכל all that was needed for the תקון of this world. (The Seven Noachide Mitzvos were subsumed under these two commands and is actually learned out from the same verse.) The verse tells us: *And G-d planted a garden in Eden in the East and He placed man, whom He had formed, in it*. This planting, says the Nesivos HaMussar, was the Torah, for there was complete harmony of the physical and the spiritual worlds. Man, by living in this very elevated 'physical' environment, was able to understand all that we do today from the Torah.

Although there was the possibility of חטא even then, חטא did not exist as a tangible reality. Before the חטא, man identified himself with the good and saw the יצר הרע as something outside of himself- the Nachash. Good and evil existed in two opposing but separate domains. There was no sensual desire, and choosing good was the more natural of the two choices. Doing evil was like putting one's hand in fire. We might be capable of doing such a thing, but no normal person would ever do so.

However, after the חטא the Chol and the Kodesh became mixed. Man began to identify his "I" with his Yetzer Hara (I want), whereas he saw goodness as something outside of himself, an 'ought' or ethical imperative to be aspired to. Man now developed a sensual desire for marital relations. He truly became more G-d-like in the sense that he now had a deeper capacity for choice; but the price he paid was huge. Spirituality now had to be looked for below the surface of things using the Midah of Tznius. Man realized that he was naked and covered himself in clothing.

Tznius now became a fundamental principle without which man would be reduced to no more than a sophisticated animal, doomed to seeing only material and not spiritual reality. Shame, the understanding that a part of one's body which is committed, at least in part, to sensuality, was now also appropriately activated.

The Nachash (animal wisdom, as Rav Hirsch calls it) appealed to Chava's enormous spiritual and intellectual prowess by saying that upon eating from the Tree of Knowledge, והייתם כאלוקים – you will have G-dly powers with which you will be able to form new worlds. Indeed, man has an inherent and good potential to imitate G-d. The name Adam, the very name for man, comes from the word Adameh – I will be like. For it is man's ability to imagine that which is beyond himself (G-d) and to strive towards Him. The Nachash cleverly harnessed this trait for his nefarious goals.

Had the First Man and Woman not done what they did, their Neshamos would have purified their bodies in continuing successive stages. They would have brought in the Messianic Era by Shabbos (5 hours later). The First Man would have been the Mashiach and all of the rest of mankind would have been born into the Messianic Era. All of mankind would have comprised the concept כלל ישראל. There would have been no distinction between Jew and non-Jew.

Prior to the sin, man's physicality was as spiritual as our spirituality is today – his spirituality was much more spiritual in turn. Had he continued to grow, his physicality in turn would have reached the level of the spirituality that he started out with, and so on.

However, after the חטא, completion had to be reached in a much more difficult two-stage process: First we have to get back to the level of אדם and חוה before the חטא and only then can we get to the level of the Messianic Era.

In order to achieve this, Adam's Neshama was now divided amongst the billions of people who came after him, each one charged with fulfilling a tiny amount of the task that Adam and Chava would have achieved on their own.

Spirituality was now more hidden. G-d asks Adam, *Where are you* (ג ט איכה) – where are you spiritually now? Where are your former exalted heights? He asks him further – *המן מן התורה מניין* ... *המן העץ ... אכלת*. The Sages ask *המן מן התורה מניין* and quote these words. In other words, at what point did the force of Haman – the anti-spirituality – enter the world? Or, the way G-d asks Adam: “Did you introduce this force into the world, making it harder for all mankind?”

The process of achieving completion had become more arduous, yet it was still accessible. On the one hand, the new reality required that Adam and Chava cover their bodies, unlike any other creature on earth. On the other hand, G-d Himself made their clothes. It was G-d's way of saying, “I am still with you. We still have a relationship.” On the one hand, the entrance to Gan Eden was guarded by revolving, sword-yielding angels. But, on the other hand, it was only guarded, limiting entry, and not completely blocked. The ground was now cursed, but man was not. The First Man, and any future generation, could still return to the exalted level before the Cheit. The exile out of the Garden was for a Shlichus, a mission: מגן עדונישלחה - *די מגן עדונישלחה* - the mission of gathering the holy sparks scattered far and wide by the Cheit.

The Cheit of Adam HaRishon brought death to the world. This was because the Neshama was no longer powerful enough to purify the body as much as the body needed. Therefore, death was now necessitated to purify the body by rotting in the ground and returning to dust, its most elemental form, thereby breaking it down and reconstituting it in a purer form. After death, the Neshama continues to grow in Olam HaNeshamos, an environment uniquely suited to its growth.

Death is therefore beneficial for both the body and the soul, which can subsequently catch up on all the growth it lost out on as a result of the חטא of אדם הראשון.

Body and soul continue to be separated until תחיית המתים, when the two will be recombined. This is the true reward, when the soul itself will finally reach its full potential both by doing what it was created to do and by turning from being a taker of goodness to being a giver of goodness to the body. As well, it will then fully take over and control the body, purifying it to the maximum extent possible. Both soul and body will then continue to grow towards ultimate spirituality forever.

Shabbos

In order to understand Shabbos, we must first come to a Jewish understanding of time. Time is a part of the physical dimensions of the universe and was either a consequence of creation or a separate act of creation by G-d. Man, as a created being, exists in time, and therefore perceives everything which G-d does within this framework. Since G-d made the whole of creation to serve man and allow man to get close to Him, time was also created to serve man.

G-d arranged time in cycles of seven, and He ensured that each cycle would end in Kedusha, allowing for all the other days to contribute to that final day and thereby be elevated by it. Seven is the unit of holiness because the physical world exists in six dimensions. The seven comes to unify these six into a higher whole. The seventh day is Shabbos, which is a concentration of time, a day that encompasses all other days. Therefore, Shabbos is begun by G-d, not man. It is Keviah VeKayama – Shabbos is holy whether we keep it or not. It is up to us to respond. If we do, we will show thereby our ability to use time to achieve holiness and get closer to G-d.

On the seventh day, rest (מנוחה) was created to complete the universe. This rest was G-d's and not man's. Clearly G-d does not need to rest because He is tired. In resting from creation, G-d showed that He had completed all that was necessary for the creation - אשר ברא אלוקים – and that now לעשות – He would renew the creation based according to that which He had already put into place.

G-d had completed His part of the creation, but He left the creation incomplete so that man could come and finish the job. This is what is meant by the words אשר לעשות ברא אלוקים – i.e. (the world) which G-d created (incompletely, leaving space for man) to do. The time for man to do this is the weekday, connecting it back up to G-d. Shabbos is the way that man stays on track, ensuring that his work reconnects the creation back up to G-d.

Each week now becomes a test of the success of the previous Shabbos, for this same work can easily enslave man. By resting on Shabbos, man puts purpose into all of his labor. By relating to all of his work as if it was complete, man proclaims his freedom from being a slave to his labor. By obeying G-d's Will and declaring his subservience to G-d, man frees himself from the shackles of this world. Then, when he engages this world, he does it as a master and not as a slave.

As for man, so for the world: The word ויכול, that G-d *completed* the heavens and the earth, means נעשה כלים; on Shabbos, the whole world becomes a receptacle to join in total harmony with higher spiritual realities. The Shabbos world is one where there is no contradiction between the world down here and the worlds higher up.

But it is not good enough to be a master of this world. One must know where it is all going to, how it all fits in. Shabbos allows us to take a step back and gain a more holistic perspective of life. We are no longer caught up in the weekday details - מה רבו מעשיך; rather, we can see מה גדלו מעשיך – how the big picture comes together. In Mussaf we say תכנת שבת רצית קרבנותיה – a reverse alphabetical acrostic. By working backwards we gain a perspective of the context of everything we did in the whole week, of how it all fits in and of how we fit in.

Shabbos unifies the creation into one whole in the same way as the soul takes a bunch of separate limbs and creates from it an integrated human being.

In fact, by seeing a whole universe we see ourselves more holistically as well. By taking a step back from our fragmented selves we become a more integrated self. On Shabbos we are no longer defined by what we do but we are rather defined by how

we are. We see ourselves not only in the specialized professional and other roles we play during the week, but *all* of ourselves. So too, we see the wholeness of the people around us. *מה גדלו* and not *מה רבו*.

In this sense, Shabbos is a relationship with oneself (self-integration) and with others (the unity of creation). Ultimately, Shabbos is the starting point for our relationship with G-d as well. Shabbos is a *Bris* – *ברית עולם*. A *Bris* is a commitment by two sides to a relationship. This is why breaking Shabbos undermines our whole relationship with G-d.

Shabbos is the fourth of the Ten Commandments. The first three commandments deal with our most basic concepts and our belief in G-d. What does Shabbos, the fourth commandment, have to do with our most basic beliefs?

The Torah itself answers this question by saying that Shabbos demonstrates our belief in G-d as a Creator. Since G-d created the world in six days and rested on the seventh, we emulate G-d and also rest. Therefore, by observing the Shabbos we are proving that G-d is the Creator of the world.

But, and here's a twist, we can only achieve this recognition of His control through *Daas*, a very active dimension on our part, which establishes the relationships of things *עיקר* to *טפל*.

A man digs a hole on Shabbos: if he wants the hole to plant a tree, it is as if he had plowed his field, and he has broken the Shabbos. But if he is digging because he wants sand, it is not considered as if he is digging at all. His mind determines the very definition of the act being done. Thought-action. Thought-action requires that the act be done to achieve an inherently higher order of design, that a person determine what is primary and what is secondary, that a person determine the purpose of his actions. All this awareness of the relationship between things must go on in the mind of the Shabbos observer even to keep Shabbos at a basic, technical level.

This concept is unprecedented in Jewish law. A man kills. He did not intend to kill. He is exempt from punishment. But kill he did. The objective action is defined by what he did. The intention merely determines the culpability. Not so on Shabbos – the very act is determined by the intention of one's mind. And so, when we refrain from *Melacha* on Shabbos we do so with the full force of our mind. We have to understand the *Melacha* and consciously rest from it.

The outer *מאמרות* of the physical world now get seen in their right proportion; they are *טפל* - there to serve the inner content of the *עשרת הדברות*. *Daas* of the human mind gets to work, and, through the Shabbos experience, defines the relationship between the two. We now see the term "holiness" mentioned in the Torah for the first time.

Therefore, Shabbos is not a removal of our minds from attempting to understand this world just as Shabbos is not a removal from the physical pleasures of this world. Quite the contrary! *Oneg Shabbos* dictates that we partake of better foods, dress better, have more sleep and enjoy the world more than the weekday. We do all of this because by removing our own creative input we want to appreciate G-d's world better; we want to see it all and understand how it all fits together. Shabbos then is not so much a day of prohibited labor as a day of restoring that labor to its serving a higher end. Without Shabbos, man is but a *מאמר* amongst the 10 *מאמרות* of *מעשה בראשית*. With the Shabbos, as created by man's *דעת*, man is no longer a *מאמר* but part of the purpose and the ends

Noach's Failed Greatness

Evil can reach a point when it is no longer a means to an end but rather an end in and of itself. The harlot plies her trade to earn money. There is nothing wrong with the ends – making a living. It is the means that is wrong. The harlot despises herself for the acts in which she engages, on the means she feels she has to use. Woe betides a harlot who loses that sensitivity to the depravity of the act itself, as she will no longer have any core, and there will be nothing to work with anymore.

This is what happened in Noach's time. Man reached a point where he was alienated from his G-d, alienated from his fellow man (selfishness had become legally institutionalized), alienated from any good core within himself. Man no longer sinned as a means; the sin had become the end in and of itself. In this state, people spent all their time working on how to be evil, רק רע כל היום. So pervasive was this momentum that the very moral fabric of nature itself began to break down, כי השחית כל בשר. This is where hope of Teshuva becomes lost.

That Noach achieved what he did in this environment made him truly a spiritually great man. Even though the 7 Noachide Mitzvos were given to the First Man, they are called after Noach as he was the one to initiate anew the moral and spiritual commitment of man to G-d.

After the Chet of Adam HaRishon, any generation could have merited to correct the original Chet and then receive the Torah. And so, the Tikunei Zohar tells us that HaSh-m initially planted Moshe Rabbeinu's Neshama into Noach, making him potentially the receiver of the Torah and maybe the Moshiach.

Yet, Noach failed to reach out to the depraved people around him. He was not by natural inclination a "kiruv worker". He thought himself not strong enough to influence those around him without being influenced himself. Finally, he didn't believe in himself sufficiently; he was מקטני אמנה in his ability to effect changes in others. Therefore, he chose to live the life of a scholarly recluse.

This seems like a reasonable position, the kind of advice that any rabbi would give his student: Don't go out and do kiruv if you are not strong enough not to be influenced yourself.

Yet, in the end, Noach's approach fails. He starts out as an איש צדיק and ends as an איש אדמה. He gets his priorities wrong, planting a vineyard instead of focusing on more important things. Drunk, and therefore no longer attached to G-d by his intellect, he is abused by his youngest son, either profaned or castrated by him.

The Midrash contrasts Noach to Moshe Rabbeinu, who started out as an Ish Mitzri, brought up in the intrigues and impurity of the Egyptian court. Moshe killed a man, ran to Midian and back – and through all this messiness he became an איש אלוקים.

The difference between the two was this: Noach's spirituality was ultimately egocentric while Moshe dedicated himself to the Klal. Noach's separation from the rest of man led him further away from his real purpose in this world, and in the end he needed the purifying effects of the Teiva to pull through.

Noach made a common mistake in thinking that although we are required to give spiritually to others, this is nevertheless not in our spiritual interests. But was he not right? After all, Avraham Avinu paid a huge price for his outreach efforts, failing to reach the mystical heights of many of his ancestors. He was willing to interrupt a conversation with G-d to run out and meet the three idolaters. Yet, it was just this that

led to him becoming the father of our people. Just when he seemed to be giving up the most from the Noach perspective, he was actually achieving his greatest heights. As the Chasam Sofer puts it, Avraham saw that G-d did not need another Malach in the world. To quote the Chovos HaLevavos: *And even if a person were to be close to the angels ...this is not as worthy as the merits of one who shows his fellow man the good and right way, and who sets the evil on a straight path in serving G-d; for such a person's merits will be multiplied because of the merits of those he helped, increasing as they accumulate merits over time.*

Therefore, even someone who feels he has good reason not to accept communal responsibility may yet be held accountable for not doing so. Noach could claim that he had tried to rebuke the world around him and failed miserably before giving up on them. Moreover, Avraham Avinu's Kiruv never brought him in danger of doing Aveiros; Noach felt that his Kiruv would.

Even so, Noach could be faulted for not sufficiently feeling the pain of others. We do not see him pleading with G-d to save the world for the sake of the few Tzadikim therein as Avraham Avinu desperately appealed on behalf of Sedom and its co-cities and as Moshe Rabbeinu later did on behalf of the Jewish people. His starting point should have been, 'I have to do something. I must reach out. And if I am not strong enough, I must work on myself until I am strong enough. And I must work on myself fast. There is no time.'

The starting position of everyone towards people who are in spiritual need must be, 'What can I do?' There is not always a good answer to this. However, someone who doesn't instinctively reach out has yet to internalize the spiritual pain of the other, and because the other is far from G-d he has not internalized G-d's pain either.

HaSh-m, realizing that Noach was lacking a mature sense of giving, gave him a fabulous opportunity to correct this. For a year, in the purifying atmosphere of the תיבה, Noach worked only on his חסד. The Gemora in Sanhedrin describes how Noach had to feed each animal an exact amount of food of a particular type according to a specific schedule.

The מבויל was like the primordial waters coming to cover the earth and purify it once more, just as a Mikvah of water purifies the one immersing in it. The ark was the dry land, the place where man can serve his Maker. It was made clear to Noach that the world depended on his Chesed, on his walking in G-d's Ways. Otherwise, the world had no purpose. This was brought home to Noach when, by being slightly off in his schedule for the lion, the lion whacked him with his tail. At that point, Noach's life and the future of the world were literally in danger.

Yet, in the end Noach doesn't get it. The moment he leaves the Ark he errs in just the area of his Tikun. He plants a vineyard, taking care of his own needs first. The verse says: ויחל - he went out of his Kedusha and made himself more secular. The next verse testifies to this: וישת מן היין וישכר - Noach put himself into exile. Exile and revealing oneself (ויגלה) come from the same root. Exile is a loss of touch with one's deeper spiritual self, a move towards relating to the surface, to that part of oneself which is revealed. Noach failed to actualize his deeper potential even though he remained a great man by our standards. The thought is a frightening one – that a man who saw his every action as a fulfillment of the word of G-d could get it so wrong. The world had to move on to Avraham Avinu, for a third beginning, after Adam HaRishon and Noach. Hence each one of the first three Parshios of Bereishis deals with one of these beginnings.

