



Rabbi Yosef Farhi

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Lech Lecha

ENGLISH Version

IN THE MERIT OF EMUNAH

Last week, at the Shabbat meal, my son came back from shul and told us all this incredible story: There was a philanthropist from America who was very close to R' Elyashiv, and every time he came for a visit, he gave huge sums of money for the causes that R Elyashiv was passionate about. Once, when R Elyashiv had a heart attack, there was a certain Hatzalah fellow who saved the Rav's life. The wealthy man offered this Hatzalah member an astronomical amount of money - millions and millions of dollars - to buy the Olam Haba for his good deed of having saved the Rav's life. So, the Hatzalah member went to R Elyashiv to ask him what he thought about the offer. Should I sell my mitzvah for this tempting amount of money? "There are so many things I can do with this money...."

Gesturing with his hand, the Rav asked, three times, "You're going to sell a mitzvah for money? You're going to sell a mitzvah for money? You're going to sell a mitzvah for money?" There was no price tag on a mitzvah for Rav Elyashiv - there was no amount of money in the world that could reach the value of a mitzvah. It is Rav Elyashiv's perfection of emunah that made him so different from most of us.

How much is a mitzvah worth? How much is a davening worth? A thought of emunah? A spark of inspiration? All the material benefits of Olam Hazez do not come close to the Olam Haba of just one spark of inspiration! Even for one step to shul! And I will prove it.

Do you know why G-d rewarded Pharaoh, giving him a nation of Jewish slaves for 400 years? The Talmud, in Sotah (46b), tells us: It is because he escorted Avraham and Sarah 4 steps when he sent them away from Egypt!!!! Had Pharaoh known what reward he was getting, 100 years of a nation of slaves for every step, he would have walked Avraham all the way back home!!! Jews don't get rewarded like that. We don't get reward for Mitzvoth in this world, because all the reward of this world is nothing compared to one second of reward in Olam Haba. The more we internalize this, the more spiritual we will be.

The Rambam (סוף פי' משניות ברכות) writes that learning just one of the 13 Principles of Belief is more valuable than any other study. In his letters (אגרת תימן), the Rambam writes that anyone who fills his soul with good middot or works on correcting his middot and has the wisdom to put his trust in the Creator is definitely deserving of Olam Haba. And this is the underlying will of the whole Torah, and the main message of all the Mitzvoth. To refine our middot and complete our trust in the Creator - to make our Emunah perfect. In the merit of our staying in this relationship, we ask G-d to save us. ותן שכר טוב לכל הבוטחים בשמך באמת... כי כך בטחנו The Midrash Tanchuma tells us how Avraham and Sarah prayed, when Pharaoh abducted Sarah. Avraham started crying and praying to G-d, saying, 'Master of the World, is this the reward that I get for trusting in You? Now that they have taken her, please, for the sake of Your Mercy and Kindness, don't cause me shame

because of my trust in You! Sarah cried, and said, 'Master of the World, I did not know anything, just that Avraham told me that You said to leave our hometown, and I believed You. And now, I am bereft of my father, my mother and my husband, and this wicked king is going to disgrace me? Please, act in the merit of Your Great Name and in the merit of my trust in Your words! G-d told her, "Nothing will happen to you, or to your

husband. And I will punish Pharaoh and his house".

This Tanchuma amazes me. It shows us Avraham's and Sarah's relationship with G-d, in times of crisis. And it shows us the merit of faith. Because this ongoing relationship, the constant faith that we are never alone, that we are always cared for, is our most powerful resource in life.

ALL YOU REALLY ARE

The Serenity Prayer is a prayer that is used by Alcoholics Anonymous. This is a prayer that has helped many people get out of various addictions. The prayer has a lot of wisdom to it. "G-d, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference." The serenity question is, how many things in life can you change? And the question of choice, of exactly what is your locus of control, is a big focus in coaching.

What happens too often is that we naturally think that we can change everything in life. But many times, the only thing that we do not realize that we actually can change is the way we think. And, like in the Serenity Prayer, when focusing on what we cannot change, we forget to focus on what we *can* change. The reason why you forget to focus on what you can change, is because you can focus on only one thing at a time.

