

PARSHAS VAYERA



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SURVIVING OUR OWN AKEIDAS YITZHAK

WHAT EXACTLY WAS THE NISAYON?

Avraham Avinu went through a major test. That test was the *Akeidah*. It was the test of all tests. Now, we need to study for that test because each of us will go through a similar test in life. The Vilna Gaon says that every person goes through the ten *nisyonos*. Avraham just paved the way for us to succeed in these tests. Now the question is how will a person face the *nisyonos* of Avraham Avinu? I know people who had challenges with *parnasah*. I know people who had to move. I know people who had challenges with their children. I know people who had a lot of similar challenges to Avraham Avinu.

But I'm trying to think, do I know of somebody who had to *shecht* his son? I can't think of anybody, not even one case. So this question bothered me. What's the *pshtat*? The answer is that we need to understand what the challenge of the *Akeidah* was. Was the challenge literally putting a knife to his child's neck? Was that the challenge? What exactly was the *nisayon*? Where was the *nisayon*? And the *emes* is, when we look carefully at the *Akeidah*, we perceive that the *nisayon* was multifaceted. And each of those facets of the *nisayon* – that is what we face.

Please, Avraham?

Let me explain. The Ran, Rabbeinu Nissim, the famous commentator on the Gemara and Chumash, has a *sefer* called *Drashos Haran*.¹ And in his sixth *drashah*, the Ran says an interesting point. Had Avraham Avinu not *shecht*ed his son at the *Akeidah*, he wouldn't have gotten any *onesh* whatsoever. If he would have said, "I'm sorry Hashem, that's above my pay grade, I can't do that *nisayon*," he would have been off the hook. Why? The Ran says because there never was a commandment from Hashem

to *shecht* his son. Hakadosh Baruch Hu just said to Avraham, קח נא את בנך (Bereishis 22:2). And the word נא means "please." It's a *bakashah*, not a commandment. Hashem was saying, "I want to ask you to please do me a favor."

Hashem said, "I would like you to do this, but I only want you to do it if you're willing and want to do it." And Avraham Avinu's *ahavah* to Hashem was such that he said, "Hashem, if this is what you want, I'm going to do it, as if I have a mitzvah and I have no choice." Do you understand what that means? Hashem promised Avraham that he would have a son, and that son is going to be the father of the nation." And now Hashem said to him, "I would appreciate it if you'd be *mochel* the gift that I've given you." Be *mochel* the gift that I gave you. Some people face that challenge. And if Avraham Avinu would have said, "You didn't give me any other children except for this one, and You promised me what the future is going to be," it would not have been considered an *aveirah*. But *af al pi ken*, out of his great love for Hashem, he found within himself the *koach* to do it. This is something remarkable.

DIFFERENT FROM MESIRAS NEFESH

And this is the answer to the famous *kasha*. People ask: What was the big deal that Avraham Avinu was willing to *shecht* Yitzchak? Over the years, a lot of people sacrificed their children when they were facing oppressive regimes that wanted their kids to convert to other religions. And they gave their kids guidance. They told their kids, "Don't give in, don't convert. To die is better." Instead of parents telling their kids, "You know, right now, convert. Later on, when you get a chance, you'll un-convert." Many parents throughout the ages were *moser* their kids' lives.

But the answer is no one had the challenge of Avraham Avinu. Those parents were faced with a dilemma. You can't let your kids *shmad zich up* and convert. That's one of the *mitzvos* that every Jew has - to be *m'kadash Shem Shamayim*. You have to love Hashem. You have a *mitzvah* to give your life up for Hashem when you're faced with such a challenge. That's a commandment. But in Avraham Avinu's case, it wasn't a commandment. That's something beyond normal. Many of us struggle with the *mitzvos* that we are commanded to do. We're not so comfortable with it, and we're not able to think about *mesiras nefesh*.