The Seven Noachide Mitzvos

The First Man (and Woman) received a prophetic revelation to keep six of the Noachide Mitzvos. After Noach left the Ark, eating meat became permissible. At that stage, a seventh law, that of not eating the flesh of a living animal, was added to נח. Since this completed these laws, and since, after the flood, civilization began anew, these Mitzvos are called Noachide Laws. These laws are to establish a system of justice, not to serve idols, not to curse G-d, not to murder, not to commit adultery, not to steal and not to eat the limb of a living creature. The Ran adds that besides these 7 commandments, non-Jews are also commanded in two positive Mitzvos: to give charity and to do work on Shabbos.

Noachide laws feature prominently in the Chumash. The judgment of the generation of the flood was sealed on theft, and that the other major sin was sexual immorality, both Noachide Mitzvos. Later on, when Shimon and Levi murdered all the males of Shchem over the defilement of their sister Dinah, we see that they were never accused of murder. This was because the inhabitants of Shchem were חייב מיתה for failing to establish a system of justice that would try Shchem for kidnapping and having relations with Dinah.

The Seven Noachide Laws reflect a baseline of civilized behavior. They are therefore relevant for all mankind through all times. The Jews were also commanded to keep the 7 Noachide Mitzvos until Maamad Har Sinai. At that stage, their acceptance of the Torah superseded the Noachide laws.

Three of these laws (גילוי עריות, ברכת ד' וע"ז) are between man and G-d, while another three (גזל ודינים ושפיכות דמים) are between man and his fellow man. The last, אבר מן החי, addresses man's base passions. Each one of the man-to-G-d Mitzvos are matched with one of the man-to-man Mitzvos. These three pairs then translate into one of the three dimensions of man, his soul-intellect, his body and a combination of both. The remaining Mitzvah, אבר מן החי, comes to harness man's desires.

	<i>Man to G-d:</i>	<i>Man to Man:</i>
Soul-Intellect	ע"ז	דינים
Body	גילוי עריות	גזל
Soul-Body	ברכת ד'	שפיכות דמים
Desire	אבר מן החי	

Besides the Noachide Laws, a non-Jew is obligated in every other natural law or law which conforms to straight logic, something akin to natural law. No legal system can detail every situation which is likely to arise. Therefore, it is also required of non-Jews that they develop their minds in order to apply them to serving HaSh-m and through this to add appropriate rules. According to this, for example, Noachides would be commanded in honoring their parents, for every society is capable of appreciating the importance and the correctness of doing this. In fact, when the nations of the world heard the Jews being commanded in Kibud Av V'Em, they recognized the truth of the Ten Commandments, a recognition which many nations give expression to until this day.

Since these seven laws are considered minimum standards of the human race, a Noachide who does not keep any of these laws gets the death penalty. They are considered so obvious that he does not need warning, and only one witness is required.

The Seven Noachide Laws are really general principles which translate into many details and ultimately into a comprehensive system of laws, values and instructions. For example, it is prohibited for a non-Jew to learn תורה. This is either an act of theft or a sub-category of an illicit relationship. (Although Noachides may not be taught the details of the Torah, they are considered holy and praiseworthy for studying those parts of the Torah and the Talmud which affect them.) There are as many as 66 separate מצוות in which Jews are commanded that have parallels subsumed under the seven Noachide laws.

The most comprehensive of the Noachide laws is the law of justice. In its narrower sense, this law requires the establishment of courts, laws of evidence, etc. However, some commentators understand this as a requirement to establish a comprehensive legal system. This would include laws relating to financial relationships between people, e.g. laws of theft, of hiring, renting and custodianship, of damages, loans, etc.

A non-Jew who keeps these Seven Mitzvos is called one of the righteous of the gentiles of the world (מחסדי אומות העולם) and receives a portion in the World to Come. Judaism is therefore unique in the opportunities it gives to those who are not of its own faith and nationality. While Jews cannot choose whether they are going to be Jewish or not, a non-Jew has a choice. He can remain a non-Jew, keep the Seven Mitzvos and get Olam Haba this way, or he can choose to convert, become a Jew and get his Olam Haba that way. In addition, a non-Jew who accepted the Seven Noachide commandments in the time of the יובל (in front of a בית דין) was called a גר תושב and was entitled to live in the land of Israel. The Jews were obligated to guarantee the welfare of such a non-Jew.

In 1900, Rabbi Elijah Benamozeg of Leghorn (Livorno) wrote to Aime Palliere, a Frenchman in Italy, as follows: "Can it be imagined for a single moment that after having concerned Himself for so long with the descendants of Noah, G-d would give a special Law to the Jews as his 'Kingdom of Priests' and then not trouble Himself further about the rest of the human race? Would He thus leave them totally abandoned, without revelation and without law, abolishing His ancient Noachide bond with them, so that they must rely for long centuries on their own poor reason? Not even a mortal man would behave in such a way..."

Though few in number, Noachides have always existed. Under Imperial Rome there were so many that the Roman government gave them special status in law. Another wave of interest began after the time of the Reformation, when the Thirty Years War destroyed the old Catholic order. The center of this interest became Holland, where Jewish refugees from Spain became close to the Dutch citizens who had fought to expel the Spanish governors from their tiny country. Rabbinic scholars discussed with the Dutch all the issues that confronted them in establishing their small state and securing its prosperity. Artists such as Rembrandt joined in this discussion too, painting many portraits of the rabbis themselves.

At this time, several great jurists came to research the Noachide Laws as a part of their effort to establish natural law as a basis for international law. John Sheldon of England wrote a whole book on the subject, and Hugo Grotius, the great Dutch jurist, referred to the Seven Noachide Laws as proof that there have always been natural laws.

There is even a USA congressional law recognizing the Noachide laws as "the bedrock of all civilization".

Migdal Bavel – Science, Civilization & G-d

The Tower of Bavel represents one of the grandest and most visionary rebellions of man against the G-d-idea. The people at that time said: *Come, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach to heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.* The idea of unifying the human race through building a great city with a great tower in the middle was noble. However, Dor HaHaflaga started their tower as an instrument to conquer every aspect of the creation and bring it under the control of man (דברים אחדים). They would then be able to prevent G-d from using the heavens as an instrument for implementing His decrees against the earth. “Remove Divine Providence from the equation,” they said, “and we can then use science and medicine to give us a more secure, healthy, wealthy and happy existence.”

The original impetus lay in the fact that the people of that generation had calculated that the world has a major collapse, as in the case of the flood, every 1656 years. The tower, in the center of a world capital, was an attempt to build some kind of an alternative, heavenly system to beat the natural cycle as they perceived it.

Similarly, the current paradigm of science does not allow G-d to be invoked in any scientific explanation. It strives for a complete explanation of reality without mentioning G-d at all. Over the last 100 years, many scientific theories have actually gotten closer to Torah ideas. But, just at the point where they could be connected back to G-d, they get cut off from the final connection and are then subsumed under man’s achievements, separate from G-d.

Although the name אלוקים was consistently used in the story of Noach, the Chumash now uses the 4-letter Name of G-d to show that all extends back to Him.

The tower, a beacon of human achievement, was to serve as a center of science, a giant lightning rod, and a potential launching pad for future lunar expeditions. Man quickly came to worship the new god of science, as testified by the fact that when a man fell to his death building the tower no one looked up but when a brick fell it attracted the greatest concern and attention.

The truth is, says the Shiurei Daas, that despite the massive advances of contemporary science, we have revealed but a drop in the vast ocean that is G-d’s world of nature. It is possible that had the generation of dispersion created the mechanisms for long term, international scientific cooperation, we would have been much further in our progress than we can imagine. This is especially true because those early generations had a much deeper understanding of certain types of forces than we have today.

The problem was not in the desire to know more and to organize accordingly; it was that when G-d “came down” to look, He saw a rebellion, not a scientific venture. In reality, the people themselves were not fully conscious of this rebellion. They didn’t see themselves as anti-G-d but rather just pro-science, not realizing that the science they proposed made G-d inadmissible. They felt this was for the good of mankind, not seeing that they were seeking a level of control that contradicted G-d’s Hashgacha. This is why the verses do not explicitly mention any sin.

The punishment of Dor HaHaflagah was Midah keNeged Midah; their attempts at unity ended in a complete breakdown in communication between them, with different languages leading to different cultures.

Earlier in Parshas Noach 70 different nations were mentioned, reflecting the complete order of the physical world. The Maharal explains that since each nation was induced to speak its own language through Ruach HaKodesh, each language reflected the inherent potential and unique contribution to world civilization which that nation could contribute. For example, Edom was to inherit the scientific, technological and industrial wisdom of the world. Greece received philosophic and aesthetic wisdom. Each country, in turn, was given a country suitable for its development.

Many individual, G-d-fearing non-Jews have made great contributions to the whole of mankind. In addition, non-Jewish civilization has, in general, advanced steadily towards higher moral and spiritual standards.

On the other hand, as a result of lacking the Torah, that progress is slow and imperfect and whole continents may be excluded from advancing. Nations have often gone backwards. Overall, the nations fell short and their potential was in danger of getting lost.

When the Jews came along, G-d began to use them to harness the positive spiritual energy of each nation. The Jewish people are capable of doing this because of their comprehensive spiritual breadth, incorporating in their core spiritual commitments all the elements spread out amongst the nations. The Jews are therefore sometimes called “nations” (as in *ולו יקרת עמים* and *אף חבב עמים*), and, in fact, reflect a concentration of the spirituality of all the 70 nations.

The Jews provided a solution to the lack of the nations' spiritual completion by harnessing their spiritual energy in two ways: Firstly, conversion meant that certain non-Jews redeemed the potential of their nations by bringing their sparks of holiness into the Jewish people. Secondly, G-d spread the Jewish people amongst the nations of the world. They then expressed their Torah observance, incorporating the positive elements of the local culture, elevating it and making it a part of the Jewish people. Both aspects required that G-d spread the Jews out amongst the nations, who themselves had been spread out at the time of the Tower of Bavel. Prior to the *גאולה*, Jews will have had to live in every country.

Both Geirus and Kedusha-consolidation through dispersion are facilitated by the fact that *אברהם אבינו* was *אב המון גוים*, which means that he was the spiritual forefather of all the nations. So too, his direct lineage has a spiritual connection to the *קדושה* in all the nations. Similarly, *שרי*, whose name meant only “*שרי לי*” and not to others, was changed to the more universal *שרה*.

In fact, the nations of the world contribute to the Torah sometimes through their very anti-Semitism. Many of the things we do today have their roots in anti-Semitic acts or decrees. For example, we read the Haftarah because the Romans banned the Torah reading; we blow the Shofar during Mussaf of Rosh Hashana (and not at the earliest possible time) because of a decree against its blowing altogether, and we add Shema into the Kedusha of Shabbos Mussaf for the same reason. Chazal understood that it was the *Ratzon HaSh-m* that these things should be done this way and left them as permanent decrees.

Once the Jews have redeemed the Kedushah of a specific country there is no point in remaining there any longer. Moshiach will redeem any remaining untapped Kedusha of the nations, which is why he will draw, through both sides of his lineage, on the *קדושה* of the nations of the world.

And so, the Torah gives us a whole perspective on life in a few lines. As individuals we are also prone to Migdalism at times. We try a particular medicine or herb, and we don't give a thought that it has to be G-d who wants to use that

instrument to heal us; we look to become rich without knowing whether our service of G-d is meant to be through wealth or poverty.

לך לך

Avraham Avinu & the Triple Cord

From Noach until the Egyptians, the actions of man had banished spirituality (the Shechina) to exist only in the very spiritual planes removed from this world. Avraham and his descendents, in turn, gradually reversed this process, bringing spirituality back down into the world. The end of this purification process was יציאת מצרים. Therefore, the one thousand years of Torah began with Avraham Avinu even though the one thousand years of Tohu only ended with the downfall of the Egyptians.

To achieve this, Avraham Avinu was given Ten Tests, a complete range of Nisyonos (ten being a complete idea, as we see with the Ten Plagues and the Ten Sayings of Creation). These Ten Tests fulfilled every aspect of his potential so that Avraham was able to serve G-d in a very complete way.

Avraham Avinu, once he gained a mature idea of G-d, set out to convince others of this idea. This was at great personal risk and with a high personal price, sacrificing certain spiritual and Kabbalistic heights that Chanoch, Shem and Ever had achieved before him.

Things were going extremely well for Avraham. He had begun a single-handed campaign to spread the G-d-idea and was achieving enormous success (to be measured in the tens of thousands of returnees). Miraculously escaping the death penalty of the king, he had become something of a celebrity, wealthy and honored by some even as he was being persecuted by others. He had everything to look forward to, with the possibility of turning tens of thousands into hundreds of thousands – perhaps the entire world – to the G-d idea.

Then, in a surprising turn, G-d tells Avraham to leave everything and start anew. לך לך – go to yourself. Go on a spiritual journey of self-discovery, for this will be לך – for your own spiritual benefit. Faced with Nimrod's furnace, you were willing to die to serve Me; but now, I will give you an even bigger test – to see whether you can live for Me.

To do this, Avraham was not only being asked to rid himself of the culture of his country (לך לך מארצך) but to go deeper into himself and get rid of all the influences of his youth (ממולדתך). Indeed, he was told to go deep into his very concept of self and rid himself of the vestiges of his home (ומבית אביך). The discontinuity between Terach and his son Avraham was so great that Avraham was considered to have begun the world from scratch.

This was a radical and complete break at the age of 75, a time when most people are looking to wind down their lives and enjoy the fruits of their labor. Avraham Avinu was not being offered anything on the other side or even told where he was heading for. He was to become a refugee in a place where his family connections would count for naught, without even progeny to hope for some remembrance or continuity of his work.

Avraham went to Canaan, where we might have thought he would be less successful in his mission, facing strange cultures and languages. Ultimately, however, he was rewarded with enormous success.

The great difference between Avraham Avinu and those who came before him was not only that he reached out to others but that he undertook responsibility for fulfilling the purpose of the world. To do this, he had to communicate not just the grand idea of One G-d, but also the idea that this G-d is both personally involved, at

every moment, with each individual, as well as with the all of history. Eventually, Avraham's spirituality reached such heights that his soul was able to envelop all the nations of the world – אב המון גוים . Through this he was able to reach out not only to those limited numbers whom he was able to convert to Judaism entirely but to provide the spiritual light (אור לגוים) for all members of the human race to understand G-d. Avraham therefore represents the prototype for which the world was created, as the Sages understand the verse: In the beginning – i.e. through Avraham (in his merit) - these became the generations of the heavens and the earth.

Just as Avraham had perfected his soul, G-d gave him circumcision to perfect his body as a sign to the world that core spirituality would now revolve around him.

Both his nephew Lot and his firstborn son Yishmael were very influenced by Avraham, and, in particular, by his chesed. However, neither could sustain this independently. Both eventually took their chesed and turned it on themselves, becoming takers rather than givers. Lot got so caught up in his possessions that he relocated to the area of Sedom, which was great for pasture but was a spiritual disaster. He became so self-centered that he began to see the G-d-idea as a contradiction to his needs. Still, some remnants of giving were so engrained in Lot that even in Sedom he defied the society to be hospitable. Somehow, he thought that he could have it both ways – be steeped in Sedom and still be holy. Nevertheless, the rot had set in to such a degree that his descendents were no longer compatible with Jews even after they had converted. Avraham already saw this coming and demanded הִפְרֵד נָא מֵעֲלֵי.

Yishmael went even further, willing to become savage in order to do chesed to himself. Yishmael took the impurities of his father's chesed, leaving an even purer line in Avraham's other son, Yitzchak. On the other hand, being that Yishmael was Avraham Avinu's firstborn son, he absorbed Avraham's lessons much more deeply and in the end did Teshuva, just as his progeny are destined to do Teshuva in the end of days.

Humans have a concept of יחוס, of the connection between generations, and the possibility that each subsequent generation will build on the efforts of the previous generation. But, until the Avos, no three generations had ever implemented this idea. Now, Yitzchak and Yaakov continued to build on Avraham's achievements, forming a triple cord or a three-legged stool, the first combination where stability can be achieved. Therefore, the generations of the Avos were completed and the generations of their progeny, the twelve tribes, began.

In certain respects, our forefathers acted with such perfection that their character traits became a permanent spiritual inheritance to all Jews. In addition, they set up historical and spiritual patterns that were to form the underlying themes and cycles of later history (מעשה אבות סימן לבנים). There were now the beginnings of an entire nation dedicated to knowing and serving G-d.

