

By Rabbi
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“HOW WILL I KNOW” – HOW DO WE KNOW
Adapted from the Chiddushim of HaRav Shimon Kessin, SHLIT’A
In memory of Eliyahu ben Yehuda, Dr. Elliot Hahn

The emergence of Avrohom Avinu and Sarah Imaynu as *the* central figures in establishing what would become the Israelite Nation takes center stage in Parashat Lech Lecha. After the passing of HaRav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, a collection of his writings on Avrohom Avinu was published in a highly recommended sefer entitled “Avrohom’s Journey”. Many volumes can be written on our sainted Biblical Mothers and Fathers, for the heart of our people finds its roots in their lives and character.

One event that stands out in this parasha is the “Brit Bain HaBesorim”, the covenant between the parts. There are two major promises made by Hashem Yisborach to Avrohom in that covenant: He and Sarah will have a son and the land of Israel will belong to the decedents of that son. Regarding the land, there is a two-worded question that Avrohom asks – BaMoh Eyda – “How will I know that I will inherit it”? As per Rov Kessin and others, that question refers to much more than just the land of Israel. Let’s understand the full scope and understanding of what Avrohom is referring to.

In a previous article we learned that a unique opportunity existed for each of the seventy nations until the time of Avrohom Avinu. Had any of them engaged in a proper relationship, as did Avrohom, they would have earned the opportunity given to Avrohom: To engage in the process that was originally given to Adam HaRishon, that being the transformation of Olom HaZeh into Olom HaBah, commonly known as “zichuch”. The proof that this opportunity was available is realized in the fact that Avrohom, in understanding and relating to Hashem properly did in fact earn the rights of zichuch transformation. If we analyze this prophetic vision from the perspective of pshat, its simple, straight forward meaning, the question Avrohom is asking in BaMoh Eyda is referring to the land of Israel. If we move to a deeper, more esoteric level, there is something in addition to the land of Israel that this question is referring to. Avrohom wants a sign, a promise that his children will be worthy of the zichuch transformation process. The request on both levels comes with great legitimacy. Avrohom’s life, his understanding of and relationship with Hashem make him worthy of the promises being made in this covenant. How does he know his children will remain worthy of the same? How does he know that the attachment he has to Avinu SheBaShamayim and the relationship he has forged with Hashem will continue to exist in the years, indeed the centuries to come? BaMoh Eyda, “How do I know that when that magic moment of Geulah arrives, my children will be worthy of the leadership role You, Hashem, are promising me”? That moment is the beginning of the process that culminates in zichuch world transformation. Avrohom is asking a very legitimate question.

To understand the answer, we must understand the “inner spiritual workings” of the world in which we

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live. Our world created by Hashem operates via three “middot”, three ideologies: Chesed, Din and Rachamim – Kindness, Justice and Mercy. As we learned last week, these ideologies are of such great importance that our Sages refer to them as if they have real lives and personalities that interact with Hashem Yisborach. Within this framework, Chesed has never been seen in Olom HaZeh. It will be experienced in its full glory in Olom HaBah, so let’s set it aside. That leaves us with Din, Justice and Rachamim, what is commonly referred to as Mercy. There is no margin of error within Din. Din is based in “Shlaymut”, an “all or nothing” philosophy that addresses the accomplishments of every person individually. If, via our free will we succeed in the Avoda, (what that “Avoda” is goes beyond the scope of this essay) we earn our full place in Olom HaBah, a state of unparalleled Simcha that is beyond human comprehension. If we fail, the only thing waiting for us is “ibud”, not just death, but total destruction. Many view the Satan as the agent of evil, when in fact, as the prosecutor in the heavenly court, he is the active representative of the Middat HaDin. His goal as executioner is to achieve the ibud destruction called for by Din as expressed last week, (and will be elaborated upon next week).

Rachamim, on the other hand, strives for kiyum – the continued existence of mankind. Anyone that understands human history within the framework of our religious ideology will quickly conclude that Rachamim must go to great lengths to achieve its goal of kiyum. Din emanates from a position of objective legitimacy. Rachamim must bend the rules to achieve kiyum. That explains how we understand the Rashi on “Boro Elokim” (Bereshit 1:1). From the outset, Hashem wanted to base the world on Middat HaDin. He realized it would never endure so Hashem integrated the Middat HaRachamim into the system so the world would remain in existence. This concept of integration is an ongoing negotiation between Din, striving for perfect Shalaymut and Rachamim working its magic so we can simply continue to exist.

