



# הַמִּזְרָחִי

# HAMIZRACHI

## PARSHA WEEKLY

PARSHAT VAYERA 5783 • 2022









ISRAEL  
Parsha Picture  
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


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Based in Jerusalem and with branches across the globe, Mizrachi – an acronym for *merkaz ruchani* (spiritual center) – was founded in 1902 by Rabbi Yitzchak Yaakov Reines, and is led today by Rabbi Doron Perez. Mizrachi's role was then and remains with vigor today, to be a proactive partner and to take personal responsibility in contributing to the collective destiny of *Klal Yisrael* through a commitment to Torah, the Land of Israel and the People of Israel.

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# Who is the Real Abraham?

## On Religiosity, Nationhood and Universalism



**Rabbi Doron Perez**

Executive Chairman, World Mizrachi

Could the real Abraham please stand up?

Who really is the Founding Father of the Jewish People and what was most important to him?

He seems to be a person of great contradictions! Was he the devout knight of faith and religious fundamentalism prepared to sacrifice his son in the name of absolute obedience to G-d?

Was he perhaps an uncompromising nationalist prepared to declare war on other nations in order to save Lot – to kill others for the sake of one member of his tribe?

Was he perhaps a great humanist prepared to pray for the good of the despicable immoral Sodomites?

A strong case could be made for all three.

### Religiosity

Avraham is the consummate ambassador of religious faith and the ultimate man of G-d. We are first introduced to him when Hashem commands him to leave his country, land of birth and father's house – to leave everything familiar behind and to embark on a Divinely ordained religious odyssey to the unknown. He follows without question. We are privy to many more Divine commands and conversations throughout his life. We encounter a man deeply connected to G-d, commanded by Him and absolutely obedient to Him.

Nowhere is this obedience clearer than in the perplexing command to sacrifice his beloved son Yitzchak, an impossible task in itself, yet made even more challenging by G-d's earlier promise that Yitzchak would be the forebear of a great nation. Nevertheless, Avraham does not deviate in his adherence to what he perceives as the will of Heaven. He unquestioningly marches with his beloved son to Mount Moriah knowing full well that he has been called upon to kill him on the altar of religious faith. Is there a greater act of religious fervor, Divine dedication and commitment than this in all of Tanach?

### Nationalistic

Avraham is also the epitome of acting on nationalistic impulses. His entire life revolves around journeying to the specific land G-d showed him, the Land of Canaan, settling in different parts of that Land and being repeatedly promised that G-d will bless him to be a *גוי גדול*, a great people, with a particular task, in this very Land.

Nowhere is this nationalist impulse clearer than in his desire to save his errant nephew Lot. As soon as he hears that Lot has been taken captive, Avraham springs into action, takes up arms and is prepared to fight against regional powers to do whatever it takes to rescue him. Nowhere does G-d command him to do so – it is his own personal decision. He is prepared to sacrifice everything – his life, his spiritual mission and the lives of

every one of his followers in order to save one member of the tribe. Not to mention that Lot chose to part ways with Abraham and seek out his own destiny choosing to live amongst the perverse Sodomites. Yet Avraham unflinchingly gathers every able-bodied man in his household – all 318 – prepares them for a military mission and leads them into battle against a coalition of major regional powers for the sake of his wayward nephew? All for one [member of the tribe] and one for all, no matter what the price.

### Universalist

Avraham is also a humanist par excellence as is clearly evidenced by two remarkable acts in this week's Parasha, Vayeira.

Firstly his **הַכֶּנֶסֶת אֹרְחָיִם** – hospitality – to unknown pagan travelers is unmatched. In great pain after his circumcision at the advanced age of 99, he runs out in the heat of the desert sun to welcome idolatrous guests – later to be revealed as angels – into his home and hosts them with a lavish meal as if they were royalty.

Although these people were the ideological antithesis of everything he stood for – he was teaching monotheism and belief in a purposeful and personal G-d and they were espousing paganism and idol worship and the belief in many impersonal amoral gods – he had no hesitation in welcoming them into his home.

These were the same men whose ideology, according to Midrashic tradition, Avraham was going out of his way to fight and destroy. He was a renowned and revolutionary idol-basher, committed zealously to his monotheistic religious beliefs. Yet, without hesitation Avraham welcomes them into his home, washes the dust of idolatry off their feet<sup>1</sup>, finding a way to bridge the boundaries and sit together.

Secondly, when G-d informs Avraham of His plan to destroy Sodom, Avraham does everything in his power to prevent it. Although their actions were abhorrent, he loved all of humanity and impassioned G-d not to destroy His creatures. He cries out in protest to G-d **הֲאִיךָ תַסְפֵּה צְדִיק עִם רָשָׁע**<sup>2</sup>

‘.will indeed the righteous die amongst the wicked?’ (Bereishit 18:23)

Surely G-d will not willy-nilly cause the death of innocent individuals amongst the other wicked practitioners in the city protests Avraham.

### Three Which Are One

Which of these three tenets – religiosity, nationalism or universalism – represents the real Avraham Avinu?

He is of course a blend of all three – the staunch advocate of faith, the proud nationalist and the ardent humanist devoted to all people created in the image of G-d.

The more he searched for G-d, the more he found his fellow man.

The core principles that he stood for formed the authentic blueprint for Judaism and the spiritual mission of the Jewish people.

In a groundbreaking way, he was able to blend the religious, the national and the universal into one complete whole.

### Rav Kook's Formula for Jewish Unity

Remarkably, it is precisely these three elements that Rav Kook identifies when describing the ideological battles raging in the early 1900s in pre-State Palestine.

To me, this was one of the most brilliant and insightful essays that I'd ever encountered and the most ingenious spiritual recipe and philosophical framework for creating a unified meeting of minds and hearts of the different ideological camps in Israel. It gave me a fresh perspective to view Jewish unity and a fresh lens through which to relook at Avraham as the founder of the Jewish people.

Rav Kook writes that the tenets that we highlighted regarding Avraham are the very same fundamental issues at the ideological heart of all societies in general and Jewish society in particular. He maintains that these three issues have divided states and societies along political and cultural fissures since time immemorial. This was certainly true regarding the fledging

Zionist enterprise at the turn of the last century and equally true in Israel today.

As Rav Kook says:

**‘שְׁלֹשָׁה כְּחוֹת מִתְאַבְּקִים כַּעַת בְּמַחְנֵינוּ...הַקּוּדֵשׁ, הָאוֹמָה, הָאֲנוּשִׁיּוּת, - אֱלֹהֵי הַשְׁלֵשֶׁת הַתְּבִיעוֹת הָעִקְרִיּוֹת, שֶׁהַחַיִּים כּוֹלֵם, שְׁלֵנוּ וְשֶׁל כָּל אָדָם, בְּאִיזוֹ צוּרָה שֶׁהִיא, מוֹרְכֵבִים מֵהֵם..’**

‘Three forces are wrestling with each other at this time in our midst... The holy, the national and the universal - these are the three central aspirations that life in general terms, of our own and of all people, in one way or another, are composed ...’ (Orot HaTechiya, 18)

Without understanding these issues there is no real way to fathom the underlying fault lines in order to build an inclusive and unified Jewish society. Rav Kook believed that not only were these three ideological underpinnings not contradictory but indeed complementary. They all also have a basis in Torah and form parts of the Torah's spiritual vision for Jewish and human life.

Although written over a century ago, they could not be more relevant today, especially in light of the ongoing elections and the divide in Israeli society. Although the most recent election brought about a decisive victory for the right wing, it has revealed once again that in the popular vote, society is divided almost down the middle as it has been over the last four years and five election campaigns. Many of the issues which divide us today as the same as the reality in Rav Kook's time. They are a reflection of the deepest human and Jewish yearnings – spirituality, nationhood and universal morality.

Let us elaborate.

Any aspiration of G-dliness has ultimately translated into a formalized set of religious laws, customs and practices. Humanity's passion for the holy and sacred and the world of the spirit is integral to the human experience. For the Jewish people, this is translated into G-d revealing Himself to the very first Jew, Avraham, and articulating a spiritual path. This was formalized at the Revelation at Sinai for the recently emancipated Jewish people with a giving

*Continued on page 10*



PIRKEI AVOT

# On The Straight and Narrow

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**Rabbi Reuven Taragin**  
Educational Director, World Mizrahi  
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רבי אומר, איזוהי דרך ישרה שיבור לו האדם?  
כל שהיא תפארת לעושיה ותפארת לו מן האדם. והוי זהיר במצוה קלה כבחמורה, שאין אמה יודע מתן שכרו של מצוה. והוי מחשב הפסד מצוה כנגד שכרה, ושכר עברה כנגד הפסדה. (אבות ב:א)  
אמר להם (רבו יוחנן בן זכאי). צאו וראו איזוהי דרך ישרה שידבק בה האדם?  
רבי אליעזר אומר, עיו טובה. רבי יהושע אומר, חבר טוב. רבי יוסי אומר, שכר טוב. רבי שמעון אומר, הרוצה את הנולד. רבי אלקעזר אומר, יב טוב. אמר להם, רוצה אני את דברי אלקעזר בן ערד מדבריקם, שבכלל דבריו דבריקם... (אבות ב:ט)

**P**irkei Avot quotes two *Tannaim* who both asked the same question: “Eizo he derech yeshara – What is the straight path?” The question was asked first by Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai<sup>1</sup> (Riba”z), who lived at the time of the *churban Beit Hamikdash*, and then again by Rabbi Yehudah HaNassi (Rebbi), who lived 150 years later. Because of the question’s importance, it was discussed over the course of many generations.<sup>2</sup>

### The Important and Consistent Choice

Before studying the answers given by the *Tannaim*, let’s examine their formulations of the question. Rebbi speaks of man “choosing” the straight path. Interestingly, instead of the word “*yivchar*,” which the Torah generally uses to connote choosing,<sup>3</sup> Rebbi uses the word “*yavor*.” This may be meant as a hint to the *pasuk* in *Kohelet* that uses the same root to refer to G-d’s choice of man.<sup>4</sup> If this is correct, Rebbi’s implication is that it is G-d’s choosing us which requires us to be careful about our life choices. Man is created in God’s image and we – the Jewish People – are his children. Our lives are significant and should be lived properly.

Instead of the word “*yavor*,” Riba”z uses the word “*sheyidbak* – that he should stick to” to describe man’s choice. Riba”z emphasizes the need for our choices and life path to be consistent. Though different paths offer various benefits, it is important to live a coherent life. We do so by “sticking” to one path.

### The Straight Path

Both *Tannaim* assume the importance of seeking the “*derech yesharah* – straight path.” Both these words – “*derech*” and “*yesharah*” – are significant.

Parshat Vayera quotes Hashem’s approval of Avraham’s intention to teach his children His “*derech*” of how to live in this world.<sup>5</sup> A *derech* is more than just the fulfillment of a specific *mitzvah* or the performance of a particular good deed. It refers to a broader way of life. While Vayera uses the term “*derech*” to refer to acting in a just and kind way, the *Tannaim* ask a broader question: what is the best “*derech*” for a person’s life as a whole?