But, despite the enormous progress of the previous four generations, the G-d-idea was still sufficiently tenuous that the historic upheaval of the Egyptian experience endangered all that had been achieved. The Jews were tested in Egypt by slavery on the one hand and the appeal of the most advanced civilization to assimilate on the other. Yet, they held fast.

Finally, the whole nation was required to unconditionally accept the Torah. By now this was no small group of exceptional people, nor even a national movement within the nation. Sinai was a commitment by every single member of the nation present.

G-d chose us as a response to our first choosing Him, again and again, over many generations, under the most trying of circumstances and exacting of standards. As the saying goes: *How odd of G-d to choose the Jews; It's not so odd the Jews chose G-d.*

Avraham Avinu: The Man of Science Transcends Himself

Avraham Avinu's great contribution to the world was Monotheism. By teaching this concept, Avraham Avinu forever changed the way in which we would relate not only to G-d but also to man.

In his search for G-d, Avraham did not take anything for granted. For 37 years, from the age of 3 until 40, he worked on developing a mature understanding and relationship with G-d. Only then did Avraham finally give up all idol-worship. It took another 35 years until, at age 75, he was ready for G-d's command at the beginning of our Parsha.

As exalted as Avraham became, his basic conclusions are accessible to all. Everywhere Avraham looked he saw incredible order, demanding a higher intelligence overseeing and guiding the whole process. It was Rav Hirsch who said: "Two revelations are given to us, Nature and the תורה." The world is, as Rav Elchanan Wasserman tells us, biased in favor of seeing G-d, so much so that we are hard-pressed to say what was so great about Avraham's achievements. Why is he the holy father of the Jewish people when all he discovered was something that is basic and obvious to anyone who opens his eyes?

Firstly, we need to understand the context in which Avraham makes his discovery. The world that Avraham is born into has become completely idolatrous. One thin line of Monotheism remained: Chanoch, Noach, and Shem to Ever, but these people lived and died with their secret. Meanwhile, the idolaters, praying to intermediaries, are able to show tangible results for their efforts. They are tuning into real intermediaries used by G-d. Avraham Avinu himself is brought up as an idolater like all those around him. It requires enormous courage and a radical breakthrough for Avraham to see the world through different eyes.

Secondly, Avraham Avinu takes his understanding to profound new depths. In the end, he reconstructs for himself the whole of creation, including the higher spiritual realms. His legacy to us is the great Kabbalistic work, the Sefer Hayetzirah, which explains how the letters of the Hebrew alphabet were used by G-d to create the world. Avraham Avinu is able to trace any object back up its spiritual trajectory.

Thirdly, Avraham Avinu does not just understand these things; he is able to harmonize his entire being with what he sees. This allows him to intuit all of the Torah and its Mitzvos, since the Torah is but a higher level of the creation-reality and therefore completely in harmony with the inner logic of creation.

Fourthly, Avraham Avinu does not rest with the discovery of the G-d of the philosophers – the G-d of nature (Hashgacha Clalis). He does not simply replace the gods with one G-d. He provides a radically different model of how that G-d acts. Avraham Avinu comes to understand the principle of Hashgacha Pratis. He comes to understand G-d's Ways so deeply that he begins to model his own behavior after G-d's Ways. Avraham Avinu perfects his giving and kindness as a way of imitating G-d's giving and kindness. He then uses his own kindness to teach people how great G-d's kindness really is.

To all this, Avraham Avinu adds one vital component – a relationship with G-d, a personal connection with and a deep love of G-d. Avraham Avinu not only loves G-d, but he is in awe of Him. And he trusts Him very deeply.

G-d now tests that relationship to see whether Avraham's faith includes faithfulness. At the age of 75, Avraham Avinu is asked to leave absolutely everything and go to an unknown land.

Avraham Avinu might have legitimately asked: Why was G-d asking this? Does G-d test our loyalty by asking us to do irrational acts of blind faith that seem to undermine our efforts to reveal Him in the world? The secret seems to lie in the second word of our parsha – לך לך. This can either mean, "Go for your own good," "Go for yourself", to fulfill your true potential and bring joy to your soul. But it can also mean, "Go to yourself" - go discover yourself. "Let the real you, the Neshama, go to the rest of you. Let it spread over your body. You have done well in discovering Me and telling others about Me. You have broken the 2,000 years of Tohu and introduced the 2,000 years of Torah. But, until you isolate yourself to really understand who you are, you cannot really have a full relationship with Me either.

"Go מארצך וממולדתך ומבית אביך גו – leave all the natural conditions of your existence and transcend yourself. (יז) קום התהלך בארץ – Get up and walk in the land of wisdom, enter a new phase of intellectual discovery and understanding. You can only do this if you free yourself from your current environment, schedule and involvements to a place where the earth itself will be in a state of greater spiritual harmony and receptivity with this growth – the holy land. Therefore, your departure is not first and foremost a physical departure, but a spiritual, intellectual, cultural departure." The order of the verses is – *from your land, your birthplace (city) and the house of your father*. A physical departure would be first from one's house, then his city and then his country, but an intellectual departure would be exactly in the order the verses appear.

Avraham Avinu set out not knowing where to, a complete refugee. He committed himself totally to G-d's plan: He left nothing behind – there was no exit plan. Seforno and others state that Avraham nevertheless headed for the land of Canaan, for it was a land already well-known as a place of intense spirituality.

In Canaan, Avraham Avinu brings even more people close to G-d than he did previously. He dies a glorious and honored king, wealthy and influential, with perhaps tens of thousands of followers. Whether he was a master orator or an electric personality is never revealed to us, for that is not the source of his success. Greatness lies not natural talents of leadership or political savvy. It lies in the details of personal perfection, and then wanting to share that perfection with others.

And indeed, Avraham Avinu did now take giant leaps forward in his body, his Nefesh and his intellect. His body enters the holy land and feeds from its produce. His Nefesh is perfected by Milah. And, the Sages tell us, he began to keep Eiruvei Chatzeiros and/or Eiruvei Techumim. As Shem Mishmuel explains, both these Mitzvos DeRabanan are unusual in that they relate to carrying, a type of Melacha which does not actually affect a change on the body of the object. An Eiruv avoids the Melacha of carrying by creating a new domain of space, an essentially intellectually perceived joining of domains into one space. This is a function of being able to impact on the Tzura of something as opposed to its Chomer, and this reflected Avraham's growth in Sechel. Avraham Avinu was able to take his new-found wisdom to plant an Eshel tree, which the Gur Aryeh interprets to mean an international center of wisdom.

For the first time since the sin of Adam HaRishon, G-d now not only spoke to man – ויאמר – but was also "seen" by Avraham Avinu – וירא. The Milah at the end of the parsha is just the beginning. Immediately afterwards, at the beginning of the next parsha, Avraham was rewarded with a new level of prophetic revelation. G-d then

showed him the 3 Malachim, and Avraham Avinu, in imitation of G-d's actions on earth (Vehalachta Bidrachav), began a new level of man-G-d relating.

וִירָא

Why is Giving such a Jewish Trait? Why is it such a Spiritual Act?

Avraham the Monotheist was a gift to the whole world; Avraham the giver was a special gift to the Jewish people. Avraham Avinu was having a prophetic conversation with G-d - וִירָא אֱלֹהֵי ד' בְּאֵלֹהֵי מִמְרָא.

The prophecy was the highest Avraham had ever experienced: It took place in the clearness of the day and without the isolation and intense meditation which prophecy normally requires. For, Avraham had achieved such new spiritual heights in circumcising himself that he now merited prophecy even under such adverse circumstances.

The Bris Milah was a covenant between Avraham and G-d. By its very nature, it excluded all other peoples of the world. As such, it contradicted everything that Avraham had stood for until now. His whole life was spent reaching out to people, including them in his Monotheistic message. And now, it seemed, he stood alone.

Reality turned out to be quite different. Avraham Avinu was immediately faced with the challenge of looking after the 3 idolaters, after which he pleaded with G-d to save the idolatrous Sodom. He found himself more concerned than ever with the fate of all of mankind and each individual as well. For, by perfecting his sensual body through Milah, Avraham Avinu became the greatest giver of all time.

Since he had perfected his body through removal of the Orla, Avraham became a human Mishkan, the perfect receptacle to receive G-d's presence. In the middle of this prophetic conversation, the three idolatrous men showed up at his tent door. Avraham Avinu asked HaSh-m to wait for him while he ran out to do something he perceived as even more spiritual – to greet these ‘goodness-knows what’ kind of G-d-less people. Remarkably, G-d waited patiently while Avraham Avinu engaged in the messy business of washing feet, slaughtering animals, and running back and forth as an old man still in pain from his circumcision.

The Sages learn from this that גדולה הכנסת אורחים מקבלת פני שכניה – *Greater is the act of hospitality than receiving the face of the Shechinah*. The former involves our own actions and therefore integrates our spirituality; the latter is a gift, and therefore never really becomes a part of the person.

The Torah goes into great detail in describing this event of greeting the angels: what Avraham said, what Sarah prepared, Avraham's running to and fro, etc., for greatness lies in details and not in grand ideas. Avraham and Sarah did these things personally and did not just delegate them to servants; three people, one tongue for each, three slaughtered animals served with delicacies. Clearly, just taking care of hunger was not the goal. These were no little acts. They triggered a relationship with G-d which was to protect the Jewish people centuries into the future.

Avraham's chesed was perfected to the degree that this became a spiritual genetic endowment of Jews for all time, one of the three signs of any Jew anywhere. It was so powerful that even after Lot went to live with the evil Sodomites and participated in some of their evil, he was still willing to risk his life to be hospitable to the three Malachim, for he had imbibed Avraham's chesed into his very bones. Sodom were the anti-Abrahamites – they developed a whole ideology of selfishness as a virtue. It was just these people who came to be destroyed after Avraham Avinu reached his new heights of Chesed. And, it was even for them that Avraham prayed.

We need to understand why it was that the father of the Jewish People was characterized by perfection in kindness and giving. The chesed elevated Avraham Avinu to the degree that his very name אברהם means אב רם, the elevated father of the Jewish people. The Akeidah was meant to prove that Avraham's Chesed was not just a natural Midah, not just something he did because he enjoyed doing. Given that Avraham's chesed was rooted in real spirituality, wherein lies the particular Kedusha of Chesed?

The answer lies in the idea that we can harmonize ourselves with G-d's actions in this world. והלכת בדרכיו – you should walk in His ways. G-d manifests in this world with actions of kindness: He clothes the naked, as he did with the Adam and Chava; He visits the sick, as He did with Avraham Avinu after his circumcision; He comforts the mourners as He did with Yitzchak over the loss of Avraham and He buries the dead as he did to Moshe Rabbeinu. We can learn to walk in His ways – just as He does acts of kindness, so should we.

Furthermore, being G-d-like reveals a great secret of the universe: that man can be a partner with G-d in running the world. When we give, we imitate Him not only in character traits and actions but also in engaging in תקון עולם – in fixing and completing this world.

Having just perfected his own body through cutting off the extra foreskin, it would have been tempting for Avraham Avinu to follow the models of great kabbalists who spent their days meditating on G-d and the cosmos – models which Avraham rejected. “G-d has enough Angels in Shamayim,” he reasoned. Can I possibly add to the world by being angel one million and one, leaving the rest of the world to despair and alienation? He did not create me as a human in order to be an angel, but to be something greater than that.” And how right he was! It was Avraham, his hands dirtied by the dust of idolatry, who became the Forefather of the Jewish people, not the holy Shem, Chanoch or Ever.

Ironically, Avraham's Chesed was not really successful, for Malachim don't really need to eat, but what *was* successful was his modeling real spirituality for Jews of all time.

There is a deeper insight into Avraham's chesed which we must share here. The day was a hot one and there were no travelers. Avraham Avinu was in pain that he had no opportunity to give. This seems strange; should he not be happy that there was no one in need? Should we hope that there will be beggars in the street so that *we* can give to them? Is this not an expression of our own egocentric needs?

The explanation lies in distinguishing three levels of giving. Level one is where our giving is activated by someone in need. No need presented – no giving activated. Clean the streets of suburbia and keep the destitute in the inner city ghetto and such a person is as satisfied as can be.

A level two giver, however, seeks out the need.

A level three giver, the level of Avraham Avinu, reflects a totally integrated character trait of giving. Such a Baal Chesed feels the push to give even when there is no one to give to, not because of some perverse need but because the Midah is always active and energetic. It does not have to be activated by some external stimulus. It is there whether there is a recipient or not.

The parsha begins with Avraham and Sarah doing discrete chesed, and it ends with the birth of Yitzchak, of the fundamental chesed of giving life to a new human being. Now Avraham and Sarah are truly imitators of G-d, His partners in producing life itself.

The Akeidah – Human Potential and its Fulfillment

Man is created incomplete, with enormous potential to grow and become. After G-d created man, the world was declared not only טוב but טוב מאד. The word מאד connotes the ability to add and the ability to actualize a potential. The letters of the word are the same letters as אדם, Man. Adam is the being that can become increasingly more. Adam comes from *Adameh LeElyon* – I will be like that which is above me. In order for man to be able to relate to that Ultimate Being who cannot be seen or heard in any normal sense, man had to be created with the power of imagination (*Adam* from *Dimyon*). This capacity, the ability to see beyond oneself, to have a vision and goals, opens endless opportunities for man's growth.

This growth is facilitated by life-circumstances that are a perfect match, each one to our unique potential. The potential-package itself is a gift from G-d; the actualization is our gift to ourselves and to the world.

To further ensure that we fulfill our potential, G-d gives us a Nisayon. In a Nisayon, G-d pushes us to greater heights by hiding Himself. This makes us dig deeper into ourselves to call upon inner reserves, reserves we sometimes never realized we had. It helps us bring out the miracle of our own potential (נסיון מלשון נס).

Nisayon also comes from נס, a banner or ensign which flies high above a ship. Hence the phrase והאלקים נסה את אברהם would be rendered: And G-d exalted Avraham [through the Akeidah]... – to model behavior for the rest of the world.

Avraham Avinu was given 10 such Nisyonos in order to ensure that he develop every aspect of himself (hence 10, a number of completion). The Akeidah was the greatest of these, the only one specifically described in the Torah as a test, נסה את אברהם. Its spiritual resonances are there for us to call upon to this day, nurturing our strength to stand up to any test.

This Akeidah was the only test that was not meant to be completed; G-d never intended that Yitzchak actually be slaughtered. Yet, Avraham Avinu was to receive all the spiritual benefits as if he had carried the act to completion.

The purpose of this test was to bring out a new level of Avraham's love for G-d. Avraham had already passed the level where he was willing to give up all of his possessions for G-d when, by the Kivshan HaEish, he was willing to give up his own life.

With the Akeidah, Avraham Avinu went a step further. He lived a century dreaming and praying for this child, and after birth, his love grew daily over almost 4 decades. Yitzchak seemed the only hope to continue his work. Avraham Avinu's massive kiruv effort was a shocking failure. The hordes he attracted did not stick. Avraham Avinu's chesed had no vessel of Gevurah to hold and maintain it. Yitzchak, now 37 years old, provided that Gevurah. Avraham loved his son so deeply that if he had a thousand lives he would have given them all instead of Yitzchak's.

That same G-d that promised him this son now says to him: "Avraham! Show Me that your love for Me is even greater than that. Show Me that you are willing to give up even Yitzchak for My sake. Give him up, and give up all your future. And don't only give him up, but be the one to slaughter him."

Avraham Avinu, as we know, went above what was known to be humanly possible and passed this test. He did it deliberately and with clarity of mind, not confused and without a taint of resentment.

He saddled his own donkey as an expression of pure affection to fulfill every detail of the Almighty's word by himself. The logical thing to do would be to

announce his dramatic undertaking in advance and to proceed with the largest entourage possible to witness the event. Yet, he decided to pass this test utterly alone (without even Sarah to strengthen and encourage him) to prevent some personal arrogance from creeping in.

After the event, G-d declared: *עתה ידעתי כי ירא אלקים אתה*. A cycle of ten tests was completed, tests that denoted not just Avraham's love for G-d but also G-d's love for Avraham. As the Midrash has it: "The potter will strike only those pots that are good and whole to test them, because he knows that they will withstand even repeated blows."

These ten tests parallel the Ten Sayings of Creation and the Ten Commandments. *כבשן האש* was like Avraham's exodus from the natural order similar to the Exodus of the Jews stated in the first of the Ten Commandments. Avraham's creation was completed by the remaining Nisyonos, ending with the Akeidah.

Each one of the Avos had a particular Midah which they perfected and through which they reached all the other Midos. Thus, through his Chesed Avraham was able to reach all the other traits just as Yitzchak did through his Gevurah. G-d ensured this by challenging each one to seemingly go against his trait in order to ensure that he would complete all of his potential.

