

*Mazal tov to Ayelet & Aaron Leibtag & to the extended Feinberg family on the birth of a baby boy*

**Jerusalem Post :: Friday, November 6, 2009**  
**HOSPITALITY :: Rabbi Berel Wein**

Home hospitality has been a staple of Jewish life and tradition since the first Jewish home – the tent of Avraham and Sarah. It is mentioned as being one of the values that if fulfilled grants one reward in this world and the merit of the good deed remains a factor in the World-to-Come as well. Not only was hospitality an established part of Jewish personal and family life but Jewish communities always had a communal, hostel type room and board for wayfarers that wandered into their villages and towns.

In Jewish legend, the prophet Elijah often appears to us as a wayfarer seeking lodging for a night or a hot meal, thereby testing the existence of the vitality of this tradition inherited by Jews from Avraham and Sarah. The Torah allows for the promise of the miraculous birth of Yitzchak to be associated with the hospitality practiced in the home of Avraham and Sarah. It is almost as though the merit of their magnanimous trait allows for this miraculous event of Jewish continuity and eternity to occur.

Throughout the ages the open door to strangers has been a facet of Jewish life. I remember the home of my grandparents in Chicago where the door was never locked so that in the event that a visitor would arrive when they were not home or were asleep and needed a place to rest, he could come right into the house! In our current modern, democratic, progressive society such behavior is unheard of and in fact is dangerous and certainly not advisable. Such is the price of progress.

All of us are aware that not all guests entering our home are equal. Again, Jewish legend portrays Elijah as being dirty, unkempt and of little notoriety or reputation when he comes to visit. We all are happy to receive people of nobility and fame, of impeccable manners and stylish dress into our homes and to our table. But it is the unkempt if not even unsavory guest that causes us problems.

I remember that as a rabbi in Miami Beach there was an alcoholic, strange scholar who constantly visited our home regularly every winter. Our children were terrified of him to the extent that they ran to their rooms weeping when he entered the house. I had to make arrangements for him to eat and sleep at a local kosher hotel and not allow him into our home any longer. I was conflicted in so doing – maybe he was the prophet Elijah – but the welfare and serenity of my children took precedence.

Oftentimes homes that are overly hospitable to others have children who are resentful of the guests and of their parents. Judaism is a faith of balance and sophistication, common sense and practicality. One's own family need not be sacrificed on the altar of extremes of hospitality. Children should be trained to adopt and value the concept of home hospitality but they should not be tyrannized by it.

The great woman of Shunam was granted miracles – the birth and later revival of her son – because of her hospitality towards the prophet Elisha. Throughout Jewish literature and legend the value of being hospitable to others is emphasized and stressed. Agnon has a great piece of literature about “one who came to sleep over the night.” Naturally the “night” turned out to be a long visit. “The Man Who Came to Dinner” is one of the classic stories of English literature, drama and cinema. In it the guest stays interminably and on his own volition takes over the entire household including the raising of the children.

How and when to tell a guest that the visit is over, is one of the great ticklish problems in human relationships. The burden of hospitality usually falls on the woman of the house. The husband should be wary of being too great a sport of hospitality on his wife's back. The rabbis of the Talmud shrewdly observed that many times the woman of the house is less than enthusiastic about having guests in her home and at her table. All of these

factors have to be taken into account when considering the limits of hospitality in one's home. Even our mother Sarah had her limits.

The torah does not intend that any of its values cause pain or familial strife. Thus again good common sense is necessary on the part of all- guests and hosts alike – in this important and holy matter of hospitality. Shabat shalom.

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### Weekly Parsha :: VAYERA :: Rabbi Berel Wein

God appears to Avraham in the opening verse of this week's parsha. How does God appear to him? The rabbis teach us that He appears to him in the form of a visitor there to cheer him in his illness and pain after the rite of circumcision. The Jewish value of visiting and cheering the sick stems from our imitation of this Godly virtue as first revealed to Avraham. In this instance, God reveals Himself to Avraham through three Bedouin Arabs who are apparently searching for a place to rest, eat and drink.

The apparent Arabs are angels and messengers of God. It is one of the great attributes of the house of Avraham and Sarah that visitors can enter their home as Arab desert dwellers and leave as angels. It is these wayfarers that deliver to Avraham and Sarah the message of continuity and eternity of Jewish life. Sarah will give birth to Yitzchak after decades of being a barren woman.

Earlier, God informed Avraham of this momentous news directly. Yet Sarah, the direct recipient of this blessing, He somehow chooses to inform in an indirect manner through the unknown strange visitors that arrive at her tent and that she hospitably feeds. There is a great insight in this chosen method of God, so to speak, in delivering the message to Sarah through seemingly human auspices. God often, if not constantly in our times, talks to us through seemingly human messengers. If we are able to listen carefully to what others say to us, oftentimes we will hear a divine message communicated to us through a human conduit.

I think that this also explains why Sarah was initially bemused by the words of the angel. She evidently thought that it was just a throw-away promise of a wandering Bedouin Arab and reacted accordingly. At the outset she did not hear the voice of God in the words of the angel that addressed her. Therefore she did not take those words seriously. God reprimands her for this attitude and asks “Why did Sarah not take these words seriously?”

Avraham who heard the tidings from God directly realized that the message was true and serious. Sarah had to believe what she thought was a human wish and therefore discounted it. But God demanded from her, as He does from each of us, that we pay proper attention to what other humans say to us. Perhaps in their statements and words we can realize that God Himself, so to speak, is talking to us.

God has many messengers and many ways of reaching us individually but we must be attuned to hear the messages that emanate from Heaven. They should never be allowed to fall on deaf or inattentive ears and minds. To a great extent this ability to listen to the otherwise unheard voice of Heaven is the measure of a Jew and of his ability to accomplish in life. Eventually Sarah hears and believes - and through this Yitzchak is born and Jewish continuity is assured and protected.

Shabat shalom.

