

HEROES OF THE TANACH

Rav Shlomo Aviner

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Dedicated

"Le-Ilui Nishmat" – in loving memory of

**Ha-Rav Gavriel Noach
and
Rivkah Holtzberg HY"D**

The beloved directors of Chabad-Lubavitch of
Mumbai, India

who were tragically taken from us
in a terrorist attack
on their Chabad House

28 Mar Cheshvan 5769

Dedicated
with great respect, immense love
and everlasting gratitude
for the success, happiness and health of

**Dr. and Mrs. Irving and Cherna
Moskowitz**

Dear Friends of Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim
Lovers of Zion
Whose hands fulfill:
"Hashem is the builder of Jerusalem"
(Tehillim 147:2)

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Introduction

Our Rabbi, Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah Ha-Cohen Kook, explains that we must view the history of our ancestors in light of the great principle “the action of the fathers is a sign for the children” (Ramban on Bereshit 12:1, Tanchuma – Lech Lecha 9 and Sotah 34a). Crucial to our understanding of this statement is the idea that our forefathers are not separate entities from their children, but rather form a continuum with them. They are the root of Klal Yisrael. Their actions are “signs” for their children (i.e. for us), because we are in fact one entity with them. We are bound together, sharing a single essence which flows throughout time, from one generation to the next. When we learn about our forefathers and their actions, we learn about ourselves and our actions, for they are one and the same.

In these beautifully crafted discussions of our ancestors in the Tanach, Ha-Rav Shlomo Aviner – Rosh Yeshiva of Ateret Yerushalayim in the heart of the Old City of Jerusalem, and Rav of Beit El – clearly elucidates the traits and potentials which we have received from each of our ancestors. These heroes are not only the foundation of our Nation, but the foundation of each of us individually as well. When we read about their experiences and their responses, we learn what is inherent within our national and personal soul.

May Rav Aviner's discussions help actualize the strengths
which are embedded in our very essence.

Mordechai Friedfertig
In the heart of Jerusalem between the Walls

Adam

1. Rabbi Banah was a Great Man
2. The Impurity of the Graves of the Righteous
3. The Level of Eliezer, Avraham's Servant
4. The Level of Avraham and Sarah
5. The Level of Adam Ha-Rishon
6. The Level of Existence

1. Rabbi Banah was a Great Man

The Gemara relates that Rabbi Banah would mark graves (Baba Batra 58a). Rashi explains that he was a great and important person and was therefore given permission to enter the graves of the righteous, while it was forbidden for others to do so since the righteous are greater in death than in life (Chullin 7b). He would enter the burial caves, measure their internal length and then measure them from the outside. Next he would make a plaster marker to indicate that the place is impure, thus deterring the pure and the cohanim from walking there and becoming impure. Rashi states that a job such as this could only be performed by an important person, since a grave is a holy and awe-inspiring place. One must enter in a proper manner, with the recognition of its holiness and not in the spirit of a builder, an archeologist or a tour guide. On the face of it, it seems as though Rabbi Banah was entering the

cave to measure, but we must understand that these measurements were not of a technical nature, but rather a serious matter for the sake of a mitzvah – a deed that could only be performed by a great and noble individual.

Question: Who is considered a great person?

Answer: Someone we rely upon to perform a holy task, who truly recognizes the task's greatness. Entering a righteous person's burial cave is like coming into his home, as the Gemara says: "the righteous are greater in death than in life" (Chullin 7b). Therefore, just as a person does not knock on a Rabbi's door, enter and begin to look around, so too would they not do so after his death. Not everyone may enter the burial cave of the righteous.

Question: Is it disrespectful to visit the graves of the righteous?

Answer: Visiting the grave is a different matter. This is similar to listening to a Rabbi's class. Just as everyone may listen to his class during his lifetime (which is similar to visiting him), so too may everyone visit his grave after his death. Visiting his grave is a way of cleaving to his spirit. Measuring a grave is like trespassing in a private home. This may only be done by a great person with an incredible awe of Heaven, guarding the honor of the Torah scholar, and only for the sake of a mitzvah, such as preventing cohanim from becoming impure.

2. The Impurity of the Graves of the Righteous

The Gemara specifically points out that Rabbi Banah was marking the graves at the Cave of Machpelah. We thereby learn that the Cave of Machpelah transmits impurity. Various points are clarified by this Gemara: 1. There is a dispute in the Gemara whether the graves of non-Jews transmit impurity. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai (Rashbi) says that the graves of non-Jews do not transmit impurity through-out a structure (referred to as "Tumat Ohel") (Yevamot 61a). Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov are, for this purpose, placed within the same category as non-Jews because they lived before the giving of the Torah, i.e. before the laws of purity and impurity were given. If this is so, we can conclude that the Cave of Machpelah does not transmit impurity. Rabbi Banah's actions, however, imply that the Halachah does not follow the Rashbi – after all, if the cave did not transmit impurity, he would have no reason to mark it off. But this is not correct. The Halachah does follow the Rashbi, but the Rama in the Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 372:2) writes that it is proper to be strict and not to enter areas where there are non-Jewish corpses. Another explanation: Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov are not in this category of non-Jews since they were prophets and great people. In this case, their graves would transmit impurity. 2. We must also discuss the opinion that the graves of the righteous do not transmit impurity, as quoted by some Rishonim (Rabbis of the Middle Ages), since the righteous

are called "living" even in their death. Our Gemara about Rabbi Banah, according to Rashi and its simple meaning, is a clear proof that the graves of the righteous do transmit impurity. The decision of the majority of Achronim (later authorities) – both Sefardic (including Ha-Rav Ovadiah Yosef) and Ashkenazic – is that they do transmit impurity and it is therefore forbidden for cohanim to enter the Cave of Machpelah, Kever Rachel, etc. While there are some authorities who are lenient in this matter, they represent a tiny minority and our Sages are not pleased with those who enter these holy places.

3. The Level of Eliezer, Avraham's Servant

When Rabbi Banah arrives at the Cave of Machpelah, he finds Eliezer, Avraham's servant, standing in front of the door. Rabbi Banah asks him: what is Avraham doing now? He responds: He is lying in Sarah's arms and she is checking his head. Rabbi Banah says: Go tell Avraham that I am at the door. Eliezer says: you should know that there is no evil inclination in the World to Come. In this world, it is immodest to enter when someone is lying in his wife's arms and is checking his head, but there is no evil inclination there.

The commentators explain that we are obligated NOT to understand this story according to its simple meaning. We are to understand that Rabbi Banah's marking of the graves was either through "Ruach Ha-Kodesh" (Divine in-

spiration), a dream or intellectual introspection. SO did Rabbi Banah really mark off the graves or not? It is possible that he did not. Rather the meaning of "marked off graves" is that he measured the spiritual levels of the earliest inhabitants of the grave. He defined who Avraham is spiritually, who Sarah is spiritually, who Eliezer is spiritually, and who Adam is spiritually. But why was Rabbi Banah so involved with evaluating the spiritual levels of the dead – why not “measure” the living? Because for as long as a person is alive, we do not know what will become of him. Yochanan, the Cohain Gadol, became a heretic at the age of eighty (Pesikta De-Rav Kahana 11, 9). Only when a person dies do we know who he is, as it says: "The day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth" (Kohelet 7:1). The well-known parable explains (Midrash Rabbah *ibid.*): There was a celebration for a new ship setting sail. On the same day, an old ship laden with merchandise was returning to the port to unload for the last time. One clerk went out to look at the old ship. They said to him: "What are you doing – the celebration is for the new ship which is now leaving the dock?!" He said to them: "We do not know what the fate of the new ship will be. Perhaps it will sink, perhaps bandits will take it over...As for the old one, who has finished its role, we know what it accomplished." Only after a person dies is it possible to summarize who he was and what he did in his life; this is what Rabbi Banah was doing. It is also possible to explain, according to the simple meaning of the text, that he was marking off the graves, i.e. checking and

measuring them, as his name – Rabbi Banah – suggests: "Banai" means a "builder." He did not simply enter and measure, rather he entered, contemplated, and became connected to these righteous people, awed by their holiness. He thus merited understanding their identity and greatness, either through a revelation in a dream (Ben Ish Chai) or through a deep intellectual understanding (Maharal). After all, as Rashi explained (see above), Rabbi Banah was a great person.

Rabbi Banah arrived at the Cave of Machpelah and met Eliezer at the entrance. Before you are able to understand Avraham, you must first understand Eliezer. Eliezer is the one who drew from the Torah of his teacher Avraham and gave it to others to drink (Rashi on Bereshit 16:2). Eliezer was the external Avraham. First and foremost, we must understand that Eliezer was a great person. Eliezer was in effect Avraham's Rosh Yeshiva, who spread Avraham's Torah outward. Eliezer was a Canaanite convert, one of the people whom Avraham converted and brought to faith.

Question: If he was such a great person, why did Avraham leave him with Yishmael during the Akeidah?

Answer: Eliezer was extremely important. He spread Avraham's Torah and Avraham entrusted him to choose a wife for Yitzchak, the woman who would be the continuation of the Nation of Israel. But at the Akeidah, Avraham said to him: "Stay here with the donkey" (Bereshit 22:5). Our Sages explain: "A nation similar to the

donkey" (Yevamot 62a), i.e. in relation to the Akeidah, you – Eliezer and Yishmael – are on the level of a donkey. This does not mean that their entire lives are on the level of a donkey, but when compared to the powerful level of the Akeidah, they were donkeys. If they had seen Avraham taking his son to be slaughtered, they would have gone crazy. They would have crumbled, become heretics or killed Avraham. They were incapable of being exposed to this great light. In its wake, they were donkeys. In order to understand Avraham, we must first understand Eliezer. Eliezer was an idealist, an important individual, a student of Torah and he stood at the door. Where Eliezer ends, Avraham begins. Compared to Avraham, he was like a donkey. The Maharal (Gevurot Hashem, chap. 29) explains that Avraham rode on a donkey, as did Moshe Rabbenu, and the Messiah will do the same. This means that they are able to overcome the material world (the Hebrew word for donkey – "Chamor" – is similar to the word for material – "Chomer"). Avraham was completely liberated from the material world. Eliezer, Avraham's servant, was important but was still mired in material reality. Avraham rose above this reality. He was on a different plane. This is the reason that he did not marry off Yitzchak to Eliezer's daughter. Our Sages state: "You are cursed and my son is blessed and the cursed do not become attached to the blessed" (Bereshit Rabbah 59:9). But if Eliezer was cursed, how did he serve as Avraham's Rosh Yeshiva?! We must understand that everything is relative. The curse of the material still grasped him, while Avraham was on a

much higher level. It is difficult to explain who Eliezer was but when you understand Eliezer's level, you can understand that Avraham was more supreme than him: he was a spiritual giant. This is the beginning of understanding Avraham. Our Sages explain that the verse (Yehoshua 14:15): "The biggest man among the giants" refers to Avraham Avinu (Massechet Sofrim, chap. 21).

4. The Level of Avraham and Sarah

What was Avraham Avinu doing? "He was lying in Sarah's arms," while she was checking his head. Even before we begin to understand the details, we must see what unites these two acts: they are both signs of affection. And by the way, the "Nimukei Yosef" says at the beginning of the Gemara in Baba Batra (and this ruling appears in the Shulchan Aruch) that it is forbidden for a person to publicly display acts of affection towards his spouse. We see from here that if Avraham and Sarah were not deceased it would be forbidden for them to act in this way. He does not state that it is a strict law, but that it is not proper etiquette, since there are occasions that it is permissible to be lenient. If one's wife is tired or sick, for example, she may lean on him in public.

We thus see that there is great affection between Avraham and Sarah. This is the most blatant fact. This is a spiritual remedy for the sin of Adam and Chavah, who had their love destroyed. Adam was cursed through an economic destruction, as it says: "You shall eat bread by the sweat

of your brow" (Bereshit 3:19), and Chavah was cursed through the destruction of the relationship between husband and wife: "Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you" (ibid. 16). These two curses are not artificial, external matters, but are implanted with the sin itself. The sin is what caused the curse. We see that the damage in the relationship was manifest in two ways: 1. Adam only gave his wife a name at a later period, i.e. he did not know her name. Knowing someone by name is the foundation of a relationship. If people call someone "Hey, redhead" – this testifies that there is a lack of relationship. After all, this person has a name! 2. When Hashem asks Adam what he did, he answered: "The woman whom You gave to be with me" (ibid. 12) – she is guilty. He throws the blame on his wife (Rashi ibid.). Hashem did not even relate to this claim, and punished them both. Our Sages say in the Midrash that Adam was ungrateful. Instead of thanking Hashem for the wife he received, he blamed Him for her. In contrast, Avraham and Sarah symbolize friendship and love even though they experienced difficult times. Sarah did not give birth for many years, but she did not demand from Avraham: "Give me children" (see Bereshit 30:1). It is written that anyone who calls on Hashem to judge his case against another is punished first (Rosh Hashanah 16b). We see that Sarah did call on Hashem to judge between herself and Avraham, as she said: "Hashem will judge between me and you" (ibid. 16:5). But we also see that Avraham did listen to her. We must therefore differentiate between a one-time unfortu-

nate event and an over-all relationship which is full of love and affection.

Our Sages state that Avraham was secondary to Sarah in prophecy (Shemot Rabbah 1:1). She was a great prophet and had a better understanding. This is the beginning of the spiritual remedy of Adam's sin. Adam's economic destruction was also repaired by Avraham, who was extremely wealthy. Maran Ha-Rav Kook explains this idea (Orot, Yisrael U-Techiyato 26). He says that the beginning of trust between one person and another is the trust between husband and wife. If there is trust between husband and wife, there is trust between one person and another, and from this there is trust among the Nation, between Nations and between worlds. Repairing the tear which is found in the world begins with a husband and wife. Avraham Avinu therefore loved all of humanity, as it says about him: "All the families of the earth shall bless themselves through you" (Bereshit 12:3). This love began between him and his wife.

Avraham laid in Sarah's arms, which points to her supremacy. She was like a support for him. From one perspective, Sarah was more important, as we mentioned, since she was a greater prophet than Avraham. But she was checking (i.e. searching the contents of) his head, showing that Avraham was greater than her in the "head." He was secondary to her in prophecy, but he was greater in Torah. Avraham kept the entire Torah before it was given, as it says: "Because Avraham obeyed My voice, and observed My safeguards, My mitzvot, My laws and My Torahs"

(Bereshit 26:5). In all matters relating to the head – the power of thought – Avraham was greater, and in everything relating to the body – to reality – Sarah was greater. Sarah was greater in bringing theoretical matters to reality. Sarah therefore makes the decision of how to reconcile the two issues: 1. "All the families of the earth shall bless themselves through you" which includes Yishmael, and 2. the issue of whether or not to remove Yishmael from their household, which, for the love of Yishmael, Avraham did not want to do. The same relationship existed between Yitzchak and Rivka, as is seen in her decision regarding Esav, whom Yitzchak loved. The Vilna Gaon explains the midrash that Esav's head is buried in the Cave of Machpelah in this way: Esav's head – his supreme element – has a portion that is endowed with the holiness of our Forefathers (see Likutim at the end of the book "Sa'arat Eliyahu and brought in Igrot Ha-Re'eiyah vol. 1, p. 142). Rivka tells Yitzchak that Esav's head will come to the Cave of Machpelah in the future, but that in the present, it is forbidden for Esav to receive his blessing! Yitzchak was correct in seeing Esav's holiness from the perspective of absolute truth, which will appear in the future, but in practice Rivka was right in seeing that this blessing was to be delayed. The Torah encompasses all worlds; it applies from the beginning of the world until its end. Prophecy, on the other hand, relates to the here and now, as Rashi explains: prophecy is a temporary measure according to reality (Rashi on Chullin 137a). Avraham therefore relied on Sarah. He lay in her arms, for she was greater in the

practical reality. But she lovingly related to his head, where he was supreme.

5. The Level of Adam Ha-Rishon

After Rabbi Banah entered, looked around and left the cave of Avraham and Sarah, he wanted to enter the Cave of Adam Ha-Rishon, which is also in the Cave of Machpelah. The Gemara continues: when Rabbi Banah came to Adam Ha-Rishon's grave, a voice from Heaven said: "You saw the form of Avraham, who has My form [via those who came before him, but] you may not see My form itself [as embodied in Adam, who was created directly in G-d's image]" (see Rashi *ibid.*). This means that you may not look at Adam Ha-Rishon, since his level of holiness is above intellect, prophecy and all understanding. Rabbi Yehudah Ha-Levi explains in the *Sefer Ha-Kuzari* (1, 95) that the Master of the Universe is the mother and father of Adam Ha-Rishonim. A normal person has three partners in his creation, but Adam only had one Being who created him: the Master of the Universe. Adam is therefore not a person like us, but something entirely different. Just as Avraham is on a completely different level than Eliezer, so too is Adam Ha-Rishon on a completely different level than Avraham. We do not possess the ability to understand Adam Ha-Rishon. Our Sages say that the soul of Adam Ha-Rishon includes all the souls of the entire world (*Tanchuma – Ki Tisa* 12, *Shemot Rabbah* 40:3, *Tikunei Zohar – Tikun* 50 p. 92). Adam 's prophecy was

also above Moshe's prophecy (Orot Ha-Kodesh 1, p. 280). Moshe Rabbenu needed to separate from his wife, since he received constant prophecy. Even a righteous and pure individual is not completely liberated from the material world. A person who ascends the Temple Mount is therefore required to ritually immerse after a seminal emission (unrelated to "Tevilat Ezra – Decree of Ezra" which always requires immersion in a case of emission), even though it occurred through a holy and pure marital encounter. In contrast, Adam was a prophet without separating from his wife. "They were naked...and they were not ashamed" (Bereshit 2:25). This is clearly not our level. Even after the sin, when his level of holiness decreased, he is still on a more exalted level than us. He is more G-dly. He is "The man". There is a dispute among the commentators whether Rabbi Banah saw Adam before or after the sin, but we must nevertheless understand that he is the person whom G-d created, the image of G-d in man.

Rabbi Banah thus wanted to mark off the cave — meaning that he wanted to teach the world who Adam was. A Divine voice told him: "The inner cave is the same size as the outer" (ibid.), i.e. you do not need to enter for this purpose, you can measure from the outside. Rabbi Banah checked and made an enigmatic statement: "Two caverns, this one above that one, the upper one is the same size as the lower." There is a dispute as to what he meant: are there two caves with one cave inside the other or is there one cave on top of the other? Rashi explains that Rabbi Banah was saying that there is Adam Ha-Rishon the way

he really was (the inner/lower cave) and there is Adam Ha-Rishon to us (the outer/upper cave). We want to know who Adam is in order to learn from his ways and to know how to act, since we are called "Adam" (man) and we are his continuation. The Divine Voice answered: you only need to learn the essence of Adam Ha-Rishon as the father of humanity. There is no need to understand his entire essence. We can compare this to a Rabbi/student relationship. In order to learn in a Rabbi's class, there is no need to know the Rabbi's inner, personal essence. It is enough to know how he acts outwardly. There is no way for you to understand the objective Adam Ha-Rishon, it is sufficient to know him subjectively. As we said, Eliezer is the "outward" Avraham Avinu, and through him we can understand the inner Avraham. But we do not have the tools to do the same with Adam Ha-Rishon. It is forbidden to relate to matters which are too deep. These are the secrets of Torah. The first parashah of the Torah is in this category and its understanding is only revealed to select individuals (Chagigah 11b). There are also Torah secrets which no one knows. Therefore, do not touch the grave of Adam Ha-Rishon – do not measure inside.

"Rabbi Banah said: I saw the heels of Adam Ha-Rishon – they were like the sun." It is possible that he looked at them before he was admonished not to look. The heel is the lowest, the lowliest and the most base part of a person. The sun is the most powerful splendor in the world and it blinds. Rabbi Banah said the lowest and most physical part of Adam was filled with splendor and it blinded anyone

who tried to look at it. Even his heels were full of Divine light. It is written that in the future "Holy to Hashem" will be written on the bells of a horse (based on Zechariah 14:20. see Orot 2, p. 311). This is the same thing that is written on the "Tzitz" worn on the Kohain Gadol's forehead when he enters the Holy of Holies. In the future, all reality will be elevated – even the bells of a horse. This was Adam's level before the sin. The level of humanity after the Resurrection of the Dead will be like Adam's level before the sin, since sinning is death. It is detachment from the Tree of Life. Before sinning, even Adam Ha-Rishon's heels were like the sun, the most supreme part of the material world.

Question: Did Adam Ha-Rishon live in this world or the World to Come?

Answer: He lived in this world. He ate the fruits of this world, but his physicality was completely spiritual and this is the entire goal of the world. A completely spiritual world is the World to Come. The purpose of creating the physical was that there would be sanctification of Hashem's Name in the lower world. Our purpose is "Be Holy" (Vayikra 19:2) here in the lower world.

6. The Level of Existence

The Gemara continues: "Anyone compared to Sarah is like a monkey compared to a person." All people, even righteous individuals and Rabbis, are monkeys when com-

pared to Sarah. We must understand that there are different levels in reality. In order to understand Sarah's greatness, the Gemara explains this idea to us in a negative way, which is often the case with great ideals that are difficult to explain. Everyone is a monkey compared to Avraham and Sarah. If you understand Eliezer's level, Avraham was greater. If you understand the level of all of humanity, they are monkeys compared to Sarah. "Sarah compared to Chavah is like a monkey compared to a man." All of us are like monkeys when compared to Sarah, but Sarah compared to Chavah is like a monkey compared to a man. Chavah is not an actual person. She is a soulful being, the person who was created by G-d Himself. The Gemara says: "Chavah compared to Adam is like a monkey compared to a man." The "Ben Ish Chai" raises a difficulty based on the Arizal (in Sha'ar Ha-Kavanot, Derush Rosh Hashanah): He brings the statement of our Sages that Adam Ha-Rishon could not look into the face of Chavah. Just as Rabbi Banah was blinded by Adam Ha-Rishon, so was Adam Ha-Rishon blinded by his wife. If this is the case, there is a contradiction. The Gemara says that she was like a monkey compared to him, but here it is implied, if he could not look in her face, that she was more supreme. The "Ben Ish Chai" explains that there is no contradiction. Adam was greater than Chavah before the sin, but she was greater than him after the sin. The sin affected Adam more than it affected Chavah. In this world and in our time, the same is true. A righteous man is more supreme than a righteous woman on account of the power

of the Torah. But when a man sins, he descends to a greater extent than when a woman sins. A man can climb higher, but he can also deteriorate to the lowest level. Perhaps a woman is not able to climb as high, but her fall is also much less. In the Torah, the most evil people are men and not women. There are hardly any evil women. It is true that there is Izevel (Jezebel), and Vashti and Zeresh, but there are many more righteous than sinful women. In the communal transgressions – the sin of the Golden Calf and the sin of the spies – the women did not participate. And the women did not sink to the forty-ninth gate of impurity in Egypt. At the same time, the two great ones who rose to save the Nation from Egyptian slavery were men: Moshe and Aharon. Our Rabbi, Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah, explains that a woman is more G-dly, and a man is more human (see the book "Bat Melech," p. 15). A woman possesses more Divine abilities, and a man possesses more human abilities. A woman is therefore more stable and less prone to spiritual descent. Although Chavah caused the sin and influenced Adam to sin, we can ask: why was he enticed? Is it possible that he was there when the snake spoke to her? Our Sages ask: where was Adam at this time? Why was Chavah left alone facing the snake? When the Master of the Universe asks him: "Where are you?" It is not a geographical question, but a spiritual one. Adam was greater than Chavah before the sin, but she was greater than him afterwards. Another interpretation: At the beginning, Adam Ha-Rishon was a combination of two people, as the Gemara (Berachot 61a and Eruvin 18a) explains the

verse: "Male and female – He created them" (Bereshit 5:2). Later, they were separated. If so, the male alone when compared to Adam Ha-Rishon (the combination of male and female) is like a monkey before a man.

One of the commentators asks: If this is true, why does the Gemara say that Sarah was like a monkey compare to Avraham? He explains that it is true that Avraham was greater in Torah, but as is known, Sarah was greater in prophecy (see Rashi on Bereshit 11:29). Rabbi Banah came to all of these understandings either through "Ruach Ha-Kodesh" (Divine inspiration), a dream or intellectual introspection.

