



From the desk of  
**MORDECHAI MALKA**  
 Chief Rabbi of Elad, Israel  
 Founder and President of Or Hamelech Institutions  
 Member of Chief Rabbinate of Israel



עיר התורה שקרובה אליך

## Office of the Rabbinate of Elad, Rosh HaAyin and Herzelia

Religious Court of Elad \* Batei Hora'ah \* Religious Services \* Marriage Licensing \* Kashrut \* Mikvaot \* Eiruvim

## TORAT

## Parashat Vayeira

## HAMELECH

### Fruitless Bargaining

Hashem let Avraham know that the people of Sodom were up to no good and the time had come to deal with them harshly. Avraham thought that if he was told that, he is meant to offer a prayer for their salvation. He said, "Perhaps there are fifty righteous people in Sodom. Will You not forgive the city in the merit of those fifty *tsaddikim*?"

Hashem verified, "If I find in Sodom fifty *tsaddikim*, I will vindicate the whole area in their merit."

Avraham understood that there was no vindication and there were no fifty *tsaddikim*.

So then he tried, "Maybe 45?"

"No, I will not destroy if there are 45."

"How about 40?"

"I won't do it if there are 40."

"And thirty?"

"I won't do it if there are 30."

"Perhaps 20?" Avraham tried.

"I won't destroy if there are twenty."

"O.K., this is my last attempt. Are there ten?"

"I will not destroy if there are ten."

That was it. End of discussion. The Judge departed, the defense lawyer relented. The prosecution went about seeing to the execution of the sentence (Rashi).

### What are you getting at?

What was Avraham trying to achieve, as he lowered his "price"? There were five cities under discussion. Sodom was the leading one, but there were also Amora, Admah, Tsoim and Soar. Avraham felt that a fair price was ten *tsaddikim* per city. So at first he asked if there were 50 *tsaddikim*, in an effort to save all five cities. Once he found out that there were not fifty, he tried

45. Why? He was still trying to save all five cities. He thought that if there would be nine per city, then Hashem, the "*Tsaddik* of the world," could join forces with each group of nine, bring it to a total of ten, earning amnesty.

But there were not 45. So he tried 40, intending to save at least 4 cities. 30 will save 3, 20 – 2 and ten – one. He did not ask for salvation for less than ten *tsaddikim* because in Noah's time, there were 8 – Noah, his wife, their three children and their wives, and their merit saved no one but themselves.

The above is Rashi's approach. According to Ramban, even though Avraham kept going lower, all the time he was asking for all five cities to be spared. The Midrash says that Avraham really thought there were at least ten *tsaddikim*. He knew that Lot had four daughters and he was counting on Lot's wife and four sons-in-law... but apparently they were not of the necessary caliber.

### In Whose Merit

One thing is clear, both from Avraham's prayers and the Almighty's response: a certain number of *tsaddikim* in a place could earn protection for the whole city or region.

In fact, we are taught that anyone who is skeptical about this truth is a heretic! Gemara Sanhedrin 99b defines an *apikores* (heretic) as one who says, "In what way do the Rabbis help us? All of their learning is only for themselves!"

The Gemara then establishes that someone with such an attitude is even worse than an *apikores*. This is because this type of attitude is in direct contrast to an explicit verse (Yirmiya 32) which says that the world goes round in the merit of Torah learning. It is also contradictory to Hashem's affirmation in our *parashah*, "If I find in Sodom fifty *tsaddikim*, I will spare the entire region in their merit."



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### Had There Been Ten

Now, let us imagine what would have happened had there been ten *tsaddikim* and the city would have been saved. Would anyone have given them a pat on the back or a standing ovation? Not at all! Had all five cities been saved in their merit, no one would know a thing. If four had been overturned and one saved, who would have attributed that salvation to those ten righteous men?

Guess what? That's us, today! We, in Eretz Yisroel, are surrounded by bloodthirsty enemies, the borders booming with bombs and all sorts of artillery, plus a heavy dose of sinister terrorists and their cohorts sprinkled throughout the country, inside the borders. The day-to-day perpetual existence of Jewish life in our land can only be attributed to the supernatural protection provided by our Father in Heaven, much to the credit of those who steadfastly adhere to His will, specifically by their untiring study of His Holy Torah.

