

## פרשת וירא

In the lead-in of the *Akeidas Yitzchak* story, the Torah recounts Avraham's preparations,<sup>1</sup> mentioning that he rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey. Rashi<sup>2</sup> makes sure to note that Avraham saddled his donkey on his own instead of having one of his servants do it for him, for "אהבה" - love (especially love for G-d) disregards conventional standards, bucks trends, and upsets the natural order.

However, it is not only love that can upset the natural order, says R' Shimon bar Yochai;<sup>3</sup> hate has a similar impact, with Bilaam's early donkey-saddling in the morning being the paradigmatic example.<sup>4</sup> But there is a possible counteraction, he continues: Let the saddling done by Avraham Avinu to fulfill Hashem's counteract the saddling done by Bilaam in order to go and curse Bnei Yisrael, let Yosef's preparing [of his chariot] to meet his father Yaakov<sup>5</sup> counteract Pharaoh's preparing to go and pursue Bnei Yisrael,<sup>6</sup> and let the sword that Avraham clutched to slaughter Yitzchak<sup>7</sup> counteract the sword that Pharaoh clenched to kill Bnei Yisrael.<sup>8</sup>

In 1686, Sir Isaac Newton famously discovered the three laws of motion, and his third law states that "for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction." However, this idea is not limited to the realm of physics; as we see both from this medrash and our daily lives, such a concept of counteractions is applicable not only in the natural order, but throughout all of Yiddishkeit as well. The mussar sefer *Orchos Tzaddikim* is famous for providing ethical teachings and advice on developing one's moral character by showing the duality of opposite attributes in life: while love, mercy, graciousness, joy, and zeal tend to be positive characteristics, whereas hatred, cruelty, envy, worry, and laziness are usually seen as negative qualities, the reality is that each trait can be seen as two sides of the same coin. Every single thing we see in life can be viewed as an inspirational galvanizing for greater spiritual heights, or as a recipe for utter behavioral degeneracy. While discussing the *Aseres HaDibros*, the *Tur HaAroch*<sup>9</sup> says that observance of the first commandment and non-violation of the second commandment is such an example, as all who refrain from that which is forbidden in the second commandment has in fact observed the first commandment without lifting a finger. This perspective is something that can be applied to everything in life; often, we either find ourselves at a crossroads between right and wrong or are aggressively accosted by surrounding negativity or iniquity, such as the well-known Gemara in *Berachos*,<sup>10</sup> where we, the inhabitants of the beis medrash, compare ourselves to the corner dwellers, who

<sup>1</sup> בראשית כב:ג

<sup>2</sup> רש"י בראשית כב:ג ד"ה ויחבש

<sup>3</sup> בראשית רבה נה:ח

<sup>4</sup> במדבר כב:כא

<sup>5</sup> בראשית מו:כט

<sup>6</sup> שמות יד:ו

<sup>7</sup> בראשית כב:י

<sup>8</sup> שמות טו:ט

<sup>9</sup> טור הארוך שמות כ:ג ד"ה לא תרצח

<sup>10</sup> ברכות כח:

also rise, toil, pursue — albeit for very different purposes. If we are able to harness the incredible alacrity and righteousness of Avraham Avinu and Yosef HaTzaddik, perhaps we can also disrupt the natural order with our powerful devotion and dedication, bringing the world one step closer to redemption.