The second word – “*yesharah*, straight” – sharpens the question’s formulation and directs us toward the answer. Our goal should be the straight path. The Torah commands us to emulate Hashem (who is described as “straight”<sup>6</sup>) by living in a way He sees as straight – “*Vasisa ha’yashar v’hatov b’einei Hashem*.”<sup>7</sup> In fact, the Midrash adds that Hashem created man in His image (only!) so that man can be *yashar* like Hashem!<sup>8</sup> Hashem is the model of straightness and cannot tolerate those who live a crooked lifestyle.<sup>9</sup>

### A Central Goal

“*Yashrut* – straightness” is meant to be one of our central goals in personal growth. The Rambam asserts that most of the *mitzvot* are Hashem’s “advice” on how to fix our perspectives and **straighten out** our lives.<sup>10</sup>

Understandably, Rav Kook defines the goal of *chinuch* (education) as helping a person find their correct form, the central characteristic of which is being a person who is “good and straight.”<sup>11</sup> This is why the Ramchal called his mussar sefer *Mesilat Yesharim* – The Path of the Straight. The sefer aims to help people identify and persist on the straight path.

### Our Natural State

“*Yashrut*” is not an external value we need to aspire to achieve; it is our original, natural

state. Sefer Kohelet teaches that Hashem creates man naturally “*yashar*.” It is man’s schemes and calculations that cause him to veer from his innate straight path.

This explains why Rav Yochanan understood the term “*Sefer Hayashar*” as referring to Sefer Bereishit – “the book of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, who are considered *yesharim*.” Because *yashrut* is man’s natural state, even before the giving of the Torah, our Avot were able to live their lives this way.

Thus, in essence, Rebbi and Riba”z are merely asking how we can sustain the natural *yashrut* we are all born with. Next week we will, *iy”H*, see their answers.

● Summarized by Rafi Davis.

1. Though this Mishna is taught second (9th vs. 1st in the perek), it occurred earlier in time.
2. The Gemara (Masechet Tamid 28a) quotes Rebbi as well as other *Tannaim* asking and discussing this question in additional contexts. See also the Ruach Chaim commentary of Rav Chaim Volozhin.
3. For example, see Sefer Devarim 30:19: “בְּחַרְתָּ בְּיַיִם”.
4. Sefer Kohelet 3:18.
5. Sefer Bereishit 18:19.
6. Sefer Devarim 2:4, Sefer Tehillim 92:16.
7. Sefer Devarim 6:17–18. Rashi and the Ramban (ibid.) discuss exactly what the term means in that context. Rebbi here is asking about the broader sense of the term.
8. Midrash Tanchuma Bereishit 7:7.
9. Ha’emek Davar on the Torah, Introduction to Sefer Bereishit.
10. Mishneh Torah Hilchot Temurah 4:13.
11. Igrot HaRe’ayah 170.





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# Halachic Q&A



## **Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon**

Head, Mizrahi Rabbinic Council | Rabbi of the Gush Etzion Regional Council  
Rosh Yeshivah, Jerusalem College of Technology | Founder and Chairman, Sulamot and La'Ofek

**Question: Can parents add a name to their three-year-old daughter for the sake of honoring the child's grandmother who passed away?**

Answer: A person's name is also his or her essence, and therefore, we only change names if there is a medical issue or other major issue. When it comes to a second name, there is a machloket. There are two different ways of looking at a second name: 1) The first name and second name are separate names and the first is really the essential one. 2) The two names together make up one name. Based on the first understanding, there seemingly would be no issue with adding a second name. However, based on the second understanding, it may be more problematic. In practice, it is more acceptable to add a second name than to change a second name, but even so I would only recommend doing this under difficult circumstances but not for the sake of honoring one who passed.

**Question: I am often hosted by others and find that whoever makes kiddush does not clearly enunciate the words of the bracha. If this happens, what should I do?**

Answer: The Shulchan Aruch writes that ideally, words should be separated when making a bracha. Bedieved, even if some of the words in the middle were swallowed, you are yotzei as long as the beginning and the end of the bracha are relatively clear (SA OC 110, MB SK 6) assuming you know what was said in the bracha.

**Question: Can one plant a seed from a kedushat shvi'it etrog in chutz la'aretz?**

Answer: Yes, because the seed itself is not fitting to be eaten.

**Question: Can I borrow somebody's tefillin without asking for permission?**

Answer: The Rema (OC 14:4) writes that one can borrow the tefillin of another if there is no option to ask permission. The reasoning is because we assume that people are pleased to have others perform mitzvot with their possessions (Bava Metzia 29b). The Mishnah Berurah and Kaf Hachaim paskin this way as well, as long as the person wraps the tefillin the way they were before. However, many poskim write that nowadays one cannot borrow somebody's tefillin/tallit without permission. This is because people are sensitive to sweat and because these belongings are very expensive (Aruch Hashulchan, Ben Ish Chai, Shu"t Tzitz Eliezer). Therefore in practice one should not borrow a tallit or tefillin without permission.

**Question: Can I put cold dairy food into a container that was used in the past for hot meat food?**

Answer: It is always best to store in separate containers. When there is no other option, you can put cold dairy into a meat container (and vice-versa) as long as it will not be there for more than 24 hours. Once it is there for 24 hours, questions of kavush arise (unless it is not liquidy at all). The same ruling is true for glass for Ashkenazim, but Sephardim can be lenient with glass and leave it in for more than 24 hours.

**Question: What must I be careful about before saying havdalah?**

Answer: Before havdalah, there is a prohibition to eat and to do any work. The prohibition to do work stems from the fact that it is still Shabbat, and therefore, once you say "baruch hamavdil bein kodesh l'chol" or if you said "ata chonantanu" in Arvit, you can do work even before havdalah. The prohibition to eat stems from the concern that one will forget to say havdalah, and therefore one may not eat even if he said "baruch hamavdil"/Arvit. If people started their meal on Shabbat and it continued through after Shabbat, they can continue the meal and do not need to stop. However, if they were not eating a meal but were snacking on something such as fruits or just drinking juice, they must stop. One can drink water before havdalah (although mekubalim write not to).

● Translated from Hebrew and abbreviated by Yaakov Panitch.

# תקציר פרשת וירא

הרבנית שרון רימון  
Tanach teacher and author



של אברהם איננה מנוגדת לרצון ה', אלא להיפך - ה' מצפה מאברהם שיהיה שותף להנהגתו וינסה להשפיע על הגזירה. יחד עם זאת הוא מצפה ממנו גם להכיר בכך שלעתים הצדק דורש ענישה של האדם החוטא, ואין אפשרות לוותר על כך, על מנת שיהיה צדק ומשפט בעולם (כפי שאכן קורה בסדום בסופו של דבר).

אברהם הוא האדם הראשון שנקרא "נביא", והוא מציג מודל של נביא שלא רק שומע את דבר ה' ומעבירו אל בני האדם, אלא גם מתערב בהחלטות האלוהיות, מתפלל עבור בני האדם, ומבקש עליהם רחמים. מודל כזה אנו מוצאים גם אצל משה רבינו ואצל ירמיהו הנביא, המתפללים לה' אחרי חטאי עם ישראל ומבקשים עליהם רחמים, ומנסים להקל ולהמתיק את גזר הדין. הקב"ה חפץ בשותפים בעולם הזה אשר יפעלו למען תיקון העולם, ובמקביל לכך יתפללו ויבקשו רחמים על בני האדם ויגרמו לה' להשפיע טובה על העולם כולו.

ואף לקיומם. וכשם שאב מרחם על בניו כך מצופה גם מאברהם לרחם על כל בני האדם. מתוך כך, אברהם מוזמן ע"י ה' להיות מעין "נציג האנושות" במשפט, וסנגורם.

בנוסף לכך, ה' מעיד על אברהם: "כִּי יִדְעִיתִיו לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר יֵצֵא אֶת בְּנָיו וְאֶת בֵּיתוֹ אַחֲרָיו וְשָׁמְרוּ דֶרֶךְ ה' לַעֲשׂוֹת צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט". אברהם הוא לא רק אבי האומות הדואג לחינוכם ולקיומם ומבקש עבורם רחמים, אלא הוא גם שותף לה', המייצג את דרך ה' בעולם, לעשות צדקה ומשפט. בתור אדם המייצג את דרך ה' בעולם, הוא יכול להשתתף בדיון מתוך שיקול דעת הוגן, המותאם לרצון ה'. אם אנשי סדום זכאים במשפט, אברהם יתפלל בעבורם ויבקש עליהם רחמים, אך אם אנשי סדום ראויים לעונש - אברהם יקבל בהבנה את ענישתם.

בעקבות ההודעה של ה' לאברהם על משפטה של סדום, אברהם מתפלל ומבקש רחמים על אנשי סדום ומנסה לשנות את הגזרה, במידת האפשר. עמדה זו

פרשת וירא אנו עדים לבחירתו של ה' לשתף את אברהם בתכניתו לגבי עתידה של סדום: "וְהָאֵמֶר הַמִּכְסָּה אֲנִי מֵאַבְרָהָם אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי עֹשֶׂה!?!... וַיֹּאמֶר ה' זַעֲקֵת סָדָם וְעַמָּהּ כִּי רָבָה וְחֹטְאֹתָם כִּי כָבְדָה מְאֹד: אֲרִידָה נָא וְאַרְאֶה הַפְּעֻעֻקָה הַבָּאָה אֵלַי עֲשׂוּ כָּלָה וְאִם לֹא אִדְעָה". לפי פשט הפסוק, ולפי רוב המפרשים, ה' עוד לא קבע את גזר דינם של אנשי סדום, אלא הוא מודיע לאברהם כי הוא יורד לבחון את מעשיהם ומתכנן לערוך להם משפט.

לשם מה ה' מודיע לאברהם על משפטם של אנשי סדום? הנימוק לכך מופיע בפסוק יח: "וְאַבְרָהָם הָיָה יְהִיָּה לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל וְעֲצוּם וּנְבָרְכוּ בוֹ כָּל גּוֹיֵי הָאָרֶץ". אברהם קיבל יכולת מיוחדת לברך את בני האדם, להיות שותף לה' בהנהגת העולם. כעת, כאשר גורלה של סדום עומד על כף המאזניים, ה' מעוניין שאברהם יהיה שותף אקטיבי בהחלטה. אברהם הוא "אב המון גויים" (ז, ט), וכשם שיש לאב אחריות על בניו, כך לאברהם יש אחריות על העמים - לחינוכם, לתיקונם,

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# Remembering Rabbi Sacks



**Sivan Rahav Meir and Yedidya Meir**  
World Mizrahi Scholars-in-Residence

**R**abbi Sacks passed away on Shabbat morning, just as Jews throughout the world read the Torah portion of Vayeira. What did Rabbi Sacks teach us about this portion? That the most fundamental priority of the Jewish people is education.

“Who was Avraham, and why was he chosen?” he asks and answers: “Avraham is not described as a righteous man, as Noah is, or as one who protests injustice, like Moshe, or as a warrior, like David, or a prophet, like Isaiah. There is only one place, in Parashat Vayera, where the Torah mentions why G-d chose Avraham: ‘For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him, to keep the way of the L-rd by doing what is right and just.’ To translate this into our vernacular, it is as if G-d is saying: I know this guy. I know what he’s all about. And do you know what he is? He is a good teacher. A good parent. A good educator. And I know that I can trust him in the area that is most important to Me. Not the army, not money, not territory, not charisma – but education. He will know how best to pass the flame on to the next generation and to ignite the same spark in their eyes. The point is not to amass knowledge. Avraham is not meant to compel his children to read many books but to live their lives in accordance with these books. Avraham succeeds in his task, and for this reason, to this day, we all call him ‘our father.’”

Rabbi Sacks passed away on the Shabbat that reminds us all to continue the path of our father Avraham by directing our sons and daughters to safeguard G-d’s ways. Although Rabbi Sacks was a man of many interests and talents, his commitment to this ideal was his greatest accomplishment.

