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Parshas Vayeira: Rav Pam - Your Spouse Doesn't Want To Hear The Truth

Toward the beginning of the parsha, the visiting Malachim delivered the message from Hashem to Avraham: "I will surely return to you at this time next year, and behold Sarah your wife will have a son. Avraham and Sarah were old and that the manner of women had ceased to be with Sarah." [Bereshis 18:10-11] Then in the next pasuk, Sarah asks: "After I have withered I shall again have smooth skin? And my husband is an old man." In other words, Sarah wonders how is it possible for her to conceive, when she is already past her years of childbearing. In addition, her husband was an old man as well. However, when Hashem went back to Avraham and admonished Sarah for laughing, Hashem only mentioned her argument that she was old to Avraham. Hashem does not reveal to Avraham that Sarah had also doubted the news because "her husband was an old man." Rashi learns from this - based on Chazal - that one change the truth to preserve peace (between husband and wife).

Rav Pam asks the following question: Avraham Avinu was in fact 99 years old. Everyone knew that he was an old man. It was obvious to him that he was an old man. It would have not at all been news to Avraham that Sarah was surprised that she would conceive, because - among other reasons - her husband was old. Would Avraham really have been upset if he had heard the "full truth" from the Hashem?

Rav Pam explains that we see from here, that the whole world can recognize and tell a person that he is old, but he cannot hear that piece of news from his wife! The reverse is true as well. A woman can have gray hair. She can be a grandmother. But if her husband should tell her, "You know, you are getting up there in years." - it would hurt her immensely. Spouses are more sensitive to each other, and therefore care must be taken.

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PARASHAT VAYERA

SICHA OF HARAV YAAKOV MEDAN SHLIT"A

The Banishment of Hagar: Did Avraham and Sarah Sin?

Translated by Kaeren Fish

A challenge of faith The accounts of Hagar's expulsion (first by Sarah [Bereishit 16], and then, together with Yishmael, by Avraham [chapter 21]) raise moral questions which have accompanied us, from the time of Avraham until the present, in our relations with those claiming to be the descendants of Yishmael. Ramban (Bereishit 16:6) is the fiercest critic of Sarah, concerning whom the Torah records that "She afflicted [Hagar], and [Hagar] fled from her," and of Avraham, who permitted her to behave in this way: "Our matriarch sinned in this affliction, as did Avraham in permitting it. God heard [Hagar's] affliction and gave her a son who would be a wild man, afflicting the offspring of Avraham and Sarah with all manner of afflictions." Ramban finds a causal connection between the narrative here and the relations between Jews and Muslims in his time; in our times the connection would seem even more clearly apparent.

However, other commentators have viewed the story differently from the Ramban, such that we are faced with an exegetical question no less than a religious one. Turning our attention first to the religious problem, there is certainly no prohibition against discussing misdeeds of our patriarchs and matriarchs; indeed, there are many examples of Chazal and the commentators doing so. This discussion assumes that the patriarchs and matriarchs were mortals with normal human feelings and desires, facing inner challenges which they had to deal with, at all times, by exercising their free will. This assumption is true, and it is only on this basis that Chazal could demand, "Every person should say, 'When will my actions reach [the level of] the actions of my forefathers?'" For if the forefathers had been like heavenly angels, devoid of the basic desires so familiar to us, how could we ever hope to emulate them? At the same time, our discussion of their faults must take into account two reservations. 1.

We would expect, and rightly so, that the Torah would state – or, at the very least, hint to – its disapproval of a misdeed, since the essence of the Torah is guidance as to the proper path for a person to follow, and which path is worthy in God's eyes. An example is Avraham's sin in the Covenant between the Parts – a sin deduced by Chazal from the punishment decreed upon Avraham's descendants for four hundred years. In contrast, it is difficult to discuss a sin when the Torah seems to regard it with equanimity. Admittedly, in the case of Hagar's banishment, this does not represent a challenge to Ramban's view, since the angel does tell Hagar, "for God has heard your affliction," and this may well allude to improper behavior by Avraham and Sarah towards her. 2. An occasional misdeed by one of the forefathers is one thing, but if we detect numerous grave sins, then we must ask why God chose to reveal Himself to them. The verse, "You are not a God Who desires wickedness, nor shall evil dwell with You," demands that we proceed from the assumption that the patriarchs and matriarchs were righteous people of positive character, as well as people of great faith, even though they were not angels. Unjustified affliction of Hagar and expelling her to the wilderness, viewed not as an incidental act but as a way of life, cannot be reconciled with such a view. Therefore, even if we adopt the position of Ramban, who is most critical of Sarah's behavior here, we shall have to understand her act as a momentary lapse rather than as an ongoing sin. The expulsion of Hagar Other commentators have rejected Ramban's view of the act of expelling Hagar, and have adopted a more forgiving attitude towards Sarah. I shall follow this trend in proposing my interpretation. My points of disagreement with Ramban concern two verses: "When she saw that she had conceived, her mistress became despised in her eyes," and "Sarai afflicted her, and she fled from her." What situation is concealed behind the words, "Her mistress became despised in her eyes"? A story that I read as a boy, The Good Earth, by Pearl S. Buck, an American writer who lived for many years in China, is engraved in my memory. She describes a poor Chinese farmer of lowly standing who marries a woman of equally humble background,

homely, but devoted and resourceful. She helps him to the best of her ability with the difficult work in the fields, even when she is pregnant, and fights alongside him most conscientiously in their struggle to survive. They experience years of drought and hunger, the village is deserted, and the couple move with their children to an unfamiliar town, with no income and no home. The husband despairs and becomes feeble; his wife assumes the helm of the family and by virtue of her efforts and resourcefulness the family is delivered from its troubles. The couple returns to the village, rebuild their home and their farmstead, and grow prosperous. Once the husband is finally in a position to rest a little from his hard work by hiring laborers, he looks at his wife, whose face has been blackened and whose body has grown old from all the effort during the difficult years, and he feels that he deserves a younger, more beautiful wife. The now-wealthy farmer is inundated with offers, and a beautiful young concubine joins his household to entertain him in his free time. Slowly his wife is pushed aside and marginalized as the concubine comes to occupy her central position in the home. We glimpse a similar scenario between the lines of Malakhi's prophecy to the returnees from the exile, at the beginning of the Second Temple Period. The Jews have returned from Babylon with their wives, and it is likely that the long journey by foot, as well as the difficulty of unfamiliar surroundings, have done nothing to enhance the women's appearance. The new arrivals encounter the local women, daughters of the Shomronim and the other nations who had been imported by Assarchadon, King of Ashur, some two hundred years previously. They may have been younger and more beautiful, and the destruction of the Jewish family was about to commence. The last of the prophets, Malakhi, was called upon to address the situation and warn of the consequences. Malakhi voices objection not only to copulation with these foreign women, but also to the betrayal of the wife of one's youth who has accompanied her husband throughout the long journey. The hecklers who argue with him cite the example of Avraham and Hagar, but we don't believe for a moment that Avraham intended to replace Sarah, who had accompanied him from Ur Kasdim, with her young handmaid, Hagar. At the same time, our question is not what Avraham's intentions were, but rather what Hagar thought when she conceived Avraham's firstborn child, and what she decreed – in thought and in her behavior – for Sarai, her mistress. Perhaps she viewed Sarah in the same light as the heroine of *The Good Earth* – her face blackened, regarded by her husband as unsuitable for the life of pleasure which he now planned for himself. It was no problem now for Hagar to evade housework, claiming that the pregnancy made it impossible for her and that she need to protect Avraham's as-yet-unborn child. Perhaps she would now ask Sarah to carry out the work, and even to perform small personal favors for herself. Sarah, with her sharp perception, understood Hagar's true intentions, and presented her claims fully to Avraham. Avraham's good and respectful treatment of the handmaid-concubine, reflecting his kindness and respect towards every person, was interpreted by the handmaid as preferential treatment towards her in relation to Sarah, owing to her pregnancy. Hagar's return. It is possible that the covert conflict between Sarah and Hagar also raised another question. Ramban offers two interpretations of Sarah's intention in proposing intimacy between Avraham and Hagar. However, it is difficult to ignore the parallel between this episode and the Torah's description of Rachel and Leah giving over their handmaids to Yaakov in order that they too could bear him children. From Rachel's words, "that she may bear children upon my knees," it would seem that her proposal involved the handmaid's agreement that the sons who would be born to her from Yaakov would belong to her mistress, Rachel, and she would raise them. The names of the children also bear this out: "Rachel said, 'God has judged me [danani] and has also heard my voice, and has given me a son.' Therefore she called him Dan." (Bereishit 30:6) "Rachel said, 'With great wrestlings I have wrestled [niftalti] with my sister, and I have prevailed.' And she called him Naftali." (ibid. 8) Dan and Naftali were considered sons of Rachel, and she was proud of them, viewing them as a victory in her rivalry with Leah. This