¹ הנה מובאר כי המצות והעבירות העקר בהן הכוונה, וימשך ששנים יעשו. מעשה אחד בשהו ויגדל שכן אחד מהם על האחר לאין חקר, כי האחד יעשהו בלי כונה וכמסתפק ואומר אם לא יועיל לא יזיק, והאחר עושהו בכונה שלמה, וזהו שרמז הכותב באמרו והיה ביום ההוא לא יוסיף עוד שאר ישראל גוון עד קדוש ישראל באמת, ואמנם יתאמת שמי שישען עליו באמת להיות נשען בעובי הקורה בעבודתו ית', ששיעשה מעשה יותר רחוק מן הטבע, ויותר רחוק הוא מעשה אברהם אבינו ע"ה בעקידת יצחק, כי לא היה נמשך לו עונש כלל אם לא עקדו כי לא צוהו השם ית' בזה, והוא הבטיחו כי ביצחק יקרא לך זרע, וזהו לשון הכותב קח נא את בנך וגו' וכבר נודע שזה המאמר אינו לשון צווי אלא לשון בקשה, שהראה לו שייטב בעיניו אם ימחול אברהם על הבטחתו ויעקוד בנו, ולו היה אברהם משיבו הן לי לא נתנה זרע כי אם זה והבטחתני בו ואיך אעשה זה, לא נחשב לו עון ולא תשיגוהו עונש מזה, ואעפ"כ לגודל אהבתו את השם מצא את לבבו לעקדו כדי שיעשה חפץ השם ית' לבד, ואעפ"כ שאילו לא עשאו לא היה משיגו עונש כלל, וזהו ענין העקידה וסודו.

AGAINST ALL HE STOOD FOR

Another aspect of the *nisayon* of the Akeidah was that it went against everything that Avraham stood for. Avraham was the pillar of *chessed*. There's nothing that stands in opposition to *chessed* like *shechting* his son. This was a tremendous challenge.

Not only that, this could have caused the greatest *chilul Hashem* possible. Avraham was always telling people of the *chessed* of Hashem and the kindness of Hashem and selling Hashem's *tov* in the world. If he would have said, "Now Hashem commanded me to *shecht* my only son," could you imagine the uproar that people would have, the backlash? The backlash would have been unbelievable. But Avraham said, "If that's the *ratzon* of Hashem, that's what I do."

HE ASKED NO QUESTIONS

My grandfather's Rebbi, Rebbi Isaac Sher (1880-1952), gave another insight into the *nisayon* of the Akeidah. He said the biggest challenge for Avraham was not the *shechting* of his child. The biggest challenge was that he perceived a contradiction in Hashem's words. Hashem said, "כי ביצחק יקרא לך זרע." Your child, your descendants are going to come through Yitzhak." And on the other hand, Hashem tells him, "Go *shecht* your son."

The *nisayon* was whether he would question Hashem. He could have said, "That's a סתירה, a contradiction. Could you please tell me the answer to my *kasha*?" The Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 56:10) says that after the Akeidah, there was a conversation between Avraham and Hashem.² Avraham said to Hashem as follows, "Ribbono Shel Olam, בשעה שאמרת לי, קח נא את בנך את יחידך, I had what to respond. What was that? Yesterday you told me כי ביצחק יקרא לך זרע, and now you're telling me to *shecht* my son? That's a סתירה, an open סתירה. And You don't even bother explaining it to me. It's like, 'Forget about what I said yesterday, just focus on what I said today.' But I didn't do that, חס ושלום לא עשיתי כן, I conquered my mercy for my son to do what was Your will." Avraham was silent. He didn't ask questions. That is almost unbelievable, unheard of! If somebody told their child they're going on vacation, and the next day they say something else, the child would get all angry. "Yesterday, you told me that we're going on this vacation. What kind of business is this? You're a liar, you're this, you're that." Adults do the same thing. You know how many adults have told me, "I had *bitachon* in Hashem and Hashem did not deliver. He said to us, 'If you're *botei'ach* in Him, He delivers,' and he didn't deliver." I remember being at a dying person's bed, a very *frum* person. They were very upset at Hashem. "How dare Hashem do this? How dare Hashem make me sick and take me out of this world at this age?" I said, "I'm not Hashem, I can't answer you." But that's the challenge.

Now, you have to know that Avraham was not only silent on the outside. You know, sometimes a guy's simply afraid to respond. Let's say he doesn't want to ask the Rabbi the question. He keeps quiet, but inside he says, "This Rabbi is not fair. I can't respect such a person." "How could you contradict yourself? You give me a promise and then one day, you just change your mind?!" But Avraham was silent even inside.

