



פרשת וירא Parshat Vayeira

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ENHANCING YOUR STUDY OF THE WEEKLY TORAH PORTION



A GUIDING VOICE

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ATARA KEEHN ('23)

DENISE MANN ('22)

ADINA EISENMAN ('22)

TAMAR BRODY ('21)

The story of this week's parsha is beloved and familiar. After a long and painful struggle with infertility, Sarah gives birth to Yitzchak, the son she and Avraham have been waiting for! He is his parents'

delight. Watching him grow up alongside Yishmael, however, causes Sarah some pain. Yitzchak is an angel, Yishmael a *metzachek*, a scorners, or worse, according to Rashi, idolatrous, criminal, and immoral. Yishmael is the antithesis of the son that Sarah and Avraham are raising Yitzchak to be, so Sarah decides to take action; she demands that Avraham banish Yishmael and his mother Hagar from their home. Now Avraham is pained. His nature is to invite visitors into his home; kicking people out -- especially people he loves -- utterly violates his ethic.

Hashem appears to Avraham and tells him to listen to Sarah:

כָּל אֲשֶׁר תֹּאמַר אֵלֶיךָ שָׂרָה שְׁמַע בְּקוֹלָהּ

“everything that Sarah says to you, listen to her voice” (Bereishit 21:12). That's pretty good news for Sarah! Not only will Avraham honor her request to banish Yishmael and Hagar, but he'll now have to listen to everything else she says as well!

Is this what Hashem meant? Sarah now has complete leeway to force Avraham to do whatever she says? The great 19th century thinker, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, reads Hashem's instruction to Avraham very carefully. He notes that God doesn't command Avraham to heed Sarah's words, rather he tells Avraham to listen to Sarah's voice. Rav Hirsch explains that God is telling Avraham: “Listen to the voice of Sarah, obey her, even if you can not agree with her words, depend on her judgment....”

In other words, it's not so much that Sarah is right in this case, but that Sarah's “voice” is the voice of good judgment. Sarah is insightful. Sarah knows how to

read people. Sarah “gets it”. God is not telling Avraham that he has to listen to Sarah because Sarah is always right. He is telling Avraham to let Sarah be his moral compass, to let her good sense guide Avraham through life’s tricky twists and turns.

We all need that guiding “voice” sometimes, helping us navigate difficult choices. It’s important that we choose that voice carefully, because it’s the one we carry with us into life, even when the actual owner of the voice is not with us. Maybe it’s the voice of a parent, a sibling, a teacher, an advisor, a counselor, or a mentor.

This seems to be what the mishna in Avot (1:6) is instructing us:

יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן פְּרַחְיָה אָמַר, עֲשֵׂה לְךָ רֵב, וְקַנְיָה לְךָ חֲבֵר

“Yehoshua ben Perachya used to say: appoint for yourself a teacher and acquire for yourself a companion.”

We encounter many friends and teachers throughout our lives, some of our choosing and some not. This mishna is urging us to choose wisely a “teacher” and “companion” whose judgment we trust to be the voice that we listen to in our moments of decision.

DON'T LOOK BACK

ATARA KEEHN ('23)

In this week’s parsha, Parshat Vayeira, we are warned not to look back at all of our mistakes. Unfortunately it’s hard to get those mistakes out of our system. The Torah tells us that focusing so much on your mistakes can lead to physical and emotional damage.

Lot and his family were instructed not to turn back and look at the city of S’dom, which was being destroyed for a lack of morality. Instead of looking back at the past, they were told to look forward to see what was ahead of them.

Lot’s wife ignored this instruction and looked back. This resulted in her turning into a “pillar of salt”. She was frozen and could no longer grow as a person, either literally and spiritually.

