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DAF KESHER

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This week's Daf Keshar is dedicated by Harold and Aviva Nussbaum.

DVAR TORAH NOT THE MOUNTAINS

Immediately before the destruction of Sedom the angel tells Lot to flee to the mountains. Surprisingly, Lot protests, begging for permission to live in nearby Tzoar; and his request is granted. Why didn't Lot want to go to the mountains?

Rashi (on Bereishit 19:17-19, based on Bereishit Rabbah 50:1) answers that the mountain country was the home of Avraham Avinu (see Bereishit 12:8); and Lot was more afraid of living near Avraham than of living near Sedom. What was Lot's calculation? When contrasted with the people of Tzoar, he would appear relatively righteous; but when contrasted with Avraham, he would be considered a sinner. Lot preferred being the "head of foxes" rather than the "tail of lions" (see Pirkei Avot 4:15).

Imagine what would have happened had Lot followed the original Divine plan and returned to Avraham's house. Perhaps, after experiencing Sedom's evil and seeing its consequences Lot might have been sufficiently shaken up to transform into a truly righteous person. Perhaps he would have remarried and his daughters would have found husbands. Perhaps he could have repaired his relationship with the righteous and holy Avraham Avinu and be influenced by him. Perhaps – but he made the wrong decision.

That wrong decision impacted on the rest of Lot's life and his descendants. The last we hear of Lot in Chumash is the terrible episode in the cave with his daughters. Moav and Amon came from Lot; and the nations they developed into were a source of pain and suffering for the People of Israel, Avraham's descendants. True, out of those nations came two righteous descendants, Ruth the Moabite and Naamah the Amonite; but they would only emerge after many generations.

Though every decision is important, some decisions change the entire trajectory of our lives. Choosing where to live, whom to marry, and how to earn a living impacts on hosts of other decisions that will follow.

Avraham, in last week's Parshah, used this strategy proactively. After the war against the four kings, the king of Sedom offered Avraham the booty. Avraham refused. He wanted to make it clear to all that his wealth and success came from Hashem. He did not want the king of Sedom to later say, "It was I who made Avraham rich." But Avraham prefaced his refusal with an oath: "I lift up my hand to Hashem, most high G-d, who possesses heaven and earth" (Bereishit 14:22). Why did he take an oath?

Taking a little money is easily rationalized; violating an oath to G-d is not. By taking the oath, Avraham forced himself not to have to deal with the temptation of the booty of Sedom. His approach is a model of making one decision that determines the outcome of subsequent decisions. Through deciding to take an oath, Avraham moved himself into a whole different level of decision making.

Lot himself made a decision that positively impacted on his entire life. In last week's Parshah, Lot chose to join Avraham in his journey to the Land of Israel. That decision changed Lot's life, and changed world history. Perhaps that decision, to link his life with Avraham's, was the source of being saved in this week's Parshah, and ultimately led to the birth of Ruth and her descendants, David and the Mashiach.

SOURCE GUIDE: EARTH AND ASHES

Because Avraham referred to himself as “earth and ashes,” his descendants merited two mitzvot: the earth of the sotah process and the ashes of the red heifer (Chullin 88b). Why did those words bring about those mitzvot? In this source guide we search for the meaning of this aggadic statement.

A. Earth and Ashes

In his dialogue with G-d about the destruction of Sodom, Avraham calls himself “earth and ashes”:

<p>1. Bereishit 18:27 Avraham responded, saying: Behold, I have begun to speak to my Master, and I am earth and ashes.</p>	<p>בראשית יח:כז וַיַּעַן אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר: הִנֵּה נָא הוֹאֵלְתִי לְדַבֵּר אֵל ה' וְאֶנְכִי עָפָר וָאֵפֶר.</p>
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Through those words, Avraham’s descendants, the People of Israel, merited two mitzvot:

<p>2. Chullin 88b Said Rava: As a reward for Avraham our father saying “I am earth and ashes,” his children merited two commandments – the ashes of the red heifer and the earth of the sotah.</p>	<p>חולין פח: אמר רבא: בשכר שאמר אברהם אבינו “ואנכי עפר ואפר” זכו בניו לשתי מצות – אפר פרה ועפר סוטה.</p>
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עפר סוטה – Earth from the ground of the Beit Hamikdash was one of the things mixed with the special water given to the sotah (woman suspected by her husband of adultery) to drink (Bamidbar 5:17).

אפר פרה – The ashes of the red heifer were mixed with spring water to prepare the mixture that would purify those who came in contact with the dead (Bamidbar 19:17).