For example, Avraham Avinu was told to circumcise himself. Certainly, after being thrown by Nimrod into the furnace, the actual challenge of circumcising his body at a ripe old age was not in and of itself a great Nisayon for Avraham Avinu. Rather, the Nisayon was that in entering into a Bris Milah, Avraham Avinu was thereby making a special covenant between him and G-d. Avraham felt conflicted by having to say, "I am different from you, more special, with a unique relationship with G-d." Yet, he overcame his natural trait of Chesed and acted with Gevurah to do as G-d wanted. It was only when Avraham Avinu expressed this Gevurah that he received news that he was to have Yitzchak. For, until then, his pure chesed could never give birth to the Gevurah of Yitzchak.

Certainly, the test of the Akeidah was all the more difficult for Avraham in that he was a giver down to the very fiber of his being. This is why the verse says that it was Avraham's, and not Yitzchak's, test.

Avraham entertained strong thoughts telling him why he should not be doing this. His logic told him that the prophecy can't be true, since why would G-d want to destroy the nation He had just chosen? Yet, he persevered to complete what had actually been a life-long process of the unfolding of his personality. It showed that his Chesed was not just a natural trait which brought him pleasure. Rather, this was a genuine instrument in the service of his Maker. And where the Will of G-d required something else, he was capable of that too.

During the Akeidah, the Malach calls Avraham's name twice - *אברהם אברהם* – i.e. now the Avraham down here is completely in harmony with the Avraham which is up there – He had now reached his full potential. Therefore, G-d no longer had a reason to address him for there was *no higher purpose for which he could possibly be elevated*. Indeed, the *עקידה* was the last time where we see that G-d contacted Avraham.

Avraham Avinu died feeling blessed – *בכל*, because he saw everything that G-d gave him, including all his tests, as blessings. Each one of us undergoes our own, personal ten tests. We can pass them and be fulfilled like Avraham or give in and have to struggle anew.

חיי שרה

The Midos and Nisyonos of the Avos

Each one of the three Avos, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, perfected a particular character trait which was then passed on as a legacy to all Jews. Avraham perfected Chesed, Yitzchak Gevurah, and Yaakov Tiferes, or Torah, which was a synthesis of the two. Through the perfection of these Midos each one of the Avos was able to complete himself in all other respects as well.

Each of the Avos approached G-d from a different angle. Each one had a relationship with G-d which started from his own unique personality and character, and yet each, despite his different starting point, achieved a holistic perspective of G-d. Hence, we say אלוקי אברהם, a whole perspective of G-d through Avraham, and so too אלוקי יצחק ואלוקי יעקוב.

Chesed, Avraham's quality, is an expanding trait; the person starts from within a point of his own reality and draws on that to go outside of himself and sustain and nurture others. Someone who lacks Chesed is selfish. Someone who turns his Chesed inwards to himself will be overly sensual.

Yitzchak's trait was Gevurah, which is a contracting Midah: the person turns inwards, to himself, to control himself and to exclude from himself all that may not be good. When a G-d-fearing person has Gevurah, he expresses it as יראה, awe of G-d and fear of disobeying Him. Such Gevurah leads to a limitation of actions lest one transgress or lest the slightest wrong thought taint one's action with a drop of impurity. It is the Midah that we need for סור מרע, not to transgress the negative commandments, and completes the Midas HaAhava which is the Midah to fulfill the positive commandments.

One who lacks Gevurah is morally and spiritually out of control. One who has Gevurah but turns it in the wrong direction, i.e. outwards, is a tyrant, delighting in the control and manipulation of others.

Emes is a synthesis of these two traits. Emes is the trait which determines the right balance of Chesed and Gevurah – when to be outward-directed and when to be inward-directed.

The Avos brought these three great Torah-principles down into the earth as a spiritual-genetic inheritance for Jews of all time. This was the preparation for the forming of the Jewish people and the giving of the Torah. And it needed to be specifically in this order.

Avraham Avinu's Chesed included spiritual-Chesed, and he converted tens of thousands to the Monotheism idea. Because the Torah is a Toras Chesed, Avraham Avinu was able to intuit the Torah. Therefore, the first of the Avos had to start with this Midah.

Yitzchak saw that all his father's actions had dissipated. All those converts had simply disappeared. He set the boundaries, created the framework and nurtured the environment which would allow his father's spiritual achievements to have continuity. As such, he was completely batul to his father – he did not see himself as having any independent reality. Only after the Akeidah, when he was prepared to give his very life for his father's Avodah, did he begin to live his own life and have his own spiritual reality. Only then was it possible for his future wife to be born.

Yaakov introduced a balance between the two previous Avos. This is the balance which we have inherited as the Golden Mean to which the sum total of the Torah and its Mitzvos direct us.

As long as the forefathers had yet to perfect a balanced set of Midos, there were some negative consequences to their efforts. Yishmael took Avraham's chesed and turned it inwards, becoming sensual, selfish and wanting to give to himself instead of to others. Eisav took Yitzchak's Gevurah and instead of using it to control himself turned it outwards, leading to a desire to colonize and control others and, if need be, to destroy them. It took three generations of sorting out purity from impurity before Yaakov was able to have 12 sons, all holy and G-d-serving.

This does not mean to say that Avraham or Yitzchak remained incomplete, unbalanced beings. Through his Chesed, Avraham was able to reach all the other traits, just as Yitzchak did through his Gevurah. G-d ensured this by challenging each one to seemingly go against his trait in order to ensure that he complete all of his potential.

Thus, Avraham was told to circumcise himself, creating a division between him and all of those people with whom he was trying to connect. Yet, he overcame his natural trait of Chesed and acted with Gevurah to do as G-d wanted. Now that he expressed this Gevurah he could give birth to the Gevurah of Yitzchak. The binding of Yitzchak was a similar challenge.

The fact that Avraham overcame these challenges showed that his Chesed was not just a natural trait which he happened to enjoy expressing. He wasn't kind simply because it brought him pleasure. Rather, this was a genuine instrument in the service of his Maker. And where the Will of G-d required something else, he was capable of that too. Similarly, Yitzchak's test went against his nature. Yitzchak's awe of HaSh-m was such that it led him to limit his actions in fear of being imperfect in his doing the Will of G-d. His tests came to add the dimension of Chesed to his personality.

Comparatively, Yaakov, whose trait was truth, was tested by having to deal with deviousness all his life, but he came out with a heightened sense of what truth was all about.

The 3 Midos of the Avos are the three primary Midos of any human being. Each one can serve as a starting point to reaching all the others. Avraham was ready to achieve his Gevurah through his Chesed just as Yitzchak achieved Chesed through his Gevurah.

For example, one who is a giving person may simply want to give as a natural desire. But he may also express his giving because he is concerned that he has not given as much as he ought to (יראת ד'). Or, he may be committed to ensuring that his giving would be true giving according to Torah principles. Thus, his giving will lead him to יראה and אמת as well. This is known as אמת, גבורה שבחסד, אמת, חסד שבחסד. So, too, with the traits of יראה and אמת. Each one, correctly applied, will lead to an acquiring of the others.

The Sages sum this up with their words in Avos: *The world stands on three things: On Torah (Emes), on Avodah (Yirah) and on Chesed.* They also tell us that in contrast to these three there are three anti-Midos which remove a person from the world: Kinah, which is anti-Chesed, Taavah, which is anti-Gevurah, and Kavod, which is anti-Emes.

Here is the whole story of every man, the whole world of psychology and of any other science of man: all must extend from this starting point.

Sarah and Rivka – Mothers and Wives: Two Generations of Female Holiness

Just as the Avos modeled character and behavior for all male Jews throughout the generations, so, too, the Imahos modeled behavior for women of all the ages. Each woman should say "When will my actions reach those of the foremothers?"

The Imahos set up patterns of spirituality which nourish and inspire the Jewish female soul. Thus, Sarah's 127 years of life (the dimension of time) translated into Esther's rule over 127 states (the dimension of space).

Sarah was the first and greatest of the seven prophetesses, experiencing direct prophecy from G-d and not through a Malach. Sarah lived every moment to its fullest - all the days that were allotted to her – ימי חייה שרה. The rest of mankind compared to Sarah was like a monkey compared to a man, say the Sages.

Sarah's physical body reflected her inner spiritual completeness. Her greatness was reflected not only in her life but also in her death, for she was the first of the Avos or the Imahos to be buried together with Adam and Chava in Mearas HaMachpelah.

Sarah derived her greatness from the fact that she found herself closeted with two famous kings of the period, Pharaoh and Avimelech, and did not attach herself to either of them. Avraham, the male, was the Sechel – abstract mind, the head. Sarah was the heart. The heart is the source of the Teshukah and the desire to connect, to attach oneself something. Sarah placed her Teshukah firmly towards the Almighty. She was the source of passion and desire for the holy. This is the Torah of the Mothers – the teaching of how to enjoy the splendor of Judaism as a living entity and not just an abstract, intellectual concept.

When Avraham Avinu eulogized Sarah, he described her as דרשה צמר ופשתים. Sarah was able to sort out wool from linen – i.e. a Shatnez mixture. Teshukah can easily be attached to the wrong thing. It requires the ability to first sort and divide the good from the bad.

Sarah and Avraham Avinu had been locked in a fundamental argument about what the borders and parameters of the Jewish people should be. Avraham Avinu was the Av Hamon Goyim – the father of all nations of the world. His spiritual vision was to envelop rather than exclude. Sarah disagreed and kicked Yishmael out of her home, leaving Yitzchak to provide the future lineage of the Jewish people. In the very next generation, a similar dispute erupted between Yitzchak and Rivka over Eisav. Yitzchak felt that Eisav's scientific, industrial and financial powers should be a part of the Jewish people. Rivka disagreed and won out, as did Sarah before her. This discerning ability to set boundaries, provide the parameters, fine tune what should be within and what should be without, set the environment and create the elements of nurturance, are all rooted in female power.

Sarah's resistance to Pharaoh and Avimelech also drew on the ability to resist any mixture of good and bad, taking out only the good in the end - the sparks of Kedusha from Mitzrayim through the gifts that were given to her husband because of her, ולאברהם הטיב בעבורה.

The second generation appeared to be just the opposite. Yitzchak had the Midah of Gevurah, and Eliezer specifically searched for a Baalas Chesed to complement this. Eliezer judged all of Rivka's character based on whether she gave the camels to drink. An average person may not even notice that the camels were thirsty, or would just as soon entrust this to one of Eliezer's entourage.

Rivka went well beyond the original minimal request. Eliezer asked for a bit of water; she quenched all his thirst. He said “from your jug” – don’t trouble yourself to go to the well, but she went anyway, giving not only to him but to all his camels until they, too, were satisfied. This is the way of a person with a whole and complete character – he is not moved to just do what he has to. He goes as far as he can to reach perfection in every detail.

Eliezer saw one other striking thing: the Parsha referred to Eliezer throughout as “the servant”. Rivka, though, called him אָדֹנָי. She related to everyone in such a way that it built them up, empowering and inspiring them to not only feel good but to reach greater heights.

Rivka entered Sarah’s tent. When Sarah was alive, her candle burned from one Shabbos eve to the next, her blessing was found in the dough (the mitzvah of Challah), and the cloud of the Shechinah continuously hovered over the tent from the purity of keeping the laws of family purity. Sarah was so complete that she was a microcosm of the entire spiritual scope of the Avos. The Avos, in turn, were a microcosm of the whole world. Another such microcosm was the Mishkan, and it is therefore no surprise that we see these same elements, Menorah, Lechem HaPanim, and the resting of the Shechina, in the Mishkan as well. These things, which departed upon Sarah’s death, returned when Rivka entered the tent.

Here it seems that our thesis that the male is the inclusive one while the female sets the boundaries, as we saw in Avraham and Sarah, applied in the reverse with Rivka and Yitzchak. But a deeper look reveals that this was not so.

Eliezer went to Bavel to take this Shidduch. Bavel is the place where good and evil is Balul – mixed up, where in fact the original nations lost their common language during the building of Migdal Bavel. In this milieu, Rivka was taught nothing. Rivka had to intuit her values, all the while living with her brother Lavan, meaning white, i.e. he who whitewashed falsehood to look like truth. It was such a person who had to occupy Sarah’s tent, who was chosen using Sarah’s Midah – דְּרִשָּׁה – צִמְרָה וּפְשִׁתִּים.

Similarly, it was Rivka who ultimately sorted the “wool” of Yaakov out from the “flax” of Eisav, ensuring that Yaakov took Eisav’s Brachos and pushing Eisav outside of the boundaries of the Jewish people.

Sarah and Rivka’s giving was the giving of the womb. A womb is an enveloping place. It provides a total environment: oxygen, food, and warmth. It sets all the boundaries and limits. Sarah was so great in her women’s Chesed that she was miraculously given a womb where there was none. And it was this womb that began the future of the Jewish people.

Sarah’s very name came from the word to rule over – to determine the parameters. She was buried in the Cave of Patriarchs next to Adam and Chava. This cave is half-way between this world and Gan Eiden. Sarah’s soul was in total harmony with this.

Sarah’s legacy is completed by others. Avraham Avinu sent the children of Hagar away with gifts, after which the Torah announces: *And these are the days of Avraham’s life, etc:* Yishmael does Teshuva, recognizing Yitzchak as the spiritual heir of his father. Sarah’s victory is complete. The very next Parsha is called תּוֹלְדוֹת – Yitzchak, Sarah’s miracle child, is mentioned as Avraham’s exclusive progeny. We now see why all of these events truly belong in the Parsha called *The Life of Sarah* even though they occurred after her death.

תולדות

Rome and Jerusalem

Rome and Jerusalem, Eisav and Yaakov: see how the history of the world turns on these two. On the one side is Eisav, the Western World, with its powerful legacy of secular humanism - the strongest civilization on earth for two thousand years. For all this time, the Jewish Nation, a tiny nation of tenacious monotheists, striving to bring history to its completion through the Messianic era, has been in Galus EDOM under Eisav's rule. Galus is ultimately an unnatural phenomenon and, being unnatural, it is destined to end. Neither the Shechina nor the Jewish people belong in Galus. Perforce the laws of spiritual nature will prevail to end our exile. Geulah is no mere wish or hope; it is the intrinsic natural forces of history that will drive the world to this resolution, for only that which is natural has continuity.

As twins from the same drop of semen, the same spiritual root, the fates of these two civilizations are inextricably linked: when one rises the other falls. Locked into the same civilization energy, each can survive only at the expense of the other. No wonder the Western World has been the seat of the most horrific anti-Semitism for thousands of years. Hitler had it right when he stated that it was either us or them.

There was one opportunity for things to be different. Yaakov and Eisav could have become one whole, each giving birth to 6 of the 12 tribes. True: Eisav had a lot of evil mixed up in him, but it was just this possibility of sorting out the good from the evil that would have allowed him to be Metaken the Cheit of Adam HaRishon.

Our story begins when Rivka, after being barren for so long, becomes pregnant. She soon realizes, however, that something is horribly wrong. She passes a house of idol worship and she feels the fetus striving towards there. She passes a Torah house of learning, and she feels the same thing. Could it be opposite twins? She discounts this because in the previous generation the *Tofel*, Yishmael, was born first and then the pure Yitzchak. Could it be that she is carrying some kind of beast-man, both righteous and evil all in one? She is in such acute discomfort that she does an about turn. After all her prayers for a child she would rather not be pregnant.

The children are born, and the crisis appears to be over. Eisav and Yaakov both show interest in their Torah and their Mitzvos. But, as soon as Eisav turns 13 he shows his true colors.

Remarkably, Eisav keeps up an external appearance of holiness in front of his father, asking all kinds of religious questions, year in and year out, for Yitzchak's entire lifetime. He genuinely honors his father in a way that was to model a standard for all generations to come. If Eisav is evil then evil is an awfully complicated, and sometimes hidden, thing.

Yaakov, on the other hand, is naturally a Tam, straightforward, honest and holy. Yet, he spends his whole life having to deal with situations that demand of him to understand the deviousness of the Eisavs and the Lavans around him, and out-trick and out-sophisticate them without losing a drop of his original Temimus and purity.

All along, Rivka and Yitzchak have a parental dispute about the nature of Eisav. Rivka did not share the prophetic information concerning the twins which she had received during her pregnancy, and, to some degree, Yitzchak was fooled by Eisav's carefully choreographed 'frumkeit', even projecting some of his own qualities onto Eisav. Yet Yitzchak definitely understood that Yaakov, his Torah-learning boy, was the core future of the Jewish nation. Both parents agreed that Eisav's power lay in his doing, עשו from the word עושה. Even Yitzchak took note of the fact that this led to

a loss of refinement and use of rough language. The question was whether his prowess could be absorbed into the Jewish nation.

