# Yitzchak in Gan Eden

Rabbi Yossi Michalowicz · Chayei Sarah

## The meeting that startled Rivka

### Opening · What did she see

Let us begin with a meeting. Rivka has left the home in which she grew up. Eliezer is bringing her to the man she will marry. Then she looks up, sees Yitzchak, and reacts in a way the Torah asks us to notice.

Please look at source 1.

> וְיִצְחָק בָּא מִבּוֹא בְּאֵר לַחַי רֹאִי וְהוּא יוֹשֵׁב בְּאֶרֶץ הַנֶּגֶב.
>
> “Yitzchak had come from the direction of Be’er Lachai Ro’i, and he was dwelling in the southern region.”

Then:

> וַתִּשָּׂא רִבְקָה אֶת עֵינֶיהָ וַתֵּרֶא אֶת יִצְחָק וַתִּפֹּל מֵעַל הַגָּמָל.
>
> “Rivka lifted her eyes, saw Yitzchak, and fell from the camel.”

These are Bereishis 24:62 and 64. Rashi comments:

> ראתה אותו הדור ותוהא מפניו.
>
> “She saw him majestic in appearance and was startled by him.”

> **Question 1** What did she see? What was so extraordinary about Yitzchak’s appearance? We will begin with where he had been. Then we will encounter an explanation of what she saw that requires us to rethink what it means for a person to move forward.

# Where Yitzchak had been

### 1א · Three years between the Akeidah and marriage

The Megaleh Amukos, at the beginning of our parsha, brings two accounts of where Yitzchak came from when the Torah says that he came from Be'er Lachai Ro'i. One says that he came from the beis midrash of Shem and Ever. The other says that he came from Gan Eden.

The interval matters. Yitzchak was thirty-seven at the Akeidah and forty when he married Rivka. **Question 2 · What took place during those three years?**

> **Answer 2 · Two accounts of the three years**
>
> According to the first account, he was learning Torah in Shem's beis midrash. According to the second, he spent those years in Gan Eden. Within that account, his absence from the familiar narrative has a remarkable explanation: he was not living here in this world during that interval.

Keep both accounts before us. We are going to identify the source for each, and then follow the account of Gan Eden to understand the encounter with Rivka.

### 2א · The Midrash and Targum about Shem's beis midrash

After the Akeidah, the Torah says:

Please look at source 2.

> וַיָּשָׁב אַבְרָהָם אֶל נְעָרָיו.
>
> "Avraham returned to his young men."

**Question 3 · Why does Avraham return without Yitzchak?**

The Midrash, Bereishis Rabbah 56:11, notices who is named and asks:

**Answer 3 · The Midrash sends Yitzchak to Shem**

> ויצחק היכן הוא? ... שלחו אצל שם ללמוד ממנו תורה.
>
> "And where was Yitzchak? ... He sent him to Shem to learn Torah from him."

Targum Yonasan gives the account in greater detail: the angels on high took Yitzchak, brought him to the beis midrash of Shem the Great, and he remained there for three years.

That supplies the source for the first account. Yitzchak does not simply return with Avraham to the young men. The interval following the Akeidah contains a further stage in his life, a period of Torah learning.

### 3א · The account of Gan Eden and Eliezer’s vindication

**Question 4 · What is the basis of the other account, that he came from Gan Eden?**

**Answer 4 · The tradition of Gan Eden** The teaching cited in Simchas Kohen, drawing upon the Arizal on our parsha, places Yitzchak in Gan Eden after the Akeidah. It also brings support from a Midrash in Yalkut Shimoni on Rivka’s fall from the camel.

We must hear this account carefully. The Midrash says that Yitzchak initially suspected Eliezer of having been intimate with Rivka, until it became clear that she had suffered an injury when she fell from the camel. Eliezer had been suspected of something he had not done.

The Midrash then describes Hashem’s response:

Please look at source 3.

> אמר הקב״ה מה אעשה לעבד הזה שהיה חשוד, אמר למלאכי השרת הכניסוהו חי בגן עדן.
>
> “The Holy One, blessed be He, said: What shall I do for this servant who was suspected? He said to the ministering angels: Bring him alive into Gan Eden.”

The account identifies him as Eliezer, son of Nimrod the Great, and concludes that **Yitzchak left Gan Eden alive, while Eliezer entered Gan Eden alive**.

That last statement is the point for our present discussion. The Midrash itself speaks of Yitzchak leaving Gan Eden alive. It supplies support for the second account brought by the Megaleh Amukos.

