

פרשת לך לך

We know the Mishnah in Masseches Ovos (Perek 5/Mishnah 3):

עשרה נסיונות נתנסה אברהם אבינו עליו השלום ועמד בכולם להודיע כמה חבתו של אברהם אבינו עליו השלום:

Avraham Ovinu was tested with ten tests and he withstood all of them to let us know the great love of Avraham Ovinu *Olov HaShalom*.

Despite the fame of this Mishnah, its explanation is quite challenging because the Meforshim differ on what events are counted as 'official' *nisyonos*-tests.

That dispute is not surprising. And we have a well-known precedent for it.

In Masseches Makkos (23 b), we read the statement of Rabi Simlai:

דרש רבי שמלאי: שש מאות ושלוש עשרה מצות נאמרו לו למשה, שלש מאות וששים וחמש לאוין כמנין ימות החמה, ומאתים וארבעים ושמונה עשה כנגד איבריו של אדם. אמר רב המנונא: מאי קרא? (דברים לג/ד¹) תורה צוה לנו משה מורשה, תורה בגימטריא שית מאה וחד סרי הוי, (שמות כ/ב-ג²) אנכי ולא יהיה לך מפי הגבורה שמענום.

Rabi Simlai interpreted: 613 Mitzvos were said to Moshe at Sinai: 365 *Mitzvos Lo Saaseh*-prohibitions, in consonance with the number of days of the year, and 248 *Mitzvos Aseh*-positive commandments, in consonance with the number of limbs in the body of man.

Rav Hamnuna said, 'What is the verse that is the proof text for Rabi Simlai? [It is] "Moshe commanded us *Torah* as an inheritance." The word *Torah* in Gematria is 611 and we heard the two Commandments of *Anochi* and *Lo yi'h'yeh I'cho* from G-d [directly].

¹ The entire verse reads:

תורה צוה לנו משה מורשה קהלת יעקב:

Moshe commanded us the Torah; it is an inheritance for the Congregation of Yaakov.

² These P'sukim read in their entirety:

אנכי ה' א...ל'קיה אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים מבית עבדים לא יהיה לך אלהים אחרים על פני:

I am Hashem your G-d Who took you out from the Land of Egypt from the House of Bondage; you may not have other gods before Me.

All this is very nice – but when one wishes to check out the facts it is immediately apparent that there are far more than 613 Mitzvos in the Torah.

Each time that HaKodosh Boruch Hu directs Moshe to a particular act, such as:

דבר אל בני ישראל

Speak to B'nei Yisroel,

that is a Mitzvah in and of itself, regardless of whether Moshe was to undertake a personal action or to deliver a message to his people.

And thus, the proliferation of *Sifrei Mitzvos* by the later Geonim and Rishonim was a result of the desire to determine which Mitzvos are included in the *Taryag*-613, and which Mitzvos are not included in the *Taryag*.

In the introduction to his *Sefer HaMitzvos*, Rambam presents fourteen *Shoroshim*, rules, that provide Rambam with *his* framework to determine which Mitzvah is included in the *Taryag* and which Mitzvah is not included.

One example of a *Shoresh* that is part of the definition of that which is included in the *Taryag* and what is not included is the seventh *shoresh*:

השרש השביעי שאין ראוי למנות דקדוקי המצוה

The seventh principle: it is not proper to count the specifics of a Mitzvah as being separate Mitzvos of the *Taryag*.

The example that Rambam brings is that of the Mitzvah of *Yibum* – when a man dies without surviving descendants, his wife is to marry the brother of the deceased.

The Torah provides us with many details of how *Yibum* is to be performed. Each of those details is a *Mitzvah D'oraisa* – a full-fledged Torah commandment but those details are not included in the computation of *Taryag*.

That is, *Taryag* does not limit the Mitzvos of Torah to 613. Rather, *Taryag* is a formal system of counting Mitzvos and we have to understand the parameters of that system.

Similarly, *עשרה נסיונות* is a formal system. Can we even begin to think that Avraham Ovinu had only ten challenges in his life? Was he never challenged

regarding speaking *Lashon Ho'ra* and he desisted? Was there never a time that he was 'too tired' to do something and he overcame that weariness? Each of those challenges was a *nisayon*-test in and of itself but Chazal said that there were Ten Tests that formed a body that we call עשרה נסיונות.

Even a cursory look at the Meforshim of that Mishnah in Masseches Ovos will reveal varying opinions of what is included in the category of Asara Nisyonos and what isn't.

Here we will focus on one of those events that the early Midrash Pirkei D'Rabi Eliezer classifies as a *nisayon*, an event from our Parshas Lech Lecha, and examine that event's multiple implications.

We read there (Perek 26):

נְסִיּוֹן הָרְבִיעִי, מִיּוֹם שֶׁנִּבְרָאוּ שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ לֹא בָּא רָעַב אֶלָּא בְּיַמֵּי אַבְרָהָם, וְלֹא בְּכָל
הָאֲרָצוֹת אֶלָּא בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן בְּלֶבֶד, לְנִסּוֹתוֹ וּלְהוֹרִידוֹ לְמִצְרַיִם, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר וַיְהִי רָעַב בְּאֶרֶץ
וַיֵּרֵד אַבְרָם מִצְרַיִם:

The fourth test: From the time of Creation there was never a famine until the days of Avraham. And that famine was not in all the lands but only in the Land of Canaan. [It happened] to test him, to make him descend to Egypt as it says, 'there was a famine in The Land and Avram went down to Egypt.'

