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הקל הגדול הגבור והנורא - Hashem is "Almighty, great, strong, and awesome." The term **הגדול** - "great" - was reflected by the avodah of Avraham Avinu, which was *chessed*. The term **הגבור** - "strong" - was reflected in the avodah of Yitzchok Avinu, which was *yirah* (awe) or *gevurah* (strength). **הנורא** was exemplified by Yaakov Avinu, which was *emes* (truth).

Let us reflect into what each of the Avos revealed onto the world.

Avraham Avinu revealed *ahavah* (loving kindness). What was the *avodah* of Yitzchok Avinu? We find different terms for the avodah of Yitzchok Avinu: his trait of *yirah* (awe), *gevurah* (strength), "*pachad*" (fear), and also the term *din* (judgment).

What is *yirah*? What is *gevurah*? What is *pachad*? We will try to explain.

Yirah: Spiritual Fire

Yirah comes from the word *reiyah*, to "see", alluding to when a person sees something fearful, he becomes afraid. A person fears punishment; this is the lowest level of *yirah*. A higher kind of *yirah* is *yiras haromemus*, when a person fears to be in the presence of the King, out of awe of the King's exaltedness.

The trait of *yirah* is rooted in the element of fire in the soul. Fire has a nature to rise, and it can keep rising higher. This is the trait of *yirah* - a person wishes to ascend spiritually, when he sees that he needs to go higher.

However, in order to one to ascend properly, he first has to destroy his previous level, because if he wishes to remain with his previous level, he won't be able to get higher.

There are people who wish to grow spirituality and they have high aspirations, but they don't want to get rid of their previous levels. They want to grow, but they would like to remain with some of their old antics that they were used to having. For this reason, many people don't progress in spirituality, even though they aspire for growth. It is because they aren't willing to give up their desires from the past.

It resembles the spiritual form of suffering known as "*Kaf HaKela*" - the person is being flung around. He wants to ascend spiritually, but at the same time he is being drawn downwards towards his various desires that he can't get himself to let go of. He is both ascending and descending at once, and this is a painful ordeal.

We are charged with the obligation to exert ourselves in Torah. But first, Chazal say that one has to “make himself like a desert.” First we need to desert our various desires, and then we can begin to really exert ourselves in Torah. Our previous levels need to be destroyed in order for us to take the spiritual ascent.

Seeking Truth and Being Willing To Make Sacrifices

Yirah is that I recognize that I need to ascend spiritually, and I want to get to a higher place than where I am now. It really comes from a desire to seek the *emes* (truth). When a person learns Torah, either he learns it superficially, and it only affects his external layers – or he learns it out of a desire for the truth, to let the Torah affect his inside layers.

This is also the power known as *mesirus nefesh* (self-sacrifice). When a person has *mesirus nefesh*, he is ready to give up anything in order to seek the truth. *Mesirus nefesh* is thus identical to the concepts of *yirah* and *emes*.

Two Different Kinds of ‘Mesirus Nefesh’

Both Avraham and Yitzchok exercised *mesirus nefesh*, but they each accomplished a unique kind of *mesirus nefesh*. Avraham Avinu let himself get thrown into the furnace. After this episode, he went to other places – such as Gerar and Mitzrayim. Yitzchok, however, after being willing to give up his life by the *Akeidah*, became an “*olah temimah*” (a perfect sacrifice). In other words, he kept ascending higher and higher.

Avraham Avinu represents giving up one’s life in order to have *mesirus nefesh* for Hashem, while Yitzchok represents an ongoing life of *mesirus nefesh*. This is reflected in the fact that Yitzchok did not leave Eretz Yisrael after the *Akeidah* [for he had become an *olah temimah*] – he continued to live his life with *mesirus nefesh*.

Yirah: Constant Ascension

Yirah is for one to keep ascending in spiritual growth, and to avoid the constant ups and downs of *Avodas Hashem* that people go through [when there is no *Yirah*.] It is to live in a permanent state of *gevurah* (strength over the evil inclination).

How can a person keep ascending spiritually?? Don’t we all have a *yetzer hora* which bothers us and causes us to fall?

There are two ways for a person to enter a state of permanent spiritual growth, where he can leave all spiritual failures behind. One way was Avraham Avinu’s path, and the other is Yitzchok Avinu’s path.

The path of Avraham Avinu was *ahavah*. A person can only be sure that his *ahavah* will protect him only if he is constantly immersed in Torah, though. Most people are not like this, and therefore, most people will have to come on to the other path, which is the path of Yitzchok Avinu.

The path of Yitzchok Avinu is *yirah*, which is achieved through active *mesirus nefesh* in one’s life. What causes a person to fall in his spiritual situation? It is all because he has various desires. If a person would give up his desires, he would never fall once he begins his spiritual growth.

Disconnecting From Indulgence

What kind of desires are we referring to here? We are not referring to the desires for committing certain sins, *chas v’shalom*. That is already obvious. We are referring to “permitted” kinds of desires,

the kinds of desires which people indulge in that are permitted, which are really detrimental to a person. This is the concept of “A disgusting one who permits his behavior within the guidelines of Torah.”^[1]

There are many desires which are permitted, but a person knows good and well that indulging in these desires does not bring him to leading a truthful kind of life. It is these kinds of “permitted” desires which we need to get rid of, if we ever wish to see progress in our spiritual improvement.

Yitzchok Avinu is also the trait of *din*\judgment. A judgment clarifies the truth of a situation. We must live in “clear world” – and in order to live in a “clear” world, we need to be very clear that we must disengage from the indulgence in permitted desires.

With *yirah\gevurah\pachad\din*, a person gains clarity. He lives in a clearer kind of world, a life in which he actively uses his power of *mesirus nefesh* – by giving up his various desires for this world.

Our Main War On This World: Giving Up Our Desires

In the world, there are many wars. It seems that most of the wars take place on this world of action that we see. But the truth is that most of the wars are taking place in our own internal world, in our own hearts: we have an inner fight about what our heart wants.

With using the power of *yirah\mesirus nefesh*, we can get rid of these various desires.

Our *avodah* on this world is not mainly about bettering our **actions**; it is more about fighting with our various *retzonos* (desires), which are the motivating factors behind our actions.

By giving up our various worldly *retzonos*, we are enabled to live a life of *mesirus nefesh*, which will enable us to get very far.

^[1] See *Ramban to Parshas Kedoshim (19:1)* who expounds this concept, with particular regards to the lusts for food and for marital relations.