would appear to be the reason why they are included among the tribes of Israel: the tribes need matriarchs as well as the patriarch Yaakov, and Bilha and Zilpa were not worthy of this status. Rather, Dan and Naftali are considered Rachel's adopted sons, just as Gad and Asher are considered the adopted children of Leah. The structure of the encampment of Israel by its tribes (Bamidbar 2) and at the gates of Jerusalem (Yechezkel 48) are further proof of this. It seems that Hagar at first agreed to this arrangement, but once she had conceived she felt a closeness to and possession of her fetus, and regretted her agreement. Indeed, it would appear that despite her original willingness, and despite her handmaid status, she had a right to change her mind; no one can take a child from his natural mother against her will. However, her change of mind had a price, and it had to be paid: she reverted to being a handmaid. We need not imagine Sarah's affliction of Hagar in the form of a whip. Suffice it that Sarah made a firm decision to allow Hagar no leniency in fulfilling her duties, despite her pregnancy. This does involve a certain cruelty and affliction, but considering that the alternative was to allow Hagar to imagine herself as Sarah's replacement as the principal woman in Avraham's household, we cannot be certain that Sarah was wrong in behaving in this way, nor that Avraham was wrong in permitting her to do so. Hagar fled to the fountain of water in the wilderness, on the way to Shur. From her dialogue with the angel it would seem that she did not feel any loss of dignity; as a handmaid from a young age she accepted this exile as her fate – but could not under any circumstances live with the possibility that since she had reverted to being a handmaid, the son born to her would also be a slave. She wanted to raise him free. Here, too, we might invoke the famous story of Uncle Tom's Cabin, describing a woman slave whose young son was destined to be sold to a different family. She kidnaps him and crosses a river, heading for the states where slavery is not practiced. Just before her death, exhausted by the crossing of the river, she expresses her satisfaction at having saved her son from slavery to mortal masters. In our text, the angel speaks to Hagar: "God's angel said to her: Return to your mistress and submit yourself to her hands... And God's angel said to her, Behold, you have conceived; you shall bear a son and you shall call his name Yishmael, since God has heard your affliction. And he shall be a wild man (pere adam); his hand shall be against everyone, and everyone's hand shall be against him, and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren." (16:9-12) The angel tells Hagar to return to her servitude even though God has heard her affliction. He promises that her aim will be fulfilled and that the son to be born to her will be free. If we adopt the modern understanding of the expression "pere adam," it is difficult to understand in what sense the angel is giving Hagar good news. But according to the original meaning and context of "pere," "pere adam" means a servant who goes free: "Who has set the wild ass (pere) free, or who has loosened the bonds of the untamed ass (arod), for which I have made the wilderness its home, and the salt land its dwelling? It scorns the tumult of the city and does not heed the shouts of the driver." (Iyov 39) At the same time, the angel insists that the son who will be born to Hagar must be born into Avraham's home; later on we find that he will also be circumcised, and he will forever remain a son of Avraham and will obtain a portion of the land which God has promised to Avraham from the "River of Egypt up to the Euphrates." To this end Hagar must return and submit herself once again to Sarah. Hagar accepts this, and returns to Sarah's tent, to wait... The expulsion of Yishmael. The second narrative that we shall discuss here is the expulsion of Yishmael, following the birth of Yitzchak. We are confronted with the image of Avraham sending off Hagar and Yishmael into the wilderness early in the morning with only some bread and a bottle of water; and the image of the bottle emptied and the child cast under a bush, while his mother weeps at a bowshot distance. These are not pleasant images, and they might paint Avraham and Sarah in a negative light in our imagination. But this is not the case; God Himself intervenes in this instance, and it is He Who commands Avraham to follow this course of action: "God said to Avraham, 'Let it not be wrong in your eyes

concerning the boy and concerning your handmaid; in all that Sarah says to you – listen to her” (21:12). Heaven forefend that God Himself should commit an injustice! Before addressing God’s role in the episode of Hagar and Yishmael, let us go back to the role of Sarah, while Avraham is still against the idea of the expulsion: “Sarah saw the son of Hagar, the Egyptian, whom she [Hagar] had borne to Avraham, mocking (metzachek). And she said to Avraham, ‘Send away this handmaid and her son, for the son of this handmaid shall not inherit with my son, with Yitzhak.’” (21:9)

What does the Torah mean when it describes Yishmael as “mocking”? According to the midrash, what we are supposed to understand from this is that Yishmael engaged in idolatry, forbidden sexual relations, and killing. On its simplest level, the term “metzachek” means to smile. But perhaps the smile here was crooked – as we shall see below. For fourteen years, Yishmael grew up in Avraham’s home as an only child and the single heir. Everyone had already given up hope of Sarah ever bearing a son for Avraham. For Yishmael, Yitzhak’s birth came as an unbearably heavy blow. Every first child is anguished by the birth of a younger sibling who is his rival for the exclusive attention to which he has become accustomed. However, from Yishmael’s point of view, his specific situation here was much worse: he now stands to lose not only his father’s exclusive attention, but also the huge inheritance that awaited him – as well as his status as a free man, as Avraham’s sole heir. All at once, Yishmael once again become a slave forever to the family and to the newborn infant. While everyone else is rejoicing, Sarah, with her sharp perception, sees Yishmael looking at Yitzhak. Behind his smile she reads his hostility and his intention to be rid of Yitzhak before he ever has a chance to grow up. It would seemingly be an easy task: a single moment of inattention of Sarah’s part and Yishmael could smother the baby with a pillow, leaving no trace of his action. The tragedy would be put down to “crib death,” and Yishmael’s status as sole heir in Avraham’s household would be restored. Sarah’s expression, “for the son of this handmaid shall not inherit with my son, with Yitzhak,” may also be interpreted as “shall not agree to inherit with” – and will do whatever he can in order to obtain the entire inheritance for himself. In any event, Sarah cannot permit Yishmael to remain in the home if she wishes to protect Yitzhak. Avraham does not suspect Yishmael of any such evil intentions, but God supports Sarah’s view. However, it would seem that God views the action that Avraham should take in a different light. What Sarah tells Avraham is “garesh” (cast out), while what Avraham actually does is “va-yeshalcha” (he sent her off). Both expressions also appear in the expulsion of Adam from the Garden of Eden, and there too each expression means something different. “Gerush” (casting out) means being thrown out of one’s home. “Shiluach” (sending off) means freeing from bonds. The same two expressions appear again in the context of divorce. Standing under the chuppa (marriage canopy) a husband draws his bride into his home, as it were; in divorce he casts her out of the home. Through kiddushin (betrothal) he bound his wife to himself; now he sends her off, removing the bonds, rendering her permissible and available to someone else. The act of sending off Hagar and Yishmael was at the same time the act of setting them free from the status of servitude. God demands this of Avraham as a continuation of the angel’s promise to Hagar on the way to Shur – that her son would be a “pere adam” – a slave who has been freed. One might still wonder at the cruelty of sending off a woman and her son into the barren wilderness – but at the same time we view the sending off of Bnei Yisrael into the barren wilderness of Sinai as redemption. At times of crisis, such as in Refidim, the people who had left Egypt indeed wallowed in self-pity for having set off into such an inhospitable place, instead of remaining enslaved in Egypt, in a land full of food and water. But they were wrong: the freedom to which they had emerged justified all the hardships of journeying through the wilderness. Still, one may argue, one cannot compare the situation of Yishmael to that of Bnei Yisrael, who enjoyed God’s constant assistance and protection throughout their journey. We may point out that God heard Yishmael’s voice, too. But what of Avraham’s behavior? He sent Hagar into the barren

wilderness without knowing of the miracle that would happen to her. From the text it would appear that Avraham sent Hagar off to the same place where she fled from Sarah years previously, to the fountain on the way to Shur. This was a well-known crossroads, with water and food to live on. It was for this reason that Hagar fled to there, intending to live there. Now, at least fourteen years later, Hagar reaches the same place but fails to locate the well, the fountain, and thus Yishmael comes close to death from thirst. God opens her eyes and she discovers the water. She is thereby able to continue living there until Yishmael grows up, and God is with him.

from **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <ryfrand@torah.org> reply-to ryfrand@torah.org, genesis@torah.org to ravfrand@torah.org date Thu, Oct 21, 2010 at 12:05 PM subject Rabbi Frand on Parshas Vayera Rabbi Yissocher Frand To sponsor an edition of the Rabbi Yissocher Frand e-mail list, click here

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The Tenth Test Validated The First Nine

The parsha of the Akeida is well known. Not only does it appear prominently at the end of this week’s parsha, and is part of the Torah reading on Rosh Hashana, some people have the custom to recite it daily.

Avraham is told "Kach Nah es bincha es yechidcha asher ahavta es Yitzhak" – please take your son, your only son, whom you love -- Yitzhak. The Gemara [Sanhedin 89b] comments on the expression "nah" [please]: This is comparable to a king who had to fight many wars to protect his kingdom. He had a mighty warrior in charge of his battles who was always successful in his military efforts. Apparently, this mighty warrior got older, peace reigned for many years and the warrior was in semi-retirement. Then another war loomed on the horizon. The king went back to his trusted warrior and asked "please do me a personal favor, come back and fight one more war for me, so people will not say 'the first battles mean nothing'. If you cannot win this last war for me, my whole reputation will be destroyed."

So too, G-d comes to Avraham and tells him "I have tested you with many tests and you have withstood all of them. But I need you to undergo just one more test so that it not be said that the first tests were insignificant."

How could anyone say after the 9 tests that Avraham already underwent that "the first tests were insignificant?"

Rav Yosef Grossman quotes Rav Schwab as giving the following answer to this question: People would say "Avraham, no matter how great you are and no matter how much you achieved in your lifetime, if you are not successful in passing the tradition over to your children then what came before is insignificant." Now G-d was giving a test to Avraham that would be a test not only of his own dedication, but also of the dedication of his 37-year-old son, Yitzhak. If Yitzhak would tell his father "Dad, I am not buying into this; this is not for me; this is your religion, not mine" then in effect, Avraham's valiant success in passing all his other spiritual tests would have been insignificant.