The Posuk under discussion appears early in our Parsha. We read (B'reishis Perek 12/Posuk 10):

וַיְהִי רָעַב בְּאֶרֶץ וַיֵּרֵד אַבְרָם מִצְרַיִם לְגֹר שָׁם כִּי כָבֵד הָרָעַב בְּאֶרֶץ:

There was a famine in the land and Avram went down to Egypt to sojourn there because the famine was heavy in the land.

We can surmise what the test was. Our Parsha begins with the Divine command to Avraham Ovinu, one which was a test in and of itself. We read (ibid. P'sukim 1-2):

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל אַבְרָם לֵךְ מֵאֶרֶץ וּמְמוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ אֶל הָאֲרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲרָאָךְ:
וְאָעֲשֶׂה לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל וְאַבְרָכְךָ וְאַגְדִּלְהָ שְׁמֶךָ וְהָיָה בְרָכָה:

Hashem said to Avram, 'Go for yourself from your land, from your birthplace and from the house of your father to the land that I will show you. I will make

you into a great nation and I will bless you and I will increase your fame; you will be a blessing.

From Rashi's commentary we can derive what was involved in this test, beyond leaving behind all that Avraham knew from his more limited circles and from the greater society and environment in which he lived. He writes:

ואעשך לגוי גדול - לפי שהדרך גורמת לשלשה דברים ממעטת פריה ורביה, וממעטת את הממון, וממעטת את השם, לכך הוזקק לשלש ברכות הללו שהבטיחו על הבנים, ועל הממון, ועל השם.

ואברכך - בממון:

I will make you into a great nation – Because travel causes three things: it diminishes the number of offspring; it diminishes one's wealth and it diminishes one's reputation – therefore Avraham needed these three blessings. Hashem promised him regarding sons, regarding wealth and regarding reputation.

I will bless you – with money.

That is, besides that which are explicit challenges and tests in this verse, there are implicit challenges and tests which make this departure to Canaan even more threatening.

And now, when Avraham withstands the test, instead of finding the fulfillment of those promises, he is still lacking children and, seemingly because of the famine, is now lacking funds as well³.

³ In reference to Avraham Ovinu's journey from Egypt, Rashi (ibid. Perek 13/Posuk 3) writes:

...בחזרתו פרע הקפותיו:

Upon his return, he paid for the credit that he received.

That is, when Avraham Ovinu descended to Egypt, his bank account was empty; he was impoverished. He could not pay for his room and board!

The implications, as others will make later on, is that Avraham Ovinu only left Eretz Canaan as the last resort, after depleting all of his financial resources.

And now, with the advent of the famine, he is lacking food; his very sustenance, and the sustenance of his wife and his entire entourage⁴ is called into question.

Rashi and Ibn Ezra emphasize the challenge and test. They write, respectively:

רעב בארץ - באותה ארץ לבדה, לנסותו אם יהרהר אחר דבריו של הקדוש ברוך הוא
שאמר לו ללכת אל ארץ כנען, ועכשיו משיאו לצאת ממנה:

Famine in the land – in that land only. To test Avraham if he will question the Words of HaKodosh Boruch Hu Who told him to go to the Land of Canaan and now he is causing him to leave it.

ויהי רעב בארץ הנזכרת, שהיא ארץ כנען הזכיר הכתוב זה כי לא יצא מארץ כנען רק
בעבור חזק הרעב:

There was a famine in the land – the land, the one that was mentioned earlier which is the Land of Canaan. The Torah mentions this [to teach us] that Avraham only left the Land of Canaan because of the strength of the famine.

⁴ We read early in our Parsha (ibid. Perek 12/Posuk 5):

וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָם אֶת שָׂרִי אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאֶת לוֹט בֶּן אָחִיו וְאֶת כָּל רְכוּשָׁם אֲשֶׁר רָכְשׁוּ וְאֶת הַנַּפְשׁ אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ בְּחָרָן
וַיֵּצְאוּ לָלֶכֶת אֶרְצָה כְּנָעַן וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶרְצָה כְּנָעַן:

Avram took his wife Sarai and his nephew Lot and all of their property that they acquired and the soul that they made in Choron and they departed to go to the Land of Canaan and they came to the Land of Canaan.

Rashi writes:

אשר עשו בחרן - שהכניסן תחת כנפי השכינה, אברהם מגייר את האנשים, ושרה מגיירת הנשים,
ומעלה עליהם הכתוב כאלו עשאו. ופשוטו של מקרא עבדים ושפחות שקנו להם...

That they made in Choron – He brought them under the wings of the Shechinah. Avraham converted the men and Sarah converted the women and the Posuk considers it as if they made them.

The *p'shat* of the verses is that 'the souls that they made' refers to male and female servants that they acquired.

Avraham Ovinu had a very large contingent to support – and the Posuk teaches that he had the wherewithal to meet that obligation when he left Choron for Eretz Yisroel.

The famine decimated his belongs and wealth. This is quite the opposite of the Divine promise that Avraham received from G-d at his departure from Choron.