And do they give us any credit? What does the media have to say about this? They pour propaganda and distort truths, they label their very lifelines as leeches and parasites. It is like an ill man who awakens in a hospital and finds himself connected to all sorts of machines which are keeping him alive, providing him with oxygen and sustenance, regulating his heartbeat, etc. Instead of accurately assessing his predicament and being appreciative and giving credit where credit is due, he gets upset at all the machines and at the hospital staff, claiming that they are killing him and weakening him and taking away his blood and air, etc. On top of his physical illness, he is mentally deranged and confuses friend and foe.

So is the secular attitude towards their observant brothers, the very source of their continued existence. Any military success or economic boost, successful crop and timely rainfall, it is all

in the merit of those who toil in Torah, as stated in the opening verses of Parashat Bechukotai.

### The Conquest of Beitar

This idea is clearly illustrated by the historical conquest of the great city of Beitar, fifty-two years after the destruction of the Second *Beit Hamikdash*. An army of 80,000 Romans set siege on Beitar. The Jewish warrior, Ben Kosiba was inside the city. He had an army of 400,000 able-bodied Jews, half of whom were capable of uprooting cedar trees with their bare hands.

But the army was not so religious. When they went to battle, they said to Hashem, "Don't help us and don't hurt us," meaning to say, "We do not need Your help; we can manage on our own."

Ben Kosiba was indeed quite powerful. The Romans would shoot cannon balls and he would catch them and throw them back at the enemy, killing a number of them at a time.

For three and half years, the siege continued. The Romans could not penetrate the city.

What was the real reason? The city hosted an aged, weak scholar named Rabbi Elazar HaModai. He fasted and prayed.

The Roman Caesar Hadrian had had enough. He was ready to give up and retreat, to return home. They were not getting anywhere. But one Cuthite revealed the secret. He told King Hadrian, "So long as that chicken is rolling around in ashes, you will not be able to conquer the city. [Using a metaphor, he was saying that as long as R' Elazar HaModai was fasting, wearing sackcloth and praying, the city was invincible.] Allow me to allow you to invade the city today."

Permission granted, the Cuthite entered the city, climbing through a drain pipe. He found R' Elazar praying. He approached him and whispered something into his ear.



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Now, Ben Kosiba had spies all over the city, keeping their eyes open for defectors. Some of his spies witnessed this unusual “exchange” and immediately proceeded to alert Ben Kosiba. The Jewish general sent for the Cuthite and interrogated him.

“What did you say to him?” Ben Kosiba insisted on knowing.

The Cuthite acted out his pre-planned part. “If I tell you,” he began, “the Caesar will have my head. If I do not tell you, you’ll get the privilege of beheading me. I’d rather get killed than reveal royal secrets.”

Ben Kosiba was convinced that his pious uncle, R’ Elazar, was planning a peace treaty with the Romans. This infuriated him. When R’ Elazar finished his prayers, Ben Kosiba sent for him.

He said, “What did this Cuthite tell you?”

R’ Elazar responded, “I don’t know. I was praying. I didn’t hear a thing.”

Now Ben Kosiba got really mad. He was red with anger. He gave R’ Elazar one kick and killed the aged Sage.

A Heavenly Voice proclaimed, “Woe upon the foolish shepherd who abandons his sheep! You just paralyzed the arm of Israel and blinded their right eye. [I.e., you killed R’ Elazar who had provided protection for the Jews of Beitar with his intense prayers and illuminating Torah study.] Therefore, your arm will become powerless and your right eye – dim.”

At that, Beitar was invaded and conquered. Ben Kosiba was killed. His head was brought to King Hadrian. The Caesar asked, “Who killed him?”

One soldier wished to take credit. “I killed him,” he said.

Caesar demanded, “Bring the rest of the body.”

The body was brought and a poisonous snake was upon Ben Kosiba’s neck.