Now, how did Avraham do that? What was it all about? You know what Avraham had? He had *emunah* and *bitachon*.

AVRAHAM'S EMUNAH AND BITACHON

Avraham Avinu was such a *botei'ach* in Hashem that he believed 100% זרע לך זרע. He had *emunah*: If Hashem said that, it's 100% going to happen. And at the same time, he believed 100% when Hashem told him, go *shecht*. Maybe I have a *kasha*. So he says, "I'm a human being. I'm a human being. I don't know the *terutz*. But that doesn't detract from my *emunah* in any of the statements of Hashem." When he went to Akeidah, in his mind, there did not exist the promise of זרע לך זרע. כי ביצחק יקרא לך זרע. There was only one thing in front of him, the *mitzvah* of that Akeidah. Is that not a contradiction? Sure it is, except that the way Avraham saw it, right then, the promise didn't exist. That's what *emunah* demands of us.

How many people went through the Holocaust, or they had parents who went through the Holocaust, or they read books about the Holocaust, and they became very upset. They became very upset at Hashem. Extremely upset. They were burnt up. "How dare Hashem do such a thing?! This is a merciful Hashem?! Is this mercy? How could Hashem let such a thing happen? And to His *kinderlach*?"

But for a *maamin*, there's no *kasha*. The people who have *kushiyos* are the people who have no *emunah*. I had an aunt, Rebbetzin Osband, *a"h*. She was a very, very special woman. She was the daughter of the Telzer Rav. They were in the Holocaust when the town of Telz was herded together into horse barns. And the Telzer Rav was there. He told his daughter to go get a *sefer*, the Rambam. He wanted to teach her the halachos of *kiddush Hashem*. He read her the *halachos* in the Rambam in *hilchos Yesodei HaTorah* about *kiddush Hashem*. She went through the war, but couldn't talk about the war. And I asked her many times, "Tell me something about it." But she couldn't. "I can't talk about it." That was after years and years! And she was aware of what was going on in the world.

I said to her once, "Did what you see in the war strengthen your *emunah*, detract from your *emunah* or have no effect on your *emunah*?" She told me, "It strengthened my *emunah*. Any person who had no *emunah* or was weak in their *emunah* before the war, their *emunah* became a lot weaker from the war. But anybody who had *emunah* knew it

² רבי יוסון אמר, אמר לפניו רבון העולמים בשעה שאמרת לי (בראשית כב, ב): קח נא את בנך את יחידך, הנה לי מה להשיב, אתמול אמרת (בראשית כא, כב): כי ביצחק יקרא לך זרע, ועכשו קח נא את בנך וגו' וחס ושלום לא עשיתי כן אלא כבשתי רחמי לעשות רצונך, יהי רצון מלפניך ה' אלהינו בשעה שיהיו בניו של יצחק באים לידי עברות ומעשים רעים תהא נזכר להם אותה העקדה ותתמלא עליהם רחמים.

was Hashem and understood it was Hashem. I was aware that Hashem knew what He was doing. My *emunah* became strengthened.” Even though that was the case, she couldn’t talk about it.

How many people became non-frum and threw off their *Yiddishkeit* after the war? Like the Satmer Rebbe said, “Any person who has the numbers on his arm, and you see him putting on *tefillin*, that’s a Yid you want to get a *brachah* from because he faced a big challenge.” To not only trust Hashem, but to say, “Hashem, I know it was right, it was a good thing. I have trust in You, I rely on You that what You did was mamash 100%. You didn’t have any trouble with Hitler. You could have taken him out in one second. But You let him be and You gave him the ideas to do what he did.” It is very difficult to understand, but that’s what *emunah* is. Having *emunah* gives us an opportunity to learn how to face such a *nisayon* and to take the right thing out of it.