Rabbi Sacks understood that the most pressing problem of our times is the ignorance of the Jewish people and the assimilation and disappearance that has inevitably followed. Recognizing this tragedy, he changed his life course to dedicate himself to the cause of Jewish education. Although he was a Lord, a professor, a scholar and a commentator, he was first and foremost a rabbi and a teacher. Above his studies of the works of Shakespeare, Goethe, and Nietzsche, he placed Jewish continuity.

He taught us how to pass on our heritage to the next generation: through discussions, questions and answers, with curiosity and passion, and with a spark in our eyes (who can forget the spark in Rabbi Sacks’ eyes when he learned and taught?). He would constantly remind us that Judaism is not something to be learned by rote, and its students are not meant to be robots.

This is why it moved me so deeply to hear how his wife, Lady Elaine, began the memorial ceremony marking one month since his passing. Participating in the worldwide virtual ceremony were Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, Prince Charles and the Archbishop of Canterbury. And yet Lady Elaine’s opening words were these: “We received so many letters and stories this past month. People told us that they sent their children to get a Jewish education because of my husband.” This was her message before all of the eulogies delivered by honored guests because this truly was Rabbi Sacks’ greatest passion. Although he had the opportunity to sit in lavish mansions with kings and princes, Rabbi Sacks understood that it was far more important to ensure that one more Jewish child would continue on the path of their ancestors.

We all loved Rabbi Sacks very much, and we were deeply pained when he was suddenly taken from us. But the great vacuum that has been created in the Jewish world by his parting will not be filled by merely loving and missing Rabbi Sacks. It will only be filled if we strive to be like Rabbi Sacks. The task that he left us is not to purchase his books but to adopt his path. As he said about the Lubavitcher Rebbe: “Good leaders create followers. Great leaders create leaders.” Rabbi Sacks did not want people to quote his ideas by copying and pasting. He wanted people to take responsibility, transcend themselves to change the Jewish world and bring the Torah to every Jew.



Stop. The Torah interrupts the narration of dramatic events that start with the creation of the universe and continue with the flood, only in order to describe in detail a seemingly insignificant act: how someone invites guests into his tent and shows them hospitality. How Avraham Avinu runs after three strangers in the desert in order to ask how they are and to give them food and drink.

Many commentators write that there is a lesson here, that the purpose of this description of welcoming guests is to teach us that this is actually the main event. The Torah is not a scientific or historical book. The word “Torah” is derived from the word for instruction. Its purpose is to instruct, to guide, to educate. Therefore it tells us almost nothing about all the nations and kings that rose and fell during that time, but it does pause and include many passages when the subject is welcoming guests.

The Torah describes events that transpired over thousands of years in a few passages, but when there is an important lesson to

*Continued on next page*

# For the Shabbat Table



**Rabbi Danny Mirvis**  
Deputy CEO, World Mizrachi  
Rabbi at Ohel Moshe Synagogue, Herzliya Pituach

“**A**nd Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, who she had born unto Avraham, mocking. And she said to Avraham, ‘Cast out this maidservant and her son for the son of this maidservant shall not inherit with my son, with Yitzchak’. And the matter was very bad in the eyes of Avraham, concerning his son. And Hashem said to Avraham, ‘Let it not be bad in your eyes because of the lad and because of your maidservant. Whatever Sarah says to you, listen in her voice, for through Yitzchak your seed shall be called’” (Bereishit 21:12).

In this wee’s Parsha we read of the miraculous birth of Yitzchak to the elderly Avraham and Sarah, after many years without children of their own. Yishmael, who until now saw himself as the natural successor of Avraham Avinu did not take well to his younger half-brother and wary of his mocking, Sarah told Avraham to cast him and his mother away from their home. Avraham disagreed with Sarah and



**It is not enough to listen to the words of others. We must listen within their words in order to understand what lies behind what they are saying.**

did not want to send them away, until Hashem appeared to him and said, “Whatever Sarah says to you, listen in her voice”.

At first glance, Hashem’s advice to Avraham appears to be worded strangely. If Hashem’s intention is to tell Avraham to listen to his wife and do as she says, He should have told him to listen TO her voice. Why does Hashem tell Avraham to listen IN Sarah’s voice? Furthermore, Avraham has already heard her request and was greatly troubled by it. How was listening to Sarah again supposed to change Avraham’s mind?

In truth, Hashem did not only advise Avraham to listen to Sarah a second time, but advised him to listen to her in a different way. Avraham has already listened TO her voice and heard what she has to say. This time, Hashem commands him to listen IN her voice and understand the reasoning, emotion and wisdom in her words. Once Avraham had listened IN Sarah’s voice, he was prepared to make the tough but necessary decision to send Yishmael away.

It is not enough to listen to the words of others. We must listen within their words in order to understand what lies behind what they are saying. Sensitive listening will allow us to understand the true intention of what is being said as opposed to the meanings we impose or assume in the words of others. We may not end up agreeing, but we can drastically improve our communication.

Shabbat Shalom!

*Continued from previous page*

teach we are forced to pause, to study what is happening in depth, and to draw the proper conclusions.

All such “small” acts we do in the course of our lives that no researcher or journalist would notice, all our tiny good deeds, seemingly devoid of drama, may ultimately be the most significant and influential of all. And perhaps the moment for such an act on our part is waiting for us this very moment.



זמן עם הילדים – זו השליחות, בלי לנסות להספיק עוד מלא דברים תוך כדי.

אנחנו בעידן שבו הקרב על הקשב והריכוז הופך קשה יותר ויותר. הרב ירוחם ליבוביץ' כתב שכבני אדם עלינו לזכור שאפילו מלאך לא עושה שתי שליחויות. הוא נהג לשאול את תלמידיו שאלה ממוקדת: “מה אני עושה עכשיו?”. במקום לבלבל את עצמנו במטלות רבות בבת אחת, צריך להגדיר בבהירות ובצלילות מה המשימה שעומדת בפנינו כעת. בהצלחה.

למה שלושה מלאכים מגיעים לאוהל של אברהם ושרה בפרשת השבוע? פרשנינו מסבירים שאחד הגיע כדי לבשר לשרה על לידת יצחק, אחד כדי להפוך את העיר סדום, ואחד כדי לרפא את אברהם אחרי ברית המילה. ולמה זה לא מספיק שמלאך אחד יבצע את שלוש המשימות? רש"י כותב על כך: “אין מלאך אחד עושה שתי שליחויות”.

כלומר, גם כשמדובר במלאך, נותנים לו משימה אחת בכל פעם, שליחות אחת שהוא מרוכז בה. זה לא דבר פשוט ליישום: אם אנחנו לומדים כעת – זוהי המשימה שלנו, בלי הסחות דעת. אם אנחנו מבליים

*Continued from page 3*

of Divine law to direct Jewish collective and individual life.

Since the very dawn of humankind, people have divided themselves into nations as separate people talking different languages and living in clearly demarcated lands. Jewish tradition speaks of the original 70 core nations in the aftermath of the flood and the descendants of Noah. Identifying with a particular group of people who share a similar history and culture, speak a common language, and live in defined borders has proven to be part of the psyche of man. The Jewish people are indeed no different. Jewish nationhood, as we've mentioned, goes as far back as the first Jew and the promise to create a distinct people in a distinct land. At the outset Abraham is called אברהם העברי – Abraham the Hebrew, as a person and people set apart, ultimately becoming the name of the Hebrew language, עברית.

Universal morality has also been a deep yearning of humanity for peace amongst the family of nations; love and fellowship amongst all human beings. Since the dawn of time, there have been significant forces in society seeking out a collective universal good. Avraham as we saw was a champion of this ideal and his type of monotheism is arguably the most influential moral idea ever taught – a purposeful and personal G-d who created all people in His image, imbuing them all with infinite value.

### **Divided We Stand**

A careful analysis shows that these three issues cut to the heart of the divide in the political and cultural spectrum in Israel today. I studied for a degree in Jewish philosophy in Israel many years ago and chose to do as my final paper a dissertation on Rav Kook's article – an analysis of the issues that divide and unite us. I decided to analyze the political platforms of all the major parties in Israel then in order to see to what extent they reflect these values that Rav Kook points out. I was amazed at my findings. Rav Kook, with almost prophetic insight, revealed the ideological essence and pulse of the entire society. I found that all the parties defining themselves as religious parties



### **Exclusive universalism can lead to compromising national security, assimilation and dilution of distinct Jewish identity.**

saw as their most important value, the principle of Jewish law – Halacha – before anything else. Every one of these parties called on their followers to submit themselves to all of the minutiae of Torah law.

I found that all of the political parties on the Right Wing of Israel see as their core value preserving and building a strong Jewish Zionist nation. Their core values are security for all Israeli citizens within strong defensible borders. They believe in preserving the national and Zionist traditions of language and culture and in a strong and united army in order to preserve these values.

All the Left Wing parties see as their salient value the democratic element of the Jewish State, the moral and universal values of brotherhood amongst the families of nations – an ongoing quest for peace between Jews and Arabs and indeed all of humanity. Their secular humanism is inspired by lofty spiritual ideas of the unity of all men.

This is not to say that some or all of these values are unimportant to the other parties as well. Indeed in the platform of many of the other parties, some or all of these values appear in one form or another. The point being made though is that to some parties and ideological groupings one of these values takes greater precedence over the other.

So too is this the same today in Israel's major political parties.

### **The Power to Unite**

Rav Kook's remarkably novel insight is that all three of the values of G-dliness, Nationhood and Universal morality are a reflection of the deepest yearnings of

the human spirit. Most importantly they reflect the vision and aspiration of Biblical and Rabbinic Judaism. They are the very foundation of the Torah.

Rav Kook is in essence explaining that as much as these three values have divided the Jewish people, they have the potential to unite them. All the significant parties in Israel reflect in some way or another these eternal Torah values.

Rav Kook explains how each one represents part of the whole truth of what Judaism is about and that a complete understanding of the Jewish mission must incorporate all three, weaved into one seamless whole. Alone they can be divisive to the extreme. Together they unite. Alone they are contradictory, together they are complementary. Alone they are a thesis and antithesis, together they are a synthesis.

He warns how dangerous it is for each ideology to see itself as the only truth. This leads to a myopic view of Jewish life, an unhealthy one dimensional potential extremism with each camp seeing itself as the only truth. When each focuses on the shortcomings of the other and sees itself in a self righteous way, divisiveness and distortion prevail. An exclusive religious view alone can lead to Neturei Karta type extremism of siding with Israel's enemies and complete separatism from all others. Exclusively nationalist views can descend into racial supremacism and undermining of minorities. Exclusive universalism can lead to compromising national security, assimilation and dilution of distinct Jewish identity. Each, highlights Rav Kook, must be complemented by the others. Only together can balance and wholeness be achieved.

The above teaching of Rav Kook is the most powerful framework that I know within which to galvanize Israeli society. We are in urgent need of like-minded people and thinkers from all walks of life to engage together in a dialogue and to articulate a manifesto incorporating these values of G-dliness and religion, nationhood and Zionism and ethical humanism.



Bringing these three basic principles closer together will serve as a cultural platform for unity going forward.

### The Role of Mizrachi

Mizrachi traditionally has always strived to be a bridge in Israeli society. Indeed it was the great Rav J B Soloveitchik who decided to join the Mizrachi for this very reason. He maintained that there would be no cohesive future for Israel if there were only religious and secular extremes. He believed that Mizrachi's path was the binding ideology holding Jewish society together. In today's divided society, this important historic role of a bridge builder is more critical than ever.