Caesar declared, “Had their Almighty not killed him, no one could have.” (Midrash Eichah 2:4)

### The Voice of Yaakov

The verse states (Bereishit 27), “The voice is the voice of Yaakov, and the hands are the hands of Eisav.” Our Sages explain: When the voice of Yaakov is heard in the synagogues and study halls, Eisav’s hand are powerless. [However,] when Yaakov’s voice is no longer chirping in the synagogues and study halls, Eisav’s hand are empowered. Asks the Vilna Gaon: The explanation seems contradictory to the simple meaning of the verse. The verse seems to indicate that at the very same time that Yaakov [representative of all of Klal Yisroel] uses his voice, Eisav [heathen nations] will be able to use their hands [against Yaakov].

The Vilna Gaon points out that in the phrase, “Hakol kol Yaakov,” the first “HaKol” is spelled without a vov, indicating that something is lacking in the intensity of Yaakov’s voice. The frightening message is that even if Torah is still being learned, but not with same degree of intensity, that also empowers Eisav’s hands to take action.

The obvious message for us is that if we see our enemies being allowed to attack us, our best bet at self-defense and protection is to strengthen and support intense Torah study. That is our bomb shelter.

### Who is Supporting Whom?

In the days of Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan Spector, of blessed memory, a wealthy man married off his daughter to a fine Talmid Chacham, a disciple of Rabbi Spector. The father-in-law happily agreed to support his scholarly son-in-law.

Time passed and a small community asked Rabbi Spector to provide for them a Rav. Rabbi Spector suggested this particular young budding scholar. The committee approached him, and he, in turn, asked his father-in-law how he felt about the



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offer. His shver [father-in-law] said, "I'll start paying you more. Just don't leave."

A little while later, another similar opportunity arose and again Rabbi Spector suggested this name. But the father-in-law was adamant that his daughter and son-in-law live nearby and again he increased the stipend.

When the issue came up for the third time, the young wife spoke up. "Father," she said, "until when must we be supported by you? Let us go out and begin to be independent."

Her father responded, "I don't know just who is supporting whom."

The young woman was insistent and the travel arrangements were made. The young family were in transit to their new home, when a horseback rider caught up to them, informing them of her father's passing. Apparently, the shver knew all too well that through his financial support of his scholarly son-in-law, his son-in-law's Torah merits were keeping him alive.

### Rav of the Town

Some laymen think that a town Rav needs all sorts of qualifications, but being a *lamdan* is not one of them. Rav Chaim Brisker held differently.

Rav E. M. Schach (whose *yahrzeit* was just now on 16 *Marcheshvan*) would relate a story about one of our *Gedolei Yisroel* who was Rav in a town. One day, the townspeople demoted him. Why? Because they noticed that his house was dark at night. "How could we have a Rav who sleeps at night instead of learning?" they questioned.

The truth is that that Rav could not afford to pay for candles to burn. So at night he reviewed his learning by heart. The townspeople did not know this. But he did not defend himself. He let Hashem show him the way and soon assumed a much more prestigious position as Rav over a larger city.

### World for Torah

Our Sages reveal to us that Hashem created the whole world so that Yisroel would learn Torah. The Chofetz Chaim explains that if a king has a palace built, paying attention to each detail that it should come out in a manner which befits its royal occupants, it follows that the intended result is worth more than the original investment, in the investor's eyes. So too, if Hashem made the entire world, with all of its intricate details, it follows that Torah is much more important than anything else in the world, since Torah is the ultimate purpose.

The Zohar teaches that Hashem wrote the Torah as a blueprint for Creation. Hashem then "studied" the Torah and thereby created the world. Once He created mankind and gave Torah to Klal Yisroel, Yisroel study Torah and thereby provide continual energy to keep the world going. This is one of the fundamental facts of Creation.

We gain from all that was said here, a newfound awesome respect and appreciation for Torah scholars and all Torah learners in general. We owe them our very lives. Each of us must make Torah learning part of our daily schedule and we must also do what we can to keep the flame of Torah burning.

Says R' Elazar: Any home in which words of Torah are not heard at night, is susceptible to be burned by fire. Says R' Elazar: Anyone who does not support Torah scholars will never see a sign of blessing. (Sanhedrin 92a)

Praiseworthy are those who support Torah. Someone who supports *Lomdei Torah* is creating a protective shield for himself and his family.

May the merit of Torah protect Klal Yisroel and may we merit the Redemption and the Rebuilding of the Beit Hamikdash, speedily in our days.

Fondly,  
Mordechai Malka