We know the continuation of this fourth test, as it is designated by Pirkei D'Rabi Eliezer, (ibid. Perek 12/P'sukim 11-16):

וְיִהְיֶה כְּאִשֶּׁר הִקְרִיב לְבוֹא מִצְרַיִם וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל שָׂרִי אִשְׁתּוֹ הִנֵּה נָא יָדַעְתִּי כִּי אִשָּׁה יִפְתַּ מִּרְאֵה אֶת: וְהָיָה כִּי יִרְאוּ אֶתְךָ הַמִּצְרַיִם וַאֲמָרוּ אִשְׁתּוֹ זֹאת וְהָרְגוּ אֹתִי וְאֶתְךָ יַחֲיוּ: אָמַרְי נָא אַחֲתִי אַתְּ לְמַעַן יִיטֵב לִי בְּעַבְדֶּיךָ וְחַיֶּיךָ נִפְשִׁי בְּגִלְלָה: וְיִהְיֶה כְּבוֹא אַבְרָם מִצְרַיִם וַיִּרְאוּ הַמִּצְרַיִם אֶת הָאִשָּׁה כִּי יָפָה הוּא מְאֹד: וַיִּרְאוּ אֶתְךָ שָׂרִי פָרְעָה וַיְהַלְלוּ אֶתְךָ אֶל פָּרְעָה וַתִּקַּח הָאִשָּׁה בֵּית פָּרְעָה: וְלֹאבְרָם הֵיטִיב בְּעַבְדֶּיךָ וְיִהְיֶה לּוֹ צֶאֱן וּבָקָר וְחֲמֹרִים וְעַבְדִּים וְשִׁפְחוֹת וְאֶתְנַת וּגְמִלִים:

When Avram approached Egypt, he said to Sarai his wife, 'Behold I know that you are a beautiful-looking woman. When the Egyptians will see you and say, "This is his wife", they will kill me and let you live. Please say that you are my sister in order that they will be good to me because of you and my soul will be given life for your sake.'

When Avram came to Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. The officers of Par'o saw her and they praised her to Par'o and the woman was taken to the house of Par'o. He treated Avram well because of her and Avram had sheep and cattle and male servants and female servants and donkeys and camels.

Certainly, this episode regarding the instructions that Avraham Ovinu gave to Sarah l'meinu, and Sarah's acquiescence require elucidation. They are puzzling to say the very least.

In fact, Ramban here replies harshly to the actions that Avraham Ovinu undertook. He writes:

ודע כי אברהם אבינו חטא חטא גדול בשגגה שהביא אשתו הצדקת במכשול עון מפני פחדו פן יהרגוהו, והיה לו לבטוח בשם שיציל אותו ואת אשתו ואת כל אשר לו, כי יש בא...ל'קים כח לעזור ולהציל. גם יציאתו מן הארץ, שנצטווה עליה בתחילה, מפני הרעב, עון אשר חטא, כי הא...ל'קים ברעב יפדנו ממות⁵. ועל המעשה הזה נגזר על

⁵ We read (Tehillim Perek 33/Posuk 19):

לְהַצִּיל מִמּוֹת נַפְשָׁם וּלְחַיֹּתָם בְּרָעֵב:

To save from death; to give them life in famine.

We read (Iyov Perek 5/Posuk 20):

בְּרָעֵב פְּדוּךָ מִמּוֹת וּבְמַלְחָמָה מִיַּד חֶרֶב:

זרעו הגלות בארץ מצרים ביד פרעה. (קוהלת ג/טז⁶) במקום המשפט שמה הרשע
והחטא:

Know that Avraham Ovinu sinned greatly, unintentionally, when he brought his righteous wife to a stumbling block of sin because he was afraid that he would be killed.

Avraham should have trusted that Hashem would save him and his wife and all that he had because G-d has the power to help and to save.

Also his leaving Eretz Yisroel, where from the beginning he was commanded to go there, because of the famine, was a sin that he committed because G-d would redeem him in famine from death.

And because of this action, exile was decreed upon his descendants in the Land of Egypt under the rule of Par'o.

Where the judgment was made – it is a place of evil and sin⁷.

In famine He has redeemed you from death; and in war – from the sword.

⁶ The entire verse reads:

וְעוֹד רָאִיתִי תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ מְקוֹם הַמִּשְׁפָּט שָׁמָּה הָרָשָׁע וּמְקוֹם הַצְּדִק שָׁמָּה הָרָשָׁע:

I saw furthermore under the sun that the place of justice – there, there is evil; the place of righteousness, there, there is the evil.

⁷ Sadly enough there are those who see this Ramban as a gold mine to further improper approaches to the study of Torah. That improper approach is referred to by its adherents as:

תורה בגובה עיניים

Looking at the righteous personalities of Torah as being equivalent to all others.

[Surprisingly enough, this phrase continues to be used despite the uncomplimentary words of Rashi that explain it. See Yeshaya Perek 2/Posuk 11 and Rashi there.]

The 'gold mine' here is that Ramban has made Avraham a common sinner, allowing his wife to be put in a situation of likely immorality – and all for the purpose of saving his own skin. And, therefore, we have a precedent to seeing the Tzaddikim of the Torah as being no different than anyone else. They have their strengths, but they have their weaknesses as well and thus it is unnecessary to continually to strive 'to be like them'. The fact is, says this approach: they are like us.

With great understanding and prescience, Rav Shimshon Rafael Hirsch presented his rebuttal to this approach some 150 years ago.

Rav Hirsch writes:

ויהי רעב בארץ. הסיפור הפותח במלים אלה יש בו כדי להתמיה במבט ראשון. אברהם עזב את הארץ היעודה לו; הוא לא בטח בה', הזן ומפרנס גם בארץ ציה; ונראים הדברים במבט ראשון, שהוא סיכן את שלומה המוסרי של אשתו כדי להחיות את נפשו! - והנה, אפילו אין בידינו ליישב את כל התמיהות, אפילו נאלצנו לגזור כדעת רמב"ן: "ודע כי אברהם אבינו חטא חטא גדול בשגגה...הרי אין בכל זה כדי להביא אותנו במבוכה. אין התורה מציגה את גדולי ישראל כאידיאליים בתכלית השלמות..."