Avraham Avinu is not only about personal perfection. Avraham Avinu is about creating a legacy that he passes on to his children and his children's children. Avraham Avinu was not only successful in creating a religion but in passing it on to his offspring. Had he been unsuccessful in this last test, the value of his success in passing all of the previous test could indeed be questioned.

Rashi in Lech Lecha cites the idea that each letter in Yitzhak's name was symbolic. The Tzadee alludes to the fact that his mother was 90 years old when she bore him. The Ches refers to the fact that he was circumcised on the 8th day of his life. The Kuf symbolizes the fact that his father was 100

years old when he was born. Finally, the Yud symbolizes the fact that his father Avraham withstood ten tests.

Rav Yosef Grossman asks how the Yud referring to the ten tests of Avraham relates to Yitzchak. It seems to relate to Avraham, rather than to Yitzchak.

The answer is that Yitzchak validated all ten tests. If not for Yitzchak cooperating willingly at the Akeida, others could rightfully consider the first nine tests insignificant. Therefore, the Yud is an appropriate part of Yitzchak's name. He had a crucial role in confirming the validity of all of the previous tests that his father withstood.

This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Vayera are provided below: Tapes or a complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information.

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PARSHAT VA'YERA - the AKEYDA (and more)

In Part Two of this week's shiur, we present a six short 'mini-shiurim' that discuss the Akeyda and misc. topics in the Parasha.

PART I - A CONFLICT BETWEEN IDEALS In the story of the Akeyda (Breishit chapter 22), we find a conflict between two ideals. From the perspective of 'natural morality', there is probably nothing more detestable to man's natural instinct that killing his own son, even so his only son. On the other hand, from the perspective of man's relationship with God, there is nothing more compelling than the diligent fulfillment of a divine command. In an ideal world, these two ideals should never conflict, for how could God command man to perform an act that is immoral? However, in the real world, individuals often face situations where they are torn between his 'conscience' and his 'religion'. How should one act in such situations? One could suggest a resolution of this dilemma based on the special manner by which the Torah tells the story of the Akeyda (chapter 22). On the one hand, God ["b'shem Elokim"] commands Avraham to offer his only son Yitzchak. Avraham, a devout servant of God, diligently follows God's command, even though this must have been one of the most difficult moments of his life. In this manner, God tests Avraham's faith (see 22:1). However, it is impossible that God could truly make such a demand. Therefore, at the last minute, He sends a "malach" [b'shem Havaya/ see 22:11] to stop him. Was Avraham correct in his behavior? Should he have not questioned God's command, just as he had questioned God's decision to destroy Sodom? There is no easy answer to this question. In fact, hundreds of articles and commentaries have been written that deal with this question, and even though they are all based on the same narrative, many of them reach very different conclusion - and for a very simple reason! The story of the Akeyda does not provide us with enough details to arrive at a concrete conclusion. One could suggest that this Biblical ambiguity may be deliberate, for the Torah's intention may be that we do not resolve this conflict, rather we must ponder it. In fact, it is rather amazing how one very short but dramatic narrative (about ten psukim) has sparked hundreds of philosophical debates over centuries. [This is the beauty of the Bible.]

In other words, it is important that we are internally torn by this conflict, and make every effort to resolve it, while recognizing that ultimately a divine command could not be immoral. This conflict becomes more acute when we face a situation when is not so clear precisely what God's command is, and when it is not so clear what is considered moral or immoral. When those situations arise, not only must we ponder, we must

also pray that God send a "malach" to help guide us in the proper direction. =====

PART TWO - YIRAT ELOKIM & NATURAL MORALITY'

Undoubtedly, the climax of the Akeyda takes place in 22:12, when God's angel tells Avraham not to harm his child. However, this pasuk includes a very interesting phrase - "ki ya'rey Elokim ata...", which may relate directly to our above discussion. To explain how, let's first take a careful look at that pasuk: "And he [God'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" [See 22:12 / Note in the various English translations and commentaries the unclarity whether this "malach" is talking on behalf of himself or if it's a direct comment from God.]

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 God that Avraham was indeed a "ya'rey Elokim" [the middle clause]. The use of God'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, God had doubted if Avraham was a "ya'rey Elokim"; yet there doesn't seem to be any reason for this doubt. [Unless one explains that this test was due to God's anger to the covenant that Avraham had just made with Avimelech, see this amazing ('right wing') Rashbam on 22:1!] 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. God 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' (i.e. not to kill or steal etc. /see the last five of the Ten Commandments!) does not require a divine command. Rather it is God's expectation from mankind. [Why nonetheless God decided to include them in the Ten Commandments is a very interesting topic, but not for now. However, I do suggest that you note the conclusion of Rashbam's interpretation to Breishit 26:5 in this regard.]

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.] [Please review these before continuing.]

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' (see discussion in Part One, above). 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!' [As in Shmot 34:9 - "ki am keshe ofef hu", and Shmot 13:17 "ki karov hu" - see Ibn Ezra on that pasuk for other examples.] If so, then this pasuk would be emphasizing precisely the point that we discussed in Part One, i.e. - 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 [God'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! In reward, God now promises Avraham with an 'oath' (see 22:16) that he shall never break His covenant with them (even should Bnei Yisrael sin), as explained by Ramban and Radak on 22:16, and as we will now discuss in Part Three.

PART THREE - THE OATH At the conclusion of the Akeyda, God affirms His promise to Avraham Avinu one more time concerning the future of his offspring (see 22:15-19). Note however, that the when God first explains why He is making this oath in 22:16, He explains specifically because "lo chasachta et bincha" - that Avraham did not hold back his son - and NOT because he was a "yarey Elokim". This provides additional support to our discussion in Part Two (above). In this oath (see 22:16-19), we find the repetition of themes from Brit Bein ha'btarim such as "kochvei ha'shayamyim" and "yerusha", as well as a repetition of God's original blessing to Avraham from the beginning of Lech L'cha. It is interesting to note that this blessing relates (as does "brit bein ha'btarim") to our relationship with God as a Nation, and our future conquest of the land of Israel ("v'yirash zaracha et shaar oyvav" - your offspring will conquer the gates of its enemies/ see 22:17). It is specifically in this context that Bnei Yisrael will later face this moral conflict as discussed in Part I. However, the most special aspect of this blessing is the "shvuah" - the oath that God makes that He will indeed fulfill this promise. See Ramban & Radak on 22:16, noting their explanation how this oath takes God's commitment to His covenant one step higher. Now, no matter how unfaithful Bnei Yisrael may be in the future, even though God will have the right to punish them, He will never break His covenant with them and they will always remain His special nation. With this in mind, it is interesting to note that the story in Chumash that precedes the Akeyda also relates to a covenant and an oath (see 21:22-34). Recall how Avimelech approaches Avraham to enter into a covenant, while Avraham insists that Avimelech must remain honest in relation to the wells that his servants had stolen. At the conclusion of that agreement, as Avraham now gains the respect of the local sovereign power, we find once again how Avraham 'call out in God's Name'. Foreshadowing the time period of David and Shlomo, Avraham is now in a position where he can successfully represent God before the other nations of the world. That setting provides a significant backdrop for Avraham Avinu's ultimate test at the Akeyda.

==== MISC TOPICS - [Relating once again to Sdom vs. Avraham Avinu] **PART FOUR - YEDA & YTUD** In the shiur we sent out yesterday, we discussed the importance of 18:18-19, showing how God's

goal for the nation of Avraham would come true through the establishment of a society characterized by "tzedaka u'mishpat". Recall how that pasuk began with "ki y'DAATIV", which implies to KNOW, but the key word carried a deeper meaning throughout the entire narrative of Lot being saved from Sdom. [Note also the use of the word "rah" (and "tov") as well as "Idaat" in 19:7-9. This may (and should) point to a thematic connection between the events in Sdom and the story of Adam in Gan Eden where we find the "etz ha'DAAT TOV v'RAH. Note also how God is described by "shem Ha'vayah" in both stories.] In relation to the translation of the pasuk itself - "Ki YeDA'ATIV lema'an asher yetzaveh et banav... ve-shamru derekh Hashem la'assot TZEDAKA u-MISHPAT....." (18:19), in our shiur we translated "yeda'ativ" as "I have singled him out." The term literally translates as, "I have known him." This meaning, however, seems out of place in this context. If it simply means that God 'knows' that Bnei Yisrael will do "tzedek u-mishpat," how does Hashem 'know' this? What guarantee is there that Avraham's children will keep this mitzvah more than anyone else? Is there no bechira chofshit - freedom of choice to do good or bad? (Further troubling is the usage of the construction "yeda'ativ," rather than the expected, "yeda'ati" - see mefarshim al atar.) In answer to this question, Rav Yoel bin Nun explained in a shiur several years ago that the word "yeda'ativ" should be understood not as 'yeda' - to know - but rather as 'ye'ud" (switching the last two letters as in keves-kesev; salma-simla). Ye'ud (a similar shresh) means designation, being singled out for a specific purpose, a raison d'etre, a destiny. Thus, "yeda'ativ" here should be read not as, "God knows..." but rather, "God set them aside for the purpose... (that they keep tzedaka and mishpat)." The point is not that God KNOWS that bnei Avraham will do tzedaka & mishpat, but that God chose Avraham in ORDER that his children will do tzedaka & mishpat!

==== **PART FIVE - TOLDOT TERACH** Parshat Va'yera informs us not only of the birth of Yitzchak, but also of several other grandchildren and great-grandchildren of Terach, such as the twelve children of Nachor, and the two children/grandchildren of Lot. [See 19:30-38, 22:20-24.]