### 4א · Who is missing from Sarah’s funeral

The Megaleh Amukos brings another indication. When Sarah dies, the Torah says:

Please look at source 4.

> וַיָּבֹא אַבְרָהָם לִסְפֹּד לְשָׂרָה וְלִבְכֹּתָהּ.
>
> “Avraham came to eulogize Sarah and to weep for her.”

**Question 5** Where is Yitzchak? Why would Avraham not bring Sarah’s only son to take part in eulogizing his mother?

### Answer 5 · His absence is explained by Gan Eden

The explanation offered here is that Yitzchak was in Gan Eden and was therefore unavailable. The verse’s naming of Avraham belongs, within this reading, to the period when Yitzchak was absent from this world.

We are not questioning Yitzchak’s love for his mother. The question is about his absence from the account, and the Gan Eden tradition supplies an explanation for that absence.

## 5א · The radiance that Rivka encountered

Now return to the first meeting. The Torah describes Rivka lifting her eyes and seeing Yitzchak. She asks Eliezer:

> מִי הָאִישׁ הַלָּזֶה הַהֹלֵךְ בַּשָּׂדֶה לִקְרָאתֵנוּ?
>
> “Who is this man walking in the field toward us?”

Eliezer answers:

> הוּא אֲדֹנִי.
>
> “He is my master.”

### Answer 1 · Rivka encounters the radiance of Gan Eden

The Megaleh Amukos connects this meeting with Yitzchak’s return from Gan Eden. Rivka encounters someone bearing an extraordinary holiness, a radiance associated with the place from which he has just returned. This explains the force of Rashi’s description: she saw him majestic and was startled by him.

Eliezer's answer identifies the extraordinary figure before her: this is Yitzchak, the man she has come to marry. On this reading, her reaction belongs to a revelation of his holiness as he returns to life in this world.

### 6א · How Yitzchak recognized the fragrance

The Yismach Moshe, in Parshas Toldos, adds a beautiful connection. Years later, Yaakov enters to receive the brachos. The Torah says:

Please look at source 5.

> וַיַּגֶּשׁ וַיִּשַּׁק לוֹ וַיָּרַח אֶת רֵיחַ בְּגָדָיו וַיְבָרֲכֵהוּ ... רְאֵה רֵיחַ בְּנִי כְּרֵיחַ שָׂדֶה אֲשֶׁר בֵּרְכוֹ ה׳.
>
> "He approached and kissed him, and he smelled the fragrance of his garments and blessed him.... See, the fragrance of my son is like the fragrance of a field that Hashem has blessed."

Rashi explains:

> מלמד שנכנסה עמו ריח גן עדן.
>
> "This teaches that the fragrance of Gan Eden entered with him."

**Question 6** But how did Yitzchak recognize that fragrance? How did he know what Gan Eden smelled like?

#### Answer 6 · He had experienced it himself

The Yismach Moshe answers through the account we have been following: **he knew that fragrance from his own three years in Gan Eden**. When Yaakov entered accompanied by it, Yitzchak recognized what he had experienced before.

Rashi gives us the fragrance entering with Yaakov. The Yismach Moshe connects Yitzchak's recognition to his earlier stay there. Together, these passages allow us to hear the later brachos with the earlier part of Yitzchak's life in mind.

### 7א · Avraham receives his son back

There is one more question before we leave this section. At the beginning of our parsha we read:

Please look at source 6.

> וְאַבְרָהָם זָקֵן בָּא בַּיָּמִים וַה׳ בֵּרַךְ אֶת אַבְרָהָם בַּכֹּל.
>
> "Avraham was old, advanced in days, and Hashem had blessed Avraham with everything."

Rashi explains that "bakol" has the numerical value of "ben," a son. Since he had a son, he needed to find him a wife.

> **Question 7** Why hint that Avraham had a son? We already know that Yitzchak is his son. Scripture has told us so repeatedly.

> **Answer 7 · Avraham receives his son back**
>
> According to this explanation, Avraham begins seeking a wife for Yitzchak after his return from Gan Eden. The blessing now includes receiving that son back. "Hashem blessed Avraham bakol": the son has returned, and the time has come to establish his home.

If you heard our earlier class, this returns us briefly to a familiar question. Here we are following the explanation of the return from Gan Eden and its connection to the marriage. A son returns; the search for a wife begins.

But we have not yet heard the most startling description of that return.

