

מעשה אבות סימן לבנים

הפעלא ה' את מכתך ואת מכות ורעך מכות גדלות ונאמנות והלים רעים ונאמנים ... (כה-נט)

The Jewish population of Greece was the oldest of its kind in mainland Europe. Dating back to shortly after the *Churban Bais HaMikdash*, when Jews were dispersed all over the world and the long exile began. Over 80 years ago, sixty-thousand Jews lived peacefully in the Greek port city of Thessaloniki. It was a valued and vibrant community. Thessaloniki at one time, was the largest center of Sephardic Jews in Europe, who nicknamed the city “La Madre de Israel” (Mother of Israel) and “Jerusalem of the Balkans.” Most Thessaloniki Jews worked at the port and they controlled the commerce. To the point that the Port of Thessaloniki was even closed on *Shabbat*, the Jewish day when religion forbids working, as there were no people around on that day. Great rabbis lived and studied there. It was a close knit community and people liked each other.

World War II brought disaster for the Jewish Greeks, as the Germans occupied Greece and began actions against the Jewish population. On April 6, 1941, Hitler invaded Greece in order to secure his southern front before launching the infamous Operation Barbarossa and his great offensive against Russia. Of the 60,000 Jews who had been living peacefully in Thessaloniki, over 50,000 were exterminated at the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. The wholesale massacre of the Jews of Greece was brief but intense. Very few escaped. A reported 2,000 Jews survived in total.

Among the few Greek survivors was a family known as Bourla. They were a prominent Sephardic family of jewelers and real estate developers who had fled Spain and had been living in Greece for more than five centuries. During the Holocaust, Mrs. Bourla was minutes away from execution by firing squad when she was spared via a ransom paid to a Nazi Party official by her brother-in-law, while Mr. Bourla happened to be out of the Jewish ghetto when the residents were taken to the Auschwitz concentration camp. He went into hiding and remained there for the duration of the war. He never saw his parents again.

The couple married after the war and in 1961, a son was born into this miraculous family. His parents called him Israel Abraham. He grew up and studied veterinary medicine in Greece. A brilliant student, Abraham got his doctorate in reproductive biotechnology at the veterinary school of Aristotle University in Salonika. At the age of 34, he decided to move to the United States. Albert, as he was known to all, met his wife Miriam in the U.S. and together they raised two children.

In the United States, Albert was integrated into the medical industry. He was industrious and smart and he progressed very quickly. He joined a pharmaceutical company where he climbed the corporate ladder and became a senior manager. From there, the road was short for Albert to rise through the ranks and become Chief Operations Officer (COO) for a short period of time, before obtaining his appointment as CEO of the company in 2019.

Throughout 2020, Albert decided to direct all the efforts of his company to try to find a vaccine against a new virus which had just struck the world. Known as Covid-19 or Novel Coronavirus, Albert expended great financial and technological efforts to achieve his goal. He was tireless and fearless. It took some time, but one year later, his work paid off and the WHO (World Health Organization) and U.S. government authorized his company to produce the long-awaited vaccine.

For months, this vaccine has been distributed all over the world and just this week, it was the first to receive full FDA approval (it only attained emergency use status beforehand) to produce and market to the world, a life-saving vaccine that has helped billions of people worldwide, an unprecedented accomplishment in the field of in pharmaceutical technology.

Ironically, this vaccine which has saved so many people all around the world, including many Germans, was led by a Jew from Thessaloniki, son of Holocaust survivors, most of his people exterminated by Nazi Germany.

Albert remained true to his heritage. He struck a deal with Israel to produce the vaccine in exchange for important data and that is why Israel became the first country to receive the vaccine. In memory of his grandparents who died as proud Jews, and his parents who gave birth to Israel Abraham Bourla, known today as Albert Bourla - the CEO of Pfizer Inc.

קומי אנדי כי בא אורך וכבוד ה' עילך וזה ... (ישעי"ב ס-א)

A PENETRATING ANALYSIS OF THE WEEKLY HAFTORAH BY R' TZVI HIRSCH HOFFMAN

תורת הצבי על הפטרות

Unlike the terrible curses mentioned in the *Parsha*, in the *Haftarah*, *Yeshaya HaNavi* draws a contrasting view with promises from *Hashem* that *Klal Yisroel* would eventually find comfort in the very punishments that they had experienced throughout the long and arduous exile.

“*Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of Hashem has shone upon you.*” Such is the divine message for *Klal Yisroel* which offers a sliver of hope in a very dark world. The question is: what light is the *Navi* referring to and what is the significance of its shine?

R' Shlomo Ashkenazi Rapaport zt"l of Chelm explains that the light and shine detailed by the *Navi* are a reference to the two crowns that *Klal Yisroel* received at *Matan Torah* on

Har Sinai when they wholeheartedly accepted the *Torah*. These two crowns signified a balance of the two main worldly elements – light and dark – which enumerates how the *Torah* is the only thing that holds the balance of evil (dark) and good (light) in this world. After *Matan Torah*, *Klal Yisroel* proudly wore these crowns and acted as arbiters of their ideals, but they were eventually lost due to sin and *Hashem* promised to return them at a later time.

Even today, as the keepers of these values, it is important for every Jew to know that simply activating a light does not make a significant difference in the world; however, projecting that very same light of *Torah* and letting it shine forth, will ultimately make the greatest impact.