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**Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Vayera**  
**For the week ending 7 November 2009 / 19 Heshvan 5770**  
**by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - [www.seasonsofthemoon.com](http://www.seasonsofthemoon.com)**  
**Overview**

Three days after performing brit mila on himself, Avraham is visited by G-d. When three angels appear in human form, Avraham rushes to show them hospitality by bringing them into his tent, despite this being the most

painful time after the operation. Sarah laughs when she hears from them that she will bear a son next year. G-d reveals to Avraham that He will destroy Sodom, and Avraham pleads for Sodom to be spared. G-d agrees that if there are fifty righteous people in Sodom He will not destroy it. Avraham "bargains" G-d down to ten righteous people. However, not even ten can be found. Lot, his wife and two daughters are rescued just before sulfur and fire rain down on Sodom and her sister cities. Lot's wife looks back and is turned into a pillar of salt. Lot's daughters fear that as a result of the destruction there will be no husbands for them. They decide to get their father drunk and through him to perpetuate the human race. From the elder daughter, Moav is born, and from the younger, Ammon. Avraham moves to Gerar where Avimelech abducts Sarah. After G-d appears to Avimelech in a dream, he releases Sarah and appeases Avraham. As promised, a son, Yitzchak, is born to Sarah and Avraham. On the eighth day after the birth, Avraham circumcises him as commanded. Avraham makes a feast the day Yitzchak is weaned. Sarah tells Avraham to banish Hagar and Hagar's son Yishmael because she sees in him signs of degeneracy. Avraham is distressed at the prospect of banishing his son, but G-d tells him to listen to whatever Sarah tells him to do. After nearly dying of thirst in the desert, Yishmael is rescued by an angel and G-d promises that he will be the progenitor of a mighty nation. Avimelech enters into an alliance with Avraham when he sees that G-d is with him. In a tenth and final test, G-d instructs Avraham to take Yitzchak, who is now 37, and to offer him as a sacrifice. Avraham does this, in spite of ostensibly aborting Jewish nationhood and contradicting his life-long preaching against human sacrifice. At the last moment, G-d sends an angel to stop Avraham. Because of Avraham's unquestioning obedience, G-d promises him that even if the Jewish People sin, they will never be completely dominated by their foes. The parsha ends with the genealogy and birth of Rivka.

### Insights

#### The Knowledge of the Night

##### "...and have not withheld your son..." (22:16)

It's difficult for us to experience what real night is anymore.

Nowadays, the electric light has vanquished the night, and night is more or less like a rather overcast day. We live in a twenty-four hour, round-the-clock world that never slumbers or sleeps.

But it wasn't always so. Not more than a couple of hundred years ago the day ended when the sun went down, and whatever artificial light existed was meager, expensive, and difficult to generate.

Imagine yourself in total darkness. A darkness where all outside stimuli have been removed; a darkness so deep that all you can perceive is your own existence. The existential truth that you are there. The sort of darkness where everything else is withheld from you.

The word for darkness in Hebrew is choshech, whose root is connected to the verb "to withhold" as it says in this week's Torah portion, "And you have not withheld your son..."

In real darkness we experience the withholding of every other existence save the sense of our own being.

"To relate in the morning Your kindness, and Your faith, in the night..." (Mizmor Shir L'Yom HaShabbat)

Faith is something that takes place in the night, in the absence of any other reality than the surety of our own existence.

Everything we know, all knowledge, can be discussed, examined, argued about, refuted, proved, dissected, and shared.

With one exception.

There is one piece of knowledge that is beyond all refutation or controversy, beyond doubt and beyond proof.

And that is the certainty of our own existence.

No one can tell us that we are not here, and we need no proof that we exist.

The truth of our own existence is irrefutable and intuitive, beyond all logic or discussion. It is the deepest form of knowledge, and deeper than knowledge itself.

It is the knowledge of the night; the certainty of our own existence when all outside stimuli have been removed.

The Rambam writes that in the last syllable of the Shema, we should be moser nefesh, literally we should "give over our souls" to G-d. This doesn't just mean that we are prepared to give up our lives rather than

betray our faith; it means that in the Shema, despite our total certainty that we exist — that we are 'one' — we submit that certainty to His Oneness. We surrender that irrefutable certainty of our own existence and declare that that we are no more than just one expression of what G-d wishes to reveal in His world.

This is the meaning of the verse "...and Your Faith, in the night."

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### Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

#### Parshas Vayera

##### And Sarah laughed at herself, saying, "After I have withered shall I again have delicate skin?"... "Is anything beyond Hashem?" (18:12,14)

Sarah Imeinu questioned her ability to return to youthfulness. The response was simple: "Is anything beyond Hashem?" If it is Hashem's will, it will happen, regardless of the apparent "laws" of nature. The Chafetz Chaim, zl, remarked that we, too, the surviving remnants of over two thousand years of exile, question whether our people will ever experience rebirth and rejuvenation as a vibrant nation once again. We have suffered so much, sustaining the greatest calamities to befall human civilization. Dare we hope? Can we possibly return to our past glory? The answer, claims the Chafetz Chaim, lies in the words, Hayipalei mei Hashem davar, "Is there anything beyond Hashem?" The Torah uses the word davar, anything, specifically to teach us that shum davar, absolutely nothing, is impossible for Hashem. The Chafetz Chaim exhorts us to continue believing that everything for which we pray can and will occur at the time that Hashem deems it appropriate.

Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, extends this idea to all areas in which people have been ready to throw up their hands in frustration, sadly giving up, accepting that nothing can change a given situation. He feels that Sarah's declaration, Acharei belosi haysah li ednah, "After I have withered, will I again have delicate skin?" applies to all situations in which a favorable outcome appears unlikely. One topic that seems to be coming to the fore, receiving its rightful and significant attention, is the serious problem concerning boys and girls from fine, observant backgrounds who have been gravitating to the darker side of humanity and rejecting any effort to bring them back to a life of observance. Regrettably, after they have rebuffed every solicitation of help, parents and educators give up. They should not, but sometimes it is just too overwhelming to address, and the prospects of even minor success seem remote. Hayipalei mei Hashem davar, "Is anything beyond Hashem?" That should reflect the attitude, as prayer and continued attempts at spiritual conciliation will ultimately invoke Hashem's favorable response.

Rav Zilberstein relates a powerful story which teaches us a dual lesson concerning hope and chinuch, education. A middle-aged mother brought her son to the Baba Sali, zl, for help. Perhaps, the blessing of the tzaddik, righteous person, would have a positive effect on her long-haired, unkempt, unruly son. Her son had long stopped listening to her. Now, he was constantly abusive and derisive. While his mother understood that the only person her son hated was himself, the self-loathing had reached a point at which he no longer respected anything Jewish.