## What it means to walk in the world of souls

### 1ב · The Riva's extraordinary description

One of the Tosafists, the Riva, comments on Rivka's fall from the camel. Let us hear the important words inside:

Please look at source 7.

> לפי שראתה יצחק שהיה בא מגן עדן והיה בא כדרך שהמתים הולכים הרגלים למעלה.
>
> “Because she saw Yitzchak coming from Gan Eden, and he was coming in the manner in which the departed walk, with their feet above.”

He also records Rashi’s words, that she saw him “hadur” and was startled by him. He brings an explanation that she saw his handsome appearance, and another that connects “hadur” with returning, with his thoughts directed upward, as explained in his commentary.

We should notice the alternatives rather than flatten them into one reading. The familiar explanation describes his majestic appearance. The extraordinary account before us describes his return in the manner of those in the world beyond, with their feet above.

> **Question 8** Rivka is startled by a sight she has never encountered. But now we have a much larger question than why she was startled. **What could this description mean?**

### 2ב · Hadur and the problem of spiritual walking

The word “hadur” can be associated here with turning or returning. The Gemara uses the expression about Yaakov, “He set his mind to return.” Someone going back to where he came from turns around.

On the interpretation developed here, Rivka saw Yitzchak inverted, with his head directed downward. This is the unusual reading of “she saw him hadur”; she was startled by what she saw.

But we must stop before imagining that we have understood the statement merely by picturing a person upside down. **The question is about the world of souls.** There is no ordinary physical walking there. We are not discussing someone taking bodily steps across a floor in the way we walk here.

> **Question 9** What, then, does spiritual walking mean? Why should its direction be described through the head and the feet? The explanation will begin with a familiar phrase about parents and children.

### 3ב · Why is a child called a parent’s leg

The Gemara says:

Please look at source 8.

> יורש כרעיה דאבוה.
>
> “An heir is the leg of his father.”

The familiar formulation is:

> ברא כרעא דאבוה.
>
> “A son is the leg of his father.”

> **Question 10** Why the leg? Why choose that limb to describe the relationship between a parent and a child?

An explanation is brought in Orach Latzaddik, by Rabbi Eliezer Lipa, son of Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk, and is developed further in Tzemach David, by Rabbi David of Dinov. It begins with the words of Koheles:

> כֹּל אֲשֶׁר תִּמְצָא יָדְךָ לַעֲשׂוֹת בְּכֹחֲךָ עֲשֵׂה כִּי אֵין מַעֲשֶׂה וְחֶשְׁבּוֹן וְדַעַת וְחָכְמָה בִּשְׁאוֹל אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה הֹלֵךְ שָׁמָּה.
>
> “Whatever your hand finds to do, do with your strength, for there is no action, calculation, knowledge, or wisdom in the grave to which you are going.”

Rashi explains the urgency: fulfil the mitzvos while you are alive. After death, you can no longer undertake mitzvos as you can now.

We hear something very practical in those words. A person can intend to learn, intend to repair a relationship, intend to give. While he is alive, the intention can still become an action. The opportunity to make that choice and carry it out belongs to this life. That is why Koheles says, “Do.”

### 4ב · Standing at a level and advancing beyond it

Now we need two terms: “standing” and “walking.” The verse in Zechariah says:

Please look at source 9.

> וְנָתַתִּי לְךָ מַהְלְכִים בֵּין הָעֹמְדִים הָאֵלֶּה.
>
> “I will give you those who walk among these who stand.”

### Answer 9 · Walking means spiritual advancement

In the explanation brought in the holy sefarim, an angel is called an "omed," one who stands. It remains at its assigned spiritual level. A human being is called a "holech," one who walks, because through Torah and mitzvos a person can advance from one level to another. The Torah expresses this in the words, "If you walk in My statutes."

Picture the difference between standing on a step and being able to climb to the next one. The question is not whether someone has a place. It is whether there is a means of further ascent.

After death, the person can no longer perform new mitzvos through his own choices in the way he could while alive. In that respect he is now "standing." Yet the sefarim teach that someone who educated his children and household in avodas Hashem receives reward for their mitzvos even after his passing.

**The actions continue below, and their merit can enable further ascent above.** What a parent taught has not ceased to produce results merely because the parent is no longer physically present.

## 5ב · The good that children continue

If a person leaves children who follow the way of Torah and yiras Shamayim, he can remain among "those who walk" in the upper world. This follows the teaching:

Please look at source 10.