There was a famine in the land – This story that begins with these words raises many questions when it is first encountered: Avraham forsook the land that was designated for him; he did not trust in G-d Who fed and supported him in the dry land. It appears when first encountered that he endangered the moral wholesomeness of his wife to preserve his own life!

Even if we do not have all of the answers and even if we are forced to decree that the correct explanation of this section is that of Ramban who wrote, 'Know that Avraham Ovinu sinned a great sin unintentionally' – even so that is not sufficient to bring us to confusion.

The Torah does not present *Gedolei Yisroel* as the ultimate ideal of perfection.

אין התורה מעלימה את השגיאות, השגגות והחולשות של גדולי ישראל; ודוקא על ידי כך היא מטביעה על סיפורה את חותם האמת. אולם, לאמתו של דבר, ידיעת חטאם של גדולי ישראל איננה מנמיכה את דמותם, אלא להיפך: דמותם גדולה ומאלפת - בעצם החטא שחטאו. אילו הזהירו כולם כזוהר הרקיע ללא רבב ושמץ פגם, היינו סבורים שטבעם שונה מטבענו, והוא למעלה מהישג ידינו...

The Torah does not hide the errors, the unintentional mistakes and the weaknesses of *Gedolei Yisroel* and *davka* in that way does the Torah embed its tales with the stamp of truth. In fact, truly, knowing the sins of *Gedolei Yisroel* does not lower their character. The opposite is true: their character is great and instructive – by the very fact of the sin that they committed. If all of *Gedolei Yisroel* shone like the glow of heaven, without stain or imperfection or defect, we would conclude that their nature is different than ours – above our ability to reach that nature.

כל זה - אילו נאלצנו באמת לומר כדעת הרמב"ן: "חטא אברהם חטא גדול בשגגה"...

This is what we would say if in fact we were forced to say as Ramban did that 'Avraham sinned a great sin unintentionally'.

אולם, בטרם נחרוץ משפט, נתבונן בעובדות המסופרות כאן.

But, before we render final judgment, let us consider the facts that are told to us.

...ועתה, התנהגותו במצרים - כלום חשש אברהם רק לחייו? כלום סיכן את כבוד אשתו רק כדי להציל את עצמו? נשמע את דברי אברהם: הנה נא ידעתי וגו': הנה ידעתי למרות הכל, כי אשה יפת מראה את. למדנו מלשון "נא", ששיחה אחרת קדמה לזו. המאורעות במצרים ובארץ פלשתים רומזים על מנהגי הפריצות שם - ואולי תימצא הקבלה לכך במדינה אירופית של הזמן החדש: אשה פנויה היתה מוגנה יותר מאשר אשה נשואה. קל וחומר באשה נכריה!...

Regarding his behavior in Egypt – was Avraham only concerned about his life? Is it true that he was willing to endanger the honor of his wife only for the purpose of saving himself?

Let us listen to the words of Avraham: 'Behold *now* I know' – I know despite everything that you are a beautiful woman.

We learn from the word *now* that there was a conversation that preceded this one.

When we study the events in Egypt and in the Land of the Philistines we learn of the immoral behavior that was rampant there. Perhaps you will find a parallel in modern Europe: an unmarried woman is more protected than a married woman – and all the more if the married woman was a foreigner.

הסכנה הנשקפת לאשה נשואה היתה גדולה שבעתים: הרגו את האיש וגזלו את האשה. לא כן באשה פנויה, המלווה על ידי אחיה: היו מקומים לזכות באשה על ידי חסדי אחיה. מכל מקום, דרך זו היא ארוכה יותר, ואפשר להרויח זמן; בין כך לכך יכולה עזרה לבוא משמים. ולטובת שרה הוא בחר בדרך השנייה. כאשה נשואה היא היתה אבודה בודאי. ואילו לאשה פנויה עוד היתה תקווה...

The danger facing a married woman was greatly increased – they would kill the husband and steal his wife.

It wasn't the same for an unmarried woman who was escorted by her brother. In such an instance, the inhabitants of the land would hope to merit the woman because of the kindness of her brother.

No matter what, this approach is more involved and thus Avraham hoped to gain more time so that Sarah would not be taken and in the meantime he could hope for Divine salvation.

It was for the benefit of Sarah that Avraham chose this path. If she would have been known as a married woman, she would have perished with certainty. Perhaps as a single woman there would still be hope.

The explanation of Ramban engendered much discussion. Before viewing a sampling of that discussion that comes to argue with Ramban, let us see an additional implication of the Ramban's *peirush*.

We saw earlier the Mishnah in Ovos that writes:

עשרה נסיונות נתנסה אברהם אבינו עליו השלום ועמד בכולם

Avraham Ovinu was tested with ten tests and was successful in all of them.

Since Ramban writes that Avraham Ovinu sinned in multiple ways in going to Egypt: he did not show his *bitachon* in Hashem; he left Eretz Yisroel; he endangered his wife; he was more concerned for his personal safety than for the moral welfare of his wife – that means that according to Ramban, Avraham did not succeed in this event; he failed! Therefore, Ramban cannot include this episode of descending to Egypt as one of the *nisyonos* since the *Nisyonos* in the Mishnah are crowned with success.

