



Ohr Yerushalayim News

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T NEWS ... LATEST NEWS ... LATEST

Kiddush This Shabbos

There will be a Kiddush after Davenning this Shabbos which is sponsored by Mr & Mrs Andrew Addleman in honour of Izzy's second birthday.

T NEWS ... LATEST NEWS ... LATEST

When An Argument Isn't

Dani Epstein

In May 2012, World Cup Finalist Alexander Grischuk took on the Kuka Monstr (that's how they spell it, 'e's being in short supply at the time) chess robot in a match consisting of six blitz games, and lost quite badly.

After this defeat and the first great loss of Kasparov versus Deep Blue, one wonders how many Grand Masters would be willing to take on a chess computer these days. Few if any.

Leaving the professionals aside, which enthusiast would consider taking on one of these formidable machines. It's reasonable to suppose that the answer is so close to zero that one might as well say that no-one would be prepared to play against any of these bots hoping to win. It would be completely pointless. If a Grand Master barely stands a chance, how much less so a mere mortal.

Now let's ramp things a little. Supposing Hashem came to one of us and said: "Put on an orange jumpsuit, design a large plaque that reads 'The end of the world is nigh' and go to the Trafford Centre and declare My message there." Who would hesitate for even a moment? Who would consider asking Hashem what the backstory is? Would we debate or argue with Him? Plead a headache? Absolutely not! We would jump to His command.

Yet here we have Avrohom being approached by Hashem who informs him that Sodom and its four sister cities were about to be destroyed, and he starts haggling.

It's safe to assume that were we placed in such a situation, we would react with a mixture of emotions. Horror at the idea of five entire cities being wiped out, pity for the victims, sadness at the destruction of so many people yet we would feel an overriding confidence in Hashem's decision that it is just and correct to the nth degree.

So it begs the question, what was Avrohom thinking of when he started to haggle? 50 zadikim, 45, maybe 40, would You settle for 30? No? 20 then? Any chance for 10?

In what way was this act even vaguely rational?

Let's examine the logic briefly.

Hashem tells Avrohom that He will destroy Sedom and it's sister cities. Now, is there a possibility that Hashem is making a tiny mistake here? Obviously not. In which case, there is absolutely no room for manoeuvre, no room for negotiation since the minute you start negotiating you are suggesting that Hashem has made a mistake!

What is even worse is that Avrohom accused Hashem – even if rather obliquely – of being unjust. After all, said Avrohom, if there are 50 zadikim there, killing them along with the evil people would be

thoroughly evil in and of itself. This is essentially suggesting that Hashem somehow has not really thought this one through properly. Now, Avrohom was perfectly aware that Hashem's justice is absolute and the very definition of "fair". So what was he thinking when accusing Hashem of a potential miscarriage of justice?

Now, did Avrohom not stop to consider for a moment that maybe Hashem actually had checked to see if there were tzadikim in Sedom? After all, when Avrohom starts haggling with Hashem, where does he get his information from regarding the amount of zadikim? From Hashem, of course! Now, if Hashem is supplying the relevant information regarding the existence or lack thereof of zadikim in the condemned cities, we can assume quite safely that Hashem did not actually need to go and count the zadikim. He was perfectly aware of every single individual and their righteousness before the argument began. Not only that, Avrohom was perfectly well aware of this fact before he started the argument as well.

In which case one really has to ask, what was Avrohom thinking of? Clearly Hashem knew there were no tzadikim there before the argument started! Why argue at all?

If this was the only instance of anyone arguing with Hashem recorded in the Torah, then it would be reasonable to say that this was an anomaly – a special one-off occasion. This, however, is hardly the case. The Torah is replete with people arguing with Hashem.

Take Moshe Rabeinu, for example. He practically made an art form of arguing with Hashem. In fact, in Berochos (32a) the gemoroh tells us that Moseh "threw" his words to Hashem.

How so?

Moshe argued that the reason the Jews sinned with the Golden Calf was because Hashem provided them with the gold and therefore was partially responsible for their failure.

The Week Ahead	
פרשת וירא	
Candle Lighting	4.10pm
Mincha & Kabbolas Shabbos	4.15pm
Seder HaLimud	8.40am
Shacharis	9.00am
סוף זמן ק"ש	9.36am
1st Mincha	1.30pm
Rov's Hilchos Shabbos Shiur	3.26pm
2nd Mincha	3.56pm
Seuda Shlishis	following
Motzei Shabbos	5.16pm
Ovos uBonim	6.31pm
Sunday	7.15am / 8.20am
Monday / Thursday	6.45am / 7.10am
Tuesday / Wednesday / Friday	6.45am / 7.20am
Mincha & Maariv	4.05pm
Late Maariv	8.00pm

How exactly does this make any sense? Of course Hashem provided them with the gold. Hashem provided them with everything else as well, such as the ability to breathe, eat, build bridges and make carts. Who would successfully argue in Beis Din that the only reason they murdered was because Hashem provided them with a gun? Had Hashem never given them a gun, they would not have murdered. Is this a great defence? It's ridiculous. So what sort of logical argument is Moshe making with Hashem?

The strangest thing is that the gemoroh records that Hashem eventually agreed with Moshe! How does this incident make any sense? Surely if Hashem agreed with Moshe that implies that He was wrong in the first place. Yet how can that be? Hashem was aware of Moshe's argument even before it was made; Hashem has cheshbonos that no-one aside from Him has access to, and His justice is by definition absolutely correct, every time. How is it even possible for Hashem to agree with Moshe's arguments without somehow casting a doubt on His initial decision? This story seems to lack any logic or sense as we understand it.