Yitzchak experienced the extraordinary lengths of love which Eisav went to serve him, something he did not see from the scholarly Yaakov, and saw that here lay the genuine seeds of greatness. Could a blessing from Yitzchak be the eye opener for Eisav to realize his purpose - ורב יעבוד צעיר - to conquer the Holy Land, run its economy and free Yaakov and his descendents to dedicate their lives to scholarship? Could then Eisav and Yaakov not be considered as one unity so that even Yaakov's earthly blessings would go through Eisav? There could be no greater privilege for Eisav, a fact that was recognized by the Roman general Antoninus in his relationship with Rebbe. In fact, both Rebbe Akiva and Rebbe Meir descended from Roman nobility, i.e. from Eisav, whose potential greatness in the Oral Law was expressed by his power of ציד בפיו. The Oral Law is the final bringing down of the Torah, the application of the Torah to the world of action – just what Yitzchak saw would complement Yaakov's more abstract Torah learning.

At this critical juncture, the very parameters of the Jewish people were being defined. It was Rivka, the woman, who determined our future, as had similarly occurred with the previous dispute between Avraham and Sarah concerning Yishmael. Rivka saw that Eisav had no interest in serving Yaakov. He wanted to be the leader. This would have been disastrous for the Jewish people, with the scientists and businessmen leading the Torah scholars and not the other way around. By the time Yitzchak lay on his deathbed, the potential of this magnificent soul still remained mainly superficial and unintegrated – ציד בפיו. Had Rivka not been told by G-d Himself that these two were destined to be two great, separate nations from the very outset?

Rivka dressed up Yaakov, who proceeded to take Eisav's blessings, forever more defining the two brothers as separate, each a progenitor of their respective, separate nations.

The classic description of Eisav is like a swine, which has a split hoof but does not chew the cud. Its external appearance is one of holiness, and it therefore extends its feet outwards when lying down (unlike most animals), as if to show off its purity, while really it is hiding the fact that it does not chew the cud. Rome was the classic Eisav paradigm. To look at its kingdom was breath-taking. Roman architecture and buildings, streets, sewage systems and stadiums are legendary. Roman law was so brilliant that all Western legal systems are based on it. But wait! Go inside one of those magnificent stadiums and you would witness people being thrown to the lions for other people's pleasure. The powerful Roman mind was best applied to its army, which became one big killing machine. The Roman roads were filled with Jewish and other blood. In the end, the Romans failed and disappeared because they used their greatness to serve themselves rather than G-d. There was nothing that the Roman mind did not claim to be masters in, nothing that they did not try to subjugate to their own kingdom. Therein lay their great destructiveness and ultimately their destruction. This is the frightening lesson of Eisav.

The Mashiach will be a descendent of Yaakov, not Eisav, and will be a fulfillment of Yaakov's hand reaching out to grab the heel of Eisav's foot in order to go first and be the leader. However, Eisav's potential has to be related to even then. What Eisav had relegated to his heel had to be grabbed and incorporated into the Messianic era, for Eisav the doer had what Yaakov, the deep man of Torah thought, needed – the possibility of applying truth into this world of action. In the end, this too will become a part of the Jewish legacy.

Yitzchak

Yitzchak is a mysterious personality. The Chumash talks less about him than it does about the other Avos, Avraham and Yaakov. This is because Yitzchak was the personification of Gevurah – of inner strength rooted in his tremendous awe of G-d. It was just this awe of G-d that gave Yitzchak his awesome power of Avodah, and in particular, of prayer. When Yitzchak goes to “talk in the field” it is with G-d.

Avraham Avinu’s Chesed led him to be action- and outward-orientated; Yitzchak’s trait led him to set boundaries, to withdraw out of fear that his actions would be negative. Gevurah is a contracting Midah, of defining what is good and within the boundaries and what is not good and outside of the boundaries. It allows for the purifying of the soul by keeping all impurities at bay. This quality gives us the spiritual energy and strength for סור מרע, not to transgress the negative commandments, just as Avraham’s love of G-d is the source of our strength to fulfill the positive commandments.

Yitzchak limited his actions in fear of being imperfect in his doing the Will of G-d. Thus, while we see that Avraham Avinu built a Bamah to G-d several times throughout his lifetime, we only see Yitzchak doing this much later in his life. Yitzchak's immediate reaction to difficulties was to consider his own imperfections and to presume that he was not worthy of G-d’s blessings. Only when G-d gave him a clear sign that he merited G-d’s Bracha did Yitzchak build an altar to G-d.

Why did Yitzchak concentrate on Gevurah? He saw that all the tens of thousands of converts that his father had brought close had simply disappeared. He understood that unless there would be a solid, inner personal strength, there would be nothing to sustain the great spiritual achievements of man. Avraham’s whole essence was to give to others. Yitzchak realized that if he did not give to himself he would not be able to give to others either. Avraham Avinu also understood this, giving over all of his future spiritual legacy to Yitzchak.

Yitzchak’s personal life-circumstances reflected his internal development. He was born in the shadow of his father’s great success, wealth and fame. But, his life grew progressively more challenging as he grew up, and he died with dimmed eyes and poor vision, alienated from the rest of the world – alone in his struggle to maintain the flame of Monotheism.

Yitzchak’s attributes led him to introduce the power of the afternoon Mincha prayer. Mincha is a time when the sun has passed its zenith and is on its way to setting. Yitschak’s Mincha was a preparation for the Golus of the Jewish people centuries later. This, too, was a time of our setting sun. But, Yitzchak had already set up the patterns of spirituality, of fortitude and inner strength, that would allow us to pull through.

Yitzchak provided a framework for things. Just as G-d’s Will in creating the world required laws of nature to hold and express that Will, so too the Torah required Yitzchak’s Gevurah. Avraham began the recognition of G-d and a deep understanding of His Will; sitting in a yeshiva of one, Yitzchak built on that.

Yitzchak seemed to deliberately repeat the history of his father, visiting the same places and undergoing the same events while adding a component of Gevurah. Avraham Avinu went to Egypt when there was famine, and Yitzchak’s instinct was to do the same (although G-d stopped him). Yitzchak re-dug the same wells (of Torah) which his father had originally dug. He, like his father, told Avimelech that his wife was his sister. So, too, he made a covenant with Avimelech. All of this was done in order to ensure that the work of his father had continuity and permanence.

Hence Eliezer specifically looked for signs of Chesed in choosing Rivka to combine with Yitzchak's Gevurah in a new synthesis for the next generation. In fact, it was only by drawing on the giving which he inherited from his father that Yitzchak was able to overcome the limiting and defining realities of his Midah and to do that ultimate Chesed, the granting of life to another, i.e. having children.

The question should be asked, why did Yitzchak's quality not come first? Would it not have been better if Avraham would first have engaged in his outreach already with Yitzchak's character trait of inner self-restraint, of providing boundaries and spiritual structures to contain all the hub of spiritual activity?

We face a similar question with the Ten Commandments. The First Commandment declares G-d to be *the Lord your G-d*, and only afterwards does the second of the Ten Commandments tell us not serve idols. Logically, we should have first thrown out our idols before committing to G-d. How can we accept G-d with our idols still in our house? However, it would seem that it is not possible to get rid of our idols if we would simply leave a vacuum. First we need to fill ourselves up with G-d and only then can we find the strength to get rid of our idols. Hence Avraham had to precede Yitzchak in his work, first teaching us love of G-d and only then setting boundaries and parameters.

Avraham Avinu sifted his purity. Lot and Yishmael took the impurities of Avraham, created their own nations, and left what was pure in Yitzchak. From then onwards, every descendent of Yitzchak has a permanent and deeply ingrained sense of G-d's existence – a gift and an inheritance from Avraham Avinu. Avraham was תחילה לגרים – he had to make radical changes in his life, tantamount to a conversion, in order to commit to the G-d-idea. Avraham's vision was that his descendents would never have to struggle to achieve the G-d-idea as he did, that they should be born with an inherent potential for holiness that would allow them easy access to belief in G-d. When Yitzchak was born, he was circumcised on the eighth day and Avraham's dream was seemingly fulfilled. From then on it was still possible to abandon the G-d-idea, but only as an active decision after birth, as happened with Eisav. Even then, Eisav is called a Yisrael Mumar – a denying Israelite – as even he was not able to get rid of his inheritance from Avraham and Yitzchak.

By fortifying himself against all evil, Yitzchak was trying to create a permanent reality of holiness which could never be changed. By sifting out the last remnants of impurity which went to Eisav, Yitzchak was able to create a lineage through Yaakov that was totally pure.

Just as Avraham Avinu was tested to go against his nature, so too, Yitzchak's test went against his nature.

In that sense, the Akeidah – giving himself to be bound and killed for the sake of G-d – was not uniquely against his character – on the contrary, he seemed well-suited for such a challenge, and therefore the Akeidah is specifically called Avraham Avinu's test. However, although the test was primarily Avraham's, Yitzchak was not able to sacrifice himself on the altar based on his Yirah alone. He had to draw on his love for G-d, Avraham Avinu's Midah, to pass his challenge. And so ילכו שניהם יחדו – Avraham and Yitzchak walked together, each having acquired the other's Midah.

Yaakov – Truth in a Messy World

Truth, אמת, is comprised of the first, middle and last letters of the alphabet: stable, well-based and all-inclusive. Falsehood, שקר, is comprised of 3 letters in a row. If we take away one letter of the truth, the א, we are left with the word מת, death. It all looks so obvious, so sensible to make a choice for truth. But this world is a messy place, and, in a post-Cheit world, truth and non-truth are mixed up.

Moreover, one can be very creative with falsehood. There are infinite varieties of lies, but only one truth. This is another reason why the letters שקר are next to each other (and those of אמת span the alphabet). Very clever people have spent their whole lives living a lie, sometimes even willing to die for it. How can one know through all the confusion that it is indeed truth which he has discovered?

In the end, we can discover truth through all the thickets of confusion because of its lasting quality. Even when it is under great siege, it eventually emerges victorious. Since falsehood by its very definition is unreal, it cannot endure.

No one symbolizes a commitment to truth more than Yaakov Avinu. Yaakov Avinu's whole Midah is to be straight, honest and true. His second name is Yisrael, *Yashar Kel*: straight with G-d. But he is also Yaakov (from עקב, a heel), holding onto the heels of his brother and ready to deal with the manipulations and dishonesty of others. In fact, he had to deal with deception his whole life and very often engage in it himself. Yaakov teaches us when and where deception for the sake of truth can be employed. Drawing the line here is exceptionally complex - the last letter of truth, the ת, is right next to the first letter of falsehood, the ש. There is but a hairsbreadth separating them, separating truth from falsehood.

Yaakov surely had no interest in this world at all, except as a vehicle to bring him to the next world. Yet, all of Yaakov's 'trickery' appears to further this-worldly aims, as in recovering his due from Lavan or gaining the birthright from Eisav.

Yaakov has to deal with Eisav regarding the birthright on three occasion. He is born after Eisav, though clutching his heels. He then 'buys' the birthright for a pot of lentil soup. Finally, he 'steals' the blessings that Yitzchak wants to give to Eisav, and Eisav points out that Yaakov's whole name seems to signify some kind of treachery.

From this last incident we learn that deception is sometimes unavoidable. Yaakov is forced into a situation to take the blessings which are truly his all along. However, there are rules of deception. Firstly, there must be no choice, no conceivable way of achieving this through honest means. Secondly, one has to feel great pain at not being able to be absolutely truthful. Thirdly, one has to minimize the deception. Finally, one has to know that, despite following all the rules, there will still be a spiritual price to be paid.

Yaakov engages in this final act of clear deception with the greatest reluctance. "*Perhaps my Father will feel me*" (כז יב: אולי ימשנו אבי) he says to his mother, hoping that his father would reveal the deception and that he, Yaakov, would not get away with it. Rivka has to force him, backed by the full force of her prophecy, crying and bent over, to go along with the deception.

Yaakov deliberately does things slowly. Faced with the great urgency of going into his father before Eisav returns, it seems as if he is trying to fail. Once he enters to his father, he desperately tries to minimize the element of deception by being extremely careful with his words so that as much truth as possible is maintained. And all the time he is in great pain that such a thing has to be done at all. One who does not feel the pain of deception cannot even begin to think about doing such a thing.

Later, Yaakov himself is taken in. Despite anticipating this and taking steps to avoid the deception, Leah masquerades as Rochel, and Yaakov is reminded of his own supplanting of his brother. Both Rochel and Leah, his chosen wives, cooperate in the deception. There is no one left in his immediate environment, it seems, who can be trusted to be honest, open and straight. Leah defends her behavior as Midah Keneged Midah, detailing for Yaakov his deception in stealing Eisav's blessing.

Yaakov is now thrust into the hands of the master manipulator, a man whose very name, Lavan – 'white', denotes the whitewashing of reality so that half-lies and untruths could all be coated with the glossy look of truth. From the very first meeting, day in and day out, a thousand manipulations a day, Yaakov faces Lavan's world: והחליף את משכרתי עשרת מנים – *And he changed my wages tens of times.*

Yaakov remains faithful and true through all this. He doesn't do it by quietly withdrawing to live the honest life. Rather, he remains honest in the thick of daily deception, cheating and downright nastiness. He says to his wives: *And you have known that I have served your father with all my might.*

And when Yaakov finally makes up his earnings by taking all the spotted and striped sheep, although he has to be cunning, he remains totally honest. The deal is agreed upon in advance and Lavan goes so far as to hide any spotted or striped sheep so that Yaakov will again come out empty-handed. Yaakov shows that a person often has to be cunning to remain truthful, and that איש תם יושב אוהלים, *A straight-forward person, dwelling in the tent (of scholarship)*, does not mean someone who is naive and can be taken in. Rather, it refers to someone who will act in the most straightforward fashion which this messy world allows in order to achieve Emes.

We see such messiness when Yaakov flees from Lavan - ויגנוב יעקוב את לב לבן - הארמי על בלי הגיד לו כי בורח הוא. The Torah testifies that he *stole* the heart of Lavan - strong language – by leaving with his wives (and Lavan's daughters) without telling Lavan.

Rochel, too, who started out her relationship with Yaakov by fooling him, now uses those same effects in the cause of Monotheism by stealing Lavan's idols and hiding them.

Yaakov's final showdown is in next week's Parshah, when he first confronts Eisav's guardian angel (שר) who asks him his name. The angel asks Yaakov his name not because he does not know it but rather to get him to define himself as Yaakov, the one who comes to confront the trickery of this world in slyness. Yaakov is asked to recognize the messiness of his mission of truth in this world and then to be shown, by his new name Yisrael, *straight with G-d*, that he has overcome the falsity of this world to achieve a higher level of truth. Or, as Rashi gloriously puts it: No longer will you be called Yaakov – one whose blessings come to you in a roundabout way and with deception; rather (you will be called Yisrael) – someone who receives the blessings openly and in a princely fashion (בשררה). (Yisrael is here interpreted as *he will be a prince to G-d*).

In a messy world of deception, Yaakov stays true and deserves, as a result, to become the third of our three forefathers.

יציא

Yaakov - Sanctifying the World

Avraham Avinu was rooted in the quality of love, a trait which moves us beyond ourselves to act for the sake of the person we love. This led to Avraham's great Chesed to his fellow-man and to his fulfilling the Will of G-d, i.e. the doing of positive actions, ultimately bequeathed to us in the form of the positive commandments.

Yitzchak was rooted in Yiras HaSh-m, a great awe of HaSh-m. This led to a containment of actions, an avoidance of doing the wrong thing. The great Gevura (strength of character) of Yitzchak nourishes the fulfillment of the negative Mitzvos.

Yaakov was left to conquer the area of Reshus where the Halacha does not clearly mandate for us what to do. To harmonize oneself with G-d's Will in this area requires a great sensitivity to truth, Yaakov's trait per excellence. Hence, Yaakov is the one to introduce us to the Maariv (evening) prayer as a permanent way of relating to HaSh-m, though Maariv remained a voluntary prayer (רשות).

Last week's parsha dealt with the development of the lower levels of this truth, lower only relative to what Yaakov would ultimately achieve. Yaakov, as we saw, was forced into the situation of taking Eisav's blessings through an act of deviousness, all the while nurturing his trait of truth. This trait is further challenged in this week's Parsha when Yaakov confronts the daily manipulations of the scheming Lavan. We see it come through when he approaches total strangers in their own country and questions their right, as shepherds, to knock off early. This is not a wise thing to do, as then, like now, the Middle East was not a friendly place; but his sense of truth is outraged even when one stranger was being dishonest to another.