The Gemara continues: "Adam compared to the Divine Presence is like a monkey compared to a person. The Divine light which sparkles within a person is like a monkey compared to the Divine light which sparkles throughout G-d's creation. This Divine light, which dwells in the entirety of existence, is the Divine Presence. There was a Divine light even before G-d's spiritual creations, as we say: "You existed before the world was created and You exist after the world was created." This is in opposition to philosophies which limit the Divine light to the Divine light within man. These beliefs state that G-d is man and man is G-d. Although this is true, since there is a Divine light within man, there is a much more supreme Divine light than man, which came before man. I once spoke with a Buddhist and I told him that we cleave to Hashem. He asked me: "What is cleaving to Hashem? Hashem is man. The way to cleave to Hashem is to cleave to yourself." This

is similar to the top of the glue which sticks to the container: man cleaves to himself. But it is not true. The Divine light in G-d's creation is far more supreme than the Divine light in man, and the Divine light in existence is like a monkey compared to the Divine light which is above existence. Someone who does not understand this is a Pantheist, which is the philosophy of Spinoza, who said that everything is G-d. This is incorrect. Although the entire world is full of Divine light, the Master of the Universe was before the world and is above the world: "Who reigned before any form was created" and "after all has ceased to be" (from "Adon Olam"). To a certain extent, we can reach the Divine light within existence but we have no concept of the Divine light before or above existence. This is something that even Adam Ha-Rishon could not understand.

The Gemara brings examples to clarify this matter: "The radiance of Rav Kahana is a semblance of that of Rav. The radiance of Rav is a semblance of that of Rabbi Abahu. The radiance of Rabbi Abahu is a semblance of that of Yaakov." We know that Rav Kahana was the student of Rav, but can we compare the two?! They were worlds apart. The Maharal explains that Rav Kahana was a morsel compared to Rav. "The radiance of Yaakov is a semblance of Adam Ha-Rishon." Yaakov was similar to Adam Ha-Rishon. Although we are all like monkeys compared to Adam Ha-Rishon, there are different levels among the monkeys. The Maharal explains in his introduction to "Beer Ha-Golah" that in our times people think that they

are the great Torah scholars of the generation but they do not understand the difference between themselves and their Rabbi, and they do not understand the difference between their Rabbi and the "Rishonim" (the earlier ones). The "Rishonim" understood this concept well. The student understood that he was nothing compared to his teacher, and everyone knew that they were absolutely nothing compared to the ancient ones. "If the early Sages were like sons of angels, we are like people; if they were like people, we are like donkeys" (see Shabbat 112b).

Avraham

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1. The Wisdom of Avraham

Avraham Avinu is the greatest of the spiritual giants. How is it possible to dare talk about him? When we learn Chumash, there is certainly no choice but to mention his name. To simply discuss Avraham Avinu is chutzpah. But our generation has much chutzpah and we will therefore be brazen and speak about him. The Nation of Israel had many spiritual giants, but Avraham Avinu is the greatest of them. All of the giants who followed him are giants because they are standing on his shoulders. If we did not believe in Torah, it would be impossible to believe that a person such as this actually existed in history. When I arrive in the World to Come, I will not be brazen enough to approach Avraham Avinu and say "Shalom." I will stand at a distance and stare, and this too will be a brazen act. I will stand in fear and trembling at a distance. I will also not dare to approach other giants. Only one giant will I be bra-

zen enough to approach: Our Rabbi, Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah Kook. I will dare to do this since I met him during his lifetime, but I will not do more than that.

Hashem could have begun the Nation of Israel from the ground up, with primitive generations slowly advancing spiritually. This is what occurred with the other nations of the world. Those nations look at their past with some embarrassment, apologetically and even arrogantly, but most of all with happiness that their current state has improved and developed beyond that of the primitive generations. Hashem could have created the Nation of Israel in the same way, but His wisdom dictated otherwise. The Nation of Israel began from a giant about whom it is said: "When will my actions reach [the level of] my forefathers' actions?" In contrast, the non-Jews say: "When will my actions not be like my forefathers' actions, but much better?" For the Nation of Israel, there is someone to look at and say: "Look at this one and sanctify yourself" (Rosh Hashanah 20a). Our education is not only built on words and general concepts, even if they are spiritual, ethical and supreme ones. We believe that a person will grow spiritually greater when he sees a living model before him, who serves as a guide, teacher and Rabbi. Avraham Avinu lives within us and we say about him: "Look at this one and sanctify yourself." Our Sages state that every Jew must look at himself and say: "When will my actions reach my forefathers' actions?" (Tana De-Bei Eliyahu Rabbah 25), i.e. the actions of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov.

The prophet Yeshayahu says: "Listen to me, you who fol-

low after righteousness, you who seek Hashem" (Yeshayahu 51:1). One who is searching for justice and ethical integrity, one who is searching for recognition of the Divine: "Listen to me...: Look at the rock from which you are hewn, and to the pit from which you are dug. Look to Avraham your father and to Sarah who bore you" (Yeshayahu 51:1-2). Someone who is searching for these things only has to do one thing: Look at Avraham Avinu and Sarah Imenu. Avraham and Sarah are the same thing. Everything we learn about Avraham Avinu is the same for Sarah Imenu, except for minor differences. Avraham is the male paradigm and Sarah is the female paradigm for one identity.

What then is Avraham Avinu's greatness? Avraham Avinu was a giant in what distinguishes man from beast, as explained in the book "Moreh Nevuchim" (1, 2) – the intellect. Animals also have emotions, imaginations and desires, but only people possess intellect – technological intellect and spiritual intellect, ethical and supreme intellect. Rashi asks on the verse: "And man became a living being" – aren't animals also living beings? He explains that this is true but the soul of the human being is greater since it possesses knowledge and speech (Rashi on Bereshit 2:7). Knowledge, speech and intellect are identical concepts. Avraham Avinu was a giant of wisdom. This was his unique path. Maran Ha-Rav Kook explains in his commentary on the siddur, "Olat Re'eiyah" (vol. 1, p. 269), that the prayer "Shemoneh Esrei" begins: "the G-d of Avraham, the G-d of Yitzchak and the G-d of Yaakov" in-

stead of mentioning them altogether: "the G-d of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov" since each of the forefathers had a different path to the Master of the Universe.

There are different types of wisdom in the world: mathematics, physics, etc., but Avraham Avinu was a giant in the greatest of wisdoms: the wisdom of the world. He investigated questions such as: why are we in the world? Why were we created? Who created us? Maran Ha-Rav Kook said that Avraham Avinu's trait was the attainment of understanding through deep examination and philosophical and critical introspection. "And with it, he lovingly called in the name of Hashem to inform everyone about Him" (Olat Re'eiyah *ibid.*). Intellect provides the ability to transmit messages to others. Emotion, imagination and desire are non-transmittable. Intellect can be translated into words and transmitted from one person to another. If the explanation is unclear, it can be explained again and again until the message is absorbed.

Yitzchak possessed a different trait – "the fear of Yitzchak" – awe of Hashem. Should we understand from this, G-d forbid, that Avraham Avinu did not possess awe of Hashem? He certainly possessed it. He had awe of Hashem through his wisdom. But didn't Yitzchak possess wisdom? He certainly had wisdom, but it flowed through his awe of Hashem. A hint of this idea is found in the fact that Avraham established Shacharit (the morning prayer) and Yitzchak established Minchah (the afternoon prayer) (Berachot 26b). The Tosafot ask: If this is so, how can the Gemara (Yoma 28b) say that Avraham prayed Minchah?

Answer: After Yitzchak established it, Avraham also prayed it.

Avraham thus possessed great wisdom. He learned on his own from the time he was a small child. For a time, he ran away from home and learned in the yeshiva of Shem and Ever. Shem and Ever were spiritual giants, but they were hidden from the world. In every generation, there were a few who were believers. The Rambam lists them: Chanoch, Metushelach, Shem and Ever (Hilchot Avodah Zarah, chap. 1). They were loners, hidden within their yeshivot, and one could come and learn from them if he so desired. Nimrod, the great warrior in the name of evil and heresy, a sort of Hitler of yesteryear, did not fear Shem and Ever, but he did fear Avraham Avinu.

Question: Isn't it written that King Shlomo was the wisest of all men. Was he wiser than Avraham Avinu?

Answer: He was the wisest of all men. The Gemara in Rosh Hashanah (21b) says that no prophet arose like Moshe – no one arose like Moshe among the prophets, but someone did arise like Moshe among the kings. Moshe Rabbenu was the greatest in prophecy but King Shlomo was greater in kingship. In this area, he was greater than Moshe Rabbenu and even greater than Avraham Avinu. Avraham was not a king at all, and Moshe Rabbenu was the beginning of kingship. The verse: "He became king over Yeshurun" (Devarim 33:5) refers to Moshe Rabbenu, but King Shlomo was the greatest of all kings. At the end of his book "Or Le-Netivati," Our Rabbi, Ha-Rav Tzvi

Yehudah, records dreams which he dreamt. He writes that he once dreamt that he wrote an article about the way to run a state according to Torah, and showed it to "Abba z"l" (Maran Ha-Rav Kook). Maran Ha-Rav looked at him and said: "You need to show it to King Shlomo." "I brought it to King Shlomo," our Rabbi wrote, "And he agreed." If so, the proper way to run a state is by the example set by King Shlomo. The administration of a state is obviously not detached from other areas of wisdom. We see in the book of Kohelet how this wisdom is connected to many other areas of wisdom, but it is also a wisdom in and of itself.

2. Character Traits and Actions

Avraham Avinu's wisdom was revealed in acts of kindness or, more precisely, in positive character traits. Character traits are the general and actions are the details. Connecting the two is the uniqueness of Avraham's wisdom. Wisdom unconnected to action is Bila'am's wisdom, who was a great sage, as it says: "He knows the supreme knowledge" (Bemidbar 24:16), not for the sake of improvement but for the sake of evil. Even wisdom can be used in both directions, as it says: "whoever you bless will be blessed and whoever you curse will be cursed" (Bemidbar 22:6). Bila'am chose to utilize it for evil. In contrast, Avraham Avinu used wisdom for good. Ha-Rav Naftali Hertz Vizel proves in his book "Gan Na'ul" that whenever the Tanach uses the term "chacham" (sage) it means a righteous sage.

A person may be learned, a professor or a philosopher but if he is not righteous, he is not called a "chacham." In Shut "Noda Bi-Yehudah," he brings a quote which refers to a particular individual as an enlightened person, a researcher and a "chacham." The "Noda Bi-Yehudah" writes to the person who was writing: "Do not call him a 'chacham.'" A "chacham" is someone whose entire wisdom is revealed in Torah, mitzvot and acts of goodness. This is in fact Avraham Avinu's wisdom: wisdom which leads to kindness, acts of goodness and to the entire Torah. Avraham Avinu learned the entire Torah before it was given. How? Through his conscience. The "Ba'al Ha-Tanya" explains that Avraham Avinu's Torah learning did not include the details (Likutei Torah, Shelach, ma'amar 2). Avraham did not light Chanukah candles, did not read the Haggadah on Pesach or celebrate Sukkot. He did not live in the details but in the general concepts. He may have observed the details or not, but the essence is that he learned Torah through his faith and out of the faith he built his character traits.

Our Sages say that Avraham had four hundred chapters in his tractate of Avodah Zarah ("Idol Worship") (Avodah Zarah 14b). We have five chapters and we understand them with difficulty. Where is Avraham's Tractate Avodah Zarah with four hundred chapters? We do not know. It disappeared. Only one book remains which Avraham wrote: "Sefer Ha-Yetzirah – The Book of Creation." It was passed down orally until Rabbi Akiva wrote it down and arranged it. Avraham Avinu was a great warrior against idol wor-

ship, since idol worship is a metaphysical and ideological error which results in horrible unethical corruption. This is certainly not difficult to understand since there are so many gods and a person can always find a god for whatever he wants to do. This is not permissibility, it is much more. In idol worship, everything is holy. Even illicit sexual relations can be performed in a Temple and called "kedeshot" (holy women) – everything is holy. In idol worship, any human inclination is permitted and holy (see Yerushalami, Avodah Zarah 1:1). But we say: "Hashem is one."

3. Avraham's Faith

At the beginning of his journey, Avraham Avinu was a philosopher. Philosophy is intellectual investigation. Everything must be proven, and anything which is not proven does not exist. Avraham went on to be higher than a philosopher. He was a believer, a believer in Hashem. When Hashem said to him: "Take your son" (Bereshit 22:1), he took his son although there is no way to explain it from a philosophical perspective. There was no explanation from the perspective of human intellect, human ethics or societal norms. There was only belief.

Maran Ha-Rav Kook explains the expression in the Gemara: "He is called humble, he is called righteous, from the students of Avraham Avinu" (Berachot 6b) that the fundamental qualities of righteousness and humility are not to be arrogant and not to apply the prevailing intellect

to every situation. The commandment of Brit Milah is unclear, and the Akedah is certainly unclear. "We must understand that a person does not live a true life based on the prevailing intellect alone, but by acts of goodness. And Avraham Avinu, may peace be upon him, also nullified his intellect after all of his philosophizing, with simple faith, as the commentators explain in the trial of the Akedah" (Ain Aya, Berachot vol.1, chap. 1 #55). There are those who think that faith in Hashem is designed for the weak and those who are empty, that awe of Hashem is for those who are afraid. This is not true. Faith in Hashem comes from wisdom. The wiser a person, the greater his belief in Hashem, the greater his awe of Hashem and the greater are his acts of goodness. The Gemara uses an expression: "A strong person who fears" (Shabbat 31b). Maran Ha-Rav Kook explains that one can fear sin out of weakness of character or from general fear. But the ultimate goal is to be strong and fear sin (see Ain Aya *ibid.*). Avraham Avinu possessed positive character traits, feared Hashem and nullified his intellect precisely on account of his wisdom. Through intellect and wisdom, one reaches humility and the understanding that something exists above wisdom. The things we have learned about Avraham Avinu up to this point are surprising. We do not usually discuss Avraham Avinu from the perspective of wisdom but from his loving-kindness and positive character traits. We must understand that his positive character traits flowed from recognition of Hashem and understanding. There are other paths to refining one's character traits – the paths of

emotion, imagination, desire, fear, societal pressure or societal influence. There are many paths and they are all good, but the supreme path is through knowledge. The Rambam therefore named his collection of laws of positive traits as "Hilchot De'ot – the Laws of Knowledge." A person knows more and more until knowledge takes his entire personality captive.

This is how Avraham Avinu proceeded and ultimately created a revolution. He revolutionized wisdom, and out of this came a revolution of positive character traits in the world. Human history is divided into two parts: before Avraham Avinu and after Avraham Avinu. In a completely different, secular realm, Greek philosophers talk about the period before Socrates and the period after Socrates. Some things are pre-Socrates and others are post-Socrates. In contrast, Chabad Chasidim talk about the period before St. Petersburg and after St. Petersburg. The first Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi known as the "Ba'al Ha-Tanya," was arrested on suspicion of treason, brought to the jail in St. Petersburg, acquitted and released. Chabad Chasidim therefore divide history into the periods before St. Petersburg and after it. But we are the students of Avraham Avinu and we divide history between the periods before Avraham Avinu and after him. In world history, pre-history is until Avraham Avinu and history begins with Avraham Avinu. Nursery school children and first- and second-graders therefore must begin to learn Torah from Avraham Avinu. Pre-history from Adam Ha-Rishon and Noach must be oc-

asionally mentioned only for the sake of general knowledge. The essence of history begins with Avraham Avinu. Before Avraham Avinu, all humanity deteriorated to a horrid state until the flood, not to mention what occurred before humanity, as our Sages state: Hashem built worlds and destroyed them (Kohelet Rabbah 3:14). Each new world created was better than the previous one. How many worlds did Hashem build and destroy? I saw that one Kabbalist wrote that Hashem spent seventeen and a half billion years creating worlds and destroying them. This is interesting, since scientists estimate that the Big Bang occurred fifteen billion years ago. If so, the exact time was seventeen and a half billion years ago. All history is thus divided between seventeen and a half billion years before Avraham, and the time from Avraham Avinu onward. The sun, by the way, has enough energy for another five to ten billion years.

Question: Hasn't the world only existed for approximately five thousand years?

Answer: Our world has only existed for a little over fifty-seven hundred years but Hashem built worlds and destroyed them beforehand. Our world is beautiful. I love our world. It is better for a person in our world than in all the other worlds which Hashem built over the seventeen and a half billion years and then destroyed. Our Sages state that the first word in the Torah, "Bereshit" (In the beginning), begins with the Hebrew letter "bet" which is closed on its right side to teach us that we should not

search for what came before. It can be compared to a king who built a castle in a place that had been a garbage dump. A journalist came [The midrash does not say a journalist but "a person came" but we understand what type of person...] and asked: "Wasn't it disgusting here before?" The king threw him out: "You're disgusting! Get out of here! What does it matter to you that it was disgusting before?! Now it is not." It is forbidden to remind a newly-observant person of his past actions. Now, we are not only in a much better world, but we also have the great fortune to live after the appearance of Avraham Avinu. There is therefore no reason to dwell on what preceded Avraham Avinu, it is insulting and extraneous. It is written at the end of Pirkei Avot (6:9) that Hashem acquired five possessions for Himself in His world: Torah, heaven and earth, Avraham, Israel and the Temple. If this is so, where did Avraham stand? He stood with the Torah, with heaven and earth, with Israel and with the Temple. The Mishnah brings as a proof that Hashem acquired Avraham from the verse: "He blessed him, saying: Blessed is Avram of G-d, the Most High, who acquired heaven and earth" (Bereshit 14:19). Who acquired heaven and earth? G-d, the Most High, acquired heaven and earth. Midrash Shmuel on Pirkei Avot says: This is not so, Avraham Avinu is the one who acquired heaven and earth! But did Avraham Avinu create heaven and earth? Certainly not, but Avraham Avinu gave meaning to all of heaven and earth. There is no meaning to the creation of heaven and earth without Avraham Avinu (see Bereshit Rabbah 12:9).

Everything was suspended after creation to see if Avraham Avinu would come into existence or not. If Avraham did not come, there would be a need to destroy all of humanity. Midrash Shmuel thus says that if Hashem acquires heaven and earth, He acquires Avraham Avinu all the more so, since all of heaven and earth is not worth anything without Avraham Avinu.

4. Calling out Hashem's Name in the World

There were thus catastrophes before Avraham Avinu. At the time of the flood, Hashem blessed Noach, but Noach did not elevate humanity. He only elevated himself. Even his sons were not exactly on his level. The Rambam describes at great length in the first chapter of Hilchot Avodah Zarah (Laws of Idol Worship) how humanity deteriorated in the generation after the flood to the point that there was a lack of recognition of the Master of the Universe. The world became so primitive, materialistic, base, lowly and evil that all they knew was the form of trees and stones, and their “sages” were ignorant. Only a few select individuals knew Hashem: Chanoch, Metushelach, Noach, Shem and Ever. The world continued on this way until the birth of the Pillar of the World: Avraham Avinu. From the time he was weaned – maybe two or three years old, his mind began to wander. As we said, Avraham's greatness was his wisdom. There are wise children and foolish elders. His thoughts began to wander and he began to think

day and night, and he was surprised: how does this cycle constantly continue if there is no one controlling it? The cycle is all of nature. He did not have a teacher, and was living in Ur Kasdim among ignorant idol worshippers. Avraham continued to ponder until he reached the true path from his own proper understanding. He came to everything through the power of his own wisdom. He knew that there is only one Gd, and that He controls the cycle. He created everything and there is no other god but Him. He also knew that the entire world was mistaken, and that this error was caused by the worshipping of stars and forms until the truth was lost from their body of knowledge. At the age of forty, Avraham came to know his Creator. Thirty-seven years of investigating, learning and pondering. He began at the age of three and reached his conclusions when he was forty. It took him thirty-seven years. The Gemara says that Avraham knew his Creator at the age of three (Nedarim 32a). There is no contradiction here. The "Kesef Mishnah" explains that he began to know at the age of three and his recognition of the Divine was complete at the age of forty. "A forty year old reaches understanding" (Pirkei Avot 5:21). The Rambam continues that once he knew, he began discussing this with the people of Ur Kasdim and explaining to them that they were on the wrong path. He broke the idols and informed them that it is only proper to worship G-d. Because he began to influence them with his proofs, King Nimrod wanted to kill him. He was the king of the idol worshippers, the king of heretics, the king of those who rebel, the king of evil. He

threw Avraham Avinu into a fiery furnace, into a crematorium, exactly like Hitler. He threw him in alive, but "Baruch Hashem" a miracle occurred for him and he escaped unharmed. He then went to Charan and began to inform the entire world that there is only one G-d and it is proper to worship him. He would go from city to city and from country to country calling to the people until he came to the land of Canaan...and when the people would gather around him and ask him about his words, he would offer an explanation to each of them according to their understanding until they returned to the path of truth. Each person required a different explanation, a different reason, a different proof. Each person according to his path, according to his soul. He gathered thousands and tens of thousands of people and he implanted in their hearts this great essential teaching (faith in Hashem) and he wrote many books. Four hundred chapters disappeared, all except "Sefer Ha-Yetzirah – the Book of Creation." But the ideas were not lost – they were absorbed into the Oral Torah.

Question: Where are these people?

Answer: All these people seemed to have disappeared. They are not the Nation of Israel. They are good people who were absorbed into the nations of the world, beside the Nation of Israel. They are part of the covenant of Avraham. They are not the Nation of Israel. The Nation of Israel is the offspring of Yaakov.

The Rambam explains that this chain continues in the Nation of Israel: Avraham taught it to his son Yitzchak.

Yitzchak sat, taught and cautioned others. Yitzchak taught Yaakov and appointed him to teach, and he sat, taught, and strengthened those who gathered around him. And Yaakov Avinu taught all of his sons, and he chose Levi and appointed him as the leader. All of his sons learned and taught but Levi was the head. He placed him in a yeshiva to teach them the way of Hashem, and to observe the mitzvot of Avraham. He commanded his sons that the leadership should not depart from the offspring of Levi, so that the teachings would not be forgotten. This idea gained strength amongst the children of Yaakov, and those who gathered around them, and there became a nation within the world who knew Hashem. The Nation is only the children of Yaakov, and not those who gathered around them from the nations, and the Nation's uniqueness was that its essence was faith in Hashem. Those who gathered around them were good and pleasant people but they are not the Nation of Israel. They are the righteous people from the nations of the world, similar to Aner, Eshkol and Mamre, with whom Avraham took counsel, who were righteous non-Jews. There are also righteous non-Jews today and they are the students of the students of these people who gathered around. The Rambam continues: When Israel extended their stay in Egypt, they learned their ways and worshipped idols like them, with the exception of the tribe of Levi who stood firmly by the mitzvot of the forefathers and never worshipped idols. The Nation of Israel sank to the forty-ninth gate of impurity, walking among them and experiencing the spiritual death of idol worship. Because

of Hashem's love for us, and to keep the oath He made to Avraham Avinu, He made Moshe Rabbenu, the master of all of the prophets, and sent him to take the Nation of Israel out of Egypt (Rambam, Hilchot Avodah Zarah – Laws of Idol Worship 1:3). Hashem thus loves us because He loves Avraham Avinu. We are the Nation of Avraham Avinu. The qualities of Avraham Avinu, the faith of Avraham Avinu, the character traits of Avraham Avinu, were absorbed into the Nation of Israel in the iron furnace of Egypt. Because of Hashem's love for and promise to Avraham Avinu, He took us out of Egypt by Moshe Rabbenu. Avraham Avinu is us and we are Avraham Avinu in the form of a Nation. He is in the form of an individual and we are in the form of a Nation. We said earlier that Avraham is the male paradigm and Sarah is the female paradigm. The paradigm of an individual is Avraham and the paradigm of a community is the Nation of Israel – "the Nation of the G-d of Avraham."

Our Sages say that Avraham Avinu walked the length and breadth of the Land of Israel. Why? So that it would be easily conquered by his children (Baba Batra 100a). Since Avraham Avinu is us, his cleaving to the Land of Israel made it easier for us to conquer. Avraham is the seed and we are the tree, we are the fruit. Everything within us comes from Avraham Avinu. When we learn about Avraham Avinu, we learn about ourselves.