Yet the gemoroh records this incident, as well as others such as that of Chana, mother of Shmuel Hanovi. She, too, "threw" her words at Hashem (Berochos 31b).

How can we get a grip on these incidents, and of course that of Avrohom and Sedom?

The first step to comprehending these stories is to understand that whatever argument one might want to present to Hashem, He is fully aware of it already. There is no out-arguing Hashem under any circumstance. It is axiomatic that every single argument we might wish to present to Hashem has a counter-argument that Hashem can respond with before the argument has even started. We cannot under any circumstances out-think Hashem.

The next step is to understand that Hashem knew exactly how the argument was going to go before the argument was made. There is no possibility of the outcome being different to what Hashem foresaw. We can conclude, therefore, that Hashem does not participate in the argument in order to benefit His position. After all, He knows which way the argument will go before it starts anyway, so in what way can arguing benefit Hashem?

We can conclude from these two points that since the argument cannot take place for Hashem's benefit, it must be for the arguer's benefit, such as Avrohom, Moshe or Chana.

If the argument is for their benefit, what exactly are they gaining from them? What does the argument do for them that a simple instruction would fail to convey?

The answer to this lies in the way the gemoroh is constructed. Generally it is believed that the gemoroh is the "Oral Law", the Torah Shel baal-peh. This is simply not the case. It does of course record some of the Oral Law, but the Talmud is not in and of itself the Oral law. It is in fact largely a record of the arguments that took place in the major Torah centres in Bavel (Babylon) such as Sura, Pumbediso and Mechuzo.

Why are the arguments recorded as opposed to the law itself? The reason for this is that when one examines the to-and-fro of some the arguments recorded, that can go on for line after line, sometimes spanning two pages, one can understand the underlying mechanisms, logic and facts. Only by examine every side of the argument, the various hypotheses proffered at every stage, the arguments and counter arguments, only this way can the depth of the subject matter be understood, extrapolated, expanded and applied to other similar or even dissimilar cases.

In much the same way, Hashem deliberately provoked Avrohom into an argument. He had become the Av Hamon Goyim, the father of all nations of the earth. He was the most important person on the planet at that time. He was also very humble. How does one reconcile these two conflicting facts without adversely affecting either one?

So when Hashem informed Avrohom of the impending destruction of Sedom and its environs, Avrohom must have asked himself, "Why is

Hashem telling me this? What does He expect of me? Can I somehow or another rush across there and bring them round to their senses?"

After pondering this question Avrohom must have realised that Hashem actually wanted him to try and save Sedom et al, even if it was just a gesture. So he did the only thing he could think of, and tried to negotiate a settlement with Hashem. This also served to reinforce the importance of his position as the father of all nations without upsetting the careful balance of his humility. Through the argument he was able to internalise his responsibility to humanity without getting his ego over-inflated with his importance; since after all, he failed in his mission to save them.

The purpose of the arguments, therefore, was not for Hashem to "lose" to them, but to inculcate a given message to the recipient in a way that would lead them to analyse every facet of the situation until they began to perceive a faint glimmer of Hashem infinite justice with their frail and limited human capacities.

Hashem's Humility

Shlomo Katz (Torah.org)

"For I have loved him [Avraham], because he commands his children and his household after him that they keep the way of Hashem, doing charity and justice . . ." (18:19)

R' Klonimus Kalman Shapiro z"l (chassidic rebbe of Piaseczno, Poland; killed in the Holocaust) addresses parents and teachers in strong language in the introduction to his classic work on chinuch / Jewish education:

"We are accustomed to looking at today's youth who have thrown off the yoke of Torah as if they alone are responsible for their sorry spiritual state. However, the above verse teaches that it is not so. Every generation is a link in a chain that began with Avraham Avinu. Each generation derives its emunah / faith, Torah, and yir'ah / fear of G-d from the preceding generation.

Are our youth not descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov? Do they not possess holy souls? Let us not fool ourselves about who is responsible for the failures of our youth! Picture today's rebellious youth in a prior generation; would they not have been tzaddikim, or at least G-d-fearing men and women? And why? Because their parents would have been more G-d-fearing than we are. Those generations would not have accepted the situation that we accept. They would never have shrugged their shoulders and neglected their duties. What excuses will we offer on the day of judgment?" R' Shapiro asks.

He continues: What causes youth to reject the ways of their parents? The *primary* cause is that they see themselves as mature adults when, in fact, they are still children. A young person who has such feelings cannot be taught to live a Torah life by being lectured about mitzvah observance.

Habit, also, will not keep such a young person on the path of mitzvah-observance. Rather, it is necessary to appeal to the youth's feeling of self-importance. He must be convinced that he is a sapling that G-d Himself planted in the orchard that we call "the Jewish People." Only if the youth is made to feel that G-d truly cares about his success can there be hope.

Some teachers see their job as lecturing children about their mitzvah-obligations. Some parents see their task as helping children develop good habits. Neither of these practices is "chinuch," declares R' Shapiro. Yes, they are tools of chinuch, but they are not the essence of chinuch.

A related mistake that many teachers and parents make, writes R' Shapiro, is focusing their efforts on raising good *children.* The true goal of parents and teachers should be to raise good *adults.* The job of teachers and parents is to help the flower within each child blossom, i.e., to give each child the tools he or she will need so that the child's holy neshamah will reach its full potential when the child does become an adult. This requires discovering the unique potential within each soul and facilitating its development. That is the essence of chinuch, and that is the true meaning of King Shlomo's famous dictum (Mishlei 22:6), "Train the youth according to his way; even when he grows old, he will not swerve from it." (Chovat Ha'talmidim)