**I fervently believe that the issue of internal strife and disunity is a greater threat than any external one.**

Unifying around embracing the synergy and complementary nature of these differences is key. We have to have it all ways.

Jewish life is rooted in our belief in G-d and His Torah. Without belief in G-d and acceptance of the moral and spiritual laws revealed at Sinai, we miss the mark of Jewish destiny. It defines who we are and what G-d wants from us. At the same time, the G-dliness revealed to Avraham very clearly and profoundly includes both a national and a universal ethos.

The principle of Am Yisrael, our collective responsibility and destiny, is critical to the Jewish story. Yes, G-d revealed himself to one man, who became the founder of a singular people given a particular land and a distinct set of laws to fulfill their purpose in this world.

Yes, Jewish particularism and peoplehood are at the heart of Judaism. One cannot separate Judaism from the Jewish people.

Yet at the same time, G-d demanded that Avraham be a source of blessing to all people. Jews are part of the family of nations because G-d wants us to be a source of spiritual blessing and moral light to all. To love and respect all those created in the image of G-d and be a proactive force in a universal mission for the greater good of all of humanity.

Hence there is no comprehensive definition of Judaism without integrating all three elements into one harmonious whole.

May we merit to be forces of unity as Avraham our Founding Father and as Rav Kook taught at the return of Jewish nation-building in the modern era.

1. See Rashi, Bereishit 18:4.



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# To Bless the Space Between Us



Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt"l

There is a mystery at the heart of the biblical story of Abraham, and it has immense implications for our understanding of Judaism.

Who was Abraham and why was he chosen? The answer is far from obvious. Nowhere is he described, as was Noah, as “a righteous man, perfect in his generations” (Gen. 6:9). We have no portrait of him, like the young Moses, physically intervening in conflicts as a protest against injustice. He was not a soldier like David, or a visionary like Isaiah. In only one place, near the beginning of our parsha, does the Torah say why G-d singled him out:

Then the Lord said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. For I have chosen him, *so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just*, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what He has promised him.” (Gen. 18:17-9)

Abraham was chosen *in order to be a father*. Indeed Abraham’s original name, *Av ram*, means “mighty father”, and his enlarged name, *Avraham*, means “father of many nations”.

No sooner do we notice this than we recall that the first person in history to be given a proper name was *Chava*, Eve, because, said Adam, “she is the mother of all life.” (Gen. 3:20) Note that motherhood is drawn attention to in the Torah long before fatherhood (twenty generations to be precise, ten from Adam to Noah, and

ten from Noah to Abraham). The reason is that motherhood is a biological phenomenon. It is common to almost all forms of advanced life. Fatherhood is a cultural phenomenon. There is little in biology that supports pair-bonding, monogamy, and faithfulness in marriage, and less still that connects males with their offspring. That is why fatherhood always needs reinforcement from the moral code operative in a society. Absent that, and families fragment very fast indeed, with the burden being overwhelmingly borne by the abandoned mother.

This emphasis on parenthood – motherhood in the case of Eve, fatherhood in that of Abraham – is absolutely central to Jewish spirituality, because what Abrahamic monotheism brought into the world was not just a mathematical reduction of the number of gods from many to one. The G-d of Israel is not primarily the G-d of the scientists who set the universe into motion with the Big Bang. It is not the G-d of the philosophers, whose necessary being undergirds our contingency. Nor is it even the G-d of the mystics, the *Ein Sof*, the Infinity that frames our finitude. The G-d of Israel is *the G-d who loves us and cares for us as a parent loves for, and cares for, a child*.

Sometimes G-d is described as our father: “Have we not all one Father? Has not one G-d created us?” (Malachi 2:10). Sometimes, especially in the late chapters of the book of Isaiah, G-d is described as a mother: “Like one whom his mother comforts, so shall I comfort you” (Is. 66:13). “Can a woman forget her nursing child and have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you” (Is. 49:15). The primary attribute of G-d, especially whenever

the four-letter name Hashem is used, is compassion, the Hebrew word for which, *rachamim*, comes from the word *rechem*, meaning “a womb”.

Thus our relationship with G-d is deeply connected to our relationship with our parents, and our understanding of G-d is deepened if we have had the blessing of children (I love the remark of a young American Jewish mother: “Now that I’ve become a parent I find that I can relate to G-d much better: now I know what it’s like creating something you can’t control”).

All of which makes the story of Abraham very hard to understand for two reasons. The first is that *Abraham was the son told by G-d to leave his father*:

“Leave your land, your birthplace and your father’s house.” (Gen. 12:1)

The second is that *Abraham was the father told by G-d to sacrifice his son*:

“Then G-d said: Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the land of Moriah, and there sacrifice him as a burnt offering on the mountain I will show you.” (Gen. 22:2)

How can this make sense? It is hard enough to understand G-d commanding these things of anyone. How much more so given that G-d chose Abraham specifically to become a role model of the parent-child, father-son relationship.

The Torah is teaching us something fundamental and counterintuitive. *There has to be separation before there can be connection*. We have to have the space to be ourselves if we are to be good children to our parents, and we have to allow our children the space to be themselves if we are to be good parents.



I argued last week that Abraham was in fact continuing a journey his father Terach had already begun. However, it takes a certain maturity on our part before we realise this, since our first reading of the narrative seems to suggest that Abraham was about to set out on a journey that was completely new. Abraham, in the famous midrashic tradition, was the iconoclast who took a hammer to his father's idols. Only later in life do we fully appreciate that, despite our adolescent rebellions, there is more of our parents in us than we thought when we were young. But before we can appreciate this, there has to be an act of separation.

Likewise in the case of the Binding of Isaac. I have long argued that the point of the story is not that Abraham loved G-d enough to sacrifice his son, but rather that G-d was teaching Abraham that *we do not own our children*, however much we love them. The first human child was called Cain because his mother Eve said, "With the help of G-d I have acquired [kaniti] a man" (Gen. 4:1). When parents think they own their child, the result is often tragic.

*First separate, then join. First individuate, then relate.* That is one of the fundamentals of Jewish spirituality. We are not G-d. G-d is

not us. It is the clarity of the boundaries between heaven and earth that allows us to have a healthy relationship with G-d. It is true that Jewish mysticism speaks about *bittul ha-yesh*, the complete nullification of the self in the all-embracing infinite light of G-d, but that is not the normative mainstream of Jewish spirituality. What is so striking about the heroes and heroines of the Hebrew Bible is that when they speak to G-d, they remain themselves. G-d does not overwhelm us. That is the principle the kabbalists called *tzimtzum*, G-d's self-limitation. *G-d makes space for us to be ourselves.*

Abraham had to separate himself from his father before he, and we, could understand how much he owed his father. He had to separate from his son so that Isaac could be Isaac and not simply a clone of Abraham. Rabbi Menahem Mendel, the Rebbe of Kotzk, put this inimitably. He said:

"If I am I because I am I, and you are you because you are you, then I am I and you are you. But if I am I because you are you, and you are you because I am I, then I am not I and you are not you!"

G-d loves us as a parent loves a child – *but a parent who truly loves their child makes space for the child to develop their own identity.* It is the space we create for one another that allows love to be like sunlight to a flower, not like a tree to the plants that grow beneath. The role of love, human and Divine, is, in the lovely phrase of Irish poet John O'Donohue, "to bless the space between us".

#### AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE:

- How does G-d make space for us to be ourselves?
- Do you think it is hard for parents to make space for children to be themselves? Why?
- Does this approach prevent parents (and G-d) from protecting their children from making mistakes? Do you think this is a good approach, or is it too risky?

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# The Akeidah



**Rabbi Hershel Schachter**

Rosh Yeshivah, Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary of Yeshiva University

**T**he Rambam writes in Moreh Nevuchim (3:24) that the Torah records the story of the Akeidah in order to emphasize the clarity of the prophecies of the nevi'im. Although other nevi'im did not reach the level of nevu'ah of Moshe Rabbeinu, which is termed אספקלריא המאירה (a "clear glass" vision), their nevu'ah was not at all ambiguous. Avraham Avinu would certainly not have been prepared to sacrifice his son had his nevu'ah not been totally clear! Even though the nevi'im received prophecies through dreams and visions, they recognized them to be undoubtedly clear, with the vividness of something experienced physically.

We may wonder how to reconcile these words of the Rambam with the comment that Rashi cites from the Midrash (Bereishis 22:12): Avraham said to [Hashem], "I will set my words before You. Yesterday, You said to me, כי ביצחק יקרא לך זרע - "Since through Yitzchak will offspring be considered yours." And You subsequently said, קח נא את בנך - "Please take your son [and bring him up there as an offering]." Now, You say to me, אל תשלח ידך אל הנוער - "Do not send forth your hand at the lad." [How am I to reconcile these statements?]" The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to him, "When I said to you, 'Take,' I did not say to you, 'Slaughter him,' but rather, 'Bring him up.' You have brought him up. [Now,] take him down."

According to this Midrash, it seems as though Avraham misunderstood this nevu'ah, whereas according to the Rambam, the Akeidah teaches us how clear and truthful the various prophecies were to the nevi'im!

Rav Chaim Soloveitchik (Chiddushei HaGri"z MiPi HaShmu'ah Al HaTorah, siman 18) notes that the command, והעלהו



**The ram did not merely serve as a physical replacement for Yitzchak, but also as an actual embodiment of Yitzchak himself.**

- "Bring him up," merely connotes the kiddush (sanctification) of Yitzchak as a Korban Olah (Burnt Offering). This nevu'ah was indeed clear to Avraham, who obeyed Hashem's command and proceeded to sanctify Yitzchak as a korban. Avraham assumed on his own that something sanctified as a korban should also be offered as such, just as an animal that is found in the absence of its owner but known to have been sanctified as a korban must be offered in the name of its owner (Shekalim 7:4). This halachah was not part of the nevu'ah. Therefore, the subsequent nevu'ah was necessary to explain to Avraham that in this particular case, this halachah would not apply. Rather, Hashem explained, Avraham was to perform the avodah of Yitzchak upon the "ram, caught in the thicket by its horns" (Bereishis 22:13), instead of upon Yitzchak himself.

This is why Chazal understood that Yitzchak in fact attained the full status of a Korban Olah. Commenting on the passuk, וזכרתי את בריתי יעקוב ואף את בריתי, "I will remember My covenant with Ya'akov, and also My covenant with Yitzchak, and also My covenant with Avraham will I remember, and I will remember the land" (Vayikra 26:42), Rashi quotes the Midrash: Why was "remembering" not stated with reference to Yitz-

chak? Rather, ["remembering" is not necessary in the case of Yitzchak, because]

the ashes of Yitzchak appear before Me, gathered up and placed on the mizbe'ach.

How are we to understand the reference to Yitzchak's ashes if Yitzchak ultimately was not offered as a korban? Apparently, although Yitzchak himself was not physically offered, the ashes of the ram, which was offered in his place, were considered to be "the ashes of Yitzchak."

Similarly, when there was a famine in the land, Hashem told Yitzchak, "Do not descend to Mitzrayim, for you are a blemish-free offering, and [territory] outside the Land [of Israel] is not worthy of you" (Rashi, Bereishis 26:2). At first glance, this is also difficult to understand, as the disqualification of removing a korban from a more sanctified area to a less sanctified area only applies after the shechitah of the animal. Since Yitzchak was never slaughtered, why was he considered a korban that could not leave Eretz Yisrael?