Our Rabbis tell us very clearly what is in our hands and what is in the hands of G-d. "Everything is in the hands of G-d, except for fear of G-d." The only area of life you have control over is fear of G-d, how much fear of Heaven you have. Fear of Heaven, of course, is as wide a spectrum as a spectrum could be. It affects every area of life.

Interestingly enough, Rashi in this week's Parasha says that Avraham actually prayed that his son, Yishmael, have Fear of Heaven. (לו ישמעאל-ל יהיה) Rashi adds, ביראתך. (17; 18) The Siftei Chachamim asks, from the aforementioned statement, "If everything is in the hands of G-d, except for fear of Heaven," that means that

Yishmael's fear of Heaven is up to Yishmael, alone. How, then, would praying for Yishmael to have fear of Heaven be in any way effective?

The answer is, that our own Fear of Heaven is in our control, it is in our hands, by praying for it. R' Ben Tzion Abba Shaul actually puts a spin on the words of our Rabbis and says, "Everything is in the hands of Heaven, i.e., it is up to G-d to say "no" to any one of your prayers or requests from Him. But when one prays for fear of Heaven, G-d never says no.

We pray for fear of Heaven when we say before Shema in the morning, ויחד לבבנו לאהבה וליראה את שמך, when we say, after U'va Letzion, וישים בלבנו הרחמן הוא יטע, אהבתו ויראתו תורתו ואהבתו בלבנו ותהיה יראתו על פנינו לבלתי נחטא. The Chafetz Chaim prayed that he not engage in forbidden speech, that he would not see what he was not supposed to look at, and that he would not listen to what he was not supposed to hear. Even the Chafetz Chaim prayed for Fear of Heaven. Maybe that was how he became the Chafetz Chaim.

Avraham prayed for Yishmael to have Fear of Heaven, because the way that a child gets Fear of Heaven is by seeing how important Fear of Heaven is to the parent. Avraham was praying for his own Yirat Shamayim, that it be strong enough, that it would affect Yishmael.

Reb Moshe Bloy, when visiting America, spent Shabbat by a working fellow, who cried to him over his children who were not following the way of the Torah. Over his Shabbat stay, one of the children touched Muktzeh, and the father told him

calmly that it is forbidden to touch Muktzeh on Shabbat. On Motzaei Shabbat, the child took the father's money from his wallet, and was playing with it. The father screamed so furiously that the whole house shook.

Reb Moshe told him, "Now I know why the kids don't keep Torah. They see that when it comes to issues of Halacha, you are very calm and reserved. But when it comes to your money, you scream!"

Think Lot. Lot was a man who had so much. But he wanted more. He let his animals graze in the fields of the Canaanites, without even considering asking their permission or thinking that he should pay them. Avraham asked him why. Lot said because the Land would belong to him anyway, because G-d gave the Land to Avraham, and when Avraham would die, childless, Lot, as Avraham's nephew, would be the only inheritor. Avraham told Lot that they could not stay together. So Lot chose to go to Sedom. From here, Lot's spirituality, Lot's Fear of Heaven, went downhill.

Reb Reuven Karlshtein asked, why didn't Avraham try to be "mekarev" his own nephew?

Avraham was the Outreach King; couldn't he change his own family member? The answer Reb Reuven gives is that when a person commits a sin with a logical justification, it is much harder to change his behavior than it is to influence a more neutral, random "Joe Shmoe".

But, I believe that the reason why Avraham did not try to be mekarev his nephew was because Lot had "dollar signs" in his eyes. When someone is running after money, more money than he needs, Kiruv becomes very difficult. Because when a person is focusing on materialistic goals, if he believes that this is an area where G-d gives him ultimate control, there is absolutely no room in his agenda for anything spiritual.

It seems that this is what King Solomon, the wisest of men, meant when he said. סוף דבר הכל נשמע את האלקים ירא ואת מצוותיו שמור כי זה כל האדם
All you are, at the end of the day, is the amount of Fear of Heaven you have. Because that is your only choice, and the only place where G-d gives you control.

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