These stories form an integral part of Sefer Breishit for technically speaking, Parshat Va'yera is still under the title of TOLDOT TERACH (see 11:27 with TOLDOT SHEM (see 11:10 and our shiur on Parshat Noach). [It is interesting to note when considering 11:26-32 that we find a 'header' - "ayle toldot Terach," but we never find the expression: "ayle toldot Avraham" throughout Sefer Breishit, even though we do find "ayle toldot Yitzchak" (25:19), and "ayle toldot Yaakov" (37:2). This may relate to Avram's name change, so there can't be TOLDOT AVRAM when he is first introduced, since AVRAM as AVRAM never has children from Sarah! This may also explain the need for the additional phrase "Avraham holid et Yitzchak" in 25:19!]

Furthermore, many (female) descendants of Terach later 'weave' their way back into the family of Avraham Avinu, such as Rivka, Nachor's granddaughter, and her brother Lavan's daughters Rachel & Leah. [See also part five below in regard to Ruth from Moab.] [Recall that Terach was the first 'zionist', i.e. it was his idea to attempt aliyah to eretz Canaan (even though he never made it). It may have been in that zchut!] [Note also the number (and type) of wives and children born to Nachor (in 22:20-24)! Which of the Avot does this bring to mind? [8 + 4]! Who else in Sefer Breishit has twelve children [8 + 4]? =====

PART SIX / 'MITZAR' - A sad but fitting ending As Lot escapes from Sdom, a somewhat peculiar conversation ensues between him and the angel concerning the city of TZOAR. What is it all about? For those of you who don't remember, here's a quick recap: After taking Lot out of Sdom, the "malachim" instruct Lot to run away 'up to the mountain' ["he'hara hi'malet" /see 19:17]. Lot defers, claiming that 'up in the mountain' poses potential danger. He requests that instead the angels spare one city, which will serve as a "MITZAR," a small place of refuge. The Torah then informs us that this is why the city is named TZOAR (see 19:17-22). Why do we need to hear about all this? To appreciate this story, we must return to the first reference to Sedom in Chumash. When

Avraham and Lot decide that the time had come to part ways, Lot decides to move to the KIKAR HAYARDEN (the region of Sdom), rather than the mountain range of Canaan, where Avraham resided. Recall from our shiur on Parshat Lech L'cha that Lot's choice reflected his preference of the 'good-life' in KIKAR HAYARDEN (where the abundant water supply alleviated the need to rely upon God's provision of water) over Avraham's lifestyle in the MOUNTAINS (where one depends upon rainfall for his water supply). Let's take a closer look at the key pasuk of that narrative. [I recommend you read this pasuk in the original Hebrew to note its key phrases. Pay particular attention to the word "kol"]: "And Lot lifted his eyes, and he saw KOL KIKAR HAYARDEN - the ENTIRE Jordan River Valley - that it was FULL of water... like God's Garden, like the land of Egypt, UP UNTIL TZOAR." (13:10)

The final phrase of this pasuk - BO'ACHA TZOAR - appears superfluous. Why must we know the exact spot where the KIKAR ends? When we consider the origin of the city's name - TZOAR - from the story of Lot's flight from Sdom, this short phrase takes on a whole new meaning. The Torah appears to be taking a cynical 'jibe' at Lot. He wanted EVERYTHING - "et KOL Kikar Ha'Yarden" [see also 13:11: "And Lot chose for himself KOL KIKAR HA'YARDEN..."], and thus chose to settle in Sdom. But when it's all over, Lot finds himself begging the "malachim" for a small hideaway - a MITZAR (the city to be named TZOAR). Lot wants EVERYTHING - KOL Kikar ha'Yarden - and ends up with 'next to nothing' - BO'ACHA TZOAR! [Thanks to Danny Berlin - ish Karmeit Zsur - for this insight.] With this background we can better understand Lot's conversation with the "malachim" when he flees from Sdom. Note their original instruction to Lot: "And it came to pass when they had brought them out [of Sdom], they told him: Escape for your life, do not look behind you, do not stay behind B'KOL HA'KIKAR. Rather, run away to the MOUNTAIN, lest you be consumed." (19:17)

Once again, the Torah establishes a direct CONTRAST between KIKAR HAYARDEN and the MOUNTAIN. Lot is commanded to return to the MOUNTAIN - to the area of Avraham, from where he never have left in the first place. Lot, however, refuses to return. He knows that if he returns to the mountain, he will not be able to 'survive' living in the shadow of Avraham Avinu. He will no longer be the righteous among the wicked, but rather the wicked among the righteous. He therefore begs them for a refuge: "And Lot begged them - please no. Behold if I have found favor in your eyes...I cannot run away to the MOUNTAIN, lest some evil will take me and I die. [Rather,] there is a city nearby [at the edge of Kikar ha'Yarden] and it is MITZAR - a little one. Let me escape there and my SOUL will live...[They concede to Lot's request,] and that city was therefore named TZOAR. Then the sun rose over the land and Lot arrived in TZOAR..." (see 19:18-24)

Finally, after Sdom and the other cities of the KIKAR are destroyed, Lot changes his mind. He decides to leave TZOAR and settle with his daughters in the MOUNTAINS (see 19:25-30). However, instead of reuniting with Avraham, they HIDE AWAY in a CAVE. The rest is history - i.e. the history of AMON & MOAV, whose descendants have not even the common decency to offer bread & water to Am Yisrael (their kinsman) as they pass Moav on their way from Egypt to Eretz Canaan (see Devarim 23:4-5). It's no coincidence that they never learn the lesson of "hachnasat orchim" - welcoming guests. Sdom was destroyed, but unfortunately, its 'legacy' continued. One spark of good does, however, come forth from Moav. Ruth the Moabite joins the tribe of Judah - through an act of "chessed" (see Megillat Rut) - and she becomes the great-grandmother of David ben Yishai, the king of Israel. Predictably, Sefer Shmuel summarizes his reign as follows: "And David reigned over all of Israel, and David performed MISHPAT and TZEDAKA for his entire nation." (see Shmuel 8:15) [Recall that David had earlier hidden out in a CAVE in the area of the Dead Sea (Ein Gedi), where he performed an act of "chessed" by not injuring Shaul - see I Shmuel 24:1-15; note especially 24:12-15! See also Yirmiyahu 22:1-5!]

Malchut David constitutes the "tikun" for the descendants of Lot: his kingdom was characterized by the performance of TZEDAKA & MISHPAT - the antithesis of Sdom.

shabbat shalom menachem

http://modzitz.org/torah/vayeira.htm

Divrei Torah Parshas Vayeira

Eating to "Live" a Loftier Existence, Divrei Yisroel, Parshas Vayeira
Our Father, Our Shield, Divrei Yisroel, Parshas Vayeira Parshas Vayeira,
From Reb Motti Rosen z"l

Eating to "Live" a Loftier Existence

Based on the Divrei Yisroel, Parshas Vayeira

"VaYitah Eshel B'Beer Sheva, Vayikrah Sham B'Shem HaShem..." - And He (Avraham) planted a Tamarisk tree in Beer Sheva, and called there on the Name of (i.e. - to) Hashem..." Breishis 21:33

Rashi explains that the calling on the name of Hashem means that Avraham had Avimelech and his companions make a bracha, to bless and thank Hashem for the repast they had just enjoyed. The Kedushas Levi, Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, asks a well-known question - if Avraham wanted them to make a bracha, and accept upon themselves the "yoke of Hashem", why not do so before the meal, why only afterwards? The Kedushas Levi answers beforehand, they were not in a position to accomplish this in their lowly, impure and ignoble state. However, after eating the food that the Tzaddik Avraham Avinu provided them, and after assisting him by giving him the opportunity to fulfill the mitzvah of hachnosas orchim (hosting guests), Avimelech and his companions raised themselves into the higher status of one who could appreciate Hashem, and thank Him. (writer's note - Their eating within the context of mitzvah lifted them to a loftier plateau - even an Avimelech!)

A similar situation existed with Chana, the mother of Shmuel HaNavi. The Divrei Yisroel quotes his grandfather, Rebbe Yechezkel of Kuzmir, who explains the verse in Sefer Shmuel - "And Chana got up after eating and drinking in Shilo, and she prayed...". Rebbe Yechezkel of Kuzmir is puzzled - how could Chana eat before davening? Chazal teach us that this is specifically prohibited. However, when Chana ate and drank with her saintly husband Elkana, in a holy location - the Mishkan/Sanctuary at Shilo, she was granted a loftier level of kedusha/sanctity herself. This higher level of personal kedusha was exactly what she sought as appropriate preparation for her tefilla.

The Divrei Yisroel applies this same lesson to Avimelech. How could a goy, especially one who was as gross and lowly as Avimelech, make a true bracha? The answer is learned from Chana - after partaking of Avraham Avinu's meal, after "digesting" the spiritual calories, as well as the physical ones, even Avimelech could make a bracha, and accept the "yoke of Heaven".

Thus, we don't live to eat, nor do we merely eat to live, we eat to live... a loftier existence.

Translated by Reb Eliezer Weger of Rechovot, a Modzitzer Chasid

Our Father, Our Shield

based on ma'amarim in Divrei Yisrael, Parshas Vayeira

V'ehu Yoshev Pesach Ha'Ohel K'Chom Hayom - [Hashem appeared to Avraham Avinu] while he was sitting at the entrance of the tent in the heat of the day" (Bereshis 6,1).