Apparently, the shechitah of the ram was considered on some level a shechitah of Yitzchak, giving him the elevated status of a post-shechitah korban. This is the meaning of the passuk, ויעלהו לעולה תחת בנו - "And [Avraham] offered [the ram] up as an offering instead of his son" (Bereishis 22:13). The ram did not merely serve as a physical replacement for Yitzchak, but also as an actual embodiment of Yitzchak himself.

It is for this reason that, to this day, Klal Yisrael invokes the merit of the Akeidah when we pray on Rosh Hashanah: ויעקדת יצחק לזרעו היום ברחמים תזכור - "And may You mercifully remember today the Akeidah of Yitzchak for the sake of his offspring."

● Adapted from Rav Schachter on the Parsha.

# Learning By G-d's Example



**Rabbi Yisroel Reisman**  
Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshiva Torah Vodaas

וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו ה' בְּאֵלֵי מַמְרָא וְהוּא יָשָׁב פֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל כְּחֹם הַיּוֹם:

“And Hashem appeared to him (to Avraham) by the plains of Mamre; and he was sitting at the entrance of the tent as the day grew hot.” (18:1)

**T**he commentaries discuss the nature of Hashem's appearance to Avraham at the beginning of this week's parsha. Taking place immediately after the episode of Avraham circumcising himself and the members of his household, Rashi explains that Hashem appeared to Avraham for the purpose of Bikur Cholim, of visiting the sick. The concept of the Almighty visiting the sick is one that demands explanation.

To deepen our question, Rav Moshe Feinstein, in his commentary on the Torah, Darash Moshe, points out that the commandment of Bikur Cholim contains two core elements. The Shulchan Aruch requires a person visiting the sick to both pray on behalf of the sick person and to examine the specific needs of the sick person. Only with these two elements in place has the person optimally fulfilled the positive commandment of visiting the sick. Seemingly, these two fundamental aspects of Bikur Cholim are not relevant for Hashem. G-d takes care of the needs of all people and is the recipient of all our prayers. With that in mind, how can we understand Rashi's comment that Hashem came to visit Avraham while he was recovering from his Brit Milah?



**When we try to emulate G-d's ways by fulfilling the mitzvah of Bikur Cholim ourselves, we must ensure that our intentions in performing the mitzvah are for the results that Hashem desires.**

When Halacha demands of us to pray on behalf of the sick and to take care of all the needs of the sick person, the goal in mind is not for the results themselves. What is required from us is the show of empathy that demonstrates our care and love of the person we are visiting. Prayer and practical help are the medium used to achieve this. The desired result, however, is the sick person feeling the compassion and friendship of the person visiting.

On a Halachic level it would appear that if a sick person had all of their needs taken care of and there were already people davening on their behalf, it would not become incumbent on another individual

to visit the sick person in question. However, with our new perspective on the mitzvah of Bikur Cholim, it's clear that the imperative remains nonetheless. The feeling of warmth, love and care can always be provided through the mediums of prayer and practical help. There is no limit on the feeling of friendship.

Hashem appearing to Avraham as an act of Bikur Cholim demonstrates exactly this. While the usual elements of Bikur Cholim are not applicable to the Almighty, Hashem's appearance to Avraham showed love and empathy; showed that G-d was by Avraham's side and supporting him along his journey.

When we try to emulate G-d's ways by fulfilling the mitzvah of Bikur Cholim ourselves, we must ensure that our intentions in performing the mitzvah are for the results that Hashem desires. We must attempt to increase friendship and to spread love at every opportunity we get to fulfil this positive commandment.

● Edited by Yehuda Kaufold and Josh Harris.

# The Trial of the Binding of Isaac



**Chief Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau**  
Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv, Israel

**A**braham's tenth and final trial was that of the binding of Isaac. In his first trial – “G-d said to Abraham, ‘Go away from your land, from your birthplace, and from your father’s house, to the land that I will show you....’” – Abraham is told to divorce himself from his past. His final trial, though, is even more difficult. This time, he is told to renounce his future. He is being put to the test with regard to his entire life’s work.

At the age of three, Abraham came to the conclusion that the world has a creator, smashed his father’s idols, and was saved from the fiery furnace in Ur Casdim. He threw himself into the fire in sanctification of G-d’s name. When he was miraculously saved from death, he began to “make souls,” i.e., gather a following which he would teach that the world has a creator.

Abraham took in guests, and when they thanked him, he told them that the world has a Master, and that there is no need to thank him. Via the duties between man and his fellow man, he brought them to an awareness of the duties between man and G-d, and, later, to the obligation of ransoming captives when he saved Lot. Positive action, though, is not enough; one must also fight evil. Abraham fought against, among other things, the worship



**Abraham binds and ties Isaac in order not to damage his innocence. He controls himself carefully and exactly.**

of the fire-G-d Molekh which involved child sacrifice. This was idolatry which also embodied the transgression of both the duties between man and his fellow man and those between man and G-d.

We can just imagine what was going through Abraham’s mind during those three days on which he journeyed to Mount Moriah to sacrifice his son, Isaac. Upon descending from the mountain, he would have to relate to everybody that he sacrificed his son as a burnt-offering to G-d. Would not this call into question all of his success in his fight against the worshippers of Molekh in the name of “thou shall not kill”?

This was a very difficult trial, calling his entire life-long struggle into question.

Yet, all the same, “The two of them walked together.” Abraham binds and ties Isaac in order not to damage his innocence. He controls himself carefully and exactly.

Rabbi Simcha Bunim of Peshischa, one of the leaders of Chassidic movement, asked the following question: We blow on a ram’s horn on the Day of Judgment in order to awaken the merit of the act of the binding of Isaac. If this is the goal, why do we blow on the ram’s horn which recalls the fact that Isaac was not sacrificed? It would be more appropriate to hold up a slaughtering knife and proclaim that with a similar knife was Abraham ready to sacrifice his son.

The answer is that the blowing of the ram’s horn recalls the words of the Almighty, “Do not harm the lad, and do not do a thing to him.” We “remind” the Almighty that, in the end, He was opposed to human sacrifices; we too, today, anticipate the fulfillment of the eternal promise, “Do not harm the lad.”

We too, at this time, say, “Enough!” to the evil adversary of death – we pray and request of the Almighty that the sacrifices cease and that we merit a speedy and complete redemption.





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# I am Dust and Ashes



**Rabbi Shalom Rosner**  
Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavneh

**A**vraham courageously argues with Hashem in defense of the people of Sedom, begging that G-d spare them from imminent annihilation. Avraham takes a strong stand, and does not accept Hashem's rejection, consecutively lowering the number of righteous people warranting sparing the city (from 50 regressively down to 10). Yet, Avraham initiates the conversation with humbling words, referring to himself as mere "dust and ashes" (*v'anochi afar v'efer*). The Gemara in Chulin 88b states that due to this statement by Avraham, we merited the ashes of the *Parah Aduma* and the dust used in the concoction drunk of the *isha Sotah*. What exactly is the connection between Avraham's statement and *Para Aduma* and *Sota*?

The Beit Halevi offers a fascinating explanation based on the characteristics of ashes and dust. Dust has no significant past, yet from dust blossom flowers, trees and other vegetation. Avraham is utilizing this comparison to illustrate that he is not worthy of arguing with Hashem for he has no significant past. Ashes, on the other hand, had a past, but the significant object was burnt, destroyed and left with no current or future existence. Avraham is



**Each of us has to look into ourselves to identify our purpose and mission and to do what we can to fulfill that mission.**

utilizing this comparison to highlight that he is not worthy of arguing with Hashem for he has no great future.

Due to Avraham's humility in approaching Hashem on behalf of the people of Sedom, we were granted *Para Aduma* and *Sotah* – which is actually *mida knegged mida* (measure for measure). The **ashes** which we previously described as resulting from a burnt object depicting no future, when connected to the *Para Aduma*, actually purify the future of the individual that is *tamei met*. The dust which we previously described as having no past, when included in the drink of the *Isha Sotah*, reveal the true past of the accused women. The innate characteristics of these two elements is flipped in relation to the *Para Aduma* and *Sotah*.

Avraham's humility is what warranted the miraculous results from dust and ashes. People often err in understanding the essence of humility. Being a humble person does not mean one has to be a quiet, removed and sort of a passive individual. Moshe is referred to as being *anav mekol adam* – the humblest of all people. Moshe was not a shy person. He stood up to Pharaoh, demanding the release of the Jewish people. Moshe stood up to the shepherds who scoffed Yitro's daughters and Moshe led the nation through the trials and tribulations during 40 years in the desert. Yet, Moshe is referred to as being humble.

Avraham is depicted here as a humble individual, yet, he has the audacity to argue with the Almighty! He does so not for any personal gain, but rather to save a city. A humble person is someone who acts not for personal honor or recognition, but rather because acting in such respect is the right thing to do.

Like our patriarch, Avraham Avinu, may we be able to act with humility, yet garner strength from our past (ashes) to conduct ourselves in a way that is befitting to lead to a brighter future (dust) for all of Klal Yisrael.

# Full Service Hachnasas Orchim



**Michal Horowitz**  
Judaic Studies Teacher

**T**his week's parsha, *Parshas Vayeira*, opens with the famous visit of the three angels to the home (tent) of Avraham and Sarah. Avraham is ninety-nine years old and healing from his *bris milah* (see Ch.17). Sarah is eight-nine years old. The angels have arrived to heal Avraham, to inform Sarah that at this time next year she will have a son, and to go on from the tent of Avraham to destroy Sodom and Amorah (Ch.19).

The opening *pasuk* of the *parsha* teaches us about *bikkur cholim*, visiting the sick, as G-d has come to visit Avraham on the third day post circumcision; **וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים ה' בְּאֵלֵי מִמְרָא וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב פֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל כְּחָם הַיּוֹם – and Hashem appeared to him in the plains of Mamre, and he was sitting at the entrance to his tent, like the heat of the day (Bereishis 18:1).** Rashi teaches (and see Sotah 14a): **וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים**. לְבַקֵּר אֶת הַחֹלֶה. אָמַר רַבִּי חֲמַאי בְּרַ חֲנִינְיָא, – יוֹם שְׁלִישִׁי לְמִילְתּוֹ הִיָּה, וּבָא הַקָּב"ה וְשָׂאֵל בְּשֻׁלוֹמוֹ **And Hashem appeared to him:** *To visit the sick. It was the third day after his circumcision (which is the day of greatest pain) and Hashem came to inquire after his welfare.*

The opening *pasuk* of the *parsha* further teaches us about *hachnasas orchim*, welcoming guests. Why was Avraham sitting at the entrance to his tent? Should he not have been resting in bed, convalescing and recuperating from his *bris milah*, particularly if on this day, the pain was the most intense?