The mother figured that the revered Baba Sali would chastise her son and present to him the serious fate in store for one who transgresses the Torah, but he did not. Instead, he began to cry. The weeping continued for a few minutes, at times uncontrollable and bitter. Finally, the Baba Sali stopped, looked at the boy, and said, "If my mother would still be alive, I would carry her upon my shoulders!" A miracle occurred. As soon as the sage uttered these words, the boy's face softened. No more look of derision, no animus, no bitterness, just remorse, and the tears began to flow. The boy wept as the tzaddik wept, until the boy declared that he had been foolish. Could he come back to a life of observance? The answer the Baba Sali gave is obvious.

We learn a lesson in chinuch. This boy must have heard plenty of rebuke and much mussar day in and day out, but all to no avail. Why? Because it was probably improperly doled out. When one makes a number of attempts to open a door and does not succeed, he tries another key. The Baba Sali tried another key: love. He connected with the boy by showing that he

cared. His tearful declaration, "If my mother would be alive I would carry her upon my shoulders," taught the boy the importance of a mother, and the special care one should provide for her. His words struck home, and a life once lost, returned. "Hayipalei mei Hashem davar?"

**Avraham arose early in the morning to the place where he had stood before Hashem. (19:27)**

In the Talmud Berachos, 6b, this pasuk is used as a source for an interesting halachah. "Anyone who sets himself a makom kavua, fixed place, in which to pray, will have the G-d of Avraham in his aid. Furthermore, when he dies, he will be eulogized thus: 'Alas for the humble one, alas for the pious one, a disciple of Avraham Avinu.'" This pasuk indicates that Avraham "stood," which is interpreted as "prayed," in the fixed place which he had used before. The question that confronts us is simple: What connection can there possibly be between picking a fixed place and the character trait of humility?

In order to explain Chazal, Horav Meir Bergman, Shlita, cites a Midrash that gives us a perspective on the disciples of Avraham Avinu. The Mishnah in Pirkei Avos 5:19 teaches that the disciples of Avraham possess the following three positive character traits: a kindly eye, a humble temperament, and a subdued spirit, while Bilaam's disciples manifest a grudging eye, a haughty temperament, and an uncontrolled spirit. If their disciples display opposite characteristics, it stands to reason that Avraham and Bilaam were also opposites. We learn this from their individual behavior in two parallel situations.

When Balak engaged Bilaam to curse the Jewish people, they went from place to place building altars and offering sacrifices, all to no avail. Each time that Balak did not experience success, he suggested that they try a different place. Perhaps another place would effect a better response to their cause. Three times they went, and three times they were stymied. Each time, Balak attributed their failure to the place. Bilaam knew the truth. The place was not the problem. He was the problem. Thus, he continued underscoring the place, rather than focusing on the mission, which did not have Hashem's approval. Instead of acknowledging that his request was going unfulfilled because his personal behavior was lacking, he blamed the place. His arrogance did not permit him to see the true cause of his failure.

Avraham, however, rendered long entreaties on behalf of the people of Sodom. Finally, he was down to ten righteous men, but Hashem could not find even ten righteous men in this wicked city. Although Avraham's request was not granted, he arose early the next morning, returned to the place where he had prayed the previous day and began over again. He did not go elsewhere. He did not convince himself that his failure was due to the place at which he prayed. No, his sole thought was that he failed because he had not prayed hard enough and with great enough fervor. It was his fault - not that of the place. His humility would not allow him to blame anyone, or anything, other than himself.

This conceptualizes the contrast between Avraham and the wicked Bilaam. Avraham returned to the same site, because he blamed his failure on himself. Bilaam knew the truth. He was acutely aware that he was at fault. Yet, he blamed the place for his failure. This is why someone who chooses to pray in one particular place - and does not alter his position - indicates that he is humble and pious, a disciple of Avraham. He acknowledges that the success or failure of his prayers has been dependent on his own deeds - not the place in which he prayed. Is there a better demonstration of humility than this?

**Avraham journeyed from there to the region of the south and settled between Kadesh and Shur, and he sojourned in Gerar. (20:1)**

The first Jew seems to have wandered considerably. We first see him as he isolated himself and his household from relationship with towns. He, therefore, chose to reside in the inhospitable region of the south as his earliest place of settlement. Gradually, he entered back into humanity into the region of cities, finally making his home in a most friendly and highly respected position, maintaining an amicable relationship with his allies Aver, Eshkol and Mamre. In his declining years, we see that he moved once again to the south, settling between Kadesh and Shur, in what was the loneliest part of the least visited region, near the desert of Shur. He seems to have moved once again into isolation. At the same time, he did appear to

seek some connection with city life by stopping temporarily in Gerar, capitol of the Philistines. What was behind Avraham Avinu's latest venture into seclusion?

Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, asserts that the approaching expectation of the birth of Yitzchak catalyzed Avraham and Sarah's decision to select this peculiar site as their new place of residence. A "Yitzchak" should grow up in isolation, away from the pernicious influence of a pagan society which was marked by a bankrupt set of moral codes. Such isolation, however, in which the young child never comes into contact with other people, other ideas, other perspectives, people living different lives with different goals and objectives, comprises an equally dangerous fault in education.

Rav Hirsch explains the above assertion - a powerful statement from an individual who was a Torah pedagogue at a time when the Jewish world was falling prey to the effect of external, secular influences. He explains that a young man who has never been privy to any other way of life than that of his parents - who has never learned to value, respect, and remain steadfast in his commitment to that way of life - who is unaware of its moral contrast to others, certainly is in danger of falling victim to strange influences as soon as he confronts them. It is like shutting all of the windows and not allowing fresh air to enter the home. Such a person is certain to catch a cold the first time he goes out. He simply is not used to the "air."

The son of Avraham, the future Patriarch, the one who was to continue the Abrahamatic legacy, transmitting it to the next generation, should from time to time leave his pristine world and enter into the world that does not adhere to the Abrahamatic mission. Yitzchak needed to learn what there is to oppose in their world, to strengthen himself through his practice of Torah and mitzvos in a world that is antithetical to a life of the spirit, the way of life espoused by Avraham. Thus, he would be able to maintain fidelity to his mission. It is for this reason that Avraham chose a city that was the residence of a Philistine prince. Apparently, the Philistines had not plummeted into the abyss of depravity in the same way as their Emorite neighbors. Thus, they were not included in the destruction.

