



Dust and Ashes

“So Hashem said, ‘The outcry of Sdom and Amorrhah is great, and their sin is very grave,’ (Bereshis 18:20). Due to this horrible state of affairs, the Almighty was prepared to destroy Sdom and Amorrhah. Avraham Avinu, however, was not at peace with this. “And Avraham came forward and said, ‘Will You stamp out the righteous along with the wicked? Perhaps there are fifty righteous within the city? Would You indeed stamp it out rather than spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people within it?’” (18:23, 24). Amazingly, Hashem agreed to Avraham’s request. However, Avraham proceeded further. “Behold, now, I have taken upon myself to speak to the Lord although I am but dust and ashes” (18:27). This statement is truly astounding. How could Avraham refer to himself as dust and ashes? Didn’t he realize who he was? Avraham Avinu was a king with a royal household. He was a prophet whom the Creator of the universe chose to speak to personally. Hashem had just agreed to Avraham’s request, which showed that He valued his opinion. Was a man of this stature no more than dust and ashes?

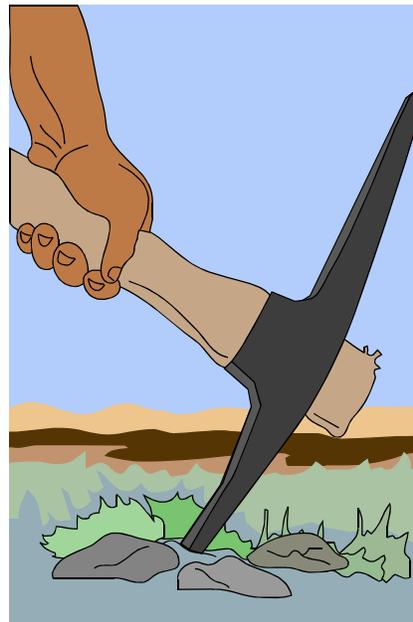
The Gemora (Chullin 89a) praises Avraham’s statement. The Holy One Blessed be He said to Klal Yisrael, “I desire you. (Why?) Even at the time that I bestow greatness upon you, you humble yourselves before Me. I granted greatness (to these leaders of My chosen nation). Avraham responded, ‘I am dust and ashes.’ Moshe and Aharon said about themselves, ‘What are we?’ (Shemos 16:7). Dovid HaMelech referred to himself as a ‘worm and not a man’” (Tehillim 22:7). Our tsaddikim possessed exemplary humility.

The Mesillas Yesharim (Chapter 22) speaks at length on the subject of humility. “How great are the humble in spirit! . . . They are humble in heart and thought” (Sota 5b). A person with an honest heart does not allow himself to be deceived by any good trait that he may possess. He should not elevate himself nor be proud or haughty. Instead, he should thank the One who has been gracious to him; and strive to grow constantly in humility.

The truly great humble person is compared to a poor person who accepts kind gifts from people. He cannot help but be ashamed because he must accept the gifts. The more kindness he receives, the greater is his shame. So too it is with us. We receive kind gifts from Hashem every moment of every day of our lives. All of the good qualities and things that

we possess from him. we ever repay Him? As Dovid HaMelech said, “What can I return to Hashem for all of His loving-kindness to me?” (Tehillim 116:12).

Contrast this with the proud person. Our Sages relate examples of people who took credit for their good deeds and were punished accordingly. If one cannot even take credit for good things that he has done, he surely cannot become self-important and proud because of them. We learn from the Mesillas Yesharim that pride is nothing more than self-deception. We must not deceive ourselves. We should give credit where credit is due – to the Almighty, Creator of the universe. What can we take for ourselves? Humility.



Kinderlach . . . How do we relate to our good deeds? Did you learn well today? Boruch Hashem. He gave you the intelligence, patience, and concentration necessary to learn Torah. Did Imma cook a delicious meal today? Boruch Hashem. He provided her with the food to cook, the kitchen, the knowledge, and the coach to make the meal. Does Abba bring home parnassa (income)? Boruch Hashem. The Almighty is providing the family with money that they need to keep serving Him. Do we take credit for these good things? Absolutely not! We humbly acknowledge that they are all gifts from Hashem. Work on your humility, kinderlach. Do not take credit for yourselves. Give it to the One Who is responsible – the Provider of all good things – Hashem.

Pray for Others

“There is no fear of G-d in this place” (Bereshis 20:11). What place? In Gerar, the kingdom of Avimelech. Avraham and Sara traveled to Gerar after the destruction of Sdom and Amora. “Is this your wife or your sister?” the men of Gerar asked him. “That is how you treat a guest?” comments Rashi. You should ask him whether he needs food and drink. Instead you ask him about his wife. You only want to kill him and take her for a wife. You have no fear of Hashem.

Avimelech and his court were punished for their behavior. “Hashem surely closed every womb in the home of Avimelech upon the word of Sara the wife of Avraham” (Bereshis 20:18). Yet they were healed by the power of Avraham’s prayer. “And Avraham prayed to G-d and G-d healed Avimelech and his wife and his maidservants and they gave birth” (Bereshis 20:17). The very next verse states, “And Hashem remembered Sara... and she became pregnant and Sara bore a son to Avraham in his old age.” Rashi explains the juxtaposition of these two events. Avraham prayed to Hashem to open the wombs of the people of Gerar. Therefore, Hashem opened Sara’s womb. One can pray for Hashem’s mercy to fulfill his friend’s needs. If the one who prays is lacking the same thing, he will be answered first.

Perhaps we can understand this as follows. When one prays for another, he reaches a level of empathy with the other person. He truly cares for him. He feels his lack because he is lacking the same thing. Hashem says (so to speak), “You care for one of my children? Then I care for you. I will grant your request first.”

Kinderlach . . . We all have our special requests that we pray for every day. Do you know someone else who needs the same thing? You can certainly empathize with him. He is lacking the same thing as you. You know how he feels. Pray for him. Put all of your heart into it, as if you were praying for yourself. Truly care for him. No prayer is ever wasted. Hashem hears you. If the thing you request is good for you, then Hashem will answer your prayers. First.

- Parasha Questions:
- Why did only two malochim come to Sdom, and what were their jobs? (Rashi 19:1)
 - When did the malochim come to Lot? (19:3 and Rashi)
 - Were there any tsaddikim in Sdom? (Rashi 19:4)