> ברא מזכי אבא.
>
> "A son brings merit to his father."

The Gemara asks why Scripture speaks of David as lying down with his fathers, but speaks of Yoav's death. Its answer is that David left a son like himself, whereas Yoav did not leave a son like himself. David's continuation through his son gives meaning to that different expression.

We also have the Gemara's teaching, "Yaakov Avinu did not die," and the explanation:

> מה זרעו בחיים אף הוא בחיים.
>
> "Just as his descendants are alive, he too is alive."

These teachings establish the connection the argument needs. The children's spiritual life has consequences for the parent. The parent's work can continue to bear fruit through them.

That is the meaning given here to "those who walk among these who stand." In the world where angels are described as standing, the person can have continued spiritual movement through the Torah and mitzvos of the children he raised in that path.

### 6ב · The legs that enable a parent's next step

> **Answer 10 · The child enables the parent's ascent**
>
> Now the expression "a son is his father's leg" becomes precise. The son has the task of supplying, through his good deeds, the means of movement that the deceased father no longer supplies through his own new deeds.

His father cannot climb from level to level through personal action as he did in this world. Koheles has already told us why: "There is no action or calculation in the grave." The son's Torah and mitzvos, however, can bring merit to his father and raise him higher.

**He is called a leg because he enables the next step.** The relationship is not merely a memory of someone who once lived. Through the good that continues, there can be an ongoing consequence in the parent's spiritual life.

This gives us the meaning of walking. But why should the head face downward? For that, we turn to words we recite in the Shema every day.

## The Shema and the direction of our attention

### 1ג · Days that continue to bear fruit

The Maharid of Belz explains the passage in the second paragraph of the Shema:

Please look at source 11.

> וְלִמַּדְתֶּם אֹתָם אֶת בְּנֵיכֶם לְדַבֵּר בָּם ... לְמַעַן יִרְבּוּ יְמֵיכֶם וִימֵי בְּנֵיכֶם ... כִּימֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם עַל הָאָרֶץ.
>
> "You shall teach them to your children, to speak of them.... So that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied ... like the days of heaven upon the earth."

By teaching Torah to our children and educating them to follow Torah and mitzvos, we can merit that even the days spent in the upper world continue to count as days bearing fruit here below. The parent receives reward for the children's mitzvos and is considered, in this respect, as though still living upon the earth.

Listen to the connection in the passage. First comes teaching the children. Then comes the multiplication of days, "like the days of heaven upon the earth." The effect of that teaching can join the parent's life above to deeds still being performed below.

We are familiar with the words. This explanation asks us to pause over what we are asking for and what our teaching can accomplish.

### 2ג · To give to them

The same passage refers to the land that Hashem swore to our forefathers to give "to them." Rashi observes:

> לתת להם. לתת לכם אין כתיב כאן אלא לתת להם, מכאן מצינו למדים תחיית המתים מן התורה.
>
> "'To give to them': it does not say 'to give to you,' but 'to give to them.' From here we learn resurrection of the dead from the Torah."

Rashi's direct point is that the promise concerns the forefathers themselves, indicating that they will live again. The exposition we are following hears a further allusion in his words: children following the Torah's path can bring continuing life and ascent to parents who have died.

Through the children's Torah and mitzvos, their parents can be "those who walk." This brings us back to "like the days of heaven upon the earth." The lives of the parents above remain connected to the spiritual deeds of the children here.

We should keep the two levels clear: Rashi gives the Torah's indication of resurrection; this teaching draws out the connection between the parents' continued ascent and the children's deeds.

### 3ג · While alive we look upward

Now we can understand the two directions. In this world we walk with our feet below and our heads above. In the image of the world of souls, the head is directed downward and the feet upward.

While we are here, our thoughts are directed toward fulfilling Torah and mitzvos for Hashem. The head is above: we look upward for the help that enables us to serve Him.

Please look at source 12.

The Sages teach that a person's yetzer rises against him, and that without Hashem's assistance he could not overcome it. Our capacity to choose good does not make us independent of Hashem. We need His help to overcome what stands in our way and to fulfil His mitzvos.

That is the direction of our dependence while alive. We are here below, and our eyes turn above for assistance. We want to learn, to daven with attention, to respond patiently when we are provoked. We still have the opportunity to act, and we ask Hashem to help us use it.