In Yaakov's prophetic dream of the ladder we see a new level of truth. Up until then, Yaakov's trait had been tested by the obvious dishonesty, scheming and falsehood of others. Now, the challenge was to see truth as a unifying force for the whole world.

To do this, Yaakov had to reach up and go beyond himself in order to be given a model of man, a roadmap and a vision. He dreams of angels going up the ladder to get a picture of the ideal humanity and then coming down and comparing what they find here below.

This dream is Yaakov Avinu's Maamad Har Sinai – his equivalent of standing at Sinai. The very word סולם (ladder) is the numerical equivalent of סיני, and the verse clearly says *והנה די נצב אליו* – *and behold G-d was standing over him*, unprecedented amongst the Avos. The ladder comes all the way down to earth just as G-d at Sinai descended from the mountain. G-d says to Yaakov, “אני די” - *I am G-d* - just as He says in the first of the Ten Commandments “אנכי די אלוקים” – *I am the Lord your G-d*.

All of this happens as Yaakov is about to leave Eretz Yisroel and go into Galus - exile. The purpose of exile is to redeem all sparks of Kedusha from every corner of the earth. To do this, we need to draw on Yaakov's area of Reshus. The area of Reshus requires that we not only engage things that are obviously there for us to sanctify, where the Halacha commands us to do so, but that we also discover Kedusha where none reveals itself obviously. All things (every spark) need to join Yaakov's mission in sanctifying the world.

At the beginning of the Parsha, Yaakov surrounds himself with a bunch of stones to serve as his pillow for the night. Yaakov's overarching spirituality is such that the stones unite. Yaakov rises above the level of fragmentation to a level where all things are combined into a higher unity. Yaakov places the seat of his Neshama, his head, on a group of stones, which are then all attached to him and united thereby. The Jewish people, who emerge from Yaakov, greatly benefit from this holiness: they too are able to draw on this and combine into one body.

This is one of the many ideas of a ladder, a way of using this world to climb to higher spiritual heights. The ladder, then, reflects all of the cosmos, each rung of the ladder representing a different level of spiritual reality. The ladder teaches Yaakov that the physical world and the higher spiritual worlds are parallel.

Not everything can be included in this unity, however. Yaakov is the founder of Techumim (ויחך את פני העיר – פסיקתא), the making of boundaries for Shabbos – the idea for what can and cannot be included.

This dichotomy, between reaching out and redeeming all Kedusha on the one hand and yet drawing boundaries on the other, expresses itself through Yaakov in many ways. Yaakov goes back for his small forgotten vessels (פחים קטנים), for even these have sparks of Kedusha which need to be redeemed. In contrast, Yaakov not only flees from his father-in-law, but he takes his wages in such a way that there is no direct connection between him and Lavan - the sheep are born and he is rewarded and Yaakov remains a Ger, a stranger (עם לבן גרתי), for his entire fourteen-year sojourn under the same roof as Lavan.

Perhaps it would be correct to say that Yaakov fully engages the physical world, but the world of man requires more caution. Even to engage the physical world one has to be in control and not controlled by it. Yaakov makes a vow in which he asks G-d to give him לחם לאכול ובגד ללבוש – *bread to eat and clothes to wear*. The body requires certain necessities, and that is all that Yaakov wants. Having gotten his bread and clothes, he later says to Eisav that he has everything. The issue is not just one of simplicity but also of faith that the future will provide one's every need. The truth be told, the things we need most are most readily available. We need air the most, and that is most plentiful. Then we need water, and there is plenty of that. We need food, and so on. After the minimum needs of physical sustenance the body can only be nurtured spiritually. The rest is not rooted in necessity and will never fill anyone up.

Yaakov's dream was G-d's lesson to him on how to handle this big, messy world and turn it all into holiness. Fourteen years of complete isolation, immersed in Torah, was great preparation. First one must separate, become holy, and only then go out into the affair of this world (חרונו של עולם - וילך חרונה) At first he is a little confused, bumping into a seeming impenetrable wall of the material world (ויפגע במקום). How does one plunge into such a thing, take it and use it without being consumed? G-d answers Yaakov by showing him the ladder, how one begins from this world and rises through and with all this into the heavens. For the task of creating holiness is in the nitty-gritty of this world. Yaakov wakes up and says *אכן יש ה' במקום הזה*, behold I did not realize before now that this world is full of G-d, and that each moment of dealing with it is precious. He is now able to elevate every foot that he places on the ground – *וישא יעקוב רגליו וילך* – *and Yaakov raised himself on his feet and walked*, and he walks *דסקני ברצה א* - *to the land of the sons of Kedem*, whose first letters stand for *א* *ודשקריית ברות א* – *the sign of the holy covenant*, i.e. the sanctification of passion and desire.

וישלה

Bitachon

If Avraham was the morning and Yitzchak the afternoon, Yaakov was the night. His entire life was a concentration of trials and tribulations: Yosef and the brothers, the rape of Dina, the trickery of Lavan and the hatred of Eisav, famine, the loss of Yosef and Shimon.

Amongst Yaakov's legacies to us is the night service, Maariv. Night is a time of darkness, when we turn inwards. The world becomes an uncertain place, clear truth is hidden and we are forced to rely on our faith. Hence we change the wording *אמת ויציב* – *true and firm* - of the morning prayers to *אמת ואמונה* – *true and with faith* - in the evening.

However, it is just at this point, when we are forced to take a leap of faith beyond that which we can normally see, that we can go much deeper and much further than ever before. Hence the morning Brocha of *אמת ויציב* (*true and firm*) refers only to the past, the Exodus, whereas the evening Brocha of *אמת ואמונה* (*true and with faith*) provides a vision of the ultimate completion of history, the Messianic Era. Yaakov's night comes just before the dawn when light will again shine brightly and clearly.

But first, into the darkness: Yaakov is about to meet his brother Eisav, who has shown every intention of killing him. In preparation for his meeting, Yaakov engages in a triple effort: *gift, prayers* and *preparation for war*. Were not such efforts exaggerated? Where was Yaakov's faith in all of this? Did G-d not guarantee him in last week's Parsha that *הנה אנכי עמך* – *behold I am with you*? Moreover, Yaakov experienced great fear – *ויירא יעקוב מאד ויצר לו*. Surely that shows a lack of faith.

Yaakov did not want to rely on his own righteousness to be saved by G-d, especially in circumstances which, on the surface of things, would require a miracle. We know that Yaakov did the right thing because his actions are held up as a paradigm for how we, and each generation, have to deal with Edom, the anti-Semitism of Western Civilization.

There is a delicate balance between effort and faith, between not relying on miracles on the one hand and not going too far on the other. We need to allow human effort to go as far as it can reasonably go. However, at some point we ought to hand ourselves over to G-d and say to Him, "G-d, I have done my bit; now it is up to You. It is Your decision to decide whether to support and complete my efforts, by miracle if need be, or to deny them." But that is His business; not ours.

The point at which we abandon further efforts and give ourselves over to G-d is a function of our level of faith (trust). We never see that Yaakov is criticized for a lack of faith. Seemingly, he acted just as he was supposed to. To understand this, it would be helpful to contrast Yaakov's faith with a case of failed faith, Yosef's appeal to the butler to remember him to the king. Yosef's tiny sentence caused a lengthening of his imprisonment by two years, whereas Yaakov is praised for his mighty effort.

One insight into this is that Yaakov Avinu saw G-d's promise to him as a conditional promise – something which could be undermined if his own deeds were not up to scratch. And, being the Tzadik that he was, he was nervous that he was not worthy. Perhaps he had done wrong by annulling his covenant with Lavan. He had not

learned Torah during this period, since he was tending to Lavan's sheep, and he had married two sisters, which was perhaps the wrong thing to do.

Moreover, Eisav had his own merits to counter Yaakov's. Eisav had lived in the Holy Land all this time whereas Yaakov had spent the last 20 years outside of Israel, far from holiness. In addition, Eisav was a master of honoring his parents. Even in his most angry moment, when he committed to killing Yaakov, Eisav was determined to wait until his father would die so as not to cause him any pain. Yaakov, on the other hand, had been absent all this time, and was therefore not able to fulfill this Mitzvah.

For all this, Yaakov was frightened for his life. Faith should not be confused with fearlessness. Too often, those who do not fear are simply being reckless and are confusing their irresponsibility with a holy trait. Yaakov valued his life, and appropriately feared to lose it. Those who go into war without such fear simply do not understand the value of their own life, and certainly not anyone else's.

Yaakov's efforts were in a sensible direction. They reflected the normal range of intelligent actions one would take in a situation like this. Offering gifts, preparing for war and dovening are just what one ought to be doing in this situation. In fact, one thrust of his efforts was in the direction of faith; it involved dovening to HaSh-m. Additionally, Yaakov exerted himself to bring about the result which he knew had been promised to him.

Finally, Yaakov Avinu was committed to any result which G-d had chosen for him. He was not committed to a conditional faith, i.e. "If you save me then I will believe in you." Faith does not mean that you believe that G-d will give you the result that you want. Rather, faith means that you believe that there is nothing circumstantial which takes place in the world and that whatever results is G-d-given and therefore all for the best. This does not mean that Yaakov was not entitled to want a particular result, doven for it, and act towards it. But he did it with the knowledge that he did not control the results. Man was given the *efforts department*. But G-d always retains the *results department*.

Yosef, in contrast, was not simply trying to get out of prison. Yosef had a very definite plan to which he was committed, the fulfillment of his two dreams that he was to become a ruler over his parents and his brothers. This led him to not immediately reveal himself to his brothers and save his father further suffering. In fact, he never sent a message to his father when he was rising in the ranks in Potifar's home. Chevron was, after all, but 6 days away! Yosef was totally convinced that all his efforts should be directed towards fulfilling his two dreams in all their detail. Had he sent a message to his father while he was in Potifar's home, his father would have redeemed him, whatever the cost, and brought him home, and there would have been no dream fulfilled.

Yosef went too far – he was committed to his dreams at all costs. He closed himself to the possibility that G-d may have other plans for him. Yosef's request to the butler was to get a position in the palace, something he knew had to happen as a part of the fulfillment of his dreams. This led him to choose a human for his redemption, rather than G-d. The chances of the butler actually fulfilling Yosef's request were very slim; it would have required a miracle to make this happen. And one shouldn't rely on miracles.

Yosef didn't see it that way. Because he was so holy, he became a king over himself with total control over his evil inclinations. And by being a king over himself, he became a king over the world. No matter how low he appeared to sink, he miraculously emerged to control that very situation. He was sold as a slave to the

country from which no slave ever escapes. Yet, he immediately became the head of the very household in which he was enslaved. Things got worse: Yosef was imprisoned in a dungeon for a crime for which there was a life-sentence. Yet, he emerged in a flash to rule over all of Egypt. He did not get released, go to rehab and then work his way up gradually over twenty years; his holiness simply overcame the impurity of Egypt. The environment yielded to his majesty.

Despite this, Yosef placed himself in the hands of an Egyptian who left prison to serve the king of impurity and was thus totally subservient to it. Yosef overreached, hoping that the impurity itself would help to elevate his own holiness. Yaakov, though, made an effort and then placed himself totally in the hands of G-d.

Yaakov and the Sar shel Eisav

The night before Yaakov's meeting with Eisav, the Sar Shel Eisav, an angel in the form of a man, fights with him until the rise of the morning star. ויותר יעקוב לבדו - Yaakov is left utterly alone: without his family or his possessions; without even the help of the angels that had accompanied him to the border of Chutz LaAretz. He is to face the Sar of Eisav alone. Even the normal spiritual help, the Siyata Dishmaya, leaves him. In this time of darkness he has only his own inner resources to call on. This is just what a Nisayon is – a person finds himself stripped of all outside help, heavenly or earthly, and must face his challenge unaided.

Yaakov defeats the angel, who confirms that the blessings of the firstborn are indeed his, and receives a new name, ישראל. Yaakov goes so far as to incorporate the evil of the angel and to harness it as a force of good. Yet, Yaakov does not emerge from the battle unscathed. The angel injures him in his thigh, and from then onwards the Jews are prohibited from eating the Gid HaNashe, the sciatic tendon.

It is clear that all of this is pregnant with intense symbolism, lessons which are meant for the ages. Both the victory and the injury reflect the deep lessons of history and faith for every generation.

Let us start with the victory over the angel:

The angels were created on the second day of creation. On the first day it says, "And it was evening and it was morning, *one* day." The word "one", and not "first", is used because G-d's unity was still manifest on the first day. The things that were created were all lifeless and therefore automatically and totally fulfilled the Will of their Creator. But, the second day was by its very nature something which comes after the first, the idea that after the first there are others as well. Therefore, on the second day angels were created, separate beings, seemingly, from the Creator.

ויותר יעקוב לבדו – *And Yaakov was left alone* - Yaakov reaches a level where there is only לבדו - *Alone*. The level of לבדו is the realization that G-d is One in the world just as He was on the first day before the angels were created.

It is to remove Yaakov from this exalted level that causes the Sar of Eisav to battle with him. The word used for this struggle is ויאבק, which is related to the word אבק, dust. Dust covers and blurs, and Eisav's Sar comes to blur Yaakov's spirituality. Later, Eisav's grandchild Amalek dedicates his life to this task – כי יד על כס קה – Amalek places his hand on the seat of the Almighty to cover it and hide it.

But Yaakov is above all of this – above any level where separation from G-d's unity takes place, and therefore he is able to subdue the angel. All of Yaakov's life is to prove the great unity of truth. When Yaakov sleeps on the stones that Avraham built for the Akeidas Yitzchak, they turn into one stone. The ladder, too, showed this. Each rung of the ladder was both a barrier preventing further growth, but, if overcome, was also a rung to be stood on, a springboard for getting closer to the truth.

Eisav battled this truth. ויאבק from אבק - the dust that darkens and confuses. The long history of anti-Semitism is testimony to the ghastly depths this battle has taken us. But ויאבק is also related to חבוק, the embrace of assimilation and intermarriage. Eisav wages his battle in this way as well. It is interesting that the Sages tell us that גידים have no taste, as we will not feel (taste) the damage of this kind of battle.

Yaakov prepared the Jewish nation to survive these onslaughts: וירא כי לא יכול לו, but it will not emerge unscathed, as the thigh is damaged in the process. Klal

Yisrael limps along, but we continue to move forward. The Gid is a symbol of hope, for that will be the extent of our injury. And, in the end, our limp will be cured. יעקוב survives by barely grabbing on to the heel of history; but he is also ישראל, straight with G-d (ישר קל), whose spiritual core is above all of this. ישראל is the Gematriah of יעקוב ושטן, for, when Yaakov defeats the angel, he absorbs all within him as well and uses it for the good. The battle will be long and hard - Yaakov only defeats the enemy at the end of the night. But, the battle is won in the end. And, in fact, just as Eisav's angel blesses Yaakov, Eisav himself will do so at the end of days.

וישב

Yosef and His Brothers

Just at the time that Yaakov felt he could look satisfactorily on his spiritual achievements as being complete, to twelve pure lineages that formed a perfect spiritual whole, Yosef and his brothers have their dispute. At first, none of the brothers merit to see the big picture with accuracy. They certainly don't see how, in the middle of this conflict, the ancestor of the Mashiach is born of a most unusual union of Yehuda with Tamar, right under their noses.

The Torah says, "These are the generations of Yaakov", and then the verse mentions only Yosef, etc. Seemingly, the existence of the other tribes works through Yosef. It is Yosef whose birth allows Yaakov to break loose from Lavan. It is Yosef who feeds Yaakov and his family in Egypt and who even has the spiritual radiance of his father.

This is reinforced by the fact that the purpose of something is conceived first but achieved last. Hence, the first born of Rochel, Yosef, is seen by Yaakov as the potential future leader of the Jewish people. (Similarly, Yaakov is born after Eisav and Yitzchak after Yishmael).

It was Leah, in fact, who was originally supposed to have had Yosef. Had this happened, Yosef would have been strong enough to create the final Tikun Olam in his generation. But Leah judges herself and the world by the highest standards, the attribute of justice and, by these standards the world was not yet ready for the final redemption. As an act of mercy, Leah decides to leave Yosef to Rochel, and she has Dinah (from the word Din - judgment) instead.

Leah and her children operate at a much deeper level than we see on the surface, a fact that made Leah appear to be Eisav's marriage partner when she actually had no spiritual connection with him at all. In this world, Rochel is the עקרת הבית – the center of the home, but ultimately Yaakov is buried next to Leah, not Rochel. It is she who is the עקרת הבית at a deeper level. But this is so hidden that even after Rochel dies, Yaakov moves his bed to Rochel's maidservant, prompting Reuven, who knows who his mother really is, to attempt to disrupt this move.