Rashi explains that Avraham was sitting at the entrance of the tent to see if there were any passers-by, so he could bring them into his house. The Divrei Yisrael Zt'l cites Rebbe Yechezkel of Kuzmir Zt'l, who sees a deeper meaning in Rashi's explanation of "Over Va'Shuv" (which would literally be translated as "passer-by"). He was searching for a sinner ["Over"] who was seeking to repent, looking for a return ["Va'Shuv"] path, but couldn't

find the entrance in which to return. Avraham Avinu would invite these lost souls into his tent and show them the path to Teshuva, and the way back to the Divine.

In another ma'amar, the Divrei Yisrael cites our Sages' interpretation of this verse: Avraham Avinu was sitting at the gate of Hell, not allowing entrance to any Jew sent there. The Divrei Yisrael Zt'l continues and explains: It is known that Avraham Avinu was given a choice (of punishment for the Jews) - hell or exile, and he chose exile. He was therefore sitting at the entrance of hell protesting that he chose exile and not hell, the agreement was only punishment of exile - not both - and therefore no Jew should have to enter.

From both of these ma'amarim we see Avraham Avinu's role as Magein Avraham, the shield and protector of the Jewish People.

Translated by Reb Shlomo Gelbtuch of Brooklyn, a Modzitzer Chassid

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PARSHAS VAYEIRA He lifted his eyes and saw and behold! Three men were standing on him. (18:2) Avraham Avinu is considered the amud ha'chesed, pillar of loving-kindness. He took advantage of every opportunity that availed itself to help someone, to perform a kindness for another person. He paved the way for the many acts of kindness that, in a sense, define the Jewish People. Avraham did not merely delegate others to act in his behalf. He personally acted. He reached out with love, with care, with empathy - but, above all, he reached out. As the father of our nation, as an exclusive member of the "high and mighty," it was not necessary for the Patriarch to personally involve himself. That was Avraham Avinu. When a great person personally carries out an act that he could have easily delegated to others, it elevates the act, ennobling the individual who executes it.

One of the greatest acts of kindness is caring about those individuals who are hardly noticed. People are always ready to ear-mark money and assign personnel to go out of their way to help someone well-known or to participate in an organization that is either prominent or caters to the exotic, the shocking, the dreadful, the heart-breaking cases which draw at our heartstrings, or achieve notoriety. Very few resources, however, are allotted to the down-and-out individual who will not generate fame for his saviors. The "little guy" who does not garner much attention regrettably does not receive much attention either.

Chief Rabbi Jonathan Saks of England relates an intriguing story about a woman, who, together with her husband, was among the greatest philanthropists of our time. This woman tragically passed away at a young age. She and her husband had been blessed with great wealth, most of which they had given away. They retained little for themselves, as they were satisfied to live a simple life. Their tzedakah, charitable bequests, which were spread over the world community, were primarily directed toward Jewish interests.

When Sarah (not her real name) passed away, she was mourned by many. Among those who grieved for her the most, were the waiters and waitresses at a popular hotel in Eretz Yisrael, where she and her husband had often vacationed. Over time, she came to know all of the staff: their origins, their family situations, and the problems they faced. She had developed a close, personal relationship with the hotel's staff. This was not - and still is not - a common practice. She was, however, no ordinary woman. She remembered not only their names, but also the names of their spouses and children.

Whenever any of them needed assistance, she saw to it that it was provided, in a dignified manner, discreetly, without fanfare. This was her habit wherever she went. Is it a wonder that she was loved by all?

After her passing, it became known how it happened that she married her husband. There was, after all, a very distinct difference in their ages; he was a close friend of her parents! Apparently, she had a few weeks of free time available in the summer before she was to commence her academic year. Her future husband gave her a summer job with his company. One evening after work, the two were about to join her parents for dinner. They passed by a beggar on the street. Her future husband was punctilious concerning the mitzvah of tzedakah, and he immediately proceeded to reach into his pocket and gave the man a coin. As they continued to walk, Sarah asked him to lend her some money. Indeed, it was a fairly large sum, which she promised to pay back at the end of the week, at which time she would be paid her wages. After he gave her the money, she promptly ran back to the beggar and gave the money to him. "Why did you do that?" he asked. "I already gave him money." "What you gave him," she replied, "was enough for today, but not enough to make a difference in his life."

At the end of the week she was paid her wages, and she returned the amount she had borrowed from her future husband. He said, "I will accept the money only because I do not want to deprive you of your mitzvah." Many years later, following the untimely passing of his wife, he divulged to a close friend that it was then that he decided that this was the woman he wanted to marry, because "her heart was bigger than mine."

By her selfless caring for others, empathizing with their simple, everyday needs, she elevated the middah, attribute, of chesed to a new pinnacle. It is not enough simply to help others, one must feel their need within his heart; one must be sensitive to their pain as if it were his own. Indeed, by giving, we are actually receiving.

Then Avraham ran to the cattle... he stood over them beneath the tree and they ate. (18:7,8)

Avraham Avinu was the consummate master of the middah, attribute, of chesed, acts of loving-kindness. Clearly, this was not simply because he was a "nice man." There is more to it. When we take into consideration the lofty ideals that he imparted through his performance of chesed, we wonder who his mentor was. From whom or from where did our Patriarch learn the true depth of chesed, its significance and application? Perhaps the following thesis might shed some light on this anomaly.

Imagine: giving someone a ride using a company car; paying for the gas with a company credit card; deducting the time expended in doing the "favor" from company time. This is no different than giving tzedakah, charity, with company money. In other words, the act of giving is made easy for us, considering the fact that it does not deprive us of anything. The Mishnah in Pirkei Avos 3:7, states: Ten lo mishelo, she'atah v'shelcha shelo. "Give him what is his, for you and yours are His." Rabbeinu Yonah explains this somewhat cryptic statement in the following manner. When one gives charity - be it money, or even time - one is parting with nothing of his own - neither of his money, nor of his self, for everything belongs to Hashem, Who "loans" it to us. At best, we are merely custodians of Hashem's property. We enjoy no proprietary interest in anything in the world, because everything ultimately belongs to Hashem. This understanding is fundamental to Jewish belief. A Jew must realize and accept the notion that nothing is to be attributed to his own powers - because he really has none of his own powers. Everything belongs to Hashem, Who is its sole proprietor. He permits us access as long as we utilize it for the proper purpose.

The Toldos Yaakov Yosef applies an analogy to explain the Mishnah in Avos. A man was known to never exhibit signs of worry. While equanimity is a wonderful quality to possess, the reason behind his placid approach to life was ambiguous. He either had such incredible conviction in Hashem that, as a result, he did not worry, or he was, quite possibly, a very unrealistic person. In other words; he was either a saint or miswired. When he was questioned concerning his presence of mind in confronting the

anxious moments of life, he replied that he had nothing to worry about, because he possessed nothing! He considered nothing in life to be his own. Thus, he had nothing of himself invested in any item of his personal, little world. He, therefore, found nothing to worry him. Everything belongs to Hashem, Who is eminently capable of dealing with the issues.

The Baal HaToldos cites the Sefer Chassidim who further illuminates this concept. Let us, for example, take the mitzvah of Tefillin. When we bind the Tefillin on ourselves, we realize that it is Hashem who gave us the Tefillin; He also gave us the arm upon which to bind the Tefillin, and the ratzon, will, and thought process to carry out the mitzvah. So, how can we claim any reward for what is clearly all Hashem's doing? When Hashem rewards us for mitzvah observance, it is purely out of a sense of chesed. It is altruism of the highest order. He is being "extra-kind" to us for performing a mitzvah, which, in fact, was all His doing.

This idea explains the pasuk in Tehillim 62:13, u'lecha Hashem chesed, ki Atah tishalem l'ish k'maaseihu. "Chesed is yours, Hashem, because You reward a person according to his deeds." Why should Hashem's reward be an act of altruism? If one acts properly, if he observes the mitzvos, he deserves to be rewarded! If anything, reward should be an act of din, justice. Man's actions warrant reward. The Baal HaToldos illuminates the pasuk with the above insight. Essentially, everything that we do for Hashem is not really "we." It is made possible only due to Hashem's intervention, His constant support. Without the "Hashem component" in our lives, we simply do not have anything. He does not really have to reward us, because He made it all possible in the first place. Therefore, Hashem's reward is the consummate act of chesed.

Now we understand Who was the Rebbe of Avraham Avinu in the middah of chesed. It was Hashem. Yes, Avraham learned from the Almighty. With such a Rebbe, it is no wonder that Avraham became the amud hachesed, pillar of loving-kindness.

And Hashem said, "Because the cry of Sodom and Amorah has become great, and because their sin has been very grave." (18:20)

Sodom's crime was so grave that it caused an "outcry... so great" that it led to their total destruction. We wonder at the seriousness and finality of the punishment. Was there no other city so corrupt that deserved such punishment? Apparently not. Sodom's sin was not so much the result of the people's behavior, as it was their perverted philosophy of life. Chazal documented their sins as: inhospitality to strangers; animus towards anyone giving charity; social oppression; sexual perversion. These were the manifestations of their depraved philosophy, symptoms of a sick community. What lay beneath these symptoms? What motivated them to act in such a baneful manner? What was it about Sodom that set the standard for evil for all time to come?