When we focus on all the mistakes we have made in the past, it prevents us from spiritual growth in the

future, just as in the case of Lot’s wife. We need to admit to our shortcomings. We need to make amends and we need to start over so that we can grow and maximize to our full potential. As King Shlomo teaches (Mishlei 24:16):

כִּי שָׁבַע יִפּוֹל צַדִּיק וְקָם וְרָשָׁעִים יִכְשְׁלוּ בְרַעְיָה

“A bad person will fall and never again get up, whereas a righteous person will fall seven times and get up.” The tzadik who falls will get up again each and every time. May we all have a Shabbat filled with spiritual growth.

A LOT TO LEARN

DENISE MANN ('22)

‘וִירָא אֱלֹהֵי ה’ — “And Hashem appeared to Avraham” (Bereishit 18:1).

In all of Sefer Bereishit, there are only two mitzvot mentioned. Many ask about the relevance of the majority of those parshiyot if they do not contain any mitzvot. According to the Vilna Gaon, there are many specific details to be learned from each one of the 613 mitzvot, not just the halachot about each mitzvah, but how that mitzvah impacts our middot and behavior.

Parshat Vayeira is one of those cases where there are no mitzvot mentioned, but there is a lot to learn about chesed. When Avraham was recovering from his brit milah, he interrupted his conversation with Hashem to tend to three strangers who showed up at his tent. He went above and beyond for them; not only did he give them bread, but he also prepared fine meat for them and hurried to bring delicious dishes to his hungry visitors. When they finished, he personally escorted them out.

A second lesson in chesed that we learn from Avraham in this week’s parsha is when he was informed by Hashem about the imminent destruction of the cities of S’dom, Amorah, and the surrounding areas. Avraham was very concerned for their inhabitants so he pleaded for them and prayed for their survival. He didn’t even know them personally, yet he still begged Hashem to save them.

Avraham is the epitome of chesed. We can incorpo-

rate many aspects of his life in our everyday tasks, whether it is by helping another person, doing an act of kindness without delay, or giving people the best treatment they deserve no matter what age or social status they have. The most important lessons we learn from our Avot in Sefer Bereshit is how to model our behavior as Jews in today's society.

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

ADINA EISENMAN ('22)

People often wonder how it was that Avraham could be so brazen when speaking to Hashem, as he debates the fate of S'dom. This question can be answered by the way Hashem describes Avraham:

כִּי יִדְעָתִיו לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר יֵצֵא אֶת בְּנָיו
וְאֶת בֵּיתוֹ אַחֲרָיו וְשִׁמְרוּ דְרָגְהוֹ
לְעִשׂוֹת צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט לְמַעַן הִבִּיא ה'
עַל אֲבֵרָהֶם אֶת אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר עֲלָיו

“For I have singled him out, that he may instruct his children and his posterity to keep the way of Hashem by doing what is just and right, in order that Hashem may bring about for Avraham what He has promised him” (Bereishit 18:19).

Rashi explains that this pasuk proves just how much Hashem loved Avraham. The word יִדְעָתִיו means “to know”, but often in the Torah it has a double meaning. Rashi suggests that יִדְעָתִיו can also mean love. When you genuinely love someone, that is when you truly know them. Hashem continues to explain that Avraham taught his children Jewish values and morality. Says Rashi, it was because Avraham taught his children the ways of Hashem, that he was able to speak to Hashem.

From this a new question arises: why is teaching your kids so important? Why is it so powerful that it could grant Avraham the ability to speak with Hashem? Simply put, Hashem loves His children. He wants so badly for us to constantly grow closer to Him in the same way a father wants to be close to his children. It's clear in this parsha that Hashem wanted to save the nation of S'dom. When Avraham argues with Hashem he begs saying:

אוּלַי יֵשׁ חֲמִשִּׁים צְדִיקִים, בְּתוֹךְ הָעִיר
הָאֵף תִּסְפֶּה וְלֹא-תִשָּׂא לְמַקוֹם, לְמַעַן
חֲמִשִּׁים הַצְדִּיקִים אֲשֶׁר בְּקִרְבָּהּ

“What if there should be fifty innocent people within the city; will You then wipe out the place and not forgive it for the sake of the innocent fifty who are in it?” (Bereishit 18:24).