**Sarah saw the son of Hagar, the Egyptian...mocking. So she said to Avraham, "Drive out this slave woman with her son." (21:9, 10)**

Rabbeinu Avraham ben HaRambam makes a remarkable statement in his explanation of Sarah Imeinu's complaint concerning Hagar and Yishmael. He says that Sarah noticed Yishmael's mockery, his use of profanity, and the lack of purpose which is common among young people, thus, she feared that if Yitzchak would fraternize with Yishmael, he, too, would waste his precious time, when, in fact, he should be devoting himself totally to seeking and attaining perfection. This is incredible! It seems that the fact that Yishmael transgressed the three cardinal sins of adultery, idol worship and murder did not bother Sarah as much as his wasting time, which prevented him from achieving sheleimus, spiritual perfection.

Horav Moshe Shmuel Shapiro, zl, gives an insightful answer when he says that sinful behavior can be rectified through teshuvah, repentance; wasting time, cannot. Once it has been wasted, it is gone forever. Wasting one hour of time for someone destined to become the next Patriarch is an unpardonable sin.

The sons of the Gaon, zl, m'Vilna write - in their preface to his commentary to Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim - that their father would often speak about the importance of time. He would chastise his students to treasure every moment and value its potential. Furthermore, every moment should be a quality moment, making every moment count - not simply counting every moment.

When Horav Elchanan Wasserman, zl, returned to Baranowitz from Warsaw, he was queried concerning the greatest impression he had while visiting this preeminent Polish city. Rav Elchanan replied that it was the Gerrer Rebbe, zl that made the greatest impact on him. Here was a man who had regularly designated sedarim, study sessions, that lasted for only five minutes! So important was time to him that five minutes constituted an entire seder! It was a lifetime. We, on the other hand, allow hours - and even days - to pass without giving it a second thought.

Rav Moshe Shmuel asserts that the Gaon's urgency regarding time was not connected to the mitzvah of limud haTorah, Torah study. Bitul Torah, wasting time, when one should, or could be, studying Torah, is a grave sin,

which constitutes *dvar Hashem bazah*, denigrating the word of G-d. The Gaon's urgency concerning time was not because wasting time would limit his ability to earn the kesser, crown of Torah. These are both significant reasons for not wasting time, but they do not explain what the Gaon was cautioning his students about. He was referring to *sheleimus*, perfection. We are each individually allocated a definitive amount of time on this world, during which we are to achieve *sheleimus*. If even one moment is squandered, or even misapplied, it is forever lost, and the individual is no longer able to achieve the *sheleimus* that is expected of him.

The following episode is one which I am certain will not sit well with some people, but that is only due to a lack of understanding of the value of Torah study, what it means to be a ben Torah, and the value of time. We all have priorities in life. For some people, it "just happens" to be studying Torah! Rav Elchanan Wasserman was the *chavrusah* of Horav Yosef Kahaneman, *zl*, popularly known as the *Ponevezer Rav*, in the *Kollel Kodoshim*, in *Radin*, under the aegis of the *Chafetz Chaim*. Understandably, such a *kollel* was all about one thing - learning Torah. One day, Rav Elchanan received a telegram notifying him of the birth of his son. He stopped learning for a moment, recited the appropriate *brachah*, blessing, and returned to the *Gemorah*. As the eighth day approached, Rav Elchanan approached the *Chafetz Chaim* to inform him that he was leaving for the *Bris* of his son. The sage looked at him and asked, "Are you a *mohel*, ritual circumciser?" Rav Elchanan replied in the negative. "If you are not a *mohel*, why are you going? Why are you interrupting your Torah study?" the *Chafetz Chaim* asked. He then added that he should wire his family and ask if they acquiesced to his decision to remain in *Radin* and not attend the *Bris* of his own son. I do not know if the *Chafetz Chaim* would have responded in a similar manner to anyone else. But, Rav Elchanan was destined to become the leader of European Jewry.

We now have some idea of the *Chafetz Chaim's* perception of time. Let us go a bit further in contemplating the *Chafetz Chaim's* perspective on time. Another time, during the *chavrusaschaft* of Rav Elchanan and the *Ponevezer Rav*, they came across a question for which they needed access to a certain *sefer*. They remembered that in his *Shaarei Tzion* commentary of the *Mishnah Berurah*, the *Chafetz Chaim* cites this *sefer*. Clearly, he must have the *sefer* in his library. They would go to the *Chafetz Chaim's* house and ask to borrow the *sefer*, which they did, and asked to see the *sefer*. Their *rebbe* replied that he did not own the *sefer*. When he needed it, he had borrowed it from someone else who owned it. Afterwards, the *Chafetz Chaim* stared for a few moments at his bookcase and sighed. Rav Elchanan immediately asked, "Rebbe, what is wrong?" The *Chafetz Chaim* answered, "When I stare at the bookcase, I begin to wonder how many of these *sefarim* I really need. After all, *sefarim* cost money and money is time. If I do not really need something, and I spend money to acquire it, then I waste precious time." Rav Elchanan interjected that the *Chafetz Chaim* only possessed about thirty or forty *sefarim*, a meager outlay of money, but sufficient enough, that if he felt there was no absolute need for them, it represented a demand on his time which he was not willing to sacrifice.

The secular world screams that one should not waste time because "time is money." We, however, view money as time. Every penny that a person possesses represents a segment of time which he expended. Money should not be squandered, since we have just so much time.

I recently came across a "timely" story which conveys the importance of time. Rav Lipa Silverman, *zl*, was a preeminent *mechanech*, Torah educator in *Eretz Yisrael*. He would give lengthy discourses to students, as well as to parents, about the importance of guarding every minute. Time is a part of one's *avodas ha'kodesh*, service to the Almighty. One who arrives on time, whether it be to *shul* or to the *bais ha'medrash* to study, has the "time" to daven properly, or to study without being rushed. Any endeavor carried out in a timely fashion is performed more fully.