Sodom's corruption was unique. It is this corruption that causes its inhabitants to be singled out among the wicked of the world. Chazal make a statement that gives us some hint concerning their depravity. We are told not to "act like the characteristic of Sodom." Middas Sodom seems to be a cruel quality. It is the act of depriving someone else of deriving benefit even when one has nothing to lose thereby. Zeh neheneh, v'zeh lo chasar. "This one benefits, and this one loses nothing." Yet, the Sodomnik begrudges the other person his benefit. Why? No reason. He has nothing to lose; yet, he refuses to do anything that might benefit another person. That is middas Sodom.

In Pirkei Avos 5:13, we are taught a powerful insight into the depravity that defined the people of Sodom. Chazal cite two opinions concerning the type of character possessed by a man who says: "What is mine is mine, and what is yours is yours." The first opinion holds that such a person is a beinoni, average person, while the second opinion in the Mishnah contends that this statement reflects middas Sodom. In other words, one who sticks to himself, who is neither interested in taking from others nor giving to them is a wicked person. Why?

The Tzemach Tzedek explains these two opinions. The Tanna who considers this to be the quality of an average person opines that a Sodom character applies only when one denies another a benefit, although he personally loses nothing. If he, however, has something to lose, he may not be manifesting proper behavior, but he cannot be called a Sodomnik. The second Tanna posits that even if one has something to lose by helping someone out, the very statement, "What is mine, is mine, and what is yours, is yours," undermines the fundamental underpinnings of existence, which is a symbiotic coalescence of diverse forces, systems and individuals. Hashem made the world in such a manner that forces interact together. Our bodies exist on the premise that all its cells, organs and limbs collaborate in a mutually beneficial manner to promote health and continued existence. The "what is mine, is mine, and what is yours, is yours" attitude brings the world to self-destruction.

Every community, every system, every process is based on a "give and take" system, in which those who are able - give, and those who must - take. Isolation from one another is disastrous to the individual and destructive to the community. Such a system cannot survive. Between neighbor and neighbor, callous indifference or taut hostility will reign. Soon, the only hospitality in that community will be that which is reminiscent of Sodom - no hospitality!

From a tzedakah, philanthropic, perspective, such an attitude is dangerous. The wealthy man who says, "What is mine, is mine, and what is yours, is yours," is basically looking for a way out of helping others. The problem, however, goes deeper than that. The first mistake he makes is in defining and claiming that what he possesses actually belongs to him. It does not! It belongs to the poor man, while he is his surrogate, holding his money for him. Hashem selected the wealthy man to serve as the guardian for the poor man's money. By claiming it is "mine," he rejects its true ownership, thereby reneging his Divine mission. That is middas Sodom.

He planted an eishel in Be'er-Sheva, and there he proclaimed the Name of Hashem, G-d of the Universe. (21:33)

There is no question that Avraham Avinu was the most successful outreach professional to have ever lived. He was the master in bringing a pagan society into the world of monotheistic belief. Every religion that has since initiated the process of rejecting idol-worship has done so as the result of his ground-breaking work. At one point, over half of the world population had accepted monotheism. This was without a doubt a marvelous, unprecedented feat. How did he do it? What was our Patriarch's recipe for success? What can we learn from his pioneering efforts that are applicable to life in our present society?

My brother-in-law related an incident that occurred with him a while ago which I feel can be applied to shed some light on Avraham's work. My brother-in-law takes the "F" train from Brooklyn to Manhattan daily. Like every responsible Jew who utilizes public transportation as a means of going to work, he had his Tehillim, travel Daf Yomi Talmud and a small Chumash with him. After all, one never knows how long the trip on a New York subway can take. While he usually does not find it a great difficulty to find a seat, this Friday morning was an exception. So, he stood there, holding onto the bar, while he recited Tehillim. Directly in front of him sat a middle-aged man and woman, who appeared to be husband and wife. The wife, although not dressed in the latest observant haute couture, appeared to be of Jewish extraction. The husband appeared most likely to be Jewish, but to the uneducated eye might be mistaken for Italian.

Noticing my brother-in-law hanging on precariously to the bar as the train sped along the rails, the man motioned to his wife to move over to make room for the Jew. Noticing that a place had been made for him, my brother-in-law thanked the couple, sat down, and proceeded to study Daf Yomi; Tehillim was over. In the back of his mind, the question that would bother most of us gnawed at him: Were they Jewish? They certainly did not appear to be. As my brother-in-law was about to depart from the subway at the 50th Street exit, he turned to the couple and instinctively said, "Gut Shabbos!"

Suddenly, as if a heavy cloud had been lifted from the man, his face lit up as he said, "That is the first time anyone has said that to me in years." Hearing this, my brother-in-law decided to remain on the train - even if it meant traveling to the Bronx and back. There began a conversation between a Bobover chasid and two alienated Jews, one of which had grown up in a "semi"-traditional family, but had been swept up in America's pop culture. The other one had never really been exposed to any form of tradition. They were two lost souls, waiting to be saved, but nobody had recognized them as Jewish. No one had taken the effort to care. My brother-in-law took a chance. The worst that could have happened is that they would have ignored him. Today, the couple is beginning to observe, to believe, to return to the heritage of their ancestors.

Avraham Avinu saw what appeared to be three Arabs. They were the most idolatrous of the pagan world - bowing down to the dust of their feet. Yet, the Patriarch did not prejudice them. He invited them into his tent and served them a hearty meal. After explaining to them that everything we possess is a service of the Almighty G-d, he asked them to join him in blessing Hashem. We all know the rest of the story.

It is so easy to prejudice others and to conjure up excuses about why they are not worthy of our time: "They are probably not even Jewish", "They are not interested," "Why bother"; "He is not my type," etc. Avraham succeeded because he did not prejudice. He reached out to everyone. The Pintele Yid is there. The spark is just waiting to be ignited.

After writing this, I saw a question along similar lines pondered by the Chafetz Chaim. Avraham was not the only one who served Hashem, individual who served Hashem. There were others. Shem and Eivar were great men. They established a yeshivah which was the primary source of monotheistic education at the time. When Rivkah Imeinu was in need of spiritual counseling, she went to the yeshivah of Shem and Eivar. Yet, despite their efforts, they did not succeed in converting a nation or even a tribal family to monotheism.

The Chafetz Chaim attributes this anomaly to the premise that these spiritual leaders were concerned primarily with their own personal spiritual advancement. Whatever overflowed to others was to their benefit. Running a yeshivah for outreach purposes was not on their agenda. Avraham looked around and saw a world inundated with idolatry, submerged in debauchery, and living by a depraved standard of ethical values. Life revolved around the individual with selfish consistency. In order to change society's status quo, Avraham commenced on a program of outreach, which would acquaint the world community with Hashem, Who He was, and how much He cared about each and every creation! Vayikra b'shem Hashem, "Avraham called out in the Name of Hashem." He taught everyone about Hashem. This was the essence of his life.

This, explains the Chafetz Chaim, is the meaning of the pasuk, "For I have loved him, because he commands his children and his household after him" (Bereishis 18:19). Avraham did not live for himself. His sole purpose in life was to spread the word of Hashem. This distinguished him from all the others, and this is why his legacy endured. He cared about the future of others; therefore, his future was ensured.

The Chafetz Chaim was like that, reaching out to anyone who would listen, caring about every Jew, regardless of how far he had drifted away from tradition, his blatant disregard notwithstanding. Even in his advanced age, feeble and weak, he would travel far distances by train for the opportunity to reach out to a Jew. Once, after taking a long, arduous journey by train to Horodna, the venerable sage remarked, "If someone were to grant me one hundred mitzvos for taking this journey, I still would not have endangered my health by traveling from Radin to Horodna. Since this trip involves the possibility of helping Torah dissemination, however, how could I refuse? If there is no Torah - there is no life. I must do everything within my ability to help Torah development." He made those remarks at a time in which the Chafetz Chaim was so old and ill that he had

to be carried from the train to a waiting coach. He was no longer able to walk of his own volition.

The Chafetz Chaim related that he was once asked by one of the Torah leaders of the previous generation, who was surprised at the number of Jews who were distant from Torah, to explain the phenomenon. According to a passage in the Talmud Bava Metzia 85a, we are assured that Torah will never cease from our midst. In the Talmud Rabbi Parnach states in the name of Rabbi Yochanan: "If someone is a Torah scholar, and his son is a Torah scholar, and his son's son is likewise a Torah scholar, the Torah will not cease from his offspring forever." This is supported by the pasuk in Yeshayah 59:21, Vaani zos brisi - "And as for Me, this is My covenant... that the words that I have placed in your mouth shall not be withdrawn from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your offspring, nor from the mouth's of your offspring's offspring... from this moment and forever!" This phrase teaches us, "I am a guarantor for you in the matter that the Torah will naturally come around to its home."

In other words, a home that has for three generations proven its commitment, by producing three generations of Torah scholars, becomes a home of Torah, and the Torah is naturally attracted to it. If this is so, who can be better models than the Avos, Patriarchs, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, who were three generations of talmidei chachamim, Torah scholars. Why then does there exist the phenomenon in which so many Jews are alienated from Torah? What happened to Torah's natural habitat?

The Chafetz Chaim replied by applying a personal vignette. When he was younger, he traveled from city to city, selling the books which he had authored. Bookstores were not as popular then as they are today. He came to one community where he had been a number of times and knocked on a door - to no avail. He was surprised, because he had been there often, and the householder was always home. Apparently, this time was different, so he left.

"The same idea applies to Torah, as well," the Chafetz Chaim commented to the questioner. "The Torah returns to its natural home; it knocks on the door and waits to be admitted. It continues to wait, but if no one opens the door, it must go elsewhere. The Torah comes around, but it does not always gain entry. We must remember not to close the door on the Torah when it comes knocking!"