Rashi teaches: **פֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל**. לְרֹאוֹת אֵם יֵשׁ עוֹבְרֵי וָשֶׁב – *he was sitting at the entrance to his tent to see if there were passersby, and he would invite them into his home.*

*And behold, he lifted his eyes and there were three men standing upon him! And he ran to greet them and invited them to rest in the shade of the tree, while a sumptuous meal was prepared in their honor.*

How great is the *mitzvah* of *hachnasas orchim*? Based on this *parsha*, the Sages teach (Shabbos 127a) אֲרֵחִין וְגִדּוּלָה הַכִּנְסֵת אוֹרְחֵיךָ

*welcoming guests is greater than receiving the Divine Presence, as Avraham left his visit with G-d to welcome the guests into his home.*

Our great forefather, Avraham Avinu, cared for all aspects of his guests' needs. In his *Peninim* on the Torah, Rabbi A.L. Scheinbaum teaches a beautiful *chiddush* (novel Torah interpretation) into Rashi's words (as quoted above):

**פֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל**. לְרֹאוֹת אֵם יֵשׁ עוֹבְרֵי וָשֶׁב וַיִּכְנִיסֵם בְּבֵיתוֹ. “Rashi states that Avraham Avinu sat at the entrance of the tent in order to see אֵם יֵשׁ עוֹבְרֵי וָשֶׁב, *if there were passersby, who might be going going back and forth.* Interestingly, Rashi bases his exegesis on the Medrash which uses the word ‘orchim,’ guests, in contrast to the words that Rashi selects in its stead, וָשֶׁב.”

In deviating from the *lashon* (text) of the Medrash, and substituting the words וָשֶׁב for the *lashon ha'medresh* of “orchim,” what lesson can be learned from this Rashi? Rabbi Scheinbaum answers as follows:

“Ha'Rav Mordechai ha'Kohen z'l, renders these words of Rashi homiletically. עוֹבֵר is the root word of ‘aveirah,’ sin, and שֶׁב is the root word of ‘teshuvah,’ repentance. We learn from here that inclusive in the *mitzvah* of *hachnasas orchim*, hospitality to wayfarers, which generally addresses their physical needs, is to care for their spiritual needs. Avraham served his guests food, gave them water to wash, and a place to rest; but he *also* cared for his guests' spiritual needs and deficiencies. He reached out to all people, seeking to infuse them with belief in the Almighty (see Rashi to Bereishis 12:5 and 21:33).

“Therefore, Avraham sat at the פֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל, ‘entrance/opening’ of the tent. Homiletically, this can be understood as: he attempted to find an opening, a reason to inspire the travelers, an opening to catalyze the path away from sin – עוֹבֵר – and

motivate them to repentance – וָשֶׁב. Avraham sought to bring the sinner (עוֹבֵר) to the level of *teshuvah* (וָשֶׁב).

“Hence, Avraham Avinu performed a ‘full service’ *hachnasas orchim* by ministering to the spiritual, as well as physical, needs of his guests” (Peninim on the Torah, Eleventh Series, p.22).

The legendary *tzadekes*, Mrs. Henny Machlis a'h (who passed away in Oct. 2015 at the age of 58 years old), was a world-renowned *machneses orchim*, who hosted hundreds of guests for the Shabbos meals each and every week. Henny a'h was the epitome of one who understood that welcoming guests is to take care of both their physical and spiritual needs.

“Once a woman who was a professional opera singer came for Shabbos. She got up in the middle of the meal and wanted to sing. A woman singing in front of men is prohibited by *halacha*, but to silence her would have been insulting. Henny went over to her and calmly explained the prohibition of *kol isha*. Then she added, ‘Even though you can't sing right now, we women are very interested in hearing you. So after the meal we will have an opera recital downstairs. No men allowed. We'll close the door. And only the women will get to enjoy you. We really would be honored to hear you sing.’

“Relating the story one of her daughters concluded, ‘That woman was very weird.’ Rabbi Machlis' response to his daughter's comment encapsulates the Machlis attitude towards every Jew: ‘What do you mean she was weird? She was Jewish!’” (Emunah with Love and Chicken Soup, p.167).

With this beautiful interpretation of לְרֹאוֹת אֵם יֵשׁ עוֹבְרֵי וָשֶׁב, we can appreciate even further the greatness of our first forefather, Avraham, and his approach to welcoming guests. Indeed, this is a worthy model for us all to emulate, as we strive to bring ourselves, and others, closer to Hashem.



# Yirat Elokim & ‘Natural Morality’



**Rabbi Menachem Leibtag**

Tanach Study Center | Yeshivat Har Etzion

Undoubtedly, the climax of the Akeyda takes place in 22:12, when G-d’s angel tells Avraham not to harm his child. However, this pasuk includes a very interesting phrase – “*ki ya’rey Elokim ata...*”, Let’s first take a careful look at that pasuk: “And he [G-d’s angel] said: Do not harm the boy – don’t do anything to him, for now I know – *KI ya’rey Elokim ata* – ‘that’ you fear Elokim, and you have not withheld your only son from Me”

According to the ‘simplest’ understanding of this pasuk, the word “*ki*” should be translated ‘that’. In other words, Avraham’s readiness to sacrifice his own son [the final clause of this pasuk] proved to G-d that Avraham was indeed a “*ya’rey Elokim*” [the middle clause]. The use of G-d’s Name – Elokim – also appears to make sense, for it was “*shem Elokim*” in 22:1 that first commanded Avraham to offer his son.

However, there is a small problem with this interpretation. First of all, this suggests that before the Akeyda, G-d had doubted if Avraham was a “*ya’rey Elokim*”; yet there doesn’t seem to be any reason for this doubt.

Furthermore, this phrase “*yirat Elokim*” is found several other times in Chumash, but with a very different meaning. The best example is found in Parshat Va’yera itself, in the story when Avimelech takes Avraham’s wife Sarah (see 20:1-18). Recall the reason that Avraham tells Avimelech, explaining why he had to lie about Sarah’s true identity, and note the phrase “*yirat Elokim*”: “And Avraham said: for I had assumed that there was no YIRAT ELOKIM in this place, and they would kill me in order to take my wife” (see 20:11)

Obviously, Avraham did not expect that Avimelech and his people were ‘Jewish’, i.e. G-d had never spoken to them, nor

had He given them any commandments. Clearly, when Avraham mentions YIRAT ELOKIM, he must be referring to the basic ‘moral behavior’ expected of any just society. As can be proven from the story of the Flood, this ‘natural morality’ does not require a divine command. Rather it is G-d’s expectation from mankind.

Another example is found in the story of Yosef and his brothers; when Yosef, pretending to be an Egyptian, explains to his brothers why he will not leave them all in jail. After first jailing them, he changes his mind after three days, allowing them to go home to bring back their brother so that they can prove their innocence. Note how Yosef introduces this ‘change of mind’ by saying: “*et ha’Elokim ani ya’rey*” (see 42:18 and its context!).

But Yosef says this to his brothers pretending to be an Egyptian! Surely he wouldn’t ‘blow his cover’ by hinting to the fact that he is Jewish. Clearly, here as well, the phrase “*yirat Elokim*” relates to a concept of ‘natural morality’. Yosef, acting as an important Egyptian official, wants to impress upon his brothers that he is acting in a just manner.

The following other examples also include this phrase, and each one also relates to some standard of ‘moral’ behavior:

Shmot 1:21 – re: the midwives killing the male babies

Shmot 18:21 – re: Yitro’s advice re: the appt. of judges

Devarim 25:18 – re: the sin of the Amalek.

Based on these examples, it seems that the phrase “*yirat Elokim*” in Chumash refers exclusively to some type of ‘moral’ behavior. If so, then we would expect it to carry a similar meaning in the pasuk that we are discussing (i.e. Breishit 22:12, the key pasuk of the Akeyda).

However, it would be difficult to explain our pasuk at the Akeyda in this manner, for Avraham did what appears to be exactly the opposite, i.e. he followed a divine command that contradicts ‘natural morality’.

Why would the fact that Avraham is willing to sacrifice his son make him a “*ya’rey Elokim*” – in the Biblical sense of this phrase?

The simplest answer would be to say that this instance is an exception, because the Akeyda began with a direct command, given by Elokim, that Avraham take his son (see 22:1).

However, one could suggest a rather daring interpretation that would be consistent with the meaning of “*yirat Elokim*” elsewhere in Sefer Breishit. To do so, we must reconsider our translation of the Hebrew word “*ki*” in 22:12, i.e. in “*ata yadati, KI yarey Elokim ata, v’lo cha’sachta et bincha et yechidecha mi’meni*”.

Instead of translating “*ki*” as ‘that’, one could use an alternate meaning of “*ki*” = ‘even though’!

If so, then this pasuk would be emphasizing that EVEN THOUGH Avraham was a “*ya’rey Elokim*”, he overcame his ‘moral conscience’ in order to follow a divine command. Thus, we could translate the pasuk as follows: “And he [G-d’s angel] said: Do not harm the boy – don’t do anything to him, for now I know – *KI ya’rey Elokim ata* – EVEN THOUGH you are a YAREY ELOKIM, you did not withhold your only son from Me.”

Specifically because Avraham was a man of such a high moral nature, this test was most difficult for him. Nevertheless, his commitment to follow a Divine command prevailed!

# Every Guest is Important



**Rabbi Eli Mansour**

Edmond J Safra Synagogue, Brooklyn

**P**arashat Vayera begins with the story of the three angels – who appeared as ordinary nomads – whom Abraham Abinu welcomed and hosted. The Torah describes at length the efforts Abraham expended on their behalf, personally serving them food and standing over them to care for them while they sat and ate.

We know from last week's Parasha, Parashat Lech-Lecha, that Abraham had 318 servants. The question thus becomes why Abraham did not delegate the responsibilities entailed in hosting his guests to his servants. Why did he go through all the trouble to care for the three guests if he had a large team of workers to do so? This point becomes especially noteworthy in light of the fact that Abraham was ninety-nine years old and had just undergone circumcision. He was obviously physically frail, and yet he made a point of personally tending to his guests.

It is explained that a host shows honor to his guests by personally tending to their needs, rather than asking his housekeeper or family members to do so for him. Hospitality entails more than simply providing



**We are not to abstain from the pleasures of the world, but to enjoy them, in a way that brings Kedusha and extracts the sparks of sanctity that are waiting for us to come along and uncover them.**

the guests with their basic needs. It also requires making the guests feel at ease and feel respected. As such, it is important to not just ensure that their needs are cared for, but to personally involve oneself in this undertaking.

As mentioned, the three angels who visited Abraham appeared as simple nomads. Abraham did not think they were distinguished statesmen or great Rabbis. They were ordinary people. Even so, he insisted on giving them the respect of personally tending to them, rather than delegating this role to his servants.

Rav Avraham Pam (1913-2001) applied this lesson to the common situation of charity collectors. Often, when a collector comes to the door, we give a young child a bill and have him bring the money to the collector. While our motives are sincere – to train the child in the special Misva of charity – we fail to realize that this is demeaning to the collector. A person who knocks on the door needs not only financial assistance, but also comfort and dignity. And we cannot fulfill this need unless we personally greet him and speak to him with respect. Rav Pam therefore urged people to bring their child with them to the collector when giving him money, rather than delegate the job to the child.

Children are very perceptive, and they note the difference between the way we welcome distinguished guests and the way we deal with others. It is important for them to see us show every visitor respect. If Abraham personally served three guests whom he thought were simple nomads, then we must likewise treat all people with respect and dignity.



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# Spending Time



**Rabbi Moshe Weinberger**

Congregation Aish Kodesh, Woodmere

**H**ashem says about Avraham (Bereishis 18:19): “For I have known him because he commanded his children and his household after him, and they observed the path of Hashem, doing righteousness and justice...” the Meshech Chochma, zt”l, teaches that this pasuk is the Torah source for the mitzva of *chinuch*, educating our children. He explains that the mitzva of “And you shall review with your son” (Devarim 6:7) and “And you shall teach your children” (Devarim 11:19) refer to the mitzva to teach one’s children Torah. That is the curriculum of Torah. But the general, all-encompassing mitzva of *chinuch*, the mitzva to raise one’s children to live a G-dly life, is derived from Avraham Avinu.