5. The Great Man among the Giants

Those who look at Avraham Avinu as an equal commit a grave error. This is called learning Tanach "Be-Gova Einayim" (literally, "at the height of the eyes"). This is first and foremost an intellectual error. This shows that they do not understand anything, they did not learn anything and they did not grasp anything. They do not understand who Avraham Avinu is. The second error results from the first. It is an educational error. If we look at Avraham Avinu from the correct perspective and follow after him, we follow his light. But if Avraham Avinu is the same as us, even when we follow him, we will remain in the same place. We will not be elevated and exalted. We will not have a guide. We will lack the "Look at this one and sanctify yourself." This is thus a double error. The educational error comes in tow since all of the personalities in the Tanach are spiritual giants. Ha-Rav Moshe Feinstein relates in the preface to the last volume of his responsa, Shut Igrot Moshe, an incident which occurred in his city in Russia. A man became ill with a horrible sickness: his tongue swelled up within his mouth, he was unable to speak and he eventually died. A day before his death, Rav Moshe came to visit him and the man asked that everyone leave the room. He had something private and of great importance to discuss with the Rav. He explained that he had given a class and had discussed Lot's older daughter who named her son Moav – from father. She was the progenitor of the Moabite People, which means that she is the ancestor of Rut, who is the great-grandmother of King David, from whom the

Messiah will descend. How could it be, he had asked, that this woman, who had no shame, and therefore publicized her illicit and immoral behavior by giving her son a name that would ever recall her sinful act, was granted such honor? He spared no words in denigrating her behavior. He continued: "That night, two elderly women appeared to me in a dream. Their heads and faces were covered, and they said they were Lot's daughters. They had heard my complaint about their behavior and came from the World of Truth to convey to me a justification for their actions. Since it was well-known that Avraham Avinu, their uncle, was an individual for whom miracles were commonplace, they feared that people might say that their sons were conceived by immaculate conception. There were no men around, so how else could they have been conceived? In order to prevent another religion such as Christianity from being established by this misunderstanding, they decided to publicize the source of their conception. Their motives were pure and lofty. Since he had spoken ill against them and defamed their character, he was to be punished as the spies in the wilderness were punished. Their tongues swelled, and they died an unusual death." Ha-Rav Feinstein says that this seems correct. We are not speaking about the daughters of Lot. We are speaking about our great and holy people, and all the more so the giant of the giants. This expression referring to Avraham Avinu: "The great man among the giants" is found in the Book of Yehoshua (14:15). Our Sages say that his full stature was equal to seventy-four men. This is

an exact figure. How much is the great man among the giants? Seventy-four (Massechet Sofrim 21:9). Everything with us is exact. The midrash says that he was as strong as seventy-four men, and he ate and drank like seventy-four men, and the drinking refers to wine! This midrash appears in a work "Midrash Peli'ah" (Surprising Midrash) which quotes midrashim that are difficult to understand (piskah 17). There is an explanation of this midrash in the name of Rabbi Eliyahu Vilna, which I have not been able to locate in the works of the Vilna Gaon (Rabbi Eliyahu of Vilna), but it certainly fits his genius. He quotes the verses: "Moshe, Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, and the seventy elders of Israel ascended...they gazed at G-d, ate and drank" (Shemot 24:9, 11), i.e. seventy-four people. What does "eat and drink mean"? Purification of the physical until "they gazed at G-d." "And Avraham Avinu fed this food to the angels, whose food is the splendor of the Divine Presence," i.e. supreme, spiritual food. This means that Avraham was like the seventy elders, Moshe, Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, in relation to the purification of the material. King David also purified the physical. He had an evil inclination which he killed by fasting (Yerushalmi, Berachot 9:5, Tanya chap. 1). Avraham Avinu however did not kill his evil inclination but purified it. He is therefore called Avraham which has the gematria (each letter has a numerical value) of 248, since all 248 of his limbs served Hashem.

6. The Students of Avraham Avinu

As we stated, Avraham Avinu's wisdom was revealed in the purity of his character traits. This is in contrast to Bilam, who had wisdom but did not purify his character. Therefore, "What is the difference between the students of Avraham Avinu and the students of Bilam?" (Pirkei Avot 5:19) Avraham Avinu had a "good eye," he loved everyone. Bilam however had an "evil eye," he hated everyone. Why is it written: "What is the difference between the students of Avraham Avinu and the students of Bilam?" and not "What is the difference between Avraham Avinu and Bilam?" Answer: a person is recognized through his students. Tell me who your student is and I will tell you who you are. Avraham Avinu is recognized through his student Moshe Rabbenu and all of the spiritual giants of the Nation of Israel who are his students. Everyone of the Nation of Israel at this time is a student of Avraham Avinu. As we said, we therefore begin by teaching little children about Avraham Avinu. A successful teacher is not one who has a student who knows more about Avraham Avinu after the class, but one who has a student who is more like Avraham Avinu after the class. Avraham Avinu is imprinted in our personality and soul, but we must exert effort in order to bring the potential Avraham Avinu out from within us. The connection to the Land of Israel begins with Avraham Avinu. Positive character traits begin with Avraham Avinu. And the love of Israel begins with Avraham Avinu. Our love of Israel does not begin with Moshe Rabbenu, since if that were so, it would be possible

to say that we only love someone who learns Torah. Our love of Israel begins with Avraham Avinu. The Nation of Israel is Avraham Avinu. We are saturated with the spirit of Avraham Avinu, the treasured character of Israel, which itself began with Avraham Avinu. The treasured character of Israel appeared during the Exodus from Egypt, but it was absorbed from Avraham Avinu in the fiery furnace. We are the Nation of Avraham Avinu. Moshe Rabbenu is the student of Avraham Avinu. Someone who is as wise as Moshe Rabbenu, but is not the student of Avraham Avinu, becomes Bilam. "Our Sages say: 'A prophet like Israel never arose again in Israel' (Devarim 34:10) but someone did arise like him among the nations of the world," namely Bilam (Bemidbar Rabbah 14:19). Is Bilam similar to Moshe? There are similarities, but the great difference is that Moshe Rabbenu is the student of Avraham Avinu and Bilam is not. And if he is the opposite of Avraham Avinu, he is also the opposite of Moshe Rabbenu.

We have thus merited meeting a spiritual giant. We must think about him all the time, look to him all the time. Every act that a person performs must be considered from the perspective of what Avraham Avinu would have done in this situation. We must act in consonance with Avraham Avinu. May we merit fulfilling the command "Look to Avraham your father and to Sarah who bore you."

Yitzchak

1. "Avraham begot Yitzchak"
2. The Fear of Yitzchak
3. "Bitul Ha-Yesh – Self-Nullification"
4. A Hidden Tzadik
5. "Yitzchak Sowed"
6. A Spirit of the World to Come

1. "Avraham begot Yitzchak"

Fear grips us when we discuss Yitzchak Avinu. We fear discussing all of the spiritual giants of the world who appear in the Tanach, but all the more so when it comes to Yitzchak Avinu, about whom it is said: "the fear of Yitzchak" (Bereshit 31:42). Yaakov Avinu refers to the Master of the Universe as "the fear of Yitzchak" (Bereshit 31:42). It appears that the fear of the Master of the Universe is also the fear of Yitzchak himself. Rivka Imenu also feared Yitzchak. The first time that Rivka saw him from afar, she fell off her camel (Bereshit 24:64). The Netziv says that all of her life, along with the love, peace and friendship she shared with him, Rivka also feared him. She was therefore not brazen enough to tell him directly that it was preferable to bless Yaakov over Esav. Rivka feared him even though she was full of courage. After all, when Eliezer came as the agent of Avraham Avinu, Betuel did

not want Rivka to go with him. Eliezer was extremely patient and said: "Let us call the young woman and ask her" (Bereshit 24:57). Betuel was certain that she would refuse to go with a stranger to a distant land. But Rivka said: "I will go". Rashi expands upon the forcefulness of her words, telling us that she said: "I will go on my own, even if you do not want [me to go] (ibid.), i.e. do not start to speak to my heart, saying that you do not want me to go, for I am going anyway!" So we can see that she was already full of courage. Even sending Yaakov to deceive Yitzchak required great strength from her. But when it came to things relating to Yitzchak, to stand facing him, she was full of fear. We too are therefore not brazen enough to discuss him. But even if we were brazen, there is not much to discuss since not much is related about Yitzchak Avinu. Yitzchak hardly spoke and there are very few details about what he did. The Torah relates that he sowed seeds, harvested and dug wells. All is summarized in two verses. This is in stark contrast to Avraham Avinu who was active in many areas. Avraham was a warrior and conquered countries. Avraham called out in the name of Hashem, went down to Egypt and dwelled there, and experienced many amazing things in his life. Yaakov Avinu also had an eventful life, though it was stormy and full of deceptions. He received the blessing, left the Land, and was with Lavan. He survived all of these difficulties, and then returned to the Land, struggled with the angels, met with Esav, endured the episode with Shechem, and many other things. But there are no stories about Yitzchak Avinu! It is

as if he did not do anything. Researchers of Tanach thus claim, in their shallow way, that Yitzchak did nothing of his own. He is merely a connector, a bland passageway between Avraham and Yaakov. He is the "son of" and the "father of." Some of them even claim that part of what is related about him is simply made up in order to say something about this pareve figure.

In truth, they grasp the point precisely – Yitzchak is "nothing," and being "nothing" is the highest level which exists. It is called "Bitul Ha-Yesh" – self-nullification. Yitzchak is an unknown phenomenon: a hidden tzadik (righteous person). A revealed tzadik is an active person, who runs from place to place, teaching, performing acts of kindness, etc. A figure such as this is understandable. But we are incapable of understanding a hidden tzadik. In an enigmatic statement, our great Rabbi, the Rambam, says that every person can be as righteous as Moshe Rabbenu (Hilchot Teshuvah 9:2). As is known, the Rambam does not use rhetoric. He speaks straight and to the point, especially in his books of Halachah. If he nonetheless uses rhetoric, he explicitly says: "This is homiletics!" Therefore, if the Rambam states that any person can be as righteous as Moshe Rabbenu, we must understand it according to its simple meaning. How so? Can we really be like Moshe Rabbenu?! Answer: we must pay close attention to the fact that the Rambam does not say that we can be as wise as Moshe Rabbenu, or that we can be a prophet like Moshe Rabbenu or a leader like Moshe Rabbenu, but that we can be as righteous as him. We learn from here that any per-

son can be righteous! In every role in the world, a person can be evil or righteous. We do not choose the role which is designated for us in the world. The Master of the Universe places each person in a different place: one is poor, one is rich, one is wise, one is stupid, one is strong and one is weak. But regardless of the circumstances in which one finds oneself, one can be as righteous as Moshe Rabbenu or as wicked as Yeravam ben Navat. He can be a revealed tzadik about whom everyone knows and talks about, or he can be a hidden tzadik whom others do not recognize.

Yitzchak Avinu was thus a giant among spiritual giants. He was a giant like Avraham Avinu and perhaps even greater, since he was both Avraham Avinu and Yitzchak Avinu. As is known, the cynics of that generation said that Yitzchak was born from Sarah and Avimelech. In order to combat this notion, Hashem made Yitzchak's features identical to Avraham Avinu's (Bereshit Rabbah 53:6). But not only did Yitzchak's face appear as Avraham Avinu's, his experiences also paralleled those of Avraham Avinu: Avraham yearned to have offspring, Yitzchak yearned to have offspring. Avraham traveled to the land of the Philistines on account of a famine. So did Yitzchak. Avraham foresaw danger for his wife, who was taken captive — the same occurred to Yitzchak and his wife. Avraham had two sons who were polar opposites — Yitzchak had two sons who were polar opposites. Avraham removed one of his sons after his wife demanded that he do so; Yitzchak too removed one of his sons following his wife's directives. Eve-

ryone can see the parallel life experiences between Avraham and Yitzchak. It is less obvious though, that their inner, spiritual worlds were also identical. Our Sages say that Yitzchak is called Avraham because Yitzchak is Avraham. He is a type of Avraham. There are different types of Avraham: There is Avraham who is Avraham and there is Avraham who is Yitzchak. The Midrash explains this idea on the verse: "And these are the generations of Yitzchak son of Avraham – Avraham begot Yitzchak" (Bereshit 25:19). The Midrash says "And these are the generations of Yitzchak son of Avraham – Avraham," Yitzchak is Avraham. The Midrash adds: "This is a deep matter," the soul of the father flows through the son (Bereshit 63:3). This reality applies not only when a father dies while his wife is pregnant and the son is named for him. Even when the father is alive, his soul flows through and shines within his son. All of the wells which Avraham Avinu dug and which were closed up by the Philistines were opened anew by Yitzchak Avinu. This applies to the simple wells of water as well as the supreme, spiritual wells which were closed by the Philistines, because the war with the Philistines and the other evil non-Jews is always fought on two fronts: there is a military, agricultural, and settlement war and a spiritual, faith-based, supreme war. Yitzchak opened the wells of Avraham and dug additional ones of his own.

2. The Fear of Yitzchak

Maran Ha-Rav Kook explains in his commentary on the siddur, "Olat Re'eiyah" (vol. 1, p. 269), that the prayer "Shemoneh Esrei" begins: "the G-d of Avraham, the G-d of Yitzchak and the G-d of Yaakov" instead of "the G-d of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov," because each of the forefathers had a different form of Divine service. There is the worship of the "G-d of Avraham," there is the worship of the "G-d of Yitzchak" and there is the worship of the "G-d of Yaakov." Maran Ha-Rav Kook explains that the main characteristic of Avraham Avinu is wisdom. As is known, while still in his youth, Avraham engaged in intellectual investigation and asked himself who created the world. He had great wisdom, and all of the kings from the east and west came to take counsel with him. The main characteristic of Yitzchak is awe of Hashem – "the fear of Yitzchak." Obviously, Avraham Avinu also possessed awe of Hashem, since a person who does not possess awe is an ignoramus. Wisdom leads one to the awe of Hashem: "The awe of Hashem is wisdom" (Iyov 28:28). The Ramchal in the introduction to his book "Mesilat Yesharim" says that this is "the wisdom" with the definitive "the." Awe of Hashem means seeing that everything comes from the source of everything. People often think that someone who has awe of Hashem is primitive, but the Rambam does not. The Rambam says: "What is the path to love Him and fear Him? When one reflects..." (Hilchot Yesodei Ha-Torah, chap. 2). Through introspective and deep wisdom, one is filled with awe of Hashem. Yitzchak Avinu's

special characteristic was awe of Hashem, and through it he was filled with wisdom, since there is no greater wisdom than looking at the source of everything. On account of Yitzchak's deep introspection, he also possessed the ability to look positively at the Nation of Israel more so than the other of our forefathers. The Gemara relates that in the future Hashem will turn to Avraham and tell him that He cannot redeem the Nation of Israel since they are full of sin. Avraham Avinu will answer Him: "They should be wiped out for the sake of the sanctification of Hashem's Name." Yaakov Avinu will respond in the same way. When Hashem turns to Yitzchak Avinu, Yitzchak will answer Him: "Most people live seventy years. Deduct the first twenty for which he is not liable for sin. Thus, fifty years remain. Half of them are night, and therefore only twenty-five years remain. Half the daytime is occupied with eating and drinking, when a person does not perform many transgressions. What remains? Twelve and a half years! I'll bear the sin upon myself for half of the time and You accept half of the time on Yourself. And if you do not agree to this, I will bear responsibility for it all. Hashem will say to him: "I accept" (Shabbat 99b).

Nonetheless, Avraham and Yitzchak had the same Divine worship. Their point of departure, however, was different. Avraham began from wisdom and through it reached awe of Hashem, while Yitzchak began from awe of Hashem and through it reached wisdom. Avraham established Shacharit and Yitzchak established Minchah. It is obviously not the same prayer. But Yitzchak also prayed Shacharit,

which his father established. The Tosafot explain that Avraham Avinu also prayed Minchah, as soon as Yitzchak established it. Through his own Divine service, Avraham reached the Divine service of Yitzchak. This is all summarized in one short phrase: "And the two of them walked together" (Bereshit 22:6, 8). The two of them walked together to the most supreme trial, to the spiritual Everest of all history.

3. "Bitul Ha-Yesh – Self-Nullification"

Yitzchak thus possessed the trait of awe. "Hashem's treasure-house only contains awe of heaven" (Berachot 33b). The Maharal explains that there is an advantage to the awe of Hashem in contrast to the love of Hashem. In love of Hashem – "I love Hashem." In contrast, there is no "I" in awe of Hashem. This is the advantage of "self-nullification" ((Netivot Olam, Netiv Ha-Yirah), i.e. a person does not act in awe of Hashem. He nullifies himself to Hashem. On the face of it, it is not a positive thing for a person to nullify himself. But it all depends before whom a person is nullifying himself. If it is nullification before another person, it is negative. We recite a blessing over this: "Blessed is Hashem...who has not made me a slave." As Maran Ha-Rav Kook explains (Olat Ha-Re'eiyah vol. 1, p. 71), the intention is not only physical enslavement but also emotional/psychological enslavement. But someone who nullifies himself before Hashem, enjoys the greatest level

of existence. That is "and a spirit lifted me" (Yechezkel 3:12).

In truth, Yitzchak also nullified himself before other people, but only those whom he recognized as agents of Hashem. He did not search for a spouse by himself, rather Eliezer, the trusted servant of Avraham, who drew from the Torah of his teacher Avraham and gave it to others to drink, is the one who brought him a spouse, and he accepted. Yitzchak understood that this servant, in this area, was the hand of Hashem. The blessing to Yaakov also came through Rivka, i.e. Yitzchak understood that Rivka arranged it. She knew what she was doing. In this area, the hand of Hashem acted through Rivka. The Akedah is the ultimate example. His father takes him based on a Divine command, and he goes: "And the two of them walked together." "'And where is the lamb for the offering?' And Avraham said: 'G-d will see to it Himself the lamb for the offering, my son.' And the two of them walked together" (Bereshit 22:8). This is self-sacrifice, the climax of climaxes of self-nullification.

The Chasidic Rebbe of Piacezna, Ha-Rav Kolonymous Kalman Shapira, lived during the Holocaust. Every Shabbat night he would deliver a Dvar Torah in the Warsaw Ghetto. He would write it down after Shabbat. For many years after the war, his Dvrei Torah remained hidden in a jar among the ruins of the Warsaw Ghetto. The Rebbe was murdered along with his entire family during the Holocaust. His book called "Aish Kodesh – Sacred Fire" was published not long ago. The Rebbe of Piacezna

says that although Yitzchak was ready to be slaughtered, in actuality, he was not slaughtered. It is not the same thing to be ready to be slaughtered as it is to be actually slaughtered. The Rebbe asks: was it possible to have the Akedah against Yitzchak's will? He answers: certainly! No one asked the millions murdered during the Holocaust if they were willing to be slaughtered, and yet they were slaughtered. This is Akedah Yitzchak against their will! The Rebbe states that this was the completion of the Akedah. The will without the actualization of Yitzchak, combined with the actualization without the will of the millions murdered for the sanctification of Hashem's name, form a whole. He says that the millions slaughtered are not "like the Akedah of Yitzchak" or a "continuation of the Akedah of Yitzchak," rather their deaths are the actualization of the Akedah of Yitzchak.

4. A Hidden Tzadik

Yitzchak Avinu is thus a hidden tzadik. The characteristic of a hidden tzadik is that his righteousness is expressed in his inner world. Our world does not see the internal, for it values the external. Our world is a world of deception and externals. Someone told me that there was once a gathering of Rabbis. Some of the Rabbis were wearing white shirts, some were wearing hats and suits and a few wore rabbinic hats and long jackets. No one interacted with the ones who wore the white shirts. They said "shalom" to the ones with a hat and suit. And they asked for a blessing

from the ones with the rabbinic hats and long jackets. This is how our world appears; it is a world of externals. If a person performs many outer acts of loving kindness, he is respected. But we must remember that there are people who are hidden tzadikim, whose righteous is hidden within their inner world. Their greatness is hidden there. But a person sees with his eyes. Even the prophet Shmuel erred when he was impressed by Eliav. When Hashem sent Shmuel to make one of the sons of Yishai king, Shmuel saw Eliav and said: "Surely Hashem's anointed is before Him" (Shmuel 1 16:6). Hashem said to him: "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have refused him. For it is not as a man sees, since a man sees the outer appearance but Hashem sees the heart" (ibid. 7-8). Our Sages say (Pesachim 66b) that Eliav was an angry person. We see much later that when David comes to his brothers to draft them to wage war, Eliav he is angry. If Eliav was going to be angry much later, why judge him for it now? Our Sages explain that although he would be angry later, he had the character of an angry person. Hashem sees the heart, and he knew that he was an angry person by nature. In contrast, David went around with base people, and for every transgression, they blamed him and his men. But "Man sees the outer appearance but Hashem sees the heart," and Hashem said about him: "Anoint him, for he is the one" (ibid. 12).

Question: How does a hidden tzadik contribute to others when he has amazing inner world?

Answer: His contribution is on the level of souls. The secret of souls is that everyone is connected. When a person is full of kindness, his kindness influences all of the souls. When a person performs a good act, he exalts all of humanity – Jews, non-Jews and even animals. When a hidden tzadik lives in society, people sense, either consciously or unconsciously, his greatness and absorb it. The influence of a hidden tzadik on the world is therefore greater than that of a revealed tzadik. The revealed tzadikim draw their spiritual strength from the hidden tzadikim. Furthermore, revealed tzadikim also have a hidden part. We know revealed tzadikim, but we do not truly know them, since they also possess a hidden righteousness, and it is greater beyond measure. It is possible to say that the revealed part is only the excess of the hidden. There is a statement in "Orot Ha-Kodesh" (vol. 3, pp. 347-348) in which Maran Ha-Rav Kook relates to a revealed tzadik and a hidden tzadik. He explains that the revealed tzadik desires the best of the best and the best of society, and he acts to attain it. The hidden tzadik desires the best of humanity and existence. He is not restricted by time, but strives to elevate all of existence. This does not mean that on account of his broad sight he was not involved in immediate small issues, but that this is only a small part of the overall reality. Maran Ha-Rav Kook explains that there is a tzadik who is both hidden and revealed, and there is an inner tension within his personality. There is also a tzadik in which the hidden and revealed are united without tension between them. And

there is a supreme tzadik in which the revealed side and the hidden side are one. Since he is a hidden tzadik, he also influences all of existence.

5. "Yitzchak Sowed"

The meaning of "the fear of Yitzchak" is not that Yitzchak Avinu went around gloomy all day, bent over and sad. It is related that Yitzchak was sporting with Rivka, his wife. Avimelech saw this from afar, and did not believe that this was his wife, since the way of the world is for a person to sport with everyone, smile at everyone, flirt with everyone and insult his wife... Therefore, if Yitzchak was sporting with this woman, it certainly was not his wife! So Avimelech thought. Yitzchak also worked the land. He sowed and harvested one hundred gates, one hundred times more than everyone else. It appears that he was a good farmer. He dug wells, and was completely connected to the Land of Israel. He was the only one who did not leave the Land. Avraham Avinu was an "Oleh Chadash" (a new immigrant) and Yaakov Avinu was forced to leave the Land for many years. But Yitzchak was born in the Land and died in the Land, and he did not leave it. He lived in "Gerar," which is located in the area of Gush Katif. The name "Gerar" is preserved today as the valley next to Gush Katif. He occasionally came to Be'er Sheva and Hevron, but he lived mostly in places in the south. Avraham Avinu was in Beit El in Binyamin and Elon Moreh in the Shomron and also in Be'er Sheva in the

Negev, while Yitzchak lived in Gush Katif and south of Mt. Hebron. Yitzchak was a settler and suffered greatly at the hands of the Philistines. He dug a well, and the Philistines came and said: "It is ours." And from then on and always, everything belonged to them... Yitzchak did not argue with them, for he knew with whom he was dealing. He dug the well a second time, and they also claimed ownership over it, as was their way. Yitzchak knew that they hated him. Yitzchak did not look at the world with fear and trembling. He was a person who nullified himself towards the Master of the Universe, and he was filled with the power of action. On the verse: "Yitzchak went to meditate in the field," Maran Ha-Rav Kook says that the word "Si'ach" (meditate) is an abbreviation on "Sekel" (intellect), "Yecholet" (ability) and "Chaim" (life) (Orot Ha-Kodesh vol. 3, p. 106). Yitzchak possessed much intellect, had great ability and the strength of life. Maran Ha-Rav Kook says: do not err and think that Avraham Avinu had the character trait of kindness and Yitzchak Avinu did not. Yitzchak also had the trait of kindness. After all, Yitzchak was the student of Avraham. Yitzchak prayed Shacharit like Avraham: "To relate Your kindness in the morning," and the trait of Yitzchak was built upon the trait of Avraham. The characteristic of Yitzchak is above the characteristic of Avraham (see Shemoneh Kevatzim 6, #163). The stature of Yitzchak is his self-nullification, which is referred to as the characteristic of strength.

We see the unbound trait of kindness in Yitzchak. He loves Esav, even though he knows who Esav is. Even though it

is written that his eyes were dim, a blind person also knows what Esav is engaged in all day long. Yitzchak knew that "Yaakov was a wholesome man who sat in tents" and that Esav was running around in the field hunting rabbits. If so, why did Yitzchak love Esav? He loved him without bounds. And even in the future when difficulties will be raised against the behavior of the Nation of Israel, and Avraham Avinu will not have what to respond, it will be Yitzchak who will defend the Nation. Israel will then say to him: "You are our father" (Shabbat 89b). Yitzchak possessed the trait of unbounded kindness and he therefore loved Esav. But Esav caused great distress! Yitzchak said that Esav will repent in the future. We know this because Esav's head is buried in the Cave of Machpelah. But it is not yet the future and Esav is still completely wicked. Yitzchak constantly lived with the recognition of the future time. Maran Ha-Rav Kook explains that for this reason, Yitzchak had to marry someone who did not possess supreme kindness, but someone who was practical. This was Rivka Imenu, who was an incredibly kind person and also very practical.