Hashem gave *nisyonos* to Avraham Ovinu in order that he should succeed.

The Posuk (Tehillim Perek 11/Posuk 5) writes:

ה' צדיק יבחן ורשע ואהב חמס שגאה נפשו:

Hashem tests a Tzaddik; His soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence.

And that verse provides the underlying basis for the ultimate test of Avraham Ovinu – the *Akeida*⁸.

We read (B'reishis Perek 22/Posuk 1):

ויהי אחר הדברים האלה והא...לקים נסה את אברהם ויאמר אליו אברהם ויאמר
הנני:

It was after these words and G-d tested Avraham; He said to him, 'Avraham'; he said to Him, 'Behold I am here.'

⁸ While there is no doubt that *Akeidas Yitzchak* was one of the tests – the verse itself writes that, there are opinions that it was not the tenth and final *nisoyon*, but that there were subsequent events following the *Akeida* [such as having to purchase *Meoras HaMachpela* to bury Sarah I'meinu] that were some of the Ten Tests.

Ramban here explains:

והא...ל"קים נסה את אברהם - ענין הנסיון הוא לדעתי, בעבור היות מעשה האדם רשות מוחלטת בידו, אם ירצה יעשה ואם לא ירצה לא יעשה, יקרא "נסיון" מצד המנוסה, אבל המנסה יתברך יצוה בו להוציא הדבר מן הכח אל הפועל, להיות לו שכר מעשה טוב לא שכר לב טוב בלבד. ודע כי השם צדיק יבחן, כשהוא יודע בצדיק שיעשה רצונו וחפץ להצדיקו יצוה אותו בנסיון, ולא יבחן את הרשעים אשר לא ישמעו. והנה כל הנסיונות שבתורה לטובת המנוסה:

G-d tested Avraham – the subject of a ‘test’, according to my opinion, stems from the fact that a person’s actions are under their absolute control – if one wishes to do something he does it; if he doesn’t wish to do something, he doesn’t do it.

Therefore the ‘test’ is vis a vis the one being tested but not the One Who is testing. Hashem is commanding through the test that the testee actualizes his potential so that he will receive reward for his actions, not just reward for good intentions.

Know, the Posuk says that ‘Hashem tests the righteous’; when He knows that the Tzaddik will do His Will and Hashem wishes to enable him to act righteously, He will give him a test.

Hashem will not test the wicked who will not listen to Him.

All of the tests in the Torah are for the benefit of the testee.

Thus, according to Pirkei D’Rabi Eliezer the descent to Egypt was a test and since it was a test, all that occurred there was a success.

Since on the face of it the ‘success’ of those events isn’t evident, and the Ramban denies the success and thus eliminates those events from being considered as one of the Ten *Nisyonos*, it is necessary to find defense for the position of the Midrash of Pirkei D’Rabi Eliezer.

And, in fact, there are many *meforshim* who provide significant defense.

Chasam Sofer (in *Toras Moshe*) writes on our Posuk:

ויהי רעב בארץ וירד אברהם מצרימה. אומר כך דרך הצדיקים שלא לסמוך על הנס ובפרט כי עיקר פירסום אלקות שהיה אברהם אבינו מפרסם היה על ידי שהיה ביתו

פתוח לרוחה, ועתה אין לחם בארץ, וזאת היה הסיבה מאת ה' כדי לגדלו, כי ראו כולם השגחת ה' בו אשר מלכים לא יוכלו ליגע בכל אשר לו.

There was a famine in the land and Avram descended to Egypt – I [Chasam Sofer] say that such is the way of the righteous. They do not rely upon miracles and specifically in this case when the fundamental activities of Avraham of spreading information about Hashem was by the fact that his house was always open with abundance and now there was no bread in the land with which to offer hospitality.

This is the reason that G-d chose to aggrandize Avraham because all saw the Divine Providence that kings could not harm him whatsoever.

ונראה שזה שאמרו רז"ל בבראשית רבה (מא/ג) והובא בפירוש רש"י לקמן על הפסוק וילך למסעיו (בראשית יג/ג), בחזרתו פרע הקפותיו, ויפלא מאד אברהם שהיה אדם גדול ועשיר מאד היתכן לאמר שלוח באכסנאי בדרך. אבל הכונה כאשר קרא אברהם בשם ה' היו כל העולם שואלים לאברהם כקושיית ספר חובת הלבבות (שער הבטחון בפתיחה), אם השם יתברך זן ומפרנס לכל למה הוא צריך לילך למרחקים לבקש טרפו, גם אמרו לו כי כאשר בא הוא לארץ כנען אזי מיד בא הרעב אשר כמוהו לא היה עדיין כמאמר הרעב הראשון, והיו אומרים כי בעבורו באה הרעה הזאת, ואברהם בחוזק אמונתו בהקדוש ברוך הוא לא פנה אל טענתם ולא הרהר בכל אלה, ואמר להם כי סוף הכבוד לבוא, ועתה כאשר שב וכל טוב בידו ונודע להם הנס שנעשה לו בבית פרעה, אז פרע הקפותיו.

It appears that this is what Chazal in Midrash B'reishis Rabba were referring to, and it is brought in Rashi later on as well, that upon Avraham's return from Egypt, he paid for the credit that he received on his way to Egypt.