THE STORY OF JACK-YANKE’LE

I want to share a powerful story with you. We used to have a night *kollel* in Cleveland Heights. The learning started every night at 8:00 p.m. One day, I must have been in the area for some reason, and I arrived at the *Beis Medrash* at 7:30 p.m. The place was empty. I was looking at a *sefer*, and I saw an elderly gentleman walk into the room. I went over to him and I said, “*Shalom aleichem*. What’s your name?” He says, “Jeck.” I said, “Excuse me?” He said, “Jeck.” I was wondering, “What kind of name is ‘Jeck’?” He was trying to say ‘Jack.’ I said, “You mean, ‘Jack’? You don’t look like no Jack, my friend.” I said, “*Vos iz der numen?*” I saw he spoke with a heavy accent. I said, “*Vos iz der nemen?*” He said, “Yankev.” I said, “Yanke’le, *un vi hot dayn mame dich gerufn?* What did your mother call you?” He said, “What difference does it make?” I said, “I’m just curious to know. What did your mother call you? Yankev? Jack?” “No. Yanke’le.” “Ah! Yanke’le. *Ich vill dir oich rufn Yanke’le*. I’m also going to call you Yanke’le.” I asked him, “Yanke’le, *fun vu kumst du?* Where do you come from?” He said, “I live in Cleveland.” “I never see you around here.” He said, “I never come around. I was walking by the building and I stopped by to see what’s going on here. I know about this building. I’m familiar with it. It’s the Hebrew Academy building, and I wanted to stop in.” I said, “Yanke’le, *zent ir a frummer?* Are you a *frum?*” “No.” “Why not?” I said, “When you grew up, did you go to *cheider?*” He said, “Yeah, I went to *cheider*. I came from a very *frum* family.” “Your parents were *frum?*” “Oh, my Tatte was a *groiser talmid chacham*. My father was a big *talmid chacham*. My mother was a *tzadekes*.” “And the *brider?* All my brothers were very *frum*. And I went off.” “Why?” “I have *kushiyos*. I have questions on Hashem.” I said, “You know, maybe I can answer them.” I said, “What’s your question?” He said, “I was in the Holocaust and suffered in the concentration camps not for a short time. *Ich bin nish fun Ungarn*. I’m not from Hungary.” The Hungarians were only taken to the camps in 1944. The war was over in 1945. That was long enough, don’t get me wrong. “But he said, ‘I was in the camps from 1940.’” I said, “Wow, you made it from 1940 to 1945! Did you escape?” “No.” “What camps were you in?” And he starts to list me off all the camps he was in.

I said to him, “What’s the question?” He said, “Where was the *Ribbono Shel Olam?*” He said, “You want to know the truth? I was the black sheep of my family.” I said, “You don’t look like a black sheep to me.” He said, “I was the black sheep.” I said, “What made you the black sheep?” He said, “*Alle meine brider*, all my brothers, were able to learn *Kabbalah* when they were 25 years old. When I was 25, my father said to me, ‘*Di zolst nisht lernen Kabbalah*. You’re not ready for it. You’re not ready for it. You’re not what you’re supposed to be,’” I said. “Did you learn Gemara?” He said, “Of course, I learned Gemara.” I said, “Do you remember the last Gemara you learned?” He said, “Sure. *Pesachim*. I learned it with my father, *Pesachim, Perek Kol sha’ah*.” He knew. He was an interesting guy. And now he’s *mamash* upset at Hashem, because all his brothers were *tzaddikim*. And he was the black sheep. And all his brothers were killed with his father and his mother shortly after their arrival in the camps. They got on a line. The order came, “Right, left.” “They all went to the left, and I was chosen for the right. And does that make sense? *Vu iz geven der Ribbono Shel Olam, der Basheffer?* Where was the Creator? Where was He? He wasn’t there. Trust me. I was there.” I said, “Yanke’le, I have an answer for you. You want an answer? I have answers for you.” He said, “*Vos kenstu mir zoggen?* What are you going to tell me? You’re going to tell me the Rashi in Chumash that says that when Hashem sends the *malach hamaves* to destroy, אין מבחין בין צדיק לרשע. He doesn’t differentiate between the good and the bad. That’s what you’re gonna tell me?”