This is a valuable lesson worth remembering. When the door closes on the Torah, we are the ones who operate the mechanism.

Va'ani Tefillah v'es rodfeihem hishlachta b'mtzolos k'mo even b'mayim azim. And their pursuers You threw, like stones, into the shadowy depths of powerful waters.

In Shemos 15:5, Rashi distinguishes between three types of drowning suffered by the Egyptians. The most wicked among them were as straw, in that they were progressively stirred about, rising and descending; the average Egyptian went down as stone; and the relatively decent ones went down as lead, for they came to rest immediately. With this commentary in mind, we wonder why rodfeihem, their pursuers, who were certainly not the finest Egyptians, went down like stone? They should have been stirred around like straw. Furthermore, what is the meaning of "like stones"? Did they go down as stone or not?

Horav Chaim Kanievsky, Shlita, quotes the Talmud, in Bava Basra 73b which relates the "stories" of Rabbah bar bar Chanah. In the ninth story, they saw a certain tall bird whose ankles were in the water with its head reaching the sky. Seeing that only the ankles were in the water, they assumed that the water was not deep. A Heavenly voice warned them not to go into the water, not because the water was plentiful, but because it was torrential. The violence of the torrent did not allow anything to sink to the bottom. Hence, its shallow appearance. This teaches us that in water in which the torrent is extreme, a stone will be thrown around like straw, even though it is heavy. The Egyptian pursuers were "thrown around" like a stone in strong waters. Thus, these evil Egyptians suffered the punishment of going down like straw.

Dedicated in loving memory of our dear father and grandfather Arthur I. Genshaft Yitchok ben Yisroel z"l niftar 18 Cheshvan 5739 by his family Neil and Marie Genshaft Isaac and Naomi
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Rabbi Wein 14 Cheshvan 5771 / 22 October 2010

Weekly Parsha

VAYERA

Friday, October 22, 2010

It will come as a surprise to no one that the Torah, and Judaism generally, apparently values human life above all else. Rare are the cases to be found in the Jewish story and in halacha where human life is not the primary value that trumps all other behavior and ideals. The story of the akeida – of Abraham offering his son Isaac as a sacrifice to the Almighty and at the last moment being prevented by Heaven from so doing – is illustrative of this idea of the sanctity of human life. However as noble as this idea is, it many times wilts in the face of dire practical circumstances. The best and worst example of this problem is the conduct of war. There is no war without killing humans and the Torah in its narrative and value system certainly recognizes war as a reality and sometimes as a necessity. The current debate in the Western world regarding the funding of stem cell research faces the moral dilemma of the permissibility of killing human fetuses in the process of possibly saving other humans from diseases, genetic and otherwise. In the Torah itself, the kind, hospitable and righteous Abraham himself goes to war to rescue his kinsman Lot. It is obvious that the value of human life, dominant as it is in Judaism, is never quite absolute. And this therefore poses the moral questions that every generation, nation and even an individual eventually must face in life and society: When is taking a life justified? Halacha provides some guidance on the subject, allowing for self defense, preemptive strikes and the execution of criminals who threaten society's existence. Jewish history also provides us with some insight on the matter, approving suicide, for instance, over forced conversions or a life of shame. Because of this elasticity in what appears at first to be an absolute value, many questions are raised - and almost always in heartbreaking instances. The question of mercy killing and euthanasia remains on the agenda of the rabbinic responsa in our time though it is basically forbidden in Jewish society. Abortion is also opposed in Jewish law but individual respectable rabbinic advisors and decisors in some exceptional instances have allowed it. The general rules and outlines are clear but in individual cases the matter becomes fuzzy. Maybe that is why Midrash sees Abraham himself as being conflicted over the issue of the akeida even after the angel of God instructs him not to sacrifice Isaac. The supreme test lies in the ability of humans to conform their behavior to God's will. That is the only truly absolute value in Judaism which allows for no exceptions or deviations. Abraham is rewarded for his willingness to sacrifice his son and he is rewarded for not actually going through with the sacrifice. The common denominator in Abraham's seemingly contradictory behavior is his constant willingness to accept God's will and behave accordingly. This attitude has become the basis for all halachic decisions and Jewish behavior over the ages – the continued attempt to understand and follow through upon God's will. That is Abraham's legacy to us. Shabat shalom Rabbi Berel Wein U.S. Office 386 Route 59 Monsey, NY 10952 845-368-1425 | 800-499-WEIN (9346) Fax: 845-368-1528 Questions? info@jewishdestiny.com Israel Office P.O. Box 23671 Jerusalem, Israel 91236 052-833-9560 Fax: 02-586-8536 Questions? scubac@netvision.net.il SSL Certificates RabbiWein.com © 2010 The Destiny Foundation

Yated Neeman

Who should I Choose as Sandek? By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Since both last week's parsha, and this week's discuss the mitzvah of bris milah, I thought we would discuss who one honors as sandek at a Bris. Question #1: Aharon calls: "I would prefer asking my Rosh Yeshivah to be sandek, but I know that my father is expecting the honor. What should I do?" Question #2: As I arrive for the bris, the two new grandfathers approach me: "We would like to ask a psak halachah: Which one of us should be the sandek?" Question #3: "I would like to ask my father to be the sandek, but my wife feels that her grandfather should be honored." Question #4: "At a Sefardic bris I noticed that the sandek remained sitting even after the bris itself, and the baby remained on his lap through the naming ceremony. Afterwards, the sandek remained seated, and the attendees lined up to seek his blessing. Why were they doing this?" Answer: The greatest of the honors given at a bris is holding the baby during the bris itself; the person who does this is called the sandek (Maharil). Many authorities rule that the sandek receives greater honors than either the mohel or the father of the newborn, ruling that he has preference over them for an aliyah on the day of the bris (Rama, Yoreh Deah 265:11; Magen Avraham 282:18; cf., however, Shaarei Efrayim 2:12, who notes that this depends on local custom, and in his locale they did not give aliyos to the sandek or the mohel.) Why the Sandek? Why should the sandek deserve the highest honor? After all, if we honor him because he is performing a big mitzvah, then the honor should go to the mohel who is performing a far greater mitzvah – the bris itself. On the other hand, if it bestowed because it is a personal celebration, then it should go to the father of the baby. The halachic authorities explain that since performing a bris milah is considered like the offering of a korban (Zohar, Parshas Lech Lecha), the sandek's lap functions as the mizbei'ach, the altar, on which this korban is offered (Maharil; Toras Chayim, Sanhedrin 89b). The Maharil compares the sandek's role to that of the kohen offering the ketores, the incense, in the Beis Hamikdash, explaining that for this reason the sandek is granted top honors. However, others note that this analysis is unclear, since it is the mohel who "offers" the korban by performing the mitzvah, and therefore he should be more closely compared to the kohen offering the ketores, not the sandek who is functioning as the "mizbei'ach" [Shu"t Noda BeYehudah, Yoreh Deah 1:86]. We will discuss this point later. Halachic sources mention that one should strive to perform the mitzvah of being sandek and even spend large sums of money to accomplish this (Migdal Oz, quoted in Sefer HaBris pg 313). These authorities suggest that it is for this precise reason that the sandek has preference for an aliyah – he receives honor for showing that he endears mitzvos so much that he is willing to spend much money to fulfill them. We find many customs associated with being honored with sandek. In some places, the sandek paid for all the costs of the seudah, the festive meal served in honor of the bris. In other communities, there was a custom that the sandek paid for the first schar limud – the first Torah tuition of the child. The source for this second custom is the brachah given immediately following the bris, kesheim shenichnas labris kein yikaneis letorah ulechupah ulemaasim tovim, just as he entered the bris, he should enter studying Torah, marriage and good deeds. The sandek, who participated in the bris, thanks the parents for being honored by participating in the next step, the child's growing in Torah. Sandek Segulos Some explain that being sandek is a segulah for wealth, although many dispute the existence of such a segulah, noting that many great talmidei chachamim were sandek numerous times yet remained poor as shul mice. Another famous custom, mentioned by early authorities, is that a family should not honor the same person with sandek for a second time; which means that each of their sons requires a different sandek (Maharil; Rama). Although many authorities dispute whether one need follow this custom (Shu"t Noda BeYehudah), this practice is fairly common in Ashkenazic communities with one exception: That the local rav or rosh yeshivah is often presented this honor many times. As a matter of

fact, the honor of being sandek was considered so special that some communities had the custom that the father did not choose the sandek; instead, the community sold the right to the mitzvah and used the funds for charitable purposes (Otzar Habris 2: pg 255; see Derishah and Taz, Yoreh Deah 249:1 who discuss use of maaser kesafim to purchase the right to be the sandek). In other communities, they always gave the honor to the local rav (mentioned in Shu"t Noda BeYehudah, Yoreh Deah 1:86). However, in most locales, the father chooses this honoree. What factors should one consider when choosing the sandek?

The Greatest Tzadik The Rama says that one should choose the biggest tzadikim that one can find to be the sandek and the mohel (Yoreh Deah 264:1). It is because of this Rama that many honor their rosh yeshiva, rav or a different talmid chacham with being sandek. Other sources require only that the sandek be a "good Jew," meaning someone who observes the mitzvos properly, so that Eliyahu Hanavi will want to join him at the bris (Ohr Zarua; Rikanati #590, quoting a Medrash; Maharil). Although they certainly agree that it is preferable to choose a big tzadik, should one risk offending a family member? We can now fully appreciate Aharon's question: "I would prefer asking my Rosh Yeshiva to be sandek, but I know that my father is expecting the honor. What should I do?" Do we find halachic precedent with which to guide Aharon?