### 4ג · Afterward they look toward the deeds below

In the world of souls, the situation is different. The departed can no longer undertake mitzvos through their own actions as we do here. For the continued ascent being discussed, they look toward the Torah and mitzvos of their children in this world.

Please look at source 13.

The head is therefore directed below. The thought and concern turn toward those who remain here: toward the actions through which further ascent can come. Their feet are above because the spiritual movement takes place above, while its enabling deeds take place below.

> **Answer 8 · Their attention turns toward the deeds below**
>
> This is the explanation of the Riva's image. **The head points toward the source of the next step.** Here we look above for help to act; there, they look below toward the deeds that can bring them further ascent.

> **We look upward for help to serve Hashem. Those above look downward toward the good that continues here.**

We can now return to Rivka's astonishment. The description of Yitzchak coming from Gan Eden opens a teaching about the relationship between the two worlds. Its meaning requires us to understand spiritual movement, rather than merely to picture an unusual bodily posture.

## The inverted world becomes clear

### 1ד · What Rav Yosef saw

Please look at source 14.

The Gemara in Pesachim tells us that Rav Yosef, the son of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, became ill and his soul ascended above. He subsequently returned and recovered. His father asked him what he had seen.

Rav Yosef answered:

> עולם הפוך ראיתי, עליונים למטה ותחתונים למעלה.
>
> "An inverted world I saw: the upper below and the lower above."

His father replied:

> עולם ברור ראית.
>
> "You saw a clear world."

> **Question 11** Why call it an inverted world, and why answer that it is a clear world?

The Gemara's familiar explanation concerns the reversal of people's worldly and heavenly standing. Here, a further reading connects its words to the Riva's teaching: those in the upper world are described with their heads below and their feet above, unlike the familiar posture of people in this world.

It is inverted relative to what we see here. But once we understand what enables ascent there, the arrangement becomes clear. Its meaning is not arbitrary. It expresses where the thought turns and through what the further movement becomes possible.

### 2ד · The upper below and the lower above

Now hear the two halves of Rav Yosef's description with their explanation.

"The upper below": the aspiration of those above is directed toward the mitzvos being performed by those below. They long for the additional merit through which they can advance. Their attention turns toward the people who still have the opportunity to act here.

"The lower above": those below direct their intentions above, asking Hashem to help them overcome their yetzer and fulfil Torah and mitzvos. They look to Him for the assistance that makes their own spiritual progress possible.

> **Answer 11 · Its direction expresses spiritual dependence**
>
> Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi therefore tells his son, "You saw a clear world." The understanding is correct. Those above long to receive the spiritual benefit that comes through the mitzvos of those below.

**Our lives here have consequences beyond what we can see.** That is why the teaching ends by urging us to strive in avodas Hashem for as long as we remain in this world.

The surprising sight at the beginning has brought us to a very immediate responsibility. We still have the capacity to do. We still have people to teach and encourage. What we establish here can continue producing good beyond our own lifetime.

## Practical application for our own families

Many of us are parents and grandparents. We know that teaching a child is not confined to the years when we help with homework. An adult child can still learn from the way a parent handles disappointment. A grandchild can still learn from a grandparent's willingness to make time for Torah.

Sometimes the lasting lesson is very small. Think of a child who grows up watching a parent stop before a meal to make a bracha carefully. Years later the child has a home of his own. That parent may no longer be there, but something learned in that home is still being done. The teaching we have studied gives us a way to appreciate what that continuation can mean.

We cannot compel another person's spiritual choices, and we should not turn this teaching into an accusation against a parent whose child has taken a difficult path. The passage gives us a reason to value our opportunities to teach and encourage. It does not give us a measure of another family's worth or of what a particular parent deserved.

For an older parent, the opportunity may begin with a warmer conversation. Ask a grandchild what he is learning and listen to the answer. Share a Torah thought without turning every visit into an examination. Let a child see that learning still interests you, that a mitzvah still matters to you, that another person's dignity still has a claim upon you.

Our own avodah also continues. The fact that a person cannot do what he did twenty years ago does not mean that his present choices have ceased to matter. A few lines of Torah learned with effort, a sincere tefillah, or a considerate response when patience is difficult are actions available in the life we have now. Koheles's instruction addresses the opportunity that is before us: "Whatever your hand finds to do, do with your strength."

We can also hear this teaching as children. A parent's physical presence may be gone, but the Torah we learned from that parent can still be lived. The kindness they taught can still be practised. The principle that a child brings merit to a parent gives spiritual significance to that continuing responsibility.