And this is a wonder - Avraham was a great person and a very rich person- is it possible to say that he borrowed from innkeepers on the road? But the intent is that whenever Avraham went and called in the Name of Hashem to spread His Name, people would ask him, like the question that Chovos HaLevovos poses:

If Hashem feeds and supports everyone, why did Avraham have to go to such a distance to acquire food?

They also said to him that when he came to Canaan – then the famine came immediately and it was a famine that was unprecedented in its severity as

Chazal said that it was the first famine to come into the world. The people blamed Avraham and said that because of him this bad event befell them.

Avraham with his strong belief in Hashem did not relate to their claims and had no doubts about all of this.⁹ He told them that, eventually, Hashem's Honor will display itself.

Now, upon his return from Egypt with so many possessions it was known that a miracle occurred in the house of Par'o – and then Avraham paid his bills.

Certainly, the explanation provided by Chasam Sofer here stands in direct opposition to that of Ramban. Avraham Ovinu responded to a situation that was challenging and his response was appropriate given that he had exhausted all other options that he had at his disposal.

Avraham Ovinu did not rely on miracles because we have learned that one does not rely on a miracle to be saved. We read in Masseches Kiddushin (39 b):

וכל היכא דקביע היזיקא לא סמכינ אניסא, דכתיב: (שמואל א טז/ב)¹⁰ ויאמר שמואל איך אלך ושמע שאול והרגני.

Wherever damage is certain, we do not rely upon a miracle [to save us from the damage] as it is written, Shmuel said, 'How can I go and Shaul will hear and kill me'.

Furthermore, not only did Avraham Ovinu not rely on meta-natural events, he did not even rely on the promises that Hashem gave him because he was concerned that he no longer deserved the merits that he had.

Later in our Parshas Lech Lecha, and following Avraham's victory over the battle of the kings and his retrieval of Lot from captivity, we read Hashem's words to Avraham (B'reishis Perek 15/Posuk 1):

⁹ See Rambam Hilchos Meila (Perek 8/Halachah 8) for a similar statement regarding Dovid HaMelech Olov HaShalom.

¹⁰ The entire verse reads:

וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמוּאֵל אֵיךְ אֶלְךָ וְשָׁמַע שְׁאוּל וְהָרַגְנִי וַיֹּאמֶר ה' עֲגֵלֶת בָּקָר תִּקַּח בְּיָדְךָ וְאָמַרְתָּ לְזַבְחִי לֵה' בָּאתִי: Shmuel said [to Hashem], 'How can I go and Shaul will hear and he will kill me'; Hashem said, 'Take a calf in your hand and you will say, "I came to offer a Korban to Hashem".'

אחר הדברים האלה ה' דבר ה' אל אברם במחזה לאמר אל תירא אברם אנכי מגן
לך שכרך הרבה מאד:

After these words, the Word of Hashem was to Avraham in a vision saying:
Do not fear Avram, I Hashem protect you; your reward is very great.

Rashi explains the reason that Hashem needed to calm the concerns of Avraham
Ovinu:

אחר הדברים האלה -...אחר שנעשה לו נס זה שהרג את המלכים והיה דואג ואומר
שמא קבלתי שכר על כל צדקותי, לכך אמר לו המקום אל תירא אברם אנכי מגן לך
מן העונש שלא תענש על כל אותן נפשות שהרגת, ומה שאתה דואג על קבול שכרך,
שכרך הרבה מאד:

After these words – After Avraham experienced the miracle that he killed the
kings, he was worried and said, ‘Perhaps I have [already] received reward for
all of my righteousness’.

Therefore, Hashem said to him, ‘Do not fear, Avram, I protect you from
punishment – you will not be punished for the people whom you killed and
that about which you worry that you will not receive reward, “your reward
will be very great”.’

And we know that the grandson of Avraham Ovinu – Yaakov Ovinu – had the very
same attitude.

In Parshas Vayishlach we read the prayer of Yaakov Ovinu as he was about to
encounter his brother Eisav who had promised to eventually kill Yaakov (B’reishis
Perek 32/Posuk 11):

קִטְנִיתִי מִכָּל הַחֲסָדִים וּמִכָּל הָאֱמֶת אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ אֵת עַבְדְּךָ כִּי בַמַּקְלִי עָבַרְתִּי אֶת הַיַּרְדֵּן
הַזֶּה וְעַתָּה הֵייתִי לְשְׁנֵי מַחֲנֹת:

I have become little from all of the kindnesses and the truth that You have
done for Your servant; because I crossed the Jordan River with [only] my staff
and now I have become two encampments.

Rashi writes:

קִטְנִיתִי מִכָּל הַחֲסָדִים - נתמעטו זכותי על ידי החסדים והאמת שעשית עמי, לכך אני
ירא, שמא משהבטחתי נתלכלכתי בחטא ויגרום לי להמסר ביד עשו:

I have become little from all of Your kindnesses – My merits have diminished through the receipt of Your kindnesses and the truth that You did with me. Therefore, I am afraid that after You made Your promises to me that I have become dirtied with sin and that will cause me to be delivered into the hand of Eisav.

If a person is so aware of his weaknesses that he believes that he is undeserving of Divine promises already made, he certainly will not entertain the idea of benefitting from a miracle that was never promised.

Malbim here adds on to this concept of non-reliance upon miracles. He writes:

ויהי רעב בארץ. גם זה היה נסיון כדברי חז"ל, אם יהרהר על דבר ה' שהבטיח לו ואברככה והיה ברכה והנה מארה וזלעפות רעב, ואברהם לא הרהר כי היה קטן בעיניו שישנה ה' את הטבע בעבורו, ולכן לא סמך גם על הנס שיחיהו ברעב, רק בקש הצלה טבעית.