How does Hashem answer Avrohom regarding the future worthiness of his children as it relates to inheriting the land of Israel and the privilege of zichuch world transformation? The two must be addressed simultaneously because zichuch is destined to begin in the land of Israel. The two concepts – the land and zi-

chuch – are forever intimately tied together. Because

of Avrohom succeeding in the ten trials Hashem put him through, a major change in the briya, the created world took place. This change was also a result of Avrohom having succeeded in raising Yitzchok and Yaakov to follow in his footsteps as Avot. Until this time, the Middat HaDin and Middat HaRachamim were perched together, side by side, looking down on the world and working in the best interest of their individual attributes. Many of us are familiar with the famous teaching of our Sages that says that all of world history flows through and revolves around the Jewish people. Everything that happens in the world is based on what is going on in our camp. Why is that so? How do we understand this? In the collective merit of our Avot, and to keep the promises made to Avrohom Avinu, Hashem changed the operating location of the Middat HaRachamim. It began on the outside looking down upon the world alongside the Middat HaDin. Hashem resituated it so that it operated from **within** Bnai Yisroel. The consequences of this move are huge and provide us with clarity as to the definition of “mercy”.

Anyone that thinks that mercy, Rachamim, means that Hashem feels bad for us or He wants to give us a break is seriously mistaken. Feelings of this nature have nothing to do with Rachamim. Spiritual homeostasis is defined as maintaining a state of stable equilibrium whereby our relationship with Hashem meets a standard that guarantees our continued existence, our present and future worthiness as His chosen people, and when the time is right, the role of transforming Olom HaZeh into Olom HaBah. Achieving this for our people was always directed by Hashem and carried out by the Middat HaRachamim the moment it was situated within our nation. Whenever our state of spiritual homeostasis fails to meet the minimum standard, it became and still is the responsibility of the Middat HaRachamim to reestablish that proper equilibrium. It has done so since the days of our Avot and will continue to do so until the Geulah occurs. If you fully comprehend this statement, you realize that everything negative we have experienced throughout our history is a result of the Middat HaRachamim reestablishing our required state of spiritual homeostasis. The Middat HaRachamim was responsible for the destruc-

tion of both our Temples, the deaths of our ten martyrs, the Crusades, the pogroms, everything including the Holocaust. You will also understand that those nations that persecuted us throughout the ages were agents of Hashem and the Middat HaRachamim in achieving the goal of ongoing homeostasis. Their free-will contribution to this process makes them liable for the atrocities they committed against us.

Let's take a closer look at our history and the history of the world in understanding how the theory described above became practical reality. We begin our understanding of history with the knowledge that the six-thousand years that make up Olom HaZeh are divided into three time periods, each comprised of two-thousand years: Tohu, Torah and Ymot HaMashiach. Rabbi Akiva lived at the cusp of Ymot HaMashiach which is why he did everything he could to spearhead our Messianic era. The Geulah was scheduled to occur. The only question was if it was going to be a positive Geulah or a negative Geulah. For the Geulah to be positive, our people had to be worthy of and responsible for it becoming a reality. Therefore, Rabbi Akiva along with his students did everything possible to achieve this goal. For his generation, Rabbi Akiva was Mashiach ben Yosef while he envisioned Bar Kochba as Mashiach ben Dovid. The second Bait HaMikdash was destroyed by the Romans because of Sinat Cheenom within the Jewish nation. It was a sin we could not adequately repent for or overcome. What makes this time period one that can be characterized as a negative Geulah was the rise and domination of our people by the Romans and then the Catholic Church, serving the purpose of cleansing our people (tahara) from the sin of Sinat Cheenom. We hated each other to the point that it cost us our Temple and the Geulah. The hate of Rome and Christianity imposed upon us, measure for measure, serves the purpose of achieving spiritual tahara, purification, from this sin. This was all brought about by the Middat HaRachamim to reestablish the state of spiritual equilibrium – homeostasis - we lost because of this great sin. The problem is that we have yet to achieve the proper respect for each other that Hashem Yisborach requires.