Eliezer, the servant of Avraham, searched for a wife for Yitzchak. He knew that the young woman did not need to know everything, and did not need to be pretty or wealthy. What was important was that she had a good heart. Eliezer therefore said: "Can I please drink a little water from your jug?" and she responded: "Drink, my master, and I will also give your camels a drink" (Bereshit 24:14). She was the match for Yitzchak. As is known, a camel drinks a huge

amount of water. Rivka went back and forth to the trough while Eliezer stood there amazed. She could have asked for his help, but she did not. The servant of Avraham knew that Yitzchak was a person of boundless kindness, spiritual kindness, and he saw that Rivka was a woman with pure and holy material kindness. He therefore thought that she was the perfect match for his master, Yitzchak. Rivka is the one who prevents the blessing from going to Esav because it is not the current reality. Yitzchak possesses a boundless kindness which is unaffected by time, but practical kindness is necessary to maintain proper order.

6. A Spirit of the World to Come

Yitzchak Avinu is truly an example of self-nullification. There is no greater self-nullification than the Akedah. We said earlier that Yitzchak was not actually slaughtered. This is not precise, however, since it is written that his ashes were piled upon the altar (Bereshit Rabbah 94:5). It does not say that his soul departed, but that he will rise during the Resurrection of the Dead and Avraham will recite the blessing: "Blessed is Hashem who revives the dead." Tears fell from the eyes of the angels into the eyes of Yitzchak, and as a result he was blinded (Bereshit Rabbah 65:10). This is the supreme completion of Yitzchak Avinu. Maran Ha-Rav Kook explains (Orot Ha-Kodesh vol. 3, p. 135) that a person possesses two souls. One soul is a Divine, holy soul – an image of G-d. This is called the "super-ego" in psychology. The second soul is an impure, animal, base

soul. Psychology calls this the "id." A constant war exists within a person between the Divine soul and the animal soul, between the good inclination and the evil inclination. This is a life and death struggle. It is impossible to strike a compromise between purity and impurity. Additionally, the holy soul is divided into two spirits, both of which are good: a spirit of this world and a spirit of the World to Come. This means that there are good things in the world: to build, to perform acts of kindness, to elevate oneself, to fix, to wage war, to teach, to educate, etc. This is the spirit of this world. In contrast, the supreme and eternal spirit of the World to Come is above this world and time. There is also a war between these two spirits. It is not a war between enemies, but a war between two friends, each with a positive purpose. After the Akedah, Yitzchak was not of this world but of the World to Come. He was the spirit of the World to Come. But do not err: this does not mean that he did not act here. After all, we know that he sowed and harvested and "grew increasingly large." He grew in this world but his sustenance was from the World to Come. His body was here but his soul was there. Yitzchak was here on loan, as an emissary, but he was in other world. This strange status did not cause him to look disparagingly on what was done here. He also worked and invested energy in this world, but all of his yearnings, thoughts, feelings and interests were for the World to Come. We must remember that Yitzchak Avinu is our father and we are all nurtured by the power of his spiritual-

ity, holiness and purity, and we must remember to increase these ideals in our lives.

Yaakov

1. The Man whose Entire Life was Contrary to His Will
2. The Man whose Entire Life was Distress
3. Objective Crisis and Subjective Crisis
4. Yaakov Avinu Repaired the Guile of the Snake
5. Yaakov Avinu's Bed was Whole
6. Twelve Shades
7. Yaakov Avinu Builds a Nation
8. "I am Esav, your firstborn"
9. The Secret of Opposites
10. Sensory Integration
11. Yaakov Avinu – The Middle Man
12. Yaakov Established Ma'ariv
13. Everything is for the Best
14. To be Your Servant in all Situations
15. I Did Not Take away Free Choice

1. The Man whose Entire Life was Contrary to His Will

It is possible to refer to Yaakov Avinu as "the man above crisis." In truth, Yaakov Avinu's entire life was full of crises. The definition of a crisis is anything that is contrary to a person's will. A person's will can be evil or it can be good. Life is constructed in such a way that it is not always according to a person's will. There are some people who only

experience one crisis during the course of a lifetime, there are others who experience one crisis every year, and still others who experience crises more often. But for Yaakov Avinu, crises were routine. He knew about crises while still in the womb. Yaakov was set to come out of his mother's womb first, and then Esav, but it transpired that his twin brother Esav came out first "with his hand grasping on to Esav's heel" (Bereshit 25:26). Reality was not according to his will but he did not give in, he held on to Esav's heel. Although he was unable to prevent it, Yaakov still knew that he was the firstborn. He therefore waited for the opportunity to straighten that which was crooked. And then, when Esav came in from the field, Yaakov said to his brother: "Sell, this day, your birthright to me" (ibid. 25:31). This is surprising: is Yaakov a thief? No, he was taking what was rightfully his. Even though he paid for it, it was still his. He paid for it with a bowl of lentils and a grudge that gripped Esav to the point that he wanted to kill him. All of this was obviously not pleasant for Yaakov, it was contrary to his will, but he would not give up on the right of the firstborn, since it was completely his. Furthermore, Esav himself said: "What use is the birthright to me?" (ibid. 25:32).

Later on, the blessing was rightfully his. And again – contrary to his will – Esav was set to receive the blessing in his stead from their father Yitzchak. His mother, Rivka, called to him: "Your curse will be upon me, my son, just listen to my voice" (ibid. 26:13), i.e. all of the complications that are bound up with this deceptive act will be on

me and my head! This implies that if it were not so, Yaakov would have taken the blame on himself. But Rivka exempted him. Certainly to merit the curse of Yitzchak is not the most pleasant thing. Yaakov was saved from the curse, but Esav still wanted to kill him. Not only was there grudge and hatred – "He deceived me these two times, he took my birthright and now he took away my blessing" (ibid. 27:36) – but now Esav wanted to kill him. Leaving Israel was also contrary to his will. Without any choice, he fled from his brother, following his mother's command. And thus, when he comes to Charan, to the house of his uncle Lavan, he meets Rachel. Rachel warns him: Beware of my father, he is a deceiver! Yaakov responds to her: "Let your mind be at ease. I am his brother in deception!" (Rashi on ibid. 29:12). I know how to maneuver, how to beware of deceivers, "With the merciful you will show yourself merciful. With an upright man, you will show yourself to be upright. With the pure, you will show yourself to be pure. And with the perverse, you will show yourself to be subtle" (Tehillim 18:27). Yaakov did not intend to give in. But an additional complication arose, also contrary to his will: Rachel had mercy on Leah, her older sister, who Lavan included in his scheme. Rachel took the secret code, which Yaakov gave her to avoid being tricked, and gave it to Leah so she would not be shamed (Rashi to Bereshit 29:25) – "And behold, in the morning, it was Leah!" (ibid.). This is truly a major crisis and certainly contrary to his will, since "I will work for you for seven years for Rachel" (ibid. 18) – for Rachel and not for Leah. But

it was not meant to be. The two of them will be like one: "Complete the week of this one and we will give you this one too" (ibid. 27). Now everything was even more complicated and major tension evolved, "And Hashem saw that Leah was hated" (ibid. 31). It was not active hatred, G-d forbid, but rather "And he loved Rachel more than Leah" (ibid. 30). He loved Leah, but he loved Rachel more. Loving less is not a great thing, but loving more is. Regardless, Leah felt hated, and there was much tension. An additional complication – Rachel was barren. Bilhah, her maidservant, enters the picture, as does Zilpah, Leah's maidservant, and the tension grows further. And then there is the issue of livelihood, for Yaakov works for Lavan. As is known, Lavan was evil, "Your father mocked and changed my wages tens of times" (ibid. 31:7). But Yaakov does not give in here either: "If he said: 'Speckled ones shall be your wages,' the entire flock would give birth to speckled ones and if he said: 'Ones with rings [in their fur] shall be your wages,' the entire flock would give birth to ones with rings" (ibid. 8). "And Yaakov saw that the face of Lavan was not toward him as it had been yesterday" (ibid. 2). Yaakov knew that Lavan wanted to conspire against him. It was therefore time to leave. This was obviously under the directive of Hashem. Yaakov flees from Lavan, Lavan pursues and catches him, but – Baruch Hashem, everything works out this time.

2. The Man whose Entire Life was Distress

The time now comes for meeting his brother Esav. Yaakov, his wives, his sons and all of his possessions are on the way to the Land of Israel, and Esav is waiting to kill him. He has four hundred men with him. Is Yaakov really going to continue on his way? Why doesn't he delay his return to the Land of Israel until Esav's anger subsides? Hashem commanded him to go and he is going, even into the face of danger. As is known, the mitzvah of settling the Land of Israel exists even in a state of danger and it applies at all times (Ramban, additions to the Sefer Ha-Mitzvot of the Rambam, positive mitzvah #4. Le-Netivot Yisrael of our Rabbi, Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah Ha-Cohain Kook vol. 1, p. 181 and p. 210 and many other places). This is how it was throughout all of the generations: during the time of Avraham Avinu and time of Yitzchak Avinu and now during the time of Yaakov Avinu. The new and innovative teaching that "saving life supercedes the Land of Israel" is therefore most surprising. Who invented this strange statement? It is obviously not a proper idea.

Yaakov thus heads into the face of danger on the way to the Land of Israel to meet Esav and his four hundred men. He is also entrapped in a personal danger – he struggles with the angel the entire night and – Baruch Hashem – overcomes him, but he pays a price for the struggle: he limps on his hip. Rachel, whom he loved so much, then

dies on the way. This was certainly contrary to his will. And when he arrives in Shechem and desires to settle down, the episode of Dinah, his daughter, befalls him. This is horrible. His two sons cunningly kill all of the males of Shechem. This is also very hard: what did you (my sons) do? "You have troubled me to make me odious among the nations of the Land. And I am few in number and they will gather and strike me" (Bereshit 34:30).

Then there were wars. This is not explicitly mentioned in the Torah, but is hinted at and written in the midrash (for example, Bereshit Rabbah 81:4). "And they travelled, and the fear of G-d fell upon the cities around them, and they did not pursue the Children of Yaakov" (ibid. 35:5). If the fear of G-d was upon the cities, Yaakov surely "took care" of their inhabitants in such a way that fear descended upon them. The Torah states: "Which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and bow" (ibid. 48:22 and Bereshit Rabbah 80:9). This implies that Yaakov waged war.

And finally, "And Yaakov dwelled" (ibid. 37:1). Yaakov wanted to settle down in tranquility, but the anger over Yosef grasped him (Rashi ibid.). There is no peace! There is now tension between the children themselves. Yosef brings an evil report to Yaakov and his brothers hate him. In the end, Yosef disappears, "dies." "Do you recognize your son's coat or not?" (ibid. 37:32). And furthermore, there is famine in the Land. They go down to Egypt to get food, Binyamin is taken and then Shimon – enough! How much distress can one person handle?!

The general principle is that Yaakov Avinu's entire life was filled with crisis.

3. Objective Crisis and Subjective Crisis

We already defined a crisis as an event which occurs contrary to a person's will, i.e. everyone experiences crisis in their lives. No one lives exactly according to his will, even though all of his desires may be good. The first question is thus: how many? But the more essential question is: how do you respond to the crisis? There are two different types of crisis: an objective crisis and a subjective crisis. An objective crisis is a crisis which occurs contrary to the will of a person and also contrary to the will of all people. For example, a person breaks his foot, receives a cast, is limited and physically challenged. He then experiences the subjective crisis – how will I respond to what has occurred? The objective crisis is sometimes quite minute and the response is huge in its force. And sometimes it is the opposite: the crisis is truly great and the response is minimal. Both of these are not good. If a person's close relative dies and he does not sit "shiva," does not mourn and does not eulogize him – he is emotionally unhealthy. But sometimes, people make a huge commotion over nothing.

The question is therefore how a person responds to a crisis: does he break, fold, despair or continue on in strength? This follows what Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Satnov (Cheshbon Ha-Nefesh, chap. 2) writes regarding patience and how a person deals with tragedy: when a bad incident

occurs to you, do not make it worse by despairing over nothing. The world was not created for prophets who know what to expect ahead of time. Sometimes one cannot beware of something bad occurring, but if it has already occurred, one can beware not to make it worse.

4. Yaakov Avinu Repaired the Guile of the Snake

Yaakov experienced distress and crises, but he did not panic or complain – he continued on! From the moment of his birth and even beforehand, he continued on: "his hand held Esav's heel" (Bereshit 25:26). In the most complicated situations, he utilized different tactics. The Shelah writes that Yaakov repaired the guile of the snake. The snake was deceptive, and Yaakov Avinu also used deception. The snake however acted deceitfully for evil purposes (see Shmuel 2 13:3 with Metzudat David, Rashi and Ralbag), while Yaakov Avinu used it for good (see Rashi on Bereshit 27:35 and *ibid.* 34:13). It is true that sometimes one must use the trait of deception. The Torah testifies about Yaakov Avinu: "And Yaakov was a wholesome man, who dwelled in tents" (*ibid.* 25:22). It is rare that the Torah informs us that a particular person is wholesome or kind. The Torah also testifies about Moshe: "And the man Moshe was extremely humble, more than any man on earth" (Bemidbar 12:3). This is rare, an exception to the rule, because we might have thought that Yaakov was not wholesome. The proof: we see various times that he de-

ceives Lavan. Not true! The Torah informs us: Yaakov was wholesome: "his heart and his mouth were the same, he was not duplicitous" (Rashi *ibid.*). This was not his "profession." His profession was to be a wholesome person! A wholesome person sometimes needs to deceive, "And with the perverse, you will show yourself to be subtle." He sometimes had to dress in Esav's clothing. And what he had to do, he did without concern.

5. Yaakov Avinu's Bed was Whole

From where did Yaakov muster the strength to survive the most difficult and complicated situations? – with his brother, his father, his mother and his sons (which is the most difficult trial of all). Furthermore, all of his sons were righteous! Twelve sons and all of them were inside. Yishmael was outside, Esav was outside, but the twelve sons of Yaakov – even though they sinned – were all inside! This follows the statement of our Sages (Pesachim 56a and Tanchuma, Vayechi 8): Yaakov's bed was whole. This was unlike Avraham's bed, which contained refuse, which came out in the form of Yishmael. This does not mean that the refuse of Yishmael dwelled in Avraham Avinu, but that the potential existed in him. This is similar to a box of matches which has the potential to burn down a building. The purpose of the matches is not to burn down buildings — they have a positive purpose, but one must be careful that the matches are not used to destroy on account of negligence. This is also like a healthy person

who carries a recessive genetic disease. It is hidden. He is completely healthy, but the hidden disease can burst forth one day. It is possible to say that Avraham Avinu was a "carrier" of trouble, even though he himself was the holy of holies. And this hidden trouble appeared in Yishmael. And Yitzchak was a "carrier" of trouble which appeared in Esav.

6. Twelve Shades

And Yaakov Avinu was whole. He thus redeemed Avraham (see Yeshayahu 29:22 and Sanhedrin 19b). He retroactively justified Avraham and Yitzchak. He also succeeded in holding the brothers together. Yosef brought an evil report – Yaakov listened. The brothers hated Yosef – Yaakov waited. He united everyone together, "he guarded this thing in his heart" (Bereshit 37:11): everything will work out in the end. And indeed, as is known, it did work out: "Listen Yisrael, Hashem our G-d, Hashem is one" – just as there is only One in your heart, so too is there only One in our heart (Pesachim 56a). We are united, Baruch Hashem. Yaakov Avinu divided the brothers into their shades – this one receives this blessing and this one receives that blessing. No one is pushed aside for another. This is unlike with Yitzchak. "Your seed shall be called through Yitzchak" (Bereshit 21:12) – through part of Yitzchak and not all of the descendants of Yitzchak (Sanhedrin 59b). "For the son of this handmaiden will not inherit with my son, with Yitzchak" (ibid. verse 10). And

Esav was also outside. But regarding Yaakov Avinu, everyone was inside. There are different shades among them, as is clarified in the blessing of Yaakov to his sons (Parashat Vayechi), which later received an "approbation" from Moshe Rabbenu (Parashat Ve-Zot Ha-Berachah). Each tribe had its blessing. The Nation of Israel is assembled from twelve different shades, as Maran Ha-Rav writes rhetorically: "A war of brothers." There are wars between enemies and people who hate each other: us or Yishmael! Us or Esav! But there is also a war of brothers: The Halachah is like the Rambam or the Tosafot. This is a war, but a war between brothers. There is a war between the inclinations: the good inclination against the evil inclination – a war of enemies. But there can also be a war within the good inclination: to learn Gemara or Kuzari? To live in my parents' house or my in-laws' house? I am torn – a war of brothers. A brotherly war can also end very badly, as with Yosef being thrown into the pit and sold to the Yishmaelites. But this is not necessarily the case. It can work out, as truly happened in the end. Both are the words of the Living G-d: Yaakov divided each of his sons into different tribes, as did Moshe Rabbenu much later: "Each man in his camp and under his flag" (Bemidbar 1:52).

7. Yaakov Avinu Builds a Nation

Without us paying attention, an additional factor exists: Yaakov Avinu is not only engaged in building his family –

he is building a nation! And what Yaakov Avinu is building now has to stand throughout the course of all generations. The smallest blemish can be a catastrophe. If a man builds a multi-story building – a small defect below can cause the building to be crooked higher up and it can collapse. The Rambam says in "Moreh Nevuchim": our forefathers knew that by establishing their family, they were laying the foundation to build a nation. This is an explicit verse: "And I will make you a great Nation" (Bereshit 12:2). Avraham Avinu knew this and Yitzchak Avinu knew this. Avraham removed Yishmael from his midst, even though it was extremely difficult. And Yitzchak removed Esav. And in the end, who truly removed them? The women, who understood through their prophetic senses that these individuals were currently not to participate in building the world. It was theoretically possible, but not in the actual here and now.

A great weight therefore rested on Yaakov Avinu: to build the Jewish Nation, which needed to include all of the different shades. Yaakov was therefore married to two women. Perhaps someone will raise the difficulty that the two wives appeared on account of a conflict and not because it was the preferred path. He wanted to marry Rachel – "And behold it was Leah!?" On account of this deceit, he was not going to marry Rachel? Yaakov also married Rachel, and tension was born between the wives and their sons. And with all of this, we see that this was completely Hashem's will: "Like Rachel and Leah, both of whom, built up the House of Israel" (Rut 4:11)! And this

included the maidservants and their children – all of them built the House of Israel together. Building the family of Yaakov was complicated. Building the House of Israel – the Nation of Israel – was even more complicated, and it therefore required all of our strengths together.

8. "I am Esav, your firstborn"

There is still a great wonder here. Didn't Yitzchak Avinu understand who Esav was? Didn't he see that he was evil and fundamentally corrupt? Maran Ha-Rav Kook explains Yitzchak's reasoning (Midbar Shur, Derish #29). Yitzchak Avinu understood that a Nation was being born here, and its purpose was to spread a light among the nations, a Nation including not only those who learned in the House of Study. There are times when there is a need to destroy evil by the sword and with war. Yaakov Avinu was a "wholesome man, who dwelled in tents." His strength was not physical. In contrast, Esav was physically strong. He knew how to hunt and how to wage war. The Nation greatly needed this trait at this time. If so, perhaps Esav was the heir? Although Esav was evil, he could repent. In order to create a Nation, there is a need for "Esavs."

But Rivka saw differently through prophecy, and taught her younger son, Yaakov. Yaakov came before his father and informed him: I understand, father. "I am Esav, your firstborn!" I am Esav! When need be – I am Esav. I am not Esav in my inner soul. I am still gentle and wholesome within, but when there is a need, I wear Esav's clothing.

Our forefathers knew that they were building a Nation, that they were the root of a Nation. Yaakov Avinu was the father of the Tribes as well as the actual father of the Nation. He was thus a double man. He possessed both his blessing and Esav's blessing. He had both his wife and Esav's wife, i.e. Leah, who had weak eyes from crying since she thought that she would be Esav's wife (Rashi on Bereshit 29:17). Yaakov Avinu had to connect these two extremes to survive all of the conflicts.

9. The Secret of Opposites

How was Yaakov able to succeed? This secret was already implanted within his father and mother, who were completely different from one another. This idea is explained by the Maharal on the Mishnah (Derech Chaim on Pirkei Avot 1:12): "The world stands on three things: on the Torah, on Divine service and on acts of loving-kindness." Yitzchak's trait was Divine service. Rivka's trait was acts of loving kindness. Eliezer, Avraham's servant, searched for someone like her for Yitzchak: "Drink, my master, and I will also give your camels a drink" (Bereshit 24:14). She ran from him to the trough, and then to the well and back to the camels, over and over. "And the young woman to whom I say: 'Please lower your jug so I may drink,' and she replies: 'Drink, and I will also give water to your camels, You have designated her for your servant, Yitzchak'" (24:14) – she is suitable for him because she possesses the trait of loving-kindness (Rashi *ibid.*). Rivka was the oppo-

site of Yitzchak in her fundamental character. It seemed like an impossible match. They did not have children for twenty years, but when they had a child, he was armed with both of their talents.

Avraham and Sarah were similar. They both possessed the trait of loving-kindness. Avraham converted the men and Sarah converted the women. But Yitzchak and Rivka were fundamentally different. One should know that the more one's parents are opposites and different from one another, the greater the child's strength to overcome crises. Yaakov was torn between his parents, as in the brotherly war mentioned above. It is good to be a hidden righteous person or a revealed one – but who am I? Where do I stand between them? This is similar to a person standing with his legs close together – he is less stable. If he spreads his legs a little, he has a stronger stance. Another comparison: a person with only one eye lacks perception. When a person has two eyes, they have greater depth perception. Furthermore, the closer one's eyes, the less depth perception he has. A greater distance between them allows for greater depth.

10. Sensory Integration

An example of this idea can be seen through the wayward son (Sanhedrin 71a): "And bring him to the elders of his city...and say...our son is wayward, he does not listen to our voice" (Devarim 21:19-20). Rabbi Yehudah says: In order for him to be in the category of a wayward son, the

parents must have the same voice, appearance and stature. The Maharal says (Chiddushei Aggadot *ibid.*): That is it! If the parents are different and each pulls in his own direction, is it such a surprise that he is a wayward son? Although the Halachah does not follow Rabbi Yehudah, we clearly learn that if the parents are different, the child is torn. In order for the two eyes to see properly, there is a need for sensory integration. If a person lacks this, he is drunk and each eye sees something different. He sees double. If parents are different, there is thus a need for integration, and when this exists, the children are firm in their souls. By the way, the same is true from a biological-genetic perspective. If two parents are cousins, generation after generation, the body is prevented from battling new bacteria. If there are preexisting bacteria, there is no problem since both parents are immunized. But regarding new bacteria, a person loses the ability to withstand them. This applies biologically, psychologically and spiritually.

11. Yaakov Avinu – The Middle Man

The Maharal (Derech Chaim *ibid.*) thus explains that since Yaakov's parents were opposites – loving-kindness on the one side and Divine service on the other – he grew in the middle. Since Yaakov Avinu was the middle man, he was capable of standing firm. When a crisis arrived from the right, his powers from the left allowed him to withstand it, and vice-versa. And when a crisis came straight on, he stood firmly in the middle. The reason is that Yaakov

Avinu learned Torah in two contradictory yeshivot. He learned in the yeshiva of Avraham Avinu and he learned in the yeshiva of Yitzchak Avinu. He also later learned in the yeshiva of Shem and Ever, which is close to an "ethical university," where he learned universal ethical wisdom, which was passed through the generations from Adam Ha-Rishon to Noach. But he first learned in the yeshiva of Avraham Avinu and the yeshiva of Yitzchak Avinu, as it is written: "A wholesome man, who dwelled in tents" (Bereshit 25:27). What is the meaning of "tents"? Shouldn't it say "who dwelled in a tent"? No, he dwelled in two tents. He learned in two yeshivot. Rabbi Yosef Gikatilla explains in the book "Sha'arei Orach" (sha'ar 5, p. 57b) that Yaakov Avinu's trait was the secret of the middle trait: it is similar to the central leaf of the lulav ("Tiyomet" in Hebrew), which holds the two sides together. It is well-known that according to Halachah, if the "Tiyomet" is missing, the lulav is invalid. The two sides must be connected by the "Tiyomet." Thus, Yaakov Avinu connected the two tents: the tent of Avraham, which is kindness and the tent of Yitzchak, which is strict justice. Yaakov held the right and left together in the middle to the point that Avraham grasped Yaakov from the right and Yitzchak grasped Yaakov from the left. This is the secret of the middle, which the Rambam discusses (Shemoneh Perakim, chap. 4): the middle path is the path of Hashem. Don't be an extremist. Extremism damages even the most precious thing in the world. But wasn't Avraham Avinu an extremist? G-d forbid. Avraham Avinu was the holy of holies. But

a child who possessed an extremist "Avrahamness" came from him – Yishmael. And Yitzchak was the holy of holies, but a child who possessed an extremist "Yitzchakness" came from him: Esav, who is Rome, who is Christianity, who is Western Civilization – who engaged in murder without pause. And Yaakov Avinu – he is the middle path.