There was a famine in the land – This was a *nisayon*-test as Chazal said. The test was to see if Avraham would question the Word of G-d that promised him, “I will bless you; you will be a blessing’.

But, behold – there was a curse and the terrible famine and Avraham did not question [those events] because in his mind he was undeserving that Hashem should change nature on his behalf and therefore he also did not rely that Hashem would keep him alive during the famine – Avraham only sought to be saved through natural means.

‘Natural means’ refers to making every effort that one can do to avoid conflict and danger, as *Netziv* writes here:

כי כבד הרעב בארץ. כפל הכתוב להודיע שכל עוד שהיה אפשר להשתדל למכור רכושו ולבטוח בה' עשה, עד שמכל מקום כבד עליו הרעב, אז קיים בעצמו רעב בעיר פזר רגליך כדאיתא בפרק הכונס [בבא קמא ס ב], והיה בזה נסיון לאברהם אבינו שלא הקפיד אלא הבין שכך הוא עצת ה' ורצונו, ולא כהרמב"ן ז"ל שכתב שחטא במה שיצא שהיה לו לבטוח בה', דודאי בטח כל האפשר, אבל כך עלה במחשבה לפניו ית'.

The famine was very heavy in the land – The Posuk mentions the famine twice to let us know that as long as Avraham was capable to make the efforts, *hishtadlus*, to sell his property [remaining in Eretz Yisroel] and relying on G-

d, he did so. But when nonetheless the famine was heavy upon him, then he fulfilled the dictum of Chazal, 'when there is famine in the city, move your legs'.

This was a test, *nisoyon*, for Avraham Ovinu who was not angry at Hashem but, rather, understood that this was Hashem's counsel and His Will.

This is not like Ramban's opinion that Avraham sinned by leaving Eretz Yisroel because he should have trusted in G-d. Rather, Avraham certainly trusted in G-d as much as possible¹¹. This was G-d's plan.

In fact, beyond the commentary on this particular event in the life of Avraham Ovinu and how to interpret it, the opinions that we have seen here reflect a discussion that continues to retain its vitality to this very day.

The subject of that discussion is our outlook vis a vis השתדלות. *Hishtadlus* refers to the efforts that we expend when working within the framework of the natural world.

Since we know that G-d is Omnipotent, is it a rejection of His omnipotence when we attempt to maneuver and manipulate in a natural way?

Perhaps the foremost articulation of the opinion that *hishtadlus* is contrary to appropriate belief in G-d is found in the writings of Rav Dessler ZT"l. His writings on *Emunah U'Bitachon* that are found in Michtav MeiEliyahu (Volume I, pages 187-206 and elsewhere) and are very much based on Ramban's explanation of the sin of the *Meraglim*. Certainly, those writings there are related to Ramban's commentary to our subject as well.

Since the need for *hishtadlus* came about through the curse that was given to Odom HoRishon, emphasizing *hishtadlus* is aggrandizing an unwanted curse instead of diminishing its power.

It is true that *hishtadlus* cannot be avoided, but minimizing one's reliance upon *hishtadlus* instead of maximizing that reliance is the proper approach.

¹¹ That is, Avraham trusted in G-d as much as he was required to. When the situation became naturally impossible, Avraham employed natural means to deal with it – in consonance with the Gemara that Netziv cited.

Based on that, *Ramban's* approach was that Avraham Ovinu was able to minimize his *hishtadlus* even more.

In contrast to Rav Dessler's understanding of *hishtadlus* – that since it was a curse, it remains a curse forever, the approach of Maran Rav Moshe Feinstein ZT" L is quite different.

We read (Igros Moshe Orach Chaim Chelek II/111);

בדבר אם יש איזה מעלה או גם איזה חשש איסור ליקח אינשורענס פאליסע מצד שהוא חס ושלום כחסר לו בטחון בהשם יתברך שביכלתו לעשרו שישאר אף אחריו ליורשיו סך גדול. הנה לעניות דעתי אין בזה שום חסרון בבטחון בהשם יתברך, דהוא ככל עניני מסחר שהאדם לא רק שרשאי אלא גם מחוייב לעשות מסחר ועבודה לפרנסתו ואסור לו לומר שאף אם לא יעשה כלום יזמין לו השם יתברך פרנסתו באיזה אופן, דמנא לו שיש לו זכות כזה, לבד האיסור לסמוך על הנס אף לאלו שראוין להעשות להם נס...

In the matter of whether it is good or perhaps forbidden to take out an [life] insurance policy because perhaps, G-d forbid, it is a sign of a lack of trust in Hashem Who is able to make a person wealthy enough that he can leave his heirs a large amount of money:

In my humble opinion, there is no lack of trust in G-d by doing so. This is part of the general principle of doing business that not only is a person allowed to do – but he is obligated to do business and to work for his sustenance. It is forbidden for a person to say that even if he will do nothing that G-d will provide his sustenance no matter what.

How would a person know that he has such a merit? Additionally, it is forbidden to rely upon miracles – even for those who are deserving of miracles.

Farther on in this *Teshuva* we read:

ואין שום חטא על מה שמשדלין לבקש אומנות יותר נוחה וקלה וראויה לפי שומת האנשים יותר להרויח, אף שצריך להאמין שהשם יתברך יכול ליתן פרנסה מכל אומנות שהיא... אבל ידע שכל מה שירויח אחר כל הדברים והשתדלות שעושה הוא

רק מהשם יתברך (דברים ח/יח¹²) הנותן כח לעשות חיל ותרגם אונקלוס שנותן לך עצה למקני נכסין וכן כל דבר שעושה ומרויח בזה.