Rav Lipa would often emphasize that timeliness is not only important for the young student, it is equally important for the parents. He would note that in one of *Yerushalayim's* many observant neighborhoods, two families lived in the same building, with apartments facing each other. They were members of the same *shul*, and their children attended the same school. Both fathers were *talmidei chachamim*, Torah scholars, and both mothers

were educated in the finest schools and maintained the highest level of personal *tznius*, modesty in dress. There was one major difference between the families: their children. One family merited tremendous *nachas*, satisfaction and pleasure from their children, their sons all becoming erudite, knowledgeable Torah scholars, with their sons-in-law likewise carrying the mantle of *talmid chacham*. Their days and nights were devoted to Torah study, and their families demonstrated that they were the products of a home where *chinuch*, Torah education, reigned paramount. The other family, lamentably, did not fare as well. Their children began to stray at a young age and, regrettably, never returned to the fold, going from one incident to another, until they completely rejected the Torah Judaism in which they were raised.

Rav Lipa asked, "Wherein lay the difference between the families? Why did one enjoy such positive success, and why did the other suffer such dismal failure?" He explained that in one house, one could hear the same request repeated daily, "Will one of you (children) go to the grocery and buy some bread and milk (or whatever the mother needed that day)? It will not take but a few minutes." "But, *Ima*, I will be late for school," the child would usually reply. The mother would respond, "Do not worry. It will take but a few moments."

True, it was but a few moments, but it sent the wrong message to the children: "Torah study may be delayed for a few moments, because milk and bread take precedence." A child growing up in such a home receives a distorted perspective of their parents' value system. It appears as if Torah study is second, behind whatever is needed at the moment. For a child to value Torah, he must learn by example of its significance. Sadly, these children learned that a "few moments" spent for bread and milk took priority over Torah study.

**G-d tested Avraham and said to him, "Avraham," and he replied, "Here I am..." "Please take your son...bring him up there as an offering..." So Avraham woke up early in the morning... and went to the place of which G-d had spoken to him. (22:1, 2, 3)**

Avraham *Avinu* must have been filled with questions. Everything about Hashem's command was in direct contradiction to everything he had been led to believe. Since when does Hashem approve - even demand - human sacrifice? How does He ask his elderly, hand-picked progenitor of the Jewish nation to sacrifice his only son? True, it was a test, but where were Avraham's questions? Why did he simply not ask for some form of explanation? Surely that would not undermine his successful emergence from the test. Instead, Avraham woke up early in the morning, enthusiastic and prepared to go to *Har HaMoriah*. No questions, no doubts, only silence, total acceptance. Why?

I think that undoubtedly a multitude of questions coursed through Avraham's mind, but the questions never came to the fore, because his attitude defined *emunah*, faith: no questions; unequivocal acceptance; complete trust that Hashem has a plan; He knows what He is doing. This is the underlying meaning of *Hineni* - here I am. Avraham was prepared to accept whatever Hashem sent his way - without question.

Hashem *Yisborach* is our Healer, as it says in *Shemos* 15:26, *Ani Hashem rofecha*, "I am Hashem, your Healer." When a physician prescribes certain medicines for his patient he is not questioned. This is his specialty, for which he went to school for many years. The patient believes that his doctor knows what he is doing. That is why he is the doctor and I am the patient. Likewise, we trust Hashem without question. We accept His decrees as the Healer Who knows what He is doing. The father of the previous *Belzer Rebbe*, *zl*, went out of his way during the *Seder* on *Pesach* night to do the unusual, so that his son would ask, "Why is this night different from all other nights?" No matter what he did, as strange as it seemed, his son, who would one day be the spiritual mentor and leader of thousands, did not ask a single question. At the end of the *Seder*, his father, quite perturbed, queried him concerning his lack of questioning. "After all," his father said, "you saw me act in a strange manner, unlike any other time of the year."

The young boy, who was clearly much wiser than his age seemed to indicate, replied, "Was it not you who reiterated to me a number of times that one does not ask questions of a father? Whatever father does is good

and to be accepted, regardless of how strange or unusual it might appear. One trusts his father."

The lesson is clear. Hashem is our compassionate Father to Whom we turn through thick and thin. We must trust Him, even when what we observe seems difficult to accept.

#### **Va'ani Tefillah**

#### **Ha'sam gevuleich shalom, cheilav chittim yasbiech.**

#### **He Who makes your borders peaceful, He will satiate you with the best of wheat.**

We will live in peace and prosperity, without fear from within or from without. In the Talmud Bava Metzia 59a, Chazal say: "A person should always be careful to have adequate grain in his house, for quarrels are most commonly found in a person's home on account of grain." Rav Papa adds: "This reflects what people say, 'When the barley in the container is finished, the sounds of quarrel begin in the house.'" What is Rav Papa adding to the statement of the previous Tanna? The Chasam Sofer, zl, explains that every person has limits to his wisdom. At times, regardless of how astute he may be, the challenge is too much to overcome, and he acts in a very "unwise" manner. For some, it is jealousy which brings out their worst. Others have issues with money or honor. They confront the challenge, and regrettably fall prey to their base instincts, totally forgetting their sense of wisdom and discipline. Thus, if one feels that following his wisdom will lead to discord, he sets his limit, feeling that he would rather be considered a fool than involve himself in a machlokes, dispute.

The pasuk is now understood homiletically. "He who sets peace as the border (to his wisdom)" will be rewarded to be "satiated with the best of wheat." Rav Papa is adding that usually when there is no parnassah, livelihood, it leads to discord in the home. The tzadik is blessed, so that not only will he not be at a loss, he will even be sustained from the best of the wheat.

Dedicated in loving memory of our dear father and grandfather Arthur I. Genshaft Yitzchok ben Yisrael z"l niftar 18 Cheshvan 5739 by his family Neil and Marie Genshaft Isaac and Naomi

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#### **Rabbi Yissocher Frand on Parshas Vayeira**

#### **Analysis of Avraham's Hospitality: Honor Them and Yet Suspect Them**

At the beginning of Parshas Vayeira, the Torah introduces us to the concept of Hachnasas Orchim [hospitality] by describing how anxious Avraham is to serve guests and how graciously he in fact serves them.

Avraham had 3 guests, total strangers, who he had never seen before in his life. He ran to the cattle, and as our Rabbis infer, he slaughtered 3 animals for 3 people - so that each guest would be able to have his own tongue (apparently a great delicacy). In truth the size of one tongue from a single head of cattle is far more than enough to feed three people! In fact, it is virtually impossible for one person to finish a whole tongue in a single sitting! Why then did Avraham do this? The answer is because this is how one makes a guest feel like he is the most important person in the world. One of the main facets of hospitality is to honor one's guest (not just to provide his bare necessities for food and shelter).

