1. Rav Yosef Engel, in his בית האוצר, gives nine reasons for the Talmudic principle of אין עונשין מן הדין, that we cannot punish somebody based on a קל וחומר. The reasons range from halachic to kabbalistic. One of the explanations he offers, is based on an analysis the בני יששכר has of the parallel between the 13 מדות שהתורה נדרשת בהן and the 13 מדות הרחמים. The בני יששכר understands that it is not coincidental that there happen to be 13 of each.
2. For example the very last of the 13 מדות שהתורה נדרשה בהן is שני כתובים המכחישים זה את זה – two pesukim that contradict each other. The last of the מדות הרחמים is "ונקה, לא ינקה".
3. Similarly the first of the מדות שהתורה נדרשת בהן is קל וחומר and the first of the מדות הרחמים (in the view of the בני יששכר) is א-ל, which is the name of Hashem associated with חסד. It is interesting that one of the times קל וחומר is used in the תורה, is in connection with the punishment given to מרים. Hashem says אם אביה ירוק ירק בפניה – if her father would spit in her face she would be banished for a week, so certainly when she speaks badly about the שכינה. When משה prays for מרים, he says "א-ל נא רפא נא לה", using the name associated with קל וחומר.
4. This, Rav Yosef Engel explains, is the reason that אין עונשין מן הדין. Punishment cannot derive from חסד. קל וחומר is חסד, punishment is the opposite.
5. חסד is the מצוה in the תורה most easy to relate to and understand, and קל וחומר is the only מדה that is logical and easily understood to the human mind.
6. אברהם, who is the עמוד החסד, is the forefather who relates to Hashem with the name of א-ל. Avraham represents חסד and one would therefore imagine that he achieves perfection through an action that represents מדת החסד. Indeed, Hashem introduces himself as "**א-ל** שד-י" in the very פסוק that he commands "והיה תמים" – that אברהם should complete himself, with a ברית מילה.
7. The problem is that מילה seems to be the opposite of חסד. We don’t say שהשמחה במעונו at a ברית מילה because of the צערא דינוקא. While חסד brings joy and gratitude, מילה brings pain!
8. The גר"א explains that when Hashem promises Avraham "אנכי מגן לך שכרך הרבה מאד" – I will protect you and you will have great reward, there is a connection between מגן and lots of שכר.
9. There are three ways that we refer to Hashem’s help every day – עוזר ומושיע ומגן. What is the difference between the three? The גר"א explains that there are three circumstances during which a person experiences בטחון:
10. Sometimes a person puts in his השתדלות and trusts Hashem the rest of the way. This is בטחון, but is not as challenging to achieve. It is easy to believe that God will make me successful in a venture that I put lots of effort into. For this ה' is עוזר – He helps our efforts.
11. Sometimes a situation is out of a person’s hands completely. He doesn’t have the ability to do anything – he is waiting for a diagnosis for example – and he has בטחון. This is בטחון on a higher level – it is this type of בטחון that Hashem rewards with מושיע – saving us.
12. Then there is a third level. Sometimes a person trusts Hashem so much that he will do Hashem’s will even when it seems that doing so will achieve the opposite of the desired result. He wants to become wealthy so he gives צדקה which is totally counterintuitive. If you want to become rich you should probably save money, not give it away. It is to this that ה' is מגן – a protector.
13. The greatest שכר comes from this kind of בטחון. So Hashem tells אברהם that He will be a "מגן לך... ושכרך הרבה מאד" – the greatest reward comes when Hashem acts as a מגן.
14. What emerges from the גר"א is that for somebody to achieve greatness it is critical that he do something counterintuitive for the sake of Hashem.
15. For Avraham to become the עמוד החסד, he had to be willing to slaughter his own son – an act that is the very opposite of חסד. We can all relate to חסד but for Avraham to achieve it he had to do something that nobody could relate to.
16. Even in Avraham’s first great act, getting thrown into the furnace at אור כשדים, it was a counterintuitive decision. If Avraham wanted to preach monotheism and teach it to the masses, it was really critical that the only person who believes in monotheism should continue to exist. Logic would have dictated that the act of martyrdom at אור כשדים would have been a death blow to the doctrine of monotheism.
17. It is therefore no surprise that תמימות for בני אברהם – people who are defined as גומלי חסדים – is achieved with our willingness to participate in בריתו של אברהם אבינו – causing צערא דינוקא. Our dedication to any given cause or מדה may be great, but our dedication to God must always be greater.