One can make a study of the interaction between Jewish history, world history, and with the proper focus, how the Middat HaRachamim has operated during every time period. There has been a cycle that has re-

peated itself going back as far as our stay in Egypt during the times of Yosef HaTzadik. We come into a host nation with our identity intact and acclimate to our new surroundings. We contribute to the wellbeing, the overall progress of that host nation, raising their level of respect and comfort with us in their midst. As our success and comfort increases, we begin to abandon the Torah values that have defined us throughout every age. Our spiritual equilibrium falls below the minimum standard, forcing the Middat HaRachamim to raise it to where it needs to be. Subtle warnings go unheeded and eventually the only thing that gets our attention is the anti-Semitic sword that says in no uncertain terms, "You are forgetting who you are, so we will remind you"!! This was the story of Egypt that transformed comfort into hard slavery. The city of Alexandria, Egypt was home to tens of thousands of assimilated Jews until, in a matter of days, the Romans wiped out their entire population. Shortly before, Rabbi Akiva spoke to the masses there and warned them to repent or suffer the consequences. They asked him to leave and shortly thereafter were massacred. The same thing happened in Spain. What started as active participation in the Renaissance became the Inquisition and expulsion. The same progression occurred in Poland more than once. The Chelmnicki massacres, (referred to as "tach v'tat"), based in Poland, killed one third of the world Jewish population then and was once again a point of major focus, killing one and a half of the six million Jews during the Holocaust. This historical pattern has repeated itself time and time again because of the deficiencies of our people, manifested mostly in sinat cheenom and the abandonment of our beloved Torah values. We were responsible for the problem, while the "solution" – the reestablishment of spiritual homeostasis was the work of the Middat HaRachamim.

There are two blessings that we say today: HaTov v'ha'Metiv in response to good news and HaDayan HaEmet when we hear bad news. Rabbi Akiva is famous for authoring the phrase that, translated, states, "Everything that Hashem does, He does for the good". It's interesting that the word "Rachmono" as it appears in this phrase refers to Hashem. Throughout our history, everything down to the finest detail was and continues to be under the watchful and Infinite Eye of Avi-

nu Sheba'Shamayim via the Middat HaRachamim. If everything Hashem does, He does for the good, then why would we ever recite the blessing HaDayan HaEmet? In Olom HaZeh, we lack the eyes and intellectual ability to see everything for the good that it truly is. One of the greatest experiences we will have after the Geulah, compliments of Hashem Yisborach via Mashiach ben Yosef are the "nun shaaray bina", the fifty gates of wisdom, imbedded in our minds. With that wisdom intact, incorporated in our psyche, we will understand how everything our people experienced throughout world history was, indeed, for our good. Rov Kessin expressed that when we see the Holocaust in this light, we will *fully* comprehend why it was needed and why it happened.

BaMoh Eyda: Hashem established the system described above to keep the promise he made to Avrohom Avinu. The land would be ours – which, Boruch Hashem it is – and the privilege of transforming Olom HaZeh into Olom HaBah remains an integral part of our national destiny. Everything that is happening today in Israel and the United States – the land that will bring Esav to do Teshuva and assist Yaakov in bringing the Geulah – is being crafted by Hashem via the Middat HaRachamim. There is a powerful connection between that moment during Avrohom's prophecy, all Jewish history and what will be the Geulah, bringing Hashem's vision for our people full circle. It all started with one gifted, spiritually sensitive couple and culminates with their children, a nation that, despite what the world may think, will fulfill the destiny promised to their father.

How do we respond to these concepts today? Is there something we can do as individuals with a community, Kehilla focus to bring the Geulah sooner, even

if it is only by a matter of minutes? I think

this question comes with a two-part answer. Torah learning and Mitzvah observance are not ends in and of themselves. They are a means to an end, that being to establish a *personal* relationship with our Heavenly Father. Many of us understand Hashem in a transcendent "Malkaynu" way. We're here, and He is way out there. Engaging Hashem as our Father, being able to walk through a day, a week, a lifetime holding His Hand requires nurturing, understanding and familiarity. One must know their Father and relate to Him properly to be close to Him. Secondly, all of us must address the sinat cheenom that continues to plague our people. Focus on the fact that the second Bait HaMikdash was destroyed not because of any lack between ourselves and Hashem but because we could not get along with each other properly. How long are we as a family going to focus on our differences rather than our similarities, what divides rather than what unites us, my personal wants and needs rather than what is in our collective best interest. With the proper mindset, crossing the bridge between sinat cheenom and Ahavat Cheenom is much shorter and easier than we think, especially if we have the proper mindset and walk across that bridge together. During a moment of strife, don't focus on what either side is demanding. Take a step back and ask yourselves, "What does Hashem want"? Replace yourselves with Hashem and I guarantee that whatever problem both sides are facing will be fully resolved. In this zechut, we can look forward to the Geulah as the children of Avrohom & Sarah and Hashem's Holy Nation.