Dedicated in the *zechus* for a *refuah shleimah* for Shoshana Emuna Bas Penina Devora and everyone else who needs.

Living Appreciation

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Appreciation in the Parashah

When Gratitude Opens Doors.

Avraham's compassion for Hashem's creations knew no bounds. The people of Sedom were notorious for their wickedness. They despised hospitality and had sunk to the lowest levels of morality. Yet, when Hashem informed Avraham that He intended to destroy Sedom and its surrounding cities, Avraham did everything in his power to save them. He pleaded with Hashem from the depths of his heart to spare the cities if even a few righteous people could be found among their inhabitants. Yet Hashem responded that there wasn't even one single righteous person. Their wickedness had reached such depths that the cities had to be destroyed.

Interestingly, there was one city in the region that was spared: *Tzoar*. When Lot was miraculously rescued from *Sedom*, he fled to this nearby city (*Bereishis* 19:20). *Tzoar* was in one of the surrounding cities of Sedom and its inhabitants were also wicked. Why was it spared from destruction?



Chazal teach that Lot was afraid to return to live near Avraham. He feared that, in comparison to such a great *tzaddik*, his own lack of merits would become apparent. He therefore preferred to flee to Tzoar. The *malachim*, who had come to rescue Lot and overturn Sedom, were extremely grateful to Lot for welcoming them into his home despite the great danger involved. In recognition of this kindness, they granted his request, and the entire city of Tzoar was saved. (*Bereishis Rabbah* 50:11)

Rabbi Chatzkel Levenstein (*Yad Yechezkel*, Vayeira) draws an extraordinary lesson from this episode: Gratitude has the power to accomplish even more than *tefillah*! Avraham had pleaded with Hashem from the depths of his heart, yet his prayers could not avert the decree. However, the appreciation shown toward Lot for his hospitality brought about something remarkable. An entire city, filled with people who deserved to be destroyed, was spared so that Lot could have a place where he felt safe!

This teaches us never to underestimate the value of expressing heartfelt gratitude to someone who has helped us. If appreciating the kindness of others can accomplish so much, how much more can we achieve by recognizing and thanking Hashem for His countless blessings! Our gratitude can open the door to further blessings and salvations, far beyond anything we could ever imagine.

This is reflected in the verse, "Enter His gates with thanksgiving" (*Tehillim* 100:4). The *Sfas Emes* explains that the verse teaches us that thanking and praising Hashem opens the gates to draw closer to Him, paving the way for further blessings and salvations. (*Miketz* 5667)

An avreich named Yosef from Eretz Yisrael began experiencing serious problems with his eyesight. Concerned about his condition, he traveled to America to consult a leading eye specialist. After conducting a series of tests, the doctor delivered devastating news: "I'm sorry, but I don't have good news. We cannot save your right eye, and we must remove it immediately. If we don't, the infection could spread to your other eye, and you may lose your sight completely."

Yosef was facing the possibility of losing an eye, with the concern that his vision in the other eye might also be affected. He was thousands of miles from home, far from his family, and uncertain about what lay ahead. Yet, even in these difficult moments, Yosef chose to focus on gratitude.

He entered a nearby shul, stood before the Aron HaKodesh, and spent over an hour pouring out his heart in thanks to Hashem. Tears streamed from his eyes as he expressed his heartfelt appreciation for the precious gift of eyesight and the many years he had been blessed with healthy vision, something he had rarely stopped to appreciate. He then reflected on the countless other blessings he had received throughout his life, thanking Hashem for each one in great detail.

Shortly afterward, Yosef returned to the specialist for another examination. The doctor could hardly believe what he was seeing. The infection had completely disappeared, and his eye appeared perfectly healthy! The specialist was utterly astonished. Only a short time earlier, he had insisted that the eye had to be removed immediately to prevent the possibility of total blindness. Now, there was no trace of the condition. In all his years of medical practice, he had never witnessed anything like it!

Overwhelmed with gratitude, Yosef returned to Eretz Yisrael and arranged a seudas hoda'ah to publicly thank Hashem for the extraordinary miracle he had experienced. The remarkable impact of his gratitude did not end there. A man who heard Yosef's story was deeply moved. He had four older daughters who had not yet

found their shidduchim, a situation that had caused the family much heartache. Inspired by Yosef's example, he decided to gather his family for a seudas hoda'ah. Rather than dwelling on their difficulties, they would focus on the countless blessings Hashem had already given them and express their heartfelt appreciation. Within just one month, all four daughters became engaged!

Appreciation in the *Siddur* — *Hamechin Mitzadai Gever (2)*

Just imagine how different our daily lives would be without the ability to walk freely. Ordinary activities such as getting out of bed, moving around our homes, shopping, visiting family and friends, or going to *shul* would become far more challenging. Those with limited mobility often face difficulties we may seldom consider, reminding us how precious the ability to walk independently truly is.

Beyond its importance in daily life, walking also plays a significant role in our *avodas Hashem*. Every step we take towards a *mitzvah* has value. Chazal teach that we receive a special reward, known as *sechar pesios*, for the steps taken towards performing a *mitzvah*. Indeed, the Mishnah Berurah (90:37) writes that when there are two *shuls* in a city, it is preferable, other considerations being equal, to attend the more distant one because of the additional reward for the steps taken. Likewise, Chazal (*Pirkei Avos* 5:14) teach that even someone who goes to the *Beis Midrash* but does not learn receives a reward for walking there.

Each morning, when we recite *Hameichin mitzadei gaver*, we are reminded of the precious gift of being able to walk. Not only does it enrich our daily lives and allow us to go about our activities independently, but it also enables us to perform countless *mitzvos* and grow in our *avodas Hashem*. This gives us so much to be grateful for each day, as we recognize how much we are able to accomplish through the priceless gift of walking.

Things to appreciate: **Phones.** Phones allow instant communication across the entire planet, by just tapping a few buttons. This is something that people in the past wouldn't have even dreamed of!

Parashah Pearls

When the three angels visited Avraham Avinu, they asked him, "Where is Sarah, your wife?" Avraham replied, "She is in the tent" (*Bereishis* 18:9). The *Gemara* (Bava Metzia 87a) explains that the angels already knew where Sarah was. Their question was intended to highlight her modesty and make her even more beloved to her husband. Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz (Sichos Mussar) points out something remarkable. Avraham and Sarah had been married for many decades, and Avraham was surely well aware of her wonderful qualities. Yet the angels still sought an opportunity to strengthen the affection between them. This teaches us how precious every act of shalom truly is. Even a kind word, a thoughtful compliment, or a small gesture can bring people closer together. We should never underestimate the value of any opportunity to increase peace and harmony in our homes and relationships.

When Avraham pleaded with Hashem to spare Sedom, he declared, "*V'anochi afar va'efer*," "I am but dust and ashes" (*Bereishis* 18:27). Chazal (*Sotah* 17a) teach that in the merit of these humble words, his descendants received two precious mitzvos: the ashes of the *Parah Adumah* and the dust of the *Sotah*. The Iyun Yaakov explains why Avraham's humility earned his descendants these particular mitzvos. Hashem cherishes humility and chooses to rest His Shechinah among those who are humble. In the merit of Avraham's extraordinary humility, his descendants were given two mitzvos that help remove impurity and immorality, both of which drive away the Shechinah. Through these mitzvos, we become more worthy of having Hashem's presence dwell among us. (*Iyun Yaakov Sotah* 17a)

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