12. Yaakov Established Ma'ariv

The Gemara (Berachot 26a) states that Avraham established Shacharit, Yitzchak established Minchah and Yaakov established Ma'ariv. But the Tosafot explain that Avraham Avinu also prayed Minchah after Yitzchak established it. Then what is the difference between them? It is the emphasis that this one established Shacharit and that this one established Minchah and that this one established Maariv. Maariv is when it is night, dark, complicated. One must beware. Protect us, Hashem! During Ma'ariv, we do not connect the Redemption (mentioned in the prayer "Ga'al Yisrael") to the Shemoneh Esrei but recite "Hashkeveinu" (a plea for protection) in the middle. At Ma'ariv, there is an interruption (unlike at Shachrit): Beware!

13. Everything is for the Best

Let us return to our subject. Yaakov Avinu was the middle path. He was armed with the strength of Avraham and the strength of Yitzchak, whether from his parents or his learn-

ing in yeshiva. He was therefore prepared to stand firmly and not to stumble in any situation. And all of his sons were also inside! This is the most difficult of work. But there were crises. A crisis, as we explained, is a situation which is contrary to the human will. How do I emotionally digest such an experience? Do I wage war? I will certainly wage war. If I am sick – I go to a doctor. If I broke my leg – I put on a cast. But how do I not break subjectively, psychologically?

This is explained in the book "Mesillat Yesharim" in the chapter on righteousness (chap. 19). There are two solutions. There is one solution which is equally available to all and there is another which is for unique individuals. The solution available to all: everything is for the best! Whatever Hashem does, He does for the best. How so? I do not know, but it is for the best. The surgeon causes you pain. Do you think that he enjoys it? G-d forbid. He cuts your skin and by doing so, he saves your life. After all, you know the doctor – he loves you. If he hurts you – thank him, hug him and kiss him. If he hurts you, it is a sign that you truly have something very severe. If it were not so, he would not have hurt you. Therefore, love him and do not hate him in your heart, and do not show him that you hate him. Studies show that a high percentage of those who commit suicide are dentists, because of the enmity that is conveyed to them by the patients out of a fear of the procedure. It breaks their spirit to the point that they are lost. This is a fact. This is the solution that is equal to all: everything is for the best! You will understand in the end:

Yaakov, how good it was that you fled from your brother, since you then met Rachel and Leah. Everything will be clarified in the end, it just requires patience. "I give thanks to you, Hashem, although You were angry with me" (Yeshayahu 12:1). It once happened that two men went on a business trip. One of them had to return because he got a thorn in his foot, and he cursed and blasphemed. He later found out that his fellow's ship sank. He gave thanks and praise (Yalkut Shimoni, Yeshayahu 417).

14. To be Your Servant in all Situations

And there is the second solution, which is at a higher level, which is for exceptional individuals. These individuals have no personal concerns. They are only concerned about the Master of the Universe. And a person such as this will therefore say: what do I care about distress? What do I care if it is against my will? Isn't the ideal to serve Hashem? What prevents me from serving Him?

In my youth, I once went to the mikveh with my uncle. It was a big city outside of Israel and it had only one mikveh. It was Erev Yom Kippur, and there was a long line to get in. My uncle lost his patience. The attendant looked at him and spit out: "My master, you're impatient." My uncle said: "The time, the time." The attendant said: "Nu, what time does my master have today on Erev Yom Kippur?" My uncle said: "My master does not understand, one needs to repent." The attendant got up from his place, pulled my uncle aside gently into a corner and said: "Please, repent.

Who is disturbing my master from repenting?! Who is distracting his honor from serving Hashem?" Correct. You can serve Hashem whether healthy or sick, wealthy or poor, hated or beloved, married to a good woman or to an evil woman, etc.

15. I Did Not Take away Free Choice

Who truly prevents you from serving Hashem? You can serve Him under all circumstances. "A time to give birth and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot" (kohelet 3:2) – it is possible to serve Hashem in every situation. Nothing prevents you. The Master of the Universe can leave you bare, without money, without family and without a house, but one thing cannot be taken from you – free choice. It is not because it cannot be taken. Hashem can take it away if He so desires, as he did with Pharaoh, according to one interpretation (see Rambam, Hilchot Teshuvah 6:3). But Hashem does not want to do this. There is therefore nothing preventing you from serving Hashem. On the contrary, the Ramchal (ibid.) says that it is similar to an officer in an elite combat unit. The combat officer loves difficult missions. The more difficult and complex the mission, the greater he can prove his loyalty and love.

Perhaps I should therefore invite distress upon myself? No, do not invite it. It will come on its own. You also do not know which type will come, and if you can withstand it. Therefore, do not invite it! If Hashem sends distress, he

also provides the ability to withstand it, but you should not "volunteer." Remember: Yaakov Avinu was able to withstand all of the difficulties by remaining on the middle path.

Moshe

1. "And Moshe was a shepherd"
2. "And he went out to his brothers"
3. "And Moshe grew up"
4. "But they will not believe me"
5. Light from Darkness
6. "How can I bear"
7. Brothers and Friends
8. Listen to Me, My Nation

1. "And Moshe was a shepherd"

"And The Holy One Blessed Be He also tested Moshe with a flock. Our Sages said that when Moshe Rabbenu, may peace be upon him, tended Yitro's flock in the desert, a kid escaped and he ran after it until it reached shelter. Upon reaching shelter, a pool of water appeared, and the goat stopped to drink. When Moshe arrived, he said to it: 'I was not aware that you ran away because of thirst. You are tired. He carried it on his shoulder. The Holy One Blessed Be He said: You are merciful in tending mortals' flock, so will you tend my flock, Israel.'" (Shemot Rabbah 2:2).

This is the fundamental characteristic of a leader: self-sacrifice for the sake of his flock. He is not a leader for himself but for others. Egocentric leaders are only concerned with

themselves, as it says: "Be careful in your relations with the government, for they only draw a man close for their own interests. They appear as friends when it is to their benefit, but they do not stand by a man in his time of distress" (Pirkei Avot 2:3). But it says regarding dedicated leaders: "And all who are faithfully involved in the needs of the community, may The Holy One Blessed Be He pay their reward and remove from them any illness, heal their entire body and forgive their sin, and send blessing and success to all of the works of their hands, with all Israel, their brothers" ("Mi-Sheberach for the ruling government" recited on Shabbat morning after the Torah reading).

2. "And he went out to his brothers" (Shemot 2:11)

"And he went out to his brothers" – Pharaoh said to him: you are called my daughter's son, and any you can name your position (Tanchuma). What did Moshe Rabbenu choose? Minister of the Interior? Foreign Minister? No, he chose to be the administrator of all of the Concentration Camps! Moshe said to him: I request to organize your work force. But Moshe's intention was only to see the enslavement of Israel (ibid.) – perhaps he could help.

"And he saw their suffering" (Shemot 2:11) – And what did he see? He saw their suffering, cried and said: I would die for you. He would incline his shoulder and help each and every one of them. If he saw an adult's burden on a child, a child's burden on an adult, a man's burden on a woman,

a woman's burden on a man, an elderly person's burden on a young man, a young man's burden on an elderly person – he would put aside his royal rank and do all of the work as if he were aiding Pharaoh. The Holy One said to him: You put aside your dealings and went out to see the distress of Israel and acted in a brotherly fashion, I will put aside the supreme ones and lower ones and talk with you (Shemot Rabbah :32).

Moshe did not exalt himself over the community and he did not say “Goodbye, my soul,” but rather, was concerned about the other. He is a brother who feels the pain of his brothers.

3. "And Moshe grew up" (Shemot 2:11)

"And Moshe grew up." "But doesn't everyone grow up?!" This is to tell you that he grew not in the same way as the rest of the world" (Shemot Rabbah 1). "We have a tradition that he lived for twenty years in Pharaoh's palace" (ibid. 11:20). But this is surprising – is this a place for the leader of Israel to grow up?! Wouldn't it have been more appropriate for him to learn in a religious nursery school, Talmud Torah and then a yeshiva? Why there, in the midst of impurity?

Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra explains that the thoughts of Hashem are deep. We cannot know his secrets. Only He can create circumstances. It is possible that Hashem caused Moshe to grow up in the king's palace in order for his soul to be used to being at a supreme level, and not

used to being at a lowly level in a house of slavery. After all, we see that he killed the Egyptian who did injustice, and saved the daughters of Yitro from the shepherds who stole the water which the women had drawn for their flocks (Shemot 2:3 and see also Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra on Shemot 14:13). Since he grew up as a free man, like the son of a king, Moshe Rabbenu learned how to stand at full stature with strength and courage. In order to free themselves from slave mentality, the children of Israel needed to undergo a long process of forty years in the desert. This follows what the Rambam wrote: that it is not a man's nature to grow up enslaved with mortar, bricks, etc. and then to be able immediately to wash his hands of the filth, and wage war against the children of giants (Moreh Nevuchim 3, 32).

4. "But they will not believe me" (Shemot 4:1)

Perhaps you will say: how it is possible to have a leader who is so different from the people, who grew up in a completely different way and did not grow up in the "neighborhood"? Moshe Rabbenu was in fact concerned about this issue: "Moshe answered [Hashem] and said: But they will not believe me and will not listen to my voice, for they will say that Hashem did not appear to you."

Ha-Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin, the Netziv, explains that it is clear that Moshe did not say: "But they will not believe me" regarding the Redemption, since that is exactly

what they were requesting. Rather Moshe said, "But they will not believe me" that Hashem appeared to him. The reason is that they did not know Moshe as a great Torah scholar, expert in the tradition of the forefathers, and he did not derive from holiness and righteousness. After all, he spent his youth in Pharaoh's palace, was engaged in different worldly wisdoms, and dressed and spoke like an Egyptian to the point that the daughters of Yitro thought he was an Egyptian. People thought it was more proper that Hashem would appear to Aharon, who was already a prophet in Egypt. This was Moshe Rabbenu's claim: The people of Israel will say, "Hashem did not appear to you." If so, why was Moshe Rabbenu punished with Tzara'at (a skin disease) for suspecting that they would not believe him? The Netziv answers that you should not second-guess Hashem, as the prophet Yeshayahu (55:9) says: "For My thoughts are not your thoughts and My ways are not your ways."

The Netziv concludes by relating to our time: Therefore, at this time, when we have seen that Hashem has done wonders for the Jewish settlement in Israel, and inclined the heart of the Sultan and his minister to agree to this, His sign is His word, and we should not be so wise as to say that it needs to occur in a different manner (Igrot Acharit Ke-Bereshit, Kovetz Shivat Tzion vol. 1, p. 17-18 and Ha-Emek Davar on Shemot 4:1 in brief).

And our Sages also wrote: "Moshe said to Hashem: The Children of Israel will say to me: you never learned Torah in your life and you were a shepherd to Yitro's flock – what

did you do to merit the Divine Presence revealing itself to you and becoming the redeemer?" (Midrash, Torah Sheleimah – Shemot 4:3). It later became clear that Moshe Rabbenu is the most supreme soul which appeared in the world. "Never again has a prophet arisen in Israel like Moshe, who Hashem had known face to face" (Devarim 34:10). Maran Ha-Rav Kook writes that Moshe was the most exalted receptacle of the Divine light that a human soul could be (Olat Re'eyah vol. 2, p. 159).

5. Light from Darkness

"Pharaoh's daughter raised the one who would exact retribution from her father, in the future, in her own house" (Shemot Rabbah 1). The Maharal (Gevurot Hashem, chap. 18) explains that the reason that Moshe Rabbenu, peace be upon him, was raised in Pharaoh's palace, is like the Messiah who will sit at the entrance to Rome, since if it were not for the absence that was found there, the different form which was to appear later would not have come into being. The Nation of Israel was born out of the collapse of Egypt. The light of Israel appears out of the blotting out of Rome and the West, from the destruction of the non-Jews to the love of Israel.

6. "How can I bear" (Devarim 1:12)

The role of leadership is not an easy one, and Moshe Rabbenu was exhausted from the burden. "How can I bear alone your troubles, your burden and your strife?"

Rashi explains: "Your troubles – teaches that they were trouble-makers. One person would see another win in court, and would say: I have witnesses to bring, I have proofs to bring, I will add judges to you." Then why didn't you bring them before?! Why didn't you immediately say that you do not trust them?!

"Your burden – They were heretics. If he left home early, they said: Why did Ben Amram leave [home early]? Maybe everything is not okay in his house [i.e. he is arguing with his wife]. If he left home late, they said: Why did Ben Amram not leave? What do you think? They would sit and give [evil] suggestions and think [all types of] thoughts." So much ungraciousness and so many evil eyes! "Your strife – teaches that they were ill-tempered," constantly complaining.

Moshe Rabbenu therefore received instruction to appoint himself helpers. But who would agree to be a leader under these circumstances? How could he convince them?

7. Brothers and Friends

"I will take the heads of your tribes" (ibid. 1:15). Rashi explains that Moshe convinced them with words: Fortunate are you, who will be appointed over the Children of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, over people who are called brothers and friends.

But how so? I thought they were trouble-makers, heretics and ill-tempered?! Answer: They were both trouble-makers, heretics and ill-tempered as well as brothers and

friends! There is no contradiction. And even if there is a contradiction, life is full of contradictions. A father is angry with his son, and at the same time he loves him. It is his son, he has no other. This is our Nation, we have no other. It causes us distress and yet we still love it.

8. Listen to Me, My Nation

Maran Ha-Rav Kook writes: "Listen to me, my Nation, I speak to you from my soul, from my inner soul, from the connection of life from which I am connected to all of you, and all of you are connected to me, from the feeling which I feel more deeply than all others: You and only you, all of you, all of your souls, all of your generations, you are the only meaning of my life. I live through you, in you, in the entire constellation of all of you...Without you, I have nothing...I must love you with an eternal love. It is impossible for me to feel any other feeling...You give meaning to my life, work, Torah, prayer, song, hope...with you – my people, my nation, my mother, source of life, with you I fly to the expanses of the world. With you eternally, I live eternal life. With your glory, I am full of splendor and glory. With your affliction, I am full of pain. With the pain that is in your soul, I am full of bitterness...your Land, the Land of your hope, is holy to me, her heavens are the source of grace..." (Orot Ha-Re'eiyah p. 54).

Shimshon

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1. A Strange Man

On the face of it, this man who appears in the Book of Shoftim is quite different than other judges. He is a rather strange man. He does not act as a judge, leader or military man but engages in odd adventures: he knocks down gates and carries them on his back, gets involved with Philistine women, captures foxes and lights fires with them,

tells riddles and kills people in order to take their garments. What benefit is this to us? It is true that the Philistines caused us much distress, and any act of vengeance is justified, but there is an immense gap between these acts and the statement "And he judged Israel" (Shoftim 16:31).

We cannot deny that this was a man who possessed incredible strength. He takes the jaw of a donkey and kills one thousand men (ibid. 15:16). But instead of utilizing his strength for the beneficial and constructive purpose of saving the Nation of Israel, he uses it for his personal adventures. During his entire life, he wanders, with long hair, like a hippie, detached from society, far from Judaism, living among the Philistines, marrying their daughters and using his strength for nonsense and vanities. He does not have a friend, Rabbi, supporters or students. This is most surprising: what is his place in the Book of Shoftim?

There are in fact researchers, including religious ones, who claim: "This is clear proof that physical prowess has nothing to do with us. Hashem once 'tried' to bring a person who possessed strength, but it became clear that the result was the exact opposite of holiness. This man did not live a holy life. On the contrary, he became defiled through empty acts and the impurity of non-Jews. The concepts of holiness and strength are in the category of 'and they did not draw near to one another' (Shemot 14:20). We were not created to be strong, physical heroes. We are weak and pitiful. This is what we are meant to be. After all, look what became of Shimshon who possessed strength." This

is what appears when one learns the Book of Shoftim on a surface, superficial level.

2. Nazir

We are obviously not surface readers. It is true that this is a man with long hair, but this is not simply because of a desire to look good. He is a Nazir, and it is therefore forbidden for him to cut the hair on his head. "And razor should not touch his head because the boy will be a Nazir of G-d" (Shoftim 13:5). Furthermore, he is not a regular Nazir but a Nazir from birth. A Nazir is a supremely holy person, who raises himself above simple, lowly and base matters which interest other people. Before Shimshon's birth, an angel informs his mother: "He will be a Nazir of G-d." What is the need for this? Perhaps it is preferable to give him the opportunity to decide on his own? Why do they decide for him? There is a special reason: He will not be elevated for his own personal righteousness and holiness – he can worry about this himself – but "The child will be a Nazir of G-d from the womb, and he will begin to save Israel from the Philistines" (ibid. 13:5).

This man's role is to begin saving us from the Philistines. He needs to be a Nazir for this purpose? It seems that one would need to be a military man, not a Nazir. And did he truly act like a Nazir of G-d? It does not appear as such. While we do not have Nezirim (plural of Nazir) today, I merited meeting Ha-Rav David Cohain ztz"l, the student of Maran Ha-Rav Kook, who was called the "Nazir." He also

had long hair, but above all he was a gentle person, who had a completely good heart, wisdom and holiness. He respected and loved every person. He smiled and helped everyone. He possessed an incredible wisdom of holiness, and was also a genius in science, philosophy and languages. This is "the boy will be a Nazir of G-d from birth until the day of his death" (ibid. v. 7). It is true that there was a Divine announcement regarding Shimshon, but in reality it does not appear to be so.

3. "The spirit of Hashem began to resound"

Furthermore, it is not only that there was a Divine decision that this man would be a Nazir, but a verse also testifies that he possessed "Ruach Ha-Kodesh" (Holy Spirit). "And the spirit of Hashem began to resound in the camp of Dan, between Tzorah and Eshta'ol" (ibid. v. 25). A "Ruach Ha-Kodesh" is not something which immediately appears and descends upon one who is not ready for it. It appears slowly, out of an ethical, spiritual, emotional and intellectual elevation. After intense efforts, a Holy Spirit reveals itself little-by-little, while crumbs of spiritual awakening appear. Shimshon was in fact a very serious person, and the spirit of Hashem resounded within him. Perhaps he only possessed a Holy Spirit at first but later deteriorated? This is not so, as we see from the fact that the text tells us three more times that the Holy Spirit was within him. In the incident with the lion: "And the spirit of Hashem came

mightily upon him, and he tore him apart as he would have torn a kid" (ibid. 14:6). He accomplished this with the Holy Spirit which rested upon him. Even after Shimshon had obligated himself to pay thirty garments if someone solved his riddle, it is written: "And the Spirit of Hashem came upon him, and he went down to Ashkelon, and slew thirty men of them and took their clothing" (ibid. 14:19). And much later: "And the spirit of Hashem came mightily upon him, and the cords that were on his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire and his bands melted off his hands" (ibid. 15:14).

It is impossible to deny that there are four mentions of the fact that the spirit of Hashem rested on Shimshon. Nonetheless, this appears to be a strange spirit of Hashem, not the usual type. Although we are not experts in matters regarding the spirit of Hashem, it seems that it does not need to express itself in tearing apart a lion, the killing of thirty people and removing the cords from his arms, but in various other ways.

4. Courageous Spirit

The Rambam explains in *Moreh Nevuchim* (2, 45) that there are different levels of prophecy and the spirit of Hashem. Prophets do not immediately leap to the supreme level, but slowly climb and reach whatever level they will attain. The Rambam says that the first level is the appearance of courage and bravery. This is not courage for just anything, but an awakening for a great purpose

such as saving an important community. When one feels an intense inner pull to act and to save, it is not happenstance but a prophetic revelation.

The first act which is related about Moshe Rabbenu, the Master of all prophets, like whom no one rose or will arise, is "and he struck the Egyptian" (Shemot 2:12). He did not first appear as a holy or righteous individual but as one who saves a Jew from an Egyptian, despite the danger involved in the act. He did not come up with excuses to avoid becoming involved.

"He went out to his brothers and saw their suffering" (ibid. 2:11). Rashi explains that his intention was to see their suffering and grieve with them. When an Egyptian strikes a Jew it is impossible to be silent. The second act related about him is in Midian, when the shepherds chase away Yitro's daughters and do not allow them to give their flocks water. Moshe rose up against this injustice too, and gave water to the flocks. In general, someone who is running away and arrives in a new place prefers not to draw attention to himself on his first day. There was an injustice here, even if it only involved non-Jews. It was still an injustice that was impossible to accept. Moshe Rabbenu was therefore awakened, both spiritually and physically, since these shepherds were certainly not weaklings. The Rambam points out that this was Moshe Rabbenu's first step in prophecy. When a person hears an inner voice calling him to act courageously for the sake of justice and truth – this is the spirit of Hashem. Where does the Rambam learn that there is a connection between courage and the spirit

of Hashem? It is mentioned many times that the judges had a spirit of Hashem, even though they did not exude holiness, write holy books, prophesy and spread Torah. For example, a spirit of Hashem rested on Yiftach (Shoftim 11:29), even though his behavior was not so "clean." After all, he vowed to sacrifice his daughter to Hashem. But the Targum Yonatan explains that his spirit of courage was from Hashem. Yiftach displayed self-sacrifice to wage war and save Israel, and showed political courage in his negotiations with Ammon (ibid. 11:12-29). Similarly, "a spirit of Hashem enrobed Gidon" (ibid. 6:34), even though outwardly he was not a "Torah personality." Our Sages explain: "Yiftach in his generation was like Shmuel in his generation and Moshe in his generation" (based on Rosh Hashanah 25b). It also says about Otniel ben Kenaz: "And a spirit of Hashem was on him, and he judged Israel and went out to war" (ibid. 3:10). He was indeed a great man in Torah. A spirit of Hashem therefore also means a courageous spirit from Hashem which exalts and pushes a person to perform great acts for the sake of the entire Jewish People.

We see this regarding Yiftach and Gidon but it is more difficult to understand how Shimshon saved Israel, and it is certainly difficult to understand why he married non-Jewish women. The basic answer is that they converted. Otherwise, his parents – who were righteous people who merited a revelation from angels, and especially his mother, who was more important than his father, would never have agreed to these marriages. The Rambam therefore

writes: "Do not even think that Shimshon, who saved Israel...married non-Jewish women" (Hilchot Issurei Bi'ah 13:14 based on Yevamot 76a and Tosafot ibid. 24b). The Rambam explains that they converted but that their conversion was incomplete. They converted in the mikveh but not in the heart, and their end proved their original intentions (Rambam ibid. 16). But even if they did convert, it is strange that he went to look for a wife among the Philistine women. And, in fact, when he informed his parents: "I have seen a woman in Timnat of the daughters of the Philistines, now get her for me as a wife" (ibid. 14:2). Their hearts ached: "And his father and mother said to him: Is there no woman among the daughters of your brothers or among all of my Nation that you go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?" (ibid. verse 3). After all, this is horrible. This man, who was designated by a prophecy to be a Nazir of G-d and save Israel, went to look for a wife outside of his Nation! They tried to convince him, but Shimshon did as he pleased: "And Shimshon said to his father: Take her for me for she pleases me" (ibid.). There was no way of convincing him otherwise. This is an unpleasant and inappropriate beginning for a redeemer of Israel. But Shimshon's parents did not know a secret, which he did not reveal to them or anyone else. They did not know that he had a spirit of Hashem, since a person who possesses it does not show it off. "But his father and his mother did not know that it was from Hashem" (ibid. verse 4). It was a Divine plan that this man would receive a Divine spirit. It was truly a strange plan, but it was a Divine

one, and we therefore do not raise the difficulty whether his wife converted or not, since this was a temporary measure given through prophecy.

5. "He sought a pretext against the Philistines"

What is the meaning of this plan? "He sought a pretext against the Philistines" (Shoftim 14:4). He looked for excuses and reasons to strike the Philistines. Shimshon knows exactly who and what he is. He knows his role. His mother certainly taught him during the course of his entire childhood: you will begin to save Israel from the Philistines. This is the mission you received through a prophecy. But how will he save Israel? This is not so simple. Shimshon took an interest in military matters and researched the history of the Philistines. He goes from place to place, from Tzirah to Eshta'ol, and a Divine Spirit begins to resound within him. Finally, out of an elevated state from the Divine Spirit, the idea arrives: he should marry the daughter of a Philistine. "He sought a pretext against the Philistines" (*ibid.*), and Rashi explains: "A pretext to challenge them."