Hashem responds that He would save all of S'dom for the sake of 50 tzadikim, but there weren't even 50.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵל נָא יְחַר לֵאדֹנָי וְאַדְבָּרָה אִךְ
הַפְּעַם אוּלַי יִמָּצְאוּן שָׁם, עֶשְׂרֵה וַיֹּאמֶר
לֹא אֲשַׁחֵית, בְּעֵבֹר הָעֶשְׂרֵה

“And he said, ‘Let not my Lord be angry if I speak but this last time: What if ten should be found there?’ ‘And He answered, I will not destroy, for the sake of ten’ ” (Bereishit 18:32).

Through arguing, Avraham realizes that there aren't even 10 good people in S'dom. How can this be possible? Out of a whole nation, not even 10 of them were righteous?

The pesukim describe how immoral the people of S'dom were. A footnote in the Chumash explains that the problem which made S'dom so fundamentally terrible was their failure to abide by the principles that Avraham taught to his children. Being cruel and selfish was the center of their culture. They stole and fought as if it was nothing. S'dom made it a law to not give tzedakah, which proves how far off they strayed from Hashem, since Jewish law obligates us to give tzedakah. The way they thought and lived was all wrong and Hashem knew that they must be destroyed.

YEARNING FOR MITZVOT

TAMAR BRODY ('21)

This week's parsha begins with Hashem appearing to Avraham, but it omits any discussion of a reason for his visit. The parsha instead continues and discusses the three men/angels who came to give Avraham three messages.

יָרָא אֱלֹהֵי ה' בְּאֵלְנֵי מַמְרֵא וְהוּא יָשָׁב פְּתַח-
הָאֹהֶל, כְּחֹם הַיּוֹם. וַיִּשָּׂא עֵינָיו, וַיִּרְא, וְהִנֵּה שְׁלֹשָׁה
אָנָשִׁים, נֹצְבִים עָלָיו; וַיִּרָא, וַיֵּרָץ לְקִרְאתָם מִפֶּתַח
הָאֹהֶל, וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ, אַרְצָה

“And Hashem appeared to him by the valleys of Mamre; he was sitting at the entrance of the tent as the day grew hot. Looking up, he saw three men standing near him. As soon as he saw them, he ran from the entrance of the tent to greet them and bowed to the ground” (Bereishit 18:1-2).

Many commentaries are puzzled by this opening pasuk and try to explain what occurred during Hashem’s conversation with Avraham. Rashi explains that Hashem came to “visit the sick” because it was the third day after Avraham’s brit milah. He claims that Hashem made it very hot so no guests would travel to Avraham, which would enable him to recover. However, after Hashem saw how sad Avraham was that he could not fulfill the mitzvah of **הכנסת אורחים**, taking care of guests, He sent Avraham three messengers to take care of. Not only does this explanation teach us the importance of visiting the sick, but it also teaches us the mitzvah of inviting guests.

Rashbam offers a different opinion on why it is written this way. He argues that these pesukim are a title to the story that takes place. He explains that when the pasuk says “and Hashem appeared to him,” Hashem visited Avraham by bringing three angels disguised as men. This implies that Hashem’s appearance to Avraham really means that He sent these three messengers.

Another explanation suggests that there were two separate visits to Avraham: one visit from Hashem and the other from the messengers. Hashem went to talk to Avraham, Avraham saw guests in the distance and excitedly ran to invite them in, thus ending his conversation with Hashem. While this action may seem disrespectful, this conversation was merely an enjoyable reward Avraham received for getting circumcised at the end of the last week’s parsha.

The sages explain that all practical good deeds take precedence over any abstract spiritual enjoyment, so Avraham was actually correct and righteous in rushing out to welcome these wanderers who needed food and water, even though he shortened his conversation with Hashem. This teaches us the great value of **הכנסת אורחים**, as well as the importance of mitzvot.



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