There is no sin when a person expends efforts, *hishtadlus*, to seek a profession that is more comfortable for him and easier and more likely to be profitable, based on people's appraisal. But one must believe that Hashem can provide sustenance from any profession.

But one should know that all that he profits, after all of his *hishtadlus*, only comes from Hashem 'Who is the One Who gives strength to do valiantly'. And, according to the rendition of Targum Onkelos there that means, 'that Hashem gives counsel regarding which property to buy' and so it is with anything that a person does to make profit.

Rav Moshe ZT"l certainly agrees that the instigation of the need for *hishtadlus* was a curse. That is unquestionable.

Rav Moshe disagrees with Rav Dessler regarding if *hishtadlus* remains a curse after its imposition on mankind. Rav Moshe's opinion is clear – *hishtadlus* is part of the world in which we live and thus it is an appropriate undertaking; it is no longer a curse even though its introduction to humanity was a curse.

Thus, we find in our Parsha a fundamental dispute regarding the nature of man and his ongoing relationship with Divine Providence¹³.

¹² The entire verse reads:

וְזָכַרְתָּ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ כִּי הוּא הֵנִיחָ לְךָ כֹּחַ לַעֲשׂוֹת חֵיל לְמַעַן הַקִּים אֶת בְּרִיתוֹ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְרָהָם
כִּיּוֹם הַזֶּה:

You shall remember Hashem your G-d because it is He Who gives you strength to do valiantly in order to fulfil His covenant that He promised to your forefathers like this day.

¹³ See, however, *Emes L'Yaakov* to our Posuk. Rav Yaakov Kaminetzky there relates to the Ramban and the opinions that differ with him and writes:

... אבל באמת נראה דאין כאן פלוגתא, דהא הרמב"ן בעצמו הביא בפסוק זה את דברי חז"ל בבראשית רבה: אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא לאברהם צא וכבוש את הדרך לפני בניך, ובעל כרחך צריך לומר דלפי מדרגת אברהם באותה שעה - שלא היה עדיין שלם גמור - היה הנסיון כפי שפירש רש"י, אבל כשמגיע האדם לשלימות גמורה אזי על פי שיטת הרמב"ן במדת הבטחון היה לו לבטוח בהשם יתברך שיצילנו ויפדנו מהרעב.

However, beyond this dispute which we are incapable of taking sides – we follow the *mesorah* that we have received from our Rabbonim if we are so fortunate to have such a *mesorah*, there is an additional issue that is raised here.

In whichever way that we determine which events were included in the Ten Tests and which were not, we must think about the implications of Avraham having *only* Ten Tests.

Since the Providence of the Ribbono Shel Olom is constantly over mankind in particular (Moreh Nevuchim Maamar 3/Perek 17) and since G-d always knows everything (Mishneh Torah Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah Perek 2/Halachah 9), why do we not consider every event that comes in to our lives as being a *nisoyon*?

Sometimes we make our own determinations and classify something as a *nisoyon*. That doesn't seem unreasonable.

If the reader now expects to receive full clarity at this point – there will be disappointment because this writer does not have full clarity.

At the same time we can always be alert to that which occurs to us and contemplate if a particular event is a 'heavenly hint', as Rav Dessler¹⁴ refers to it, in order to further the sanctity for which we strive.

Nisyonos are particular events that are given to the Tzaddikim who, *davka* because of their high level, merit a very direct Divine intervention to further them on their

But, in fact it appears that there is no difference of opinion here. Ramban himself brings here the Midrash that Hashem told Avraham to go and conquer the way [to Egypt] for his descendants [and that obviously implies that Avraham did G-d's Will]. Thus, you must say that what Avraham did at that time, before he had *shleimus* [i.e. before Bris Milah] that he was tested, as Rashi explained.

However, when a person reaches complete *shleimus* then, according to Ramban, the requirement of *Bitachon* is to believe that Hashem will save him from famine [and he does not need to take any *hishtadlus* action].

Rav Yaakov ZT"L does not mention it, but he is certainly referring to the Commentary of Ramban in Parshas Bechukosai (Vayikro Perek 26/Posuk 11).

¹⁴ See Michtav Mei'Eliyahu Volume 4/Pages 308-310 and 459-461).

path towards holiness. When they are given a *nisoyon*, they will succeed in it and thereby possess a greater awareness of their potential.

For the rest of us, we are surrounded by events that are not as pointed as *nisyonos* but nonetheless provide us with the opportunity for contemplation of where we stand and the *tachlis* for which we should strive to reach.

Rav Wolbe, citing *Ruach HaChaim* (Masseches Ovos Perek 5/Mishnah 4) writes in Aley Shur II (page 73) that our forefathers undertook unique actions, actions that had extraordinary challenges and their success made our paths easier.

What was necessary for them to accomplish with hardships and the trials and tribulations of *nisyonos*, we can accomplish with the less challenging and less troublesome 'hints' of our daily existence. Their successful strivings against formidable odds impacted us positively. That which was a challenge for our Forefathers is an easier trial for us.

But those 'hints' still represent a *nisoyon* for us – will we recognize the signals that HaKodosh Boruch presents us so that we can strive and accomplish our goals and reach *our* tachlis?

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Pollock