

## Highland Park/Edison's ACTT Organization Sponsors Talk on Bitachon and Miracles

By Harry Glazer | August 20, 2020



*Harry Rothenberg speaking at the ACTT event. (Credit: Screen shot by Harry Glazer)*

At a time when our faith has been shaken by the tremendous upheaval caused by COVID-19, we need to focus inward and work harder on our faith in Hashem and his miracles. Fortunately for members of the Middlesex County Jewish community, the ACTT organization is encouraging the development of this perspective and other positive midot, as it seeks to provide the tools for sustainable personal growth.

ACTT (Achieving Change Through Torah) of Highland Park/Edison was founded in 2006 with the support of the Vaad HaRabonim of Raritan Valley and the leadership of a team of committed volunteers. The organization seeks to foster meaningful and lasting character development in Torah by providing free events with motivational speakers, selecting and publicizing programs of study (using well-regarded contemporary seforim) on specific midot, and encouraging community members to make commitments to study the seforim and build their personal midot.

In July, ACTT launched a program of study on the midah of bitachon, trust in Hashem. To boost this new program of study, the group organized a talk on August 16, via Zoom, given by Harry Rothenberg, Esq., on the topic “Do You Believe in Miracles?” Rothenberg, a partner at The Rothenberg Law Firm LLP, represents victims with catastrophic injuries and helps them to rebuild their shattered lives. He is also the commentator of Harry’s Video Blog, a popular weekly video series on the weekly Torah portion and Jewish holidays, and a passionate speaker on Jewish topics.

In his talk, Rothenberg asserted that all the stories in the Torah are designed to convey vital lessons, yet some of the stories’ lessons are not clear at first glance. As a vivid illustration, he spoke of the story of the three angels who visited Avraham Avinu, the announcement by one angel that Sarah Imainu would have a child in a year, Sarah’s initial reaction of disbelief, Hashem and Avraham’s response to Sarah’s reaction, her denial that she laughed, and then Avraham’s insistence that she did laugh (Bereshit 18:1-15).



Rothenberg noted that the lessons of the story appear to be: (1) if someone instigates a disagreement between a husband and a wife, he should make an effort to limit the dispute (why Hashem didn’t repeat to Avraham that Sarah also said “and my husband is old (too)”); (2) if someone is afraid, it’s okay to lie (Sarah’s denial that she laughed); and (3) in a dispute, it’s important to get in the last word (Avraham insisting that she did laugh).

Rothenberg asserted that these apparent lessons do not stand up to close scrutiny, because each character is acting against type. Hashem could have confronted Sarah directly about her laughter (she was a prophetess); Sarah was not afraid to tell Avraham her feelings at other times; and Avraham is content in other places not to have the last word but rather remains silent.

Rothenberg suggested that there’s another way to interpret the story and to derive lessons from it. He said that the story may indicate that Sarah and Avraham had different views of Hashem’s use of open miracles to aid a single deserving person. Sarah might have thought that Hashem would not do such a thing, whereas Avraham knew from personal experience (his survival of the fiery furnace as a child) that Hashem does do this on occasion. So when Sarah laughed at the news of her having a child, she was demonstrating her hashkafic view of Hashem.

Hearing this, Hashem confronted Avraham to ask him why he had not shared his youthful experience with his wife, which Avraham only then shared with her. Why hadn’t Avraham shared the story with Sarah earlier? Rothenberg surmised that since, in the same episode, Haran (Avraham’s brother, Sarah’s father) died in the fiery furnace because he lacked Avraham’s level of faith, Avraham was reluctant to share the story with Sarah (who was a very young child when it happened).

Accepting this interpretation, Rothenberg offered that the story provides three lessons: (1) that Hashem will, on occasion, perform miracles for specific deserving people; (2) it is important to give people the benefit of the doubt; and (3) we must do our best to be mindful of the feelings of others.

Elaborating on the notion that Hashem will perform miracles for deserving people, Rothenberg shared a story from his work in the law firm. He spoke of a religious non-Jewish client who suffered a devastating loss and was seeking a settlement from the responsible party. Rothenberg spent a great deal of time negotiating and finally got a commitment for a \$1 million settlement. He urged the client to accept on the understanding that this was likely the best deal they could obtain and a judge would not let a case advance with such an offer “on the table.” The client responded that he “spoke with God,” who told him (the victim) to take the case to court. Rothenberg took the case to court and the judge heard about the settlement offered and the victim’s view. The judge then spoke with the responsible party and was able to obtain an additional \$100,000, an outcome that is ordinarily very unlikely.

As Rothenberg described it, the non-Jewish man’s faith was very strong and it seems that it led to a small personal miracle on his behalf. This story can strengthen our own faith in Hashem and the potential for small miracles in our own lives.

Susan Haber, a community member who attended the talk on Zoom, said that she was inspired by the way Rothenberg interpreted the story of Avraham and Sarah.

Harry’s Video Blog is accessible at [www.ohr.edu/video/harry](http://www.ohr.edu/video/harry).