Avraham used tremendous quantities in virtually everything that he prepared for his guests. If the guests would have consumed even a significant fraction of the amount of bread provided, they would not have had any room left for the tongue.

There is one area, however, where Avraham does not go "overboard" in providing for the guests. Regarding water, he suggests "Let a little bit of water be taken" [Bereshis 18:4]. Why?

In fact, the Talmud [Bava Metzia 86b] infers that Avraham did not fetch the water himself, but dispatched others to do that. Again, why when it came to water did Avraham hold back - first in terms of not fetching it himself and second in terms of the quantity provided to the guests?

Rav Zalman Sorotzkin makes a simple calculation in Oznayim L'Torah. There is a principle in hospitality called "Honor him, but be suspicious of him" (kabdeihu, v'chaseihu). For this reason, Avraham washed off the feet of his guests, lest they worship the dust of their feet. Avraham did not

want to bring any idolatry into his tent. In other words, the water was not for drinking (kabdeihu) it was for bathing the feet of the guests, in fulfillment of the dictum that one must be suspicious of guests who are strangers (chaseihu).

Regarding the "chaseihu" aspect of hospitality, a good host wants to be as discreet as possible. You do not want to indicate that you are really suspicious of you guests; let it rather appear as though only your servants are concerned about the matter. Likewise, let the process of washing the feet be a short one, with a small amount of water in order to not humiliate or offend your guests. Avraham personally outdid himself in hospitality regarding the "kabdeihu" aspect; however "chaseihu" was minimized and handled by agents.

Rashi quotes this idea that the feet were washed because Avraham suspected the guests were Arabs who worshiped the dust of their feet. Rav Moshe Shapiro wonders about this kind of idolatry. Where have we ever heard of an Avoda Zara that involves worshiping the dust of the feet? We might comprehend idols involving gold and silver or the sun and the moon, but what is this crazy business of worshipping the dust of one's feet?

Rav Moshe Shapiro answers that the malachim appeared as Bnai Yishmael, descendants of Yishmael. Yishmael considers himself special because he has been invested through his name with the Name of G-d) "(k)El". [YisraEL and YishmaEL are the only two nations on the face of the earth that have this distinction]. Yishmael feels that whatever he does has Divine sanction. Even when they commit ghastly acts of terror, it is in the name of their G-d. This stems from the fact that the Name of the Almighty is embedded in the name of the nation. When people think they are acting in the name of G-d and anything they do is "holy," this is a formula for disaster.

There is an expression "I worship the ground that he walks on." This accolade shows great admiration for the person about whom it is said. The problem with Yishmael is that they worship the ground that they walk on. They are so sure of themselves, so sure that what they are doing is right that they worship the dust of their own feet. In other words they worship the ground that they themselves walk on. This is why Yishmael is so dangerous!

Transcribed by David Twersky Seattle, WA; Technical Assistance by David Hoffman, Baltimore, MD

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#### **Matzav.com**

#### **Parshas Vayeirah: Meting Justice - Meeting Kindness**

#### **By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky**

In what must be one of the greatest transitional scenes in the entire Biblical narrative, this week the Torah transposes us from the gracious home of Avraham in one scene and to the evil city of S'dom in the next. Avraham's home was one of kindness. It was a home where the master of the house would run to greet nomadic wanderers, and invite them into his abode only three days after a bris milah! It was a home in which Sora had opened a door in every direction, ensuring that there was an unrestricted invitation to any wayfarer, no matter which direction he or she came from.

The scene switches to S'dom, a city in which kindness and charity were unheard of. A city in which a damsel who committed the terrible crime of feeding a pauper, was smeared with honey and set out for the bees. Sdom was a city where visitors who had the audacity to ask for overnight lodging were treated to a special type of hospitality. They were placed in beds, and then, if they were too short for the beds, their limbs were tortuously stretched to fit the bed; if they were larger than the beds their limbs were chopped off.

How does the Torah make the transition from the world of kindness and charity to the world of evil? The Parsha tells us the story of three angels who visited Avraham. Each had a mission. Rashi tells us, "one to announce to Sarah the birth of a son, one to overthrow Sodom, and one to cure Abraham." You see, three were needed as one angel does not carry out two commissions. "Raphael," explains Rashi, "who healed Abraham went on to rescue Lot, as healing and saving may be one mission." And so the

scene moves from Avraham in Eilonai Mamrei to Lot in S'dom, where the angels posing again as wayfarers were graciously invited. They saved the hospitable Lot and destroyed the rest of the city.

I have a simple question. Why did the angel who was sent to destroy S'dom make a stop at Avraham's home? Two angels could have gone to Avraham's home, one to heal Avraham and the other to inform Sora of the good news. The third could have gone directly to S'dom and waited there for the others to catch up. Why make a detour to Avraham?

Traditionally, young children who start learning Talmud, are introduced to Tractate Bava Metzia in general and the chapter Eilu M'tziyos in particular. The tractate deals with property law and emphasizes respect for other people's possessions. Eilu M'tziyos stresses the laws of returning lost items and the responsibilities of a finder of those objects. Some wanted the boys to learn about the blessings, but Rav Moshe Feinstein insisted that the custom not be changed. He wanted to imbue the youngsters of the enormous responsibilities that they have to their fellow man. One cannot be a Jew only in shul where he can sway, pray, and recite blessings, but one must also be also be a Jew in the outside world, where the tests of honesty arise each day.

I heard the story of one of those youngsters, who found his way off the beaten yeshiva path. His college-years search for spirituality found him studying with a yogi in Bombay, India who railed against Western comforts and derided the culture of materialism. He preached peace, love, and harmony while decrying selfishness and greed. The young man was enamored with his master's vociferous objections to Western society, until he was together with him on a Bombay street. A wallet lay on the ground. There was cash and credit cards sticking out from it. It was clearly owned by an American tourist. The Yogi picked it up and put it in his sarong. "But it may belong to someone," protested his young charge. "It is a gift from the gods," he answered, "heaven meant it for us . . . ." The young man's protests fell on deaf ears.