B. Why Did We Merit Mitzvot with Earth and Ashes?

The Dubno Maggid, (Rabbi Yaakov Krantz, זצ”ל, 1740-1804), sheds light on this Midrash:

<p>3. Mishlei Yaakov – Parshat Vayeira Parable – A person made a great feast and invited guests. Among them was an upright, innocent, righteous, and dignified person, who really should have sat at the head of the table. But because of his great humility, that man chose for himself a seat at the less auspicious end of the table. The host, because he was looking out for that man’s honor, came up with an idea- to seat all the important guests next to the humble man. That way, he lifted up the humble one, and caused him great honor. Explanation – The same is true for our father, Avraham, may he rest in peace. Because he was so lowly in his own eyes, he said, with true humility, “I am earth and ashes.” And the Holy One, blessed be He, because he was concerned about the honor of this precious righteous person, said, “By your life, I will make your earth and ashes into something precious and full of importance. This is meant by “By your life, I will give your children two mitzvot with them (earth and ashes).”</p>	<p>משלי יעקב – פרשת וירא משל – אחד עשה משתה גדול והזמין קרואיו. והיה ביניהם איש ישר, נקי, וצדיק, ונשוא פנים אשר לו נאה לשבת בראש הקרואים. אבל מסבת עניו מאד בחר לו מושב השפל. הבעל הבית, להיותו חפץ ביקרו, העלה על לבו להושיב אצלו כל החשובים ובזאת הגביה השפל וקרנו הרים בכבוד. הנמשל – הוא הדבר באברהם אבינו עליו השלום כי מפאת היותו שפל בעיניו בענות צדק אמר “ואנכי עפר ואפר.” והקב”ה, להיותו חס על כבוד הצדיק היקר הזה, אמר “חייך שאני עושה עפר ואפר לענין יקר ורב החשיבות.” וזהו “חייך שאני נותן לבניך ב’ מצות בהם.”</p>
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His explanation dovetails with that of Harav Avraham Chaim Shor, זצ”ל (1560-1632, Galicia) in his Torat Chaim commentary on Chullin:

<p>4. Torat Chaim on Chullin 88b If you ask: Why did he have to say this? Why are these different from any of the other commandments? We can answer that ashes and earth are inferior and exceedingly lowly. It really wasn’t appropriate to do the All-Present One’s Will through them. But because Avraham lowered himself so</p>	<p>תורת חיים על חולין פח: אם תאמר מנא ליה למימר הכי? דמאי שנא הנך משאר כל המצות כולן שזכו בהן ישראל? וי”ל, לפי שאפר ועפר דבר פחות ושפל הוא מאוד ולא היו כדאי לעשות בהן רצונו של מקום. אלא, לפי שהשפיל אברהם</p>
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much and said, "I am earth and ashes." his children merited to do mitzvot with them even though they are lowly. This is what is meant by the verse, "Who can count the earth of Yaakov?" (Bamidbar 23:10). [Chazal explain in Midrash Tanchuma Balak 12] – There is no count to the mitzvot that they fulfill even through earth, something lowly and despicable ...

את עצמו כל כך ואמר "אנכי עפר ואפר" זכו בניו לעשות בהן מצות ה' אף על גב דדבר שפל הוא. היינו דכתיב "מי מנה עפר יעקב" – אין חשבון במצות שהן מקיימין אפילו בעפר שהוא דבר שפל ובוזי (מדרש תנחומא בלק יב) ...

These commentators explain why lowly substances like earth and ashes became mitzvah objects for Avraham's descendants. But they don't explain why they merited these two particular mitzvot: the earth of the sotah and the ashes of the red heifer. Why did they merit these two mitzvot?

C. Why Did We Merit These Mitzvot with Earth and Ashes?

Rashi's explanation of our verse is our starting point:

5. Rashi on Bereishit 18:27
 "I am earth and ashes" – And I would have become **earth** at the hands of the kings (killed in the war and buried in the earth) and **ashes** at the hands of Nimrod (when he decreed that I should be thrown into the fiery furnace in Ur Kasdim) if not for Your mercy that has stood by me.

רש"י על בראשית יח:כז
 ואנכי עפר ואפר - וכבר הייתי ראוי להיות עפר ע"י המלכים ואפר ע"י נמרוד לולי רחמיך אשר עמדו לי.

Earth alludes to the war with the kings, ashes to Nimrod's furnace. In each of these cases Avraham was willing to sacrifice his life out of love. Out of love for a person, his relative Lot, he risked his life in war; out of love of G-d he was willing to die rather than worship idols. Hashem mercifully protected him in both cases.