And so, in this revealed world the Malchus is transferred by Yaakov to Yosef, who wants to impose his vision of how to serve G-d on his brothers. He sees a tremendous unity problem threatening the future of the Jewish people. For each of the brothers was so whole and complete that they were all self-contained. Yosef, whose very name means to gather, to unite all forces, felt he could overcome this. But, the brothers resent his dreams and reject his leadership. As a result, the option of his being the uniter lapses and each one goes his separate way. This seems tragic, but it is exactly what G-d wanted to happen. For it is necessary for Yosef to be sent to Egypt first in order to prepare the way for the later Egyptian exile.

Yosef's brothers call him a בעל החלומות, a dreamer, and in some respect they are right. For, Yosef only rules in very this-worldly terms, and the real מלכות is ultimately entrusted to the descendents of Yehuda, a son of Leah. Yehuda seems to experience a similar hiding of G-d's Face to Yosef. Both face seductions of women who see greatness emerging from the union. In fact, their cases are juxtaposed to stress the similarities. But what a difference in their outcomes! Yosef, the powerful Tzadik, has total control of his own desires. He is finally about to give in and approaches Potifar's house to have relations with his wife, when an image of his

father gives him the final strength to hold back. Yehuda, on the other hand, gives in to Tamar and becomes the archetype Baal Teshuva.

Rochel's children provide us with a model of perfection, so long as we maintain that level, seemingly through our own efforts. But it is Leah who goes deeper by allowing a Jew to overcome evil even after he has fallen victim to it. This is Yehuda's (and Reuven's) secret of Teshuva. Yehuda, the Baal Teshuva, shows a deeper recognition that on our own we are nothing and that in the end it is all G-d. The Tzadik seemingly does it on his own while the Baal Teshuvah knows that he failed and turns to G-d to help him.

Spiritually, the brothers are at the same level, but their different approaches to serving G-d lead to different historical roles. The trouble is that the brothers feel that Yosef is using his greatness to exclude them from the spiritual heritage of their forefathers. Were they then to become another Yishmael and Eisav? The brothers decide that Yosef is a *גדור*, somebody who is pursuing them to their spiritual death, and deserves to die. They are certain that they, as sons of Yaakov, are spiritually sound. If Yosef could not recognize this, that was a part of his weakness as a dreamer. They feel that his error lay not in delusion but in not seeing far enough – into the Messianic world when all of our current realities will be shown to be but whiffs of dreams. But, just to be sure, they would allow the forces of nature to kill him, the snakes and scorpions in the pit, rather than do it with their own hands. When they see Yosef survive the pit they drop the idea of murder and sell him into slavery instead.

Yosef HaTzadik is convinced that his way of serving G-d is what is needed for everyone. *Zos Asu VeChiyu* – “Do this and you will be spiritually alive”, he tells his brothers (when they still think he is a foreign ruler of Egypt) *Ki Ani Yareh Elokim*, “for I am close to G-d, and fear him”. Yosef believes this so deeply that he tries to break the brothers' power. He ties up Shimon, separating him from Levi, his old partner in killing Shechem. He tries to co-opt Binyamin and separate him from the brothers. For their own sakes, and for the sake of the future of the Jewish people, the brothers must bow down to Yosef and yield to his approach to things.

Yosef does not achieve all that he wants to, but his influence as the arch-type Tzadik lives on. Like the Avos, his soul is big enough to encompass the entire Jewish People – hence one of the names of the Jewish People to this day is *שארית יוסף*, and it is his strength which allows us to stand up to the long hellish onslaught of Eisav through the centuries. In the end, our spark of eternity will be too much for Eisav and he will be defeated by a descendent of Yosef, Mashiach ben Yosef. The Messianic Era will enter through a descendent of Yehuda, Mashiach ben Dovid, and the tension between the different Avoda-approaches of Yosef and Yehuda will be completely resolved.

The beginnings of this rapprochement already take place in the life of the brothers. By the time of the famine, described in next week's Parsha, the brothers already regret the sale of Yosef and see the famine as an opportunity to go and recover him. They all accept collective blame for the misfortune that seems to befall them after Shimon gets tied up. From there, it is one long march to the future unity of the Jewish people, a people whose combined Kedusha is unstoppable.

Providence's Gentle Hand

G-d has a plan for the Jewish people, and the tribes are but messengers to fulfill the Divine Will. They can fulfill this consciously and willingly, or unwittingly, and they can even consciously refuse to do G-d's beckoning. G-d, however, has an unlimited number of ways in which He can get things done, and no human choice can get in the way. The brothers sell Yosef as a slave. That same situation serves as the springboard for him to become a king, which was G-d's intention all along.

Yaakov's favoritism to Yosef, Yosef's dreams, the brothers selling him into slavery, etc. are all used by G-d to achieve His ends. It seems like idiocy that Yosef would nurture such hatred by sharing his dreams, but Yosef holds that they are a prophecy and that he is bound to reveal them. This is just what G-d wants.

Yaakov sends Yosef to go look up the brothers, although he surely knows of their feelings towards him. Yaakov does so MeEmek Chevron, from the depths of Chevron, i.e. his grandfather who is buried in Chevron. He is inspired to push history towards what G-d had told his grandfather.

Yosef, too, plays his role. Yosef gets lost and has many excuses to turn back. But, his great commitment to fulfilling his father's wishes pushes him on. Just then, he 'happens' to meet a stranger, and presumes that he would know where his brothers are. World history will not be thrown off track because one man loses his way. The stranger is Gavriel, a messenger sent to do G-d's Will.

Yosef decides that he will risk everything in his relationship with his brothers. For, without the unity of the tribes, all is lost anyhow. G-d with His Will, Yosef with his thoughts – see how they all come together.

Yosef meets his brothers, who subsequently decide to sell him instead of killing him. It 'happens' that a caravan of Yishmaelim passes 'just then', and the deed is done. Normally, such caravans carry foul-smelling substances, tar and the like. But, 'it happens' that this caravan is carrying sweet spices, in order that Yosef HaTzadik will be transported to Egypt in the maximum of comfort.

Yosef is sold to Potifar and quickly rises to head his house. Had Yaakov known that Yosef was still alive, he would have redeemed Yosef and the exile of the family to Egypt would have required a different route. So, G-d Himself joins the brothers in imposing an oath of silence on each and every one of them, and Yaakov, who had a vision of all of history right until the end of days, does not even know the basic facts concerning his own son.

Yosef resists the wife of Potifar and gets thrown into a cell in Egypt. It 'just so happens' that two people who know all the customs of the crown become his bedfellows. They are able to teach him what he needs to know to prepare himself for his rule of Egypt. They only dream their dreams just before they leave so that the baker would not be upset with him for his negative interpretation of his dream and continue to teach him.

The Chumash stresses the rapidity of events – the king has two dreams, perfectly timed, and Yosef is hurried from his pit into the Royal Chamber. In one meeting, it seems, Yosef becomes second only to Pharaoh, a stranger rocketed, against all protocol, to the top. There he stays, for 80 long years, longer than any ruler mentioned in Tanach.

All of this happens Midah Kineged Midah: For saying that his brothers ate the limb of a living creature, Yosef's garment gets soaked in blood and presented to his father; for saying that the sons of Leah lauded it over their other brothers, he gets sold

into slavery; and for saying that they were involved in licentiousness, the wife of Potifar attempts to seduce him.

Later, the brothers suffer their own Midah Kineged Midah just for being the instrument of Yosef's Midah Kineged Midah and selling him to slavery. When Yosef, ruler of Egypt, has yet to reveal himself to his brothers, they recognize that they are now in the pit of Egypt because they mercilessly threw their brother into a pit.

The irony is that the very attempts to rid themselves of their brother are used by G-d to elevate Yosef to be ruler. Their combined efforts to damage him were in vain. I, in turn (he tells them), am powerless to hurt you against His Will. Neither of us can play G-d. And, should you be distressed that you were an instrument of my pain, since G-d caused everything to turn out alright in the end, He will consider in your merit, אלוקים חשבה לטובה, despite your original intentions to harm me. And since this is G-d's Way of looking at things, it perforce is mine as well. Had Yosef himself not been the instrument to teach them this lesson, G-d would find other Shlichim.

Yosef's ability to forgive was rooted in his acute perception of G-d's Hashgacha. Had he tried to be superhuman, to just forgive and move on, the bitterness of those long and torturous years, ending with a murder attempt, would have welled up within him. Once he understood that this was all part of G-d's plan, he was able to achieve greatness at that moment.

Yosef's brothers and fathers, who should have been brought down to Egypt in chains to fulfill G-d's promise of exile to Avraham, are now brought down with all manner of royalty. For Yosef, this was the way to fulfill his two dreams; for G-d, it was but another act of Hashgacha.

And here a new layer of Providence appears. The Avos experience both an exile and redemption that sets up the patterns of exile and redemption for the later generations. Just as the final redemption will initially be hidden, so too, the outset of this redemption, the birth and life of the sons of Yaakov, is clouded by a conflict between them. Because of this, none of the brothers, despite their great spiritual level, merit to see the big picture with accuracy.

The initial exile began with Yitzchak Avinu. Yitzchak's life grew progressively more challenging as he grew older, and he died with dimmed eyes, alone in his struggle to maintain the flame of Monotheism. His fortitude and faith throughout his suffering in later life set up the patterns of spirituality that was a preparation for the Jewish people in exile.

With Yaakov, the exile deepened in intensity. Yaakov's life was one long difficulty. The sun had now set; it was night. Yaakov introduced Maariv. Yaakov went into Egypt knowing that he was setting up the exile for his people. Upon his death, the eyes and hearts of the Jewish people began to be blocked up (סתומה), and even Yaakov's attempt to reveal to the Jewish nation when this whole cycle of exile and repression would end was blocked.

The brothers, however, begin to set up the patterns of redemption. The dark night of Yaakov comes just before the dawn, when the sun will again rise. Hence, in the middle of this conflict the Mashiach is born of a most unusual union of Yehuda with Tamar, while Yosef heralds the ultimate birth of Mashiach ben Yosef.

At the same time that G-d was using Yosef and his brothers to set up the ultimate, spiritual redemption at the end of days, He was using them to set up the physical exile in Egypt. Yosef becomes ruler of Egypt and brings Yaakov and the 70 souls of the Jewish people into that impure land, where he feeds them and looks after

them. Wheels within wheels! We can never fully grasp all the dimensions of G-d's Providence. But, in our Parsha, at least we can gain a glimmer.

Pursuing One's Dreams

Yosef is involved in six dreams: two of his own, one of Pharaoh's butler and baker each, and two of Pharaoh's, all of which he interprets correctly. His own two dreams he pursues, doggedly, to seeming success

We think of dreamers as being somehow relaxed, opened-ended people, not abundant in self-control. The interpretation and pursuit of dreams hardly seems compatible with the tremendous control and discipline which righteousness seems to demand. But those are the wrong kinds of dreamers. Yosef, the archetype Tzadik in total control of his urges, is the right type of dreamer. To his righteousness he adds his vision, his dream; a powerful combination indeed.

Yosef's vision never causes a loss of self-control. In fact, Yosef seems to have such mastery over himself that he becomes master of all around him as well. He enters into Potifar's servitude quickly to be appointed as its ruler. (Any nation that was to rule over the Jews became wealthy and powerful so that the Jews should not suffer the indignity of being ruled by a lowly and impoverished nation. As a result, not only the house of Potifar, but Pharaoh too, through Yosef's rule, becomes the strongest and wealthiest of kings, just as the Babylonians and the Romans do in later times for the same reason.)

Yosef's one weakness remains his dogged pursuit of his dreams. Just because he is so righteous he can see himself as the ruler of his brothers, and all the trouble he gets into over this leaves him unremorseful. He is totally convinced that he must try to make his two dreams come true, seemingly at any price. The trouble with visionaries is that they have great passion, and Yosef is no exception.

Potifar throws Yosef into prison. But, the actual pain and darkness serve as the basis for his future redemption, for, while yet in prison, Providence decrees that the royal butler and baker were to join him so that he can learn from them the ways of the palace. Later, Pharaoh has his dreams: the butler's best efforts to portray Yosef as a simple foreign slave now backfire. If this is true, then his powers of interpretation must be Divine.

Yosef is rushed out of prison to appear to the disturbed king. The Egyptian wise-men were not able to interpret Pharaoh's dreams, for these came from a source of pure spirituality that they were not able to access. As king of Egypt, Pharaoh was destined to be an instrument to facilitate the core historical events that were about to unfold. Hence he dreams now, because it was time for Yosef to come out of prison and become ruler of Egypt. Furthermore, he is not called a king anymore (פרעה המלך) throughout the Parsha (except for one occasion in Yosef's honor), for he is now not even a king over himself – he is rather putty in the hands and plans of the Divine.

Pharaoh is acutely aware of this. He dreams that he is literally walking on the water - a self-made god, but he changes this to state that he was standing next to the water, a humbler description. The dreams have literally shaken him up.

Yosef correctly interprets the dreams despite a Pharaoh who makes these and other deliberate changes and despite the fact that dreams always have extraneous material. But he goes further, delivering G-d's message: "You hide from Me that you dream that you are standing, as a god, by the river. But I am now telling you that I control all your food, your ability to even stay alive." Later, Pharaoh was to

experience his first plague through this same river, and his final demise was also through water by the Red Sea.

Yosef is now ruler of all Egypt. His brothers come to Egypt to buy grain, but also to recover Yosef. They take great pains to stay anonymous and out of sight. Yosef goes to even greater lengths to discover them and imprison Shimon. The dream must be fulfilled, and to do so he must first get Binyamin and then his father to come to Egypt. To do this, Yosef tightens all of Egyptian security. He is willing to have the entire Egyptian food distribution temporarily closed down in order to arrest and terrify his brothers with inside information and accusations. He orders his son to strike the resisting Shimon, and shackles him in front of his brothers. He was convinced that he was on the right track, that getting his family to follow his leadership would allow them all to connect with the type of spirituality that would ensure their future as the Chosen Nation.

Yosef's ascendancy brings seven years of plenty, and not only physically. His righteousness is so powerful that it encompasses all the produce of Egypt, bringing out the sparks of holiness in each grain. The Egyptians try to keep grain as well, but it all rots. It is Yosef's holiness that sustains the grain.

If the lesson of Yosef is *'follow your dreams'*, it is easily understood. Man is called Adam, which comes from the word "to be like" (Adameh-Ledamot) and the word Dimyon (imagination), both of which come, in turn, from the same root. This is because man, Adam, is required to take a leap of imagination to be like His Maker – אדמה לעליון, to imitate the Above (a Maker he cannot see, touch or know in the same way as he knows the rest of the world around him). To be like, לדמות, requires us to use כח הדמיון, our power of imagination. We have to leap to horizons beyond the limits of our own narrow experiences.

To get close to HaSh-m, especially in a time of darkness, we have to dream - to have a vision of things beyond ourselves. But there lies the great danger, for a dream is potentially spurious stuff - a danger of delusion and self-deception.

Yosef does come to rule, as his dreams predicted - his brothers and father do bow down to him, and his approach to serving G-d does seem to come about. But Yosef is careful to understand where this is all coming from. Again and again Yosef stresses to Pharaoh that all of this is from G-d. Yosef himself is taught this lesson when he is released from prison. He goes from darkness to light in a flash, setting a pattern of redemption for the righteous. The Tzadik, who relies so much on his own efforts to achieve greatness, is clearly shown how everything is in G-d's hands.

And yet Yosef's brothers call him a בעל החלומות, a dreamer, and in some respect they were right. For Yosef only ruled in this-worldly terms, and the real royalty was ultimately entrusted to the descendents of Yehuda (King Dovid and his descendents). Yehuda, the Baal Teshuva, shows a deeper recognition that on our own we are nothing and that in the end it is all HaSh-m.

Yosef, in such total control, yielding such power, must walk the fine line between truth and imagination, a line that will determine whether he is truly holy or but an aping of the real thing.

Yosef is right, and there is nothing more empowering than being right, but he is only right according to one level of reality. And he simply could not know that there was more, that there lay a deeper reality which turned him into a mere dreamer. In the Shir HaMaalos before the benching on Shabbos and Yom Tov we say that when we will reach the Messianic Era we will see that before this היינו כחולמים – *we will have been like dreamers*. Our higher, Messianic perspective will be such that what was previously true to us was really just a dream.

Yosef comes to rule, but only in Egypt. The ark comes to rest in his territory, Shiloh, but only until it moves to the site of the Temple. Yosef's descendent becomes Mashiach ben Yosef, but Dovid, descendent of Yehudah, becomes the true Mashiach.