At that moment, the words of his Rabbi back in fifth grade rang in his ears. "These are the items that must be announced for return; any item with an identifying sign . . . ."

He was stirred by truth of his traditions, and the purity of his past. He left the Yogi and the wallet, and eventually returned to a Torah life.

It is easy to rail against others. It is easy to talk about loose morals and unethical behavior. It's even easy to destroy Sdom. But Hashem did not let the angels do just that. He told them all to them first visit Avraham. He wanted them to see what kindness really means. See an old man run to greet total strangers. See a 90-year-old woman knead dough to bake you fresh bread. Meet the man who will plead for mercy on behalf of S'dom. And then, and only then can you mete the punishment that they truly deserve. Because without studying the good, we cannot understand the true flaws of the bad. Without watching Abraham commit true kindness, we should not watch the inhabitants of Sdom get their due.

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**Rabbi Mordechai Willig**  
**The TorahWeb Foundation**  
**Disciples of Avraham Avinu**

I  
"Whoever has the following three traits is among the disciples of Avraham Avinu; and [whoever has] three different traits is among the disciples of the wicked Bilam. Those who have a good eye, a lowly spirit, and a meek soul are among the disciples of Avraham Avinu. Those who have an evil eye, an arrogant spirit, and an expansive soul are among the disciples of the wicked Bilam" (Avos 5:19).

Rabbeinu Yona notes the redundancy of the mishna. It could have said only, "Whoever has a good eye, a lowly spirit, and a meek soul is a disciple of Avraham Avinu." Why does it state, "Whoever has the following three traits is among the disciples of Avraham Avinu," and repeat, after listing the traits, "is among the disciples of Avraham Avinu?" The answer is that these three traits contain all the perfection needed to be Avraham Avinu's disciple. The shorter version would imply that these

three are necessary, but insufficient, conditions. In fact, these three character traits suffice.

The Rambam explains these three traits as follows: A good eye is "histapkus," managing with one's resources and not pursuing greater wealth with an evil eye. Avraham refused to take anything from the king of Sodom (Bereishis 14:22,23), while Bilam sought compensation for cursing Am Yisrael (Devarim 23:5).

A lowly spirit represents humility. Avraham Avinu said, "I am like dust and ashes" (Bereishis 18:27), whereas Bilam prided himself as one who hears the words of G-d (Bamidbar 24:4), indicating an arrogant spirit.

A meek soul is a person who exercises care and restraint. Avraham Avinu did not ogle his wife's beauty (Bereishis 12:11, B.B. 16a). He did not lust the consort of his concubine Hagar (21:11,18). Bilam's expansive soul was lustful, even for bestiality (Sanhedrin 105a), and led him to advise the daughters of Midian to seduce soldiers of Am Yisrael (Bamidbar 31:16).

## II

In focusing on the stellar character traits of Avraham Avinu, the mishna ignores what is arguably his greatest accomplishment. In a world that had succumbed to paganism, Avraham Avinu discovered Hashem and called out His Name (Bereishis 12:8, Rambam Avodah Zarah 1:3). This omission is especially perplexing in light of R. Yona's comment that the three traits listed comprise the entirety of the requirements to be a disciple of Avraham Avinu.

Apparently, the perfection of character inevitably leads to belief to Hashem. Avraham Avinu understood that the world, like an illuminated castle, must have a Creator and Director (Bereishis Rabba 39:1). Why was this fundamental truth ignored by all of his contemporaries?

"Bribes blind the eyes of the wise" (Devarim 16:19). Recognizing Hashem as the Creator and Director implies obedience of His law. If one's arrogance, lust, and pursuit of wealth are limited by Hashem and His law, one is blinded and does not recognize the Creator (see Kovetz Ma'marim by R. Elchanan Wasserman, 1963 ed., pp. 12-16).

Thus, Avraham was chosen by Hashem because of his good heart (Nechemiah 9:7,8), his exemplary selflessness, humility, and restraint. These traits are all that one needs to be Avraham Avinu's disciple. Belief in Hashem is but a result of character refinement and perfection.

Am Yisrael, Avraham Avinu's descendants, are known by three simanim. They are merciful, have shame, and perform kindness (Yevamos 79a). One who is humble is not self-centered and is merciful to others. Care and self-restraint in avoiding inappropriate lust are based on shame: "So that awe of Him shall be on your faces so that you shall not sin" (Shemos 20:17) – this is shame, modesty that protects from sin (Nedarim 20a). A person who is content with his portion, is not greedy, and does not take from others, is a giver who performs kindness.

## III

Modern society is filled with the pursuit of wealth, prominence, and gratification. We must be wary of the greed that is widely blamed for the collapse of the financial markets. We must avoid ostentation, the lethal combination of wealth, real or imagined, and arrogance. And in a shameless world, in which no one blushes anymore (see "Doesn't Anyone Blush Anymore?" by R. Manis Friedman, 1990), extreme care must be exercised to avoid sinful talk, voyeurism, and behavior.

Avraham was known as the Ivri (Bereishis 14:13). He was on one side of the river, and rest of the world was on the other (Bereishis Rabba 42:8). This is commonly understood theologically: Avraham believed in Hashem when the rest of the world believed in idols. However, the unique character perfection of Avraham is equally important, and in fact led to Avraham's theological leap.

"They mingled with the nations and learned their deeds" (Tehillim 106:35). Unfortunately, many Jews have assimilated, abandoning Torah practices and even beliefs. However, the believing and practicing community of Orthodox Jews is not immune to outside influence and must be vigilant to avoid learning the negative deeds and traits that prevail in the host society.

As we read the inspiring story of our founding father, we, his descendants, must become and remain his disciples as well.

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**Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twerski**  
**The TorahWeb Foundation**  
**Akeidah**

In our liturgy, we repeatedly refer to the akeidas Yitzchak as testimony to Avraham's absolute trust in Hashem, and we plead to arouse Hashem's mercy upon us by virtue of our ancestor's great merit.

Some commentaries raise the question, Avraham's great devotion to Hashem notwithstanding, there have been many other instances of great sacrifice and martyrdom in our history. After all, Hashem spared Yitzchak's life, but Channah watched her seven sons be killed because of their refusal to bow to an idol. In fact, the king was so moved by Channah's children's acceptance of martyrdom that he wished to spare the life of the seventh child. He threw down his ring and said to the child, "Just bend down to pick it up. You will not be worshipping the idol, but the people will think you complied and bowed to the idol, and that will allow me to spare your life." Channah told the child not to pick up the ring, and the child was killed. Does this not equal the akeidah? Yet, we do not invoke Channah's merit in our prayers.