But what came of these challenges? In order to save Israel, one must train men for war, organize an army and attack the Philistines. What will come from all of these challenges and adventures with foxes, etc.? As we said, this was not so simple: "And at that time, the Philistines ruled in Israel" (*ibid.* verse 4). During the time of Shimshon, there was no

State of Israel, but the State of the Philistines, Philistina. It was therefore impossible to draft an army and organize a rebellion. People were not ready to rebel. Shimshon knew them well and knew that they were frightened. Furthermore, Israel was ready to hand Shimshon over to the Philistines. When the Philistines demanded that Shimshon be handed over to them, "three thousand men from Yehudah went down" to capture him, "and they said to Shimshon: Don't you know that the Philistines rule over us? What have you done to us?" (ibid. 15:11). It is extremely difficult to save Israel under adverse conditions. He received an appointment as the Chief of Staff, but there was no army, and no one was ready to be drafted. How could he save them under these horrible conditions? He therefore received an appointment from his gut, and he had time to contemplate and plan. During Shimshon's time, it was not the State of Israel against another country, but the Philistine State with limited autonomy for the Jews. There was therefore no possibility to wage war. So this was Shimshon's plan:

- a. He would have to wage guerilla warfare in order to exhaust and weaken the Philistines until they could no longer bear it.
- b. He would have to work alone, since the Nation was not willing to join him.
- c. He would have to act without endangering the Nation of Israel in any way. It was not possible to wage a struggle under the flag of the State of Israel or the Philistines would attack the Nation of Israel. Shimshon fought as if it were

his own personal war on account of his youth. He did not wage war for the Nation of Israel, he has nothing to do with them and doesn't even live with them. He is not married to them but to the Philistines. But the Philistines solved his riddle and he therefore took vengeance against them and he killed Philistines in order to pay them the garments that were due to them. Everything were as if it was a personal war unrelated to the Nation of Israel. It was forbidden for the Philistines to discover that he was waging war for the Nation of Israel or they would take vengeance on everyone. After all, people are cruel. When they did not succeed in solving the riddle, they threatened Shimshon's first wife: "Entice your husband into explaining the riddle to us, or we will burn you and your father's household" (ibid. 14:15). They were ready to burn an entire family of their own people to solve a riddle! It is forbidden to endanger any Jew. There were many times in our history when an individual Jew endangered himself and struck at the enemy, and the enemy then conspired against all of the Jews. For example, during the Inquisition, one Jew snuck into a church and killed the Grand Inquisitor, Torquemada who had killed thousands of Jews. Following this act, the Christians organized a vengeance crusade and killed thousands of Jews. The Nazis also did this – in response to a lone Jew's attack, they would murder hundreds of Jews. Under such circumstances, which Jew would dare attack? Shimshon therefore decided to act NOT as a Jew, but as a private individual who loved

young women and riddles. His marriage to the daughter of the Philistines was therefore part of a Divine plan. This was the beginning of Shimshon's plan: the words of our Sages are known that all marriages are pre-ordained in heaven (Moed Katan 18b). They learn this from the verse: "And his father and mother did not know that this was from Hashem" (Shoftim 14:4). Hashem arranged that he would marry her. The only possibility was to wage a war under the cover of a private war, and this was the beginning of saving Israel. He indeed succeeded in irritating the Philistines and exhausting their strength. The claims that Shimshon wasted his strength on personal adventures are therefore incorrect. It was all from Hashem. We understand that his parents did not know that the Divine plan was from Hashem, since he hid it and he was obligated to do so. But we who learn Tanach know that it was from Hashem, that the Holy Spirit did not leave him after his marriage and that Hashem performed miracles for him.

6. There are No Miracles for Naught

Hashem does not perform miracles for no reason, for a person who is just having all sorts of adventures. All of Shimshon's life was full of miracles: killing one thousand men with a donkey's jaw (ibid. 15:16), a spring appearing to save him from thirst (ibid. v. 18-19), etc.

Hashem does not waste miracles on nonsense. There were many times when Jews needed a miracle but none was forthcoming. It is true that Daniel, Chananyiah and

Misha'el were saved by a miracle. But thousands of Jews were murdered sanctifying Hashem's Name and no miracle occurred for them. And yet here miracles occurred for "The Adventurer" who snatches foxes and kills people for their shirts! The Master of the Universe does not freely dispatch miracles. Our Sages guide us: "A person should never stand in a place of danger and say: perform a miracle for me, lest no miracle occurs for him, and even if one does occur, it detracts from his merits" (Ta'anit 20b). Hashem does not perform miracles for fools or adventurers who do things which they should not do, or for a man who married a Philistine woman, put himself into a complicated situation, and needed miracles to get out of it. The Gemara tells of a man whose wife died and he was left with a nursing baby boy but without money to hire a wet nurse. A miracle occurred: he developed breasts and nursed his son. On the face of it, this is an amazing miracle: "How great is the man for whom a miracle such as this occurred." But it is not so: "How lowly is this man for whom the order of Creation was changed" (Shabbat 53b). He should have solved his problem in another, more conventional way, and not burdened the Master of the Universe to perform this miracle for him.

The Gemara also relates that Rav Shila ruled that a Jew who had married a non-Jewish woman was to be punished with lashes (Berachot 58a). A Jew informed against him to the non-Jewish authorities: this Rabbi is using his judicial power without having received permission from the authorities. The judge asked Rav Shila: who gave you

permission to give lashes? He responded: this Jew had relations with a donkey. The Jew burst out: it is all a lie, I had relations with a non-Jew and not a donkey. The judge asked Rav Shila: do you have witnesses? At that moment, a Jew with a white beard entered. It was the prophet Eliyahu, who arrived when we needed him, and said: I saw it. If so, the judge said, he deserves death. Rav Shila said: since the time we went into Exile we do not inflict capital punishment. The Jew left infuriated and yelled at Rav Shila: if so, The Master of the Universe performs miracles for lies! You lied when you said that I had relations with an animal. Rav Shila responded: I did not lie. And he used the insulting expression: "Their flesh is the flesh of donkeys" (Yechezkel 23:20). The Jew said: I am passing on your words to the judge and this will be your end. Rav Shila said: you are pursuing me to kill me, and one who comes to kill you, kill him first. Rav Shila hit him with his staff and killed him.

We learn that Hashem does not perform a miracle in order to save liars and sinners. Why then does he perform so many miracles for Shimshon? Because these are not miracles for individuals. Shimshon was involved in the salvation of the Nation of Israel, and because of the complicated situation, he was obligated to act with guile.

7. "Dan is a lion cub"

The Torah already prophesied about him. Moshe Rabbenu said in his prayer to the Tribe of Dan: "Dan is a

lion cub, leaping forth from Bashan" (Devarim 33:22). A day will come when a man who is a "lion cub" will arise from within the Tribe of Dan. There two types of lions: a lion which goes in the front and a lion which goes in more complicated ways. There were two individuals appointed over the construction of the Mishkan: Bezalel ben Uri ben Chur from the Tribe of Yehudah and Aholiav ben Achisamach from the Tribe of Dan (Shemot 35:30-34). Our Sages explain: one is the most important of Tribes, the tribe of kingship, and the second is the lowest of the tribes (Shemot Rabbah 40:4). Not that the Tribe of Dan is the lowest in terms of ethics, G-d forbid, rather they were left with the lowliest labors. The lowliest labors are also essential and must be performed. The Tribe of Dan was "the gatherer of the camp" (Bamidbar 10:25). There are always people who go missing on the outskirts of the camp, and there is a need to search for them, even in enemy territory in order to save them and return them to the camp. Amalek struck at the "weak ones at your rear" (Devarim 25:18), including those who lacked strength on account of their sin (Rashi *ibid.* and see Sifrei *ibid.*). The Tribe of Dan would go at the rear to support the weak ones and gather them. This is also a necessary job. There is the strength of the lion who goes ahead on the frontlines, and there is also the strength of the lion who goes to the rear.

8. "Dan shall judge his people"

Yaakov Avinu's prophecy was even more detailed: "Dan shall judge his people, as one of the tribes of Israel" (Bereshit 49:16). A day will arrive and a man from the Tribe of Dan will "take the revenge of the Nation on the Philistines" (Rashi *ibid.*). And indeed, at the end of the Book of Shoftim, the secret is revealed. After the end of his life, "those who he killed in his death were more than he killed in his life" (Shoftim 16:7), including all of their military men (*ibid.* verse 27). The secret was retroactively revealed: "He judged Israel for twenty years" (*ibid.* verse 31). This is done in an original and unparalleled manner, but he saved Israel during the course of twenty years. Furthermore, our Sages explain that the twenty years begins after Shimshon's death (Yerushalmi, Sota 1:8. See Radak on Shoftim 16:31 and Bemidbar 14:9), since he struck the Philistines so hard, they did not dare raise their hand against Israel for twenty years. He killed all of the Philistine leadership at one time, and instilled fear within them.

9. "A snake on the road"

"Dan shall judge his people." There will come a day and a man from the Tribe of Dan, which is Shimshon, will judge Israel, "as one of the Tribes of Israel" (Bereshit 49:16). He worked alone to save the Nation. This is a rare sight. Generally, a person does not act alone. Our Sages warn us in Pirkei Avot (4:8): "Do not judge alone, for only One may judge alone." Only the Master of the Universe

may judge alone. "Just as the Single One of the world does not need help, so too Shimshon ben Manoch does not need help" (Bereshit Rabbah 98:13). How can a person judge without an army or police force? Yaakov Avinu explains: "Dan will be a snake on the road, a viper on the path" (Bereshit 49:17). He wages war like a snake, which people do not see and therefore do not take caution, and he attacks from behind. "Who bites a horse's heel and its rider falls backwards" (ibid.). It is impossible to be "A lion cub is Yehudah" (ibid. 49:9) when there is no army. The only possibility is to act in secret, in hidden places, with guile and through theft. This was Shimshon's life. This method is certainly dangerous. When the rider falls backwards, he is liable to fall on the snake. The horse could also fall backwards and crush him. Yaakov Avinu therefore adds the words: "I await your salvation, Hashem" (ibid. v. 18). On the face of it, this prayer is appropriate for all situations in life and for all of the Tribes, but it is also unique to the Tribe of Dan. When a person penetrates enemy lines and remains there over the course of many years and causes destruction there, he is in constant, immediate danger.

In the end, Shimshon is captured by the enemy and they gauge out his eyes (Shoftim 17:21). Therefore, when Yaakov Avinu sees into the distance, he offers a unique prayer in order for Shimshon to succeed in his complicated and dangerous operation (Bereshit 49:18).

10. A Hidden Righteous Person

Shimshon's life is one of self-sacrifice during every moment. For the sake of saving Israel, he lives alone, without Torah classes, without prayer in a minyan, without a wife – after all, all these young women who betrayed him were certainly not appropriate for a true marriage and building a house. He lived without a community, scorned by the Philistines and by the Jews. It was to the point that his Jewish brothers handed him over to the Philistines! But he was as strong as a rock. He did not weep, complain or break.

He continued on his path year after year. He obviously prayed to Hashem during a time of distress in order to obtain a little water (Shoftim 15:18) or in order to knock down a Philistine house (ibid. 16:28), but he did not weep. He continued on without fatigue and with incredible self-sacrifice.

This man was a hidden righteous person. He did not appear so in his outer behavior. On the contrary, he seemed like a base and lowly person, involved in romantic or other adventures, but he was truly a man of incredible self-sacrifice for the sake of the Nation of Israel. Our Sages therefore explain that Shimshon was given a name of Hashem (Sotah 10a). He is a Divine man. His entire life has a Divine imprint. The name "Shimshon" is not one of Hashem's Names but there is a verse: "Hashem is a 'Shemesh' (sun) and shield" (Tehillim 84:12). Thus, "Shemesh" is one of the names of Hashem, and it appears in the name "SHiMSHOn," although it is not exactly

Hashem's Name. Hashem (the Four-letter Name of Hashem) is the revealed Divine Name in all of its glory, while other names of Hashem (such as Elokim) are Hashem's Name in all circumstances (see Tanya, Sha'ar Ha-Yichud Ve-Ha-Emunah, chap. 4). Shimshon is thus Hashem's hidden Name. This man was a genius in national strength. From where did he gain this strength? It came from a Divine source – "The spirit of Hashem began to resound" (Shoftim 13:25).

11. Within Impure Worlds

This man was a Nazir, elevated above all matters of life. What interests most people did not interest him: he did not eat, he did not sleep, he did not have a house, nor the comforts of life. Only one thing interested him: the honor of Hashem and the honor of the Nation of Israel. A Nazir is a supreme person, and Shimshon's superiority reveals itself in strength. Hashem's Name appeared to him in a hidden form. On the surface, Hashem's Name did not rest upon him. But occasionally, in special situations, Hashem's Name was "peering through the lattices" (Shir Ha-Shirim 2:9).

It is not simple to leave the camp and to wage a war as "a snake on the road, a viper on the path, who bites a horse's heel and its rider falls backwards." When one places himself in complicated situations, he can become confused and impure. How could a man live for years among the Philistines and marry their daughters without becoming

impure? There is a verse in Mishlei: "Can a man take fire in his chest and his clothes not be burned? Can one walk on hot coals, and his feet not be scorched? So is he who has relations with his fellow's wife – whoever touches her will not be unpunished" (Mishlei 6:27-29 and see Sanhedrin 107a). It is impossible to be implanted among the Philistines and their daughters and not be burnt! But this man was prepared for this: he was a Nazir of Hashem. This is what the angel announced: "And he will begin to save Israel" (Shoftim 13:5). He was therefore obligated to be a "Nazir of Hashem." Perhaps a person who is completely holy, completely detached from the material world, can withstand the impurity of the Philistines and stand firmly during all of the adventures without being wounded. Perhaps – but this is not for certain. It is also possible to fail. Shimshon in fact fell – when he revealed his secret to Delilah, and she caused him so much distress to the point that he was vexed to death (ibid. 16:16). It happens that people fail: "For there is no man in the world who is righteous, who performs good, and does not sin" (Kohelet 7:20). Even a Nazir can fail, as well as a prophet (Sanhedrin 89a), and even Moshe Rabbenu erred three times (Vayikra Rabbah 13:1). Would another person – in the same complicated situation of Shimshon – not have failed? Our Sages teach us that "No one can guarantee regarding forbidden relations" (Chullin 11b). A great and righteous man cannot boast that he is immune to the evil inclination of forbidden sexual relations. It is related that Rav Amram Chasida, who was great and holy (Gittin 67b), was in-

volved in redeeming captives. He once redeemed a young woman, and in order not to violate the prohibition of being secluded with a woman, had her sleep on an upper floor and he removed the ladder. When she was walking in the attic, a beam of light reflected from her face, and Rav Amram Chasida was seized with lust. He moved the ladder to ascend (normally, ten people are needed to move it), and he began to climb up. Rav Amram Chasida began to wage war against his inclination. He finally found a solution and screamed: "Fire, fire!" People came to extinguish the fire, and when they saw that there was no fire, they immediately understood which fire he was talking about... The Sages said to him: "You embarrassed us!" Rav Amram Chasida said: "It is better to suffer embarrassment in this world than in the World-to-Come" (Kiddushin 81a). "No one can guarantee regarding forbidden relations." We can understand how someone involved with this temptation day and night could stumble. Shimshon fell. And obviously, "The Holy One Blessed Be Here is exacting with those close to Him like a strand of hair" (Yevamot 121b).

12. Like a Strand of Hair

A strand of hair! Shimshon's hair revealed it all. What is hair? It is the inner and outer parts together. In truth, Shimshon was the inside, one of us, but he went out – not only geographically but also from the order of life. He was part of the Tribe of Dan, who was the "collector of all of

the camps" (Bemidbar 10:25), and he was sent on special commando missions. Hair is something which is dead, but its root is connected to the living. The fingernail is the only other part of the body which is somewhat similar, although the majority of a fingernail is connected to the body while the majority of hair is not, only the root. If you wish to understand who Shimshon is, in one word, look at hair (see at length in the book "Yisrael Kedoshim of R' Tzadok Ha-Cohain, p. 16). Shimshon is hair attached to the body of the Nation of Israel, but it can easily be detached by pulling. This is the secret of his strength. How can one go amongst the worlds of impurity and remain a Nazir of Hashem? Look at the hair which is both outside and inside at the same time.

But this man fell, "And they seized him and gouged out his eyes" (Shoftim 16:21). They mocked him, and caused him all sorts of disgrace and impurities (see Sotah 10a). He fell.

13. The One who Falls and Gets Up

It happens that a man falls. The question is if he knows how to get up. It once happened that a teacher, who just completed teaching school, received a position in a twelfth grade class in a school for juvenile delinquents. He was a thin, weak and pale young man and the students – experienced in theft and violence – were hoodlums. On the first day, he sat in the teacher's room shaking from fright and his heart was pounding. Suddenly the bell rang and he

headed towards the class, almost drunk from fear, to the point that he did not notice that there was a lip on the doorway. He tripped on it and fell face down on the floor. The entire class burst out in laughter, making fun of him and throwing paper and chalk. He got up slowly and said: "It happens that a person falls. The question is does he know how to get up. This is our first class." The students understood the lesson and gave him a round of applause. It happens that a person falls, even a great person, especially in complicated situations. But after Shimshon falls, he does not deteriorate. On the contrary, he strengthens himself. He searches: perhaps I can perform something else for the benefit of the Nation of Israel. I can take advantage of this opportunity to do something I would otherwise never have been able to do. Although I sinned and they gouged out my eyes, I am not concerned about my personal well-being, rather about the desecration of Israel's name. After all, everyone now knows who he is. The Philistines already know that he is acting in Hashem's Name, and see in their victory over Shimshon a Divine dimension: "And they said: our god gave Shimshon our enemy into our hand" (Shoftim 16:23). Shimshon says: "The Master of the Universe, give me strength to take revenge for something. Not everything. Not both eyes, only one eye."

14. "Let me die with the Philistines"

He is not concerned about his personal eye. He is not an individual person, rather he is a communal person of Is-

rael. He has nothing of his own: no house, no Torah learning, no wife. Everything he has belongs to the Nation of Israel. He gave everything he had. "Hashem G-d, please remember me. And please strengthen me just once more, G-d, and let me avenge one of my two eyes" (ibid. v. 28). I fell, but perhaps precisely because of the fall, I can bring salvation to the Nation of Israel. I am not complaining. I accept the judgment I was given. I played with fire and got burned or, more precisely, I received an order to involve myself with fire and got burned. I therefore ask: "Let me die with the Philistines" (ibid. v. 30). I am not asking for life for myself. All of my life is for the sake of the Nation of Israel. In essence, his entire life was in the category of "Let me die with the Philistines," since he devoted it to begin "to save Israel from the Philistines" (ibid. 13:5). He sacrificed his entire life, he made himself impure and placed himself in complicated situations. Our Sages say in the Zohar that he even sacrificed his World to Come for this purpose (Zohar, Naso 127a). His life conditions were not ideal for meriting the World to Come.

Only one thing interested him: "Let me die with the Philistines." In fact, Hashem accepted his request, and on the day of his death, he struck the Philistines with a crippling blow to the point that they did not dare raise their hand against Israel for the next twenty years. Although Shimshon stumbled, on account of the fall, he was able to bring great salvation to Israel that even lasted longer than his own lifetime.

15. "Shimshon in his generation was like Aharon in his generation"

When our Sages wanted to clarify Shimshon's character in relation to other great men of our Nation, they established: "The Torah equates three (lesser) people with three (greater) people: Gidon in his generation was like Moshe in his generation, Shimshon in his generation was like Aharon in his generation, Yiftach in his generation was like Shmuel in his generation" (based on Rosh Hashanah 25b). The first thing we might learn from this statement is that Shimshon's generation was so lowly that comparatively he was the "Aharon" of the generation. But in truth there is something deeper here. Shimshon performed in his generation what was needed to be done. Shimshon and Aharon were similar personalities and of similar holiness, but in Aharon's generation one needed to act like Aharon and in Shimshon's generation one needed to act like Shimshon. If Shimshon would have acted like Aharon, it would not have helped the salvation of the Nation of Israel. If Aharon would have lived in Shimshon's generation, he would have acted exactly as Shimshon. Aharon was on the uppermost level of the Nation of Israel, "and the foreigner who approaches will die" (Bemidbar 1:51), as was Shimshon, but he revealed himself in a different manner.

Holiness in each generation reveals itself according to the state and needs of that generation. Shimshon was a Nazir of G-d. There are generations in which a Nazir of G-d sits in the study hall and teaches the Nation, completely gentle

and noble. And there are some generations in which there is no time for gentility and recitation of Tehillim, but rather "tearing apart" and breaking the enemy. Shimshon needed to be a Nazir of G-d who was like a lion who tears apart and kills Philistines, and a lonely man who succeeded in destroying the strength of the enemy. Being a Nazir is not based on external appearance but inner content. A Nazir is a person who abstains from all sorts of petty, egotistical matters and is interested in major issues. This was national courage in Shimshon's generation. Maran Ha-Rav Kook writes that purity and holiness usually appear in the form of submission but when the Jewish People are awakened to revival, purity and holiness shine as national courage (Orot, Orot Ha-Techiya 8).

Being a Nazir of G-d is an inner reality and is not necessarily recognized externally. Our Sages tell about a man who decided to be a Nazir because he once looked in the river when he drank water, saw his beautiful hair and became haughty. He said: I resolved to become a Nazir and to shave off my hair for the sake of heaven. Shimon Ha-Tzadik said that this was the only time he met a true Nazir (Nedarim 9b). Being a Nazir is not religious arrogance but an inner characteristic which understands the greater issues of life. Therefore, "Shimshon in his generation was like Aharon in his generation." Shimshon's supreme Nezirut appeared to be the opposite of what being a Nazir is all about. But no one knew the truth: not the Jews, not the Philistines and not even his parents. The secret is only revealed in the end: "He judged Israel for

twenty years." Our Sages warn us: do not deride Shimshon. Do not say: There used to be respectable judges like Aharon. "Do not say: why were the earlier days better than these? For you did not inquire wisely regarding this" (Kohelet 7:1). Shimshon in his generation acted according to what was required in his generation. It is forbidden to look at such events externally. There is a hidden righteous person who does not behave in what seems like the ways of the righteous. Shimshon is a righteous person for saving the Nation of Israel, a righteous person whose self-sacrifice was for the Nation of Israel.

16. "It is from Hashem"

Question: How did Shimshon endanger himself by committing sins when we have a halachic principle that we do not tell a person "transgress in order to merit his fellow" (Shabbat 4a)?

Answer: We are not discussing the case of a person sinning in order to save his fellow from a minor prohibition (see Beit Yosef and Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim end of chap. 306), but a supreme, rare situation regarding the entirety of Israel in which the halachic possibility exists for a person to comprise himself in order to save the Nation (see Tosafot on Gittin 38a). An example of this principle is that Ester displayed self-sacrifice in marrying Achashverosh in order to save the Nation of Israel (see Maharik #167 in the name of Tosafot Rabbenu Yehudah

of Parish, Shut Noda Bi-Yehudah, Tanina Yoreh Deah 161 and Shut Mishpat Cohaim, p. 330). Yael, the wife of Chaver the Kinite, also pulled Sisera into a tent in order to save the entirety of Israel (Yevamot 103a, Meiri on Sanhedrin 74b and Mishpat Cohain ibid.). It was a unique temporary measure by a prophet (see Rambam, Hilchot Yesodei Ha-Torah 9:3). Shimshon also received a special Divine command that this is the way he should act (Rabbi Yitzchak Abarbanel on Shoftim 14:4 and also in his introduction to Shoftim). "It is from Hashem" (Shoftim 14:4).

David

1. The Shepherd
2. In the Courtyard of King Shaul
3. Ascension to the Throne and Jerusalem
4. Bringing the Ark of G-d to Jerusalem
5. Yearning to Build the Temple
6. Courage and Integrity
7. King David's Legacy

1. The Shepherd

A Nation was born, left Egypt, and, through difficult wars, returned to the Land of its Forefathers. But there were even more difficulties to come: enemies from within and from without attacked and reigned over the Nation. There was ethical corruption, idol worship and civil war between Jews which spilled much blood. The Judges arose and fixed the situation temporarily, giving the Nation a period of quiet. But the Nation again experienced darkness and agony, confusion and suffering, for everyone did as he pleased. This continued until a king arose for us: Shaul. He waged war with self-sacrifice and elevated the national honor. The mission was too great for him, however, and he fell by the arrows of the Philistines.

From the midst of the darkness, with the kindness of G-d, an amazing figure appears who saves the Nation, estab-

lishes a kingdom and provides tranquility and peace. He is not a cruel warrior, but a young man with a gentle soul, red-hair and beautiful eyes. His ancestors were of the highest caliber: Miriam the prophetess, brother of Moshe; Boaz, who is also known as Avtzan, who served as a judge; Rut, the supreme, righteous convert; his grandfather Oved and his father Yishai – both of whom served G-d with wholeness.

But David's grace and intellect did not completely protect him. His brothers expelled him from their father's house, and he became a shepherd in the wilderness. But his life as a shepherd prepared him for the exalted role of king. He was merciful with his flock. He first took out the young goats and fed them soft grass. He was dedicated to his flock with his heart and soul. He was willing to enter into difficult struggles for them and fight against and defeat bears and lions to protect them.