This is the lesson of Yosef: We cannot be limited by the perspectives which end with our noses, but we must be aware that our vision may be utterly wrong, or just not deep enough. And so we must check and check again. Such is man, and such is his challenge.

ויגש

Tochacha, Reconciliation and Galus: Happy endings aren't always so happy

ויגש יהודה: In a dramatic moment, Yehuda approaches Yosef. This is the beginning of a historic reunification of the brothers and the spiritual forces they represent. Yehuda is able to speak gently, and that act of greatness achieves more than 20 battles could have done. As with many situations involving intense human moments, there were multiple layers to this act, for the word Vayigash can mean three things: דין ופיוס ומלחמה. These were all clothed in Yehuda's soothing and conciliatory words.

Yehuda's rapprochement with Yosef leads to a historic, unbreakable pattern, and the unity of the Jewish people was established for all time. Although Yosef was to lead the 10 tribes into oblivion, they too would unite with Yehuda (and Binyamin) at the end of days.

The word ויגש, to approach, appears three times in Tanach. Each one involves an appeal: Avraham appeals to G-d to save the people of Sedom, dovening for רשעים; Yehuda appeals to Yosef, showing that כל ישראל ערבים זה לזה, and Eliyahu appeals to G-d on Har HaCarmel, dovening for a קדוש השם. Three times a day, at the beginning of each Shmoneh Esreh, we take these three steps towards G-d. Hence we see that Yehuda's step was not only towards Yosef but also provides us with a permanent model of how to approach spiritual greatness.

Yehuda learned from Avraham Avinu to take responsibility for others, but he added that it is not only the Gadol HaDor (i.e. Avraham Avinu) who is responsible: we are all responsible for one another.

Yehuda's lesson was learned through pain and tears. For twenty two years he suffered greatly: his wife died, as did his two sons in their youth. Tamar, his daughter-in-law, was stranded, Agunah-like. Yehuda then erroneously sentenced Tamar to death and publicly declared his mistake. Yehuda understood from all of this that there was an unusual תביעה on him in שמים. Since his brothers had listened to him when he stated מה בצע כי נהרג את אחינו, he should have taken further steps to save Yosef completely. Therefore, ויאמר יהודה מה נאמר ומה נדבר: All of Yehuda's pain and all the lessons he had learned from that pain were now encapsulated in his ויגש.

This one historic step generated a beautiful resonance in Yosef and in the entire entourage around him. Yosef could take it no longer. He cleared the room, more to avoid embarrassing his brothers than to have a private family moment, and revealed himself to his brothers with some of the most poignant historic words ever spoken by man: *And Yosef said to his brothers – I am Yosef, is my father still alive?* This was Yosef's entire rebuke, no more. These mighty men, who, had they put their minds to it, could have wreaked military havoc in Egypt, were rendered speechless in front of Yosef.

Implied by Yosef's words was the rebuke: "Knowing how much our father loved me, you must have known the pain you would cause him by getting rid of me. Is he still alive, or did you kill him with the pain you caused him? Even if you thought that your actions towards me were justified, how could you have done such a thing to our father?"

There was no "Look at what you have done" and "how could you?" Rather, "after all you have done to me I remain your brother, with no intention of now exerting my mighty powers over you. In fact, I love you all as much as I love my brother Binyamin." Yosef then kissed each one of the brothers. It is clear that all of this builds for us a new image of what it means to rebuke. In reality, Tochacha does not even mean rebuke. Tochacha is העמדה על הטעות.

Yosef continued this dramatic moment by immediately explaining to the brothers that his intentions were always for their good and never to exclude them. He consoled his brothers, saying, "Although your intention was to get rid of me, G-d used your action to effect what history needed. I was sent by G-d to prepare for your coming to Egypt, which is what you are now going to have to do."

"I cannot send food to you in Canaan, for the Egyptians will suspect me of squirreling away supplies to build up my fortune there, with me to follow. Stay there and you die. On the other hand, the Egyptians would be delighted to welcome people as honorable as you. For knowing that I come from gentry makes it easier for them to accept me as their ruler. So go back, pack up and come where I can take care of you. This is G-d's Will."

Against all natural instincts for cathartic venting, Yosef plowed on with his reconciliation. He asked the brothers to approach him and spoke soothingly and reassuringly. He asserted that his love for them was no less than his love for Binyamin, who had nothing to do with the sale. And finally, he kissed each one in turn and cautioned them against mutual recriminations over his sale.

Yosef's efforts to win his brothers over paid dividends. The brothers now finally recognized each other's worth and nobody seemed to express a grudge. Yet, seventeen years later when Yaakov died, the brothers were suddenly gripped by fear that it was only in honor of his father that Yosef had not taken revenge. They felt the need to lie to him, saying that Yaakov commanded him to be kind to them, and Yosef felt constrained to go through the whole act of reconciliation all over again.

What Yosef said, how he said it, and what he did not say to his brothers comprises part of what Rav Yerucham calls the Shulchan Aruch of the Nifga. A person may be wronged by someone. A terrible injustice may have been done, one that affects the person for the rest of his life, but the Torah teaches us the Yosef lesson, that, despite all, not only is it forbidden to take revenge but one should ensure that the other person feel that you have recognized his remorse and truly forgiven him. Yosef goes further, doing his best to ensure that his brothers understand that he genuinely feels that the whole situation was in his and their best interests, a Chesed Elyon. And to show that these are not just words, he now pledges his commitment to support his brothers and their families, urging them to come to Egypt so he can do so.

Yosef's model of forgiveness can only emerge out of a deep faith in Divine Providence. Yosef knows that G-d runs the world and that events unfold according to His plan. This includes everything that happened to him, Yosef, personally. If, and only if, one understands this, one can reach the heights of forgiveness achieved by Yosef. Yosef was not merely forgiving; he was recognizing a whole substrata of Divine activity, activity which told him that whatever the intentions of the brothers, their actions really led to a situation that did not require forgiveness to begin with.

Preparation For Galus

Yosef was brought to Egypt by Divine Providence in order to pave the way for the Jewish people. He and all the brothers understood that although moving to Egypt would signal the beginning of the exile, it was an unavoidable stage in the unfolding of Jewish history. The exile, in fact, contains its own spiritual revelation, but it is hidden. Hence our Parsha is a פרשה סתומה, a hidden or closed Parsha, one that has no clear break from the previous Parsha.

Given that the decree of exile seemed like a terrible tribulation, things were set up as good as they possibly could be. Physically, the Jews were given Goshen, the best land in Egypt. Socially, the Jews - strange immigrants coming into a caste-based, hierarchical society – do so at the request of the king, not as slaves or even second class citizens but rather with the best of the country's resources at their disposal.

Yehuda was sent ahead to establish a yeshiva in Goshen, so that by the time Yaakov and the tribes arrived, there was already an educational infrastructure in place. What remarkable foresight, so often overlooked in the later exiles of the Jews, when Jewish day schools and yeshivas are only built much later in the historical development of the community! Finally, Yaakov, his Ruach HaKodesh restored, arrived in Egypt, accompanied by G-d Himself.

In Canaan, the family of Yaakov could hardly have developed into a nation. As they grew in numbers they would have been scattered amongst the inhabitants, with all its dangers of assimilation and intermarriage. Egypt, however, had its caste system which prevented intermingling, especially with the foreign Jews and their strange practices. For Pharaoh, there was no choice but to separate the Jews and place them in Goshen. For the Jews, however, their semi-pariah status was a blessing.

Yaakov saw beyond the initial honeymoon, and he was scared. With the descent into Egypt, a cycle of pain seemed to start all over again, heralding a pattern of exile again and again. Slavery and cruelty awaited them, although it would be almost two centuries away.

The larger challenge, however, would be whether the Jews could spiritually survive without totally assimilating into the surroundings. The Jewish nation is enormously adaptable, invariably becoming successful whenever the slightest crack opens, and Jews quickly out-culture the locals.

Indeed, the sojourn in Egypt began in just this way. Yaakov lived the rest of his days in Egypt. His life was peaceful, the Jews settled in the most fertile part of Egypt and their brother was the king. It would have been easy to be thankful to the Almighty for this respite, to learn Torah and Shteig. But Yaakov looked ahead once more. He made Yosef, and later all his brothers, promise that they would not bury him in Egypt. The Jews were to be reminded, in a very potent way, that they were but visitors in this land. An entire funeral procession from Egypt to Chevron marked these Jews in their own eyes and in the eyes of others as strangers in Egypt.

Better that the Jews be hated for their unusual names and unusual dress - ויקוצו - than disappear. And, indeed, the Jews are still here to tell the tale, a mystery that is testimony to G-d's deliverance and Providence throughout history.

That a tiny nation, dispersed and persecuted for thousands of years, has survived is only because it was destined from the start to serve higher spiritual ends. Providence arranged things that we would be able to rest a century or two in one land, only to see a violent outbreak of anti-Semitism once again, usually leading to mass emigration, if not expulsion, from that land. Then we would quickly regroup, rebuild our Jewish institutions, and settle down as if we had finally found our permanent

future. We would no longer beseech G-d with any seriousness to redeem us from there, triggering another cycle of anti-Semitism even stronger than the first. The host nation would question our very right to exist as human beings, as anyone can read in the chronicles of the Jews.

If this is true of exile in general, it is all the more true of Egypt. Egypt was the archetype exile, the ultimate spiritual anti-G-d. Despite the great preparations by the Jews, the Egyptians were so powerful that they absorbed the Jews into 49 levels of their counter-culture. Egyptian civilization was so advanced and sophisticated in its impurity that no other civilization at the time provided even the slightest competition. The Egyptians, it might be said, were perfect chariots to carry impurity just as the forefathers were perfect chariots to carry G-d's holy presence.

G-d appears to Yaakov to assure him that the full wheel will turn and that the Jews will emerge a great nation - *כי לגוי גדול אשימנו שם*, ready to keep the Torah. The vision is at night in order to assure him that, even in the dark night of exile, G-d's presence will be with His people. Yaakov is inconsolable until G-d promises to go down into Egypt Himself to be with the Jews (Galus HaShechina).

G-d calls out to him, "Yaakov, Yaakov": the weekday Yaakov and not the Shabbos Yisrael. "Do not try to comprehend why you are being sent to Mitzrayim, just know that I will look after you every step of the way. Your children will go into Egypt as a family – but they will come out as a nation in a sudden and meteoric redemption." G-d will then take them back up to Israel.

Yaakov is shown how all this misery will end with the Messianic Era, but he was to take this secret with him to the grave. *מעשה אבות סימן לבנים*; the patterns of exile history were being set up for the last and deepest exile, the exile in which we live to this day.

Yaakov prepares for exile with one final, dramatic act. He realizes that neither spiritually nor physically are the Jews a match for the powerful Egyptians. Only by totally cleaving to G-d do they stand a chance. Yaakov meets Yosef and just then says the Shema. He thereby shows the Jewish people that every action would now have to be dedicated to G-d. Even the most elated moments of love by a father to his long lost son should become an act of furthering our acceptance of G-d's Yoke. For, as long as we are G-d's servants, no one else can claim us as theirs.

Yaakov is not the only one who prepares for the exile and redemption. Yosef, too, is acutely aware of the pending gloom. He now takes steps to alleviate the Galus, shorten it or prepare for the eventual redemption. He requires all the Egyptians to circumcise themselves in order to ensure that no decree is passed on the Jews banning the practice. He uproots and resettles the entire Egyptian population, ensuring that the Jews are no more strangers than anyone else. He takes possession of all the wealth of the Egyptians, making it easier for the Jews to access this wealth upon their departure.

The die is cast – history will now unfold!

ויחי

The Death of Yaakov

After a long life of struggle and hardship, Yaakov spends his last 17 years in Egypt so at peace (the Gematriah of 17 is טוב) that he is considered to be already living in the Next World. Yaakov dies having established the core unit of the Jewish people, with 12 unique and pure sons all combining to form the Jewish people.

As his death approached, Yaakov called his children to give them a full view of world history, including the Messianic Era. However, the tribes were not yet holy enough to glide on top of history instead of going through it. G-d intervened, Yaakov lost his Ruach HaKodesh, and he gave the tribes their blessings instead. Hence our Parsha is a closed Parsha (סתומה) - which literally means that there is no gap of even the minimum 9 letter-spaces between the previous Parsha and this one) because the death of Yaakov heralded the beginning of the slavery, a darkening of our spiritual eyes and a deadening of our heart.

Just as the light of this Parsha is hidden (סתומה), so too there is light in the exile but it, too, gets hidden deep in the hearts and minds of the Jewish people. Usually there are gaps between the Parshios to give us a chance to reflect and understand what is happening. But now, on the surface, things become hidden and unclear.

When Yaakov Avinu lost his Ruach HaKodesh a great dread overcame him. *Said he, 'Perhaps, Heaven forbid, there is one unfit among my children, like Abraham, from whom there issued Ishmael, or like my father Isaac, from whom there issued Esau.'* [But] his sons answered him, *'Hear O Israel, the Lord our G-d the Lord is One: just as there is only One in thy heart, so is there in our heart only One.'* In that moment our father Jacob opened [his mouth] and exclaimed, *'Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom for ever and ever.'* Said the Rabbis, *How shall we act? Shall we recite it, — but our Teacher Moses did not say it. Shall we not say it — but Jacob said it! [Hence] they enacted that it should be recited quietly.*

Yaakov's sons declared that even though they were not now worthy of a Messianic vision, they understood that the Messianic Era would lead to that kind of understanding – שמע ישראל. Yaakov replied with ברוך שם—he appreciated that the time was not ripe to reveal the end of days but the Kedusha of the sons would lead to that end.

Yaakov made Yosef swear that he would bury him in Israel, sending a powerful message to his children and to the Egyptians that Yosef's family still did not consider themselves naturalized and that their hearts were still in their old homeland. Yaakov's return to rest in Israel set up the historical pattern ensuring that we, too, would return from our Galus.

Yaakov explained to Yosef that he buried Rochel on the border into Israel and not in the same cave where he was now requesting to be buried. For it was she, as the עקרת הבית, who had the power to gather all the exiles and unite every Jewish Neshama, bringing them back into the Holy Land.

Yaakov was given the honor and rest in his death that he did not achieve in his life. An entire country, from the king down, spent over two months mourning his embalmed body in Egypt, and then all Jewish adults with a large military escort invested weeks in a funeral procession from Egypt to Israel. In an unprecedented show of honor, a host of kings placed their crown next to Yosef's on Yaakov's coffin.

The funeral procession ended with Yosef personally burying Yaakov. Nothing new was told about Yosef's life after the funeral, and a few Pesukim later we learn of his death, having ruled an unprecedented eighty years. Yosef was the intermediary between the Avos and the Banim, he who transferred the Kedusha of the Avos to the Banim. Hence, Yaakov now blessed his two sons, Ephraim and Menashe, that they should become like the brothers, i.e. the heads of two separate tribes.

Unlike Yaakov, there was no chance of Yosef being buried in Israel, but Moshe Rabbeinu would later personally deal with transferring his bones just as Yosef had taken care of Yaakov, *Midah Kineged Midah*.

The Sages tell us that although Yaakov died and was buried in a physical sense, he reached the level where there was no contradiction between his spiritual and physical selves. Yaakov's body was a perfect *Levush* for his soul. The greatest reason for separation of the body and the soul after death, incompatibility between the two, simply did not exist in Yaakov's case. In this sense, he did not die.

Moreover, Yaakov had taken the perfection of his father and grandfather and created a perfect combination and balance of the two, bestowing this as a permanent spiritual inheritance to his children. In this sense, too, he did not die.

There are other senses in which Yaakov Avinu did not die. He felt nothing of the pangs of death. More importantly, his body was at such a spiritual level that his soul did not need to separate from his body completely. Normally, after death the soul exists in the realm of *Olam HaNeshamos*, totally separate from the body. It is vital that the soul at this stage be in an environment where it can continue to grow in preparation for its recombining with the body during *Techiyas HaMeisim*. But in rare cases, the body is so holy that the soul is not prevented from this growth by continued association with the body.

With this holiness, Yaakov Avinu remained alive with a soul surrounded by a body which technically was physical, but was actually so spiritual that it had only the faintest outlines of the physical. We cannot really understand this concept, but in truth death itself is not really a logical thing.

Hence, our Parsha begins with the words *ויחי יעקוב*: even in death, *ויחי יעקוב*, he continues to live on.

Yosef's death completes the creation process. The patterns of history for all time have been put into place. The Avos were the seeds of human history from which all later events would later sprout. The story of their descendents now begins. The rest of the Torah will take place in Moshe Rabbeinu's life.