Unfortunately, there were far too many instances of martyrdom in our history, but the merit of the akeidah goes beyond martyrdom. In addition, the episode of the akeidah testifies to the greatness of Avraham in other ways, which constitute a source of teaching for us. These are subtleties in the episode of the akeidah that are often overlooked.

The Torah relates that on the day after he received the awesome Divine command, "Avraham woke up early in the morning" (Breishis 22:3) to carry out the divine command. The Talmud cites this as a virtue of Avraham and as a teaching that those who are diligent to serve Hashem hasten to fulfill His mitzvos. But one subtlety is overlooked. If Avraham awoke in the morning, obviously he slept during the night! What father, knowing that he was to sacrifice his beloved child the next day could possibly sleep peacefully? At the very best, a father would be up at night, pacing the floor, wringing his hands and crying. But not Avraham. His trust in Hashem was so perfect that he took everything with equanimity. Everything that Hashem does is good. If Hashem wants me to have a son, that is good. If Hashem wants me not to have a son, that, too, is good. Avraham slept peacefully all night.

Another great virtue of Avraham is pointed out by Harav Chaim Shmuelevitz (Sichos Mussar 5731:1). For decades, Avraham had been denouncing idol worship. The idolatry most severely condemned in the Torah is the Molach, which was served by human sacrifice. Avraham vigorously condemned this practice, saying that it was unthinkable that G-d would ask for human sacrifice. Now, if he would carry out what he felt to be the Divine command to sacrifice Yitzchak, what will he say to the multitude whose practice of human sacrifice he had so vehemently condemned? He would have to say, "You were all right. Throughout my entire lifetime, I was wrong!" Few people can admit that the position which they espoused so vigorously and for so many decades was an error. The greatness of Avraham was that he was ready to do this.

We can see now why the akeidah is singled out as Avraham's greatest merit. It tells us much about the character of the father of our nation, whom we are to emulate.

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**Rav Kook List**  
**Rav Kook on the Torah Portion**  
**VaYeira: Hidden and Revealed Holiness**

**A Paradoxical Blessing**

After Avraham passed the test of the Akeidah, the Binding of Isaac, an angel called out to him:

"God states: I have sworn by My Essence, since you performed this act and did not withhold your only son, I will bless you greatly and increase your descendants like the stars of the sky and the sand on the seashore. Your descendants shall possess their enemies' gate. And all the nations of the world shall be blessed through your descendants." [Gen. 22:16-18]

This blessing appears to be self-contradictory. On the one hand, Abraham's descendants will be victorious over their enemies - "Your offspring shall possess their enemies' gate." On the other hand, his descendants will be valued and appreciated by the entire world - "All the nations shall be blessed through your descendants." What will be the lot of Abraham's children - hostility and strife from the nations, or love and respect?

Also: why are Abraham's descendants compared to both the stars and the sand?

**Two Realms**

In fact, twice an angel appeared to Abraham. The first angel appeared just as Abraham was about to offer up his son:

"Do not lay your hand on the boy. Do not do anything to him. For now I know that you fear God." [Gen. 22:12]

Why were there two messages from God?

We all live in two realms. There is our external world of action and deed; and there is our hidden inner life - our thoughts and desires. Often there lies a wide discrepancy between our outward actions and our inner thoughts.

The Akeidah occurred differently in these two realms. In the realm of actual deed, Abraham offered a ram on Mount Moriah. But in his inner thoughts and emotions, in his extraordinary love and devotion to God, Abraham had offered to God his own son. As the Midrash explains:

"As he performed each stage of offering [the ram], Abraham prayed: 'May it be Your will that this should be deemed as if it were being done to my son: as if my son were slaughtered, as if his blood were sprinkled, as if my son were flayed, as if he were burnt and reduced to ashes.'" [Rashi from Tan. Shelach 14]

The two calls from heaven, as well as the dual blessing, correspond to the two sides of the Akeidah - in deed and in thought, the actual and the potential, the revealed and the hidden.

The first call from heaven prevented Abraham from physically carrying out the Akeidah. "Do not lay your hand on the boy." This summons related to Abraham's inner state of holiness, fully revealed only to God. "For now I know that you fear God." Only God knew the true greatness of Abraham's inner soul. This level of hidden holiness could not be expressed in action - "Do not do anything."

After Abraham offered the ram in place of his son, a second angel appeared. Now Abraham's inner devotion had been revealed in the realm of deed. Now, the angel informed Abraham, his blessing was no longer limited to himself, to his own inner spiritual world, but extended to all future generations of his descendants. Abraham had succeeded in expressing his inner holiness in the physical realm. The angel emphasized that Abraham had realized his love for God in deed and action - 'since you performed this act.'

What is the meaning of this unusual oath, Bi Nishbati - "I have sworn by My Essence"? This short phrase refers to both the inner and revealed dimensions. God's Essence is, of course, the deepest, most profound secret. An oath, on the other hand, is a promise to take action, to act upon an inner decision. (The word 'oath' (shevu'ah) has the same Hebrew root as the word 'seven,' thus relating to the seven days of creation and the physical world.)

**Dual Blessing**

This dichotomy of the hidden and the revealed explains the dual blessing to Abraham. Why were Abraham's children likened to both the stars and the sand? They will reach for the stars - to attain their sublime inner aspirations of love for God. At the same time, they will also be like the sand, with a down-to-earth revealed holiness, expressed in practical mitzvot.

The destiny of Abraham's descendants among the nations also reflects this dual nature. In the beginning, the Jewish people appeared as yet another nation in the world, struggling against enemies and foes. Their inner sanctity was hidden and unrecognized. For this stage in history, the Jewish people required the Divine blessing of "possessing their enemies' gate."

But in the future, God's hidden light on Israel will be revealed. The nations will realize that this is no ordinary nation, but the revelation of God's will in humanity and the entire universe. The inner sanctity of Israel will then be apparent to all, and "All the nations of the world will be blessed through your descendants."

[Adapted from Olat Re'iyah vol. I, pp. 94-96]

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