



## Above the Stars

“**W**hat a beautiful starry night, Abba.”  
 “It sure is, Chaim. Hashem is treating us to a majestic view of His handiwork in the heavens.”

“Imagine what Avraham Avinu must have been thinking when he looked up into these very heavens, over 3700 years ago.”

“Are you referring to the passage in the parasha where Avraham expresses his concern about not having children?”

“Yes, Abba.”

“The Torah says, ‘And He (Hashem) took him outside, and said, “Gaze now toward the Heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them!” And He said unto him, “So shall your offspring be”’ (Bereshis 15:5). Rashi explains the simple meaning of this verse. The Almighty graphically illustrated how many descendants Avraham Avinu would have – an uncountable amount – just as the stars of the heavens. Our Sages\* add a deeper meaning. ‘*Ain mazal li’Yisrael*’ (the Jewish people are not controlled by the heavenly bodies). Each person is born under a certain mazal. This determines his physical and emotional makeup. Avram and Sari were born under a mazal of childlessness. Had they not been Jewish, they would not have given birth their entire lives, for the nations of the world cannot change the mazal that they were born with. However, *ain mazal li’Yisrael!* We are different! We are not confined to our mazal. Avram became Avraham, Sari became Sarah, and they gave birth to a son – Yitzchak. Hashem took Avram outside. He took him out of his misconception that the stars controlled his destiny. Avram was not a slave to his mazal.”

“Is that still true nowadays, Abba?”

“**Y**es it is, Chaim. The Meiri’s commentary on the Gemora (Shabbos 156a) broadens the concept of *ain mazal li’Yisrael*. A person’s *mazal* also determines his *middos* – calm or excitable, stubborn or easy-going, desirous or satisfied, stingy or generous, etc. We may think that we are stuck with our bad *middos*. It is not so. *Ain mazal li’Yisrael!* We have *bechira* (free will). We can overcome the less-than-desirable *middos* that we were born with. It may be difficult at first, but hard work and practice make good *middos* habitual. A stingy person gives *tsedaka* over and over and over again. It becomes easier and easier. Hashem’s *Siyata Di’Shmaya* (Heavenly Assistance) gives him the spiritual boost to overcome his *mazal* and he actually becomes a generous person. He changes his nature!”  
 “Fantastic!”

“Ain mazal

li’Yisrael!”

*Kinderlach . . .*

*Is it hard for you to get out of bed in the morning? Do you find it difficult to refrain from overeating? Are you easily angered? Is it not easy for you to patiently sit and learn Torah? Is listening to Abba and Imma always a chore for you? I am sure that you would like to overcome every one of these middos. However, it seems very difficult. Habits are hard to break, especially ones that you were born with, and are a part of your nature. Guess what? Ain mazal li’Yisrael! You can change your nature. You are not caught in the trap of unbreakable habit. Hashem helps you. A sincere effort on your part, accompanied by tefillah and Siyata Di’Shmaya will bring you success! Make bad middos a thing of the past. Ain mazal li’Yisrael!*

\*Gemora Shabbos 156a, Bereshis Rabba 44:12, Rashi on (Bereshis 15:5), Biyurei Aggadot Afikei Yam on Gemora Nedarim 32a



## Change the World

“**A**nd (Hashem) said to him (Avram) ‘I am E-l Sha-dai. Walk before me and be perfect.’” (Bereshis 17:1). We know that Hashem has many names. Why did He choose to refer to Himself as “Sha-dai”? The Malbim zt”l explains that this name is a contraction of the phrase, “I said to world, ‘dai’ (enough).” He created the world, and then stopped the creation at a certain point. The world was not yet finished but Hashem said “dai”. Leave the world unfinished. Man will complete the job.

**T**he name Sha-dai is used in conjunction with the *bris mila*. Just as the world was created incomplete, so too the man is created imperfect. His first mitzvah is *mila* - perfecting his physical body. He begins his life by fixing himself, and he continues throughout his days to fix and perfect himself and the world around him.

**T**here is a famous story told about the Chofetz Chaim zt”l. When he was a young boy he wanted to change the whole world. He tried, but became frustrated. So, he revised his goal. He was only going to change Poland. He soon saw that this was also a bit too ambitious, so he decided to just change his little town of Radin. Alas, this also proved to be too much, so he decided to change just the Beis HaMedrash where he prayed and learned. He soon realized that the only person he was capable of changing was himself. So, he got to work. As we all know, he succeeded in becoming a big talmid chochom and a tsaddik. People began gravitating toward him and his Beis Medrash soon filled with people eager to learn from him. Soon, his name spread through Radin. The small town became a Torah center by virtue of the great tsaddik who lived there. Sure enough, the Jewish population of Poland began heeding the words of this tsaddik and *Godol HaDor* (Torah leader). He wrote many *seforim* (books). His masterpiece of *halacha* (Jewish Law), the *Mishna Brura* is used by *poskim* (halachic authorities) worldwide as the final word in *halacha*. His works, “Chofetz Chaim” and “Shmiras HaLoshon” have revived the all-but-forgotten mitzvah of proper speech. It has become a cornerstone of *Avodas Hashem* (serving Hashem). His multitude of *seforim* cover all aspects of Jewish life, and anyone who wants information or inspiration on practically all aspects of Torah need only turn to him. Yes, Rav Yisroel Meir succeeded. He changed the whole world.

*Kinderlach . . .*

*You can do it. You can change the world. Where do you begin? With yourself. See yourself as who you want to be. Who is that big tsaddik walking down the street? It is you --- 30 years from now. How do you get there? One mitzvah at a time. Wake up in a good mood. Pray well and get to school on time. Learn well and help your friends. Help Imma when you come home. Give Abba a warm welcome when he comes home. Go to sleep on time. Each mitzvah is another brick in the wall. You’re building a big tsaddik. “Tsaddik yesod olam.” A tsaddik is the foundation of the world. Become a tsaddik. Change the world.*

### Parasha Questions:

- Where was the famine and why was it there? (Rashi 12:10)
- Which route did Avraham Avinu take when he returned from Mitzrayim to Eretz Yisrael and why? (13:3 and Rashi)
- Who were Avraham’s “chaneichav” and why were they called by this term? (Rashi 14:14)