2. In the Courtyard of King Shaul

Shmuel the prophet comes and inform him that he is suited to rule over Israel, and anoints him for kingship. The anointment of David remains a secret. Nonetheless, he slowly ascends, level after level, until the Holy Spirit rests upon him. He also knows how to play music. He is therefore invited by the members of Shaul's household to play music for the king to save him from the evil spirit which terrorizes him.

David wanted to sit in tranquility with Shaul in the royal

courtyard, but the anger of Goliath forced him to go out to war. During the course of forty days, Goliath, this giant would wake up early and stay up late, insulting and blaspheming, in order to confuse Israel and prevent them from reciting the morning and evening Shema. The entire Nation was scared and said: who can overcome him? Shaul himself was ill at that time, and he was unable to fight him. The young David, seeing the honor of the army of Israel and the honor of G-d being trampled, became angry and said in his heart: "In a place where there are no men strive to be a man" (Pirkei Avot 2:5). "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should taunt the armies of the living G-d?" (Shmuel 1 17:26). Shaul gave him his uniform and armor and they were fit for David, as befitting one who would rule in the future. Nonetheless, David preferred fighting in his shepherd's outfit to which he had become accustomed, and he took his slingshot and five stones. David was filled with the spirit of wisdom and courage and hit Goliath in the forehead, in a place lacking armor.

Shaul was jealous of him, and instead of kissing him for the great salvation he performed for Israel, appointing him Chief of Staff and giving him his daughter, he asks in a protesting and disparaging way: "Whose son is this young man?" (Shmuel 1 17:56). In fact he knew the young man, because he was the one who would stand before him playing the harp to remove the evil spirit. But Shaul's evil spirit remained a secret from the Nation so that they would not lose faith in his kingship. If David had been a scoundrel, he would have responded: I am your servant who plays

music before you to rid you of your evil spirit. He also would have revealed his anointment as king, and then the Nation would have made him king in place of Shaul. But he was a noble and gentle man, and he simply responded: "I am David the son of your servant Yishai of Bet Lechem" (ibid. v. 58). His words ended here and he did not add anything.

"After he [David] had finished talking with Saul, Yonatan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself" (ibid. 18:1), since he saw that not only was he courageous and brave, but he guarded his tongue, and he was gentle and pure. These two friends made an eternal pact. Anyone who did not see the friendship between David and Yonatan did not see true friendship, did not see love that was not dependent on anything. Yonatan, one of the most humble people, recognized that David was better suited than him to be king, "And Yonatan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his armor, and even his sword, his bow and his belt" (ibid. v. 4). The Sages of Israel correctly saw this love as an example of idealist love, "love that is not dependent on anything" (Pirkei Avot 5:19), since there was no ulterior motive. Their concern was only for the best of their Nation and Land.

Shaul's evil spirit continued to terrorize him, and he attempted to kill David a few times with his spear. He feared that G-d was with David, and he made him an officer in the army and David went out before the Nation. But Shaul did not stop pursuing him, and he conspired for him to fall

into the hands of the Philistines. He said to David: if you will be a soldier and fight the wars of Hashem, I will give you my daughter Meirav as a wife. David fought, but Meirav was given to someone else. Shaul then said that if you bring me one hundred foreskins of the Philistines, I will give you my daughter Michal. David again passed the challenge, and Michal became his wife. In the end, Shaul sent agents to kill him, but Michal, his wife, helped him escape through a window. Fortunate is the man who has such a loyal wife. But she paid for this, and Shaul later took revenge by giving her to another man.

David fled from place to place, and even had to take refuge in Gat with Achish, the King of the Philistines, and pretend he was mentally deranged. David was still pursued by Shaul, although he was free from sin. And yet, David never took revenge against him and never injured him. Even when he had the opportunity to strike Shaul, when he was alone in a cave with him, and it would have been permissible based on the law of "If one comes to kill you, kill him first" (Sanhedrin 72a), he did not injure him. Instead he cut the corner of Shaul's robe to prove that he had no hatred against him in his heart. Even this gracious act caused David remorse, for how did he dare to cut the king's robe? David's men wanted to take revenge against Shaul, and they would have conspired to do so if it were not for David standing against them with all of his power to convince them otherwise. Shaul saw David's impeccability, cried and said: "You are more righteous than me. You treated me well while I treated you badly" (Shmuel 1

24:17). Nonetheless, the evil spirit overcame him and he continued to pursue David.

We see David's incredible nobility in another incident as well. During his journeys, all sorts of dangerous men, outcasts of society, gathered around David and he organized them for the sake of the Nation. They served David by guarding against hooligans and enemies, and also enemies of the Nation. He and his men guarded over the flock of Naval Ha-Karmali, but when it came time for Naval to pay them for their toil and self-sacrifice, he did not fulfill his word. He responded with ungratefulness and insults. David says to his men: whoever thinks Naval is a dead man should put on his sword. His men girded their swords. But Avigial, the wife of Naval, stood firm: "This should not be a cause of grief for you, and my master's heart should not be troubled because you have spilled blood without cause" (I Shmuel 25:31). The weak voice of a woman speaking ethically was more powerful to David than that of four hundred strong men yielding swords. "Blessed be your discernment and blessed be you, who have kept me today from shedding blood" (ibid. v. 33). David did not wound Naval, but nonetheless after a few days he died on his own. Later, David merited marrying Avigial, who was a great woman and a prophetess in Israel.

David was nonetheless concerned about falling by the hand of Shaul, and decided to hide himself and his men with Achish, King of Gat. David became an officer in the army of the Philistines, and took advantage of every opportunity to strike the enemies of Israel, who caused him

great distress – Amalek and the Caananites. But when the Philistines went to war against Shaul, David set a horrible trap. The Philistine officers lost faith in David and asked the king to remove him from the ranks. David continued his wars.

In the same battle with the Philistines, many Jews were killed, including Shaul and Yonatan. The survivor who informs David of their deaths and who related that he helped King Shaul fall on his sword, expected David to be happy that the kingship was now free. He was sure David would grant him a reward. But David tears his garments, rules that the informer be killed and laments from the depths of his heart.

3. Ascension to the Throne and Jerusalem

When David ascends to the throne, his main thought is to conquer Jerusalem in order for it to be a capital for the entire Nation. The city which Hashem chose, which is not divided among the Tribes and rises above all of the Tribes, is the heart of the Nation. The Nation requires a Land and State, an economy and security, but above all, it requires a heart, a place of Torah and prophecy, a place for the Temple. "Mountains surround Jerusalem and Hashem surrounds His Nation" (Tehillim 125:2). The city was completely fortified, surrounded by walls and towers, and its residents mocked David: "You will not enter here, even the blind and lame could turn you away" (Shmuel 2 5:6).

They also claimed that they would be protected by the covenant made with Avraham Avinu. In the end, David and his men succeeded in conquering the city with wondrous courage. David nevertheless did not want to acquire the city in the merit of the physical conquest, but rather collected five shekels from every Tribe and purchased the Holy City from the Yebusites by possession, money and a document (the halachic ways of making an acquisition) as an eternal acquisition, and so that no one could ever claim that this city is not ours.

"A Song of Ascents of David. I rejoiced when they said to me: 'Let us go to the House of Hashem.' Our feet are standing firmly within your gates, Jerusalem. The rebuilt Jerusalem is the city that joins together. It is the place to which the tribes ascended, the Tribes of G-d, a testimony to Israel, to give thanks to the name of Hashem. For there were set thrones for judgment, the thrones of the House of David. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem, may those who love you prosper. May peace be within your walls, and prosperity within your palaces. For my brothers and companions' sakes, I will say: 'Peace be within you.' For the sake of the House of Hashem our G-d I will seek your good" (Tehillim 122).

But immediately after David conquered Jerusalem, a great war leapt upon him, in which David proved his bravery among the warriors and his great trust in Hashem, who said to him: "When you hear the sound of marching over the balsam trees move quickly" (Shmuel 2 5:24). David waited in ambush and held back his soldiers until the Phi-

listines were less than four amah (six feet) away. David showed even greater bravery when he later waged war against Shovach, the commander of the army of Aram, who also claimed that Yaakov Avinu had made a pact with him (see *ibid.* 10:18).

4. Bringing the Ark of G-d to Jerusalem

David saw that it was time to bring the Ark of G-d to Jerusalem. "And David and all of the House of Israel played before Hashem with instruments of cypress wood, lyres, harps, drums, cornets and cymbals" (*ibid.* 6:5). David did not worry about his own honor but only that of his Creator. "David danced before Hashem with all his might" (*ibid.* 6:14). Michal, his wife, was an extremely righteous woman, but she erred here, and scorned David in her heart: "How distinguished was the King of Israel today, who exposed himself today before the handmaids of his servants as a fool uncovers himself" (*Shmuel 2* 6:20). She did not know that anyone who lowers himself before the Master of the Universe is greater and more honorable. David answered her: "I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes, but by these handmaids of whom you spoke, I will be held in honor" (*ibid.* v. 22).

This was a great day for David: "And he distributed to every person in Israel, both man and woman, a loaf of bread, a cake of dates and a cake of raisins" (*ibid.* 6:19). The sweet singer of Israel also sang before his G-d: "Give

thanks to Hashem, declare His Name, make His acts known among the nations. Sing to Him, make music for Him, speak of all His wonders. Praise His Holy Name, may the heart of those who seek Hashem be joyous. Search out Hashem and His strength, seek His Presence always. Remember His wonders that He performed, His marvels and the judgments of His mouth. Offspring of Israel, His servant, children of Yaakov, His chosen ones, He is Hashem, our G-d, His judgments are over all the earth. He remembered His covenant forever, the word He commanded for a thousand generations (Tehillim 105:1-8).

5. Yearning to Build the Temple

David came from within the Land of Israel to Jerusalem, and from Jerusalem to the Ark of the Covenant, and he now desired to build the Temple. He told Natan the prophet: "I am living in a palace of cedar while the Ark of G-d remains in a tent" (ibid. 7:2). But what David thought is not what the Master of the Universe thought. Each person has his own role and mission, and the time for building the Temple had not yet arrived. The Master of the Universe said to him: I took you from the flock to be the king over my Nation, Israel. I made you a great name like the names of the greatest people on earth. I will be with you everywhere you go and I will cut down your enemies who surround you. You have fought the wars of Hashem, you have spilled much blood, I have given my Nation a resting place and an inheritance, I have planted them in the Land.

You have established my kingdom. This is your job and your mission. Your son will be your loyal successor and he will build My Temple. David responded: Who am I that You have brought me to this point, and have done for me this greatness?

6. Courage and Integrity

David continues in his work of striking down Israel's enemies: the Philistines, Moav and Aram-Damascus. But he does not like to be involved in wars and to spill the enemies' blood. He therefore has the following custom: to strike them with a major blow into submission, and then place representatives to guard the quiet and peace in every place.

Every place that you find David's courage, you find David's integrity. He did not want to annul the covenant of his ancestors, so he charged the Sanhedrin to investigate and search for the truth of what was said by the Philistines and Arameans. The Sanhedrin taught and David responded to the Philistines: You came to invade our Land. And to the Arameans: You have already nullified that pact with Yaakov Avinu.

His military victories and successes did not take David away from the knowledge of his Creator, and did not cause him to change anything in the conduct of his life. He remained one of the most humble of people, and he felt and related about himself: "I am a worm and not a man, scorned by man and despised by people" (Tehillim

22:7). When he was King, he remained as humble as a shepherd. The coin of David had a staff and sack of shepherd on one side and the Tower of David on the other. "Hashem, my heart is not haughty, and my eyes were not raised on high, and I did not pursue matters greater and more wondrous than I. I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with his mother, my soul is with me like a weaned child" (Tehillim 131:1-2).

Even when he sat on the throne of kingship he lowered himself and sat on the floor to learn Torah. He would wake up each night at midnight in order to pray. "I awake at midnight to thank you" (Tehillim 119:62). A harp hung above David's bed, and when it was midnight, a Northern wind would blow and play it. David immediately strengthened himself like a lion, got up and learned Torah with songs and praises (see Berachot 3b). He would write songs to Hashem until he completed the entire Book of Tehillim. There is nothing in the world like this book's beauty and thirst for Hashem. All Israel, in every generation and place, pours out its soul to Hashem through these Tehillim.

David withstood many difficult trials throughout his life, but occasionally he did not withstand them, as it says: "There is no righteous man in the world who does good and does not sin" (Kohelet 7:20). But even in the place where you see the deficiency of our king, you find his greatness. After the incident with Batsheva, when Natan the prophet comes and admonishes him: why did you take the sheep of the destitute, you are that man – David did not try to conceal it. He did not say: there were no sheep

here, no destitute person here and I am not the man. He simply responded: "I sinned to Hashem" (Shmuel 2 12:13), and he cried every night for thirteen years to the point that his bed was soaked with tears and his eyes hurt from crying.

"For the conductor, a song of David. When Natan the prophet came to him when he went to Batsheva... For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me...wash me and I will become whiter than snow. Make me hear joy and gladness... Create for me a pure heart, G-d, and renew a proper spirit within me. Do not cast me away from before You, and do not take Your holy spirit from me. I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners will return to You." (Tehillim 51:1-15). From then on, anyone who sinned – even in a severe manner – knows that the way of repentance is open before him, on condition that he confesses and cries from the depths of his heart. As the head of the army, David also acted with great humility. David was extremely thirsty during a war and said: "If only someone would give me water from the well of Bet Lechem" (Shmuel 2 23:15). Three mighty men of David burst through the camp of the Philistines, drew water from the well and brought it to David, but he did not want to drink it: G-d has forbidden that I should act this way. Should I drink the blood of these men who risked their lives?

David never refrained from going out to difficult battles against the enemy of his Nation and putting his life in his hands until he was almost killed. His men then said: do

not come out to battle with us. The light of Israel should not be extinguished.

7. King David's Legacy

"David was old, advanced in years, they covered him with a blanket but he did not become warm" (Melachim 1 1:1). The body of this brave man did not suffer from coldness but his heart became cool. David, the elder and the wise, the experienced and deep thinker, looked over the incredible kingdom he built: there was peace, blessing, a state. But maybe there is no spirit? If there is no spirit, there is nothing. Perhaps the kingdom will fall. The king is concerned and gloomy. The people of the castle saw that their king was elderly and troubled and decided: we should find a pretty young woman. The king will see her, marry her and the joy in his life and the fire of his youth will return. They planned and executed, but these fools did not know that this was not the way the king would be comforted. The young woman was beautiful but the king did not touch her.

The king saw that it was time to appoint a loyal successor. David had many children, each had his own strength: one had courage, another beauty, another smarts and another Torah. But he had only one son like Shlomo: a son whose heart was like his father's, a wise and righteous son, who was called a friend of Hashem. David said to his son: The time when I lived is not like the time that you live. My days were days of war. It is impossible to establish a State with-

out military men and courageous men. I was forced to suffer them, including their many deficiencies. For example, Yoav ben Tzeruya who shed the blood of war during peacetime and Shimi ben Gera who rebelled against me and cursed me. It is now a time of quiet and tranquility, and you know what to do with these people if they try to follow the same path they followed during my life, since you are a wise man.

He also commanded him: I desire with all my heart to build a House for Hashem. And now, my son, may Hashem be with you and you should succeed in building the Temple of Hashem. May Hashem give you the wisdom and understanding to observe the Torah of Hashem.

David also managed to gather together all of the princes of Israel, the Cohanim and Levi'im and distribute to them their roles for working in the Temple. He also gave his son the plan of how the Temple was to be built. Furthermore, he collected large quantities of silver, gold, iron, and bronze for building the Temple.

This is the greatest last testament that our king gave to his Nation before his death: Listen my brothers and Nation: Observe all of the mitzvot of Hashem your G-d for the sake of possessing the good Land and bequeath it to your children for eternity.

David goes to his world, and the kingdom he establishes falls. But his songs constantly remain in our mouth, the songs of the sweet singer of Israel. Nothing like this ever occurred in the thousands of years of human history: a king who sang amazing, holy songs. Fortunate are we that

the King of Israel belongs to us, the Nation of Israel. There is no one like him.

One other thing which Israel always knows: David, King of Israel, lives and exists. We always knew that our exiles would be gathered, our Land would be rebuilt, our kingdom re-established, that we would return to Jerusalem, our Holy City, and that the light of Hashem would shine within us.

And this time is coming: "A song of ascents. When Hashem will bring the exiles back to Zion, we will be like dreamers. Now, our mouth is filled with laughter, and our tongue with song. Then it was said among the nations, 'Hashem has done great things with these people.' Hashem has done great things for us, and we rejoice. We should return from our captivity, Hashem, like streams gushing through the Negev. Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy. One goes out weeping when burdened with the full measure of seeds. He shall surely come in joy, bearing his harvested sheaves" (Tehillim 126).

Mordechai

1. "Mordechai did not kneel or bow down"
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1. "Mordechai did not kneel or bow down"

The Radvaz (Shut Ha-Radvaz 1:284) asks: how could Mordechai endanger the entire Jewish People? Although we know that it turned out positively in the end, this was not known at the outset. Because of Mordechai's actions, danger hovered over Israel: "To destroy, murder and exterminate all of the Jews, young and old, children and women, in one day...and plunder their possessions" (Ester 3:13). How could Mordechai take it upon himself to cause his people such danger? In truth, we find in the Letter of Ester an echo of the dispute between Mordechai and other Jews: "Israel said to him: You should know that you are causing us to fall by the sword at this time" (Igret Ester 3:2). The Gemara also compares Mordechai to Shaul, who did not kill Agag, and Haman, who was his descendant,

distressed Israel (Megillah 13b), i.e. Shaul had mercy on Agag, and Mordechai, Shaul's descendant, enticed Agag's descendant against us.

The claim that Mordechai did not bow down because Haman had made himself into an idol to be worshipped, or had engraved images of idols onto his garments (as is customary in our time among the rulers of the East) does not answer the question. Mordechai could have avoided passing or meeting Haman, and thereby avoided the whole problem. Even though the prohibition of bowing down to an idol falls within the category of "Be killed and do not transgress it," it is a prohibition that one may effectively circumvent, for there is no law that one must take it upon himself to encounter an object of idol worship and declare that he is not bowing down to it. This would mean endangering his life and that of the Nation's. Only if a person is forced to bow down to an idol must he refuse, even at the cost of his life. Mordechai met regularly with Haman and did not bow down, as it says: "When they said to him day after day and he did not listen to them" (Ester 3:4), i.e. he purposefully passed Haman each day. The Maharal (Or Chadash) says: "And he did not take a different path" on purpose. Our Sages (Yalkut Shimoni Ester 1054) make it even more serious by stating that Haman would come to him and say: "Shalom" and Mordechai would not respond. Haman asked him: "You wouldn't say 'Shalom' to me?" Mordechai answered: "There is no 'Shalom' (peace) – says Hashem – for the wicked" (Yeshayahu 48:22). Mordechai did everything he could to infuriate Haman. The Midrash

relates that Mordechai would show Haman a sandal each time he passed which had inscribed on it that Haman was a slave to Mordechai. Why did he seek to anger Haman so much?

2. Ingratiation or Provocation against the Non-Jews

Perhaps you will say that Mordechai did not think that matters would deteriorate to such an extent. This does not seem correct. This is particularly true regarding Mordechai's behavior with the king's clothing and horse after the decree against the Jews was already made. When Haman comes to him, Mordechai could have tried to pacify him, to ask for his forgiveness and give in to him. But Mordechai does not do so, rather he has Haman lead him around on the king's horse.

Question: But Achashverosh decreed that Haman should do this!

Answer: Mordechai could have attempted to speak with the king, or to fulfill the decree in a less prominent fashion that would be less embarrassing for Haman. But we see that Mordechai did not do this; he used a different tactic. He did not act this way out of an error in calculation or as an emotional response. He had a strategy and stuck to it. This was Mordechai's stance and he did not vacillate between ingratiation and provocation against the non-Jews.

Our Sages were in doubt regarding the question of how to act with the wicked: Should we provoke them or submit to them (Berachot 7b and also Megillah)? Most opinions in the Gemara hold that if you see the wicked prosper, you should submit to them. In contrast, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai says that it is permissible to provoke the wicked in this world. And in fact, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai explained it well and fulfilled it well. He provoked the Romans, and they issued a decree against him of capital punishment and he was forced to hide in a cave (see Shabbat 33b). The Gemara brings different answers based on the specific situation and the character of those involved. The Maharal says that Mordechai decided in this case that it was necessary to provoke the wicked (Or Chadash).

Question: Isn't it sometimes possible for a person not to ingratiate himself, or to avoid provoking another?

Answer: This is remaining neutral. But bowing down before Haman is not remaining neutral, it is ingratiation.

Question: Couldn't Mordechai have avoided putting himself in this situation?

Answer: You are correct. But Mordechai decided that he needed to provoke. Not only not to ingratiate himself or turn his eye, but to actively provoke.

3. The King's Duke

The Midrash relates that Haman said to Mordechai: Why don't you bow down to me? Your grandfather bowed

down to my grandfather, Yaakov bowed before Esav! Mordechai answered him: "I am the duke of the King" (Midrash Ester 7:9). I am noble. My grandfather was born in the Land of Israel" (ibid.). This means that there is no choice in exile and one must ingratiate himself to the non-Jews. The non-Jews murder us in pogroms and so we plead, beg, bribe and do everything we can to avert disaster. There is no choice, no other option. But, Mordechai responds, my grandfather was born in Eretz Yisrael. Binyamin, my grandfather, did not bow down to Esav. He was not yet born during the meeting between Yaakov and Esav. This was not happenstance.

Question: But Mordechai was living in the Exile during that time?

Answer: But he was not exilic.

Question: Even in the Exile?

Answer: Yes, even in the Exile, he was not exilic. The Exile makes us into Jews who have to ingratiate ourselves to the non-Jews. Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra explains this idea in connection to the Exodus from Egypt. When the Egyptians pursued the Jews, they were terrified. Why? They were six-hundred thousand armed men. Why didn't they strike the Egyptians?! The Ibn Ezra explains that this was impossible from their perspective. They had a lowly spirit, and they could not lift their hand against their taskmasters (see Ibn Ezra on Shemot 14:13). Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra explains in another place that only one person did not

have a lowly spirit following the Exile: Moshe Rabbenu. This is the inner reason why he was raised in Pharaoh's palace and not among the Jews. The Rambam says about the verse: "G-d did not lead them through the land of the Philistines, although it was near, for G-d said: Perhaps the people will reconsider when they see war and they will return to Egypt" (Shemot 13:17), i.e. the Nation of Israel was scared. It was enslaved in its soul. The process of liberating the soul from servitude is lengthy. While the Master of the Universe could have miraculously given them courage, this would have removed their free will. The solution was therefore to spend forty years in the desert: "for the sake of learning courage" (Moreh Nevuchim 3, 32). Forty years in the desert in difficult conditions would teach them how to be courageous. A slave is unable to immediately wash the mortar from his hands and wage war against giants. The Exile breeds a lowly spirit. It removes a person's willingness to pay a price for his freedom.

4. The Danger of Submission

But how did Yaakov Avinu bow down to Esav? Our Sages in fact criticize this act and say that because of the eight times that Yaakov bowed to Esav, eight kings of Edom (the descendants of Esav) ruled before the kings of Israel (Yalkut Shimoni, Bereshit 32). The Ramban takes this a step further and says that because of the bowing of Yaakov we fell by the hands of Edom; this occurred when

the kings of the Hasmonaim made a covenant with the Romans, as is related in the history books. He relates that the Hasmonaim kings curried favor with the Romans, and paid for it heavily in the end. This is obviously not a personal attack on Yaakov Avinu but on the method he utilized. Mordechai believed that one has to stand erect before an enemy. He did not think that this endangers the Nation, but the exact opposite. He believed that being bent over and submissive is what endangers the Nation. Giving in to pressure invites further pressure.

Question: Is this a model for how every Jew must act in the Exile, or may each person choose for himself in the matter?

Answer: This is a general ideal. Since Mordechai was born in the Land of Israel, he was capable of turning this ideal into real action.

Question: But those in Exile are supposed to ingratiate themselves to the wicked in order to survive! And Mordechai was in the Exile?!

Answer: We will resolve this important difficulty soon. Let us first explain Mordechai's method and then judge if it is correct or not.