I said, “Yeah, that is a Chazal.” He told me, “But I don’t want to hear that *terutz*.” I said, “Okay. I have another *terutz*.” He said, “What are you gonna tell me, the Gemara in *Shabbos? B’avon nedarim*, people make *nedarim* and they don’t keep them, that’s what caused little children to die. Don’t tell me that one. Are you going to tell me that they kept the *din* with no flexibility and that’s what brought it, just like when Yerushalayim was destroyed?” He started quoting me Chazals from all over. It was unbelievable. I was a little blown away by the guy. He didn’t look like a learned guy at all. He looked like a *frier mentsch*. I said, “Yanke’le, I’m not going to tell you that *terutz*.” He threw out at me a few more *terutzim*. I said, “Did anybody tell you these *terutzim?*” He said, “Yeah. Did you think I didn’t ask this *kasha?* I asked this *kasha* during the war, in the Holocaust. I asked this *kasha* to the Satmer Rebbe. I asked this *kasha* to the Klausenburger Rebbe, the Radziner Rebbe.” He gave me a list of Rabbanim that he asked; whomever he met, he asked. And they all told him these *terutzim*.

“YOU ARE NOT A SURVIVOR, BUT A VICTIM”

I told him, “My *terutz* is different from everybody’s *terutz*.” “What is it?” he tells me. I said, “I can’t tell you. It’s almost 8:00. I am starting a *shiur* now. I’m not sure you want a *terutz*. I’m not sure you want an answer. But if you want an answer, come back tomorrow.” The whole time I was talking to him in his Yiddish dialect, not a Litvishe dialect. He

was a Marmarousher Yid, a Radomosh. Anyway, he came back the next night at 7:30 p.m. I said, “Sit down now. This time, *zolst zich zitzen*. Yanke’le, I want to tell you something. Did the *Ribbono Shel Olam* know you were a black sheep? Your father told you that you were a black sheep. And your brothers were *tzaddikim*. Did your brothers suffer one day in the Holocaust? No. They went and were gone the next minute. Where do you think they went? Do you think they went to another Holocaust? They went straight to Olam Haba. They died *al kiddush Hashem*. They were taken as *tzaddikim* and *kedoshim*, holy Jews. They went upstairs. They went *tachas kanfei haShechinah*. They went to be together with the *Ribbono Shel Olam* and they’re in a much happier place. But you - Hashem didn’t want you up there. You know what Hashem said? ‘You should stay down there in the Holocaust. You’re staying in the Holocaust. You still have *tikkunim* to make. You have corrections to make. And you’re going to go through the wringer, and I hope you’re going to correct yourself.’ But you were a fool. You know why? Because instead of correcting yourself and doing *teshuvah* as you went through years of nonstop unimaginable *gehinnom*, you came out of the Holocaust and you became *frei*.” I told him, “Yankel, I’ve got some sad news for you. You’re not a survivor. You didn’t make it.” I told him, “You’re a victim. You never left the Holocaust.”

I said, “Do you have any *Yiddishe nachas* from your kids? How many kids do you have?” He told me he had one kid. I asked him, “Is he *frum*?” “No, he’s not *frum*.” I said, “What does he do? Is he a doctor?” “No.” “A lawyer?” “No.” “What does he do?” “He’s a UPI reporter.” I said, “Wait a minute, one second. Whoop-de-doo,” I said. “Tell me, Yanke’le, are you a millionaire? Did you make it in America?” “No. I worked in a weaving factory.” “So, *kein groiser gvir bist du nisht*, a big *gvir* you’re not. You didn’t make any *groise gelt*, right? You didn’t survive the Holocaust. You’re still in the Holocaust. Wake up. Wake up. Hashem’s telling you to wake up. Do *teshuvah*.” And he sat there and he’s looking at me for a while, and he says to me, “This *terutz* I never heard. This is original.”