Family or Scholar? I found halachah works that compared Aharon's predicament to a question that was asked of one of the great authorities of the late 17th - early 18th Centuries, the Chacham Tzvi (Shu"t #69, 70). A man, let us call him Yaakov, passed on, leaving an adult son from a previous marriage, and a young pregnant widow. Yaakov's son had recently become a mohel, although he did not have much experience. For previous brissin, Yaakov had used a certain respected talmid chacham as the mohel, and when Yaakov took ill, he had appointed this talmid chacham to oversee the affairs of his children. When the widow gave birth to a boy, she wanted the experienced mohel, to whom she owed much gratitude and who was also a talmid chacham, to perform the bris, rather than the newborn's older brother who was relatively inexperienced. One can certainly see the logic behind her position, and most of us would probably instinctively side with her opinion. Nevertheless, the Chacham Tzvi rules that the older brother should perform the bris, because one should give a close relative the opportunity to perform a mitzvah even ahead of a talmid chacham. Based on this ruling, I found authorities who rule that one should select a family member, provided of course that he is fully observant, for sandek ahead of a talmid chacham. This approach would of course guide Aharon to choose his father ahead of his Rosh Yeshiva, but I suggest that each individual discuss their specific question with their posek. At this point, let us address the next question that I mentioned above:

Which Grandfather? As I arrive for the bris, the two new grandfathers approach me: "We want to ask a shaylah: Which one of us should be the sandek?" This situation actually happened once. Not wanting to ruffle anyone's feathers, the baby's father left it for the two grandfathers to decide. Fortunately, they were both easy-going and eager to do what is halachically preferred. I will explain the basis for my answer to them. In most of our interpersonal relationships, we do not need to decide whom I am required to honor more than another person. However, the particular questions regarding which person to honor as sandek lead us to explore the following issue: Since one must choose only one sandek, whom is the new father required to honor more?

An Early Response Fortunately, we already find this issue discussed by halachic authorities as early as the Fourteenth Century, in a work called Leket Yosher. There we find the following rulings: "The father of a newborn boy who does not want to be the sandek himself out of desire to create peace and share honor with others, should give the honor to his own father, the baby's paternal grandfather, ahead of the baby's greatgrandfather, since the mitzvah of honoring one's father is greater than that of honoring one's grandfather. However, if the baby's paternal

grandfather prefers that his own father (the baby's greatgrandfather) be honored, then it is fine to give the honor to the greatgrandfather, and that is the prevalent custom, based on an adage that one who is sandek for his greatgrandchild will never face gehenom."

Being Sandek Yourself We can derive a total of five interesting halachic points from this passage. 1. The father of the child can certainly choose to keep the honor of sandek for himself. The requirement to show honor to others does not preempt my right to fulfill the mitzvah myself should I choose to. I will mention that, of the hundreds of brissin that I have attended over the years, I have seen the father act as sandek on only a few occasions. However, one highly regarded authority rules that if the father cannot perform the bris himself, which is his mitzvah, he should act as sandek, since the sandek assists the mohel in performing the bris (Shu"t Divrei Malkiel 4:86). Although the halachic reasoning here is extremely solid, this practice is fairly uncommon, presumably for the exact reasons mentioned by Leket Yosher: the father would prefer to share the honors and the mitzvah with others, and he feels that more shalom is generated this way. Indeed, in both instances that I have seen the father be the sandek for his own child, it was not the first bris in the family, and the family members who might expect this honor had been honored as sandek at previous brissin. 2. A second point we see from the Leket Yosher, is that when determining who should be sandek, one should follow the usual rules governing whom one is required to honor. Thus, since the responsibility to honor one's father is greater than honoring one's grandfather, the father of the newborn should therefore honor his own father, the baby's paternal grandfather, with being sandek. Although one is responsible to show honor to one's grandfather, one has a greater responsibility to honor one's own father (Rama, both in Yoreh Deah 240:24 and in his responsum #118). 3. The baby's paternal grandfather may defer the honor to his own father, in order to accomplish his own mitzvah of kibud av, should he desire to. Leket Yosher reports that the common custom was indeed to do this. 4. The Leket Yosher mentions an additional reason to honor the greatgrandfather with being sandek. He cites an adage that being sandek for one's greatgrandson protects the greatgrandfather from gehenom, although the Leket Yosher quotes no halachic source for this segulah other than that it was common for people to say so. Presumably, even if there is no halachic source for such an idea, the fact that people believe it to be so itself makes it a reason to honor the greatgrandfather. 5. The Leket Yosher makes no mention of honoring the maternal grandfather or the maternal greatgrandfathers. It seems that the reason for this omission is obvious: Although one is required to honor one's father-in-law, there is a greater responsibility to honor one's own father. Thus, in the absence of paternal male antecedents, one should honor the mother's father or grandfather. However, when the paternal grandfather is present, the responsibility of the baby's father to honor his own father precedes his responsibility to honor his father-in-law. At this point, I can present what I answered the two grandfathers. Since the right to provide the honor belongs to the father of the baby, he has greater responsibility to honor his father than he does to honor his father-in-law. Therefore, the paternal grandfather should be the sandek. Indeed, I found that in several places the prevalent custom was to honor the paternal grandfather with being sandek at the first bris, and the maternal grandfather at the second (Otzar Habris Volume 2, page 254).
His Father or Her Grandfather? At this point, we can also address the third question I raised above: "I would like my father to be the sandek, but my wife feels that her grandfather should be honored." As we see from the above discussion, the father of the baby has a greater responsibility to honor his father over his wife's grandfather, even though Zeide is a generation older. But I note here that one should realize that each individual situation may have other factors involved, and that the most important factor is that we achieve maximum shalom. Again, one should consult with a rav for guidance. Let us now examine the fourth question I mentioned above: "Someone attending a Sefardic bris noticed that the sandek remained sitting even after the bris itself, and the baby remained on his lap through the

naming ceremony. Afterwards, the sandek remained on his seat, and the attendees lined up to seek his blessing. Why were they doing this?"

"Standing Sandek" Allow me to provide some background. After the mohel performs the bris itself, the baby, now bearing his eternal Jewish sign, is named. There are two widespread customs as to who holds the baby while he is being named. The prevalent, although not exclusive, practice among Ashkenazim is that someone not previously honored at this bris is called forward to hold the baby while he is named. This honor is usually called either the sandek me'umad, literally, the standing sandek, or amidah lebrachos, the one who stands holding the baby while the blessings and prayers are recited. The prevalent Sefardic approach is that the sandek remains sitting and continues holding the baby while he is named. In other words, there is one less kibud – the sandek who holds the baby during the actual bris holds the baby throughout the remainder of the ceremony. Although most are familiar with this as a Sefardic practice, many Ashkenazic sources mention it (Rabbi Akiva Eiger Comments to Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 265:1, quoting Toras Chayim to Sanhedrin 89b). Indeed, I know several leading Ashkenazic gedolim who prefer this practice.

No "Standing Sandek" What is the basis for this practice? To understand this practice, we need to present and explain a short piece of aggadic Gemara.

Pouring Wine The Gemara teaches: Rabbi Berechyah said, "One who desires to pour wine libations on the mizbei'ach, should fill the throats of Torah scholars with wine" (Yoma 71a). One could interpret this Gemara as meaning that supporting needy Torah scholars is considered as meritorious as offering wine on the mizbei'ach. However, there are several reasons why this interpretation of the Gemara does not explain it fully. 1. Why specifically refer to wine; people who need support require bread rather than wine? 2. The Gemara makes no reference to "needy Torah scholars," but only to "Torah scholars," implying that it is not extolling the concept of tzedakah, but some different idea. 3. Why does the Gemara use the seeming unflattering expression fill the throats, rather than a more polite description, such as: should provide them with wine, or give them wine to drink. Filling someone's throat is not exactly a polite way of saying that one is providing wine. To answer the above questions, the Toras Chayim explains this Gemara as referring to a very specific time that one is supplying the Torah scholar with wine. As I mentioned above, the Zohar refers to bris milah as offering a korban. If the bris itself is a korban, then the sandek, on whose knees the bris is performed, is a mizbei'ach, and having him drink wine can be compared to offering libations on the mizbei'ach. The Toras Chayim explains that this is called "filling his throat" since we are comparing the sandek drinking the wine to "filling" the top of the receptacles of the mizbei'ach where the kohen pours the wine libations.

Based on this analysis, the Toras Chayim concludes that the sandek should remain sitting with the baby on his lap until after the baby is named and the wine is drunk. He further contends that the cup of wine, or at least some of it, should be drunk by the sandek. As long as the baby remains on the sandek's lap, he is still comparable to a mizbei'ach. Based on this concept, Sefardim have a custom that the sandek holds the baby on his lap through the naming, and that the Sandek remains seated for several minutes after the bris. During this time people cluster around the sandek, requesting that he bless them for whatever blessing they would like. Since he has achieved the exalted status of being comparable to a mizbei'ach, he has the ability to bless others.

Conclusion Although we have shown many ways to prioritize the honor of being sandek, we should note that an important factor in choosing a sandek is that he be someone that Eliyahu would want to join. We should bear in mind that Eliyahu is not only the malach habris, the angel who attends the bris, but also Pinchas, the bringer and angel of peace. Thus, we should remember that bringing peace to all the baalei simchah should be a highest priority in choosing the honorees.