The fact that Avraham fulfilled the mitzva of *chinuch* with his children is so great, Rashi explains that “I have known him” is an expression of love and is the source of the fact that the Navi calls Avraham (Yeshayahu 41:8), “Avraham that I love.” But what did Avraham actually command his children and the members of his household? What specifically did he teach them? We see that the result was that “they observed the path of Hashem, doing righteousness and justice.” But beyond the fact that they lived in the same household as a tzadik like Avraham, the pasuk never teaches us clearly what Avraham did to fulfill this mitzva. If the Torah does not make that clear, how can we learn from his actions and apply them to the way we educate our children in the path of Hashem?

There is a teaching in Tana D’vei Eliyahu (19:5) where Eliyahu Hanavi davens to Hashem to point out the positive attributes of the Jewish people: “My Father in Heaven, remember the covenant that You entered into with the earlier generations, with the three tzadikim, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. Remember how many poor

and impoverished people there are in the Jewish people. Yet they study Torah every single day... They do not have enough food to eat, yet they pay a salary to rebbeim to teach their children Torah...”

The Tolner Rebbe, shlita, asks how we can understand this prayer of Eliyahu Hanavi in light of our circumstances today. Unlike in previous generations, virtually no one is forced to choose between hiring teachers for his children and putting bread and water on his table. While tuition is difficult and people sacrifice to educate their children, thankfully, that education is generally not at the expense of basic sustenance. Not everyone can afford to go out for sushi and steak, but they are also not starving. So what is the test of our generation? How do we sacrifice for our children’s education and welfare? What makes us worthy of Eliyahu Hanavi’s tears?

The Tolner Rebbe suggests that while the greatest test for previous generations was spending money on Torah education rather than food, our generation’s greatest test is how we spend our time. Because of the pressures of making a living and the time people spend using their electronic devices, as well as their varied interests and social commitments, the most difficult thing in our generation is dedicating one-on-one time with one’s husband or wife, and with one’s children. Beyond handling homework assignments and daily tasks, the call to action for our generation is to spend some non-pressured, quiet, quality time with one’s spouse and children.

The key area of sacrifice we are called upon to make in our generation is to spend some time with each of our sons and daughters to talk with them about matters which concern them: How is yeshiva? How are things with friends? We must take time to call our children’s rebbeim, moros, and teachers. Instead of making time for these

conversations, so many people waste away hours and hours on their iPhones, iPads, and computers. But if someone sacrifices his time and dedicates it to his or her spouse and children, Eliyahu Hanavi highlights each precious sacrifice to Hashem in his advocacy for the Jewish people.

The Sfas Emes highlights this reality in his comment on the pasuk (Bamidbar 11:12) in which Moshe asks Hashem, “Did I conceive this entire nation or give birth to it that You should say ‘Carry it in your bosom...’” The Rebbe teaches that the pasuk reveals by implication that if a mother did give birth to the entire Jewish nation, she would have the ability to take care of its needs. But even the nation’s father, Moshe Rebbeinu, could not give the people the time they require.

So what did Avraham Avinu teach his children that caused Hashem to love him so much? How did he fulfill the mitzva of *chinuch*? The Kedushas Levi, zy”a teaches us an amazing thing about the pasuk we began with above. The Kedushas Levi explains that the word “commanded” in the pasuk, “because he commanded [יצוה] his children,” is derived from the word “צוּתָא, bound.” Avraham Avinu bound himself to his children in *everything* that he did. Every act was for their sake.

That is the essence of our generation’s test with respect to *chinuch*. If we do whatever we do to bind ourselves to our children, and not merely for our own sake, then we will surely find the will to make the time to spend with them. And just as he advocated for us in previous generations, may Eliyahu Hanavi bring the time we dedicate and sacrifice for our children up to Hashem as a merit through which we will see the coming of Moshiach soon in our days.

# The Secret of Giving



Rabbi YY Jacobson  
TheYeshiva.net

A woman is leaving her multimillion-dollar mansion in Beverly Hills when a poor man approaches her and cries, “Oh ma’am, I haven’t eaten in three days.”

To which the woman responds: “I am so envious of you; I wish had your willpower.”

## Another anecdote

David Goldberg, a seasoned doctor, turns to Harry Rabinowitz, the man seated next to him in the synagogue, and says, “Harry, you’re an intelligent lawyer, I need your help.”

The doctor begins his lament. “Every Shabbos,” he says, “during the entire time of the service, people approach me seeking medical advice. This one has stomach pains, this one’s wife woke up with a headache, this guy’s mother-in-law’s back hurts. I am just sick and tired of this. Shabbos is my only day of rest.”

“Listen to me,” says Harry. “Next guy that comes over, give him the advice he needs, but make sure to send him a bill for your medical advice the following week. I guarantee you,” says Harry, “that in no time you will have peace and quiet in the synagogue.”

“Great idea!” exclaims the doctor. He returns home in a great mood.

Tuesday, as David is opening the mail, he finds a bill from his friend Harry Rabinowitz.

## Abraham’s Menu

The Torah relates the meticulous order of the meal that Abraham offered his guests, recorded in the opening verses of this week’s Torah portion Vayeira. First

he gave them cheese and milk, and only afterward did he present them with calf’s meat, consistent with Jewish dietary laws that deli products may be eaten after dairy products, but not vice versa.

Yet another point is raised among the biblical commentators as to why Abraham chose to serve his guests these particular items – milk, cheese and meat – to begin with. The choice of meat is clear, as he wished to serve his visitors a satisfactory meal. But why, from among many possible appetizers, did Abraham decide to give them milk and cheese as a prelude to the meat?

Even if Abraham was compelled for whatever reason to serve his guests milk, why does the Torah make a point of sharing this apparently insignificant detail with us.

## The Mystique of Nursing

The rule of thumb in our world is that sharing something with somebody else constitutes a loss for the giver. If I have it, and give it to you, I lose it; if you have it, and give it to me, you lose it. If you write a check for charity, your checking account is diminished.

An exception to this rule is the milk a mother feeds her suckling. As long as a mother continues sharing her nourishing liquid with the child, her mammary glands will keep on refilling. Furthermore, the quantity of the milk is usually dependent on her sharing it: The more a mother nurses, the greater the flow of milk her body produces. When she ceases to breast-feed, her inner production of milk ceases.

This is one of the deeper reasons why G-d created nature in a way that infants are nourished by milk. Through this natural

process of infant nourishment, the Kabbalah teaches, a mother is given the opportunity to ingrain within her child’s tender consciousness the truth about sharing: The more you give, the more you will receive. Just like the milk that you are now swallowing, my dear child, the more I share it, the more I have it.

## The Gift of Love

Very often guests – particularly if they are strangers – feel uncomfortable staying in somebody else’s home and eating another person’s food.

Abraham, hypersensitive to the feelings of his guests, addressed this awkwardness by offering them milk and milk products at the start of the meal, reflecting the Jewish approach toward giving. Giving is like milk: the more you give, the more you get. The greatest gift we can give ourselves is a life filled with love and caring toward other human beings. More than the host does for the guest, the guest does for the host.

This is true in our marriages as well: when a husband and wife are committed to give to each other, they themselves are often surprised of how much they receive by the sheer act of giving to somebody outside of themselves. The love we give away is the only love we keep.

Or as Winston Churchill put it: We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.

There is a lovely story about the great Victorian Anglo-Jew, Sir Moses Montefiore. Montefiore was one of the outstanding figures of the nineteenth century. A close friend of Queen Victoria and knighted by her, he became the first Jew to attain high office in the City of London. His

*Continued on page 26*

# Vayeira: The Greatest Avodah



**Rabbi Judah Mischel**

Executive Director, Camp HASC; Mashpiah, OU-NCSY

**R**av Yisroel Belsky, zt'l, Rosh Yeshivah of Torah VoDaas, was an exceptional Torah personality and one of the great *poskim* of our generation. A *gadol* with multifaceted expertise, he was a shochet, a sofer, a musician, and a mohel, and had vast knowledge and interests ranging from physics and chemistry, to engineering, astronomy, and botany. Most importantly, perhaps, Rav Belsky's intellectual bandwidth, abilities and greatness in Torah was matched by his love of life and concern for people.

While in the hospital during his final illness, the Rav suffered deeply and slipped in and out of consciousness. In order to assuage his discomfort, the attending nurse suggested that the Rav be given some protein to eat to provide him with strength and sustenance. Rav Belsky's daughter placed a plate of homemade scrambled eggs before him and pressed her father to taste something. With his eyes still closed, slightly disoriented, he whispered, "What about the poor people? Do they have what to eat?"

His daughter assured him that everything was fine, the poor were being fed as well.

"But is it the same quality as what I am being served? It has to be the same quality."

Only after his daughter was able to convince the Rav that the poor were being served the same quality food did Rav Belsky partake of his lunch.

Rav Belsky's son, Rabbi Elimelech Belsky offered his perspective. When we recite a *berachah* on food or drink, we may not speak before partaking of it. However, we may speak if it is relevant to the eating or drinking. For example, one may request

salt in which to dip their bread — even after having recited *HaMotzi*. The Rambam rules that one may also speak to ensure that someone in need is given food, for how dare we begin to eat if someone else's needs have not been met?



Our sedra introduces us to the original Jewish home, the open tent of Avraham Avinu and Sarah Imeinu. Torah describes with great detail the way our grandparents modeled service of others:

וְאֵלֵי־הַבָּקָר יָרַח אַבְרָהָם וַיִּקַּח קָרֶבֶת בַּרְדָּ וְטוֹב...

וַיִּקַּח חֲמֵצָה וְחֵלֶב וַיְבַרֵךְ אֶשְׂרֵי עֵשֶׂה וַיִּתֵּן לַפְּנִיָּהֶם וְהוּא־עֹמֵד עֲלֵיהֶם תַּחַת הָעֵץ וַיֹּאמְרוּ:

Then Avraham ran to the herd, took a calf, tender and choice, and gave it to a servant who hastened to prepare it... He took cream and milk and the calf that had been prepared and placed these before them; and he was standing over them under the tree, and they ate. (18:7-8)

We ought to study carefully the extent to which Avraham and Sarah exerted themselves to provide for the needs of weary travelers, feeding them the finest delicacies and doting over their every need. From fresh cream to the most choice cut of meat, they showered their guests with extreme honor, generosity and alacrity. This episode of visiting angels who appeared as vagabond travelers is particularly instructive, as it began to unfold as Avraham was deeply immersed in meditative prayer. The Gemara (*Shabbos*, 137a) explains: גדולה הכנסת אורחין מהקבלת פני שכינה, "Hachnasas or'chim, receiving guests, is greater than receiving a revelation of the Shechinah!"

Rabbe Moshe Chaim Ephraim, grandson of the Baal Shem Tov and author of the *Degel*

*Machaneh Ephraim*, zy'a, expands on the holy service of Hachnasas or'chim even further. והוא עומד עליהם, "And he, Avraham, stood 'above them'" — this means being in service of others propels us to a spiritual level that is "above" that of the angels.

*Sefer haYom Yom* is a collection of daily aphorisms and sources compiled by the Lubavitcher Rebbe in 1944, helping us to follow the Alter Rebbe's instruction to 'Live with (the spiritual qualities of) each day.' In the selection for the 28th of the month of Sivan, the following story is recounted.