Avraham expressed his humility verbally, through speaking of himself as "earth and ashes." But he expressed his humility more powerfully through his actions, when he negated his very self. Avraham extended himself for others in the war against the kings and negated himself before G-d in Ur Kasdim.

Perhaps this is why Avraham's descendants merited those two mitzvot. The sotah service creates the ability to restore the love between a husband and wife by removing the suspicion of adultery hovering over a wife. Avraham's love for people enabled his descendants to preserve marital love; they therefore merited the earth of the sotah service. The red heifer, on the other hand, creates the ability to restore man's purity before G-d. Adam's sin against G-d brought about death and impurity. Through Avraham's love for G-d, his descendants gained the ability to overcome the impurity of death through the ashes of the red heifer.

2 Additional sources:

- In Divrei Yehoshua (p. 135 of the Bnei Brak 5725 edition), Harav Yehoshua Heller, זצ"ל (1814-1880, Lithuania), points out that ashes – themselves radically transformed from their previous state – are appropriate for radically transforming the impure person; whereas earth – that is static – is appropriate for preserving the marriage of the sotah and her husband.
- See Harav Meir Simchah of Dvinsk, זצ"ל (1843–1926)'s long and beautiful essay about this aggadta in his Meshech Chochmah commentary on our verse.

THERE IS SEEING AND THERE IS SEEING BY RABBI YITZCHAK HIRSHFELD

This week's Parsha, Vayeira, is replete with references to the act of seeing, ראייה. The very first words tell us that Hashem is *seen* by Avraham. The next verse teaches that Avraham *sees* the angels once (like you and I would see) and then he *sees* them again (this time he understands – Rashi).

Nearing the end of the Parshah (Bereishit 22:4), as they travel to the Akeidah, Avraham *sees* the Place from afar (a cloud covered it – Rashi). According to the Midrash, Avraham asked Yishmael and Eliezer whether they see what he could see, and their response was "no." Yishmael and Eliezer were missing that ability

to *really* see.

After successfully passing the test of the Akeidah we read, “Avraham called the name of that Place ‘Hashem will see,’ of which it will be said today, ‘At the Mountain of Hashem He will be *seen*’” (Bereishit 22:14). Hashem not only sees us, but, more surprisingly, we can see Him as well. Yes, but not everyone can. In contrast, in Parshat Lech Lecha (Bereishit 16:13, following the explanation of Targum Yonatan ben Uziel) Hagar refers to Hashem as the “Living G-d Who can see but cannot be seen.” Hagar was missing that ability to *really* see.

We have before us three examples which describe multiple levels of seeing.

I think that it is fair to assume that the higher level of seeing is done using the same organ as the merely physical level. They are both done with the eye. And so it seems that some eyes are better able to get to the core, to see dimensions of existence unavailable than others.

On another note we find that eyes have the ability to change reality. Some eyes heal while others hurt. We have heard of the concept of “ayin hara” which Rashi mentions in our Parshah (Bereishit 21:14) and upon which the Gemara (Bava Batra 2b) bases an actual halachah. But it is also interesting to note the words of the Ramban (Bamidbar 1:45) that when the Israelites were counted in the desert they merited being counted by Moshe and Aharon personally, “so that they (Moshe and Aharon) would place their eye on them for the good.” How uplifting it must have been to be able to see these holiest of men, and how sweet that they cast their holy eyes upon us!

How can we attain the seeing eye, the healing eye? Perhaps the answer lies in our last sentence. What we see is what we have seen. Holy impressions of holy people, holy places, holy deeds penetrate through our eyes to the deep recesses of our souls and provide us with lenses capable of perceiving spiritual reality. And, of course, the corollary to this is that profane, vulgar images defile our sense of sight, reducing it to the level described in physiology text books.

There is good reason that the spiritual leaders of Klal Yisrael are called “עיני הקהל – the eyes of the congregation” (Vayikra 4:13). They, who have kept their eyes pure and holy, can see, really see. And with their eyes they can heal, really heal.

Let us prepare ourselves now for the moment (may it come soon) when we will be standing on the Mountain of Hashem to be seen by Him, but not only that. May we also merit the ability to see His Divine Shechinah dwelling in our midst.

G-d gave us only one set of eyes. Let’s not waste them.

Based on an article in the sefer, Ori v’Yishi by Rav Uri Jungreis of Yerushalayim

שבת שלום ומבורך

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The following digital Torah resources have been extremely helpful in researching and preparing the Shapell's Daf Keshet:
DBS – Hataklitor Hatorani, Otzar Hachochmah, the Bar Ilan Responsa Project, and Hebrewbooks.org.

We pray for a refuah shleimah, a complete healing, for all those wounded in the attacks against our People.