SAVED BY HASHEM FOR A PURPOSE

Then he said to me, “Which camps were you in?” I said, “No, I wasn’t in any camps.” “Come on. Don’t give me this. Don’t give me this baloney. Which camps were you in?” I told him, “Yankel, I wasn’t born then. I wasn’t even a dream yet!” He said, “I don’t believe you. I know you were in Europe. Come on – you speak like you’re from Europe.” I said, “I could talk the lingo, but I never was in Europe. I was born in the second half of the 1950s.” “*Ich gleib dir nisht!*” He couldn’t believe it. I said, “Not only that, I don’t even come from the same place you come from. I’m a Litvak.” He said, “You’re a Litvak?” He said, “I can’t believe it. You don’t talk like a Litvak.” I said, “Do you know Litvaks?” He said, “I met one in the camps.” I said, “Really? What was the occasion?” He said, “I’ll tell you. One day, we weren’t working. It was a Sunday, and some guy opened up the barracks doors and came running in. ‘Is there anybody who knows Torah? Anybody who knows how to learn?’ He asked around, but didn’t get a positive reply. He came to me. I said, ‘Yes. I know Torah.’ He said, ‘Please come outside with me.’ He was a Litvak. We sat down on the hard floor outside. He said, ‘I want to say over a piece of Torah to you. I’m going to say this piece of Torah when I get to Shamayim, in Beis Din Shel Maalah, and I want your *haskamah*. I want to know if it’s good or not.’ I was very surprised by what he said. The guy didn’t look like he was dying. He sat down. He spoke to me for half an hour, and told me a *lange shtickel Torah*. And then he asked me, ‘*Nu, vos zogst du?* Is it good? Is it not good?’ I told him, ‘It’s *gut*.’ He said, ‘Thank you.’ He put his hands over his eyes, he said, ‘שמע ישראל ה' אלוהינו ה' אחד,’ he lay down, and he died. That’s the only Litvak I met.” He said, “There was no Hashem there. You know what I saw?” I said, “I can only imagine, I read about it,” I said, “But...” He said, “You know how many terrible things I saw?” I said, “Yankel, you’re the *raya* that there’s a Hashem. You are the living proof. All of your *kushiyo*s are *shtus*, they’re foolish questions. You missed the point. There are so many proofs that there’s a Hashem. And you are the biggest proof.” “How am I a proof?” he asked me. I said, “How many times did you try to commit suicide?” “Numerous times.” I said, “So tell me, how are you here?” He says, “Most of the time, I ran for the electrified fence. That’s how it was done in the camps. People who were finished with their lives ran to the fence, jumped on the fence, and grabbed a hold, and they died.” “You tried that?” “A number of times.” “Nu, what happened?” “It was my *mazel* that every time I jumped on the fence, there was no electricity going through it. The other guys who touched it were killed.” I told him, “Did you ever think that maybe Hashem didn’t want you to die yet? Hashem didn’t want you together with Him upstairs. You weren’t welcome upstairs. You needed to do *teshuvah*. Did you ever think about that?” I said, “Did you have any questions on this? How did you live? How did you live for five years in the Holocaust? How did you live five years in the Holocaust?!” “I was saved by a Kapo.” I said, “A Kapo? The Kapos were the worst people in the camps. They murdered Jews. They were the worst, most evil people.” I said, “What happened?” “So, I’ll tell you. One day, we were working in a field, and the Kapo was driving us to finish our quota of work. And I just had enough. We were trying to dig the hard earth with sticks. We couldn’t do it; nothing was going. And suddenly this big, blue truck, that looked like a big garbage truck, came by. And we all knew what it was. It was a gas truck. And they invited any of the inmates who wanted to take a rest, to come on the truck and take a rest. We knew what that meant. You got into the truck, they closed the door, and they gassed you. It was a gas truck. And I decided I had had enough. I threw down my stick, and I started walking towards the truck. The next thing I know, the Kapo is cursing me out. He was a big brute. He lifts me up like this, like a sack of potatoes, above his head, and he says, ‘You stupid Jew!’ and he throws me over a bush. I hit my head on the ground, and I was out. When I regained consciousness, the truck was gone. And he said to me, ‘If you ever do that again, I’m going to pull you apart, limb by limb. They’re killing enough of us. You don’t give your life up.’ I told him, ‘I can’t anymore.’ He said, ‘What’s the