The *Tzemach Tzedek*, the third Rebbe of Chabad, was on the way to *shul* on market day, when someone asked him for a loan. The Rebbe asked him to come back after the davening, and continued on to *shul*. In *shul* he suddenly realized that the poor fellow needed this loan *now*, so he quickly returned home, got some money, sought out the fellow with great difficulty, gave him the money and then went on to daven.

That night, the Rebbe's grandfather, the Ba'al haTanya, appeared in a vision to the *Tzemach Tzedek*, beaming, and lauded him for his thoughtfulness. The Alter Rebbe had not appeared to him for quite some time before this incident; it was clear that the favor he had performed merited the dream appearance of his holy grandfather, the Alter Rebbe.

Following this episode, the *Tzemach Tzedek* related:

By helping someone in his livelihood, even to earn just a few kopeks....

אזי כל שערי היכלות העליונים פתוחים לפניו

all the gates to the Heavenly Chambers are open for him.

צריכים... לדעת את הדרך להיכלות העליונים,

*Continued on page 27*



# Powerful Prayer

## Mrs. Shira Smiles

International lecturer and curriculum developer

**T**he destruction of Sedom and Amorah is imminent; Lot is instructed to run to the mountains to be saved (Bereisheet 19;18-23). But Lot begs the angels to allow him to escape to a closer location and spare the city of Zoar. The angels acquiesce, although Zoar was meant to be destroyed it was ultimately saved. How are we to understand that Lot's appeal was granted while Avraham Avinu, who davened for the salvation of even one city, was denied? Further, what inhibited Lot from fleeing to the hills where Avraham Avinu lived far away from all the devastation to ensure his safety?

Rashi (19;19) explains that Lot was afraid to return to the vicinity of Avraham Avinu lest Hashem compare him to his uncle and be found worthy of punishment. Rav Yaffe in *Leavdecha B'emet* questions this logic. Does Hashem compare one person to another? Is not each person judged for his own merits or otherwise? Rather, says Rav Yaffe, when one is found in the proximity of a great person there is an expectation that he should become inspired and aim to emulate the ways of the gadol. The Saba of Novardok teaches that one who lives near a righteous person has a vivid image of exemplary behavior and that ideal must be an inspiration for

all to follow. It seems that Lot viewed such a responsibility as burdensome.

Rav Zaitchik in *Ohr Chadash* reflects on Lot's pathetic mindset here. Instead of admitting his shortcomings and returning to his uncle Avraham, he chooses to remain in a precarious and insecure circumstance. Lot prefers to suffer an uncertain future rather than make the necessary changes to his lifestyle and behavior. Indeed, many of us can see a reflection of ourselves in Lot. Even when we know that making significant changes in our lives will lead to greater good, we are reluctant to go beyond what is familiar and comfortable to make those shifts.

Instead, Lot pleads that the city of Zoar be spared and remains in his habituated groove. Yet why was his request accepted? The midrash explains that the angels felt hakarat hatov to Lot for his hospitality, this obligated them to respond in the affirmative. Rav Yechezkel Levenstein adds that such is the power of gratitude! It can affect powerful change, even beyond the tefilah of Avraham Avinu.

Rav Druck in *Aish Tamid* infers from here an additional lesson; the power of a tefilah that comes from the depths of one's heart. Clearly the tefilah of Avraham Avinu was powerful, however, one cannot compare

it to a prayer offered in the direst of situations. Accordingly, chazal teach us that the tefilah of a choleh himself is the most powerful. Here, Lot feels the desperation of the moment and emphasizes that his life is in danger. This is certainly a tefilah that can pierce the heavens. Rav Druck notes that we see a similar idea in the holiday of Tu B'av. One of the reasons offered for celebration on this day is that the last group of people from ages 20 to 60 who dug their graves in the midbar on Tisha B'av did not die and were able to enter Eretz Yisrael. What was different about this group? Every year they dug their graves and although they davened earnestly there was still a part of them that said maybe we won't die this year, maybe we will still get up tomorrow. However, in that last year all those who dug their graves knew they were going to die, there was no option for survival. Thus, they prayed from the depths of their hearts and did sincere teshuvah. They all lived and Tu B'av became a day that captures the potency of tefilah to offset a negative decree.

The Torah is teaching us that despite Lot's limitations and unwillingness to reform, he remains a model for us in the power of genuine, authentic tefilah.

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philanthropy extended to both Jews and non-Jews, and on his one-hundredth birthday, The London Times devoted editorials to his praise. "He had shown," said the Times, "that fervent Judaism and patriotic citizenship are absolutely consistent with one another."

One reflection was particularly moving: Someone once asked him, "Sir Moses, what are you worth?" Moses thought for a while and named a figure. "But surely," said his questioner, "your wealth must be much more than that." With a smile, Sir Moses replied, "You didn't ask me how

much I own. You asked me how much I am worth. So I calculated how much I have given to charity this year."

"You see," he said, "we are worth what we are willing to share with others."

# Pleasant are Your Songs, Which are Eternal



**Rabbanit Yemima Mizrachi**  
Popular Torah teacher and author

**T**he long tables will open this Friday night. Tables that will reach as far as New York, Melbourne, Dubai and Gibraltar.

Exactly ten years ago, Rabbi Warren Goldstein, the Chief Rabbi of South Africa, called me and said, “I have a vision. Shabbat Olami! Let us call it ‘let’s keep it together!’”

The basic meaning would be, “Let’s keep together,” but the deeper meaning was, “Let us keep our togetherness.” Thousands of women stood on Johannesburg’s main street, which was closed to traffic. Passersby looked curiously at the women standing by the bowls, kneading dough, singing and praying... Several people stopped me and asked me curiously: what is the meaning of this ceremony? And I told them: These women are looking forward to Shabbat. They bake bread for it, but they also continue a very old biblical tradition.

On this Shabbat, this tradition began for the first time. “Hurry up! Knead! Bake cakes!” Said Avraham to Sarah, his wife. She sat in the tent in despair, not believing

she would have children. Time was working against her. “Should I really bear a child, as old as I am?” How am I supposed to have a child “now that I have lost the ability?” She is right. She has already lost the ability. But then come the preparations for Shabbat. You may be after a difficult week, after a disappointment or loneliness, but at the end of the week you are “before” it. You have to be ready before you go in, you go “towards” Shabbat, you do “Kabbalat Shabbat”. Acceptance of Shabbat is just the opposite of acceptance of judgment. It refers not to what was, to what happens when one goes, but to what might happen. The pilgrims take in a bowl all the unresolved elements of existence: Earth, water, fire and air (flour, water, oven and leaven) and create from them a new world, a new week, a new hope.

What is the central meaning of this hope? It seems to me that Sarah wanted all of this, her and Avraham’s vast life’s work, not to be scattered. She wanted it to go on. She wanted all the ingredients, even those that might contradict each other, like salt and yeast, to be combined into one dish, to nourish a family in its diversity,

to continue the tradition of the fathers and mothers who kept this Shabbat, let us bind all these fears together so that we are not scattered in the world, “let’s keep it together!”

This is exactly why we rest on Shabbat. That this long braided rope that connects us, that gives us the desire to go towards each other, like Shabbat, does not rest. Accepting one another, like accepting Shabbat, tasting this bread on which we all depend. We rest so that we do not separate: “Pleasant are your songs, which are eternal. Rest and relax on the Sabbath day!”

“Hurry up! Knead!” Said Avraham to Sarah, his wife. This is not your weekend, this is “the first yield of your baking”. Put all your tears into this dough, you will have a child who will laugh so much.

*Continued from page 25*

(In general,) one should know the route to the Heavenly Chambers, but it is actually not that crucial, since...

עס דארף זיין דער עיקר:

העלפין בלבב שלם מיט א געפיל, האבען א געשמאק אין א אידען טאן א טובה.

the main thing is to help another wholeheartedly, with feeling & sensitivity,

and to take pleasure in the sweetness of doing a kindness to another.



Rav Yisrael Salanter used to say that he had often heard people in a synagogue calling out to strangers passing by, “*Kedusha! Kedusha!* Come join the *minyán!*” But he had never heard people sitting down

to a meal call out to a stranger passing by, “*A seudah! A meal! Come and join us!*”

May the example of Avraham and Sarah inspire us in the service of others, and may this holy avodah propel us to the highest levels and Heavenly Chambers... together!







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## MISSOURI

Yeshivat Kadimah High School Nusach

Hari B'nai Zion Congregation  
Young Israel of St. Louis

## NEW HAMPSHIRE

Hillel at Dartmouth

## NEW JERSEY

Ahavas Achim  
Volunteer Chaplain Middlesex County  
Congregation AABJ&D  
Congregation Adath Israel of the JEC  
National Council of Young Israel  
Congregation Ahavat Achim  
Congregation Ahavath Torah  
Congregation Brothers of Israel  
Congregation Darchei Noam of Fair Lawn  
Congregation Etz Chaim of Livingston  
Congregation Israel of Springfield  
Congregation Ohr Torah  
Congregation Sons of Israel of Cherry Hill  
Ma Tov Day Camp  
Ohav Emeth  
Pal Foundation  
Shomrei Torah of Fair Lawn  
Synagogue of the Suburban Torah Center  
Yavneh Academy  
National Council of Young Israel  
Young Israel of Teaneck

## NEW YORK

Congregation Anshei Shalom  
Congregation B'nai Tzedek  
Congregation Bais Tefilah of Woodmere  
Congregation Beth Sholom  
Ramaz  
Ma'ayanot Yeshiva High School for Girls  
MTA – Yeshiva University  
High School for Boys  
Young Israel of Merrick  
Congregation Beth Torah  
Congregation Etz Chaim of  
Kew Gardens Hills  
Congregation Kehilath Jeshurun  
Congregation Ohab Zedek  
Great Neck Synagogue  
Iranian Jewish Center/Beth  
Hadassah Synagogue  
Irving Place Minyan  
Jewish Center of Atlantic Beach  
Kingsway Jewish Center  
Lincoln Square Synagogue  
Merkaz Yisrael of Marine Park

North Shore Hebrew Academy  
Young Israel of Merrick  
NYC Department of Correction  
OU-JLIC at Binghamton University  
OU-JLIC at Cornell University  
Queens Jewish Center  
Stars of Israel Academy  
The Riverdale Minyan  
Vaad of Chevra Kadisha  
West Side institutional Synagogue  
Yeshiva University High School for Girls  
Young Israel of Hillcrest  
Young Israel of Jamaica Estates  
Young Israel of Lawrence-Cedarhurst  
Young Israel of New Rochelle  
Young Israel of North Woodmere  
Young Israel of Oceanside  
Young Israel of Scarsdale

## OHIO

Beachwood Kehilla  
Congregation Sha'arei Torah  
Congregation Torat Emet  
Green Road Synagogue  
Fuchs Mizrachi School  
Heights Jewish Center

## PENNSYLVANIA

Shaare Torah Congregation

## SOUTH CAROLINA

Brith Sholom Beth Israel  
Congregation Dor Tikvah

## TENNESSEE

Baron Hirsch Congregation

## TEXAS

Mayerland Minyan Synagogue  
Robert M. Beren Academy  
United Orthodox Synagogues of Houston

## VIRGINIA

Keneseth Beth Israel

## WASHINGTON

Bikur Cholim-Machzikay Hadath  
Northwest Yeshiva High School  
Sephardic Bikur Holim Congregation

## VENEZUELA

### CARACAS

Ashkenazi Kehilla  
Mizrachi Venezuela



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