Mordechai's theory was that if one submits to wickedness it causes further wickedness. We see many examples of this in history. There was a famous dispute between Churchill and Chamberlain. Chamberlain, who was Prime Minister of England when Hitler rose to power, said that

Hitler only wanted a piece of Czechoslovakia. Give it to him, Chamberlain argued, and he will be quiet. It is not worth destroying the peace that was attained with such great effort (after World War One), on account of this one issue. This was his opinion. England wanted peace at any price, and in order to demonstrate it, she even significantly lowered the level of her armaments. Hitler wanted a piece of Czechoslovakia, which had a high percentage – over fifty – of Germans. The world therefore said to Hitler: "Take the territory, we will not interfere, and leave the world in peace!" But then he wanted another piece. The nations of the world "admonished" him. Hitler saw that the price was only an admonishment, which is cheap, so he took an additional piece. Churchill told Chamberlain that he was making a great mistake! If he gives in to Hitler, his desire will only grow and there will be no escaping from a World War. When Chamberlain returned from the Munich Conference, he got off the plane at Heathrow Airport waving the piece of paper containing the pact made with Hitler, and announced: I have brought you peace! Churchill responded: You have brought a piece of paper. Chamberlain did not accept this admonishment at first, but later admitted his mistake, and ended up dying from great anguish. Tens of millions of people were murdered in the Second World War, and his anguish will not resurrect them! There is therefore no peace to be made with wicked people. You must know before whom you are standing. We say many times in life that you need to learn to give in and get along with others. But Haman was an evil per-

son. He was ready to exterminate an entire nation because of one Jew who angered him. Achashverosh was also extremely wicked. He told his wife to come before him at a party, and when she refused, he decreed that she should be killed! This is deranged! Later when he wanted to remarry, it was not enough to choose a woman. He needed to check every woman in his kingdom. He was a corrupt and evil person. Thus, Haman and Achashverosh are evil and when we are before wicked people such as them, we do not submit to them.

A question was once asked of Robert McNamara who served as U.S. Secretary of Defense during the discussions between the United States and Russia over reducing their arsenals of nuclear weapons: "Do you trust that the Russians will also reduce their nuclear weapons?" He answered with a well-known parable: "A man once went out hunting in a forest, saw a bear and immediately pointed his gun at him.

The bear said: 'What are you doing?'

The hunter replied: 'I am planning to kill you because I need fur for the winter.'

The bear said to him: 'I am also planning to kill you because I haven't eaten in three days. In truth, both of our needs are legitimate. I suggest that we sit together for peace talks without preconditions and we will reach a fair and sustainable agreement, which will take into account the legitimate interests of both sides.'

The suggestion seemed quite ethical and logical to the hunter, so he accompanied the bear to his den. After a

short time, the bear emerged alone. Everything worked out fine: The bear had his meal inside and the hunter had his fur outside." One could perhaps question it from the hunter's perspective, but it was certainly sustainable...

It is therefore forbidden to give in when facing evil people like Achashverosh and Haman. An ancient saying goes: "If one makes himself a sheep, a wolf will eat him." Mordechai's calculation was not based on an idealistic or mystical passion but on precise realism. Perhaps you will say: This is correct in theory but who says that one can put it into practice? The facts prove that it is possible. As is known, Hashem's decree was not annulled and the non-Jews attacked us in a pogrom: "To destroy, murder and exterminate all of the Jews, young and old, children and women, in one day...and plunder their possessions" (Ester 3:13). But there was an additional decree that if the Jews were attacked, it was permissible for them to protect themselves!

In order to provoke the non-Jews and not submit to them, one must estimate his own ability to stand up to them. This is not always possible. We are not blaming Rabbi Yitzchak Abarbanel who pleaded with King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella to cancel the Expulsion from Spain. No one can ask him to wield a knife like Ehud ben Gera (see Shoftim, chap. 3) and stab the king. What would have happened if he did do this? A Jew in fact killed the Grand Inquisitor Torquemada, but on account of this, they killed tens of thousands of Jews. We also see similarly vicious retaliations by the Nazis during the Holocaust. One must there-

fore be realistic. Mordechai was realistic: he recognized that we had the ability to stand up before our enemies. The problem was, however, that we did not know that we had the ability. We were frightened like grasshoppers, and were even scared to be identifiable. It says that Haman wrote letters: "to each people in his language" (ibid. 3:12), but it does not say that it was written to the Jews in their language. It was only when Mordechai and Ester wrote a second letter that it was sent to each people in their language "and to the Jews in their writing and language" (ibid. 8:9). On the face of it, Achashverosh was liberal, for he allowed every person to speak the language of his people. But the Jews were scared to be identified as Hebrew speakers, and were thus a scattered and separate Nation. In order to have the power to respond with determination and pride, we must be united.

5. The Reason for the Decree

After the decree was made: "The city of Shushan was perplexed" (ibid. 3:15) and "Mordechai knew all that had been done" (ibid. 4:1). Of course he knew what was happening, everyone knew! Our Sages explain (Megillah 12) that Mordechai knew the deeper reason for all that was occurring. He knew that what was happening was not because he did not want to bow down to Haman, but because the Nation bowed down to an idol during the time of Nebuchadnezzar.

The Gemara relates that the students of the Rashbi (Rabbi

Shimon bar Yochai) asked him: Why were the haters of Israel (this is a euphemism for Israel) of that generation worthy to be destroyed? He responded: Answer yourselves! They said: It was because they benefited from the evil one's (Achashverosh's) meal. The Rashbi said: If so, the decree should have been against only the Jews in Shushan (who participated in the meal), not those of the whole world! They asked: How do you answer? The Rashbi said: It was because they bowed to Nebuchadnezzar's image (Megillah 12). The students of the Rashbi did not think that Mordechai was responsible for the decree, but understood that Israel was liable because they benefited from the meal of the wicked one. Why were they to be punished so severely? After all, as is known, the food at the meal was kosher. The problem was not the kashrut but their participation in the meal which was an act of assimilation. How could they benefit from such a thing? The second reason given by the Rashbi is that they bowed down to an idol. It is clear that Mordechai's actions were the external reason for the evil decree. If Haman was furious with Mordechai, he could have killed him. But why did he need to murder all the Jews?! Answer: He wanted to murder all of the Jews anyway, but he was waiting for the right opportunity. If he didn't have this excuse, he would have found another. Mordechai therefore did not cause the decree. The Nation of Israel did it to itself because of its ingratiation with the non-Jews. At first, Haman wanted them to bow down to him. Everyone said: "Why not? We'll bow down to him and he'll be pacified." But the

way of the wicked is that first he wants you to bow down to him, he then wants you to scrub the main square of Vienna with a toothbrush, etc. In this way, they break the morale of the Jews and lower the estimation of the Jews in the eyes of the non-Jews. Mordechai therefore said in such a situation: "We must stop it immediately." But you are endangering everyone! This is incorrect. Haman wanted to kill the Jews – men, women and children – and the non-Jews were also interested, they were only waiting to receive the order.

Question: But the command to bow down to Haman applied to all citizens and not just the Jews.

Answer: True. Everyone was commanded to bow down to Haman, not only Israel. But this does not matter. Mordechai did not want to bow down to Haman, since he understood that this was a mistake and required resoluteness. It is also possible to see this fact when Ester requested from Achashverosh to kill other wicked people in the capital of Shushan on the second day. In the end, they only killed five hundred evil persons since it was not just random killing but a plan to target specific evil individuals. The commentators explain that they were the leaders of Amalek, i.e. like important Nazis. This was a unique opportunity to eliminate them. It is an obligation to kill people such as these. The calculation of Mordechai was therefore a realistic and just calculation. He knew that the Nation of Israel had strength but the strength was dormant and needed to be aroused.

Question: Does this also explain why Mordechai sought other ways to provoke Haman?

Answer: Correct. He wanted to arouse the courage of the Nation of Israel.

Question: If all of the nations were commanded to bow down to Haman, then it seems that there is no basis to assume that the decree was specifically for Jews. And if the decree was specific for the Jews then one could expect that the decrees would become more and more severe as Mordechai persisted, but this does not seem to be the case. Why then was Mordechai so firm in his attempts to provoke Haman?

Answer: Mordechai had good reason to think that Haman had it in for the Jews, but was working in stages. Pharaoh's decree "You should throw into the river every boy that is born" (Shemot 1:22) also included the non-Jewish babies but the intention was against the Jews.

6. "There was a Jewish man in Shushan the capital"

Who was Mordechai the Jew? The Megillah says: "There was a Jewish man in Shushan the capital whose name was Mordechai...who had been exiled from Jerusalem with the exile which had been exiled with Yechonyah, King of Yehudah, whom Nebuchadnezar, King of Babylonia, had exiled" (Ester 2:5-6). In order to understand who

Mordechai was, we must understand the historical background of the Megillah.

In the year 3327 since Creation – there was the exile of Yechonyah. As is known, Yechonyah, King of Yehudah, was exiled with all of the aristocracy with the hope that it would break the Kingdom of Yehudah. Before this, in the year 3320, Nebuchadnezzar conquered the Land and exiled Chanayah, Misha'el and Azaryah. Yechonyah was exiled in 3327 and Mordechai then moved to Babylonia. According to our Sages, Mordechai was not exiled but moved to Babylonia on his own free will. He understood that now the international scene was focused in Babylonia, i.e. Babylonia was like New York in our time and he thought that it was important to be there because that is where he could act. In the meantime, Koresh became the leader of the empire. Koresh conquered the entire area and moved his capital to Shushan in 3390. Mordechai also moved to Shushan. The Koresh Declaration was made in this year, which was seventy years after the first Exile or, more precisely, seventy-two years including parts of years. Mordechai made aliyah (actually, he was a returning resident) with those who returned with Ezra. His name appears on the lists in the Book of Ezra of those who made aliyah.

In the year 3393, an indictment appeared. This indictment was written by the non-Jews who lived in the Land of Israel who were unhappy that Koresh permitted the Jews to return to Israel and build the Temple. They hired advisors to nullify this decree (see Ezra, chapters 4-5). During this

time, many non-Jews settled in the Land of Israel in our absence and they were accustomed to thinking that the Land belonged to them. They thus sent an indictment to Koresh and also threatened the Jews who were returning to the Land with pogroms. Mordechai was sent to Shushan as a representative of the Jews to act against the indictment. At the same time that Mordechai returned, Haman also arrived in Shushan. Haman was the head of the delegation sent by the indicters. Haman is what is now called a Palestinian. He was not Persian, but one of the non-Jews who lived in the Land of Israel and terrorized the Jews in Yehudah. This means that Mordechai and Haman knew each other well. An old grudge already existed between them. To our distress, Haman was successful in his mission and stopped the aliyah of the Jews and the building of the Temple. This occurred in the year 3393. And who was the king? Achashverosh. He was the king who stopped the aliyah and the building of the Temple.

Question: But didn't Koresh delay the building which he himself permitted?

Answer: This is so, but there is no contradiction. Koresh "delaying" means that he ruled that the Temple should be built from wood so that it would be able to be burned. But the one who decreed that the building of the Temple should cease is Achashverosh.

In the third year of King Achashverosh's reign, in the year 3395, Achashverosh made the party. In the seventh year of his reign, 3399, Achashverosh took Ester as a wife. In

the twelfth year of his reign, the second letters from Mordechai and Ester were sent out.

In the year 3406, there was the Daryavesh Declaration. According to calculations, Daryavesh was six years old at the time. Logic says that if the king was so young, someone else was running the empire. This was his mother: Ester. According to this, Daryavesh was Jewish. Mordechai, second to the king, also seemed to have had a hand in the Daryavesh Declaration. The Book of Ezra relates that there was an additional letter of indictment during the time of Daryavesh (Ezra, chapter 5), but he said that the building of the Temple should continue and "he will investigate the complaints." During his investigation, he found the Koresh Declaration – the explicit ruling of Koresh – and it was forbidden to argue with it. It is possible that since he was a young king, they tried not to have him do anything radical, so they hid behind Koresh's ruling. Since there was no official decision to nullify the Koresh Declaration, it seems that it still applied.

The First Temple was destroyed in the year 3338 and its rebuilding was completed in the year 3408, i.e. seventy years later. The building began in 3406 and lasted two years. There are actually a few calculations of seventy years, since there were three conquests of Nebuchadnezar. The first conquest led to the exile of Chananyah, Misha'el and Azaryah. The second led to the exile of Yechonyah. And the third led to the exile of Tzidkiyahu and the destruction of the Temple. The Koresh Declaration was seventy years after the first conquest and the Daryavesh Dec-

laration was seventy years after the destruction of the Temple, in the time of Tzidkiyahu. All of these dates are based on Rashi. There are various opinions about the dating among the Rishonim (early authorities), but we used the simple explanation of Rashi.

Based on these calculations, Achashverosh was the one who stopped the building of the Temple and the aliyah. We learn from here that the story of Purim occurred exactly in the middle of the process of the return of the Jews to Zion. The Ramban teaches that we can see “behind the curtains” that the struggle was not only against the Jews in the empire of Achashverosh but was also secretly a struggle over Eretz Yisrael (see Chidushei Ha-Ramban on Massechet Megillah) as it says: "Because Mordechai the Jew...sought the good of his Nation and spoke peacefully to all of his offspring" (Esther 10:3). "Spoke peacefully" is what is revealed and "sought the good of his Nation" is that in the recesses of his heart, in secret and with wisdom, he sought the good of his Nation in the Land of Israel.

At the beginning of this struggle, Haman succeeded. King Achashverosh promoted him. In comparison, Mordechai was not so successful, although he was a minister in the government: "And Mordechai sat in the gate of the king" (ibid. 6:12). But in the end, everything flips around: Daryavesh's Declaration was written, aliyah was renewed and the building of the Second Temple was completed.

7. Un-walled and Walled Cities

The Ramban in his commentary on Massechet Megillah says that the main problem was "To destroy, murder and exterminate" the Jews in Eretz Yisrael. Based on this idea, he resolves a famous difficulty as to why Purim is celebrated on two days: on the 14th of Adar (in un-walled cities) and on Shushan Purim (in walled cities). The halachic difficulty that it is forbidden to establish two days because of "Lo Titgodedu" (Devarim 14:1, explained by Yevamot 14a – two distinct communities maintaining disparate practices in one community) does not exist in the case of Purim since the Gemara already explained that it is similar to two "Batei Din" (Jewish courts) in two different cities giving different rulings, which is permissible to all opinions. One "Beit Din" ruling that part of the people should act one way and part should act another way is forbidden according to all opinions. A case of two "Batei Din" in one city is a dispute in the Gemara between Abaye and Rava. But there is no issue for two "Batei Din" in two different cities giving different rulings, and therefore Tel Aviv can act one way and Jerusalem can act in another.

The question remains, however, as to why they established two days in the first place. After all, we are pained that there are different customs among the Nation. Why establish the holiday with a difference between un-walled and walled cities? The Ramban explains at length that at first the Jews who lived in walled cities felt protected. They knew that they could protect themselves if attacked. The Jews in the un-walled cities, however, knew that they

could not protect themselves and they would be severely wounded if attacked.

This is the way that the Ramban explains the historical development of the celebration of these miracles: The un-walled cities fought on the 13th of Adar, rested on the 14th and celebrated a holiday on that day. In Shushan, they also fought on the 14th and rested on the 15th. The Ramban explains, in Shushan they fought on the 13th and rested on the 14th, but they also had a small operation of eliminating five hundred men on the 14th. According to this, they should have also celebrated Purim on the 14th in Shushan, and perhaps had some additional rejoicing on the 15th. He explains that the establishment of the holiday was in stages, and when we look closely in the Megillah it is possible to see four different stages:

1. The Megillah says that during the time of the miracle itself, the un-walled cities celebrated on the 14th. Because of the decree "to destroy, murder and exterminate," "and it was turned around: The Jews gained the upper hand over their enemies" (ibid. 9:1), they celebrated spontaneously (ibid. 9:16-18).
2. In the second year, only the un-walled cities celebrated. They established a holiday for themselves since they had felt endangered, but the walled cities did not celebrate. They did not feel that they were saved, and there was no reason therefore for them to celebrate (ibid. 9:19).
3. The Sages – Mordechai and his Beit Din – later thought, and Hashem opened their eyes to this, that the Jews in the un-walled cities were indeed correct to celebrate and there

should be a holiday. They searched for a halachic basis to do so out of a fear of "Bal Tosif" (the prohibition of adding mitzvot to the Torah). Baruch Hashem, we have Yom Ha-Atzmaut, Yom Yerushalayim and Lag Ba-Omer, but they did not. They therefore needed to discuss and prove that this was a true salvation and that it was permissible to establish a holiday (ibid. 9:20-23). The Megillah says that Mordechai sent a letter to celebrate the holiday, "and the Jews accepted" (ibid. verse 23). What did they accept? "What they had begun to practice" – what they had begun on their own initiative – and then "and as Mordechai wrote to them" (ibid.). Furthermore, Mordechai added that not only should the un-walled cities celebrate but the walled cities as well, and he gives the reason: "For Haman ben Hamedata the Agagite, enemy of the Jews, had plotted to destroy the Jews and had cast a lot to terrify and destroy them" (ibid. 9:24).

4. Ester sent a letter: "Queen Ester bat Avichayil and Morechai the Jew wrote with all authority to confirm this second letter of Purim. Letters were sent to all of the Jews, to one hundred and twenty-seventy provinces of the kingdom of Achashverosh, with words of peace and truth, to establish these days of Purim in their times just as Mordechai the Jew and Queen Ester established for them" (ibid. 9:29-31).

We do not always pay attention to these details when reading the Megillah, but the information they give is quite precise. The Ramban says that Mordechai established celebrating Purim on two different days – the 14th and the

15th of Adar, since there were two differences between un-walled and walled cities. The first difference was that the Jews of the un-walled cities were in greater danger. The second is that the Jews of the un-walled cities initiated the holiday. The Ramban brings two proofs for this theory. There is a dispute in the Gemara as to whether Tiveria is considered a walled city. The final decision is that it is considered a walled city but the question revolved around the fact that there is a wall around the entire city except one side, which is bordered by the sea. The Gemara discusses the status of the sea and explains that the question of whether or not it is like a wall is dependent upon the function of a wall. If the function is to protect the city, then the sea also provides protection. If someone attempts to attack the city from the side with the wall, its inhabitants can throw stones; if someone attempts an attack by sea, they defend themselves by shooting arrows with fire and sinking the ship. Thus, the city is protected. But if the function of the wall is to hide the city so that the enemy is unable to see what is happening inside, then the sea does not accomplish this goal since it is open. From the perspective of being enclosed, Tiveria is not considered a walled city, but from the perspective of being protected it is considered a walled city. Since the conclusion is that Tiveria is considered a walled city, the Ramban learns that the essential purpose of a wall is salvation and protection. He brings an additional proof from the Gemara's discussion that perhaps walled cities need not celebrate Purim at all or should celebrate it only on the 15th since they were protected.

Based on this, he clarifies the well-known halachic question regarding the status of walled cities outside of Israel, such as Prague. He explains that Jews who live in walled cities outside of Israel certainly need to celebrate on the 14th like un-walled cities, since the entire issue of the walled cities is when there are only Jews inside, and non-Jews attack it from the outside. If there is a walled city outside of Israel and both Jews and non-Jews live inside it, however, it makes no difference whether it has a wall or not, since the non-Jews could attack from within. Thus, the Ramban explains that the essence of the miracle was therefore in the Land of Israel (see *Chidushei Ha-Ramban on Massechet Megillah*, chap. 1).

According to the Ramban, the main struggle was in Eretz Yisrael. Although this connection is not written explicitly in the Megillah, it is revealed both by the dates of the events, as well as by comparing the Megillah with the Book of Ezra and Nechemiah and other books. Megillat Ester was the official book of the kings of Persia and Media. It was therefore impossible to write anything provocative in it. It had to pass the censor. It could not include facts which appear in the Book of Ezra and Nechemiah which pull back the curtain and show us what really occurred.

Question: How did Mordechai see that the Nation had the strength to stand up? On the face of it, the response of the Nation testified to its weakness.

Answer: In truth, the Nation did not possess the strength, but over the course of the year, from the casting of the lot

on Pesach until the following Pesach, Mordechai was able to raise the national morale.

Question: But wasn't Mordechai's refusal to bow down before the drawing of the lots?

Answer: This is correct. He also did not know that there would be a decree. He knew in general that the Jews were demeaning themselves before the non-Jews and the danger of extermination hovered around them. This is according to the opinions of both the Rashbi and his students. He knew this, saw this dangerous man Haman and therefore stood against him with all his might.

Question: He knew that he had the power to change the Nation even though it was weak at that time?

Answer: Certainly. The Nation was scared, as we see from the fact that everyone bowed down to Haman. But the Nation repented. We went from being a "scattered and separate Nation" (ibid. 3:8) to "Go, gather all of the Jews" (ibid. 4:16). This is also the explanation of Rabbi Shlomo Alkabetz for Mishloach Manot. He writes that this giving of gifts is in order to increase love, fraternity, peace and friendship and to lessen suspicion, tension and divisiveness (Manot Ha-Levi). Mordechai knew that he possessed the power to elevate and the fact is that he succeeded: "For the fear of the Jews had fallen upon them" (ibid. 8:17). The frightened Jews were transformed into courageous fighters. Mordechai was a great man and a true leader. A leader must understand reality but also recognize the

hidden strengths of the Nation. If he does not have this capacity, he is like an officer who yells to his soldiers: "After me," but when he gets to the top of the hill, he discovers that he is alone. Mordechai knew that he possessed the ability to actualize the strength of the Nation. He knew them well. I once read a story about the Holocaust. Two Nazi SS officers once entered a Jewish home. There was suddenly shooting. One of the SS officers said to the other: "It is good that you killed that dog." He did not know that it was the Jew who shot "that dog" – that his comrade from the SS was the one who was killed. He couldn't imagine that a Jew would have the strength to kill a Nazi. In truth, it took time until we had the strength. The strength was awakened in the Warsaw Ghetto. When we fought in the Warsaw Ghetto, we knew that there was no chance of defeating the Germans, but the decision was to fight with the feeling that if we fall it will be in a respectable battle. But after 2000 years of exile, it certainly takes more time to discover our inner strength. Look at what happened to the Nation after less than seventy years of exile! Mordechai knew that the Nation possessed strengths and he was the one who awakened them from their dormant state.

Author's Biography

Ha-Rav Shlomo Chaim Ha-Cohain Aviner was born in 5703 in German-occupied Lyon, France. As a youth, he was active there in the religious Zionist youth movement, Bnei Akiva, eventually becoming its National Director. He attended university, where he studied mathematics, physics, and electrical engineering. At the age of 23, infused with the ideal of working the Land of Israel, Rav Aviner made aliyah to Kibbutz Sedei Eliyahu, in the Beit She'an Valley of the Galil. He then went to learn at Yeshivat Merkaz Harav in Yerushalayim, where he met Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah Ha-Cohain Kook, Rosh Yeshiva and son of Israel's first Chief Rabbi, Ha-Rav Avraham Yitzchak Ha-Cohain Kook. Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah became his foremost teacher, and he became one of his "Talmdei Muvhak – leading students." During this time he also served as a soldier in Tzahal – the Israel Defense Forces, participating in the Six-Day War and the Yom Kippur War, earning the rank of Lieutenant. At the direction of his Rabbi, he joined a group that was settling Chevron and learned Torah there. In the year 5731, Rav Aviner became the Rabbi of Kibbutz Lavi in the lower Galil, where he spent half of his day working in the farm. In 5737, he left Lavi to serve as the Rabbi of Moshav Keshet in the Golan Heights. In 5741, he accepted the position of Rav of Beit El (Aleph), in the Binyamin region of the Shomron. Two years later,

he also became the Rosh Yeshiva of the newly-established Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim (formerly known as Ateret Cohanim). Located in the Old City of Yerushalayim, Rav Aviner's yeshiva is the closest yeshiva to the Har Ha-Bayit – the Temple Mount, the holiest spot in the world. In its more than twenty year history, Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim has produced rabbis, teachers, educators and officers in Tzahal, while also promoting the building and settling of the city of Yerushalayim.

Rav Aviner has become a ubiquitous presence in Israel. He has published hundreds of books and articles, including *Sichot Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah* (talks by Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah), *Tal Hermon* on the weekly Torah portion and holidays and his multi-volume responsa *Shu"t She'eilat Shlomo*. His talks and responsa appear monthly in the Yeshiva's journal, *Iturei Cohanim*. While his opinions are frequently printed in Israeli newspapers, Rav Aviner also contributes weekly to four parashah sheets, "Ma'aynei Ha-Yeshu'ah," "Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah" of *Machon Meir*, "Rosh Yehudi" and "Olam Katan" which are distributed every Shabbat in shuls throughout Israel. He hosts two weekly radio programs, has a video blog (www.video.maale.org.il), teaches weekly classes and gives talks in many different venues. The yeshiva also sends out weekly teachings of Rav Aviner in Hebrew, English, French and Spanish (to subscribe: mororly@bezeqint.net) and has an English blog which is updated on a daily basis (www.ravaviner.com). In addition to these scheduled events, Rav Aviner also makes himself available to hun-

dreds of people from all walks of life who come to him with questions via mail, telephone, fax, e-mail, text messages, his radio show and his video blog Q&A.