ולקחת מראשית כל פרי האדמה אשר תביא מארצך אשר ה' אלקיך נתן לך ושמת כבנא ... (כו-ג)

CONCEPTS IN AVODAS HALEV FROM THE FAMILY OF R' CHAIM YOSEF KOFMAN ZT"l

מחשבת הלב

The *Yalkut Shimoni* in *Parshas Bereshis* writes on the first *posuk* in the *Torah* - “*Bereshis Bara Elokim*” - that the world was created “בשביל בכורים שנקרא ראשית” due to the *Bikkurim* (first fruit that are brought to the *Bais HaMikdash*) which are also called “*Reishis*” (first), as it says in this week’s *parsha*, “ולקחת מראשית כל פרי האדמה אשר תביא מארצך”. This *Yalkut* is unclear and difficult to comprehend: What is the inherent significance of *Bikkurim* that in its merit we have the world?

The **Bris Avraham** in his *pirush* on the *Yalkut*, explains that the typical working person toils endlessly until he can finally enjoy the fruits of his labor. But because of his strenuous labor which led to success, he may have a tendency to attribute it to himself and say, “This is all due to my efforts.” Of course, this is not true as *Hashem* blessed him with success. So to eradicate such thoughts, we bring *Bikkurim*, declaring, “מאת ה' היתה זאת”. Indeed, the entire world stands on that idea.

If we delve a bit deeper, we can add that *Bikkurim* represent the idea of gratitude and *hakaras hatov* to *Hashem*, as *Chazal* have taught, that our entire being, existence, and *avodas Hashem* is based on showing a proper appreciation to HKB”H.

Parshas Ki Savo is read at the tail end of the calendar year. It’s a time to reflect on the infinite kindness that we all receive 24/7 from *Hashem*. *Chazal* also say that a year that is poor at the beginning will become rich at the end. A poor man is the epitome of understanding the notion that all he has is from *Hashem*. Perhaps this is why we take not only the *Bikkurim* but even the basket itself from the poor man. This signifies that he literally has nothing, but is still totally reliant on *Hashem* and can truly appreciate all that *Hashem* bestows upon him. Hence, by *Bereishis* - at the beginning of the year - we must internalize *Bikkurim* - at year’s end - the *machshava* of having *hakaras hatov* to *Hashem*. As the *yemei selichos* are about to commence, let us use this *middah* as a catalyst to do *teshuvah* and gain forgiveness and favor. “*Vitachal shana u'birchaseha!*”

משל למה הדבר דומה

ובאו עילך כל הברכות האלה והשיגוך ... (כה-ב)

משל: Many years ago, a woman asked her husband to go to the market and buy a fish for *Shabbos*. The man went to the market and asked to buy a particularly delicious fish. The merchant told him that for the same price, he could buy a giant fish, only of much lower quality and with a bitter taste. The man refused. The merchant then offered to sell him the larger fish at half-price, but the man still refused. When the merchant lowered the price to a quarter of the original amount, the man paid the few coins and carried the fish home. His plan was to secretly sneak into the kitchen and quickly cut up the fish into small pieces, so that his wife wouldn’t be able to recognize the type of fish. Plus, even if she could identify the fish, he couldn’t bring it back, because it was already cut into small pieces.

When he cut the fish open, he found a giant, sparkling pearl inside. He hurried to a gem dealer where he was offered a huge sum of money for the stone. The merchant asked how

he acquired the pearl, so he told him the entire story.

The merchant was shocked and exclaimed, “That’s exactly how I made my fortune! My father rented a tent in a vacation spot by the seashore. He pitched his tent in one spot and then changed his mind; he brought his tent somewhere else but still wasn’t happy. He tried a third spot and, as he was hammering in the pegs, he hit a solid surface. He dug and discovered a box full of precious jewels, a treasure that was hidden there many years earlier. You see how much your wife had to persist to get you to buy the fish - and what it took my father to chance upon that specific spot!”

נמשל: Based on this story, the **Ben Ish Chai** explains that *Parshas Ki Savo* promises us many great blessings if we observe the *mitzvos*. But what is meant by the promise: “והשיגוך” - that all the blessings “*will catch up to you*”? If we are promised these blessings, then they will certainly reach us! The answer is that if *Hashem* wants, then “*All these blessings will come upon you,*” and even if you try to avoid them, “*they will catch up to you,*” even against your will!

ושמחת בכל הטוב אשר נתן לך ה' אלקיך ולביתך אתה והלוי והגר אשר בקרבך ... (כו-א)

EDITORIAL AND INSIGHTS ON MIDDOS TOVOS FROM THE WELLSPRINGS OF R' GUTTMAN - RAMAT SHLOMO

דרגה יתירה

If there is a *mitzvah* in the *Torah* to be happy, why are so many people depressed? What is the cause of so much unhappiness in the world today and how can we combat this miserable phenomenon which does not allow us to serve *Hashem* properly? The **Steipler Gaon zt"l** gives the following explanation. He says that years ago people grew up with less. Children did not get EVERYTHING they want. People knew how to tolerate hunger, hardship and even suffering. Nowadays, children from a very early age expect their parents to give them everything they want. And if they don’t get it, they feel deprived because everyone else’s parents are giving their kids whatever they want. Even when people are blessed with so much, it does not make them happy because this abundance is taken for granted. When all one’s needs are met, that is the norm. When one thing goes wrong, it is a catastrophe, because it’s “not supposed to be like that.” Although parents think that they are doing the right thing by giving their kids everything, they are neglecting their “spiritual training” - to APPRECIATE all that they have.

Perhaps the end of our *posuk* tells us how to achieve the first part. If you want to rejoice - “שמחת בכל הטוב” - with all the good that you have, you must remember “אשר נתן לך ה' אלקיך” - it is all from *Hashem* and He knows exactly what you need!

Try this simple but effective Joy Increasing Formula! When you make a *beracha*, don’t just rattle off the words. Close your eyes for a second and say, “Thank you *Hashem* for the coffee, the delicious food, or the proper function of my body.” If you want to be miserable, the formula is ... take everything for granted! If you want to be happy ... appreciate everything you have!