For those who are not parents, the invitation to use our time in avodas Hashem is equally personal. The parent–child relationship is the particular subject of this teaching; every one of us still has the precious opportunity to learn, to daven, and to do good with the life Hashem gives us.

## A son's compassion reaches his father

Let us bring this teaching into focus through an account preserved in Shivchei HaBesht, section 72 in the Ben-Yehuda transcription. The story concerns Reb Yudel of Tchidnov, and it ends with his meeting with the Baal Shem Tov.

## The Fish and the Drowning Dog

Reb Yudel of Tchidnov was a relative of Reb Nachman of Kosov. His father, Reb Yosef, had been a mochiach—a preacher who urged people toward repentance and better conduct.

Reb Yudel did not want to depend on other people for his livelihood. He supported himself through his own work, trading in iron.

On one of his journeys, he arrived at a settlement where he intended to remain for Shabbos.

His host, however, had a problem.

"What will you eat?" he asked. "I have no fish. And you will not eat the meat, since you have not inspected the slaughtering knife."

The host suggested another place nearby.

“A prosperous man lives there. Surely he will have fish and a shochet. My advice is that you travel to him.”

Reb Yudel set out.

The road to the other settlement passed through a watercourse. Ordinarily, the water was shallow enough for travelers to cross. This time, however, heavy rains—or the melting snow—had caused the water to rise.

The travelers did not realize how dangerous the crossing had become. They were preparing to enter the water.

Just then, a dog ran ahead of them into the stream.

The dog began to drown.

Reb Yudel watched as the animal rose and sank in the water, crying out bitterly. His compassion was aroused, and **tears flowed from his eyes**.

He also understood what the dog’s struggle revealed: they could not cross safely.

He turned back to the first settlement.

Returning to his original host, he asked him to make a special effort to obtain fish for Shabbos.

The host went to the fishermen and pressed them to try. They caught an exceptionally large fish—a pike.

“I have lived in this village for years,” the host said, “and I have never come across a fish like this!”

They prepared several dishes from it for Reb Yudel’s Shabbos meals.

That Friday night, Reb Yudel sat at the table, eating his meal and singing zemiros.

He dozed off at the table.

In his dream, his deceased father appeared to him.

“You should know,” his father told him, “that I am reincarnated in this fish.

“The informer whom I pursued during my lifetime was reincarnated in the dog that drowned.

“**That was his tikkun: he drowned for your sake, my son, to save you.**

“I had to be reincarnated in this fish because I pursued him.

“**And you brought about my tikkun through the tears you shed over the drowning dog.**

“Now, my son, take care how you eat this fish.”

Later, when Reb Yudel came to the Baal Shem Tov, the Baal Shem Tov told him that he had indeed been saying that Reb Yudel was a reincarnation of Shmuel HaNavi.

**Two distinct tikkunim take place.** The dog’s tikkun comes through saving Reb Yudel. His father’s tikkun comes through the tears of compassion that Reb Yudel sheds. We should not merge those two parts of the account.

The connection to our teaching is the father and son. The father has already left this world, yet his son’s act of compassion here has consequences for him there. This story illustrates that connection through a particular account of gilgul; the teaching we have learned explains a parent’s continued ascent through the Torah and mitzvos of the children he educated. The two accounts share that connection without describing identical circumstances.

> **A son’s tears here can matter to his father there.**

## The step we can still take

So let us return to the meeting with which we began. Rivka looks up and sees Yitzchak returning from Gan Eden. The Riva’s extraordinary description has led us to ask what makes a soul capable of further movement.

We have followed the answer step by step: while alive, a person advances through Torah and mitzvos. Afterward, the good continued by the children he educated can provide further ascent. Here our attention turns upward for help; there their attention turns downward toward the deeds still being done here.

Before the day is over, choose one act that gives this teaching a practical expression. Perhaps it is a few minutes of learning that you have been postponing. Perhaps it is an invitation to learn with a child or grandchild. Perhaps it is living more carefully by something a parent taught you.

We are still here, with the ability to take a step. Let us use that ability, and let us help the next generation learn how to take its own steps in avodas Hashem.

Based on Shvilei Pinchas, Chayei Sarah, ma’amar 21, by Rabbi Pinchas Friedman, pp. 119–122 in the photographed edition. Explanatory illustrations and practical applications develop the teaching for this class. Concluding story: Shivchei HaBesht, section 72 in the Ben-Yehuda transcription.