problem?' I said, 'I'm starving.' He said, "Come to my barracks in the evening and we'll see what we can do for you." They had a private barracks. And from then on, this *rasha* gave me food. They said about him that he killed his own father, I don't know if it's true or not, and they said he wasn't exactly, Mr. Sweet Pea, you know. To everybody else, he was like a murderous guy. But to me, he decided he's going to be my benefactor." I said, "Who do you think arranged that? You don't think it was from Hashem? He was nice to nobody but you. Hashem kept you alive. Hashem didn't let you die." I said, "Did you ever meet him again?" He said, "After the war." I said, "Really, what happened?" He said, "I went to Munich after the war. One day, I was traveling on a trolley car at evening time, it was dusk, and my hand was out the window, and we were, you know, just taking in the breeze, and we passed a square in Munich. There was a large group of people there. And this group of people was screaming a name out. And that was the name of that Kapo. It was an unusual name, I forgot it now. So I decided, I wonder why they're doing that. So I jumped off the trolley, and I walked back to the square, and I saw a large group of concentration camp survivors surrounding this Kapo, and they wanted to kill him. And the military police were trying to protect him and intervene. And I pushed my way into the circle, and we locked eyes with each other. And he turned to the police and screamed, 'That's my witness.' So the police grabbed me, they pushed themselves through the crowd, and they took me to the police station. And I said, 'Listen, I've heard a lot of things about this guy. But I could just testify about what he did for me. He saved my life.' And I told them the whole story with him and how he provided me with food. They let him go. I never saw him again after that." I said, "You don't think that was from Hashem? *Hashgachah pratis*. What was the chance you were going to meet this guy again? *Punkt* you're on a trolley going across that square at that time."

He started to cry. And he said to me, "It seems Hashem didn't want me upstairs. I had to suffer. I came out and I wasn't smart." I said, "Yankel, why did you come in here now? Why did you walk into this building?" "I'm never here at this time. I'm never here." "You thought you came in here, *punkt*, because you're walking by, you wanted to see the building." I said, "Why didn't you send your son to the Hebrew Academy?" He said, "Because they wanted tuition." I said, "Did you send him to college? They want tuition; they don't give it for free. You sent him to college? What's the *pshat*? To teach him Torah, for that you don't want to pay tuition. But for college, you were willing to pay. You're a hypocrite. Don't blame it on the school. Blame yourself."

I said, "You know why you're here today? Hashem brought you here. And Hashem brought me here. I'm never here at this time. You're never here either. I'm here to bring you home. I'm here to take you back. Yankel, you're gonna stop this *shtus*. You're gonna start putting on *tefillin* again." He knew everything. The guy was such a learned guy, it was scary. And he came to the *shiur*. And I told him, "You know what *Masechta* we're learning now?" He said, "What?" "*Pesachim*." And he came to the *shiur*. He had a very difficult time with the *shiur*. Because hearing Gemara in English, he said, was like sandpaper on his ears. "Who learns Gemara in English? I can't learn Gemara in English. An American English. What kind of *avodah zarah* is that?" I told him, "Different times, Yankel. Got to go with the flow. Remember? We learned a *Tosfos*, and he even remembered a *kasha* from his father on that *Tosfos*."

NEVER TOO LATE TO SURVIVE

I told him, "You know, you never gave your father any *nachas*. You were a disappointment to him. You were a disappointment to Hashem. To your mama, who loved you. Become a survivor now. It's about time. Many years after the war, now." I said, "Don't you think it's time to survive?" And he decided he's gonna turn over a new leaf. It was in the late 80s. How many years after the war is that? But he'd always ask me over and over, "Are you sure you weren't in Europe? You're sure you weren't there?" He couldn't believe I wasn't there.

He had no *shaychus* to anybody, to anything. He knew of all the *gedolim* that I knew, but he never had *shaychus* to them. And he did *teshuvah*. He came to learn in the *shiur*. And he was *mekarev* four of his friends. They put on *tefillin* every day. They came to learn once in a while. They weren't so interested to learn, they were big *amei haaretz*. He told me, "*Zei zenen amei haaretz*. They don't know from nothing." But he did *teshuvah*.

You gotta have *emunah*, that's what it is. It's *emunah*, *bitachon*. If you don't have it, your life's gonna be shaken up. But if you have it, you can end up like Avraham Avinu. And you're gonna end up with all the *brachos* and all the *hatzlachos* that's available.